

Chapter 23 (Lachlan): This Is Good

My phone started ringing and I was surprised to see it was Elowyn.

In the last couple of weeks since Elowyn had told me us being together again was not entirely impossible now we'd been talking and texting daily with intention and purpose, spending much of our free time together doing whatever we wanted. Wyn was watching me carefully everywhere we went as if weighing my actions. Whenever we were out and a woman walked by, Wyn's eyes would shoot to me and I realized she was looking to see if I was watching the woman.

"It was never about other women, Elowyn," I'd told her once I understood her looks. "It was about me and control. I'm not looking around for comparisons or replacements or substitutes for you or any shit like that because you're the most beautiful woman there is and the only one I want. Got no one in my line of sight but you. Fucking learned that one down to the bone."

So a call from Wyn wasn't unusual, except that it was happening in the middle of the day. Usually we talked first thing in the morning before we both headed into work, then a few work days and again at night if we weren't seeing each other that evening.

"Lachlan, I have a problem I need your help with," Wyn said, and she sounded upset.

Wyn calling in the middle of the day to ask for help was definitely unusual.

"You safe, Wyn?" I asked as I got my keys out of my pocket. I threw deuces to the garage owner I'd been talking to about the change in management coming next week and left the building.

"Yes? I mean, I think so since she's not getting too close to me. She's keeping her distance. But she's growling."

What the fuck?

"What exactly are we dealing with here, Wyn?" I asked as I hurried toward my bike. Bear? Dog? Fucking wolverine?

"A big dog," she said. "And I think she's hurt but I can only get so close."

"I'm on my way," I told her. We could use Elowyn's car to transport the dog to the vet, if necessary, since my truck was only a two-seater.

"Be safe but hurry, if you can," she said. "Come in through the store and go out the back door. We're in the alley."

"Wait for me to get there," I told her, knowing a hurt dog could be dangerous. "Just...wait for me, please, and stay close to the door."

Sixteen minutes and one fast stop later, I parked in front of Wyn's store. A girl was behind the counter and she pointed to the back.

"Wyn's out back. She told me to watch for you and watch the store."

I nodded at her, then rushed past her to the back door and cautiously opened it in case Wyn was in front of it.

"You OK?" I asked Wyn, looking her over before looking at the big, black dog with a white muzzle hiding behind some wooden pallets that were stacked haphazardly next to a dumpster.

"You sure that's a dog and not a fucking horse?" I asked her quietly, trying not to spook the dog.

"She seems like she's holding her rear leg funny," Elowyn ignored my question and pointed to the dog's awkwardly-held leg.

"What's she doing when you try to get close?" I asked.

"Growling. Baring her teeth. But she doesn't back away."

I lifted the two containers of deli roast beef I'd grabbed from the convenience store on the way here. "Let's see if she's hungry."

Handing Wyn the one package, I opened the other one and crouched down a bit to try to make myself smaller to the scared animal. I held out a few slices of the meat and approached her slowly.

"Hey, girl," I crooned to her. "Hey, girl. You hungry? You want a snack?"

She let me get within three feet of her and then growled threateningly. I threw the pieces of meat right in front of her and crouched down, balancing on the balls of my feet. She snarled and then eyeing me closely, she cautiously limped forward. With one last suspicious look at me, she lunged at the meat, and I threw a few more pieces so she'd have to take a couple more steps forward.

Eventually, when I'd gone through a pack of the meat, she let me scratch her behind the ears while both Elowyn and I baby-talked her in soothing tones.

"She's got a big splinter in her leg," I noted. "Know what I'd do if it was one of the brothers, but I don't want to risk hurting her."

That made Wyn smile a bit.

"Your car's parked over there. Let's take her to the emergency vet, let them get that splinter out and see if she's chipped. Maybe she got away from her owners."

Half an hour later, the three of us were in an exam room, where the vet and vet tech examined the scared girl.

"She's a beautiful masti," the vet said. "Now we need to remove the splinter, probably just a few stitches. She seems really calm so we're hoping she'll let us take care of this with just a local and without requiring anesthesia."

Wyn had obviously fallen for the girl, because she looked distressed when they led the dog away and grabbed my hand. The dog wasn't chipped so we were going to contact all the shelters in the area to give them our number if anyone called looking for a large dog. We'd also put an ad out locally asking if anyone was missing a dog the size of a small horse.

We sat silently, Elowyn's leg bouncing up and down as she worried.

"You know, I never thought of calling anyone else." She was talking mostly to herself, I realized. "Didn't think to call animal control or the police or any of my friends or employees. It was just automatic to call you because I knew you'd come help me."

"You call, I'll always come, Elowyn. For whatever you need."

"I know, Lach. You left your old life and followed me here to start all over." She rubbed my forearm. "And you did all that without any promises from me."

"I don't want or expect any promises from you. It's enough to be near you," I told her, hoping she could tell how serious I was about that.

"And I'm holding onto the hope that I can someday change your not entirely impossible now to entirely possible. But there's no rush, Wyn."

"I know. We have to be sure."

I already was.

"Lach, I just realized I can't keep her," she said, changing the subject abruptly, her leg bouncing harder than it already had been from her nerves. "They don't allow any animals above twenty pounds where I live."

"Think her head alone might weigh twenty pounds, Elowyn. But I can keep her."

Her head lifted. "Really?"

"You know I'm closing my house next week. I'll get the property fenced in and she'll have a lot of room to roam when I let her out. You can visit whenever you want." And stay forever, as far as I'm concerned.

I'd bought a three-bedroom, two-story house that sat on a half acre just on the outskirts of the town. Wyn had refused to house hunt with me, and I knew it was because she just wasn't ready to think about another house with me. And that was fine because I knew not to push this woman now and force my agenda on her. Maybe someday she'd move in with me, but I'd wait patiently for her to let me know that was a step she wanted to take. In the meantime, before she shook herself out of that plastic chair, I needed to distract her.

"She's going to need a name if nobody claims her," I said. "Any ideas?"

"Gypsy Bushrule," she said immediately.

"Where the hell did you come up with a name like that?" I asked. "I was thinking more like Danger."

"I have all sorts of fun name combinations running around in my head," Wyn informed me with a smile. "And, in the interest of compromise, we'll name her Gypsy Bushrule Danger. We'll call her Gypsy for short."

"How is that a compromise?" I demanded, happy to see the distraction had her smiling and was keeping her leg from shaking.

"The compromise is that I let you think you had a say in her name."

I burst out laughing, hoping no one would call for...Gypsy so I could keep her for Wyn.

"But I think, when you go to work, Lachlan, I could keep her at the store with me. I'll get a bed for her and then you can pick her up on your way home from work."

I was going to need a new full-size crew cab truck so all one hundred twenty-five pounds of Gypsy could ride in comfort.

"We'll work it out," I promised her.

The vet brought Gypsy back in then, said the splinter was out, the wound had only required a couple of stitches and she was good to go with some further instructions and antibiotics.

And the dreaded cone of shame.

Gypsy healed beautifully, I got a new masti-friendly truck and best of all, no one called for our girl, even after three weeks. One beautiful Saturday, Gypsy and I pulled up to take Wyn for a ride to watch the sunset by the river. While the three of us walked trying to find the best spot, Wyn's hand firmly in mine, Gypsy's leash in my other, Wyn suddenly stopped and sighed happily.

"This is good, Lach."

I looked around. "Yeah, I think we'll have a good view of the sunset from here, too."

"No, Lachlan," she said. "I think we're at entirely possible now"

So on the FB page, I asked everyone who wanted to have their animal's name be used in a story to add their pet's names to the post. Today's selection was Gypsy Bushrule Danger, who is a beautiful 125-pound black masti.