**Dominance**

“Bullshit!” Draye countered back at Jack angrily, “In a proper fight I could easily take you down. Just because you’re a big wolf doesn’t mean anything.”

Jack rolled his eyes as he walked next to Draye on their way to a small town, “Draye, you’re being ridiculous. Don’t get me wrong, if I were a normal wolf or even a normal feral wolf still my size, I fully believe you could take me down then. But unfortunately I am neither of those. You have your strengths, Draye. Fighting something like me is not yet one of them.” He explained much more calmly than Draye.

“I don’t believe you. I fully know what you’re capable of and I can keep my wits about me enough to be able to counter them. I bet I don’t even need my sword,” He claimed proudly. “You can keep your full abilities if you want.”

“You make it sound like we’re actually about to fight,” Jack mused with a simple wag of his tail, “Are you challenging me then?”

“Maybe I am, wolf,” Draye smirked and drummed his fingers over his scabbard. “I’ll even bet on it if you’d like.”

“A bet, hm? Well, if you’re going to make it interesting, then sure. If I win, I get to eat you again and do what I want with you once you’re in there,” He offered simply, but his tone was enough to tell Draye there would be no negotiation on Jack’s side to change his bet.

“Oh. Going for that.” Draye grimaced at the thought and shuddered with a chill, “If I win, then I get to ride on your back to the next three towns we visit.” Jack shot him a dark look that made Draye grin, “What’s wrong? That upset over the thought you might lose this? You can back out now if you want.”

“I accept.” Jack said quickly, refusing to even let Draye toy with the thought. “I’ll be your steed for three trips if you win. But when I win, you’re my food.” He repeated back for Draye, letting the thought linger for a moment, “Deal?”

Draye hesitated for a moment, but eventually nodded in agreement, “Alright. Deal.” He said with much less bravado than before. “At the next clearing then.”

Jack smirked, “Sure thing, food. If you think it will help.” He said smugly earning another harsh look from Draye.

From there the pair travelled on as if the wager had never happened outside of the occasional jab to annoy the other. Nearly two hours later they found themselves coming across a small field with a stream running through the middle of it. Draye set his things aside and each took a moment to rest and refresh themselves as well as resupplying on water. After twenty minutes they gave each other a look and moved to the center of the field.

“I’ll give you this one chance, Draye. Back out now and I’ll settle for just using you as a bed for a while.” Jack offered smugly as he took his position opposite of Draye and sat down.

“I’m sure you’d love to use me as a bed again, but that’s not going to happen. You’ll be my steed and in the next town I’ll even have a saddle made just for you!” Draye grinned back, sliding his right foot backwards to spread his weight in a basic fighting stance.

“Very well. But just so you know, I learned a few tricks after my last visit to see Ryuu. Are you ready?” He asked politely, eyes now locked with Draye’s.

“Whenever you are” Draye took a steadying breath and focused, staring at Jack unblinkingly. He felt his heart pounding in his chest and thought back briefly to his other sparring matches with Jack and how rough the pair regularly got with each other.

Draye noticed a small shimmer on Jack’s coat and instantly threw his hand forward casting lighting from his fingertips. The electricity arced forward, but instead of hitting Jack the bolts hit everywhere around Jack who sat there without a care in the world as dirt kicked up around him from the blasts.

Draye’s eyes narrowed in suspicion and he muttered a spell under his breath, weaving signs with his hands as he did and soon his eyes glowed softly with a magic that would allow him to see invisible objects or people. He saw only Jack there where the wolf had been the entire time. Draye hesitated to try to figure out what Jack was up to and cut his magical sight to simply send a wave of force at the wolf.

Jack stood up upon seeing the burst of energy coming at him and quickly leapt to the side of it, letting the ground next to him take the full force. “You really should be better to nature, Draye. I’ve come to learn that it very much doesn’t like getting blown up like that.”

“Yes, yes. You’re such a sage. Why aren’t you doing anything?” Draye asked, inching his way closer. “You’re supposed to fight me. You always start out with an illusion and making yourself invisible to get closer.”

“I do, yes. And you’ve learned that,” He explained with a simple flick of his tail. “You learned that a while ago. The method I’m using now is different.”

“What method? You’re not doing anything.”

“I’m doing plenty. You just aren’t aware of it.” Jack smirked and stretched out his hind legs, “You know my powers, so you’re moving forward to avoid anything I might sprout beneath you. You know to check for illusions constantly as well as invisibility. So now you’re trying to figure out what I might do.” He explained, now stepping around to begin circling Draye who had started to sweat. “Of course, Ryuu’s fire breath that I got isn’t going to do much to you since you also received fire resistance. A physical fight is something you’d most likely win given your training in handling monsters. All around, what could I do that you’re not going to anticipate?” As he spoke, Jack retained his smug grin, but his eyes peered at Draye as if analyzing his every move, breath, and thought.

“You’re not a telepath. You’re not reading my thoughts. Even if you were, the strain of telepathy for you would be too much if you only visited Ryuu a few times. It’s not like you to visit for a longer period of time though even to train.” Draye countered back. Jack cocked his head inquisitively, but remained silent for Draye to continue. “And if that were the case, Ryuu would have mentioned something when I saw him or at the very least tried to find out where I was so we could see each other again. He’s sentimental like that. Meaning whatever trick you picked up from him was something that you could use when you’re not with him. It was fast for you to learn and easy enough for you to practice without inducing too much strain to make you defenseless. You’re too paranoid for that.” When Jack approached his half circle around Draye, Draye began to circle with Jack.

“I’m proud of you, Draye. You would never have figured that out when we first met. Even the first few years afterwards you were slow on analyzing like that.” For a moment Jack beamed at Draye and gave a small nod of his head to show his sincerity in Draye’s development. “But your biggest fault in this fight was not realizing it sooner.”

“What do you mean?” Draye asked with a stern frown.

“You sought to see through my invisibility because that’s what I’m known to do. If we were complete strangers I would likely try something like that, but you know I’m better than that with you. I have planned out several plan and you’ve managed to knock away all of them except one because it’s the one thing you can’t anticipate.”

“If you’re so confident, then feel free to show off this plan of yours,” Draye demanded, stopping his circling and firmly planting his feet on the ground, “We’re losing daylight otherwise.”

Jack stopped as well and shrugged, “If that’s what you wish.” A sudden wind picked up around the wolf sending waves through his thick fur. His eyes began to glow a brilliant white that hid all features of them and he began to chant a spell. It took a moment for Draye to realize just what spell, but he quickly recognized it as the spell Ryuu used to change his size.

Draye’s heart raced in his chest as he stepped back away, watching in silent horror as Jack grew in front of him. The winds around the wolf grew with him to kick up dirt and dust on the ground forcing Draye to cover his eyes lest they catch the debris and temporarily blind him. Soon the winds died down and Draye slowly lowered his arm to stare wide-eyed at Jack who now towered forty feet over him.

Jack stared down at Draye for a moment before grinning and showing off his large teeth, “Hello down there, Draye. You did well, but this battle was decided before it began.”

“Gods… You actually learned how to do it!” Draye shouted up, falling back onto his rear.

“I’ve learned many things, Draye. It’s how I always managed to stay one step ahead. Speaking of.” Jack raised his paw and quickly brought it down onto Draye before the small human could scramble out of the way. Draye wriggled under the paw trying to push it away. “Concede, Draye. You’ve lost.”

“Like hell! I’m not just going to give you a victory like that!” Jack frowned and pressed down on Draye’s smaller form, forcing the wind from Draye’s lungs.

“Concede. You’ve lost.” Jack repeated forcefully. “You can’t beat this.”

Draye shut his eyes and pushed with all his might managing to lift the paw only enough to get wind back in his lungs, “Fuck you!” He shouted back defiantly.

“You’ve come so far. And still you’re so stubborn. I suppose I can’t blame you. I’d be the same way in your position.” Jack smiled down at Draye before raising his paw letting Draye up.

Before Draye could get to his feet, Jack’s jaws came down and shut around him. His teeth stayed away from Draye’s body, but the wolf’s lips held a firm grip. He suddenly lifted his head up quickly, flinging Draye high into the air in a full body spiral. Draye cried out in pure terror as he flailed and tumbled through the air. He tried to stop himself from spinning, but he had no way of knowing which way he was facing or spinning at any given point.

His ascent came to a slow halt and his rotating form plummeted back down. Between his brief glimpses of the tree line and the sky he could see Jack staring up at him. Through random glimpses he saw the wolf’s jaws part below him and it clicked that this would be the only way to ensure he wouldn’t die from impact. He shut his eyes tight, praying for once that Jack’s maw would be there for him.

At first he simply felt a breath of warm air get exhaled over him. Then next came a hard landing on a soft, squishy something or other that squelched on his impact. There was a small bounce and he opened his eyes just in time to see Jack’s large throat take up his entire vision. He slid into the slick tube, but the rings of muscle gripped his form bringing him to a sliding halt. A moment after a loud *glulp* set his course downwards.

Draye was still at first, but as the shock of his near death faded and started to squirm more in weak protest. He soon slid into the wolf’s spacious gut and sat himself upright in its center. For a moment he remained silent, but he finally sighed in defeat and spoke up loud enough for Jack to hear, “I concede, Jack. You win.”

“It’s good to hear you say that, Draye. I guess that means I can end this. You are my food now after all.” There was a dark lilt to Jack’s voice that made Draye cock his head.

Suddenly the walls around him began to close in. A yellow, watery liquid seeped in from the stomach’s walls, slowly filling the ever-tightening chamber. Draye’s eyes flew wide open in a panic as he thrashed and pushed back against the walls, “Jack! Jack! What the hell are you doing?! Hey!”

“Relax, Draye. You’re always safe with me.” Jack answered calmly, “But right now I need you to open your eyes.”

“What?! They *are* open, you ass!”

“No. Focus on my voice. Open your eyes. You’re safe, Draye.” Jack repeated calmly, feeling a strange force on his head suddenly. Draye shut his eyes tight, trying to do as the wolf said. “Deep breaths. Ignore your surroundings. Focus only on my voice, then open your eyes. Trust me.”

Draye’s breath steadily slowed and deepened until he finally took a full breath of air. His mind fixated on the wolf’s words and slowly the pressure in his mind faded as did the feeling of the yellow liquid that rose over his body. When he opened his eyes he found himself trapped inside the familiar space of Jack’s stomach, but normal-sized.

He kicked and squirmed in a moment of panic. “Draye! Draye, relax! I’ve taught you how to get out of my stomach and it’s not with panic!”

“You just tried to kill me!” Draye shouted back furiously.

“No I didn’t, Draye. It was an illusion.” Jack felt Draye’s struggles weaken, “The entire fight was a trick, Draye. Only what I made you see.”

“Why the hell did you make me see you trying to digest me?!”

“That wasn’t me!” Jack shouted back. The wolf sat down by Draye’s belongings with a heavy sigh, “When my spell was fading something must have happened in your mind. I don’t know what, but I said I could end it and then you started thrashing.”

“You called me food and tried to digest me.” Draye muttered after a moment.

Jack thought back and nuzzled affectionately at his gut, “Because I called you food before when we made the bet, I think. With my control of the illusion gone, your mind must have grabbed it. You thought I was going to actually make you my food and it kicked off in the illusion.”

“Is that possible? How does that work? And wait, how much of the fight was an illusion?” Draye asked in a panic, “What the hell did you do?”

“Long story short, the shimmer you saw from me was my spell activating. You cast your lightning, yes. But everything after that was fake. You were basically a statue in reality while I put forth an entire interaction in your head. Then, just in case you realized it, I ate you so that you’d basically be trapped.”

Draye sighed deeply, “So it wasn’t real. And from the beginning it was just a huge mind game?”

“To an extent.” Jack grinned and laid on his stomach and squishing Draye under it causing the human to squirm, “I made it as realistic as I could. The deductions are your mind at work trying to figure out what was happening. A couple times I almost slipped. So good job on that,” Jack said with a hint of pride in his voice, “But you still didn’t beat me. Someday you might, but I do believe that puts me up to seventeen wins at this point.”

“Oh shut up!” Draye called back, pushing up on Jack’s form to try and alleviate the pressure on him. “It’s bad enough you ate me before you even won. I don’t see how that’s fair, mind you.”

“Oh, you misunderstand, Draye. I didn’t eat you because I won. I ate you as insurance in the battle to wear you down if you broke free of my spell. I never claimed the prize.” He explained with a smug tone.

“W-Wait, what? No. This count, Jack. This is your prize!” Draye argued, now squirming desperately.

“No, it’s not. It was insurance. But given you basically just had an all too realistic nightmare, I’ll hold off on claiming my prize for a later date. I’ll let you out soon for the night.” Draye groaned in annoyance and Jack shifted his weight back and forth on the human, “Stop whining, food. You’re ruining the moment.”