

Amongst Strangers

Chapter 4: Civilization

As the man pulled into the driveway, Larathe looked over. "You live in this place?" He asked.

"Yup. Home sweet home," Lance replied.

"It's considerably more impressive from the inside..." the wolf muttered. "From the mountain, the city doesn't really look like much."

"The outskirts really aren't much to look at but the downtown area of this place is really something else." He said. "Help me unload?"

"Ah, sure." Larathe said, exiting the vehicle and following the man around to the truck bed. Lance handed the wolf a few bags, picking up the remaining luggage and heading to the front entrance, the canine following close behind.

"Hang out here for a moment," Lance said as he opened the door. "I'll call you in a second."

Larathe nodded, perfectly happy to remain outside as the scent of several additional humans washed over him. It wasn't long before he heard lance calling him in. Larathe shifted slightly, padding inside and making his way over to the man. As he rounded the corner he found two other humans beside the man. Both he identified as female; one older, about the same age as the man, and one younger. The wolf ducked aside as a pillow flew past, frowning at the man standing between him and the others.

"Hey! I said I brought a friend over!" Lance scolded, catching the woman's wrist. "Don't throw stuff either."

"That THING is a monster!" the woman shrieked.

"Enough, Kara!" Lance said, pulling her away from the sofa. "Just say hi...he doesn't bite."

Larathe groaned, placing the bags down and padding over to where the pillow fell, picking it up. "I told you this was a bad idea, Lance," he said, making his way back over and holding the cushion out to the woman. "Next time, you might want to throw something with a little more weight to it," he said.

"Don't tell her that," Lance said. "Last thing we need is Kara here throwing crap at anyone who walks in."

The wolf held his position for what felt like an eternity, watching the female with mild amusement as she tried to process what was going on. "This is the part where you take the pillow," Larathe hissed, flicking his tail.

Kara reached out tentatively, retrieving the pillow with an incredibly confused expression decorating her features. She opened her mouth to say something, couldn't find the words and shut it again. This was repeated several times over, making her seem almost fish like to the wolf.

"Before you ask, yes...I talk," Larathe sighed. Receiving no response, he went on, "This is me talking at you..." he said, watching as the woman continued to struggle to form a sentence. "I...think I broke her..." he muttered, glancing over at Lance who simply chuckled.

"What...are you?" Kara asked, finally able to form some sort of phrase, though clearly still unnerved by his presence.

"A wolf, last I checked," Larathe replied. "I...don't know what your kind calls me so..."

"He's a were-beast," Lance said. "Of the wolf variety."

"What? Like a were-wolf?"

"Kind of," the man replied. "That's...what we'd know him as anyway."

"Except the sun's out, it's not a full moon, and I'm kind of stuck like this."

"Are you a nice doggy?"

For the first time now, Larathe found his attention drawn down to the youngest of the trio. She was much smaller, hiding behind her mother and examining him very carefully, similar to his reaction when approached with something new. "I try to be," he said, ignoring the 'doggy' part of that phrase. She must be really young if she was calling him a dog.

"Can I pet him?" the girl asked, looking at her father now.

"Eh, you might want to ask him that," Lance replied, looking over at the wolf.

Larathe gave a small smile, sitting down in front of the group of humans. "Sure, I don't mind."

The girl moved around in front of the two adults, her mother seeming to struggle with herself, unsure whether to stop her daughter or not. The wolf huffed lightly as the girl gave his muzzle a gentle pat. He lowered his head slightly, letting the girl scratch lightly between his ears. He had to admit, it felt really nice.

"I like him!" The girl exclaimed, giggling to herself now. "I'm gonna call you puppy!"

Larathe brought his paws to his face, shaking his head slightly.

"His name is actually Larathe, Sarah," Lance said.

"Oh...can we keep him?"

"He's here to figure out how we live," Lance said, glancing over at his wife. "So I'd like to have him here."

"Ohhh no. No no no no no." Kara protested. "He does not seem like pet material."

"I...don't know if I should be relieved or offended at that comment," Larathe said, wagging his tail as the young girl moved around to scratch at his back. "I'm not here to kill anyone, okay? I'd kind of like for that to stop."

"No one's died..."

"Hunters come after us," Larathe said. "We've been on the run for as long as I can remember. Your mate was kind enough to save me."

"You saved that thing?!" Kara hissed at her husband. "What are you, insane? It's wild!"

"That thing is a were-beast...don't piss him off, okay?" Lance hissed back.

"You do realize I'm standing right here, yes?" Larathe asked, thoroughly unimpressed. "I can hear everything you're saying."

"I like him. He's my friend!"

Larathe couldn't help but smile at Sarah's comment.

"I'm sure he has a family he needs to get back to, right?" Kara asked, looking over at him.

"Yes but...not for long if I don't do something about it. They probably think I'm dead."

"What do you mean? Do something about what?"

Larathe groaned. "I told you, hunters come after us, and for no reason."

"No reason?" Kara asked, sounding offended. "We still find hunters and explorers alike mauled by wolves."

"And you never ask why?" Larathe asked, raising a brow. "They come into what space we have and just start shooting. They don't announce their presence; they don't even try to communicate. We don't have those stupid death sticks you call guns. The only thing we have is speed, power, and camouflage. Half the time, hunters will walk right past without even noticing, which is fine by me. But when they do notice one of us, then we have a problem."

"That's no--"

"Kara look," Lance said, cutting her off. "He's obviously just as intelligent as we are. He can communicate perfectly fine. He doesn't act on instinct alone either. They might as well be the same as us, just...more wolf looking."

"You're playing with the lives of everyone in this city, Lance."

"Oh I'm pretty outnumbered here," Larathe said. "If I had a death wish, I'd walk right in and smack someone. No doubt that'll get me killed right away."

"He was with me for a week and I survived just fine," Lance said. "Don't give him reason to attack you and he won't, same as anyone else."

"And what if he gets scared and goes after someone?" Kara asked.

"Okay, owch," Larathe protested. "I'm not quite that stupid. You're comparing me to some animal. I'm not the same as your dogs and I'm definitely not feral, thank you. You're making me sound like some hyper aggressive dog."

"I don't know your personality."

"Do you know the personality of a human you haven't met?" Larathe asked.

"No..."

"Well then...I get that I'm different...I have fur, I look like some wolf, I have a tail and fangs...Yeah, that definitely isn't the same for you. I didn't really trust Lance there when I woke up but I also grew up thinking every human I came across would kill me. Apparently, that's not the case. Besides, I have no intention of causing anyone harm."

Kara shifted. "Fine...but I don't trust you. You're going to have to prove yourself."

Larathe sighed. "Thank you."

"Let's try not to get into some spat the first day, hmm?" Lance asked, checking his watch. "Do you know if Michelle is still available, Kara?"

The woman shrugged. "No clue, why?"

Lance gestured over at the wolf. "He's going to need some clothes and normal stuff isn't going to fit."

"Neither are any sort of shoes," Kara said, glancing down at his hind-paws. "What do you wear?"

Larathe, glanced over at Sarah as she moved to sit in his lap now. "Uh, nothing actually," he said.

"Dogs don't wear shoes," the girl said, poking at the wolf's paws.

Larathe withdrew them somewhat, frowning but staying silent otherwise.

"He's a wolf, sweetie," Kara said.

Sarah looked back at Larathe, frowning. "He looks like a doggie."

"Dogs are pets...wolves are not," Lance said.

"You mean he's not your pet?" Sarah asked.

Lance laughed. "Oh no, not in the least. He's a friend."

"That's...confusing."

"So, Kara," Lance said, looking over. "Satisfied?"

"For now," The woman sighed. "You can show it around."

"Nice to know I'm some object," Larathe muttered.

"Sorry, him." Kara said, correcting herself.

The wolf shook his head. "It doesn't really make a difference to me. Just as long as you're not calling me she or her. I'm pretty sure I don't look like a girl."

"Right," Lance said. "Come on pup, lets get you situated," he said as he made his way towards the back of the house.

"Excuse me," Larathe said, moving Sarah from his lap and standing up. "Also, not a pup," he protested, following behind Lance. "I'm going to start calling you kid."

The man laughed. "Can't complain about that one."

The wolf groaned, shaking his head in response. "Ugh...humans," he muttered.