

Chapter One – Levi

Levi gnawed on an antler-shaped jawbreaker as he wandered down the hallway of the apartment building he shared with the rest of his Coyote pack. It wasn't great, considering the broken elevator, broken laundromat, and electricity that probably needed to have been upgraded thirty years ago, but it was home. Their only home, in fact.

After the humans had decided to build a city on pack territory, the Coyotes had just moved in, taking over several abandoned or half-completed projects. It was their territory, after all. If they had been a Wolf pack, the humans wouldn't dare encroach on their packlands.

But I guess we Coyotes aren't as sexy as Wolves, Levi thought. He paused to grin at his reflection in a dirty window. He flexed his muscles and shrugged. *Sexier. We're far sexier. Humans are dumb.*

With a wide yawn, Levi pushed open the nearest door, striding into the 'office space' his brother Steven did all his Alpha work in. Steven wasn't alone. He was with that man who had started hanging around the pack lately, always smelling like cigarette smoke and gunpowder. Levi stopped in the doorway. What was Steven doing with that dude?

"Levi, how many times do I have to tell you to knock?" Steven snapped at him.

"When have you ever told me to knock?"

Levi narrowed his eyes at the strange man. He was a muscular, short man who was nondescript in a very suspicious way. He wore old clothes, neat but worn, and yet his fingernails were manicured and his teeth had that recently-visited-the-dentist gleam to them. Ever since he arrived, Steven had turned into a stuffy fuss-bucket.

His brother shook his head and pointed out to the hallway. "I'm busy."

"What's going on here, Steven?" Levi shut the door behind him. "I'm your brother and your Beta. I deserve to know what you're up to."

"This is Aaron Knox; he's a realtor. I'm looking at getting the pack better accommodations."

Levi frowned. "Then why the secrecy?"

Steven growled low in his throat. Something he rarely did. "Levi, this is none of your business. Get out of here."

"I don't think so. Not when you're lying to me." Levi strode over to the desk the two were bent over. Pictures of well-known drug dealers, men Levi had spent months heckling until they moved out of Coyote territory, were strewn over the surface. Levi looked up at his brother in alarm. "Are they coming back?"

"No. But there will always be more where they came from." Steven shook his head. "The pack is poor. We might not be able to afford to move, and I don't want people getting their hopes up. Now go, so I can discuss the matter with Mr. Knox."

"We could always sue the city for stealing our land."

Knox started gathering up some other papers. "If we're not going to discuss these matters, I have other business to attend to."

"Levi was leaving." Steven narrowed his eyes at his brother. "Now."

Levi let one of his canines grow into a long, sharp point. He flashed it at Aaron Knox before he turned on his heel and left. His brother was the Alpha, after all, and with the position came a certain amount of respect.

Still, it stung that Steven didn't trust his own Beta. Sometimes Levi thought that Steven named him his second just because he was his brother and the pack expected it. He certainly was given little to no responsibilities. Even though it was he who had driven away the drug dealers from the pack. Even though he was the one to get the city to start a recycling program in this area. Steven thought his methods were 'too childish'. So what if he collected weeks' worth of garbage and dumped it on the councilmen's lawns? It was effective!

Levi kicked the wall. Steven was too serious – too determined to use the humans' diplomatic methods to solve things. The problem was, they didn't actually solve anything. Yet, moving would probably be a helpful thing – if that was what Steven was really planning.

The neighborhood the pack currently lived in was dirty and unkempt, just like the homeless people who lived in the alleys and behind dumpsters. The roads were full of potholes, the buildings made of crumbling concrete and covered with peeling paint. Trees had once lined the streets, but after one of them caught fire while entangled in the power lines, the city had cut them all down. Now children played on the stumps.

Levi's hands swung freely as he gazed across the bleak, gray jungle he lived in. The only brightness remained in splashes of graffiti that changed every so often when people got bored.

"Hey! You!"

The familiar, harsh call made Levi roll his eyes. *This* again. He turned towards the two police officers who often scoured the area, looking for people to bully. If they wanted to fight actual crimes, all they'd have to do was go north four or five blocks to where the drug rings ran rampant, but they preferred to harass the Coyotes. Levi smiled pleasantly as they approached.

"Is it time for our daily frisk, officers?"

The taller, more ripped one Levi liked to call Moose scowled at him. His hand was on his gun. "Put your hands on the wall, dog."

"Someone needs some cultural sensitivity training," Levi muttered as he turned to do as the officer said.

Even though he tried to keep his muscles loose and relaxed, a tight ball of anger simmered in his stomach. If he had his way, he'd bar all of these cops from the part of the city the Coyotes had staked out as their territory. It wasn't like they kept the streets safe. They just harassed people trying to go about their daily lives.

"So which one of you guys has the Coyote fetish, eh?" Levi asked as the smaller of the two cops, nicknamed Forsythe, began patting him down. "Must be you, eh Forsythe? You're the one who's always patting me down."

"Shut up. We got intel that you Coyotes are moving drugs, and we know the likes of you," Moose said. "Now spread your legs."

Levi snickered. "You're not even going to buy me dinner first?"

Moose showed just how much restraint he had as he stepped forward and punched at the Coyote's kidneys. Levi twisted away just in time for the cop to crack his knuckles on the brick wall instead. He laughed as Forsythe grappled with him, trying to hold him. The Coyote easily removed the cop's gun from its holster, and as Moose started raising his own gun, Levi spun away from Forsythe and grabbed Moose's gun by the barrel. With a yank and twist, it was in his hands.

"Oops, what happened?" Levi asked as Forsythe reached for his weapon. He smirked at the cops.

"I'm going to kill you," Moose seethed, coming at him.

Levi danced back a few steps, waving the guns by their barrels. "This is gonna be a little embarrassing when you get back to the precinct, isn't it?"

He turned on his heel and dashed off as both of them lunged. They shouted as they chased after him. Levi smirked. This was the kind of thing he enjoyed doing—making the bad guys pay for their villainy. He dodged down an alley and through a

culvert to an open sewage line that the city had been promising Steven they'd clean up for months now.

Levi dropped the two guns into the sludge. Once the police got an 'anonymous' tip describing where the guns were, the city would be forced to clean it up. He made sure that the weapons sank below the stinking surface before he took off again. He couldn't hear any sounds of pursuit, so he briefly stopped to steal a shirt and pants from a laundry line before he headed to the more human-populated part of the city.

He dirtied his hands in soot and dragged them through his light-colored hair to darken it as he emerged into the street again. He slowed his pace to a walk, wiping his hands off on his old shirt before tossing it into the garbage. Stuffing his hands into his pockets, he whistled as he strode towards a little café on the other side of the street. Just as he entered, he saw Moose and Forsythe turn the corner.

Hmm. They were harder to shake than usual today. He'd have to find a new escape route. Levi scouted the café out. There had to be somebody in here who would be willing to help a Coyote out...

The café was sparsely populated, and Levi's gaze soon locked on a pretty brunette sitting by herself. She had a newspaper up over her face and was tucked into an inconspicuous corner. The woman was all curves, sitting straight and prim. Perfect. He grinned as he strode over to her and sat down.

"Hello," he said.

The brunette jumped and looked up. "Um... hello."

"You look like the kind of girl that likes to help out strangers in need," Levi said, grinning broadly at her.

He propped his elbows on the table and leaned forward, keeping his eyes locked on hers. She had amazing eyes, perhaps the bluest he had ever seen. The effect with her dark hair and pale features was stunning.

Outside, Moose and Forsythe were looking in the windows of the shops they passed, faces drawn in scowls. Thinking about it, it was a good thing that they didn't know his name or his position as Beta... It could cause a few problems with the pack. Oh, well. He'd just keep his head down for a while. He focused on the brunette again.

"I don't have any money on me," she said.

"I was thinking a different kind of help. And I've got plenty of cash – I'll buy your coffee. Just come with me."

He gripped her wrist and pulled her up. She looked startled but allowed him to pull her towards the bathroom. She dug her heels just as Moose and Forsythe headed towards the café.

"What are you doing?" she demanded.

"What if I gave you a hundred dollars?"

The woman's brow arched, but allowed him to pull her in. He shut the door—not locking it, and pushed her against the wall. She gasped. He grinned. He pressed his mouth to hers, gripping her hips with his hands.

Holy crap!

Levi started in surprise when the woman kissed him back passionately. She threw her arms around his neck, pulling his body tight against hers. He growled, moving his mouth to her neck. She tasted sweet and spicy, stirring something inside of him. He growled again. With one hand gripping her, he pulled her leg up over his hip.

He jumped when the door to the bathroom burst open. Moose and Forsythe grabbed him by the back of the neck, dragging him out. Levi panted – he'd actually forgotten that they were the reason he had started kissing the brunette!

"What are you doing?" the woman demanded, latching a hand onto Levi's arm.

Moose tipped his hat. "Sorry, miss. This man's under arrest."

"For what?"

"Assaulting two police officers and stealing our weapons."

Levi pitched his voice deeper and attempted a British accent. "And when, sir, was I meant to have done this? I just arrived in the country this morning, and I have been with my girlfriend ever since."

The brunette shot him a suspicious glance, but he couldn't help but grin when she nodded. "I don't know who you think he is, but he's been with me all morning. When was this assault meant to have taken place, exactly? Before I picked him up at the airport? Or maybe when I stopped in to use the bathroom at the hotel. My boyfriend is a reporter, here to write a very important follow-up article on the peace summit that was held in the city last year."

Moose and Forsythe glanced at each other, looking bewildered. Levi wiped the grin from his face, instead doing his best to look outraged. They reluctantly released him, although Moose looked more suspicious than Forsythe. The smaller

cop ran a hand through his hair, chewing on the inside of his cheek. Levi straightened, smoothing his shirt, and stepped closer to the brunette.

"Now, what is this about?" he demanded. "Is it customary for you people to assault your visitors? I want your names and badge numbers. Your superiors will be hearing from me."

"We're pursuing a suspect. Somebody that looks exactly like you."

The brunette sighed heavily. "Go back to our booth, darling, I'll take care of this."

Levi narrowed his eyes at the cops a moment before nodding. If he stayed and argued with them, his accent would slip and they'd lose whatever believability they had gained. He returned to the booth, leaving the two cops behind with the brunette. She talked to them in a low voice, too low for Levi to hear. Moose continued to look suspicious, but Forsythe's expression quickly became alarmed. When she pulled out her wallet and showed them something inside, even Moose took on a contrite look.

Both cops shot glances at him, but left without another word. The brunette smirked as she joined him. She settled down opposite him and leaned her elbows against the table.

"Care to tell me what that was about?"

Levi shrugged. "They were getting handsy and I didn't want them to shoot me, so I took their guns and ran away. It's their own fault for being idiotic enough to let me get my hands on their weapons. How'd you get them to leave?"

"I waved an old army vet disability plaque at them. Always works. People just love to worship former military, especially when they were wounded in action."

Levi peered at her. "You're military?"

"Nope. Dad was, though. I carry his with me to get out of trouble."

Levi laughed and slapped his thigh. "Excellent trick! I like you."

The brunette sat back, her blue eyes cunning. A smile crossed her lips. "I'm Lucy by the way."

"Levi."

"Pleased to meet you." She held out her hand to him.

He shook it and grinned. "So, did it hurt when you fell from heaven?"

Lucy rolled her eyes. "Cheesy. Very cheesy. But I like you. Want to come back to my place?"

Levi reached into his sock and peeled out a few bills that he kept in there. He slapped it onto the table, for the coffee, and stood. "For you, I'd go to the ends of the earth."

Lucy rolled her eyes again but giggled as they headed out. Levi caught a glance of his soot-darkened hair in the window and leaned a little closer to her. "I'm going to need a shower first."