
World of the Lupi bonus short story

The New Kid

January 10, 1976

by [Eileen Wilks](#)

Mrs. Rogers had really great legs. She liked it when she knew you were looking, too.

“The Battle of Bunker Hill—who knows when that was fought?” Mrs. Rogers looked around the room. Maybe her gaze lingered on Rule a moment. He was pretty sure it did. “Susan?”

After only one week at Hillcrest High School, Rule already knew Susan’s hand would shoot up any time Mrs. Rogers asked a question. He was pretty sure Susan liked Mrs. Roger’s legs, too, but he knew better than to say so. He also knew that Susan wouldn’t get asked to stay after class.

Poor Susan. He, on the other hand—

A sharp rap on the back of his head made him turn around to scowl at the boy behind him.

“Forget it,” Alex said. “No teacher nookie.”

Alex’s lips didn’t move. He was subvocalizing, so none of the humans around them would have heard him. Rule heard just fine and replied the same way. “She’s interested.”

“She’s off-limits. Do you really need me to explain why?”

Rule sighed and faced front again. He knew why, dammit. He’d forgotten for a minute, but he knew. Humans had more taboos and hangups about sex than he could keep straight . . . but that’s why he was here. He needed to learn how to deal with humans, hangups and all. How to pass for one of them. At least, that was the reason that counted. The one he could talk about back at Clanhome.

He didn’t talk about his other reason, though his father knew. Isen always knew things, which could be a pain the ass at times in a father, but was important in a Rho. Rule wanted to prove he could do this. That he could hang onto his control and pass as human even though he was

only sixteen. A few lupi youngsters mastered themselves in time to attend public high school as seniors, but they were unusual. Most kids didn't leave terra tradis until they were eighteen, and no one went straight from that sequestration to being immersed in human scent and behavior at a public high school. Everyone spent at least the first year after terra tradis with clan.

But Rule wasn't most kids. He was heir. He'd be named Lu Nuncio when—if—he fathered a child. He had more to prove . . . especially to himself.

That's what his father had said when he granted permission. Oh, being Isen, he hadn't come out and said it, and he'd been speaking as Rho, not as Rule's father: "Mason thinks you're ready. So does Benedict. Have you decided what role you wish to play in the school hierarchy?"

"One of the misfits." That's what Alex was. Usually there were a few Nokolai girls at Hillcrest High, but this year Alex was the only Nokolai there, so he'd been coaching Rule. Alex was twenty-one, though the school thought he was eighteen. Diddling with records was getting hard to do, so everyone had been relieved when the Vietnam war ended last year. With no more draft to worry about—eighteen-year-old young lupi simply could not make it through basic training without giving themselves away—it wouldn't be necessary to change records so much. But Alex's records, like Rule's, had been altered while the draft was still active, so he was using a different surname than the one he'd been born with.

The four-year age difference between Rule and Alex didn't matter much at Clanhome, but would loom large at the human school. There Alex was a senior, while Rule would be a lowly sophomore . . . if his Rho agreed to let him attend. "I'm no clown, and I can't be a jock. My control is good, but trying to stay at a human level of athleticism would be hard and the payoff isn't enough. I don't think I'd be good at playing a hippie, and while the egghead role might suit me in some ways—"

"Not," Isen had said dryly, "the egghead."

"No, I don't look the part." And eggheads didn't get girls much. Rule would do what he had to, but he'd just as soon his role didn't keep him sexually sequestered.

"Perhaps a bad boy?"

"Too much attention," Rule had said. "Bad boys don't blend in."

"Neither do misfits. By definition."

"But they expect us Oddies to be misfits, and it's an established group. Being a misfit has worked out fine for Alex."

"Oddies" was what the nearby townspeople called them. The nickname was inevitable. Supposedly Rule was part of a reclusive cult called the Od Dama that lived on the acreage that was really Clanhome—a feminist cult that home-schooled their male children "to prevent them

from being poisoned by the dominant patriarchal culture.” That was so no one would guess they were lupi.

When Isen began gathering Nokolai onto Clanhome, he'd needed a cover story. Lupi were rounded up whenever the government could identify them—rounded up, dosed with gado, and branded. So Isen had invented the Od Dama cult, claiming the phrase was Sanskrit. It wasn't. There were a couple similar Sanskrit words that Isen worked deftly into the theology they claimed to espouse, but really the name was a sly joke. Od Dama was Croatian for “of the Lady,” which was the very definition of what it was to be lupi. Humans didn't know about the Lady, of course, so the joke could be enjoyed by the clan while it sailed over the heads of the wider world.

Isen nodded. “For Alex it works. But he is not dominant. You are.”

“But not high-dominant. I can submit when the need is real. Or pretend to.” That was the whole point, wasn't it? He could control himself. Repressing the Change when some jackass pissed him off was the most critical part, but not the whole story. “Besides, the kids there aren't mine to lead.”

“Very well. I give permission, with the usual conditions. You'll report to me every day for the first two weeks, and twice a week after that until I say otherwise.”

He meant that Rule would report to his Rho, not to his father. You couldn't lie to your Rho. Not successfully, anyway, since he'd smell it, so if Isen asked Rule if he'd felt in danger of losing control at any point, Rule would have to be honest. If Isen deemed it necessary, he'd pull Rule out of school. This was necessary. If one of the young Oddies lost it and turned wolf, the entire clan would be jeopardized. “Of course.”

“Bear in mind,” Isen had added casually, “that whatever you think you need to prove to yourself, we sometimes learn more from failure than success.”

But he wasn't going to fail. Sure, the first couple days had been hard. He'd gotten through them with gritted teeth, his neck constantly prickling with raised hackles. Humans crowded you. They stood too close, and while he'd been warned to expect that, he hadn't realized how exhausting it would be to keep reminding his wolf it was not a challenge, just a dumb human over and over. But by now Rule's wolf had settled down. He'd been here a week, and things were going okay. Rule returned his attention to American history and diligently did not look at Mrs. Rogers' legs while she covered stuff he'd learned two years ago.

Near the end of class, Sarah Welbourne passed him a note asking if he was going to try out for the team. . . . Sarah of the long blond hair, adorable dimples, and c-cup breasts. Rule spent a good ten seconds wondering if getting to know Sarah as closely as he'd like would violate his role as misfit. She was a sophomore, like him, so it wouldn't break any of the age rules humans had about pairings, but she was extremely popular. Popularity was the scale on which human teens measured rank, and Sarah was a cheerleader who wielded her dimpled power over a large

coterie of other girls and pretty much every male in school. Especially the jocks. Most of the kids seemed to consider the jocks at the apex of the school's hierarchy, with cheerleaders one step down and misfits near the bottom.

Would a misfit dare make a play for Sarah Welbourne?

Duh. He was a heterosexual misfit. Of course he would.

Sarah didn't say which team she meant, but it didn't matter. Rule scribbled back that his father wouldn't give permission—true—and would she like to go get a Coke after school? He managed to pass it to her via one of her attendants without Mrs. Rogers noticing.

For some reason this made Alex sigh loudly.



Hillcrest High was a small school, so some age-mingling happened at lunch. Not much sex-mingling, though. Human teens were funny. The boys obsessed about girls and vice versa, but they didn't hang out together. Even at dances, Alex said, the boys would all clump up together when they weren't actually on the dance floor. Established couples were the exception, but you had to be going steady before it was considered okay to hang out with a girl at a dance instead of your buddies.

The “instead of” part was especially weird. Girls who hung out with a guy and his buddies were suspected of being fast, and that was a serious social stigma. Unless you were a hippie, that is, but there weren't that many hippie types at Hillcrest, and outside their own group, hippie girls were looked down on. This fit with the way bad boys were different from bad girls. Bad boys were considered cool, and the tag was earned by winning fights, driving a motorcycle or a fast car, and drinking a lot, with a few sexual conquests thrown in. Bad girls were sexually active. Period. That's what the term meant, and it wasn't cool. Isen said this attitude was the trickle-down from the larger society's efforts to control female sexuality. Unlike lupi, a human man didn't know if a woman carried his child or someone else's. As a result, human men had spent centuries trying desperately to control women. A lot of them wanted to keep women sexually ignorant and isolated, afraid of their own bodies. This was changing some now that woman had the Pill, but not all at once.

Not at all at Hillcrest, from what Rule could see. This might be California, but the school was in a small, rural town. At lunch Rule carried his tray to the sexually segregated table table where Alex sat with some of the other male misfits. Most of them were seniors. Rule was allowed into their ranks because of Alex, who'd explained that he was supposed to look after “the kid.” Of the other two non-seniors, one was the younger brother of an accepted member, and the other was Donny, the group's clown.

Clowns had a special status. One of the older Nokolai—he was at college now—had told Rule

that a gifted clown could move pretty freely among all the social strata at school, kind of the way a gamma wolf operates in a natural wolf pack. Andy wasn't that gifted, though. Or maybe the others sensed what Rule knew for a fact. Rule hadn't seen anything overt, but arousal was such an obvious scent. No way he could help knowing that Donny thought Rule was a lot sexier than Sarah.

The group with the lowest status of all were homosexuals. This was true in the larger society and doubly so at Hillcrest High, where none of them dared admit what they were. This boggled Rule's brain. If human men held the power in their world, and they were hell-bent on keeping rivals from impregnating their women, why didn't they welcome men who were not sexual rivals?

But they didn't. They sure as hell didn't.

Rule felt sorry for Donny. He was trying not to. Isen said pity was a corrosive weed that warmed its donor while strangling its object. In other words, you didn't respect those you pitied. You couldn't always feel what you were supposed to, though, so Rule concentrated on controlling what he could. His actions. When he set his tray down between Donny and Alex, Donny donned what he used for his Rule Face—a haughty look—and said in a really bad British accent that he'd decided to “eat with the commoners” today. Rule showed him respect by slapping the side of his head. “Scoot over, commoner.”

The guys laughed as Donny cringed in exaggerated fear and scooted over. “Yessir, yessir, whatever you say, sir.”

Donny imitated everyone. He mugged, he exaggerated, and people laughed. But things were only funny if they were a little bit true, so it was bothersome that he'd chosen to depict Rule as some kind of English aristocrat. Clearly Rule didn't have his role down as well as he'd thought.

The food wasn't bad. It wasn't good, either, but Rule's wolf wasn't picky, so he let that part of him pay attention to eating.

Alex had already finished. He gave a slow head shake. “So are you meeting Sarah after school?”

“Don't know yet.” She hadn't answered, but she'd looked at him quickly and giggled, and he'd heard it clearly when one of her friends whispered much the same question at her. He'd heard what she whispered back, too. He smiled. Sarah thought he was dreamy. “Maybe not today. She wants to be chased a bit, I think.”

One of the guys announced, “You are not talking about the beautiful Sarah.”

“What about Sarah?” someone asked.

Runt snorted. His real name was Harold, but everyone called him Runt for obvious reasons. “His lordship here thinks Sarah's going to go out with him.”

A couple of them hooted in disbelief, a couple more demanded details, and Donny looked worried. “Sarah is Pete’s girl.”

“They broke up, didn’t they?” She’d referred to that, most emphatically, in her whispering—saying Pete didn’t own her, not anymore.

Donny shook his head. “Pete doesn’t care if they’re not officially going together at the moment. Far as he’s concerned, she’s his girl. You go sniffing around her and he’ll break you into itsy-bitsy pieces.”

Rule frowned, thinking about that. Pete was the top jock, a senior, top of the food chain. He was supposed to be strong as an ox. Looked kind of like one, too, in a blond-haired, blue-eyed sort of way. He couldn’t damage Rule, but stopping him from doing so would draw attention. Rule glanced at Alex.

“True words,” Alex murmured. “Plus he’s a bully.”

“Then Sarah’s better off with someone else.”

“Is it up to you to make that happen?”

No, dammit, it wasn’t. Rule scowled at the tray—empty; he’d polished off everything without noticing—and sighed. “My father wouldn’t like it if I got in a fight.”

Runt’s eyebrows shot up. “You always do like your daddy wants?”

“Pretty much.” That, he knew, was uncool, but he was a misfit. He didn’t have to be cool. His lips twitched. “People usually do what my father wants. Even Alex.” Seeing that Isen was Rho and all.

Alex rolled his eyes. “Don’t be so clever. Hey, are any of you guys—”

Some small sound alerted Rule. He spun in his seat.

Three of the jocks were advancing on his table. The one in the lead was blond, blue-eyed, and built like an ox. Every instinct urged Rule to his feet to face this threat head-on. His suppressed it, along with the desire to bare his teeth. Human teeth, he reminded his wolf, weren’t that impressive, and there were teachers present. Pete was unlikely to do much other than make stupid threats, and Rule did not intend to challenge Pete. It was more submissive to remain seated.

Pete stopped way too close so he could loom over Rule and sneer down at him. “You’re that new kid. The Oddie.”

Rule looked away, as if intimidated. “I belong to the Od Dama, yes. And I’m new here.”

“Well, because you’re new, I’m gonna give you a break. You get a warning. You stay away from Sarah. Don’t look at her, don’t talk to her, don’t hassle her. She’s too nice to tell some freak to leave her alone, so I’m saying it for her.”

Rule wanted badly to tell the ox that Sarah was capable of making her own decisions. He wanted to stare at Pete and let his wolf rise just enough that Pete would have to look away. Instead he said quietly, “My father doesn’t want me getting into fights here.”

Pete snickered. “Like it would even be a fight. You stay away, hear?”

Stay calm, stay calm, stay calm . . . “I hear.”

“Sir.”

Rule’s eyes jerked up. “What?”

“When freaks like you talk to me, you say yes sir or no sir.”

“No, actually, I don’t.” Whoops. He hadn’t intended to say that.

“Oh, yeah? Well, you’ll think differently when I—”

“Is there a problem here, boys?” That was Mr. Carlton, the assistant principal, moving in from the left.

“No problem, sir,” Rule said politely.

“Pete?” Mr. Carlton said.

Pete smiled, his blue eyes bright and guileless. “Just getting to know the new guy. Welcoming him to Hillcrest.” He slapped Rule on the arm. He made it look friendly, but it was a hard slap. “You ought to try out for football next year. Work out some over the summer, and maybe you could make the team.” He winked, then he and his two cronies moved off. After giving Rule a hard look, so did Mr. Carlton. Clearly the man blamed Rule for something, but Rule didn’t know if it was for lying about there being a problem, or if he thought Rule was the one making trouble.

“You are so in for it,” Runt said.

“He’ll be laying for you,” Donny said.

“After school,” Alex said. “In the parking lot, probably.”

Rule sighed.

Rule knelt in front of his Rho.

“Did you feel in danger of losing control at any point today?”

“No, sir.” Rule considered that response and decided to elaborate. “I did react outside my role once, but it was a verbal reaction. My wolf wasn’t a problem.”

“Hmm. And yet something is bothering you.”

“There’s a jock who wants to beat me up. I avoided him today.” It hadn’t been hard. The Ox had football practice. There were only about twenty minutes between the last bell and practice, so he had a short interval when he was free to beat people up. Rule had lingered in the library. “But that’s a temporary fix, and I’m not sure how to handle it, longterm.” He looked in Isen’s eyes. “I’d like to come up with my own solution.”

Isen considered that in silence, then nodded. “Very well. For now I’ll withhold advice.”



Rule kept up the avoidance tactic for another two days, and then it was the weekend. By Monday, he’d decided what he had to do. He’d let Pete punch him a few times, then submit.

It sucked. It purely sucked, but he couldn’t see any way to resolve this without one of them getting beaten up, and if he beat up the baddest guy in school he’d stand out way too much. He’d have to stay home for a few days afterwards so no one realized how fast he healed, but that was no biggie. Taking a few blows didn’t bother him, either. He trained with his brother Benedict. He knew how to take blows.

He’d probably have to say yes, sir to get Pete to stop, though. That grated. That really, really grated.

The halls were crowded Monday morning as everyone hurried to beat the bell, with plenty of arm-punching—the guys—and giggling—the girls—among knots of friends. Rule’s home period was with Mrs. Rogers in a room at the end of the hall, so he wound through and around the knots. He didn’t have any classes with Pete, but he had second period with Pete’s buddy, Mike. Rule would use Mike to arrange a meeting after school.

The fight itself shouldn’t be too bad. Keeping himself from Changing would be the easiest part. Benedict trained all the young lupi, and one of the first things they learned was to stay in the form they’d been told to hold. You weren’t much of a warrior if you couldn’t stay in the most suitable form for a fight. Losing the fight would be harder, but manageable. Humans were painfully slow; he’d have plenty of time to figure out where he wanted Pete’s blows to land. He’d allow himself to get in a couple punches, too. He couldn’t put much strength in them, but he’d promised himself he’d at least black the Ox’s eye. The hard part would come after he let Pete

punch him in the gut so he could collapse. When he had to pretend to submit, act like the Ox has authority over him, and . . .

Rule came to a stop. He had to. The hall was completely blocked. People in front of him started laughing—some nervous, some hearty. A girl squealed and a locker door slammed. “There, you see?” Pete said, invisible in the crowd. “You owe me five, Mike.”

Then Rule heard Sarah. “Oh, Pete, shame on you.” Her voice was warm with laughter, though, not condemnation. “Poor Runt. Now—”

Rule didn’t hear the rest of it because the warning bell sounded. He did hear Pete telling someone jovially to come on, don’t want to be late, do you? The crowd cleared out and Rule hurried ahead.

Someone was banging on one of the lockers. From the inside. There was a pile of books and personal stuff on the floor next to it. Rule opened the locker. Runt was folded up inside.

Runt was pale and shaky. Rule helped him out of the tiny space.

“You’ll be late. Better hurry.” Runt ducked his head down and crouched to gather his stuff together. He was shaking so much he had trouble holding onto things. He was also humiliated.

He’d get over the shakes. The other was harder. Rule crouched down beside him and started stacking Runt’s books. “I can be late. That’s about my worst nightmare, you know.”

“What, being late?”

The second bell rang, making them officially tardy. Rule stood and set the books back in the locker. “Being locked up in a tiny space like that. I don’t know if I could stand it. What happened?”

Runt shrugged. He still wouldn’t meet Rule’s eyes, but when he stood and started shoving the rest of his things in the locker he didn’t reek quite so much of shame. “Pete had a bet with his good buddy Mike. He told me to take my stuff out of my locker and climb in. If I fit, he won. So that’s what I did.”

Runt weighed maybe a hundred pounds, and none of it was muscle. Pete weighed two hundred, and none of it was fat. “And no one hung around to let you out?”

“Pete didn’t want them to, and everyone does what Pete wants.” Runt’s voice was bitter. “Just like I did.”

Anger lit a cold flame in Rule’s gut. “The Ox has a real basic sense of humor, doesn’t he?” He clapped a hand on Runt’s shoulder. “You ever see a cat get in a boxing match with an ox?”

Runt blinked. “Do what?”

“You know about cats, right? They’re small and smart and sneaky, and they know they’re the coolest of the cool. They don’t think there’s something wrong with them because they can’t punch out an ox.”

“A cat, huh?” Runt’s shoulders straightened. “He looks like an ox, doesn’t he?”

“Thinks like one, too.”

Rule went on to class, where he got in trouble for being tardy. That morning he had no trouble ignoring Mrs. Roger’s legs. He was too busy explaining to himself why it was not up to him to fix things here. Even though the culture was sick. All schools had bullies, but Pete had everyone convinced that his bullying was cool. The other kids didn’t just let him get away with it out of fear—they laughed.

But Rule’s duty was to the clan, not to these young humans. It wasn’t his job to straighten them out. He explained that to himself all through first period, but the cold knot of anger in his gut didn’t go away.



At three-thirty-five that afternoon, the sun was shining brightly and the air was brisk. Great weather for a run, especially four-footed. Pity he wouldn’t be doing that. “You are not to get involved,” he told Alex firmly as they threaded through the crowd in the parking lot. Hillcrest High had a lot of rural kids, but even the townies drove to class instead of riding the bus if they could. It was a big parking lot.

“He’ll have his buddies with him. If any of them get in on it—”

“No. It would draw too much attention to Oddies if you acted, too.”

They were nearly at the appointed meeting place at the far end of the parking lot, next to the new gym. Looked like a lot of kids had heard about the proposed fight. There was quite a crowd.

“You’re sure you can just let him hit you?”

Rule nodded grimly. It bothered Alex to think of the heir submitting to the Ox. It bothered Rule, too, but . . . “It’s not like it will be a real submission. We’re supposed to lie to humans.”

Alex brightened a bit. “True. And none of them will smell the lie.”

But Alex would, which was what mattered. “Right. Hey.” Rule paused, listening. “That’s Donny. He sounds scared.”

He and Alex pushed and slithered their way to the front of the crowd. In a small open area, Sarah stood with two of her maids-in-waiting. So did Pete with half a dozen other jocks.

So did Donny, but he stood all alone. “I didn’t!”

“That’s not what I heard,” Sarah said. “Are you saying Bella lied?”

“No, but—but she was mistaken.” Donny darted a frightened glance at Pete, who was rubbing one fist with his other hand. “I wasn’t making fun of you, Sarah. I was just—just—” He stopped and swallowed.

Sarah was gorgeous even when she was boiling mad. She tossed her shiny blond hair back and said sweetly, “No? Well, let’s see your little impersonation, then. So we can all decide if you were making fun of me or not.”

“Yeah,” Pete growled. “Do what the lady says, jerk.”

Donny shook his head frantically.

Sarah’s smile turned poisonous. “What’s the matter, Donny? Afraid everyone will see what a good girl you make?”

Donny went white.

Rule stepped forward. “Methinks the lady—” he laid just enough emphasis on the word to make it clear he doubted that it applied— “doth protest too much. Plus she seems to lack a sense of humor. Takes herself pretty seriously, doesn’t she?”

Sarah spun, her beautiful face pale with fury. “How dare you?”

Pete smiled evilly. “Don’t you worry, honey. Pretty soon he won’t dare take a piss without my permission.” He moved to stand in front of Rule and cracked his knuckles. “Positions, boys. We don’t want to be interrupted.”



“The dumpster, eh?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Hmm.”

For several moments Isen didn’t say a thing. Rule was kneeling in front of him. He kept his head down so his father—his Rho—wouldn’t see how sick he felt. He’d failed. He’d only been at the human school one week, and he’d failed.

“How exactly did you get him into the dumpster?”

It wasn't the question Rule had expected. Startled, he looked up. “Kung Fu. At least, I made it look like what they think is Kung Fu, though I didn't call it that. I couldn't let them know how strong I am, but those kids think Kung Fu masters can do just about anything.”

“And do they think you're a Kung Fu master now?”

Rule shrugged. “I'm an Oddie. Who knows what we're taught in our weird cult? I bowed at him and waved my hands around before I flipped him over my hip the first time. I never did hit him, just kept tossing him around. Afterwards,” he added, “I said something about my father teaching me the ancient art of Kung Pao, in case any of them actually knew something about Kung Fu.”

Isen's lips twitched. “I believe that's a Chinese dish, not a martial art.”

Shit. “I had to make up something.”

“I see. How did your wolf react to the combat?”

“He liked it. He would've liked to come out and play,” Rule added. “He had a lot of ideas about what to do to Pete.” Wolves mostly think in sensory images. At least young wolves do. Rule had been told his wolf would get more verbal as time went on. “His thoughts were kind of distracting, but not too bad. And it wasn't that hard to keep him inside.”

“None of the teachers noticed all this?”

“Pete has everyone trained to hide him and his target when he wants to beat someone up. He won't tattle,” Rule added in case Isen didn't realize that. “He wasn't hurt aside from some bumps and bruises, and it's too humiliating to tell anyone.”

There was another long pause.

Here it comes, Rule thought, and steeled himself.

“You couldn't make yourself to submit to this Pete fellow, I suppose.”

“No! No, that wasn't it. I mean . . . I didn't want to. I hated the idea. But that wasn't what made me change my plan. It was Donny. He's homosexual, but no one knows, even if some of them suspect. You know how humans are about that. When Sarah said what she did, I had to get everyone's attention away from him. And . . .”

“Yes?”

Rule sighed. “I'd miscalculated. I thought the power lay with Pete. That's what everyone at school thinks, and I bought it. But the real power-holder there is Sarah. She's the reason the culture at

school is so sick, but I didn't realize that until I saw the way she used Pete as her enforcer." That's why she couldn't tolerate being laughed at. It undercut her power. He'd done his best to expose how small she really was—another whack at her power—and to take away her enforcer. Pity he wouldn't be around to see how it worked out.

"So you decided you had to fix things."

Rule flushed. "Yes, sir. I shouldn't have. I know that."

"Do you?" All at once Isen smiled, splitting his beard in a flash of humor. "Rule, what's the definition of dominant?"

He blinked. Why was Isen asking him something so basic? "A dominant wants to be in charge. To lead. Especially if there isn't another dominant who's doing the job."

"Why does he want to be in charge?"

"So he can take care of the others. Protect them, guide them, make things as right as they can be."

Isen leaned back in his chair and steepled his fingers together. "Now, what was it you told that young man you call Runt? Something about a cat and an ox, wasn't it? You didn't want him blaming himself for being a cat, unable to do battle with an ox."

"Uh . . . yes, sir. I mean, no, I didn't."

"Why do you think I'll blame you for being what you are—dominant?"

Hope stirred to life inside him. "But they aren't mine to take care of."

"No one else was doing the job, were they?" He squeezed Rule's shoulder. Isen had a grip like the blacksmith he resembled. "Get up, get up. It may not have been the best solution, but there shouldn't be any repercussions for the clan, so your Rho isn't unhappy with you. And your father is pretty damn pleased."

Rule rose slowly and cocked his head. "You knew all along I was going to fail at being a misfit."

"Never a doubt in my mind. Not the way you were defining misfit, anyway. I'd say you're stuck with being a bad boy now."

A grin flickered. "Does that mean I get a motorcycle?"

Isen chuckled and stood. "We'll see. The dumpster, eh?" he said again, this time with a grin. "Not the most elegant solution, but satisfying. I'm sure it was satisfying. Tell me all about it."



For more information on this book,
and other books by Eileen Wilks,
visit eileenwilks.com.