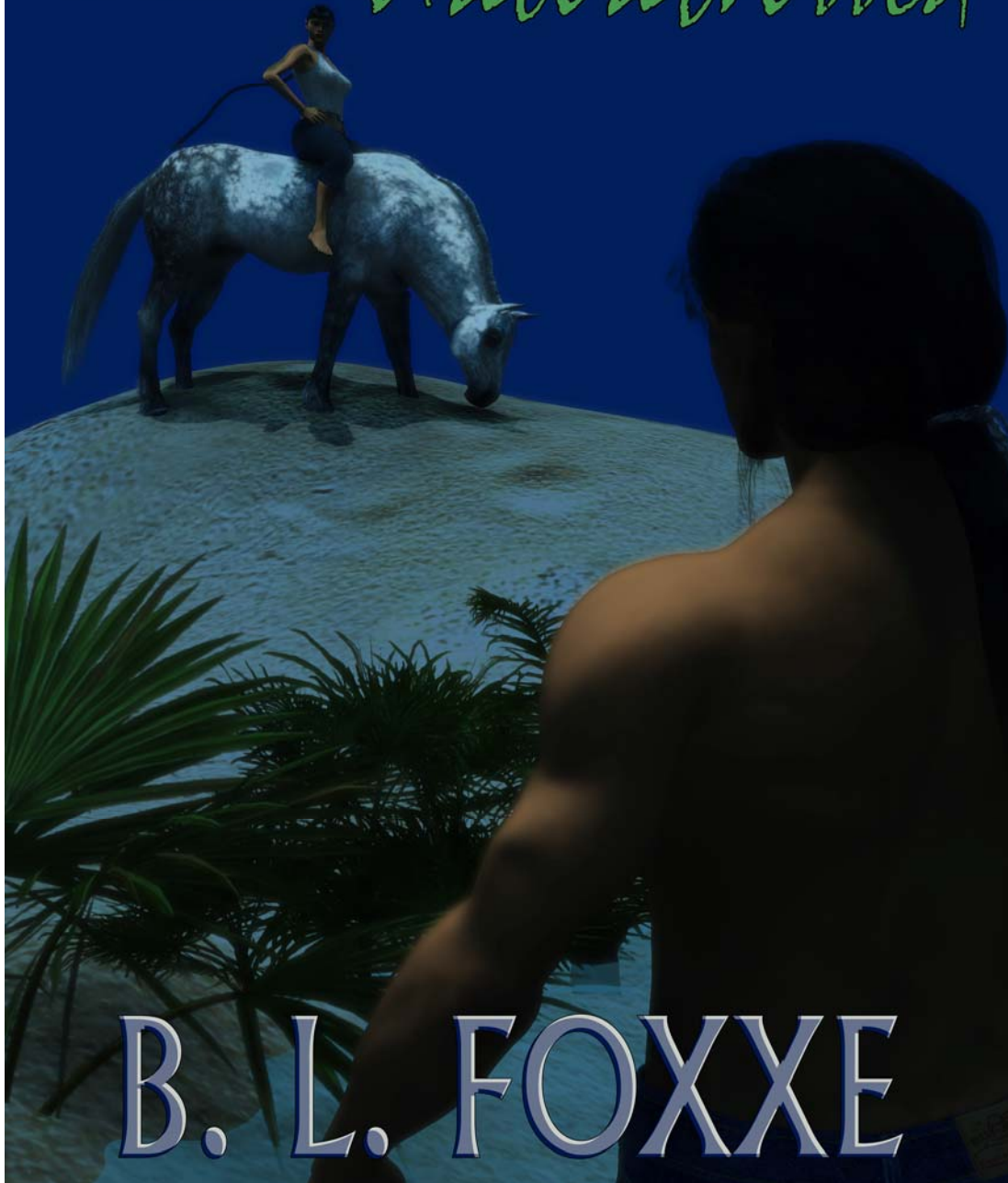


VENUS PRESS

CORRUPTION

Uncontrolled



B. L. FOXXE

B.L. Foxxe

**CORRUPTION
UNCONTROLLED**

BY

B.L. FOXXE

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ISBN: 1-59836-398-0

Cover Art © 2006 by Wendon Smoot

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Dedication:

Many thanks go out to Angel Lynn and several others of the mod squad over at Dara Joy's site. I hope they're enjoying their successes as well. I also dedicate this to all those shapeshifter lovers out there who love such books as this.

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Prologue

Wako Springs Ranch, Wako Springs
19 years ago, 5046

The night was quiet as a skinny but wiry boy clambered down from his top perch on the bunk bed. It was one of twelve rooms lined up in a row. Normally his twin sister Ruby slept on the lower portion. Not tonight though. His mother and father were arguing again, and he sensed something was happening elsewhere. He frowned, remembering his sister being removed from the room that was too small and cramped.

He wanted to go with them, but his mother shot him a filthy look of hatred. She never looked at him that way before. He kept quiet though. Instead, he watched out a barred picture window from his twenty by twenty square foot communal room. Soon it would be filled with other kids. He knew there were others.

Didn't matter where they came from, not even at his age. He was only twelve years old, but he knew there was something wrong about how his father was conducting his life, and dealing with others. When he hit thirteen, he would likely be sent to a different communal room, or better yet, fostered out somewhere.

Man, he hated this dusty ancient town. It had been around forever, and yet parts of it always became new, no matter that his father was always blustering on about tainted blood and trashy kinds of folks. As far as the boy was concerned, his father was the worst type of trash around.

As he watched, the boy saw what he suspected were his mother and his remaining sisters slipping away. Two of them turned back and waved, he did not wave back. It would be foolish and he had no doubt that his own activities were being monitored. They would always be monitored considering that he apparently was not an actual Loman. Far be it from him to disturb the status quo.

He suspected that sooner or later someone would make it a point to start asking about his true parentage. Then all hell would break loose. Even now he could feel differences in his body that had not manifested when he was younger. Sharper teeth, faster reflexes, as well as night vision that kept him from banging into all kinds of obstacles that

could have killed him.

He shrugged his shoulders. Not something he wanted to think about right at the moment. No telling what would happen if he were caught up in a weak moment. His older sisters had already been taken off the ranch years ago. The next sisters who were only months away from turning eighteen were slated for being removed. He just hoped that his mother got the younger ones away before it was too late.

He knew that he had older female siblings. Most of them had already disappeared. He only remembered most of them from the age of eight and up. Sighing he rested his head against the window. There was a faint cry, abruptly hushed and then they disappeared into the dark and still night.

The weather was hot, painfully so, and he felt the burning heat washing over him. He knew what it meant, but when the lights flared on in the room, he did not move. He could already feel the sting of a whip, he had yet to hear what his so-called sire's demands would be.

"Where did they go boy?" The rough voice of his father made him flinch.

He did not respond though. His back was lashed by a multiple pronged whip, cracking against skin with each stroke. He knew his father held it in his hands and was readying to administer a new blow. In detached corner of his mind, he wondered how many of the girls he had seen had received a taste of it as well.

"Who?" The boy asked, knowing full well that his interrogator would not be pleased by his backtalk.

Erasmus Sr. scowled at the boy. He was already showing signs of superior musculature. Something that he knew had been missing from his other sons. Still the fact that he had been born on this ranch made him the property of Erasmus Raymond Loman Sr., and nothing would stop him from keeping the bastard.

Didn't matter that the boy's true father had been wolf trash. He would be raised as a Loman. Especially since his slut of a wife hadn't taken him away. The kid was fair game for whatever treatment Loman decided to mete out to him.

There were footsteps pounding in the hallway as the other Loman boys appeared in the doorway. None of them wanted to miss seeing their father's handling of the kid. He was a thorn in their sides. The oldest of the four who were half blocking the doorway finally glanced at the boy. Blond hair, light blue eyes, and skinny as a rail in comparison to the others who were either black or dark brown haired, black or green eyed, and all had dark complexions.

"Dad, the kid didn't see anything. It's too dark." Erasmus Jr. said, scowling at his

CORRUPTION UNCONTROLLED

father and youngest kid brother. He hated it when his father always turned to Reggie the bastard for answers. Unfortunately it was a fact that he had a knack for ferreting out forbidden knowledge.

Reggie did not respond, nor did he even attempt to give reason for his silence. Nothing would help, as he knew well from past experiences.

“Shut up.” The speaker was hit across the face. Erasmus Raymond “Ray” Loman Sr. was in no mood for his oldest namesake’s attitude. He had to learn obedience and the proper way of dealing with him if he ever wanted to be successful. Hell, he was already into his early twenties. “I’m taking him down to the cellar. If I catch any of you boys sneaking down there, I’ll make you all stay too.”

He yanked the silent boy away from the window where he had been kneeling and dragged him away. “I’ll teach you to tell me the truth when I ask you to, boy. Even if I have to beat it out of you. God knows your ma wasn’t any better than those whores on Minnow street.”

He continued dragging Reggie down three flights of stairs and then into a small windowless, lightless room. The boy was thrown into it and the door locked. “You’ll stay in there for as long as it takes you to tell me where they went boy.” Erasmus told him through the door.

The boy remained silent, his eyes cold and lifeless, devoid of emotion, as he stared at the closed door. Then he curled up into a small ball and fell into a nightmare filled sleep.

“Pa, he isn’t going to tell you anything. Ma never told the little brat nothing.” Erasmus Jr. told his big angry father. He wasn’t afraid of his father, not right now anyway. He ignored the fact that the kid was likely going to be suffering from at least one or two nasty bruises and seven gashes.

“How do you know?” He turned on his son sharply.

“Cause I would beat out any information from him.” His namesake told him. “Then I told you.” He had not spread it around to the others. It had been his brothers’ runaway mouths that had ruined things in the past for him.

“No one else?” Erasmus Sr. asked him harshly.

“None.” Erasmus Jr. told him. “I made sure to keep the beatings between the brat and me.” He admitted. “Otherwise what might have been told, Ray, Ruiz and Gregory would yak about to the others.”

“I see. So that is why they seemed so smug on other occasions.” Erasmus Sr. said softly, his voice deadly.

“Yes sir. I made sure to keep them away from him when I wanted to get

information.” Erasmus added. He would not admit to bullying the boy for other reasons. Like getting information about their father. The brat had an instinct for knowing where to hide. Even at six years of age.

“Your mama had an affair. That is why Reginald and Ruby had different looks from the rest.” Erasmus said. “He’s the bastard that she forced me into acknowledging.” He added, not bothering to add that he had killed the man who had had the gall to make up to his wife.

“What about the other women?” Erasmus Jr. asked him. “You’re other wives.” There was a tinge of irony in his voice as he added the last two words.

“They don’t know I am Loman. The others don’t look like me.” He shrugged his shoulders, not truly caring about the effect that his words would have on his oldest son of his first wife. That stupid whore, she should have known that he would find out about her lover. The man had been a lovesick fool, mooning around her all the time.

He dismissed that line of thinking. It was useless in the long run. It would not get his woman back. At least not right at this very moment. Tracking her down would take patience and guile. He would get those girls back. They were valuable merchandise for the future of the rest of the family. “The others resemble my parents and siblings. I am the perfect example of what recessive genes do when they reveal themselves.” He said it with acerbic amusement.

“Why did you want to have more than one wife?” Erasmus asked in puzzlement.

“Boy, sometimes there are just some things you don’t ask a man. However, I will tell you this. My grandfather was a sheik.” Loman shrugged his shoulders. “My mother was sold to an American, and banished from the family.” His smile was thin and vicious.

“Seems though that the old sheik can’t find a good son, or a grandson from his other wives.” His expression grew vindictive. “So he tracked me down and offered me a shot at becoming his heir. I had to provide female offspring to be tutored and then sent to the Matania.” He said, referring to the colony where polygamy was allowed and encouraged.

“So?” Erasmus Jr. was not impressed so far. None of this explained his fury about the kid brother that his father had turned into mincemeat for the night. He had counted forty lashes on the boy’s back.

“So you boys, as my heirs, are going to be running my ranch.” Erasmus Sr. told him. He shrugged. “That is, if you even want a stake in what it will be.”

“What will be going on?” The younger man asked suspiciously. He knew he had two other brothers who were a year older than him. Their last names were Truman-Kerr and he knew that they were aware of their connection to him. Needless to say, that when

CORRUPTION UNCONTROLLED

they had come to this small flyspeck town, they had not been happy to find out just who he was in relation to their location.

“Lots of free sex.” Erasmus said, well aware of the fact that his randy sons were generating a reputation for themselves.

Erasmus Jr. continued to eye him skeptically.

“This will only be a Loman operation.” His father said. “Kerr and Josiah are going to be running this ranch.” He also knew that they had no interest in the local women. Their minds were set on getting back out of Wako Springs. They preferred Virginia with its more friendly surroundings.

“Ah.” His son considered the advantages of not having to worry about a scrawny little brat sneaking around. “The boy is good at finding the oddest places to hide in. He watches you, me, and the others having fun with the girls.” Erasmus warned his father. He was uneasy, but knew he had the unpleasant duty of keeping his father aware of some bad habits that Reginald had developed.

“Oh really?” His father did not seem unduly upset, which bothered his son. However, he did not show any signs of being too ruffled. He figured it was likely a test of some kind.

His father glanced over his shoulder at the small room and then shrugged. “Go find a willing girl. There was a new crop sent in. Four girls by the name of Morales, eight by the name of Lopez.” He said it casually, dismissing his son. He had to do some paperwork.

“Yes, sir.” Erasmus Jr. never got over the pleasure of being able to sample the newest girls. True, they were usually broken in by one of his father’s trusted brothers. Still, it was always fun to find out what they could do. He walked back up the stairs without another word. Reginald was dismissed from his consciousness, concentrating on more interesting stuff.

Erasmus Sr. watched his son leave with a smirk. That was always one of the easiest ways to get rid of his son. He had a feeling that the boy was also a voyeuristic pest. It did not mean though that it was a bad thing.

Reggie however, was a problem. Erasmus shrugged. He would keep the boy in the cellar for a month or two. That should teach him some manners.

After waiting for the coast to clear, a slender figure sneaked down the stairs as soon as Erasmus Sr. had headed to his offices that were on the floor above the cellars. She picked the lock that held the young boy locked in. With a penlight, the girl located where he was curled up. Silently she put down a roll of blankets, food and water. She could do no more while the master of the house was there. He had too good of hearing and a knack for

unexpected searches.

The boy was watching her solemnly. "He is coming." The boy spoke softly. The girl tensed. "There is a closet, you can hide in there. It smells though." He added, it was the bathroom but rarely cleaned. The last time that he had been in there, he had cleaned it, and had gotten beaten up for his trouble.

His father had been furious to discover that the boy had been that at ease with the cleaning supplies. He had docked all the janitorial staff three months worth of wages. Then he had informed them to never give him instructions in cleaning up again. The majority had followed his orders. Four had not, but then neither of them nor the boy had acknowledged each other.

The girl nodded and then climbed into it. The cellar chamber door had locked behind her anyway. The boy suspected that she had planned on that happening. When his father stormed in, there was nothing out of place or changed. He tied the boy up and beat him savagely.

Not once did the boy give in to the demands of his father. There were worse fates that he could envision, one of them being that the girl would be caught. The old man wouldn't hesitate to rape her right in front of him. He had done it in the past. All it had done was disgust the boy into vomiting. He had been beaten for showing weakness right then.

When his angry father could not get a word out of his son, he stormed out of the room. Then he reentered and untied the boy, but not before kicking him in the kidneys and in the groin. He double locked the door. After a moment of thought, he activated a third lock.

By activating it, he was using three special alarms to keep it from being opened without his knowledge. He listened for movement or voices, but neither of those actions occurred. Finally, he stormed back to his office and began making several calls. He was going to make sure that his wife paid for her defiance.

"You need to leave before he comes back." The boy said hoarsely, his ears catching the sounds of the girl emerging from the room.

"No." She carefully sat down by his prone figure. He had uncurled, though it was clear that he was suffering. "How long has he been beating you like this?"

"Three years ago, right about when I was able to start running from him." Reginald replied as he lay still.

She had clicked on a penlight and was using it to guide her hands. "He doesn't use your name?"

CORRUPTION UNCONTROLLED

“No, I’m not his blood.” The boy replied, lapsing into silence.

“What is your name?”

“Reginald Gauguin Loman.” He said after a moment. “I just go by Reggie most times. I hate the other two names.”

“Okay. I’m Mora Aless.” She said, and he just looked at her with a cynical gaze.

“Why are you helping me when it could mean that you would die?”

“He’s an old asshole.” She replied bluntly.

His eyebrows rose slightly, but then he sighed. “Well if you can get out past those special alarms, I will admire you more than if you stay here.” He told her.

“Not going anywhere.” She told him.

“Why?”

“You are my brother.” She said at last. “You and Ruby aren’t my only brothers and sisters by your mama.” She told him. “You are the only two that Loman did discover.” Mora told him.

Reggie eyed her. “In that case I will not ask you for your real name then.” He said solemnly. “He is eventually going to catch you.”

“No shit.” She replied curtly, after wrapping bandages around his thin body.

Reggie had managed to unroll the blankets and lay full length on two. A third one lay lightly over his battered skin. He had shoved the others toward her. There had been six in all. “Use ‘em. No sense in letting the extras going to waste.”

“You don’t act like you are twelve years old.” She commented.

“Dunno and don’t care how old I’m supposed to act.” Reggie said testily. “Likely I’ll regress if I manage to survive to become any older.” Something in his voice alerted her to the fact that he doubted that would happen.

“Why do you say that?”

“Old bastard hates my guts. By now he knows that I warn others of when he’s going to make a raid on certain sections of towns for the easy women. Or the ones who’ll go for the money.” His voice was cynical.

“Why do you do it?”

“Right thing to do, even if it makes for long times of solitude.” Reggie didn’t look at her. “I prefer being alone to having people help me. Less likely they’ll turn up missing or dead.”

“I did it the other way to just piss him off. I can escape through other ways.” She told him.

“Good for you. Leave while you can.” He told her. “I will hide this stuff before he

comes back. Though it could happen at any time.”

“I am nine years old.” The girl muttered. She was sitting next to him.

He did a double take and eyed her suspiciously. “Coulda fooled me. You look about fifteen.” Reggie was less than thrilled that she was staying in there with him.

“Yeah, that is because I am an early bloomer, according to my folks. I am just real tall for my age. That is all.” She said, though she was clearly not at all happy.

“Well, you can use it to your advantage if you can learn how to fight.” Reggie said finally.

“Yeah?”

“Yeah.”

“How do you know?”

Reggie shrugged. “Just some things that I have heard. You got an advantage if you can fight back.” He glanced at her out of the corner of his eyes. “Some of the girls managed to fight back and run.” Reggie murmured. “They got out a south gate that is hidden in one of the pastures that is closest to the main road.”

“Why are you telling me this?” She asked him.

“So that you can get the unwilling ones off the ranch.” He told her. “And so that you don’t end up getting raped and then sold to the highest bidder as a whore for the night.” For once he was telling her something that he sensed in her.

“How do you know all this?”

“Listening, spying.” He said.

“Don’t you know that is totally wrong?” She asked him.

“Maybe so, and yeah, it gets me locked up in this filthy place. At least I can help others.” He said, and then dropped into sleep.

She watched him with a sigh. There was a click at the door.

Then all the locks were released and an old man stood there in the doorway. Light flooded them, and the boy lay like a stone. He said not a word as his father dragged her out by her hair.

“So you disobeyed my rules, bitch.” He roughly pulled her to her feet and pushed his hand against her shoulders. She let him shove her around. The girl knew what she had to do.

“You will tell me everything he said.” The old man said coldly.

“He did not tell me anything.” She spat at him.

“Don’t you give me any sass girl,” He snarled at her. “You know that you are going to get what you’ve been asking for ever since you got here.” He slapped her across the face,

CORRUPTION UNCONTROLLED

splitting her lips. "You think I don't know who you are, huh?" He smiled evilly when fear filled her eyes.

"He did and I want to know what he gave to you." His eyes skimmed over her. "Neither of you are old enough for other things. So he talked to you. Tell me what he told you." He paused and then added. "You may as well accept the fact that you won't leave this property alive."

The girl refused to talk, even when he let his men have her. She was dead before the morning came.

Erasmus shrugged he was disappointed by the fact that he had gotten no useful information from her. It had been a waste of their time. "Pitch the remains for the coyotes to find." Erasmus told his men.

They did as ordered and dismissed her death as business. They shivered though. Something about the moonlit arroyo made them wonder if they should have taken her to the local dump. Before they could go anywhere, shots were fired and they fell off their horses, but were dragged back to the ranch.

A cold wind blew around the small area, where the girl's body was laying like a broken doll. It stirred once or twice, and then a wolf came upon it. It was dragging something else behind it.

He exchanged one, and moved the girl so that she was draped over his lean rangy form. The animal was silhouetted for a brief time. Its fur was a steel gray with thick bars of black along its sides and around his eyes. Then it disappeared, hiding any tracks that led to that area.

A second wolf, younger and wilder in its movement from point to point, joined the elder, pure black with dark gray markings on its muzzle and ears. It sniffed cautiously at the unconscious girl and nuzzled one hand gently. The hand twitched convulsively, then the fingers twined into the thick silky fur of the younger wolf.

Together they ran swiftly, baying murderously into the night. Resounding howls joined from ridge to ridge, sending fear into the hearts of men and women alike that dwelled in the ranch.

The girl was tended to and then taken to a safe haven by others who raised her. She was a broken doll compared to what she once was. It was a while later that she took the name of Sheba Tolliver. She talked rarely of her past, but was often approached by others who treated her kindly.

One was a young man who went by the name of Lobo. "What happened?" Lobo

was curious. She would let him sit next to her often. He never touched her or was rude to her.

"I was bad hurt. The boy who tried to warn me was beaten near to death twice. I didn't listen to his advice, he was hurt even worse." She finally told him everything that had happened to her. The one thing that Sheba never told him was her real name. She also did not tell him of the boy's name either.

He never asked for it either, it was not exactly any of his business. Instead he gave her support, let her cry on his shoulder and waved when she left on a bus that was scheduled to take orphaned girls and boys alike to Carmenite.

"Lobo." She looked at him one last time.

"What, little bird?" He asked.

His nickname made her smile. She was three inches smaller than he. "Whatever you do, avoid that place. Its bad stuff out there. Lotsa nasty things go on that aren't legal." She warned him.

"What is it called?" He asked her.

Sheba thought for a moment and became frightened. "I...I don't know." She looked completely bewildered.

"Don't try to remember then, Sheba. Your mind will just fight you." He stroked her dark blond hair with a friendly smile.

She looked at him. "You are my only family, Lobo. See to it that you take care of yourself." Sheba told him, and then gave him a tight hug. When there was a toot of a horn, she ran off.

He watched her leave, uncomfortable with her show of affection. When the bus pulled out, he turned away and prowled the small town of Cactus. He had grown up there. It was the place where most orphans were sent to, if none of their blood relatives could be tracked down.

Those of his that had been found had nearly killed him on sight. Lobo had decided that he wanted nothing to do with family and blood ties. They were the most likely to kill a man or woman.

Lobo, at the age of twenty, was too old to go there. He struck out on his own instead. When he reached the age of twenty-one, he was inducted into a wild group. It was made up of men and women known as the Beregonia Lycan Pack, but theirs was a small segment located in Wako Springs. Lobo never went to that location though. That was only due to the fact that the head Alpha made it a point to send him elsewhere.

Lobo met others who were headed to Wako Springs. None of them had ever truly

CORRUPTION UNCONTROLLED

shown a delight for going out there. Good work was to be had if one enjoyed working with horses though. Since he had nothing better to do, he and three others headed down to the surrounding ranches that were nearby Wako Springs. Lobo got a job as a horse trainer, as had some others.

“Hey Lobo!” He turned toward the other young men who were getting ready to move on.

“What Lear, Kraal?” Lobo asked, when he walked over to them. “Keep in touch man.” Kraal said. “Let us know when you get into a situation that gets outta hand, ya hear?”

“You all are too damn protective.” He said wryly. “I will do it.” Lobo said. Lear studied him. “Get yourself a new name and identity, you will likely need it for a future problem.”

“Right, Lear.” Lobo said, folding his arms over his chest. “How the hell am I supposed to do that?” He asked with a scowl. He knew that sooner or later he was going to change into a wolf, luckily he could control when and where.

“That is when you contact the head Alpha, dude. That is what he has been waiting for you to do ever since you left ole Cactus.” Lear told him.

“Better believe it, Lobo, Lear here, doesn’t make that many mistakes about the future.” Kraal said, his eyes glinting with wicked laughter.

“Yeah, yeah. Beat it, or else your ride is going to leave you chasing its dust.” Lobo said, and waved them off. Then he caught his own transportation to Merrick. There he found a good job, and was able to scout out Wako Springs and its inhabitants. He paid particular attention to the main wealth that flowed in and out. The Lomans. He never saw the old man, but the five boys he glimpsed them now and again.

On a small ranch located twelve miles west of the Loman Ranch, a small pup was frisking about when it came upon an odd smell. Dark fur bristling, the pup shifted until it became a small child approximately six or more years of age in age. She wandered around and then screamed loudly.

An elderly woman who was graying at the temples of her dark brown hair ran after the little mischief-maker. The child was always into something. Now she had undoubtedly found something else and disturbed it. Cursing beneath her breath she ran after the girl. She was able to locate her after the endless screaming. “Alessandra!” A voice bellowed. “Alessandra Morales get back here you...”

The woman broke off as she gazed in horror at what the girl was pointing at. There

were no more screams.

“Holy mother of!” She broke off. “Dios Mios!” More screams followed the girl’s own. Together the two females ran for the main room.

“Alessandra, tell your grandfather Castaneda about this.” She ordered her granddaughter. “He will be able to do something about this.” At least she hoped he would.

“Si abuela, I will do what you tell me to.” Alessandra ran to the study where she knew her grandfather would be talking with his vaqueros. She did not stop to think that he would not want her in there.

“Abuelo! Abuelo!” She stopped short at the sight of the hulking figures. “Get out of here little brat!” One of them snarled at her, baring evilly yellowed teeth at her. Abuelo nodded urgently, and Alessandra ran from the room. She never saw the blow coming and fell to the floor in a dead faint.

Police arrived and swarmed the small ranch. Something happened and a fire broke out. Only three of the Morales clan survived and they chose to move to Abornia. It was still fairly close, but they would not have to worry about arsons and people who hated and yet lusted after the abilities of those who were outright lycanthropes.

Alessandra only awoke when everything had been removed and they had entered their new home. She remembered everything else though. She never forgot and vowed revenge on the Loman men who had dishonored her and the women of her family in such a manner that they had chosen suicide over life.

Erasmus Raymond Loman Sr. got off the phone and eyed the two visitors who had come to his office. “Well?”

“The answer is yes, he will agree to finance your other project in return for your agreement to give over blood samples and the occasional corpse for study.” He lifted an eyebrow at Loman’s grimace. “That was part of the deal I believe.”

“Yes, yes it was. I will have what ones haven’t been buried sent to your waiting vehicles.” He pressed a buzzer. There was an answering bleep three seconds later and an ETA showed up as well.

“Efficient.” One of them measuringly said.

Loman shrugged his shoulders. “Sensible, can’t dump all the Lycan corpses wherever they are disposed of.” He said it briefly. “Especially since some more will be found.” His smile was faint. “Supposed suicides, but hell, not all subjects or trash can be that easily dealt with.”

“So the lycan’s are giving you trouble, hmm?”

“Yes.” Loman shrugged. “I am taking care of them though. I will soon own all the

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acreage, legally.” He added when the men stared at him.

“How are you going to be able to control it all?” They were well aware of the fact that he had managed to take out two powerful Lycan alphas. Still there were more out there.

“My sons. Did you really think I would only have one wife?” Loman asked mildly. “They are assumed legal.” He told the men.

“Good I am also assuming you are not going to let your present wife live much longer?”

“She is already dying. Too many babies.” His smile was cold and satisfied. “Not all the births were recorded, I might add.”

“What about the two bastards that she foisted upon you?” The main questioner asked.

“The girl disappeared, but I still have Reginald. He is the one that you are referring to?” The man nodded.

“I’m keeping him around. Doesn’t hurt to have a scapegoat around. Besides he is a Lycan, or will be in the future.” Loman shrugged. “I’m keeping tabs on him. I will decide what to do with him once his usefulness is over.”

The two men glanced at each other and the man who had been speaking finally shrugged. Loman stared at the two men. “So who is your other friend, Cassias?” He asked.

“My heir apparent in the facility. I suppose you should have his name for future reference.” Cassias replied calmly. “Tarlington.” He shrugged.

Tarlington inclined his head. His eyes held an intensity that bothered Loman somewhat.

“He has an interest in finding subjects to study whether they are true Lycan’s or Hybrids.” Cassias murmured.

Tarlington smiled. He did not speak until a few minutes elapsed. “I want the boy, Loman. How much will you take to get him off your hands now rather than later?”

Loman shook his head. “I have plans for the boy. If he lives past the age of twenty-five, you can have him for the price of ten billion.” Loman shrugged at their expressions.

“Before then, nothing.” He said it politely. “He is not up for sale.”

Tarlington’s fist clenched and then he seemed to settle down. “All right.” He said softly, staring at the man. “I will keep an eye on your progress though.” His smile was flint like. “To be sure, I will. I do not give up easily when I want something as bad as I want

that boy.” His eyes were remote and opaque.

Erasmus shrugged off a trickle of unease as he regarded the man. “I take it our meeting is done, gentlemen?” His tone was polite and dismissive.

Cassias inclined his head though he was suspicious of Erasmus’ motives. For some reason he began wondering how he’d be able to keep tabs on him besides what Tarlington had in mind. “For now, yes.”

Tarlington stared at him coldly, letting Cassias speak for them both. He was not done yet. He studied the different rooms his eyes gleaming with speculation while he waited for Erasmus to become overconfident. Tarlington hoped he’d be able to get into the office again. However his hopes were not to materialize, he soon realized, when Erasmus addressed them again.

“Good evening then.” Erasmus made it an obvious dismissal at that point. He wanted them off his property as soon as possible.

CORRUPTION UNCONTROLLED

Chapter One

Gatadoria, Carmenite 5059

A quiet, dark-eyed woman sat reading a news article that appeared just recently. As her eyes skimmed the content, her mind blanked for a few seconds. Her hands paused and shook briefly before they settled down again.

One of these days I will have to face the past, she thought, when she could uncoil her taut muscles enough to move. Sighing, the woman once known as Mora Aless, made her way to her message relay that had been blinking madly all day. She listened to all the messages and closed her eyes with an angry sense of defeat.

Finally, the woman put in an order for a shuttle reservation. There were places to go and teamwork to set up in place... She only hoped that she had the courage to face the tragedies that had taken place in the past.

In her research, Sheba had learned many different items of note. Chief of which, Reginald Gauguin Loman was not her brother at all. Her mother had lied to her about that among other things. Still, the past was dead and now she had to find a way to help keep Reginald alive. She bit her lip remembering the physical wreck he had been. She shrugged.

“Well, whether they are ready or not, the Lycan Wolf pack of Wako Springs will have to take me back.” Tired and grouchy, she despised interplanetary travel with a passion, Sheba didn’t notice a man leaning against a wall and observing her with a closed expression.

Finally he straightened up and slowly walked toward the woman who had been pacing irritably for an hour or so. Something had apparently gone awry with her plans.

“Miss Sheba Tolliver?” A quiet baritone growl made her whirl in surprise.

Her eyes narrowed as she took in his appearance. “Yes. Who might you be?” There was something familiar about him, but she could not quite put her finger on what he reminded her of. Then she caught a flash of fur on his wrist. It was dark gray. Her eyes widened for a split second. “Kerr Truman.”

“Yes. We must depart. Time is slowly draining away.” He said tersely.

“Thank you for coming to retrieve me.” Sheba said sarcastically. “Will I be assigned a name?”

“That is up to Castillo.” Truman replied coolly never actually looking at the lovely black haired, dark beauty. Kerr was too busy trying to correlate what he had learned from her files to what he was seeing in front of him.

She shot him a wary stare. “Castillo?”

“Yes.” Truman replied briefly.

Sheba shrugged. She knew he would eventually tell her what she needed to know. They always did. Right at the moment they were in too public an arena to speak of some subjects. Keeping that in mind, she switched subjects. “So how is your family?”

“Raising hell at the moment.” He tossed her a wry stare. “There have been some interesting developments concerning my true father’s name, and some other familial branches sprouting from an ugly rotten seed.” Truman was not in a good mood and it showed.

Sheba bit her lip. “I am sorry to hear that.” She said finally. “Perhaps we should be on our way?”

Truman sent her an ironic stare. “I thought we already were?” He asked with a raised eyebrow. She felt herself flush crimson and kept her mouth shut. Satisfied, Kerr began walking again, setting a faster pace that would keep her quiet and concentrating on where she was placing her feet.

After twenty minutes of complete silence, Sheba’s tolerance for his bad mood snapped. “Will you please tell me what the hell is going on?”

“All Lycan clans who originate from Wako Springs, Callisto Heights, Abornia, and Cumulus Range are being summoned. That also includes estranged and outcast members.” Truman sounded reluctant to give her the information, when they were out of the tunnel that reached from the shuttle to the station in Abornia.

It was twilight already and Sheba grumbled in disgust. “It will take me some time to adjust to the difference in time.”

“No time difference here, Sheba.” Truman told her. “It is just that Abornia is not located as near to the southeastern hemisphere as Matagoria.” He said it wryly. “Nor as close to the sun as Matania.” His gaze was unreadable as he continued walking.

“What happened to the last Alpha, Truman?” Sheba asked unable to reconcile the fact that there had been an abrupt change in the structure.

“Carfonse was killed when it was discovered that he had sold his female clan members to Loman’s acquisitions managers.” Truman said tautly. “I cannot say more than

CORRUPTION UNCONTROLLED

that. Only that he did not last long after you were found as badly broken as your body was.”

“I was not expected to live, was I?”

“No.”

“So who else do we meet this night?”

“A special task force set up with some of the officials of the Wako Springs Law Enforcers.” He glanced at Sheba. “Some of whom are Lycans.”

“Is that good or bad?” Sheba asked warily.

Truman shrugged, his gaze veiled. “Only time will tell.” He told her. “Try to get some sleep. You look like you were run over by a herd of wild buffalo.”

Sheba snorted at that, but there was a smile on her lips as she slouched back in the vehicle that he had escorted her towards, while they were speaking. She had not even realized that they had arrived to the baggage claim and picked up her scant luggage till that point.

Truman glanced at the exhausted woman and closed his eyes before reopening them. He started the vehicle and drove out of the inner tunnels of Abornia. His radio made a soft crackling noise. “Five-three-King-Trey.” He rolled his eyes at the password. “Seven-twelve-Kale.” His tone held a note of sarcasm.

There was a throaty chuckle. “You have her?”

“Yes.” Truman recognized the voice as that of Castillo.

“Good. Get her to the safe house as soon as possible. All but three or four men are there. The remaining Lycans are out of range.”

Truman was silent as he digested the news. “Thank you for updating me, Castillo. I will contact those others as soon as I drop off my passenger.” He would definitely be glad to get this troublesome female off his hands.

“It is not a problem, Kerr. Over and out.” There was a soft crackle and then silence.

“Roger that.” Kerr muttered and then cursed beneath his breath. He gave a frustrated sigh and yet shrugged his shoulders. It was not Sheba’s fault that she was not being viewed with happiness that she was back. He had received the distinct impression that only he, Lobo, and Sykes would be willing to work with her. The others had chosen to wash their hands of her long ago. He glanced at the woman and then shrugged his shoulders. For better or worse, she was back. They would just have to suck it in or depart.

Alessandra stood in the doorway, watching the arrivals. She was still in the battle-training mode of her heritage. When the vehicle drove up, Alessandra hailed them

with a request for a codeword. She was blindfolded and her ears had been disabled, so that she had to rely on scents. Though not in this case, but she did not care. It was enough that she was able to greet the newest arrivals.

Sheba Tolliver studied the young woman with interest and curiosity. "Who is she?" Having roused at one point Sheba preferred the silence to forced chatter.

Truman gave the codeword and they were allowed inside. He glanced at her. "A young Lycan by the name of Alessandra Morales." Kerr told her. "You may or may not interact with her. It depends on whether or not you chose to go into a field position or stay here at headquarters."

"How long does training take?" Sheba asked him.

"Depending on the individual, between three to seven years, maybe less maybe more." Truman replied.

"I see." Sheba became quiet as she considered her options, which were not very many at all.

"Before you start giving yourself an ulcer, I suggest that you settle down and wait till the Alpha, Castillo gives you a chance to speak with him." Truman cast her an amused grin. "He likes to vet all the members personally." He wondered how well Sheba Tolliver would deal with the nosiness of the current Alpha.

Sheba said nothing, her eyes narrowing at him in response. She turned her attention back to the road and glanced around the compact compound.

Tarlington had been pacing his office for an hour. He liked the quiet hushed atmosphere of the facility in the correctional facility located in Matania. Finally his summons was answered and he thanked the aide. Then he motioned for the young woman to enter. She did as he bade her, but she was quite clearly not comfortable in his presence.

Too bad, she would just have to get used to it. Tarlington sat down behind his desk and stared quietly at the young woman. She did not look up at him and stood quietly in the subservient manner that would be requested of her elsewhere.

The young woman was not happy about being summoned. She disliked being in this office. Ever since she had arrived to the place, it always meant trouble when summoned. However in this case, she hoped that it would be for a different reason.

"You have been trained thoroughly, my dear." Tarlington spoke with approval as he gazed at his newest agent. He had noticed her reaction to the room and it was all that he had expected. No one enjoyed entering this room if they could help it. It gave them nightmares for weeks afterward. Though that had not happened to him for which he was

CORRUPTION UNCONTROLLED

grateful.

Tarlington was pleased with the sound judgment that she had shown in accepting this way of life. This Lycanthrope had chosen to double cross her clans. His people had done an excellent job in training her. It was a pity that her family had been forced to believe that she had died so many years ago.

As he watched her thoughtfully, the man admired the blue highlights in the black hair of the young woman. She looked very young for her age. He knew, however, that appearances were extremely deceiving. "So tell me, Raquela Ramirez, what is your only assignment now?"

Raquela darted him a glance but kept her eyes down in the manner of an obedient slave. "I am to work my way into the affections of Reginald Loman and find a way to activate his Lycan abilities."

He smiled toothily. "Go on."

Raquela was wondering what this man's name was. She did not dare ask him though. He was rather cruel to everyone beneath his thumb. "Then I am to arrange my capture once I am deflowered by this Reginald." She said calmly. "I will run away, and then I will be captured again. As soon as he is at a vulnerable moment, I am to strike him, and bring him down to the location."

Raquela hesitated, waiting for his eyes to indicate whether he was impatient with her or not. When his eyes became a slightly bored green, she continued her spiel. "Where he will be taken to the special facility for the criminally insane."

"Good. You have six years in which to do something." Tarlington said briefly. "I do believe that you will make it worth my while to reward you during the time that you are working on the ranch." He did not look at her as he spoke.

"You have four days with which to solidify your identity as Raquela Ramirez." He pinned her with a lethal stare. "Do not fuck up." His smile was cold, even if his eyes were alive with molten warning.

"I will make sure that I do not fuck up, sir." Raquela knew what he meant by his words. She was a tad angry that he would doubt her. Raquela had trained for this moment and she would not let him or anyone else down.

Her clan had outcaste her when she had gone against their rules as a youngling. Now she would be able to gain revenge against them. Them and all the others who had slighted her, she had all the time that she needed to make sure that everything went as was planned.

Tarlington watched the wench leave. "Low class trash." He muttered in disgust.

Then he clicked a hidden button. His aide appeared without a word. Tarlington glanced at him briefly. "Go to Chantry and inform him of a task that I need him to accomplish." He told the aide. He also gave him the written instructions that he had signed with his seal.

"Yes, sir." The aide replied and headed to the security office where there was a man who was busily working on a computer. "Chantry."

Chantry's head came up. "What?"

"The boss gave me this." The aide handed him the piece of paper.

Chantry scanned it without comment and shrugged. It was short and to the point. "Install another spy to watch over her movements, Chantry." He glanced at the aide who was hovering by the door. "Aide, tell him that I am on it."

The young man who had been the one to summon the female was not surprised. He set about doing what his boss had asked him to do. Chantry did not question the order. Something about the woman had apparently made Tarlington suspicious. Stupid females. They always screwed up, no matter how well trained they were.

Aphrodite Bordello, Callisto Heights, Cumulus Range, Beregonia, and Year: 5065

In a beautifully decorated chamber a woman was spread eagled across a wide luxurious bed. Her hands and feet were tied, and she was groaning from pleasurable agony. There was a dildo between her legs, where it had been slid in hours ago.

Every so often, a man would come in and adjust it, making her body convulse with a frenzied climax. Before he adjusted the dildo, however, he would lean over and tantalize her mouth with his cock. She would manage to get in a few licks that had him hardening.

Then he would squeeze and manipulate her breasts, making her pant in frustration. When he was done, he left her alone to contemplate why she had been placed in that chamber.

She was being punished, she knew for refusing a customer. She did not mind though. She enjoyed these times a lot better. Here, she would be able to hone her other skill. Not to mention give men plenty of torment at the same time.

"So, Mary. You balked once again."

"Yes, Jail master, I did." She kept her eyes on the man as soon as he had appeared.

"How long is the sentence this time?" His voice remote, as his eyes traveled over the straining nipples and quivering body.

"Three weeks." She gasped when he reached out and fingered her clitoris. She was sent into spasms.

He watched her narrowly. Once she was finished, he sighed. "Mary, Mary. What

CORRUPTION UNCONTROLLED

am I to do with you?” He threw a leg over hers, and then crawled up so that his mouth was hovering over her breasts.

“Dominate me?” She asked cautiously. He was in a strange mood this time. She writhed when he sucked on her nipples, one hand bracing his body above hers, while the other manipulated the dildo and brought her to screaming ecstasy.

They both knew that others, specifically voyeurs who enjoyed viewing such activities and paid good money to do so, watched them. She was wracked with shivers and then finally stopped with a replete sigh.

He shifted and this time what she really wanted was presented to her. His cock. He eyed her with mocking amusement. “Suck me.” He braced his hands against the wall, as his knees widened. He pressed his head against the wall as well, and smiled as he felt the suction begin.

It would last for hours, and he could stall her as well. One hand pressed a hidden sensor and another man entered the room. “Manipulate the dildo.”

“Yes sir.” The man awaited further orders, his own cock hardening at the view he was being presented with.

“Fondle her breasts. If she behaves, move so that she can hold your cock in her hand.”

The man swelled with anticipation. “Yes, sir.” In the meantime, he would make do with the sassy rear end that was being exposed to him. The female was clearly well primed. Fitting himself into the tight tunnel that began working him immediately the assistant began manipulating the dildo and playing with the woman’s breasts. There were muffled sounds from below the bed and he grinned, rolling his hips. They had needed some extra help it seemed. He wondered how many were beneath the bed.

The jail master smiled as the woman sucked him more diligently, and the assistant was getting some earlier action. “What is beneath the bed, assistant?”

The assistant paused, causing a squeal of dismay, before he resumed his pumping into the inner paradise. “An orgy it seems. I think there are at least three others down below, sir.”

The little female who was squeezing him so tight appeared to be finally coming. He recognized those thighs, and slapped one lightly. She climaxed, her walls rippling around him. He was not ready to come though.

A muffled voice spoke from below. “Lace, Jin, Mindy, and Linnet.” There were a mumble of other voices.

“Connor, Basil, Tyler, and David.” The assistant added, after getting the names.

There were flurries of movement beneath and he sighed, as a different female body appeared. Then he thrust into the welcoming thighs.

“Keep it going then.” The jail master would deal with those ones next. In the meantime, the assistant kept arousing the lithe female who was pleasuring him into ecstasy. “Attach the feathers to her breasts, assistant.” The jail master said. “Then start working one hand on that wench that you are servicing so well.”

“Yes sir.” The assistant continued what he was doing, and bent forward once or twice, who made him stroke deeper inward, causing a few groans in the process from other parties. Good, soon they would be pumped dry. The man was getting an idea of what was going on down there. One female on her knees, obviously. Then there were four males. They were probably getting head, giving it, and driving the other women crazy while waiting their turn.

After a few more minutes, the jail master made them come out from beneath the bed. It was six feet by ten feet in width and length, and placed on a dais. There was a hollow area beneath below the box springs that took up roughly two feet. Other than that, there was plenty of room for extra playing around beneath.

The men and women circled it and waited for the instructions that would be issued from the Jail master. The males were aroused by what was happening, and as they watched, their cocks were swelling and rising. The females were just standing patiently while the males fondled their breasts and dipped into their slits.

“David, sit on that chair by Mary’s left hand.” The jail master watched them carefully. “Lace, stand on the foot stools so that you are in front of David’s mouth.” She did as requested. Her slit was positioned exactly for his tongue to enter her. “Mindy kneel down with your legs spread in front of David.” She was positioned so that she could pleasure him as well. “Nobody start.”

They stilled but were clearly impatient.

“Basil, lay between Mindy’s thighs. You know what you need to do.”

Basil found another low stool and then did as he was told. Mindy hissed as she felt his breath against her clit.

“Jin, straddle Basil’s thighs. Tyler, sit on the stool. Linnet, kneel between both Tyler’s and Basil’s legs.” He paused as his personal favorite was bringing him close to the edge. He made a slight motion with one hand, and the assistant tilted the dildo, making her suck him harder as her body flushed and climaxed.

The others shifted impatiently.

“Connor, kneel behind Linnet.” He surveyed them all and then made a flicking

CORRUPTION UNCONTROLLED

motion with his fingers. "Begin."

The men were already aroused and plunged into their consorts yet again. The women bent eagerly to their tasks, though Linnet was resting her head against the wall, and her jaw was moving.

Someone needed release, the current voyeur, the jail master was amused to note. His hips were rolling slightly, as his cock swelled tighter. Finally his body could last no longer and it shuddered in climax. His female of choice swallowed his seed, her eyes glistening, even as she shuddered in reaction to the dildo manipulating her inner walls and their sensitive nerves.

The large building where the chamber was secreted was in another sprawling and imposing seven-story main building. It had seven different wings and was a working ranch. Men could be seen entering and departing from its enclosed fences and walls. Within those walls other delights abounded, lush gardens, multiple orchards, two labyrinths, and several outside private cabanas. Occasionally buses were noticed going down to some of the more rural towns, where males were more apparent than females.

In a study, Erasmus Jr. was working out another deal where he would be sending two busloads of women for a conference. It was men only and they wanted some company. He negotiated the logistics while; he also worked on other items. His two brothers Raymond and Ruiz were working at similar desks. They dealt with the day to day running of the ranch itself.

"When is Reginald due?" Erasmus Sr. asked irritably, watching while his sons were hard at work. He knew what his fourth son, Gregory was doing. He was trying out some of the new girls. There had been some new girls who had been recruited from some small southern town. Now they were putting their talents to better use, and getting money for them.

"In three or four hours." Ruiz said, as he totaled up figures, and finished a column. He glanced uneasily at his father as he adjusted his seat slightly. There was a woman's head moving rhythmically between his thighs where his pants had been unfastened.

Nothing like getting caught with a female sucking on a man's cock, he thought wryly. He noticed that his brothers were doing the same thing. Though they were grinning as their physical needs were satisfied.

Erasmus Sr. shrugged, he knew exactly what was going on. He needed a female to relieve some tension and soon, as well. "Enjoying their cock's ladies?" There was a moment of stunned silence.

“Yes, sir.” Three voices chorused.

Erasmus looked amused. “Just as long as you do not marry them, boys, you can have them jerking you off as long as you want.”

Right at that moment, Erasmus Jr. grinned, as his body did exactly that, and there was a low satisfied groan issuing from his lips. The woman who had been servicing him, smiled in satisfaction for a job well done. Then she began to work him once more. Definitely a good way to enjoy one’s self, literally.

None of them wanted to be reminded of the fact that Reggie’s watchdog would also be sniffing around. McKenyon was a menace and a bad influence on their youngest brother. He was defying them, and yet they could not provide proof of his subversive activities to their father.

None of them wanted McKenyon touching their possessions. He would despoil them. They were upset that Reginald was resisting the other women who were consistently throwing themselves at him. They generally gave up and frustrated, turned to whatever man was handy. Usually one of the Loman men got lucky right in an alleyway, they smiled in remembrance, swelling up and the women reversed positions for them to pump in the other way, which they did automatically.

Erasmus left the study, shaking his head with amusement. He spotted one of his usual consorts who were waiting for him. Erasmus walked past her, and then into his own private room. As soon as he sat down in a chair, she straddled his waist and sank onto him. His mind was blissful, and soon his body would be. He was enjoying the jiggle and swaying of her breasts as she rocked on him. He leaned forward and sucked on the taut, reddish-brown nipples while he pumped into her.

He looked out a window and smiled. Gregory was busy all right, and clearly enjoying himself. He was tied down and at present giving a female oral satisfaction. Another was riding him and giving someone else an experience to remember. Erasmus shrugged and returned his attention to what was going on at the moment.

He drank from a glass of scotch that had been waiting like always. He gasped when he felt a flash of pain in his head. Seeing the signs of inevitable death, the woman stepped back and watched him silently. She was not one to help an old man who was a complete asshole. As she watched, Erasmus Raymond Loman died from a busted vessel in his brain.

When it ended, and the man was truly dead, she wrinkled her nose at the stench. Then she walked away with a graceful stride toward the offices. “He is dead.”

“That is good.” Erasmus Jr. said coldly. “Tell Jordan and Carmen to deal with the mess.” He eyed the woman. Her eyes revealed that she was past her prime. She would

CORRUPTION UNCONTROLLED

have to be dealt with later on.

“Yes, sir.” She walked out of the room and summoned the two. They dealt with the corpse and bore it away to be shipped back to the other ranch.

A man had entered the front of the sprawling bordello when he had become aware of activities that worried him. He silently watched as two men hauled out a blanket wrapped man. A hand dangled out and a unique ring flashed from one finger. It slipped off the limply dangling hand and landed on the padding of grass. None of the bearers noticed, they were too busy getting the corpse out of the ranch.

The man waited till the other men left the side entrance. He ran a hand through his own hair and then picked up the ring. Father. He contemplated what action to take, when he glimpsed a familiar face. One he had not seen in twenty years. She stared at him, and he stared back. There was nothing but hatred in her face, and resigned acknowledgement in his eyes. He turned away from her and walked back to the front door.

The man considered what he had to do and then in a split second decision dialed a number. He knew from past experience that it would take at least fifteen minutes before someone would reach the door.

“Its hot here and the smells are sharp, and filled with death.” He spoke quietly. “This is Reginald, at one, six four three, twelve seventy.” Reginald paused from speaking. His eyes, looking around, were cold and emotionless. Then he continued speaking. “Do not call this number, it will be tapped by the time you get the message.” He just hoped that whoever got the message, got his code. Then he closed the phone and ten minutes later, a very seductively dressed young woman answered the door. Her eyes were cold and appraising as she stared at him.

“Senor Reginald?” She asked him, her gaze ascertaining his identity.

“Yes. I have been summoned by the Head of the household.” Reginald said coldly. He was in no mood to chitchat.

The woman’s eyes narrowed in affront. “I understand. Come.” She led the way to the offices where his brothers were presumably drinking to their father’s demise.

Reginald had no doubt that all four of them had been involved. He just wished that he did not share their cursed blood. His eyes glowed a molten red for a moment and then he settled his mind. He prepared for the coming confrontation.

“Ah so you did decide to come after all.” Erasmus commented, staring at his youngest brother with extreme dislike. This was the last loose wild card that had to be dealt with. His eyes narrowed calmly as the young man made no reply. “Nothing to say,

Reginald?”

“None at all, Erasmus. We have said all that there was to say weeks ago. As I had also informed father.” Reginald remotely replied.

“You still are angry about him including you in the business?”

“Why should I not be?” Reginald said after a few seconds. His eyes were distant. “You and the others know damn well that I am not one of Loman’s blood.” His expression was an outright sneer. “It would be easier on us all if I were just disinherited with the rest.”

Erasmus smiled cruelly. “Well there will be no disinheriting in the near future, boyo, so just forget the notion.” He advised his brother. Erasmus smiled coldly when he caught the tensing of Reginald’s shoulders.

Reginald hated it when he was called by that nickname. Erasmus only used it in order to induce less pleasant memories. “Why don’t you just sample one of the women here?”

“That is a disgusting notion.” Reginald snapped offended by the very idea.

Erasmus shook his head. “You look like Grandfather Loman.” He said dryly. “Same light brown hair and dark blue eyes.”

Reginald snorted. “Not to mention over three quarters of all the other Caucasian males.” He said contemptuously. “Looks alone will not prove to me what you believe, Erasmus. Give it up for a lost cause.” He advised his brother with a glint in his eyes.

Erasmus stared at him woodenly. “Forget any notions of breaking free from us, Reginald. It won’t happen. You might as well give in gracefully.”

Reginald merely looked at him. “No.” Then he walked away without another word.

Erasmus’ eyes gained a feral gleam within their depths. “Take him to the dungeon and chain him.” He watched while his rebellious young brother fought the two men and was eventually knocked over the head with a metal baton.

Three times in fact, and the last drew blood from behind an ear, an eye, and broke his jaw on the left side. The young man fell to the floor and he was dragged away. Blood was splattered everywhere. “Some never learn do they?”

“No Erasmus, some do not.” A pretty woman came to his side. She watched with interest as he slid his arm around her.

“I am glad that you came, Esme, together we can do something about his recalcitrance.” Erasmus continued to watch the doorway where Reginald was dragged away.

“Tell me, has he ever shown any interest in females back at the ranch?”

CORRUPTION UNCONTROLLED

“None that I can remember, Erasmus.” Esme muttered, her pique evident.

“Pity, I think we will have to do something different this time.” Erasmus shrugged.
“Soon he will learn how to do what he is asked to do.”

“What if he chooses not to?” Esme asked.

“Then he will die, or be turned over to some other place to be dealt with.” Erasmus replied, his cold eyes pitiless as he scowled slightly.

Esme lifted a hand to his jaw and he smiled at her.

“Come, we will have a bit of fun by ourselves now.” He said huskily, rubbing a hand down one of her sides.

She smiled, snuggling up beneath his enclosing arm. “That will be wonderful.” She replied looking forward to what was to come.

He smiled at his mistress, one who had been faithful to his every demand for so many years.

Chapter Two

Castillo eyed his lieutenants. “Kerr what can you give me on the progress of the raids and training?” He was tapping his fingers on a wooden table that had small slivers fraying off the edges.

“All of them have finished their training sir.” Kerr rattled off names that were ready to be put into the field.

Castillo nodded calmly. “Good. I have received word that another raid is to commence on the Loman Ranch. Who is available to participate in it?” His eyes were intense, as he looked at his other lieutenant. Wolff Peterman.

Wolff shrugged. “There are too many berserkers to be safe for that ranch.” He said at last. “I can give you a list of the more reasonable ones.”

Castillo shook his head. “I meant, who in Wako Springs at present?” He spoke very calmly and politely, as his two lieutenants glanced at each other.

“Deja, Lobo, Ash...there is one who could be sent out there. She is ready, but has not been given a code name.” Wolff said.

Kerr glanced at him warily with a frown his expression was disapproving to say the least.

Castillo eyed them both. “Who is it?” He was not going to send in Sheba yet. Despite all reports, he was not going to give her active duty yet. She was too much of a berserker to be trusted yet.

“Fern Dolmas.” Kerr said finally. “I have observed her progress for many months.” He never spoke in terms of years.

“And?” Castillo continued to eye Kerr, though then his mind was clearly elsewhere.

“She is ready, though not all that anxious to return to the area of her birth.” Kerr shrugged. “Her unease is palpable, but if asked, in terms of an assignment, she will go back.” His eyes flicked from her file to the eyes of his superior and other partner. “There is the other option.” He wasn’t happy about it, but it seemed to be the most reasonable way to get her to go back without protest.

CORRUPTION UNCONTROLLED

“What might that be?” Wolff asked, noticing that his superior had retreated elsewhere.

“Alessandra Morales.” Kerr Truman said briefly. “We believe that she will have an easier time, though she will have to familiarize herself with the town again.”

Wolff and Castillo nodded calmly. In that moment they made their decision.

Castillo glanced at the others. “All right, get her informed and supplied with what is needed for her time out there.” His eyes glinted with mischief, and they realized that he had just been planning ahead. They had been tricked as usual. “Now see to it that the others are ready for future assignments.”

Sitting in a room was an odd gathering of individuals, Josiah Truman mused as he glanced around. He was glad in some respects that he was not actually an officer. He had been politely informed six years ago that he would be working with the ones in Wako Springs.

He rolled his eyes briefly and kept himself from yawning by dint of remembering why he had agreed to join the team. Luckily, only a few of the non-Lycan and hybrid were there for the special meeting.

“Ray Loman, what do you have on him?” Gray asked his fellow officers.

“Man was busy.” A lean wolfish man said after a moment. There were snorts of laughter and a stirring of some of the others.

“I know that. Tell me how and why.” Gray said, looking at the other men. Of the seven men in the room, four had yet to speak up.

“He was married to a total of eight times that have been recorded.” Another spoke, reluctant, Jason Gray noted with a slight frown.

“He had four long-term mistresses. Maybe another two or three wives tucked away somewhere.” A third man said, though he seemed skeptical about what he was reading.

A gray haired man spoke up finally. He was scowling at the others who had spoken previously. His venom seemed to be concentrated specifically at McKenyon and his partner, a redheaded energetic man. “Eight different states. Fathered over forty children. Most of them legit though there were about twenty-eight more that were discovered as the results of affairs and one-night stands.”

“Anything else Lou?” Gray sarcastically inquired. The wolfish looking man merely stared down at the folder that he had in his grasp. He finally realized that it would only be Lobo and his partner who would be willing to discuss what they had found thus far.

Lou shrugged and spread out his hands as he looked back at the other man.

The redheaded officer spoke up and said. "Only one of the eight plus marriages was legal. The other seven were consummated beneath aliases. Considered legal in these other states though." He merely grinned when Gray eyed him with wry resignation.

"There are suspicions as others have already noted, that there are more wives." Sykes shrugged his shoulders. "Apparently he was not above trying to avoid penalties for having more than a reasonable amount of children." He gave his last comment with slightly grim expression.

"Our man was creating his own dynasty it seems." Gray commented as he eyed the two men who had spoken up.

One of the others, who were sitting around the table, a woman, finally cleared her throat. Lou didn't bother to glance over at her. Instead he signaled to Gray that he had to depart. Jason scowled at him in aggravation. When his desire to depart was reinforced by his partner, Jason made a slight go ahead gesture. Jason was clearly not happy with what was going on.

Lou got to his feet and left the overcrowded conference room. The others could do more to contribute without him there. He believed in letting others finish their routines, but so far the rest had refused to comment. He hoped that without his presence in the room that the others would be more forthcoming about what information that they had gathered. She had not tried to speak up in the past three weeks that she had been there. None of the others knew what to make of her, much less trust her.

The woman watched the others without comment. Sooner or later something was going to break the case wide open. She would be there when it happened. "He put an emphasis on his women bearing females more than males." She rustled papers.

"First and only legal wife bore him five sons and seven daughters. She ended up in emergency rooms several times during the pregnancies when she carried boys." Her face was remote as she examined the other men and women in the office.

"Disappeared about nineteen years ago." She checked her facts and regarded the other officers coolly. "Left the boys and the girls vanished." She shrugged her shoulders at their startled expressions. She paused and then added. "Those who had not already been shuffled off by their father that is." Her eyes were cool.

"Once they hit eighteen, they were fair game for his plans. Nothing to stop him, the girls sure were unable to make their choice in the matter." None of the men and women spoke as they were clearly digesting what she had just forced down their throats. None of them were pleased with her.

"Gentlemen, ladies, meet Alessandra Morales. She is helping us in the

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investigation.” Gray said politely.

There were polite nods, but no real friendly acknowledgements of her presence. Clearly none of them really wanted her there. Especially none of the older men who took an unusually intense interest in their papers that held information on the case. They had been especially unhappy when her last name was mentioned.

Her eyes narrowed thoughtfully as she studied the older men. She dismissed the younger ones as being somewhat innocent of the filth that was a closely held secret in Wako Springs. Her eyes flickered toward a man who intrigued her, and yet made her wary. He had yet to comment.

Alessandra blinked when she realized that someone had departed right before she had spoken and been introduced. Her lips flattened in disapprobation. No matter, there were more ways to catch a wild creature and she still had time to chase her quarry.

The redhead was watching her with skeptical cynicism. He knew something but he did not choose to speak up. There was another man whom she disliked intensely. He smirked at her, his eyes traveling over her body with a lewd promise in their depths. He was going to cause trouble for her and the investigation.

Settling back in his chair for a brief moment to stretch, Sykes studied her. “What is your connection to Loman and the missing wife and girls?” The question was abrupt as he took in her features and figure. She was one fine looking woman. Not the redhead’s type, but definitely a good looking female.

Alessandra smiled despite herself. “Confidential.”

Sykes merely shook his head and shrugged back into sitting up straight and returning his attention to other things that he was checking.

Gray grimaced, noticing that his other liaison was going over his own notes. The evening was hot, he knew, and tempers were flaring. There was a group of specially picked undercover detectives working with other agencies.

Sykes was one of the other agents, though he had been with the small police department for over eight years to that point. When he thought about it, he realized that the other officer had been on for near twenty years. The record was not something he remembered often enough.

“We’ll call it a night then.” Gray regarded the handpicked men and women calmly. “Reconvene at fifteen hundred, tomorrow.” All the officers rose to their feet and left. Sykes stretched and left the room on a leisurely stride. He ignored the woman completely but acknowledged fellow men and women officers.

Alessandra watched Sykes leave and turned to Gray. “Why do I get the distinct

impression that he doesn't like or trust me, Jason?"

Gray just shook his head. "He has always been that way." She cocked an eyebrow at him. "He is out of his element." Gray added.

She looked fleetingly interested. "Oh?"

"Yep, and everything else is confidential." Gray informed her. He did not reveal anything else to the curious woman.

Alessandra tapped her jaw as she walked out of the back office. With another snap decision, she headed out of the main offices. This was not getting her anywhere. Alessandra needed to go for a ride, preferably astride an obnoxious four-legged critter. She smiled at the thought of going horseback riding for a couple of hours. She would get some time to relax and then deal with intriguing yet elusive police officer's later on.

With that thought in mind, Alessandra managed to get to the stables, after walking out a back door to get to her hotel. There she went through a hurried shower and changed into different clothing, which was much more comfortable and suited for a long hard ride over unexplored territory. She smiled at the thought.

"Alessandra."

She turned at her name being called. It was Castillo, the Alpha of her Lycan clan in Wako Springs. "Yes sir?"

"I need just a moment of your time." Castillo said, waving her over. He had two men by his side and they were watching her with inscrutable expressions.

Alessandra sighed. She was hoping to get away and soon. Tossing her hair back from her face, she listened patiently to what was being said by Castillo and the other two men.

After getting out of the office, earlier, he had gone to the stables and found his stallion, Zeus. Mounted on the fractious animal, Lobo rubbed his jaw as he studied the countryside and then noticed a pretty woman standing with some other people. He identified the others who were standing with her and he whistled softly.

One of the men glanced up, his hearing having caught the soft sound. His eyes studied Lobo and waved him on. Lobo saluted him, though he stared at the woman again. She looked familiar but he could not figure out why.

He caught a mocking grin on one of the other men's faces. Clearly they were aware of his dilemma and very amused. Lobo barely restrained himself from making an age-old rude gesture in response. Instead, he ignored them and continued to study the woman.

As if noticing his attention, she looked around over at him and seemed to stiffen. A small smile touched his lips as he tipped his hat and then rode off. The heat that had filled

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him as soon as he had seen her warned him that he would have to find someone else who would relieve him of his lust, or he would have to face her. Otherwise he was going to be damned uncomfortable when he finally did meet up with her.

Sykes glanced around the area and then spotted his rapidly departing partner. "Lou."

Lou stopped and looked over his left shoulder. "What?"

"There is some more information that you should get some looking over." Sykes said patiently. "Or else it could wait until after you have your ritual swim."

"Very funny, Deja." Lou muttered beneath his breath. "I got a page from Castillo, but he's busy. Guess I will need to talk to him some other time."

Sykes rolled his eyes. "I will have a copy of the reports waiting for you." He said briefly. "Enjoy your swim." Sykes left as well. He had other things he wanted to get accomplished.

Alessandra Morales watched the distant rider from where she was standing. Even from there she could feel the heat that he was emanating. Lust, desire and distinct interest were driving him from her, and to her at the same time. All of those same things flowed through her at that instant. She looked at the men by her side. "Who is he?" Alessandra demanded.

"He is a loner and one who distrusts all and anyone who is in his vision." A white haired elderly man told her. "But he is also strong, smart and cunning. He is Lobo." His words were quiet.

Alessandra's eyes widened. "The man who has run in my dreams for many months and years." She murmured her eyes thoughtful.

"Yes." The man said calmly. "He will not be easy to catch unawares or unguarded. Be careful in your methods should you decide to chase after him, Alessandra. I would not want you to be hurt."

Alessandra's thoughtful expression faded and her gaze became purposeful. "He knows who I am subconsciously." She said at last. "He is just not ready to acknowledge me as his woman." Alessandra considered her own words. She shrugged her shoulders. Then she walked off without another word.

The older man smiled slightly. "Lobo has met his match then. In more ways than one." He graced her with an approving smile. There were soft chuckles and shaken heads. There were going to be fireworks in Wako Springs and not just of the kind set off for holidays either.

One of the dark haired men in the group grinned to the other man and muttered.

“They have both met their matches. Literally.” There was soft laughter from the other men who had come up after the woman had left.

A half hour later, a lean young woman dressed in light hued colors rode a mount through the different trails of Wako springs. She was learning the area, when she noticed something interesting. She tossed her hair back and pulled a pair of binoculars. She trained them on a water hole that was just out of sight of the biggest ranch around that was run by the Lomans. In it was a handsome man who was enjoying a private swim. What had caught her attention was the fact that he had an obvious campsite down there. The woman watched the swimmer with interest.

His body, she noted, rippled with muscle, and was only lightly haired down the middle of his chest and body. It was a glossy black. His hair streamed around him, it was also a glossy black. She was not able to see what color his eyes were. She did finally realize that he was swimming in the nude when he stopped swimming and walked out of the water, his dripping hair draped across his muscular back. Clearly unconcerned and at peace with his surroundings, he towed off the water from his body.

Soon enough the man reached backward, and wove his hair in a thick single braid. He turned his head briefly, as though sensing her presence. She blew out a frustrated breath as he pulled on a pair of pants and a white undershirt. They covered his body, and clung to his still damp shoulders and wide chest. What she had seen of him was enough fuel for at least three weeks of explicit dreams perhaps more. She needed to find out who he was other than the fact that he was called Lobo. What kind of name was that? She wondered.

Alessandra had heard of a rogue wolf that had chosen to break off from the Lycan pack. She wondered if he was the one. His attitude seemed to fit. She shrugged. She would search around.

Lobo looked around, trying to find out who was spying on him. He caught a glimpse of light reflecting off something. Binoculars, he suspected and swore vituperatively. “Well moving to a new place won’t be too difficult.” He began packing his kit. “Hopefully whoever was watching me will stop long enough that I can go for a different place.” Lobo had enjoyed living in his small campsite.

“Talking to yourself, Lobo?” An amused voice spoke guardedly.

Lobo spun, a knife appearing in one of his hands. It was poised into a throw, and then he saw who it was. “Josiah, that is no way to announce your presence to a man. Especially one who is as paranoid as I am.” He snapped scowling at him, and the knife

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went back into its sheath.

"I had wondered where that was hidden. Interesting location." Josiah said as he tucked his hands into his pockets.

Lobo ignored him, clearly not going to answer the unspoken question.

Amused by the way that Lobo was being uncharacteristically stubborn in not talking to him, Josiah just sat down in a different position. "Noticed your watcher yet?"

"Just after I finished taking my swim." Lobo growled in annoyance. He cast a surreptitious glance upward again. It looked as though the person had disappeared. He glanced at his companion disparagingly. "Why?" Lobo was well aware that the other man was going to keep on goading him until he gave into his curiosity.

"It's a female and a curious one at that. She is asking about you in the Wako Springs village." Josiah said calmly.

The lean muscular man blocked the watcher's view of Lobo by casually leaning against the cracked crags. He knew he presented a perfect target if the woman wanted to practice shooting. He did not think that was the purpose of her shenanigans though.

"A woman is watching me?" Lobo threw his hands into the air in exasperation. "Great, that is all I need."

"Seems she's got the hots for you." Josiah ventured. "I figured I would tell you since Sykes hasn't bothered to inform you yet."

"I have not been in town lately." Lobo told him.

"Why not?"

"Been snooping around as ordered by the head guy himself."

"Wako Springs Alpha?" Josiah was surprised.

"Yeah." Lobo wasn't too happy. "He thinks something rotten is going down in Wako Springs, specifically the ranch run by the Lomans." He caught sight of Josiah's face as he spat on the ground. "Whoa, what is that all about?"

Josiah sighed. "Old bastard Loman is my true-blood father."

"How long have you known that?" Lobo asked.

"Since I was nineteen, twenty years." Josiah told him. "Me and Kerr were hauled out here two weeks before his old lady ran off with her girls." His lips thinned.

"And?"

"Place is a disgrace." Josiah said contemptuously. "Youngest boy there, Reginald, gets the hell beaten out of him on a daily basis." He continued. "Pisses me off to no end the way that he is kicked around all the damn time."

Lobo nodded slowly. "I been teaching him self defense. He is already a good knife

fighter and knows dirty tricks that even his brothers aren't aware of." He grinned.

Josiah smiled back. "That is good to hear." He stared at the ground. "What about guns?"

Lobo shrugged. "What about them?"

"Will he use them?"

"Yes. He is a better shot than I am." Lobo finally said. "Especially when it comes to being on moving objects at the same time."

Josiah nodded. "Glad to hear it, something tells me he is going to need to know how to use them soon." He admitted.

Lobo threw him an unreadable glance. "Yeah, it's why I am teaching him what I am." He looked irritated and uncomfortable. "Now I have to go into town and get more supplies."

"I will drive you in and back." Josiah said. "I am no longer employed in the Loman ranch."

"Is that good or bad?" Lobo asked him.

"Good, means I can do what I have been wanting to do anyway."

"Oh?"

"Yeah."

"What is that?"

"Join that agency that operates independently." Josiah said. "I am one of the pack members; I was just unable to do more than be a figurehead for a while."

"I see." Lobo said finally. "Well, let's go. I want to try and figure out who the hell was watching me swim. She got an eyeful." He was mad and it showed.

Josiah chuckled. "That I believe I can help you with." The two men headed for Josiah's pickup truck.

"Wait...I think I know who my watcher is." Lobo was thoughtful. "You go into the village. I still need to do a few things out here."

Josiah eyed him with wry distrust. "You will come along eventually?" His eyebrows were arched rather sardonically when he spoke.

"Yes."

Josiah watched him leave with a frown. Then he went to his truck and decided to stay where he was. No harm in just taking a nap. With that thought, he settled in for a midday siesta on the second well-concealed seat in the cab.

Lobo listened for sounds of the vehicle departing. He shook his head and grinned in realization that his friend was not going to do anything of the sort. Knowing him, he

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figured that Josiah had settled in for a long nap. He just hoped that his friend wouldn't be caught unawares by prowling predators.

Chapter Three

Lobo set out with a long ranging lope. He caught up with the rider without her being aware and yanked her off her mount.

When she realized that she had been seen, Alessandra had not wasted any time getting back to the main trail. However she had not counted on being caught by the man that she had set her sights on. She yelped when tumbled to the ground.

He eyed her, even as he ground tied the horse and carried her off in his arms. "Now perhaps you will tell me what you were doing following me, spying on me?" He set her down with a dark scowl.

Alessandra looked around. It was not his camp. She was wishing that she had made it back to town. "I am curious about you." She did her best to shrug, looking innocent.

"To the point that you endanger both of us by snooping around the wild lands?" He was disbelieving, even as she eyed him suggestively.

"I was looking for you, no one else." She told him bluntly.

"You were slowly making sure that I would be caught by others." He growled menace snapping in his eyes.

"I had no intent of doing that. You were my only focus." Alessandra protested angrily, even as she curled her legs around his waist. He stared at her, even as his arousal made it felt and his hips slowly moved against hers. She inhaled his scent as he leaned over and nipped her shoulder, his hands moving up and down her sides.

"What do you want from me, miss?" Lobo didn't ask her name as he moved his fingers over her blouse's fastenings.

"You. I only want you." She breathed softly, her eyes locked on his dark head. He nibbled her shoulder and upward to her lips. Her hips squeezed him and he growled low in his throat. His eyes met hers, even as his fingers moved lower.

"Why?" He asked.

She shrugged her shoulders. "We are here and now." Alessandra replied tartly.

Lobo's eyes became cool and remote. "So be it." He said softly, dismissing faint

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dreams before they came to life.

Her eyes focused on him while he made adjustments. Her eyebrows rose slightly when he made her turn around. She did it willingly though, and her hands reached back toward his pants. Her hands were promptly set back on the rock, but she had managed to brush one hand against him. Making him groan. Then she gasped as he surged into her.

That was when Alessandra realized that he had unfastened her riding pants and had shoved them to her knees. Her blouse had also been unbuttoned as well. His hands were fast and clever but she wanted them on her flesh. She muffled her cry by biting his arm savagely. He bit her throat in retaliation.

“We will do this for as long as we meet each other, is that it?” He growled savagely.

“Yes.” She gasped as she moved back against his straining body.

“So be it.” Lobo said softly, even as his hands cupped her breasts, tugging at the nipples.

She turned her head and he kissed her deeply. At the same time they climaxed, though he was still hard afterward. She came with a low groan, as he growled and her eyes closed. When they did, she missed seeing his face turn into a dark wolfish cast. His eyes glittered upon her face, and then the features abruptly reverted back to their normal cast.

Alessandra moaned as he pulled from her, her inner muscles protested his leaving and clenched tightly around him. Lobo grunted as he eased himself out of her warm body. Every instinct in his body cried out in anger at the separation, but still he had to. He set her gently against the rock and she promptly pulled him back toward her. Lobo’s eyebrows rose as he studied her determined expression.

“You are not completely finished.” She said.

In his experienced gaze, he took in her flushed face and glittering eyes. No she was not finished, not with him at any rate. Lobo was almost amused and would have been had the situation been a tad different. “It would take hours and we do not have the time.”

“So we take what time we have and use it.” Alessandra said, clasping her legs around his waist.

Lobo’s nostrils flared as he took in her scent. She desired him once more. He tried to shake his head, but she rose upward, bracing her hands against the rock and mounted him. He steadied her against him.

“How long?” He asked her remotely, his dark eyes drilling into hers.

“Minutes.” She panted, wrapping around him as he deep stroked her into more cries and excitement.

Lobo was growling softly beneath his breath, his gaze turning feral.

Alessandra saw it in his eyes, and her eyes went feral as a result. She loved tuning into a man's wild side. There was no better time than the present. Heat rose from them, making visible waves. Still they mated, not content with a single time. Groaning, he collapsed to the ground and held her close.

She rested against him and then murmured. "Now I have to go."

He watched her with angry dark eyes as she dressed and walked to her horse. She stared down at him and then with a clicking noise from her the horse rode off.

Grumbling, Lobo rose to his feet and swam once more, to rinse off the sand, and the sensation of feeling used. He hated that and once again he had allowed it. Swearing viciously, Lobo vowed to himself that he would find her, and not let her get the better of him again. "Josiah!" He was feeling a little better after he heard a thud and a muttered epithet.

"I take it that not all was well?" Josiah asked sarcastically.

"Just drive." Lobo growled angrily.

Josiah said nothing, as he revved the engine and they headed to the town of Wako Springs. After a few minutes of silence, Josiah slanted a glance at the brooding dark man. "Want to give me an idea of what is running through your head, friend?"

"Nothing, other than the fact that I may have found someone." He sighed and broke off. "Doesn't matter. I doubt that we would suit each other in any way."

"What is the name that you are going to be using again?" Josiah asked after a moment.

"Lou, Louis Josiah McKenyon." Lobo muttered, his eyes expressing his disgust.

"I take it you did not pick that one?" Josiah noted, realizing that complications could arise just because of the middle name. "What were they thinking of?" His question was rhetorical and only received a snort in response.

"Nope. We need to contact the head alpha, find out what is going on." Lobo said after a moment. "I saw her with him and a few others, yesterday, I believe." He shifted in his seat.

"So she is the one that has had you pacing about lately, huh?" Josiah was amused.

"Back off, Truman, before I decide to help run this vehicle off road." Lobo snapped.

"Sheesh, temper, temper." Josiah groused at him. Then he put on speed and drove into the outskirts, before hitting the brakes in order to avoid an unexpected cluster of townsmen. None of them looked happy to see them.

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“Trouble?”

“Looks like it.”

“The timing really sucks doesn’t it?” Josiah asked his friend.

“Always has, always will. I have a feeling she will stay away after she realizes that explosions and fights follow me everywhere.” Lobo predicted.

Josiah snorted. “Yeah, at least until they realize that you fight as dirty if not worse than they do.”

“Whatever, let’s go.” The truck kept going and the pedestrians scattered when they realized that the two in the truck were not intimidated by them one bit.

Once Alessandra regained her composure, she smiled. He would be coming after her, of that she had no doubt. Now all she had to do was get to town before he arrived. She wondered who else would be arriving. She remembered that there had been a second man out there. He had been annoying and had blocked her view of her fantastic lover.

Her horse snorted, and danced around. He did not like being on hard paved street. Alessandra shook off her pleasurable memories and speculations to concentrate on her direction. Once she arrived to the town’s outskirts, she rode down the main street, avoiding pedestrians and angry drivers alike. There she headed into her hotel room, after returning the horse.

The stable owner had been surprised to see her still on the contrary beast’s back. “How was your ride, ma’am?”

“Interesting to say the least. I think I was able to see more than I bargained for.” She said with amusement lighting her eyes. “Can I take him out tomorrow, or is he being requisitioned by someone else?”

“Oh you can take him if you wish. Nobody else will ride him. Too damn cussedly mean.” The stable owner cackled gleefully.

“Very well then, I will top him off since no one else will.” Alessandra said mildly.

The man looked at her with considerable more respect than he normally reserved for women. “Miz Morales, if you can keep him as well exercised as you have in the past two weeks, you can have him outright.”

“He is considered to be that bad?” Alessandra asked in clear surprise.

“Yes. Hates men, he does. Well, all men but for one.” The stable owner admitted after a moment of consideration.

“Who is this man?” Alessandra asked him curiously.

There was a muffled roar of a pickup truck and the stableman stuck his head out the

window. "Well if he comes in here, you can meet him, Miss. Just drove in with one of Loman's other boys. A decent young man, Josiah Truman is. Not a complete ass." The man told her.

"He is actually another of Loman's sons, just was given a different surname by the old ass." The stableman grumbled, his eyes flashing. "The other young man would be Louis Josiah McKenyon." When her eyes widened in confusion, he shrugged. "He goes by Lou, and has been known to beat up the Lomans, well except for Reginald, that is, if they hassle him too much."

"Unlike Raymond and Ruiz Loman?" She asked, disgust flavoring her words. She disliked the twins who hit on her whenever Erasmus, the oldest brother was not around.

The stableman nodded, though his manner became more alert. "Is that why you have...changed your appearance?"

"Yes." She did not look at him, as she unsaddled the stallion and generally did everything that normally he would be doing.

"You have had experience with horses, miss?" The man was surprised.

"I grew up on a ranch." She glanced at him when she spoke quietly. "Not one that is well known."

"Nor do you talk about your family." He observed. "You were not one of the ones taken to the Loman Ranch were you?"

She stiffened in response but said nothing.

Lobo and Josiah approached the stable and quietly conversed about what they needed to do. As they approached the stable they heard voices of a female and the stableman. Lobo's eyebrow arched up in curiosity. He recognized that voice, he thought, but was not willing to admit it for the moment. He was curious to see how she would react to his presence with Josiah.

As soon as she saw who had come into the stable, Alessandra immediately stepped into the shadows. Tilantos snorted when she entered his stall, but he continued to eat his oats. He had been well taken care of and was not of mind to try and kick the female who had joined him.

At her actions, the stableman glanced around. "Ah, good afternoon, senores. How may I help you?" He was eyeing the two men nervously. They made his charges just as nervous. His ears caught the sounds of whinnies and pawing of the straw.

"No, we just wanted to look at the animals. They may be needed later on tonight." A rough husky drawl spoke.

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Alessandra peered around one post. It was the black haired man from earlier. She had a name that she could associate with a face. Lou McKenyon. For some reason, she liked the name Lobo. That puzzled her and she shrugged it off. He was now decently clothed in dusty worn jeans and a denim jacket. A black Stetson covered his head and it was tilted downward shading his features. A gleam of white teeth appeared in a slight smile.

“What are you going to need?” The stableman asked them. From past experiences, they had needed the type that featured endurance and speed.

Lou turned to the other man, a blond haired muscular gent, “Josiah? What do you think? The usual?”

Regarding him and the stableman, Josiah spoke wryly. “What we generally need, Ramon.” He grinned at the stableman. He pushed back his gray Stetson from his brow, and peered around thoughtfully. His eyes narrowed when he spotted the woman who had been spying on his good buddy.

Ramon laughed lightly. “Will you want Tilantos?” He referred to the beast that Alessandra had been riding earlier.

“No, I imagine that he got quite a workout today.” The blond man said mildly. He was staring straight at Alessandra with a warning stare.

She blinked and turned a dull red, her eyes straying from the cool gray ice that shimmered in their depths. He had recognized her from earlier. When he had been out in the brush? Alessandra wondered, though her eyes strayed back to the other man. He had not looked toward the stall where the stallion was placidly chewing his oats.

Lobo shifted restively, he felt that same presence watching him from earlier. He was ignoring it though he realized that Josiah was trying to tell him that his watcher was there. Lobo already knew just from the differing scents in the air. He could smell the arousal wafting from where she was standing.

Clearly what they had done earlier had not been enough. Not for either of them. Finally just to satisfy his ornery friend, he cast a glance at the stall. He caught a glimpse of the woman who was half hidden by the horse. He spotted enough of her to acknowledge the fact that she had been the one from earlier.

Lobo shrugged and dismissed her from his mind though he had felt a zing of attraction. He had business that could not be put off for a flirtation. Besides, Lobo did not trust women who watched and then later approached. It meant that they had an agenda. He did not like females with agendas. Those generally meant that he or someone else got badly wounded sooner or later. Lobo grunted when he got an elbow in his gut.

Josiah was regarding him with amusement. "Back to earth, Lou." He nearly spoke the man's real name.

Lobo shook his head at Josiah in warning. "We will need seven horses. Anything additional we will have provided per our usual agreement." Lobo told the stableman knowing that he'd be giving information to the woman.

"Deal." Ramon said, wondering what the men would do about the listening woman. He decided it did not matter. They could do something about her later on.

The two men shook hands with Ramon and departed the stable.

Lobo left without a backward glance.

The other man tapped his temple in lieu of tipping a hat to the woman. Then he caught up with his friend. "What did you think of her?"

"Trouble."

"That is your usual assessment." Josiah grumbled.

Lobo just shrugged his shoulders.

Josiah sighed. "How well do you think Reginald will deal with the people at the other ranch?"

"Not well at all. There have been some complications." Lobo replied, though he made a slight movement with one hand. The other man dropped the subject and they began conversing about life on ranches and other subjects.

As they walked, Lobo observed who was in the streets and who wasn't. Too many were still out there.

"They are expecting a confrontation to occur." Josiah said beneath his breath as they walked to his pickup.

"Yes they are." Lobo paused, glanced downward with a frown, leaned against the truck, and then asked conversationally. "You do have spares?"

"Huh?" Josiah watched his actions with a puzzlement before he glanced downward at the tires, when he realized what Lobo commented on. He threw a hand in the air and swore a blue streak. He and Lobo eyed each other and then they shrugged.

"I can push it to the garage." Josiah said.

"I can help you, just let me put these things away first." Lobo said.

"Y'know Truman you are in bad company." It was a soft menacing drawl, and Josiah looked around.

"Did you hear anything?" He asked his friend.

Lobo shrugged, his body language conveying puzzlement. "Nope, must have been a foul smelling wind crossing the road." Truman grinned, appreciating his friend's humor.

CORRUPTION UNCONTROLLED

Both men ducked when crowbars were swung at their heads.

“Nasty. You boys need to learn a thing or two about fair play.” Josiah said as he kicked his attacker in the face. It was Ruiz.

“Some people need to start exercising again. You, Ruiz, your twin, Raymond, and ole Gregory, are going soft.” Lobo added, kicking Raymond in the gut.

Both of the twins were dealt with, within seconds. There were shouts and angry commentary from the Loman supporters. Two policemen walked over to them and glanced from the two men still on their feet to the other two who were on their backs scowling. They had crowbars by their sides.

Kelloran Sykes glanced at the man by his side. Jason Gray eyed Josiah and Lobo with a frown.

“Clear case of self-defense.” Gray decided.

The two police officers handcuffed the Loman men and dragged them off to the jail. For all they could care, the two men could rot.

Alessandra stepped outside from the stable and watched them leave. She frowned but said nothing. They were up to something and she was curious to find out what.

Ramon came up to her side. “They are good friends, and the black haired one, Lou McKenyon is a good friend of Reginald Loman.” He offered that information.

She looked at him in surprise. “You are the only one will talk to me about him.” She observed after a moment.

Ramon’s lips twitched. “They are scared of him, senorita.” He said at last. “He cowed the Loman boys twice, in the past eight years.” He told her. “He did it simply because they had cornered Reginald and were using crowbars to beat information out of him.” Ramon’s lips tightened as he spoke.

“What else?” She asked quietly.

“He helped some girls who had been kidnapped, get away from the ranch. Not this one, but another one.” Ramon whispered softly.

Alessandra felt a chill go down her back. That she had not known about. “There is a second one?”

“I said too much.” Ramon’s eyes held unease as he regarded her.

“I do not tell what I find out.” Alessandra said calmly. Her eyes were direct and level.

He believed her. Ramon sighed. “There is not much else I can tell you, senorita.” He admitted. “Though they are going on another raid. It is set for three to four days from

now. Another one, that was for this night, was cancelled.” He shrugged his shoulders in a weary fashion. “You wish for more information, I have no doubt.”

Alessandra nodded her head.

“Try to speak to Castillo, or watch for a gray furred wolf.” Ramon said at last, avoiding her eyes. “He can lead you to where the action is.” He felt bad about what he was directing her to.

“Why is it you are afraid of them?” Alessandra pressed.

“They are Lycan.” Ramon told her tersely. “Even Reginald is, though his inheritance will have to be activated by being bitten.”

Alessandra debated her options, and then she twisted her shoulder and arm. A bit of fur showed.

He stared at her in shocked silence. Then he smiled and nodded his head. “All right. I will tell you more. Not here though. Even walls and floors have ears.” Ramon told her.

“That is fine. Watch your back though. There are people here who hate me just because of my surname.” Alessandra told him.

Ramon gave her a mirthless smile. “It would serve them right if one of their own unacknowledged offspring came back and exposed them for what they are.”

Alessandra grimaced. “I am not one of them.” She said flatly. “There were tests done to clear that up.” Her eyes were hard. “Plus, I was three years old when my mother and three aunts, and six cousins were kidnapped, twenty years ago.”

Ramon eyed her. “You want revenge?”

“They all killed themselves rather than go on living.” She said bluntly. “Hell yes, I want revenge.” For a moment there was furious anger in her eyes and then she sighed. “I am sorry, but it is a sore point with me.”

Ramon merely studied her and averted his eyes. He glanced back at her. “I should be sorry for being nosy.” He said wryly. “Not you.” Then he smiled at her. “We talk later, yes?”

“Yes.” Alessandra agreed with a smile. She watched in horrified silence as two angry men spat at McKenyon and Truman. They spotted her and their expressions of menace became palpable. They picked up the crowbars and eyed her for a moment.

She tensed, not sure what she should do, but also not happy with their actions either. Then they strolled to where her car was and whistling trashed it completely. Then they poured kerosene over it and lit a match. It went up in flames.

Alessandra swore in complete disgust. She pulled out a small gun and fired shots at

CORRUPTION UNCONTROLLED

the two men. Red bloomed on their arms, and they dropped the crowbars. Neither of them bothered to look backward as they took to their heels. She put her gun away and sighed. "There goes another one."

Ramon watched her with amused respect. It occurred to him, that others were fools to assume that they could force her to do other than what they wanted. It was a disturbing thought.

McKenyon and Truman spun around and were horrified by the sight of the wreckage. They looked for the men who had done it. They had long since disappeared.

Alessandra had walked over to the vehicle with a disgusted expression on her faces. "Could they have been a little less obvious in their message to me?"

"Maybe, then again maybe not." Lou said, after a moment, scaring her into wheeling around. Alessandra stared at them with thinned lips and then she walked off in a huff. Lou watched where she was headed, and it was right over to the rental station. He doubted that she would get service after what had just occurred. Truman walked over to Ramon and spoke to him quietly. Lou walked over to the flaming vehicle and then he found a hose, hooked it to a water pump and let it spray down the flaming heap of metal.

By the time Alessandra had returned with a man from the rental station, the flames had been put out. Lou had tidied up the area and promptly disappeared. Josiah stuck around. He understood why Lou was in no mood to be friendly about what just happened. Things were heating up and fast. He eyed the woman who had put his friend in such a foul mood and then shook his head. Sooner or later, something would give. He just hoped that neither of them would lose their newly formed bond.

"What does the man have against people being friendly and grateful to him?" She grumbled softly.

The stableman grinned at her. "I reckon he is just as mad as you are, Miss. Though in this case it's because his friend, Josiah's truck's tires were slashed just a few minutes ago."

"Oh." She blinked and then sighed. There was a loud rumble and a vehicle came tearing down the road toward them.

There was a shout, and Josiah and Ramon dove to one side. Alessandra wasn't able to move. She was frozen with fear. Something that she later was furious to admit to doing.

In the meantime, Lou appeared and grabbed her with a curse. "Dammit woman! Move!" He gave her a hard shove.

Alessandra staggered and made it to an alleyway just in time. Not content with that, Lou knocked her to the ground and held her still. His eyes gleamed angrily as shots

peppered the walls where their heads would have been. Still cursing and snarling, they both crawled into a different back alley that led to different streets, though most were blocked off at the moment. Fences were all around from construction sites.

“Do you have an invisible sign that says, ‘I’m trouble, shoot me’?” Lou asked irately, as he held her still beneath his body. The vehicle drove past three times, spraying the now deserted area with bullets. None of which missiles connected with them since they had moved to a different location.

“No, do you?” She snapped back at him, even as she turned so that she was cradling him between her thighs. He looked down at her in disbelief. Her fingers were nimble as she released him from his jeans. He was bare beneath them and hard as stone.

Shifting his gun that he had pulled from his jacket, he tugged at her jeans and pulled them down to her knees. Her eyes widened at his quick movements and smiled, as he slid into her moist cunt.

“This is crazy.” He muttered, even though he was clearly aware of what exactly was happening. Nor was he about to stop either. The adrenaline was rolling through him along with an uncontrollable desire that was overwhelming his sense of awareness. When he realized that there were no more gunshots spraying the other alleyway entrance, he knew that they were safe for the moment. He still did not drop his subconscious alertness for danger.

“Just shut up and enjoy it.” Alessandra panted as she held him close to her. She pulled his head down to her mouth and kissed him thoroughly. He groaned, a muffled sound as he drove deeper into her. She squirmed against him and over him.

Satisfied that he was kissing her, her hands disappeared beneath his shirt and roamed over his hard muscles and discovered that he had no ounce of fat on his frame. His muscles rippled and flexed beneath her exploratory touch.

Lou returned her kiss and then when they climaxed, he sent her flying a second time by kneeling up and letting her sink onto him. Her eyes widened when she realized he was not going to let her go that easily. She had pushed him a bit too far with her earlier antics and now she was going to have to deal with the consequences.

He leaned against a wall, while suckling her breasts and his hands held her firmly on his lap. Alessandra bit him on his shoulder and chest. He nipped her nipples lightly in warning punishment. She gasped at the extra stimulation. He watched the alleyway, his eyes remote, as he continued to take his pleasure of this lovely yet definitely aggravating woman.

He felt her climax again, and again. He was determined to wear her out so that she

CORRUPTION UNCONTROLLED

could not move for at least a couple of hours. Hopefully by that time he would have found a different camp to live in, or else find a place in town. Not something he was looking forward to. Not even with the new temptation he had on his hands.

“Stop, please.” Alessandra finally begged, even as she felt another orgasm hitting her. His fingers were reaching her most vulnerable sensitive points.

“Are you sure?” Lou asked, as he lifted his mouth from her reddened nipples. His eyes were narrowed on her face.

“Yes.” She snapped, even as her eyes widened and rolled back into her head.

He had just sent her over, by rolling his hips as he shifted position. He smiled down at her and kissed her lips. “As you wish, lovely stranger. We will meet again.” His voice was a dark promise of sensuality. She was truly his match, though he refused to consider the odds of what he could do to keep her by his side.

Chapter Four

“You finally get her to pass out?” Josiah’s back appeared in the opening of the second alley. He was standing so that he could not see anything of what was in the alleyway. He preferred not having to see the aftermath, it was hard on his own weakened self-control. For the moment, Josiah was still running on adrenaline. Knowing that his friend had just gotten laid was not making his baser instincts any easier to control.

“Yes.” Lou replied, as he neatened his clothing and hers.

“Good, we need to get some others who will be willing to help us work on our other plans. Events are speeding up.” Josiah said harshly. “Reginald was badly beaten when he went to the other location.” His eyes were cold and fierce. He was protective of his stepbrother. He cared nothing for his blood brothers.

“I am aware of that.” Lou paused over his last words. “When did you find out about that?”

“About two minutes ago while you were dallying.” Josiah snapped back at him.

Lou stared at him, and then at the woman still astride his lap and closed his eyes. “I will get her dealt with and then we can go on as planned.” Lou switched from satisfied male to angry and worried. His expression became remote.

Josiah felt a flicker of guilt. “Lou...I.”

“Don’t. Don’t say anything more, Josiah. You made your point.” Clearly he was no longer basking in the warmth of her body or the aftermath. His mind had reverted back to strategy and logistics. Still, Lou stared down at the woman in his lap. If it had been different time, place and circumstance, maybe they would have the luxury to relax their guard.

He shook his head with disgust. Then he got to his feet and carried her in his arms over to the hotel. Once at the front desk, Lou accessed her room and took her up there with a few words to the proprietor. He laid her on the bed and set everything else that had been retrieved from the wrecked vehicle on the floor near the wall and then locked the door. Lou had things to do and this woman had just become an unneeded complication in his life.

With the door quietly shutting and locking, Alessandra awoke with a start and a

CORRUPTION UNCONTROLLED

jerk. She groaned when she realized she was too stiff to move. “Damn that man.” She realized that he had managed to ditch her again. At least he had the good manners to deliver her to her room safely. Sighing, she dialed out for room service. Alessandra was not going to be going anywhere anytime soon it seemed, so she decided to take advantage of the amenities while she could.

She did stop to stare out the window and spotted a shadow lurking outside. Her gaze shifted to different points, as though she were just enjoying the view, and spotted four others. Alessandra glanced to distant stars that were twinkling and shook her head. Turning away, she headed to the shower.

His arms pillowing his head, Lobo had stretched out by his campfire. His thoughts were solely on the woman. What was her name? He wondered absently and then his ears picked up muffled hoof beats. He got to his feet and retreated into the shadows, though stars were briefly blotted out by whoever was arriving.

Sykes scanned the campfire. Deserted he realized and softly called out his partner’s name. “Lobo.”

Lobo relaxed. “What do you want, Deja?” He watched the redhead dismount.

“Just to give you these reports. One of them is on the woman.” His smile was faint. “She was introduced to the rest of us earlier at the office. Her name is Alessandra Morales.”

Lobo’s eyes flickered, but gave no other indication of his thoughts. “Thanks.” He accepted the packet that was handed to him. Sykes nodded and then mounted up and rode away without another word. Lobo looked down at the papers and muttered a curse. A name that matched the face, he sighed and settled down and began reading reports.

As Lobo scanned them, his eyebrows drew together in a distinct frown. He glanced at his stallion that had been hidden in an underground stall that he had constructed. “Shall we go for a midnight ride, Zeus?”

When the horse snorted in protest, Lobo shrugged his shoulders in amusement. “All right, I will leave you with enough feed to keep you content for the next twelve hours.”

The horse snorted again and pawed at his bedding. “Yes, that will be changed as well.” Lobo got to his feet and led the animal out of the stall and tethered him to a branch. The stallion stuck its muzzle into water and slowly drank from it.

Lobo mucked out the stall and then spread in new bedding. Once he was finished with that, he also put in more feed and supplements. He refreshed the water and added a

second bucket as well. Satisfied with his work, Lobo approached the stallion that had finished drinking. "Finished?"

He ran his hands over the stallion's body checking for any signs of ill health. The animal snorted and nuzzled his shoulder. Lobo laughed softly. The stallion gave him a definite shove with his head after he was lead back to his stall. "All right, all right, I am going."

Lobo chuckled when the stallion stomped a hoof. "Good evening, Zeus. I will see you sometime on the morrow." He walked away, after putting out his fire. Lou shook his head when he realized he'd dropped back into the speech of a different time and age. He could not keep doing that without gaining others' suspicion should they overhear him. It was bad enough that he made people curious just from his ageless appearance. Then he loped away stretching, elongating into a rangy powerful wolf that howled to the moon.

Alessandra heard the howl and was tempted to answer it. She could not though. If she did, she would betray her true nature to the towns' inhabitants. Some were friendly to Lycans but most were not. That was the worst part of being in Wako Springs. Frustrated and lonely for Lobo, she shifted and became a wolf, sleeping on the bed with a sigh.

Lobo watched the different men standing in shadows. They were smoking and watching someone's window, he realized. Deciding that a diversion had to be created, he kicked a few rocks toward a nearby home that had an extremely expensive and aggravating alarm system. Damn thing went off at any given instance.

Clink, clink, clink...

His ears flattened against his head when the alarms went off with a shrill warning. His entire body was shrinking into itself to get away from the noise. He dodged the men who were swiftly running toward the house, and he spotted an open window and leaped toward it. There was a moment when he thought he would fall but didn't.

Instead, two hands reached out and pulled him in. The female that stared at him was naked and exasperated. It was none other than his lovely stranger from earlier. He sniffed at her and realized that she must have been dreaming earlier.

The woman scowled and shut the window. "I hope that you don't mind me shutting it." The wolf shook its head and then shifted form. Her eyes widened when Lobo stood in front of her.

"Shall we spend the night together?" He smiled into her eyes as he pulled her towards his body and they tumbled to the carpeted floor, in a tangle of arms and legs.

"Who are you?" She asked him. "What are you?" Her eyes held questions that would not be denied.

CORRUPTION UNCONTROLLED

Lobo stared at her somberly. “There are things that I cannot tell you yet, Alessandra Morales.” He said at last. “I am for now called Lou McKenyon.” His eyes were unhappy as he spoke, and she clung to him tightly when he would have pulled away.

“No. Don’t leave, please.” She said quietly. “We can talk another time. Stay with me for this night.” Alessandra was afraid that something would happen to her warrior if he left that night.

Sighing Lobo held her tightly. “I will not leave, I was not going to. I was just going to get a blanket.” He smiled at her with amusement. “Better yet.” He scooped her into his arms and put her onto the bed. “This is more comfortable.” Lobo cradled her in his arms.

“Mmm, so it is.” Alessandra murmured, cuddling against him, falling asleep almost instantaneously.

He held her in his arms, enjoying the feel of her skin against his. He knew there was a rough contrast between him and her body, though he had not thought of it till now. Was his skin too rough? He wondered and inhaled her personal scent with a smile. Perhaps, but she had not complained as of yet. So he was not going to change his ways.

When it became darker, and the stars dimmed for the darkest hour before dawn, Lobo slipped out of the room. He had made no promises to her, but at the same time he felt guilty for leaving her. He considered leaving her a note but in the end decided not to.

Lobo glanced at the time and swore. Out of time, he didn’t leave a note. Lobo couldn’t take the chance that someone else might find it instead of her. He was going to be late for the meeting and finalizing details of this and another raid on the Loman Ranch. All of them were for the sole purpose of hassling the remaining Lomans.

A smile curved his lips as he jumped from the window and fell in a controlled roll. Then he got up to his feet and took off as a wolf before anyone investigated the thump. He had judged his getaway just in time. He realized as he heard footsteps thudding toward his last direction.

Lobo howled with a determination in order to call the others from their rooms. He wondered if they would respond to the summons. Lately it had been all that he could do to get them to emerge, though he understood. When he reached the outskirts of town and to where he knew Josiah Truman possessed a home, Lobo shifted to his human form.

Josiah spotted him coming and yelled out for the pure orneriness of amusing others and breaking the tension. “For goodness sakes put on some clothes.” Then he threw out a shirt and pants.

Lobo stepped into the pants and pulled the shirt on without any modesty. There could not be any under some circumstances.

“Thanks for stopping by.” Truman said sarcastically. “What the hell delayed you?” He was scowling at Lobo.

“What else but a pretty woman?” Lobo taunted right back. There were roars of laughter at his sally.

Josiah just shook his head. “Ha, ha, very funny.” He said with exasperation. “Now let us get down to business. Luckily, the raid was set back for the coming night.”

Sykes did not say anything at first and then he hesitantly asked. “Any word from the Alpha about our lady?” He referred to Alessandra.

“We do not tell her anything.” Josiah said at last. “We just wait until she is summoned back to Abornia.” He shrugged at their expressions. “Castillo’s orders were handed down to that effect. There are some things I cannot act on and you know it.”

“As it is, all this jabbering is making me want to get some sleep.” Lobo muttered wryly.

“More like you just want to get back to your woman.” Sykes countered and ducked the punch that Lobo threw at him. There was another burst of laughter and then the Lycans got back to work. They had things that they needed to accomplish. After three hours of coordinating three different maps, they had definite ideas of what sections would be needed to watch over the most.

“Is there any chance of finding a way to convince the Castaneda clan to join us?” Lobo asked tiredly.

“No.” Josiah said briefly. “They pulled out years ago.” He rubbed his forehead. “Went to a different territory completely.” He added. “Though they will welcome others who want to begin a new life out there.” Josiah’s eyes rested on Lobo.

His eyes were flat and he merely shrugged his shoulders. “First I would have to produce a wife.” He said softly. “A true mate.” He shook his head. “No time to talk about that, we need to continue solidifying our plans and you know that.”

Josiah looked at Lobo. “What about after all this goes down?” He made it clear that there would be an end with his words.

“When that happens.” Lobo shrugged. “If she agrees to be my mate and wife, then that will be when a final decision is made.” He was not happy with the current conversation. Lobo made it clear he wanted it to end. “If we are finished for the night, I will go back to my lady.” The others glanced at each other and then at Josiah.

He shrugged. “On your head lay your choice Lobo.” Josiah said. “I just hope that you two make up your minds and quickly. Time is running out.”

Lobo sighed. “I know that, you know that, we all know that. I for one am sick of

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hearing it and thinking of those terms only.” He said flatly. “Goodbye.” Then he walked out of the house and headed away on foot. Lobo preferred taking a circuitous route back to the hotel, where Alessandra was staying.

Stopping short of the hotel, Lobo glanced around from where he was standing. No one was outright watching the window where Alessandra was occupying the room. Shrugging, Lobo went in through a side door and climbed the stairs that led to her floor that was third from the ground, and luckily was right next to the staircase. He did not really mind the climb.

It gave him some time to think about what he should do. Lobo was not certain that he liked the way that his feelings had struck him, so hard and sudden as they had. For sure, they were intense and so deep his body shivered just thinking about them. Would they last though? Well there would only be one way to find out and that would be to spend time with her.

He ignored the inner warnings of his conscience about time, blah, blah, blah, so what if he was late? It wouldn’t be the first time it happened. Which he already had heard enough about from others, so what? Grumbling, Lobo slipped into the room and joined Alessandra in the bed.

She immediately turned toward him with a sleepy murmur. “You are back.”

He held her in his arms, enjoying the feel of her. “Yes, I am back.” He had turned off her alarm clock and had warned Gray that they would not be coming in until much later that morning.

The older man had not been pleased to say the least, but had let Lobo off the hook for the time being. His last words to Lobo had him rolling his eyes in exasperation. “I want an invitation to your wedding.”

Lobo had just hung up on the other man’s laughter. Wedding he had thought. That was not something he wanted to consider though his inner eye filled with a vision that had him smiling against Alessandra’s lips. She kissed him, though she was involved in a dream and had not really realized that he was back yet.

He kissed her deeply, and then one hand slid between her thighs to rouse her to a keener edge as his nose detected her arousal. Then he slid down her body, licking it and grazing over sensitive areas.

Alessandra cried out as his caresses brought her out of sleep, but he had reached his goal and she found herself writhing against the covers as he sucked at her clitoris and gave her an orgasm just by flicking his tongue over it. Then he slid his fingers into her and made her moan in surprise and need.

Her hands pulled at his hair and were pleading. “Lou, come away from there.” She was cut off when his tongue replaced his fingers and her hips bucked against him.

“Will you be my mate?” He growled softly, staring up at her. His eyes had taken on a feral gleam in their depths.

Alessandra gaped at him, as he held her on the cusp of another orgasm. “Damn you, I can’t think!”

He chuckled, the sound rumbling against her body. Still he made no move to give her surcease. She clearly was not prepared for his words. Lobo used his tongue to further her need, she was pouring over his mouth and he was lapping up the juices. “Then think no more, and I will ask you again later on.”

Then, Lobo slid up her body and thrust into her, making her wrap around him. He rolled so that she was on top of him. “Ride me, my lovely woman.” Lobo bent his legs upward so that she was braced against them. Her hips slide over him, as she pushed herself up and down on his hard throbbing cock. He had awakened a savage desire within her.

Now she would take her fill of him. None of them bothered to consider sleeping after he had gotten her revved up for more action. He came with a low growl, a barring of teeth as his features went abruptly to those of a wolf. Hers did the same thing, though he was not able to make out hers so well. Another time he vowed to himself he would view her as a lupine.

Until then, he would continue being with her however they could manage the feat. Their flesh slapped together in a rhythm that neither wanted to end. Finally, Alessandra cried out in a low scream that he muffled with a kiss. His body shook as his hips thrust upward against her hard. He cried out as well, not wanting the moment to end, though if others had asked him about his time with her, he would just clam up and not give out much information at all. Lobo did not like to kiss and tell.

As their bodies cooled off they laid at rest for the time being. His body was replete and exhausted. Her emotions were brimming over, but she did not speak. Alessandra did not want to break their time together with questions that he would not greet with understanding. She wondered though. Had he really asked her to be his mate and would he again.

Ring... Ring... Ring...

The man looked up, glancing at the time, his dark grey streaked hair showing his age. It was right on schedule and he smiled faintly. Good. He was hoping for some good news. The phone stopped ringing and he waited patiently.

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Ring... Ring... Ring... He picked the phone up speaking politely.

“Tarlington.” He identified. “Is this Raquela?”

She gave him the codeword. “Transit.”

He nodded though he knew she could not see his movement. “Report.” He heard a low growl coming from her throat and smiled faintly. It was always good, in his mind, to remind operatives of their manners.

Raquela took a deep breath and reminded herself that he was on a different planet that was two galaxy systems away. Then she began speaking. “He has been taken to the other place again.” She filled him in on other details that she had learned.

“So young Reginald is involved in the raids on both locations.” Tarlington was not too surprised. The young man had struck him as very intelligent and resourceful.

“Yes. There is to be another one this night.” Raquela said briefly. “I cannot spend more time on the phone, it is tapped.” There was amusement in her words. “All lines are tapped.”

Tarlington frowned at the one in his hand. Tapped lines? What were those Loman men up to? Perhaps he should arrange a visit down there. He wondered if the old deceased bastard had even told his sons about their arrangement. Tarlington was not pleased. “So what are you using?”

Raquela was amused. He was angry it served him right for being so smug and self-righteous. “An abandoned line just outside of the Loman territory. There is an investigation of the old man’s death. So far it has been stalled by the older sons.” There was a shrug in her voice.

“Thank you for that information. Now what is your progress on Reginald?” Tarlington cut through to the part that interested him the most. He could feel the hesitation on the other end.

Raquela winced. Stubborn was given a new definition by Reginald Loman, she thought rubbing her forehead where a headache was developing. “He is beginning to trust me, but I had run into a complication that I only now became free of.”

There was anger in her voice for the first time. “The others did not tell me that I would be stuck up in that godforsaken wilderness of a hideaway in the Cumulus Range.” Hopefully that would get him off her back for a while.

Tarlington frowned. “You were not supposed to be sent there.” From her silence it was clear that Raquela remained unconvinced. He was definitely going to have to carve out some time to go down there. Not only to remind her of her priorities but also to make her more subservient. His thoughts were drawn back to the conversation at hand, when she

spoke again.

“What actually happened was that I was down with the flu and other ah problems during those weeks. I was able to scout around and see who all was there.” He heard the smirk in her voice. “Turns out that there was a glut of trainees and so after two weeks, I was sent to the ranch in Wako Springs.”

Tarlington rolled his eyes. “What else is there that you can give me about Reginald?” He just wanted to be able to get his hands on the man. Loman had reneged on his agreement and had upped the price six years ago. That had insured that neither he nor Cassias had been able to lay hands on the man. A pity that Cassias was no longer one of the living Tarlington frowned as he thought about that. Then he shrugged it off and listened to what she had to say.

“Just that I am getting into his confidence and his heart.” She said briefly. “In order to do both I could not seduce him. Seduction it seems has been a favored ploy in the past. End result was that the women were humiliated.” Raquela shrugged her shoulders.

“Work harder on him.” Tarlington advised. “He needs to be brought to heel in two or three more days because I will be arranging to come and take him to the facility.”

“I will do my best, but he is suspicious of everyone and everything.” Raquela said. “Most of the others there spy on him and answer to Esme Gonzalez.” There was something in her tone that drew his attention.

“Who is this Esme Gonzalez?” Tarlington asked, writing down the name.

Raquela grimaced slightly, but she soon smiled as a thought occurred to her. “She is Erasmus’ woman. Fully in his pocket but discontented right now.” She broke off and listened.

“What is wrong, Raquela?” Tarlington demanded. He had managed to pick up on the sounds that he had heard.

“I must go, but I will report to you again later in the week.” She replied hurriedly and hung up before he could ask further questions.

Raquela nearly heaved a sigh of relief as she hurried away from the deserted room. It had been one of the few that had an untapped phone line. A grim smile flickered over her face. Too bad Tarlington had not considered the fact that she might actually double cross him for the other Lycans. Her eyes chilled as she thought of Tarlington.

Sadistic bastard. He would get what was coming to him sooner or later. She would lure Reginald for him, but she wasn’t going to go all out and help put him in one of those cages. Tarlington was on his own after she got Reginald to the drop off point.

CORRUPTION UNCONTROLLED

Raquela idly wondered if his spy genius was beginning to notice an unnerving flow of corpses heading into the facility. Her smile turned vindictive. Chantry had always had a weak stomach for that kind of thing. Now she only hoped that he still had enough humanity to get out while he still could.

As it was, the older brothers were suspicious of her unwillingness to follow the same pattern of the other female staff. Soon she would have to risk trying to get to Reginald. Not yet, she would give him some more time.

“Senorita Ramirez!” A familiar and slimy voice made her grimace. Damn. One of the Lomans, she cursed her own inattention.

“Yes, Senor Loman?” Raquela asked, her deferential mask in place as she gazed at the man watching her with a leer.

“Where are the linens you were sent for?” The man asked her sharply.

Linens? She had not been sent to get linens, Raquela’s eyes narrowed slightly. Which one was he anyway? They all looked the same to her. “Senorita Gonzalez did not send me to get linens, senor.” She tried to act subservient. “I was on my break and resting in one of the old rooms.”

Gregory eyed her sharply and then shrugged. He had overheard her speaking on one of the phones. The name Tarlington had come up and he had been instantly suspicious. “Well get back to work girl.” He slapped her rear end, even as he felt it with his palm. Nice and tight he thought with a speculative gleam entering his eye. No, not yet. He had other things he had to do.

“Yes, senor.” Raquela murmured and ran off before he could think of something else to ask her about. If she read him right, he had eavesdropped on her conversation. Too bad for Tarlington, of course it had helped that she had made sure she would be overheard by that one. It had to be Gregory. He was minimally better than the others. Now she had to go back to work for real.

Gregory watched her run off. It was time for another family meeting, he decided. He would get the others ready and then they would question Reginald about the little beauty’s actions around him. Then he sighed. There would not be another family meeting. He had other things to do.

The finances of both ranches were in a huge mess and he would put it off for as long as possible. He would just pass on information to the other spymaster, the head woman of the entire network at the bordello.

As far as he was concerned, the others could stew in their own juices. He was tired of the lies. The deceptions and he just wanted to do something good for a change. His lips

tightened. He could start in small ways and do his best to warn others in the network of the Lycans.

Tarlington cursed the woman. She was becoming sloppy in her work. He set the phone down and debated his options. He glanced at the door that was closed for the moment. Then he pressed for his latest aide to arrive.

A man appeared automatically, after the door opened with a silent swish. "Sir?"

"Get me Chantry. I need to speak with him in here. Not in his office." Tarlington said coldly.

"Yes, sir."

Five minutes elapsed and a harried looking man finally walked in. He scowled at Tarlington. "What the hell do you want now?" Chantry demanded. "If I cannot be in my office, I cannot do any of those updates that you consider so damn important."

Seeing that he was just getting started and not wanting to listen to a four-hour rant, Tarlington waved him to a chair. "Do you still want to work on the challenge of both properties of the Lomans?" He cut off Chantry's tirade.

Chantry eyed him suspiciously. "I suppose so." Chantry wondered what his quixotic boss was up to this time.

"I have a little job I need you to do for me." Tarlington told him about the details and Chantry's eyes widened in disbelief.

"You want me to put in spy devices over and above what those Loman boys have in place already?" He sounded dubious but intrigued.

"Why do you refer to them as boys?" Tarlington asked with interest. "They are about your age."

Chantry shrugged. "Never grew up in here." He tapped the side of his head. "Immature and cruel. Though they have certainly learned a few more techniques from that manual you sent to them for purposes of trying to break Reginald Loman." Chantry had never approved of that decision.

"Did you ever wonder?" Tarlington stopped when Chantry just looked at him.

"Not about my parentage." He shrugged. "It was never a priority as far as I was concerned." Chantry was not impressed with Tarlington's little mind games.

"I did find out." Tarlington said, watching Chantry with cool eyes.

"Goody for you." Chantry said sardonically. "I don't give a fuck." He ignored Tarlington's furious expression. His mind was on different matters now. "Now if you will excuse me, I will gather up what I need for the work on both places."

CORRUPTION UNCONTROLLED

"I can always get another technician." Tarlington said softly.

Chantry smiled slightly his eyes frosted over but his voice remained chillingly pleasant and civil. "You making a promise or a threat, Tarlington?"

There was a chilling hardness that had Tarlington scrutinizing him warily. "Neither." Tarlington said. "For now."

Chantry smiled back at him. "I only make promises. No bluffs." He walked to the door and paused. "Let me know when my flight is. I will see myself out." Chantry headed out the office, knowing that he would have to make alternate arrangements just in case things got sticky.

Tarlington's eyes became flinty. "Aide."

The aide came in and stood at the doorway. "Sir?"

"Tell Petersen and Michaels to keep track of Chantry's actions." Tarlington told him. It never hurt to keep tabs on the mechanical genius. He was wondering what had gotten up Chantry's ass to make him so stubborn.

Back in his spare office, Chantry packed up what he would need. He, unlike others he could name, did not need a whole lot. Personal comfort was always a low necessity for him. Searching his desk drawers he found everything that he had put aside for a time like this. He hurried through the rest of his packing. Then he strode through the different levels.

Chantry had access to all levels and floors of the building. A good thing too, he needed to keep track of Tarlington's actions, though he knew full well that Tarlington had put some of his underlings on his own tail. It did not bother him. He would just ditch them when the time came.

Tarlington had to learn that some things would not come to him so easily. Frankly, Chantry had known all along what his parentage was. Did he care? No. So he was not biting that particular poisoned carrot that Tarlington had dangled before him. He smiled grimly. Nah, he would just take it when the time came. When it ever did.

Chantry's smile faded as he walked to the morgue. Nasty place. He had always gotten the eerie feeling that the spirits of the deceased were still there, floating around. Not a comforting thought.

Taking in a deep breath, Chantry studied the different records that were kept in a neat file and he paused when he found Cassias' records. Once he finished studying the results he closed the file. Standing there he knew he would have to make a decision. He would have to wait till later though.

Always putting off the more important decisions he thought wryly. Then Chantry scanned copies of all the reports and tucked the small disk that held the information away for later. Now that that distasteful task was finished, he headed up to the offices again.

It was time to collect his itinerary. He was well aware that his actions had been recorded and that Tarlington would be foaming at the mouth. Chantry didn't give a good damn. He was out of there for a short while and it would be good to be back in wilderness. Chantry needed that solace. Even if the trip were being conducted for nefarious purposes, he would take what he could get.

Lobo yawned as he awoke once again. It was afternoon, late from what he could judge by the shadows. He kissed the nape of Alessandra's neck and then he slipped away to get some extra tasks done that had remembered about. Lobo made a face, as he glanced at his woman. She looked so peaceful sleeping there.

He did not want to leave her, but duty called. Sometimes he despised duty, but this one he could not abandon. Sighing he used the facilities and dressed swiftly.

Once he was outside he pressed the small phone and listened to all the messages that had accumulated. "Lobo, this is Kerr, an emergency erupted and we're dealing with more wild cards. Get your ass out of your lady's bed and join us. It's the highest code out there so don't tell us to get lost or take a hike off the nearest sand dune into a dry creek bed." Kerr's voice held a taut authoritative note. Silence and then a click. His face whitened as he listened to the last messages and he took off at a run.

Luckily his preference for being out in the wilderness was going to serve in his favor. He just hoped that the other Lycans were still waiting for him at Head Quarters. Surely there would be some news about dealing with the menace that was from a different direction than that of the Lomans. Pressing another button, he listened to his phone ringing.

An impatient voice answered the phone as a man paced his office like a caged tiger. He was not in a good mood and it showed in his voice. "Kerr Truman, where the hell are you, Lobo?"

"On my way, Kerr. ETA, depending on who I catch first, Josiah or Sykes, will be two hours." Lobo said tersely.

"Meet 'em at the airport, Lobo." Kerr signed off abruptly.

Lobo clicked off and continued to run, and then a horn honked. He glanced around warily. It was Josiah and Sykes and they were not happy.

"Let's go dammit." Josiah said harshly.

CORRUPTION UNCONTROLLED

“How soon do we fly out of there?” Lobo asked.

“As soon as we arrive, you idiot.” Sykes growled at him. His eyes were angry and wounded. As soon as Lobo had settled in and fastened his safety belt, Sykes floored the pedal and they roared out of the small oasis that the two men had been waiting in.

“Get down!” Josiah warned, he had already knelt and was firing out one of the windows.

Lobo fired out of a different one, while Sykes held steady and kept driving like a bat out of a flame filled cave.

“Damn I hope we arrive in time.” Josiah murmured softly.

Lobo was just plain quiet. He could be heard firing steadily.

Sykes noticed that Josiah was about to start speaking again. “Shut up, Truman.” He said harshly. “Do not start on the ranting and raving or else I’ll bash you one to shut you up till we get to Abornia.”

Truman lapsed into silence at that. The three men concentrated on escaping the death trap that that route away had become.

Chapter Five

Chained in a room, Reginald came back to consciousness with a low groan. He felt pain in his arms and knew where he had ended up. It was a familiar place almost a second home, sad as it impinged on his mind. It was the location he was always thrown into when his brothers wanted to gain information, but did not want others to hear his screams when they used more exotic forms of torture.

All he did was lose his voice and have to deal with other types of garbage as a result. Now it seemed he was back over at the bordello. Beautiful country, rotting human decay, that is all that the bordello made him think of, that and repression of the worst kind.

He kept his eyes closed and wondered how long this session of interrogation and pressure would last this time. Reginald had no doubt that his brothers were up to something and it was not going to be pretty. As usual he waited to see what they were going to do this time.

Usually they had tried to force females to succor him. That had lasted for about two days and then they had given up that notion completely. He wasn't altogether too unhappy when they had stopped that. Reginald had never responded to that sort of stimulation all that well.

Not even after he had begun developing an interest in females. His eyes slitted open when he heard voices approach and then pass by the room where he was chained. For the moment he just relaxed and let himself hang. Sooner or later he would be hassled for now he would just enjoy the moments of quiet and peace, which he so rarely possessed.

"What is he doing?" Erasmus asked, his eyes watching the person who was controlling the hidden cameras.

"Sleeping." The person said in a detached voice.

It was a female, one who had aged gracefully. So well that Erasmus was not sure what her age was. He had never learned her name either. Of course, Erasmus had decided that he would remedy that as soon as he got a quiet moment to go over records. Surely there would be some interesting information within them. His father had never thrown anything out within his sixty-five years of hard living.

CORRUPTION UNCONTROLLED

“He is sleeping?” Erasmus sounded disbelieving as he glanced at the monitor. There sure enough, was Reginald and indeed he was sleeping. As he watched, sensors attached themselves to the man’s body through his clothes. No one ever wanted to see what was beneath the shirt and pants for some reason or another. He had found that laughable, but no one else would grant his request to remove the clothing. His lips thinned.

One of these days he would find out why others were so reluctant to have anything to do with his brother. Erasmus suspected that it had to do with the fact that Reginald was an underdeveloped little punk. His eyes became cold. “We will try another woman with him this time. Send in Salama. She is ready, yes?” Erasmus glanced at the woman monitoring all the security systems.

“She came down with the flu, yesterday, Erasmus. I can find others who will try to arouse him though.” The security chief responded politely. She was going to do nothing of the sort and when Erasmus swore at her, she merely eyed him with a detached expression. “They are all afraid of him and humiliated when he does not respond to their wiles.”

“What do you mean?” He asked suspiciously.

“He does become aroused, but it fades rapidly.” She shrugged her shoulders. “No one has been able to return to that chamber quickly enough to take advantage of him in that state. No one wishes to either.” Her eyes flickered away at the last word.

“What is so frightening about my brother? He is just a punk.” He said it contemptuously.

“He fights. You might as well try drugging him first. Otherwise just give up on the idea that he will be amenable to anything that you do to him.” She said it bluntly.

Erasmus shrugged his shoulders. “We will just take other measures to get him to do what we want him to.” He said simply. “Devise a new punishment. He does not reveal what happens to him. Not to anyone.” Erasmus smiled grimly.

“How would you know that?” She sounded intrigued and aggravated.

“Sources that not even the little bastard chained in there would know about.” Erasmus told the woman. He shoved her shoulder so that her chair went spinning toward the computer terminals. He had no patience with females like her. They asked too damn many questions in his opinion. “Now get to work.” His voice was harsh as he gave her a cold stare.

She returned the stare threefold once his back was to her. However, hers was filled with venom. Had he seen it, Erasmus would not have been so cocksure about getting his way. “See to it my ass.” The woman sighed as she thought about what had happened.

Mirabella supposed that she had been lucky that her now very deceased husband

had allowed her to live. She wasn't thankful for it. Especially when she had learned what Reginald had been put through after her leave-taking. She shrugged her shoulders as she looked down at the chained man.

He had brought it upon himself for being a damned idiotic rebel, Mirabella decided. Still he deserved more than one chance to get away. So instead of devising some new system of torture, she pressed several buttons and watched as the young man was lowered to the ground.

He blinked and stood shakily, she noticed, before he leaned against a wall. She tapped a few more buttons and he staggered when shocked by voltage. Luckily it was not too much, but enough to make him wake up more thoroughly.

When he turned his head away from her, she saw the locations of bruises on his head. She realized that he had gained several concussions. Her lips thinned. Before she could do anything else, the young man moved to a different wall, tapping along it with an experienced deftness, and then fled out the opened passageway. It snapped shut.

She smiled at his craftiness and went back and accidentally erased his escape. No need to show the others the secrets on the Aphrodite Bordello underground escape routes. He was given a hard enough time by those assholes that called themselves his brothers.

Dazed but determined, Reginald staggered through the passageway. He knew he was going to have a difficult time getting away from the Bordello this time. Security had been tightened more than just a tad bit.

Even while he had been half passed out, his ears had still made out the sounds of faint whirring. That had alerted Reginald to the fact that more hidden devices and bugs had been implanted elsewhere. That was information he needed to get back to the others. They would find it far more useful than he did at the moment.

Using his memory that was undoubtedly shaken up since his incarceration. He truly did not know how long he had been chained that time and it bothered him to no end. Sighing he made his way through different passageways so that he would get out of the worst of the excesses before he had to slip away through the outdoor escapes. He had not managed to figure out where some of the other passages led to, nor did he believe that he would get that chance. Life had a way of short-circuiting opportunities.

"Reginald?" The voice was a hiss of disbelief.

Reginald's head snapped around, and he tensed. The voice was unfamiliar and then it clicked with a name and face. He relaxed but only briefly. "Lear."

Lear studied him with a frown. Never had he seen Reginald after one of his worse ending visits to the bordello. Now that he had, he was furious. "Kraal, Arid, get him to

CORRUPTION UNCONTROLLED

shelter.” Lear said briskly. “We need to alert the others of a change in plans.”

“What is going on...holy hell, Reg, what did they do to you man?” Kraal looked at him with a frown.

“Questions later.” Reginald said aloofly. His eyes were flat and dull.

“Other than the fact that he’d been beaten up, I’d say that this is what is usual for him.” A female voice spoke softly.

Reginald looked around at the female, but he did not register anything else. He followed them slowly as they signaled him to go.

Lear closed his eyes and then shook his head. “The Alpha isn’t going to be happy when he hears about this.”

Reginald stopped and looked back at him. “The Alpha has known all along. I accept what can happen of my own free will when I take on my vicious brothers’ whims whenever I come out here.” Reginald kept on going.

Arid continued walking, while Kraal rejoined Lear.

“Is that true?” Lear asked Kraal.

“Yes.” He said finally. “Unfortunately it is.”

The two men broke off their conversation as soon as they heard shouting and yelling. Shots were fired at their location, but they had already departed from the area. Being sensible men and women, they had learned early on not to tarry in one place for too long. No matter the circumstances.

Arid had gone on ahead from the others. She had become tired of their bickering. There was no denying the fact that she had felt some sort of connection to the troubled man who had been beaten so badly. Arid finally found him on the ground, his hands spread toward a freestanding rock that he had been reaching for.

She frowned, wondering why he looked familiar in such a position. Arid nearly passed out as she was hit with painful memories of the past. None of which she had ever been able to recall before this moment.

Shaking off her near faint, Arid sighed. Her timing tended to really be bad when it came to reminiscing down memory lane. That trait had not changed with time it seemed. She clicked on a small buzzer. It would signal Kraal and Lear to her side. Hopefully they would hurry.

She did not like being in a vulnerable location, as it was right then. Come on guys, hurry it up out there, Arid thought worriedly, her focus on the injured man was hypersensitive as she was monitoring for other sounds that were not normal. Other than the mumbling that was coming from Reginald, there was nothing else.

Then her ears caught swiftly approaching footsteps. It was the guys, finally. She rolled her eyes and then frowned at her charge again. Who the hell was Raquela? Arid wondered, and why was she so important to him?

When their beepers went off, Kraal and Lear swore softly. They glanced at the locator that showed where Arid was, and a shadow next to her. They could not make out whom it was, but they answered the call anyway.

Most of the time Arid did not panic unless it was for a good reason. Lately, they had all had a good reason to become panicked. More of their Lycan relatives had been disappearing at an alarming rate.

None of them were too surprised to be informed of abrupt decisions to depart from the area. All of the elders were worried and uncommunicative. When Lear checked his beeper again, he saw a name and cursed lividly. Reginald.

Something had happened to the young man after he had departed from their company. After running through different passages they found Reginald. He had passed out again on the ground.

Arid was crouched over him, cradling a weapon in her hands. She glanced up at Lear and Kraal. Her eyes were blank. "He is delirious." Arid was not appreciative of what she was hearing at all.

"Other than being delirious and out cold, how is he doing?" Lear asked bluntly.

Kraal remained silent as he glanced at his locator, cautious of others using similar devices to scan for heat sources in odd areas.

"Running a bad fever." Arid said shortly. "He's been mumbling about some female named Mora Aless and someone else, Raquela." She shrugged, but the others' expressions told them that they knew she was upset. Arid rolled her eyes not impressed by their understanding.

Right now they had a sick man to deal with. She was oddly worried about him and had braced his head and shoulders against her legs. Arid did not really recognize the boy in this battered man. At some point she needed to contact the other Lycan wolves that were posted elsewhere in the vast state that included both Wako Springs and Cumulus Range.

Reginald flailed unexpectedly, knocking the weapon from her hand, and then stilled. His eyes blinked open showing confusion and anxiety. There was absolutely no recognition in his expression as he stared up at them. Lear and Kraal balanced next to him, waiting to hear what he had to say. Though he was indeed as feverish as Arid had declared him to be. "Don't let them get to Raquela."

"Who are after her?" Arid demanded, but he subsided into mumbles and was

CORRUPTION UNCONTROLLED

shivering.

Lear and Kraal exchanged glances.

“Do you know who he is talking about?” Arid asked them.

“Yes.” Kraal muttered. “For now we must get him somewhere else and medicated.”

Kraal removed Reginald’s shirt and shook his head.

Arid hissed between her teeth. “What the bloody hell have they done to him?”

“Punishments of all sorts, looks like they have become more sophisticated and less caring of the scarring that indicate why he won’t be with others.” Lear replied finally. Muscles were ticking in his jaw as he spoke.

“All because of these scars?” Arid asked quietly.

“It goes beyond the physical, Arid.” Lear told her wearily. “Come on, we need to get him back to Wako, other than that poison ridden ranch.” He made it clear when the others looked less than thrilled about the idea.

Sighing, Arid shook her head. “He has a bad head wound, Lear.” Her hand stroked Reginald’s features carefully. She pushed away shaggy hair from his face.

Lear glanced at her. “He needs to be moved.” He repeated quietly. “Sooner or later he will need to be returned to his home.”

Arid scowled but finally nodded her head abruptly. She carefully laid his head down to the ground, and moved away. She picked up her weapon again and moved away. Her eyes were on the two men as they carefully picked Reginald up and began carrying him.

“He is heavy.” Kraal said, his eyes somewhat startled as he glanced at Lear.

Lear shrugged. “He has had to learn different ways of protecting himself. I’d say that he is more muscle and bone, than skin at this point.”

“Because all his skin is almost literally whipped away?” Arid asked as she continued to listen for other signs of being pursued.

“That and the fact that he is extremely active no matter what he does.” Kraal said mildly. He had a feeling that the man was actually a virgin in some things. It bothered him to consider that possibility.

“Well, here we are. Talk to you later, Arid.” Lear said briefly.

He and Kraal disappeared with their burden, while Arid returned to her guard post. It would not do to have someone decide to catch them off guard right then. She drew in a deep breath of air, cleansing her lungs of what had been found around Reginald.

She frowned and shook her head. Now was not the time to be thinking of him. He was a disturbance that she did not need to consider at the moment. With that thought in her

mind, Arid began her patrol.

Lear and Kraal lugged their burden to the medical room.

“Ash, sir. He has been badly wounded.” Lear said before anyone could order them out. The Alpha was there. Not something that they had expected to see on this night of all nights.

“How bad?” Ash asked.

“He is delirious.” Lear said.

“We found him after he had apparently escaped from wherever he was being held prisoner.” Kraal added.

Sighing the other men shook their heads.

“All right. Kraal, Lear both of you, back to the patrols.” The Alpha said, eying his two reluctant men. They were upset with the day’s happenings. None of them knew how long Reginald had been forced to become incommunicado from the ranches’ processes. “I will contact the others and have them hold off on the raid.” His face was expressionless when he said the words.

The other two men nodded and then left the medical section of the underground HQ of the Wako Springs Lycan Pack. Once word had spread from the secondary HQ in Callisto Heights, all the Lycan clans were outraged. They were also wary and cautious of revealing their movements at least during the day.

They had also tightened up any possible weaknesses in their identities. All but for one female and she was on the loose. She would have to be recalled back as soon as possible.

Now more so than previously, the newly appointed assistant to the Alpha, Kerr Truman grimaced at the news that he had just received. “Lobo is not going to enjoy hearing this.” He glanced at the men and women who had gathered around.

One of the others rolled his eyes and said dryly. “No duh Sherlock Holms.”

Some of the others made to grumble at that response from the extremely young Lycan. At the resounding silence he shifted nervously from one foot to another.

There were a few snorts at that betraying action, but no one laughed. Tension was too high for that.

Kerr did not look at the young man. “No more smart ass remarks, Tomas, until you can provide something useful to say.” There was an undertone of annoyance that said that his temper was at snapping point.

A pretty girl did not heed the obvious warning or listen to the undertone. She stood by a window and occasionally glanced outside. “Why are we just standing here?”

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There was a rumble of other murmurs the others were in agreement. Her eyes flashed with impatience.

“Patience, Serenity.” He said quietly. “You should know by now that we have gone against all advice of other Lycan packs in Altagon.” He said quietly. “We are considered renegade and will be until this mess is cleaned up.”

Patience was startled into silence as Kerr had hoped. However that did not stop her from asking the obvious. Someone had not informed her of all that had been going on. Kerr was aggravated by that misstep.

“What are you saying, Truman?” She asked, baring her fangs at him in a defiant glare.

“That as far as reinforcements are concerned, we will not receive any, except from the seven other packs that run the towns in and around Callisto Heights.” He sighed. “Even they are displeased with Loman’s activities.”

After making several stops and alternate routes they had arrived to Abornia. Right at the last sentences, Josiah Truman, Lobo, and Kelloran Sykes walked in through the door. They were radiating furious menace and rage at the simultaneously.

“What else do we have to do, Kerr?” Truman glanced over his shoulder at the doorway. He noticed that as soon as his twin had spoken, the others had scattered to avoid being near the three undoubtedly male species who were Lycans and angry ones. Lobo was already half crouched and his features had elongated to that of a black wolf.

The other two, he noted were on the verge of altering. “Do not even change, Ash.” He glared at Josiah Truman who was scowling with fury.

Kerr glared at Kelloran who stood still. “You, Deja, get back to your normal human form.” He had become a red furred half wolf at that point. His fangs were bared and he was snarling. At the Alpha’s words, he glared but shifted back without protest. “The last thing we need around here is a bright red wolf running wild.” Kerr regarded them all with exasperation.

Sykes’ eyes snapped at him, but he said nothing, folding his arms over his chest. Then Sykes glanced over at Truman and Lobo who was leaning against a wall.

Lobo returned Sykes’ gaze with a deadpan expression. He turned his attention back to Kerr. “This had better be good.” Alessandra was going to want his head for this.

And not the one that was controlled by his heart and everything else.

Raquela peered through the different abandoned rooms in the Wako Ranch of the Lomans. He was nowhere to be found. She frowned at the disturbing possibilities of what

that meant. Reginald was overdue to be back from his last excursion to the bordello. Where the hell was he? She wondered angrily.

“Raquela!”

She winced at that voice. It was Esme. “Yes, senorita?” She turned around to face the other woman.

“Why are you here when you should be serving drinks outside on the patio?” Esme demanded as she slapped the girl. Impudent slut. She was always snooping around and calling other people at odd hours. She wondered why the girl was being kept on when it was obvious that she would never be satisfactory for the true purpose of her being there.

“I was told to get linens.” The words popped out without her thinking about them first and Esme hit her again.

“Well, I am sure that you will go back and find out what your true duties are won’t you?” She asked Raquela, her eyes cold. Then she whispered venomously. “I do not know why you are still here, little bitch, but listen to me good and well.” Esme said softly.

“You may take orders from the cook, but I am the one in charge of all the servants. If you do not stop snooping around and lying about your presence, I will hand you over to Erasmus.” She smiled when Raquela blanched. She hated Erasmus and it was not just because he was always fondling her either. He just reminded her of Tarlington and they were both slime that should never have been born.

Raquela merely stared at her. “I understand.” She walked away without another word. Clearly she was going to have to figure out another way to contact Chantry. She knew he was out there in the wilderness. Raquela had caught some obvious signs of his habitation.

Chantry was watching the ranch when he saw the altercation between Raquela and Esme Gonzalez. He shook his head. Raquela was getting too bold and careless. Rubbing his jaw, he beeped her and tapped in a series of numbers. Then he faded into the shadows and selected his latest campsite with care.

Chantry hated fires and never used them. They drove him nuts anyway. Surest way to get caught by suspicious guards and cowhands these days, he figured. With that thought, Chantry realized that he had better send in a note to Tarlington detailing what he had managed to accomplish since he had vacated Matania for the foreseeable future.

He was reading other reports that he had compiled on the various properties and land that the Lomans were running and his thoughts were running down various paths. Tarlington was therefore surprised when he heard a beeping from his fax. He clicked on it and watched as thirty pages spewed forth.

CORRUPTION UNCONTROLLED

He put in more paper before the machine ran out. After the avalanche of papers was finished coming out, Tarlington stacked them in order of titles and pages. Then he neatened the other stacks and put the files that Chantry had faxed him aside to finish going through the other reports.

A half hour and then two hours passed. He rubbed his eyes and then reached for the faxes. As he skimmed them, Tarlington noticed that what discrepancies had come from other sources, Chantry had filled them in with his own reports. Efficient and complete as always, Tarlington thought sourly.

He read recommendations from Chantry as to what his options were and which ones were not considered to be viable. Tarlington was not too surprised to find that Chantry had also been keeping tabs on Raquela, though he had not asked for surveillance upon her. He shrugged.

If it kept Chantry happy to do them, he would read them, but he put aside the other surveillance off to one side. In his mind, they were not that important. He could go through them at another time. For now, Tarlington had to get to an important meeting.

Chapter Six

It had been a frustrating morning all in all, Alessandra determined. She glanced at her watch and her eyes darkened in extreme annoyance. At least six hours and who knows how many minutes had passed since Alessandra had slept with the man she knew as Lou McKenyon. He had slipped out while she was sleeping again. She was bound and determined to catch him alone.

Alessandra needed to figure out what his allure for her was and how to get him to be more forthcoming with her. Other than with sex, though that also seemed to work just fine. When she saw him again, it was at the police station. She had been allowed to join the police officers in dealing with an unusually frustrating case. Her capacity for them had been announced to others, the other day.

Despite the fact that it was obvious, no more new information would be forthcoming. At least not until McKenyon and Sykes, the main two investigators, had uncovered more evidence about the case being more than a simple murder.

Alessandra had noted that the redhead and the dark man were an odd couple. Yet they worked with ease. The redhead seemed to treat life as a complete joke, yet he took his duties seriously. One of them was refusing to answer questions about his erstwhile partner.

That included sending other people on wild goose chases whenever they tried to pry McKenyon's location out of him. Still, Alessandra had found him to be baffling in the extreme. He was an enigma and a challenge. However, she found McKenyon to be more of a challenge. As a result she had nearly tracked the man down several times, before he had eluded her at the last turn or twist of a road.

After a long drive with two angry bristling men by his side, Lobo was not in any mood for another confrontation of any kind. However, while he was in the grocery store, he felt a tingling in his neck and he glanced over one shoulder. He nearly closed his eyes when he saw who it was.

Some days, he thought wryly, were ones where you didn't want to leave the bed. It just was not possible for him to get out of this mess.

"Senor McKenyon." She said pleasantly, meeting him in a grocery store. She

CORRUPTION UNCONTROLLED

watched him still and frustration well up in a visible veil around him.

“Yes, Ms. Morales?” Lobo was still getting used to slipping into that name. He was even less thrilled with this lovely young woman who persisted in following him everywhere.

Still memories flashed from the day before, as he regarded her with an impatient expression. They had agreed to continue using their surnames to avoid possible complications with the locals believing that they were known to each other outside of being involved in the investigation.

Somehow he was beginning to believe that that fallacy was now blown to hell. Among other things that the Lycans were trying to accomplish, the main objective being to get their lands back from the Lomans.

“Would you allow me to speak with you about some of the elements of the case?” Alessandra asked him. She was undeterred by his forbidding expression.

“No, I will not, Morales.” He replied curtly. “Especially not in this place.” He shot an apologetic glance at the manager who merely grinned in response. The other patrons were clearly offended however.

Still, he knew they were going to strain their ears to catch bits of interesting tidbits for later gossip sessions. However, Lobo was not phased by hostility from others. He thrived on it because it meant that they were hiding information from him and others.

Alessandra tilted her head back to look him in the eye. He stared at her with open heat and desire, and then shackled it. She was pleased to get him to react to her like that. It was difficult to provoke any kind of emotion from him.

“I did not mean here.” She said dryly, letting him know he was not going to be forgiven easily for his comment. “I was just wondering if perhaps we could eat dinner somewhere.” Alessandra lifted her shoulders in a shrug as she spoke.

“No, Miss. You are a complication I do not need at this time.” His eyes raked over her. Clearly he was becoming both exasperated and aggravated with her chasing and arousing him. “Please stop following me.” He was trying to be courteous, but his bad mood was a blatant signal that he was losing patience with her.

Alessandra made a throaty sound of disagreement that had him standing rather still. He faced her without his usual annoyance, but his eyes gleamed with intent. Her eyes widened ever so slightly, when he took a step toward her.

She smiled in challenge and he turned away, and moved to a good distance from the temptation that she offered. The woman was making him crazy. He nearly closed his eyes and then lost all interest in what else was going on when he caught familiar footsteps

approaching.

His lips thinned as he watched who was approaching the doorway. Still he couldn't help but be partially distracted by Alessandra. She definitely had a way about her that clouded his mind at the worst of times.

Alessandra noticed his reaction and frowned ever so slightly. She did not stop watching him though. Even when he still had a fascinating attraction for her. He tantalized her senses, making her want him more than ever.

Lou slanted his eyes toward the doorway, but she merely continued to watch him with a slight smile creasing her cheeks. Dimples appeared and his eyes studied them as if they were something he had never seen before.

Alessandra sighed and then glancing around, lost her smile. It seemed that there would be more tension this day. She hated it when things went completely wrong. Everything since she had come to Wako Springs, had been going wrong but for a few occasions, which she was loathe to dismiss as being something other than meant to be.

Her eyes narrowed at a newcomer, who did not fill her with joy or happiness. One lip slightly curled in disgust, but she reined in her instinct to snarl. Alessandra said nothing though. The other could speak first. She certainly was not going to waste charm on him if she could help it.

Erasmus Jr. stood in the doorway, waiting for the lady of his attention to turn his way. He had been watching her for some time now and he figured that he would have to speak to get her attention.

Erasmus did not like it when attractive females ignored him, especially when it was by one such as Alessandra Morales. "Miss Morales."

A new voice spoke. It was friendly and congenial. There was uneasy silence falling in the air of the grocery store.

She flinched hearing the voice and looked like she wanted to swear. Her unhappy reaction caught McKenyon's attention. He focused on the speaker, and Alessandra became aware of his hostility radiating and encompassing the small building, when he glanced at the newcomer.

"Mr. Loman." Her politeness was clearly forced though. Alessandra had always gotten a feeling of oil and slime around the man. The sensation was substantiated when he tried to take her hand and she slipped away from his reach.

"Could we share this dinner that Mr., what is your name again?" Erasmus glanced at McKenyon. He knew what it was, but preferred to be obnoxious.

Loman's face mottled with rage when McKenyon ignored him completely and

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went back to picking out different items from different aisles. Erasmus turned his attention back to Alessandra who was clearly insulted, but not in the mood to show it. “Well, whatever his name is refused to let you have with him?”

His insinuation suggested that he would be the better choice over all. There was a shuffling of feet as other patrons cleared out of the store. Some of them left behind their groceries they were in such a rush to report what they had learned.

Alessandra’s eyes went from him to McKenyon and one eyebrow rose. Her opinion was all too clear to the other onlookers. Lou locked eyes with her briefly and merely flashed his teeth at her. He was amused by her predicament and was not going to give her any help. Some gentleman, she thought sourly, but was forced to turn her attention back to the other speaker.

Loman was oblivious to the fact that she preferred McKenyon to him. She shook her head. “I have an appointment with someone else. Out of town.” She added when Loman would have tried to demand that she break it.

Weasel. She thought, while being fairly polite. The others were nudging each other and grinning when they realized that she hated the man’s guts. They averted their eyes when Loman looked around expectantly for some support.

His face darkened in ominous anger when he studied Alessandra. “You will regret turning me down, Ms. Morales.” He turned on his heel and walked out of the grocery store.

Silence lay heavy on the inside of the store. Then when she was sure he was gone, Alessandra said softly. “No, Mr. Loman, it will be you who will be sorry.” There was something in her eyes, a harshness that had not been present previously. “For even trying to get me to consider you as someone I would ever want to be connected with.”

Venom dripped from her soft throaty words. Then she avoided looking at others who were watching her avidly. They were disappointed when she completely ignored McKenyon. Clearly there was no more gossip to be had from this day. More patrons shuffled out, and earlier ones returned. They needed to get their groceries no matter what was happening.

McKenyon glanced at her sharply. His senses were alert and well aware of her presence. She was filled with purpose as she stocked up on different supplies. His eyes took in what she was gathering up and he just shook his head. Then he took his to the register, and paid for the supplies in cash.

The cashier looked at him with tolerant acknowledgement. “Ranching business going well, McKenyon?”

“Yes, it has Stuart.” McKenyon favored him with a faint smile.

“Good. Keep coming. We invite good folks like you.” He hesitated and then said quietly. “All their credit has been frozen. Except for the youngest one. His is still good with us.”

McKenyon smiled at that. “Good, it would be too bad if Reginald was forced to go elsewhere.”

Stuart nodded. “He is good stuff. The others are trash.” He said matter of factly. There was a mutter of agreement from the other patrons.

McKenyon just shrugged his shoulders. “Be careful all of you. There are some who will still report to the Lomans. Fired buildings have been a danger all too recently.” He said and left it at that. The others got their items paid for and scattered.

Alessandra approached the counter, her gaze wary.

“Got everything?” Stuart asked. His gaze was polite but unreadable. He was going to have to proof his home and store that afternoon. He knew others would be taking precautions as well.

“Yes, I have everything.” She said unable to smile. She was worried about McKenzie and it showed even while she was standing quietly at the register.

“He can take care of himself, Ms. Morales.” Stuart said. “You on the other hand need to be more careful with your own activities.” He warned her. “You are making people nervous.”

Alessandra nodded slowly. “I know that, but I am here in an official and unofficial capacity.” She said quietly. Her eyes were shadowed. It was time to make sure she had an alternate hiding place. The hotel was becoming too conspicuous of late.

“I just wanted to let you know, Ms. Morales because I admire what you and others are doing.” Stuart grinned. “Even if it is upsetting the status quo.”

She shrugged. “I am getting the feeling that you don’t mind at all.”

“I do not. Others are getting treated like dirt.” He said bluntly. “Just because those cash flashing, insolent prejudiced jerks are throwing their weight around.” Stuart shook his head, but there was a gleam in his eye that suggested that if someone hadn’t taken Loman out, others would have.

“Don’t go vigilante now, Mr. Stuart.” Alessandra cautioned him. “Something is being done, even if it not obvious.” She added.

Stuart smiled slightly. “I know.” He said simply. “Have a good evening, now.” His change in topic alerted her that someone had walked in. So did the extreme hatred that flashed in his eyes. Alessandra turned around and she nearly bristled.

A woman was standing there watching them. A barely concealed flash of anger

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showed in her eyes as she looked at them. “Hello, Stuart.” Then she strolled toward the bins where alcohol was held.

“Your credit is no longer good here, Ms. Gonzalez.” Stuart said flatly. “You have to pay in cash or leave your choices and get out.”

Esme Gonzalez stared at him with a thoughtful gaze as she raked his figure with an insolent expression. It seemed that others were no longer afraid of her status as Erasmus’s son’s mistress. She would have to warn Erasmus of this latest development. He was in town since he had given her time to do a bit of shopping.

None of the other storeowners had been as outright hostile to her. Stuart merely regarded her with a gimlet eye. He was not going to back down from this pit viper. Stuart had seen what had happened to others who had before.

Alessandra slipped out. She grimacing, thinking of the venom that had been all but flooding the store.

Josiah Truman lounged against the wall of the store. Lou had signaled him that she was in there. It was time that he had a small chat with her. He just hoped that she was not as pit bull stubborn as his friend. He straightened up and rested an elbow on a fence post. Josiah studied the woman for a moment before he finally spoke. “You are stirring up a hornet’s nest.”

A husky voice said. Alessandra looked up in surprise. It was Lou McKenyon’s companion from the stables.

“I will escort you to your vehicle.” He said politely.

“Thank you, Mr...?” She raised her eyebrows at him.

“Josiah Truman.” He said it briefly. When he reached for her heavier groceries, she let him take them.

“I appreciate your gentlemanly concern.” Alessandra said dryly.

“You are driving Lou crazy with your persistence. Not to mention endangering other missions.” He said it softly, harshly.

Alessandra sighed. “All I would like to do is be able to talk to him.” She said defensively, and glared when he snorted derisively.

“Be honest with yourself for once.” He told her.

“All right, so I am also crazy with lust for him.” She said bluntly.

He nodded. “That is better.” Josiah eyed her contemplatively. This time he was wearing a Stetson. It was a dusty gray and emphasized his blond build.

He sighed. “What other reason do you have for wanting to speak with him?”

She shrugged her shoulders. “He interests me.” Alessandra said dryly. “Whatever

else, I cannot say.” She added when he eyed her with amusement.

“You are not the first to say that, Ms. Morales. However, I do believe you more than I did the others who chased him.”

“Were they successful?”

“No.”

“Why?”

“Because I chose not to believe their words.” McKenyon spoke from their right. He stood by her vehicle.

“Not to mention that they were employed by the Loman’s to find out his purpose for chatting up the youngest one, Reginald.” Josiah said.

“What happened when they did not succeed?” She asked.

“They vanished.” Josiah said.

McKenyon merely stared off into space. A muscle ticked in his cheek as he waited for her to digest their words.

“So what are you saying? That they are killed or else taken somewhere and not let go?” Alessandra was disgusted, but knew that it made altogether too much sense.

“You wanted to know, so we are telling you what happens.” Lou told her. Clearly he thought it was too much.

“Check your other sources, Ms. Morales.” Josiah told her.

“I must go.” McKenyon said, but he gave Alessandra a long stare. Then he walked off before she could say goodbye to him. She made a growled sound of frustration. McKenyon nearly halted and then kept going.

Josiah eyed her. “Something tells me that you are more than what you seem.” He said quietly. “Now I must say my goodbyes as well.”

“What did you mean by other sources, Josiah?” Alessandra asked, ignoring his other observations. He was too perceptive for his own good. She noticed that McKenyon had caught the undercurrents in her reaction.

“You know what I mean, Ms. Morales.” He said dryly. “Don’t get caught meeting the others. Or else there will be hell to pay.” Then he strode away grumbling beneath his breath.

He wondered why Lobo was putting up with the pretty lady. She was an outright nuisance as Lobo had dubbed her when he had first seen her, but Truman had not believed him. Now he agreed with it a bit too much. He rolled his eyes.

Oh well, hindsight was always great, even if it wasn’t perfect. He wondered why they were still so formal toward each other. He figured that they had their own reasons

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though it seemed to be a complete waste of time in his opinion.

Alessandra gazed after him and snarled beneath her breath. She spotted a glint of metal and leaped to the other side of her latest vehicle, a good-sized van, just as a bullet shattered her window.

Cursing, Lou ran from where he had been kneeling behind a different vehicle. He had been watching for something like that to happen. Josiah opened up a battery of fire from where he was crouched, and Lou streaked over to where Alessandra was now hiding in the back of her van. Luckily, the windows not shot out were tinted. "I must definitely say. You have a way of making things interesting."

Lou whispered softly into her ear. After jumping in behind her and sliding the door shut, with a click. "At least this time your car was not blown up." He grinned when she scowled back at him. His hand was resting against her abdomen, and sliding beneath the seam of her pants. Alessandra squirmed, when he found her bare skin beneath the outfit.

One eyebrow lifted at her. "You are making this too easy for me." He breathed into her ear. She said nothing while another blast of gunfire erupted around them, cracking the windows, holding thankfully because of the reinforcing. Taking the time was well worth it, sealing the glass to resist damage such as that from a crowbar or gunshot.

Despite the gun fire outside and the danger, Alessandra angled her body toward him, her hips lifting in a silent plea. He was silent and then he moved away slightly, his fingers pulled at her pants, pulling them low enough to keep her from squirming away if she tried to. One hand nudged her legs apart the needed small distance so that his head would fit into the widened space.

Then, with the fingers of his other hand, spreading her swollen moist nether lips open, his lips pressed against her clitoris. His tongue entered her, tasting licking, and finally suckling her. Alessandra muffled her sounds of ecstasy with her shirttail, even as he drove her higher and higher.

If it had been his aim to drive her wild, he was succeeding, she realized. He spread her legs even more and kissed his way up quivering body. Her breasts were swollen and begging for his attention, as he pulled her shirt up beneath her arms. He paid attention to her rosy peaks as she pushed against his nipping teeth.

Then he continued on his way kissing the flesh that led to her neck. As his thighs fitted into hers, he thrust into her, after she had kicked off her pants, which he had shoved down to her ankles. While she had been deliciously distracted earlier, he had unfastened his belt and jeans so they were no longer in the way.

"Going for broke?" She gasped when his ear came to her mouth.

There was a swift lunge and a snarled. "Yes." Into her other ear that had her grinding hard up against his body.

She gave him a long look. "One of these days I will do to you what you are doing to me." Alessandra vowed with an irate growl in her voice that had his body flexing over hers in a more intent manner than before. She was shaking from the sensations he was invoking in her body.

"I will definitely be waiting for the time and day when that does happen. For now, like you once said to me. 'Just shut up and kiss me.'" He mocked her and then did so with an aggressive growl that had her groaning with renewed desire as she felt him fencing with her tongue and she wrapped her arms around his neck. He moved within her, knowing full well that he had to stop, but the sensations of her orgasms were messing with his concentration.

"We cannot be seen, Lou, don't stop!" She gasped out. "I parked so that no matter what angle." She stopped and pulled something that concealed the rear view mirror and the front of the vehicle. "No one can see us." Alessandra added as he pulled his cock out of her and then thrust back into her. "Tinted windows and material were put onto the vehicle."

His eyes were narrowed as he stared into her eyes. "I am pretty sure that at least a few folks got an eyeful." His expression became cynical, though he did not stop. The timing sucked, literally. She scowled at him and clearly took offense at his response.

Without warning, Lou found himself tumbled to the floor of the van and she arched over him to ride him hard. He sucked her nipples making her groan harshly, her hands clinging to his back, nails digging in. Neither of them could stop, even as they realized now was not the time to be doing this. Eventually they had to stop, only because they had a feeling that time was running out for them. Lobo held her hand while she drove back to her hotel room.

"Will you stay the night with me again, Lou?" her voice was hesitant, as he kissed her with a gentle caress.

"Yes, though if I disappear, do not be too angry. There are some things that I have to take care of." Lou said, watching her cautiously.

Alessandra grumbled in annoyance, but her expression was resigned. "Still, could you try to let me know?"

He nodded. "I am not able to make promises now." Lou warned her, though he wanted to and it showed in his eyes.

Alessandra smiled. "Your eyes tell me what I need to know." Nodding she grabbed his hand. "No promises, at least until we are done."

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Her smile warmed him and Lou kissed her again. "I have to take off."

She nodded and watched him slip away. Her smile fled as she sighed and got out of her vehicle. Alessandra pondered on her situation. Pressure was mounting and it looked as though she were not going to make much more progress in the investigation. She was surprised that she had made as much as she had.

It had been three days since she had last seen that aggravating man. Grumbling, Alessandra stormed out to her vehicle. She hated it when the Alpha summoned her and made her act like a messenger. At least it showed that he was not angry with her.

Since she had nearly screwed up the operations and missions that the WSLPs were performing. Alessandra was cursing softly but audibly as she reached for the door. She also was considering going to a different city for a rental agency. None of her vehicles in the past two weeks had survived even a day without something happening to them.

Her thoughts were whirring in her head as she grimaced remembering what she still had yet to do. Contact Lobo. He was the only Lycan that she had not been able to reach so far. Her Alpha was amused by her frustration. However time was running out. Soon she would have to leave and prepare for a different mission.

"So why were you leaving in such a hurry, Miss Morales?" Lou's voice whispered softly in the air. She stilled, sensing that he was only inches away from her.

"I was just delivering a message to Truman." She said bluntly, going back to working on getting her door open this time. His hand stopped hers. Alessandra glared up at him, and her eyes closed when he pushed her against the door and kissed her. His hands held hers while his body pushed between her thighs. She moaned he growled and they panted for air.

"One of these days we will end up in a luxurious pallet of furs." Alessandra said softly. "Not the ground. Not a vehicle, a floor and definitely not a rock." Her voice rose slightly on the last sentence. "Nor a bloody second rate hotel bed." Her eyes crackled with anger and annoyance.

"Yes. Not this night though." Lou said though his voice was gravelly. He moved backward, releasing her from his hold.

"Why not?" Alessandra demanded.

"The time is all wrong." There was a muscle ticking in his jaw.

"That is nonsense. You just do not want to be seen with me." She accused him.

"It is for your own safety." Lou told her in a grating voice. He was scanning the area uneasily. "Us together, we are a danger to others and a red flag being waved beneath

the noses of our enemies.” He was unhappy with the situation there was no doubt.

Alessandra growled in disgust. Her eyes flashed and she muttered beneath her breath.

He glanced at her sharply. “What do you mean time is running out and you have to contact Lobo?” His eyes gleamed, almost green despite the fact that their normal color was black.

She caught that change and stared at him warily. “I am part of a Pack.”

“Go on.”

“If you could pass on this message I would be grateful.” Alessandra eyed him speculatively, and then spoke what she needed to say.

“I will pass it on to him.” McKenyon said. “If you want to know another reason why I try to avoid you. It is because I get distracted by you, your scent, my desire for your body.” He backed her up with every word that he spoke. “That means either one of us could get killed. For some odd reason I do not want to see you dead. So avoid me at all costs.” His nose flared as he stared at her with harsh longing in his gaze.

“I cannot.” her voice somber as she watched him, watching her.

“So be it.” McKenyon kissed her hard one last time and then vanished. He had to go down a different direction and just hoped that she had been distracted enough by his kiss to not notice where he had headed.

There was a crackle of shots fired into the air. This time, though Alessandra was waiting for that. She simply activated her bulletproofed shields and they covered her vehicle. She was not in the mood for that intimidation bullshit it was getting way too damn old already.

With that in mind, she shouted through an intercom that she had attached. “Yo morons! Try something original. You are just wasting a crap load of ammunition that you should be using for other purposes. Like on aggravating bullies who try to steal your miserably barren land.” Her voice echoed into an astonished silence.

Josiah Truman listened with astonished respect. Someone had finally pushed her to the limit. Now hell really would break loose. He grinned and then ducked around a corner and dropped to the ground, crawling to his vehicle as another barrage of ammunition was loosed in his direction. He rolled his eyes. They needed to learn how to shoot. He thought disparagingly.

Alessandra was wondering where the devil McKenyon had gone off to this time. Sighing, she contemplated just returning to Abornia early, but knew that she could not do that. Instead Alessandra began composing more reports into a recording device. She hated

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the fact that she was unable to tell him where she'd come from originally. Alessandra wasn't too pleased with the fact that he would have no idea of where she'd gone.

Each of them would be transmitted to the office of the left and right lieutenant as Castillo had ordered her to before she had come to Wako Springs. Her eyes were blurred as she wiped away tears. She and Lobo would get through everything that had happened. Deep in her heart she knew, even though the future outlook was discouraging now.

Lobo avoided the guards that were patrolling the perimeters of the ranch. He had learned their locations long before they had been reassigned. Now he was grateful for that fact. He had also seen disturbing signs of another intruder on the grounds.

One who had not been caught yet apparently, he shrugged his shoulders, wishing the person luck with his or her venture. He was more concerned with Reginald. They had not been able to communicate recently. Brooding, Lobo moved on, keeping to the shadows.

Chapter Seven

The day had dawned bright and early, Reginald had noticed with an unsurprised mood. It more than lived up to its threatening promise to be a scorcher. His mood was black and depressed, some of the new girls had disappeared during his incarceration.

He had not learned until a couple of hours after he had returned to the Wako ranch, that this time he had been gone for five days total, throwing off the timetable for plans that had been made.

Reginald was worried about the events that had occurred the day before. Everything pointed to Gregory's handiwork. The signs were all there, telling him the activities had all the earmarks of Gregory's work. He sighed as he waited for Lobo to appear since then.

Observing his friend, Lobo noticed all the signs pointing toward a deep depression. He was not surprised, but he was a little disturbed. It looked like Reggie was going to need some good news if it was at all possible.

Finally he spoke to put his friend out of his anxious misery. Though, he admittedly wanted to be back with his own woman. "Reggie."

Reggie whirled around. Lobo was leaning against one of the trees and stood watching him impassively. Reginald felt the hair rise on the back of his neck. Something had happened all right and his long time pal was pissed. "What is going on, Lobo?"

"We are getting too close to someone for his or her comfort." Lobo said finally. "A woman, who was a consultant for the police officers, was ambushed yesterday. She was unhurt though."

Reggie blanched, and then his eyes blazed with acknowledgement.

"It is assumed that she had managed to escape." Lobo watched him steadily.

"I will be glad when everything gets sorted out." Reggie said tersely. He was tired of the way that his brothers were running roughshod over the investigation. There was something rank and vile rising in the ranch.

There was trouble in the mountain range concerning ownership of that ranch. Reggie was damned if he was going to be dragged into that mess. He wanted nothing to do

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with either the ranch or his family. He despised all of them because none of them were worth living with.

"It seems that others are sticking their noses into the investigation, and not in a kind way." There was anguish showing in his features. "I'll see to it that trails are redirected away from innocent folks who will not be framed if I can help it." He told his friend.

"That will be a relief. What else do you know about the case?" Lobo asked him.

Reggie shook his head. "We need to go through our usual routine or else they will get suspicious." He made a disgusted sound deep in his throat. His eyes were angry and he kicked at several small rocks.

Lobo rolled his eyes. "I have plenty of time."

There was an edge to his words that alerted Reggie to eye his friend more clearly. He blinked in complete shock. The man was dressed in clothing more suitable to living outdoors than in town.

Sighing, Reggie smiled ever so slightly. "I had wondered who the second person was who vanished." He commented. "There was not a clear description of him or her." Reggie spoke in a cheerful way that had Lobo's hackles rising.

His eyes surveyed the place and he spotted glints of metal. He inclined his head in silent acknowledgement. "So now they have this entire area rigged, eh?"

"Yes, they have instituted tighter security." Reggie replied, and the two men strolled into the main patio of the house.

Lobo's hand slid into his jeans pockets as he scanned the outside. His eyes caught the obvious improvements to the ranch itself. "Your brothers decided to renovate?" He asked in a conversational tone.

Reggie shrugged. "Yeah. The women were objecting to the fact that we were in a different century." His eyes held a wickedly malicious glint within their depths. "Gregory was screaming about the amount of money that the entire project would take, if done all at once."

Lobo shook his head. "He is the one who eventually approved it?"

"Yeah, he is the money man." Reggie said wryly. "I have managed to stay out of the business though, only by the skin of my teeth." He shrugged when Lobo arched his eyebrows. "I carry my mother's blood, if not the actual Loman blood. I am still family." His teeth were gritted as he spoke.

"So that is how he justified keeping you in the fold?"

"Yes." Reggie said, though there was more to it from Lobo's perspective.

"What else?" He asked.

“There was an incident the same night that my mother left. Though, I have yet to really speak of it to anyone.” Reginald said tightly. “I am not proud of what had happened, but I was unable to speak to any of the authorities who were not in my father’s and brothers’ payrolls.”

“I know of someone who isn’t.” Lobo said after a moment.

“I am talking twenty years ago.” Reggie said impassively. His face was tight and unhappy as he spoke. They walked to the pool that was gleaming and beckoning as a surcease from the unrelenting heat.

Sensing that his friend did not want to talk about what had happened just yet, Lobo rubbed his forehead. “All right.” He eyed the pool. “Mind if I take a dip?” Lobo glanced at his friend for permission.

“Its fine with me, I will join you.” Reggie said after a moment. They both headed to the dressing room for the men.

Lobo emerged first, and dove into the pool. Reggie also came out and he took time to set out towels. He grinned at the sight of his friend’s muscular build. No ounce of fat covered him. The man was an example of a male in his prime. Then he dove into the pool from where he was standing.

The two men swam easily from one side to the other. Neither was competing, just slicing cleanly through the water. They cleared their minds and released tension that had been building. Finally Lobo pulled himself out of the water and towed off.

“Would you like something to drink, sir?” One of the servants had come out right then.

To Reggie’s amusement, Lobo was clearly uncomfortable. She was eyeing him with distinct interest and he was not happy with the way that she was looking at him. “Cola, light on the ice, and no extras.” He finally said. “Reggie?” Lobo grinned enjoying the fact that she would soon change her attitude.

The woman visibly pulled herself back to being servile as she looked down at Reggie. Her eyes went from interested to scorn filled and contemptuous in three seconds flat.

Reggie smiled at her; it was filled with shark teeth. He did not like her at all. “Ice water, heavy on the ice, nothing added.”

With a flounce, and an appraising smile aimed at Lobo, the woman sauntered away.

“Watch, whoever comes out next will have forgotten the ice water.” Reggie said with amusement. He knew that the woman would report Lobo’s visit as well as everything else about him.

CORRUPTION UNCONTROLLED

Lobo grunted his disgust apparent. "Need a hand?"

"Nope." Reggie pulled himself out. The two men were of similar height, but that was where the comparison ended. Reggie toweled off his hair and then wrapped a second one around his waist.

Lobo had already done so in order to preserve his modesty. He hated being assessed as though he were a piece of meat.

"Sirs." A soft musical voice spoke hesitantly. "Your ice water and cola." The woman's eyes were averted from both of the men.

Reggie's eyes widened slightly.

Lobo grinned. "Thank you, Miss." He would have reached for his glass, but she quickly handed it to him. Her palm flashed, and he saw a piece of metal implanted into it. His eyes narrowed, as did Reggie's. She looked up then and eyed them both. Her eyes flicked over Lobo briefly and he relaxed when he realized that she was not interested in him.

"I see that you are back, Raquela." Reggie said after a moment of uncomfortable silence.

Lobo sensed a different tension in the air, but ignored it since all it would do would was linger. At least while the woman still was there. He smiled, appreciating the fact that his friend had better taste than his brothers did.

"Yes, sir." A small smile appeared at his words. She poured his water into a glass from a pitcher. Then she retreated back into the main building without another word.

Reggie stared at his glass of ice water and then tested it with the tip of his tongue. After a moment he drank from the water. "They are safe."

"Poison?" Lobo asked.

"Aphrodisiacs. Same thing though." Reggie said simply. "That is how males are hooked into viewing the innocent females and wanting to take them." He glanced at Lobo. "Raquela is one of the ones who consistently forgets to put that stuff in. She is one of the minority." Reggie stared at his hands quietly.

Lobo let him drop into silence. There was a scraping against the cement making Lobo wince. "What was that?"

"This." Reggie said, handing him papers that he had hidden in an unusual place.

Lobo's eyebrows rose. "Copies of the investigation?"

"Something else." Reggie said. "It is an earlier one." He shrugged at Lobo's frown. "From nineteen years before. Hopefully it can be used by the investigators and other agencies." A smile flickered over Reggie's face as he tilted his palm. There was a

scrambler in his hand. It worked for the area that they were in.

Lobo shook his head, but he grinned in understanding. "What feelings do you have for Raquela?"

"Hello?" Reggie looked at him in disbelief. "She is too young." He sounded chagrined. "In some aspects I am as bad as my brothers." His lips thinned in disgust.

"No, you are not." Lobo said harshly. "How old is she?"

"Seventeen." Reggie said finally. His face still held remnants of horror at the idea. "I am still too old for her."

Lobo shrugged. "Just as long as you realize what it is that you are feeling." He said, and then began looking over the papers carefully. His shoulders tensed. "This is an investigation into the disappearance of a ten year old girl by the name of Mora Aless." Lobo's brain was racing over the implications.

First, Alessandra Morales whose name was so similar to the dead girl had mentioned her connection. Now his friend had information on a case of a girl who had died at such a young age. He was beginning to wonder why he had gotten pulled into this mess. It was becoming worse with each day that passed.

"Yes." Reggie said impassively. "You might want to note that it is an unsolved murder." His eyes held haunting memories.

"This happened at roughly the same time that your mother disappeared." Lobo said after a moment. He frowned at his friend's silence.

"Just keep on reading." Reggie ground out. "Then I will tell you what I know about that night."

"Fine." Lobo continued reading and his skin chilled. Finally he rubbed his forehead. "Well, this is a fine mess." Lobo gave his friend an exasperated glare. "Why did you bring this up now?"

"The woman." Reggie said impassively. "She has a name that is too similar." He rubbed his arms as he spoke and then sat up so that he could readjust his chair. "Here is what my brothers managed to bribe other officers into copying for them." Reggie handed him more papers. He was becoming increasingly fidgety about the way that the case was becoming more complicated.

"Subject: Loman V, Erasmus Raymond. Dead at sixty-five years of age." Lobo read without comment. He stretched yawned and sighed. He glanced at Reggie who shrugged his shoulders, but was oddly pale.

"What is this all about, Reginald?" Lobo knew, but wanted to find out how his friend had gotten a hold of the information that was supposed to be confidential. He

CORRUPTION UNCONTROLLED

suspected that money had changed hands with some of the police officers involved in the officer.

“He was my father.” Reginald finally admitted uneasily.

“What else?” Lobo persisted patiently.

Reggie stared at his hands and then sighed. He rubbed the back of his head and grimaced. “He died while having intercourse with one of his women.” Reggie muttered. “Perhaps one of his other wives or one of his long term mistresses. He had at least two mistresses at that time.”

“Why are you so damn jumpy about this?”

“He was a bigamist. God only knows how many other kids he managed to father altogether.” Reggie said calmly glancing at Lobo uneasily.

“Does this have anything to do with that blasted blood test that that old man forced me to go through when he first set eyes on me?” Lobo asked suspiciously. He knew damn well that he was not Loman’s kid. The DNA results had come in a very obvious negative.

“Maybe.” Reggie hedged and then threw his hands up. “Erasmus, my oldest brother, or so he likes to believe, is searching for all his brothers and sisters. Including my own mother and full blood sisters.”

“He is as big a snob as your old man was.” Lobo’s disgust colored his words.

“Yeah I know.” Reggie said, his own disgust obvious.

“Do you know what your old man had planned for the females of his seed?”

“Yes. He also implemented it, when the majority of girls reached legal age in all eight states.” Reggie muttered. “Coincidentally enough, his ...err ranch is located in a very far remote area in the Cumulus Mountain Range.”

“What did he run, Reggie?” Lobo had a feeling he was not going to like the answer.

“He ran what amounts to an exclusive bordello. The girls were his meal ticket in how many rich men they catered to sexually in a night or however long they were wanted.” Reggie’s lips thinned.

“Needless to say, it was not one of Father’s more well-known enterprises. I heard about it by mistake from one of his seven brothers.” When Lobo looked at him with raised eyebrows. He made it clear that he wanted the truthful answer not bullshit. Reggie turned a dull red, and looked a bit defensive as he spoke.

“All right it was one of those times when I just happened to be listening in on a conversation. Must have been around twelve or thirteen years old at the time.” He had the tapes that he would turn over at the right time. Reggie rubbed his jaw as he spoke. His eyes were cool and contemplative of his future and much limited options. Reggie closed

his eyes and then he shrugged his shoulders.

“Sheesh. You have a large family.” Lobo muttered, eyeing his young friend. He barely knew who any of his were. Those that he had found by accident were not specimens that he would claim if he had a choice. There were probably more out there, but at thirty-nine, Lobo had no real interest in ties. Especially not ties that were by blood or whatever else there could be.

“Seven uncles, twelve aunts, and a gazillion cousins.” Reggie nodded with distinct amusement gleaming in his eyes. “I think that the aunts are in charge of the training of the girls, and any of their daughters who show interest and aptitude are also taken to the ranch.”

“That is atrocious.” Lobo muttered, his eyes blazing.

“None of the females are active until the age of eighteen.” Reggie said after a moment. “Though they run a bordello in various shires of Carmenite, the mining planet. From what I have heard, they are very proficient.” He shrugged at Lobo’s expression. “They have plans to populate each of the various planet colonies with one of the bordellos so that men could have another option for pleasure.”

Reggie rolled his eyes. “I think that did not go over too well with others.” He was amused, mockingly so. “After a while I got used to hearing such things and then began recording meetings and what was discussed.” Reggie said with wry amusement. “I think that I knew sooner or later that old Ray would come to a bad end.”

“What was he doing anyway?” Lobo was slightly curious. He nearly choked when he heard the explanation.

“He was getting laid.” Reggie shrugged. “Guess he was planning an orgy of sorts, but he died of an aneurysm right before anything good could happen.”

“Hell of a way to go.” Lobo muttered, though he looked more than a little amused.

“True.” Reggie conceded. “They take in other females than family. I have a suspicion that when conception does occur. The offspring is carefully adopted out and monitored as they grow older.”

Lobo nodded thoughtfully. “Sounds like something your old man would have done. Definitely a better way of keeping track of all his offspring, legit or otherwise.” His lips twisted as an uncomfortable thought occurred to him. “I hate to say this, but I think your old man knew where your mother and sisters were located.”

Reggie just shrugged, letting his friend that he had suspected that as well. “It bothers me, but I cannot do a hell of lot at the moment. My hands are tied by familial obligations.”

CORRUPTION UNCONTROLLED

“Oh?”

“Yeah.”

“How?”

“By the fact that I am now thirty-one years old.” Reggie grimaced. “I am eligible to become inducted into the family business and get to know the dealings.” He sighed quietly. “There were attempts on my life between the time of when I was thirteen and twenty-five. Someone did not want me to reach my majority.” Reggie shrugged.

Lobo glanced at him. “The attempts ended after your twenty-fifth birthday though?” He asked.

“Yeah, though other strange things began happening. I was confined to this ranch, the town of Wako Springs, or Callisto Heights and that damn bordello. It was as if old Loman did not want me to be able to escape.” Reggie shrugged. “Well back to the business right?”

“Of the bordellos?” Lobo asked eyeing his less than thrilled friend.

“Yes.” Reggie affirmed, his eyes darkening.

The two men relaxed by the gleaming pool, lazing an hour or two away, talking about the Loman bordello. Together they mapped out a strategy that would completely misdirect their listeners if the temporary jammers did not scramble their conversation.

Esme sauntered out onto the patio. She hoped that she could hear more about their conversation. Even as she thought that, she greeted them with something that was more likely to clam them up entirely.

Esme propped a hand on her hip as she wondered why Erasmus was such a stick in the mud about Lou McKenyon hanging around. He was certainly a nice looking piece of male meat. Her eyes stroked over his build. “What is this talk of bordellos, Reginald?”

The two men turned to stare at the doorway of the house. She studied both of them more thoroughly, her eyes narrowing speculatively. Right then, none of Reginald’s various scars showed. However, there was just something about him and the brooding aloof dark man that made her wonder if in fact Reginald truly was not a Loman.

“None of your business, Esme.” Reggie glowered at the woman. She was a lush five foot seven in height and had long flowing black hair straight down to her ass. Her eyes held a knowing gleam in their black depths. He admired her from behind his sunglasses. She placed her hands on her hips and glared back.

“Tell me that again without your glasses, Reginald Gauguin Loman!” Esme challenged. She knew full well what effect she had on the young man.

Reginald ignored her and turned back to Lobo.

Esme huffed and stormed away. She had yet to persuade him into her bed. Esme figured that one of these days she would accomplish the task that Erasmus had set her. Then Reginald would, in the proper tradition, have his due punishment meted out to him. He would disappear without a trace. She smiled smugly at her own appearance. Now she had to talk to Erasmus in allocating more to her allowance. Esme was going to need to bring out the big guns.

Once she was out of hearing range, Lobo had ascertained that much after a few seconds. He turned to his friend. "What is Esme to your family?"

Reggie grunted in aggravation. That blasted tart was up to something. He hated it when she tried to trip him up with her wiles. Not that he did not appreciate them he was definitely a male. However, she was his brother's woman. He had no real interest in getting entangled with that vicious bitch.

"Erasmus' mistress and spy." He said quietly. "Older than she looks. Will be hitting thirty-six next month." Reginald's eyes were hooded as he stared at his hands. "She has already given him seven kids in the twelve years that they have been hooked up together." He added and then shrugged philosophically. "Neither have plans to get married, but he has acknowledged every single one of them."

Lobo snorted at that. "His mistress huh?" He sounded skeptical. "He seems more the type to keep his women barefoot and pregnant for the duration of their time together." Lobo commented, he had not really noticed her in his earlier visits. He was glad now though that he had seen her. She might become an unwanted complication.

Reggie shrugged his shoulders. "Wanted to but apparently Esme told him no dice. He had to give her something else in return for being his broodmare without the legal marriage." He grinned sardonically. "I am getting the feeling that he is tired of her. He has a new piece in town."

His grin faded and he became serious once again. Reggie had a feeling that Lobo was still not completely sure about this own situation. He could not blame the man. They were both go-betweens in a situation that had all the earmarks of something that would explode in their faces.

"What about the thirteen other hellions running loose?" Lobo asked in wry puzzlement.

"Ruiz, Raymond, and Gregory's contribution." Reginald said easily. "All of them started their biological duties at the age of sixteen." He shrugged at Lobo's snort of disgust. "Disgusting, I know, but Father was the one who had control over the purse strings. He commanded. They danced to his tune if they wanted the bucks to flash around to attract the

CORRUPTION UNCONTROLLED

hussies.”

Reginald was distinctly amused. “In other words, stay away from the decent respectable girls.” His expression altered and became cynical and disillusioned. “He practically ordered them to go for those who’ll do any deed for enough money and a little attention.”

“What about you?” Lobo asked.

“Huh?” Reginald looked at him blankly and then his smile faded. “Oh. Me? No, no children from me.” He shrugged, folding his arms over his chest. “He didn’t give a damn. As far as he was concerned I should have been drowned at birth.” Reginald gave a humorless laugh.

“I just sort of became the last reminder of the fact that my mother took off twenty years ago with his eldest daughters. My half-sisters, except for Ruby, and I was left as an unwanted reminder of her worst mistake.”

“Getting involved with your father to begin with?” Lobo asked.

Reginald nodded, his lips thinned. “Or rather that she was caught with another man.” He revealed without too much surprise. Lobo thought about that and then settled into listening when Reggie began speaking.

“I was thirteen, and remember watching mother and the girls sneak out. There must have been about seven in all, three were helping Mother carry out the youngest ones.” There was anger simmering in his voice, his darkened eyes.

“So there were more than seven sisters, in all?” Lobo asked, not wanting to interrupt completely but he wanted to make sure he was hearing things correctly.

Reginald nodded slowly and he smiled slightly. “There were also other sons that Loman thought were not his, even though they had been tested as positive to having the same DNA as his. Four in all that mother had besides me, Erasmus, Raymond, Ruiz and Gregory.”

Lobo nodded. “So you watched your sisters escape?” He switched back to the earlier subject.

Reginald did not miss a beat and took up the story that he had been telling a moment ago. “I could have sounded an alarm, but when Ruby saw me watching, she was downright terrified and looked angry. I didn’t do anything, just watched. My mother had already told me that I was a burden that she despised and had never wanted to carry. When it comes down to it, I doubt that I am a Loman by blood.” Lobo just looked at him out of calm eyes.

He closed his eyes and took in a deep breath. “That was the hardest thing I ever

did.” Reginald smiled bitterly. “When Ruby realized that I was just watching, wasn’t gonna do anythin’ else. She waved goodbye, as did the others. I think Laurel and Bernice were aware that something was wrong. How they saw me, I don’t know but I thought I heard one of them scream ‘Rewrinal.’” His eyes laughed at the memory, though the rest of his face was distinctly stony.

Lobo eyed him for a moment. “What was Rewrinal?”

Reginald was silent. He shrugged. “Sisters couldn’t say my name right, so they called me that, or Reggie.” Then he sighed. “I was beaten and locked up in one of the cellars for two weeks after that.” Reginald shrugged when Lobo looked at him in surprise.

“Typical. He did not want male sons.” He grunted and then got to his feet. “I found it ironic that he kept meticulous records of all his offspring. Roughly half his children from his first three women were male.” His gaze turned cynical. “It was only his last five to seven women who bore him more females than males.” Reginald shrugged his shoulders.

“Time to get back to the grindstone, eh.” Lobo asked, well aware that the good mood had been broken by Esme’s intrusion.

“That too.” Reginald walked him to one of the pastures. “There is more than I need to talk to you about.” He rubbed his forehead. “The girl, Mora Aless tried to get me to leave the ranch.” His voice was hollow. “I was the last one to speak to her.” His lips twisted.

“No one was supposed to know where I was locked up, but it was a known fact that my brothers Raymond, Ruiz, and Gregory have blabbermouths.” His eyes were somber and cold. “All she did was tell me her name and I tried to warn her that she would likely die at my father’s hands if she didn’t leave.”

He rubbed the back of his head and then turned toward Lobo. “Last thing I remember seeing is him dragging her out of the room by her hair.”

“How long were you locked up in the cellar?” Lobo asked him.

“Originally it was supposed to be two months of solitary confinement.” Reginald said calmly. “It stretched into a year. Then into a complete total of three years in solitary.” He shrugged his eyes were cold as he regarded his friend.

“So now you have the reason why I could care less about my brothers. Why I want to get those women free.” He paused. “At least those who want to be freed.” Reginald stared past him and then he returned his gaze to Lobo.

“So this is what you needed to tell me?” Lobo said softly, wondering how Reginald could have kept it a secret till now.

“I had to come forth at some point.” Reginald said finally. “The trigger was the woman.” His eyes were tired and too old for his face. “I was not allowed to speak to anyone

CORRUPTION UNCONTROLLED

during the time that I was locked up.” His eyes drilled into Lobo’s. “Not even the police or the investigators.” His voice became curt. “I am going to do all that I can to help you and the others.”

His smile was thin. “Including handing over the names of the officers who are selling the information and evidence to my brothers.” He shrugged his shoulders. “It will do them good to find that they cannot have everything their way for once.”

Lobo studied his friend. Hell of a way to find out a bad secret that Reginald had been holding for so close. There was movement in the sunlight behind Reggie. It was not Raquela, so it had to be Esme. He did not like the fact that the woman had been bold enough to hit on him once or twice. “I will keep you informed of what I find out.”

Reggie nodded, but moved no closer to the gate. His eyes held longing as he looked beyond the gate. “I will do the same. God knows you have been my link to sanity at times.” Reggie admitted, looking distinctly embarrassed. “How old are you?”

Lobo blinked at the question. “Thirty-nine.” His expression was somewhat wary as he eyed Reginald.

“You don’t look a day older than twenty-nine.” Reginald was shaken by the information. He studied his friend closely. “I did not really notice it till now.” He was curious, not enough though to pry more details from his friend though.

“That is the current age that I am going by.” Lobo rubbed a hand over his jaw. “Let me put it this way. There are some things that I cannot talk about. My lack of aging is one of them.”

Reggie smiled. “Understood.”

Esme slowly stalked the two men in the clearing. She wanted to know what they were up to. Half the time, it was the only way she could find out what their plans were for the future. Esme stopped and stepped behind a tree when she spotted one of them looking back at her.

It was that watchdog. Personally, Esme thought that he should have been put down long ago like a rabid animal. If she ever got the chance she would do it herself. He had been a menace for too long. As she watched, Esme realized that neither was talking anymore.

Reginald had been alerted to her presence, and was no longer going to talk freely. Mentally she cursed Lou McKenyon. Fuming she made to walk back to the ranch, when she spotted movement elsewhere. Her eyes became speculative when she finally recognized who it was.

Lobo glanced over Reggie’s shoulder. “That woman is trying to sneak up on us.”

He did not say which woman.

Thinking that it was Esme, Reggie scowled, his voice showing his distaste. "She has been trying to seduce me for three months now." He rolled his eyes.

Raquela was moving silently, advancing on the clearing. She had given up any hope for not being seen. Both men had been alerted and whoever it was, were not coming from her direction.

She paused to catch her breath and watch for any other male or females approaching the clearing. That was when Raquela spotted Esme and her eyes gleamed with rage. Then she shook her head and smiled. Pathetic woman, she thought, it was too bad that she had never learned stealth. So that was whom the watchdog had spotted. She decided to rest her legs and wait till other competition left.

Keeping his eye on the now still Esme who was intently gazing in a different direction, Lobo scowled. "Be careful of her. She reminds me of a copperhead."

Reggie visibly winced. "Now I know what she reminded me of." He had become aware of the fact that someone else was nearby. He had spotted the glint of a reflection. Raking a hand through his hair, Reginald kicked at a small rock and then walked in a different direction, where he knew there were some benches.

Lobo walked away without another word. He was frowning in worry for his friend. It did not matter that he was older than all the Loman boys. As far as he was concerned the only good one was Reggie. His friend was in danger. The woman was a menace.

Sighing, Lobo waved a hand to Reggie and then strolled away toward the back gate. None of the other Loman's wanted him on the grounds. They would shoot him on sight if they could come up with a good reason.

He was well aware of the fact that his actual existence was the reason why they were pissed. His smile was faintly mocking as he remembered the first time that they had met him. He had been dating a friend who was one of Erasmus' girlfriends. Needless to say, of all of them, only Reginald had seen beneath the hostile attitude. That had been eight years ago. He paused for a moment, a tall lean black haired man. He had one hand on the fence as he drifted off into the past.

CORRUPTION UNCONTROLLED

Chapter Eight

As he glanced around, Lobo smiled faintly. It had been in town and approximately ten to twelve years ago. Reginald had only entered his late teens, early twenties. Lobo had been there and his identity as Lou McKenyon had been only just established. He had been a cowhand over at a small shoestring operation.

Hard work but fun, he grinned remembering the first time that he had met Reginald. He had been wiry and already had multiple layers of scar tissue. His grin faded as he remembered. He rubbed his forehead as he pulled a particular scene from his memories. Man, where had the time gone since then? Lobo wondered regretfully.

“Hey bastard breed, get your slimy hands off Jessie!” A tall muscled boy hollered at him.

The then twenty-three year old Lobo looked back at the heckler. “Who is he, Jessie?”

“One of the Loman boys. Erasmus. Ignore him, he is a total asshole, I do not know what Jen sees in him, especially since he hooked up with old Esme, and keeps getting her knocked up.” contempt filled her tone as she tossed her pale brown hair back over one tanned shoulder. Defiantly, Jessie hung onto his arm.

Lobo considered his options. He did not like them one bit. There was also the little fact that he did not trust the girl by his side. He had heard rumors about her that he believed now. “Ah, so he likes to sample all girls, is that it?” Lobo’s eyes were glinting with wicked intent as he eyed the four Loman boys.

Even as he noticed that one of the Loman boys was watching him with amusement and very little respect. The thin young man was standing off to one side and mostly out of sight of the others. He was not sure why.

Jessie noticed as well. “Not often that Reggie looks like that.” She winced, when Erasmus spotted Reggie and broke his nose with careless ease. He also kicked the kid in the groin.

“Get out of here, brat. You know you are not supposed to be here. You should be in school.” There was a sneer in the man’s voice as he tried to get Reggie back to his feet

with taunts and general nastiness.

The boy remained silent, though fury smoldered in his eyes as he spat at his brother in a wordless gesture of contempt. Clearly he knew what would happen if he reacted in any other fashion.

“Second time this week he has done that.” Jessie scowled angrily. “Like I said—a complete asshole.”

Lobo watched impassively. He was wondering what the boy would do, no not a boy, a young man. He turned his attention back to Erasmus just as he began to approach him, along with the slightly younger tagalongs. He asked, though his attention was split between her and the others. “Who are the other two?”

Jessie smiled maliciously at his back, as though sending a signal to the other boys. “Raymond and Ruiz. The four oldest boys run roughshod over everyone in this little community, Lou, so watch out.”

“I said, bastard, get your slimy breed hands off her.” Erasmus’ voice rolled out. It was funny though, when all three young men tripped.

Reggie had gotten to his knees and had thrown small pebbles beneath their feet. It seemed to Lobo that he had been waiting for that opportunity.

Laughter rang out when they ended up face first in the dirt. Gregory whirled around and kicked Reggie in the throat.

“Oh, that was rotten. You supremacist assholes!” Jessie yelled in disbelief. She ran from Lobo’s side and would have knelt down by Reggie’s side.

However, Gregory grabbed her shoulder and slapped her across the face three times. “Bitch.” He spat on her face and then kicked her in the stomach after throwing her on the ground.

The three other brothers came back and grabbed her. There was an ominous clicking sound. They turned around and stilled. Whatever they had had in mind fled at the sound.

Lobo was holding a shotgun and the business end was pointed at them. The safety was off. “Move away from Reginald and Jessie.” his voice cold and deadly. “Now. I have eight shots, I won’t miss.” He warned when they made a move toward the young man and girl.

“Dude you are fucking nuts.” Erasmus’ eyes were glancing behind the shotgun wielding man. His gaze swung back, and locked on the bastard breed’s own. Erasmus was frightened when he saw his own death in their depths. He stilled and the other three backed away from Jessie and Reggie who immediately got to their feet. Reggie moved off to one

CORRUPTION UNCONTROLLED

side of Lobo.

However, Jessie pulled a knife and lunging stabbed at Lobo with it. His instincts kicking in, he whirled, and therefore the knife missed most parts of his body. He did get sliced on a shoulder and wrist. Tired of being nice, he shoved Jessie hard. She was thrown to the ground when she tripped over one of the fallen males' legs. When she realized who it was, Jessie aimed for hamstrings and muscles.

Catching her actions, Reggie kicked at her hand, and sprinted off to one side. The knife went flying and got stuck in wet cement. It was never removed. He managed to avoid the spray of buckshot that Lobo fired off from his gun. He had managed to regain his hold on it.

Jessie was not so lucky, she got peppered with a load of the buckshot and it covered most of her body and scarring her face. The other Loman boys were knocked off their feet as a result of also being hit by the buckshot. Most of it had ended up on their legs and the resulting shot narrowly missed their reproductive organs.

Reggie swore as Lobo dropped to the ground. Small splashes of blood began to pool around the fallen man. He grabbed the shotgun and stood in front of the fallen man. Whatever showed of his emotions, Reggie never knew, but they convinced his four brothers to stay away from them.

He refused to let them get off their feet, and was half crouched from the pain of kicking the knife from Jessie's hand. The blonde was a real witch. He was glad that he had not succumbed to her overtures. She was just another slut, being passed around from one brother to the next. Maybe even had a turn with his father. That thought disgusted him beyond thinking about any longer.

An off-duty police officer heard the shot and came running before the others made it out of the local precinct. He called for an ambulance and headed off the firemen, who were already on their way to the scene.

Two more officers appeared and took one look at the situation. The four Loman brothers were hauled off to jail. There they were going to be cooling their heels till their father was available. Jessie was taken to an ER. One of the police officers waved to his wife, who hauled Lobo and Reggie off the streets to his home.

"So what happened out there?" The policeman asked patiently, while his wife tended to their wounds. Lobo's stabbing wound proved to be superficial, something that he was grateful for.

Reggie's wounds were more serious and he had to be horizontal for them to be treated. The kicks to his groin, stomach and other areas were bruising and swelling up.

Reggie learned later that he was lucky that he had managed to get off with only a broken jaw, and cracked ribs.

“Erasmus was mad because Lobo showed up with one of his other girls, Officer Gray.” Reggie spoke around his broken jaw. “Lobo was ignoring Erasmus’ taunting, though Jessie was egging him on.” He grimaced, ignoring the pain.

Lobo looked at Reggie. “A favorite tactic I’m guessing.”

Reggie nodded. “Yeah, they wanted an excuse to get rid of you.” He grinned briefly even though it hurt like the devil. “You are too handsome in your own way for them to be comfortable. They like to have their pick of the ladies. Whether they’re in high school or in college.”

“Gray, can you tell me specifically why I was supposed to come here again?” Lobo asked the police officer.

“Yes, we need someone to just get under the Lomans’ skin.” Jason Gray grinned at the lean young man.

Lobo was not amused. “Ha, ha. Now give me a better excuse please.” Rage was snapping through his veins as he spoke. His eyes were still burning with intense anger and adrenaline. Soon he knew the adrenaline would wear off, but the other would stick for a bit longer. He was a danger to most people right now.

“Seriously?” Jason sighed. “Something about that family stinks to high heaven. Reginald is the only one who isn’t involved up to his eyebrows.” He tapped Reginald’s shoulder as he spoke.

“So I figured by the fact that he was being used as their punching bag.” Lobo said sardonically. He looked at Reggie. “How long has that been going on?”

Reggie shrugged. “Since I could walk.” meeting his eyes calmly Reggie continued. “They dance to Father’s tune. I don’t. I get the hell beaten out of me.” A mocking smile quirked his lips. “You will hear whispers and rumors about me.” Reggie said mildly. “Listen to them and decide for yourself.”

“I’ve heard them already and I think they are a bunch of bullshit.” Lobo told him. “I am going to teach you to defend yourself. Give them a surprise the next time they try something. You do not have to put up with that crap.”

Reggie smiled slightly. “I do it to protect the other women and kids on the ranch.” His eyes held a chill in their depths. Lobo saw that he was actually far more knowledgeable than he should be in the ways of men and criminal activities. “Otherwise I would have struck back by now.” His eyes were deadly as he spoke.

Jason glanced at him, and then at his wife who was finishing with tending Reggie’s

CORRUPTION UNCONTROLLED

wounds. Catching Jason's, her husband, glance she immediately went into another room and closed the door behind her. The two men regarded him somberly. The younger was a cynical teenager who knew too much about his father and brothers' business. The other was a quiet man who clearly knew that something was up.

"All right gentlemen. We need to clear the air." Jason said simply. "Reggie, Lobo is a friend of mine from way back. He tends to be gruff, rude, and rather quiet. He also has instincts as far as situations like these go."

"I noticed." Reggie said, clearly remembering the way that he had reacted when Jessie had tried to stab him.

"I also do not suffer fools gladly." Lobo said to him curtly. He leaned against the back of the chair and regarded Reggie shrewdly. "You are not a fool. They are idiots not to consider the fact that it is the quiet ones who are the most deadly when they snap." His words were quiet.

Reggie inclined his head. "True."

Jason nodded. "Basically, I need you two to work together. Be friends outwardly and piss off the rest of the Lomans."

"What else?" Reggie asked patiently. "I hope he is not supposed to be the bodyguard that you wanted to drag into this mess."

Lobo scowled. "You don't need a damn bodyguard."

"You may, just to beat off the swarms of females around here." Jason said dryly, and Reggie chuckled in dry amusement.

"Anything else I should be warned about?" Lobo asked. He was skeptical about the female comment.

"Other than the fact that people may find you more than a little intimidating. They're damn nosy. Better come up with a different name than Lobo to use around here." Reggie advised him.

"Already did that." Lobo said calmly.

"What is it, so that I don't have to call you the English version of 'Wolf'?" Reggie asked him.

Jason grinned at Lobo's less than amused expression.

"I do not go by Wolf." He said sourly. "I go by Lobo." He sighed when they just looked at him.

"Louis Josiah McKenyon." He said after a pause. "Lou or McKenyon I will answer to. Call me Josiah and I will punch you." He warned them.

The other two laughed and Reggie looked at him. "That is your real name isn't it?"

Lobo shook his head. "Don't bother calling me Josiah, since that is Truman's first name." He shook his head again at Reggie's question.

"Lobo is the name I was given, nothing else, when I was dumped at the foot of a shack." Lobo said coldly.

Jason stared at him with a frown. He had not known that about the hothead that he had grown fond of. There would be questions asked of other sources later on.

Reggie looked at his hands. "Sorry."

Lobo shook his head. "You could not know. It is a sore point with me." His response was gruff as he eyed Reggie, his expression softened and a sly smile curled his lips. "Now I must get back to wandering around and being a nuisance."

The other two men laughed.

"You do agree about the fact that you need to be friends with Reggie openly?" Jason asked.

Lobo just looked at him, his expression said that he had just been insulted.

Reggie had to hide a smile when Jason just looked at him waiting for confirmation.

"I gave my word." Lobo stated. "I meant it." His grin was rakish and reckless.

Reggie laughed.

Jason shook his head. "There is going to be hell to pay." He mumbled. "This place is going to be blown open come Judgment Day."

Reggie did not say a word. His expression became unreadable as he muttered. "Perhaps that would be better for all involved."

Lobo turned from the door. "Only those who need to pay, Jason, will do so." He walked out of the house entirely.

Reggie looked at Jason. "I will have to go back." He said softly. "My father will likely find some way of forcing whoever takes me in, to give me back."

Jason looked at him. "When an investigation occurs in the future, will you give your help?" He gave the young man something to write on.

Reggie's lips curled into a snarl. Then he relaxed them into a faint sinister smile. "They already consider me to be a mole in some aspects. Why the hell not for something that will bring them to justice?" He said sardonically. "I will give you tip offs if I find anything about females who have disappeared." His gaze was tired. "As well as those who are alive."

"You do have your way of finding out information." Jason commented, when he watched Reggie begin writing patiently on a pad of paper. Jason left him to it. He had other things he needed to do. It struck him as odd that his family treated him with so little

CORRUPTION UNCONTROLLED

respect. Obviously Reginald was used to it. However the day would come when Reggie was most likely going to turn on them. He only hoped that when Reggie did so, it would be through legal channels.

Lobo had watched the house and was satisfied that Reggie had already begun to do something. He headed out to where his camp was in the brush. Lobo preferred being out in the open land. He was not a sociable creature and he knew it. Plus he did not like being rude, but it would happen sooner or later. With this new twist though, he was going to have to live in the actual town of Wako Springs.

Lobo shook his head, as he recalled those earlier days, and then he walked the rest of the way out of the fence. No sense in courting trouble. That woman would be ratting them out soon enough. He figured. He heard footsteps behind him, but he kept on going.

“Hey Breed!” Came a familiar yell.

Lobo ignored it. He had heard it too many times in other places. Not for the first time he wondered what he really was.

“I’m talking to you, breed!” This time the bellow was a bit closer.

“Do not come near me, do not fire at me. I am not on your property.”

The footsteps following him stopped. There was an odd whirring noise and muttered curses. He noticed some other odd scents perfuming the air and his nose wrinkled ever so slightly.

Disgusted Lobo kept walking. He was in no mood to hassle with any of the Loman boys. From the sounds of their voices they had been interrupted in some kind of meeting. He would not have been surprised if it including females who were specifically trained to pleasure them, but not be distracting.

“If we catch you anywhere near the ranch, no matter if you’re on the property or not, you will be dead.” The voice threatened angrily. It was Erasmus, the Jr.

Lobo turned around at that and his eyebrows rose ever so slightly.

Erasmus did not look a day over twenty-five years of age. He was standing on an odd looking device, but Lobo could still make out the top of a head level with the man’s lower body. Talk about arrogance. He was having sex right there. The other three males were half dressed at that, only wearing low-slung jeans. Two of them already had the beginnings of beer bellies.

“I would be careful Erasmus Loman Jr.” He chose his words carefully, deliberately leaving out the middle name, which had Erasmus flushing angrily from the intended slight. “One of these days, the sun will burn you in a bad spot.” His smile was lethal. “You would

not be so comfortable with a woman sucking you then.” With those words, Lobo turned around and resumed his walk to his horse that he had pastured in a different field.

As he listened, Erasmus Jr., Raymond, Ruiz, and Gregory cursed their way back to the ranch. He shook his head. Apparently they had been too busy with their thinking processes elsewhere to remember putting on some kind of protection. Idiots.

His stallion snorted at him and he smiled slightly. “Yes it is time to leave. We have people to see, things to do, rather than to set up finally.” The animal snorted and danced after Lobo mounted up. Then they took off, leaving no dust in their departure.

Once he had made it out of eyesight and earshot of Esme and Erasmus, Reggie took a moment to get some time alone. He walked to a different field and stripped the shirt off so that he would not feel so confined. He heard his name called and groaned out a curse. Reggie just wanted to be left alone.

Raquela prowled through the woods looking for her quarry. She had nearly been caught eavesdropping by the men, not to mention Esme, interfering old biddy. Raquela thought in aggravation. Still she had to put on a good face and kiss ass for a little longer. Not much though. Raquela would be glad when all was over. With her goal in mind, she called out Reggie’s name. It was a risk, but one that she had to take. “Reggie?”

The voice came again, closer this time. Reggie did not move finally realizing who the speaker was. Instead he sat down on a bench. He buried his head into his hands.

“Is something wrong, senior?” The girl who had come out to him earlier approached apprehensively. She remembered that he had been in an odd mood all morning. The meeting had not made things much better. If anything his frame of mind had become worse.

“Where am I needed, Raquela?” He asked without looking at her.

“Nowhere, I just thought I would give this to you.” She said, and placed a small object on the bench by his side. Then she impulsively knelt down and placed a hand on his knee. That brought his head up so that they were eye to eye. He was looking down at her, surprise and wariness clearly etched in his features.

This was not what Reginald would have expected from Raquela. Clearly taking advantage of their unexpected time alone, she pulled his head down to her waiting lips and kissed him passionately. As she did that, she leaned into his body, between his legs, which happened to be slightly spread open. She smiled against his mouth when she felt his response to her actions.

When he realized that his unruly cock had betrayed his desire for her, he inwardly

CORRUPTION UNCONTROLLED

cursed himself. Despite what Lobo and a few others believed, Reggie knew that he could be just as uncontrollable as his brothers when the need came upon him to mate, or just relieve the pressure of his body's physical demands.

"Stop Raquela." Reginald said, pulling back from her in shock. Still he returned the kiss despite his better sense. She was too young for him in many respects. Not just age though that was also a factor.

"No!" She slipped her arms around his waist, as she kept on kissing him. "I love you, Reginald," she said quietly. "I will not give you up." She drew her hands up his sides, feeling the taut skin that shivered beneath her touch. Raquela stared into his eyes, willing him to say something back.

"It is an infatuation." Reginald warned her.

"No, it is not," she insisted, tossing her head angrily.

"It is dangerous," he said tightly. "You do not realize what they will do to you if you are thought to be dear to my heart."

At that, Raquela pulled away, her eyes filled with caution. "What will they do?" she asked, searching his eyes and seeing remorse, and suddenly fear, not for himself, Raquela realized, but for her.

"They will use you for their personal pleasure." A sweet voice filled with victorious laughter rang through the small clearing.

Raquela moved so that she was within Reginald's embrace.

When Esme would have yanked her away from Reginald, she found herself flat on her back, a knife at her throat. Her eyes were wide and scared as she gazed up at Reginald.

"Keep your hands off her." Reginald threatened holding the knife with ease and deadly accuracy. His eyes were flat and pleasant as rattlesnakes.

Frightened by his unexpected display of strength and dominance, Esme spat at him undeterred by his unexpected show of strength and dexterity. He was still a complete wuss compared to her man and his brothers. Still she would be more careful about what she did to provoke him into making some sort of movement.

"You will never see her alive, as innocent looking as she is now, Reginald. You could have had me for all your...pleasures." She taunted him. Esme was angry enough that she no longer cared that she was revealing her long hidden jealousy and desire for him. It was an honest emotion and feeling and she was angry with him, and herself.

"Used goods?" Reginald said pleasantly. His eyes hardened when she gave him a contemptuous glare. "I don't think so."

Raquela's eyes became wary and speculative as she listened to what was being

said. She realized that something was going on that had been a sore point between the two for longer than she had been around. Raquela listened more carefully to decide how to exploit that unexpected information to her advantage.

“At least I am able to bear children.” She sneered at him.

He made a distinctly rude noise at that. “Big deal.”

Raquela frowned. He was being a complete jerk. Why? She wondered, though she was still determined to break through his shields. Raquela nearly had until this jealous cunt had interfered.

“At least your brothers are fertile.” Her eyes raked over him with the covetous gaze of a woman who had longed for and been denied something.

“At least I do not have to worry that I am diseased with something that is incurable.” Reggie spat back at her in response.

She subsided into insulted silence.

“I chose not to waste my seed.” He added, making her flush. He was infertile and damn well knew it. No sense in spreading that information around though. The knowledge would be discovered sooner or later, and at the moment, he preferred later. “You should know that Erasmus has other women on this ranch. In town as well.”

She shot him a filthy glare. “Those are lies.”

“Are they?” He challenged her.

“You have not had children in four years, Esme, are you losing his interest?” There was cool mockery in his words. He knew that she had born him two girls in the last pregnancies.

All his brothers wanted were males. She knew it and so did he. Then he withdrew the blade and shoved her with one foot. “Get out of my sight, you nasty piece of work.”

“Oh I will, but say goodbye to your little sweetheart.” Esme sneered as she scrambled to her feet. “You will never see her again as innocent and pure looking as she is now.” She said with a cold smile. She had a much sweeter chance for revenge now. How to use it for her ends though. Esme hurried back to the ranch as fast as she could.

Reggie rested his head against Raquela’s. “I am afraid that her threats are not empty ones.”

She kissed his lips, muffling his words. He held her closely in his arms, not wanting to release her, even for a moment.

Raquela weighed her options. She could leave and not take the opportunity that was there, or she could simply see how he reacted if she pressured him in a different way, finally she said softly. “I am twenty-one years old.” Her eyes locked with his wary ones.

CORRUPTION UNCONTROLLED

Not precisely a lie, she would be twenty-one, in about two years give or take eight months.

“I am more than old enough to lie with you, Senor Reginald.” Her fingers caressed his abdomen and lower.

His breathing became heavy. He had removed his shirt earlier, and the scars from past fights and occasional torture could be seen when someone was extremely close to his body. “Raquela...” His hands caught her own as he tried to get back his control.

She pushed her legs in between his and rubbed against the erection she knew was straining at his pants. “No more arguments, Reggie.” Raquela insisted. “We will be together, I know it.” Her voice was passionate as she drew him down to the ground.

He unfastened her blouse and her generous breasts plopped into his exploring fingers. He groaned softly. “I will stop arguing with you then.” Reginald muttered and kissed her, even as she wriggled against his body.

They rolled around on the grass, and eventually halted when rolling up against a trunk. He sat up, and she straddled his lap. They were both naked and he stroked her face with his hands. Then the sensitive fingers moved lower. She sank down onto his shaft, and she gasped at the pulsing swollen hardness.

Since she had not had sex in about six years, she was tight and unprepared for his entry. Damn the man was big! She liked it though, and was enjoying the way that he was trying to be considerate of her youth and inexperience. Despite his attempts to slow her progress she shoved down hard.

Deliberately, and she muffled a scream by biting him on his shoulder to the point that she drew blood. His eyes widened as he stared at her, and she smiled at him, fangs showing and then receding. He grunted, but was unable to stop her as she began to ride him.

For Raquela the pain was gone, she only felt the heavy fullness of his penetration as he moved within her. Now she remembered all the good sensations that came with riding an untried man’s cock. Raquela had been surprised by the discovery that he had indeed been a virgin. To distract him, she had an option and chose the most obvious one.

By biting him as Raquela had done, she set off a different reaction within him as well. All he could do was dig his fingers into her hips and hang on, while his own responded by thrusting upwards. She rode him to the end, kissing him deeply as she hung onto him for dear life.

He dipped his head and kissed her breasts, teasing them, tasting them, and suckling her breasts. She tilted her head and cried out, no pain this time, as she felt herself begin the climb toward satisfaction.

Reginald was intent on her gaining her satisfaction, since thus far she had felt nothing but pain. His fingers, relaxing their hold, stroked along her sides, as he pulled her closer to his body. He flexed deeper into her, making her groan and bite him again. One of his hands slid down between them, and he found her dripping with wet juices.

One of his fingers found an extension of her clitoris and he rubbed it, watching her. Raquela's eyes went wide as she stared at him in shock. Then her body flushed a deep rose hue and shook convulsively. He smiled savagely as she continued to convulse around his fingers and cock.

When she sagged down upon him, she mumbled aloud. "You are the best one that I ever had, Senor." He frowned, but when she looked up at him, the frown was gone and he smiled at her.

She eyed him expectantly. "Why have you not?" She gestured at his body.

His smile faded. "I do not want to get you with child." he said it automatically, as he lifted her off him. He knelt down on the grass and his seed spewed out with a light press of his fingers.

Raquela's face twisted with anger and animosity as she glared down at his bowed head. "So you would waste it there?"

He looked up, catching a fleeting glimpse of the unfriendliness in her eyes, before it was covered with a hurt expression. He stared up at her, not really trusting what he felt for her. Not after catching that glimpse of emotion.

"Yes. I am tainted," he said expressionlessly, even though he sat back on the bench and drew her closer to his body. She wordlessly returned his embrace and sat on his lap. "Ah Raquela you are going to be the death of me."

She laughed and leaned against him. "Well I hope it was worth it." Raquela replied, while she reluctantly pulled away.

He sighed and watched her dress. There were stains on her thighs and he looked at her solemnly. Raquela stared back at him just as solemnly. He hid his true feelings, but he wondered what she had used in order to produce the necessary blood.

Reginald was feeling a bit sick and queasy for some reason, but that did not show either. There was no way that he was going to show weakness around her. Not anymore.

"What is it?" she finally asked.

"I hope that you do not regret this moment," he said at last.

"I will not." She assured him.

"Good." He rubbed his forehead. "I have to be alone for a moment." He kissed her though. It was a light caress. Then he nudged her back toward the ranch and she left

CORRUPTION UNCONTROLLED

though it was with reluctance. Reggie watched her leave and then muttered. “What the devil have I done to her?”

Raquela smiled as she stopped and leaned against a tree. She closed her eyes savoring the triumph of having successfully bitten Reginald and having had some damn good sex as well. Too bad that he was such an asshole to the females in the family.

That deciding factor had her aware of the fact that she needed to report to Tarlington, or route it through Chantry. Now that she thought about it, going through Chantry would be better.

Raquela had no doubt that she was now on the available list for any Loman male to come after her. She would be able to break her six plus years of celibacy finally. A smile curved her lips as she thought about that prospect.

Chantry lowered his binoculars as he watched the two split up. He had caught the full gamut of Raquela’s different mood swings and shook his head. Clearly something had swung her in the direction toward Tarlington’s side.

Dammit and he had thought she had potential not to be twisted by him. Disappointment filled him, but he just began working his way back to his most recent hideout. He stopped when his ears detected a whoosh of air, and then a knife at his throat stopped him from moving.

Lobo had finally caught the intruder, but he had also seen what the other man had seen. He had been furious with the idea that his friend had been taken in by a woman. “Suppose you tell me what you are up to?”

“Why should I?” Chantry rasped back at him.

“I am going on the supposition that you want to live for a couple of more years yes?” Lobo asked sarcastically.

“Yes, damn you.” Chantry snapped, frustrated that he had been caught, and not just by anyone. It was Reginald’s personal bodyguard at that.

“Come with me then.” Lobo removed the knife and moved away. He would tackle the man if he ran. Chantry turned around and faced his adversary and his eyes narrowed in contemplation.

Lobo watched him calmly, knife still in hand and made it quite clear for him to get a move on. “You will understand that I am not going to turn my back on you.” Lobo noticed what the other man was festooned with.

Chantry glanced at all his hardware and shrugged. “Direct me and I will walk, run, whatever.” He was just glad that the annoyed Lycan was not going to kill him.

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“Just move.” Lobo told him. “I am not in a good mood right now and you have just made it worse.”

Chantry flinched. Uh oh. He thought wryly. Lobo must have seen that scene in the clearing as well. The watchdog did his duty well. Either that or he had guessed part of what was going on with Raquela’s niceness toward Reginald.

CORRUPTION UNCONTROLLED

Chapter Nine

Lobo stood regarding the man that he had been interrogating for over three hours. Chantry was exhausted but had clearly told him everything that he knew. “So what you are saying is that for the past, twenty plus years Loman was killing Lycan and others of his two households and sending the corpses to Matania?” He was trying to understand what he was hearing.

“Yes.” Chantry realized that the other man believed him and was extremely pissed.

“What is all the interest in Reginald?” Lobo asked him.

Chantry grimaced, his eyes closing as he kneaded his neck muscles. “I really am not sure myself.” He said slowly. “Whatever it is, Tarlington is involved up to his eyebrows. He tortured the former Head of the facility to find out.”

He glanced through the corners of his eyes at Lobo. “Did the same to any Lycan who had been playing possum and found him or herself stuck in Matania.” Lobo winced and Chantry shrugged. “At the time, I was one of the newly arrived technicians for the equipment that runs the security over there.” He said brusquely. “Still young and somewhat naïve.” He snorted. “That last did not stick around.”

“So why did you remain in his employ for so long?” Lobo asked him.

Chantry shrugged. “Someone had to curb his excesses and see about helping others through a faked death to escape from that hell hole.” he said finally, not looking at Lobo.

“What has Tarlington held over you to stay so long?” Lobo asked him.

Chantry rolled his eyes. “Nothing except that I can play with new high-tech gadgets.”

Lobo merely stared at him in askance. “Let me guess, you are responsible for some of the new and improved security around here that Reginald has spotted all over the ranch?”

Chantry’s eyes widened but he nodded. “I am surprised that he spotted the difference.” Chantry admitted. “I guess I should not have been.”

Lobo just shook his head and rubbed his jaw. “This is one sickening mess.”

“Amen to that.” Chantry muttered.

“You will continue what you are doing here, but I want copies of everything that has been going on in that facility for the past thirty years.” Lobo said curtly. “You will send them to me, and I will hand them over to interested parties.”

“What do I get out of this?” Chantry asked warily.

“Life, and not prison or more possible, execution by other Lycans.” Lobo said remotely. He scowled at Chantry who was clearly at a loss.

Chantry shrugged. “Glad I can be of some use.” he muttered. “I will concentrate on finding out what Tarlington has in mind for Reginald.” Chantry said. “After that, I am no longer going to be a part of this, understand?”

Lobo nodded. “Just don’t screw me over,” his voice was deceptively soft. “You will not like what happens.” he paused. “I also don’t make threats or bluffs.” Lobo told him.

“You make promises that you keep.” Chantry finished. “Irony that we are so alike in that sense of ethics if nothing else.”

Lobo cast him a dirty look, before disappearing the way he came. Chantry cursed, but then smiled to himself as he watched the man’s departure. A true predator in motion, he thought with bemusement.

Realizing that he was only delaying the inevitable, Reginald reluctantly turned his steps back toward the ranch. Man he hated the place. Reginald hoped that someday soon he would be free of it and all the memories that came with it.

He slipped along the different corridors with a gliding motion that made him almost soundless. It had helped that he had removed his boots. He showered and changed into some definitely cleaner clothing. Did not matter if they were stressed at the seams with lots of white areas.

There were definite snarled curses, and then the other men returned to the ranch. They would be more comfortable. Plus they could concentrate on getting Reginald to tell them what he knew. If not, they could always ruin one of his pet girls that he kept safe. They had managed to locate where her room was.

“Reginald. What did you two talk about?” Erasmus asked his youngest brother. He was determined to get answers out of him, even if he had to resort to his father’s tactics of beating Reggie senseless.

“The usual bullshit.” Reggie replied, not looking at Erasmus. He could also tell that the other three were right behind him. They always traveled in a pack. He was busy trying to figure out how he would avoid being dragged into the family business.

CORRUPTION UNCONTROLLED

His ears detecting a whistling sound, Reggie walked off to one side, just as something hit where he would have been standing a moment ago. "Problem?" he glanced at them with disinterest.

"You are our problem." Erasmus snarled. He was now wearing pants, but he still was as wiry and muscular as he had been ten years ago.

Reggie just eyed him calmly, but there was a dangerous stillness about him, that warned them away from attacking him. "Simple enough." His eyes were frosty. "Order that DNA test that father refused to let me go through and find out if I really am a Loman." The others glanced at each other. "If it turns out that I am not a Loman you can kill me." his voice was matter of fact and sensible.

Erasmus was uneasy because of the way that Reggie was not reacting like he used to.

Reggie's eyes glinted at them. "Especially since I know too much about the business." At that Gregory attacked him, and was sent flying. He toppled both Raymond and Ruiz.

Erasmus Jr. stayed where he was. Clearly, Reginald had become a force to be reckoned with while their father was busy elsewhere. His youngest brother was clearly aware of his thoughts.

"Deal?" Reginald asked calmly.

Erasmus glared at him. "Deal." He would shoot the moron tonight. Just like he had managed to ice the old man. Different method same result, they would be dead.

"Good, now get out." Reginald removed his hand from his pocket and it held a gun that had been aimed at them the entire time.

Erasmus swallowed. It did not take a genius for him to realize that his young brother hated his guts. It was there in his eyes.

"Go on." Reginald said. His tone was inflexible as he made a slight gesture with it. The brothers glared at him, but all four shuffled out.

"Oh, one last thing, Reginald." Erasmus stuck his head in.

"What?" Reginald looked at him sourly.

"Your bitch is going to be dead before this night is out." Erasmus said pleasantly. "You will enjoy watching her execution I am sure." Then he sauntered away with a grin. "Welcome to the family business, bro." he said with a jaunty grin.

Then to his younger brothers Erasmus smiled. "Take the woman to the Bordello. The executioner will prepare her," he said harshly. "None of us will take her. He already defiled her body."

“He did?” Ruiz gawked at his oldest brother. “I thought the little bastard was gay. Didn’t even know he could get it up.”

“Surprise, moron.” Gregory jeered. He had realized that his brother was not gay and merely shook his head at Ruiz. Ruiz was so narrow-minded at times.

Then they walked out of the hallway when Erasmus snapped. “Save the social hour for some other time. Get your asses moving. We do not have a lot of time here.”

The men glanced at each other but remained silent. Shrugging each peeled off and headed off to the showers and to get dressed into different clothes. It would take all four of them to subdue Reginald later on. If they could, they wanted him out of the way to conduct their business and had recently received a phone call that had appealed to them.

Erasmus had mentioned it to Ruiz and Raymond, but none of them had told Gregory. The three oldest sons had decided that it was time to replace Gregory with a different brother who would not be such a stick in the mud about money and where it was coming from and going to. They all worked through the late dusk hours and while they were doing this and that.

Reginald stared out from his room and watched another day slowly end. He walked to a different room and decided that it would be more interesting if he could sleep there.

Erasmus strolled through the corridors to where his woman was checking over the household accounts. He realized that she must have just come in from the same direction as he. He stood watching her, and hoped that she would have something for him that was pleasant.

“Esme.” Erasmus’ voice called, beckoning her. “I have a different scenario planned for his death,” he said calmly. “You do not have to try and lure him to your bed anymore.” Erasmus told her.

“Good. He is no longer a virgin.” Esme scowled.

“No longer a...” Erasmus stopped and rolled his eyes in disgust, and began speaking again.

She snorted at his reaction. Clearly that had not been something he had expected to hear.

“What the hell is that supposed to mean?” Erasmus stared at her in disbelief. Esme rolled her eyes.

“That innocent young thing, Raquela. Remember her?” she questioned sarcastically. He nodded slowly.

“She deflowered him yesterday. As he did her.” Esme informed him pithily.

CORRUPTION UNCONTROLLED

“I see.” Erasmus was thoughtful and then he nodded his head as he came to some conclusion. “Come with me, Esme.” Men prowled the perimeters of the ranch. Erasmus knew that his brother would be caught sooner or later. He smiled in anticipation of that fact.

Esme smiled back at him and accepted his hand. She recognized what he wanted and was willing to give him ease. They walked back to the house hand-in-hand.

Standing in a passageway, Reginald’s lips tightened as he listened to what they were saying. So it was true, he realized. There was something even more foul going on than he had originally suspected. Reginald had a bad feeling that not all was going to be as clean as he and others had hoped in vain.

Reginald cursed mentally as he avoided the newest set of guards. Bloody imbeciles announced their presence with no attempt at subtly, he thought with disgust. Finally he got past the last pair of guards and exited the grounds that his brothers owned outright.

There were rustles all around him and he stilled, not sure what to make of them. He knew about the others that prowled the grounds. Reginald did not know if they would welcome him or kill him on sight. At this point, he would prefer the latter.

Arid had been reassigned temporarily to the region of Wako Springs. She did not like the place at all, the feelings it brought her were something out of her worst nightmares. When she spotted the man who she had been looking for she called to him from her hiding place. “Reginald.”

It was a soft whispery voice that he did not recognize. It chilled him to the bone. Instinctively, Reginald turned away and headed in a different direction. He was not going to lead followers, spies or anything else to his friend if he could help it. Reginald had already caused enough trouble for Lobo. Frankly he was not of mind to help the enemy.

Arid swallowed a curse as she realized that he was not going to be easy to persuade. Clearly he had been abused in other fashions since she had last seen him. Arid thought about what she should do next. Right now, her only hope was to get him to come toward where she was located. “Reginald I only want to help you and the others.”

The voice spoke softly again, and he stilled. The speaker was off to his right. He turned his head cautiously, not willing to present an outright target. “Why?”

Arid was unable to answer as the rope suddenly appeared around her neck, cutting off the ability to speak and her precious air. Her hands tried to loosen the noose, but instead they were grabbed away as she was dragged. That did ease the pressure somewhat, but now she was caught. Blackness overwhelmed her and her weight became limp at the end

of the rope as unconsciousness grabbed hold.

No answer. He shrugged uneasily and continued on his way. The rustling stopped and he knew that he was no longer being followed. Despite the assurance that he was not being followed, Reginald was uneasy by the abrupt cessation of the whispers. Something had been actually comforting about the whispering and rustling around him, though he had not believed them. He caught a flash of movement out of the corner of his eye, and twisted around, but it was too late.

“Got the little fucker.” Erasmus said with satisfaction. “Did you get the other one?” he called out to Raymond, there was no answering response and he rolled his eyes. Incompetent moron. “Ruiz?”

Ruiz appeared, his dark face showing anger. “Dumb ass got nailed over the head, and the woman taken away. I figure someone must have known about this passageway,” he said at last. “Did you manage to get Reginald, Erasmus?”

“What does it look like, you pinhead?” Erasmus said scowling. “Now we need to get going to Cumulus Range. He is the lynchpin that we needed to take out.”

Ruiz stared at his brother and then kicked him in the head twice. “That will keep him out for a good long time.” he said, and then shrugged when Erasmus glared at him. “He was already moving.”

After Reggie was conked over the head and trussed up like a turkey, Erasmus had him flown out to the bordello in Callisto Heights. There Erasmus began the laborious process of finalizing a deal with Tarlington to get rid of Reginald once and for all.

When he finally gained consciousness, he found himself chained to some kind of contraption that was suspended from the ceiling. Two more chains held his arms and legs spread apart. Reginald was resigned to the fact that he was completely naked.

They were planning something that was obvious. He was not too impressed with what they had done in the past. Maybe they had thought up something new. The only times they had tried to get him to do a woman was when they were wanting to humiliate them as far as he could tell.

He had no interest in giving females a reaction when he did not even like the idea of having sex. Well he had recently, but he did not truly believe that it had been done in sincerity. He just felt used and dirty. When he heard footsteps approaching the room, Reginald’s face became impassive.

On seeing that he was clearly aware of his surroundings, Esme smiled at him sweetly. “Finally awake, are we?” She was avidly surveying him, especially his lower extremities.

CORRUPTION UNCONTROLLED

Reginald glanced downward and then upward at her face. “If you are trying to make a point, then do so.” His face expressed his contempt for her actions. Not even the sight of her dressed in black leather could stir him up. If anything it revolted him and he felt his stomach begin to roil.

Esme pouted when she realized that he was not responding to her physically. She shrugged and exited the room. Esme had not figured out that she had revolted him personally. Disgusted by the fact that he was still as prudish as ever, Esme threw herself into a chair and pouted.

Angered but not surprised by Reginald’s reaction to Esme, Erasmus entered the chamber and examined his brother’s nude body with surprise. It was lean, muscular, and powerful. He was also much taller than had been originally guessed. The man was about six foot three inches from head to toe.

The body was also showing every single scar in hideous relief, thanks to the stark lighting of the room itself. He brought out a blacksnake whip that had extra lengths attached to it. “I am sure that this is unnecessary, but I feel that I want you unable to move.” There was no real regret in his voice when he spoke and swung it with a lethal snap into the air.

Reginald’s eyes glazed over and his mind whirled away when blackness fogged his vision. His last thought was that Raquela was still away from these Neanderthal brained boors that were loosely called his brothers. Despite everything that had happened that day, he still felt something for her that he had not felt for any other woman.

He clearly remembered when he had first seen her. He realized then that his guess about her age had been off. Though, from the looks of things, Raquela had managed to cleverly distort her appearance to reflect a much younger age.

Arid was cursing and struggling to get free of her captors.

Chantry smacked her and she became still. “Knock it off woman. I just want to deliver you back to your damn comrades so that you can report the fact that those idiot Lomans were successful in taking him out of commission for a short while.”

Arid stared at him. “Who the hell are you and why are you helping?”

Chantry merely rolled his eyes. “A belated good Samaritan, now shut up.” He had already dumped Raquela off in a place where the others would undoubtedly find her. Now he had to take care of this one. With that in mind, Chantry bellowed for her partner to come out of hiding. When Kraal appeared bristling like a wolf, Chantry dropped her and then walked away.

Kraal watched him in shock and then shifted to his human form, and pulled on clothing. He carried Arid back to the tunnels and tended to her wounds. Arid was shivering from her near death experience. This was the second time that she had been nearly killed.

Erasmus began searching around through the debris of an old fire. He had received an anonymous tip that he would find Raquela lying somewhere near there. His flashlight spotlighted a crumpled form and it was shivering. He turned her over with a rough nudge of one boot and she closed her eyes against the glaring light.

“Did you find her, Erasmus?” Raymond asked, he was scowling and in a mean mood after having been smashed over the head by something blunt.

“Yeah. Carry the little slut to the copter. This time all of us are going to the bordello.” Erasmus wanted to get everything finished and neatly. No more fuck ups and no more damned rebellious idiots. He glanced at Ruiz. “Where is Gregory?”

“Tied up as you ordered. Is it necessary that Greg be shot?” Ruiz asked. He wasn’t all that happy about that. Gregory had a definite way with the ladies.

“Yes.” Erasmus said shortly. “Now shut your mouth and get moving,” he ordered and the three of them headed off to where their private helicopter was waiting for them.

CORRUPTION UNCONTROLLED

Chapter Ten

Kicking back in the house that Josiah owned just outside the town limits, he, Sykes and Lobo were drinking water and munching on some food that had been leftovers from the meeting that morning. Sykes was tense and on edge, while the older men were just yakking about this and that. When the radio kicked on they fell silent, waiting to hear what calamity had occurred this time.

“Calling three-four-seven. Do you read me?”

“Coming through loud and clear, seven-twelve-eight.”

“There is a kidnapping being called in regarding one young woman by the name of Raquela Conchita Ramirez.” came a calm clear voice.

“Details?”

“She was taken to the Loman ranch and now is being taken somewhere else. Forcibly. The man who called informed us that he would do his best to help retrieve us.”

“Thank you.”

Click.

Lobo sat quietly, thinking about what he had just heard on the radio. His friend’s little lady had just been taken from the ranch. They were really trying to make sure that his friend’s life was a living hell. Sighing he glanced at Truman and Sykes who were sprawled on the floor of Truman’s small house.

“So what do we do?” Sykes asked.

“Talk to the alpha of the pack.” Lobo said succinctly.

Truman shook his head. “They are going to send in berserkers.”

“We may need to do that just to give the others a chance to get out.” Sykes was chewing on a bite of beef jerky.

“When?”

“Give me a couple of days to see what I can do.” Sykes said, knowing that Lobo was not in good odor with the Alpha. He had gone elsewhere to arrange for his alternate identity and contacts.

Truman cast him a frown. Lobo shrugged his shoulders.

Sykes cursed when he heard footsteps. "Who the hell is that?" He pulled his gun.

There were three sharp knocks on the front door, and then a voice spoke quickly. "Its Morales, just give me a couple minutes, alright?"

The three men glanced at each other. Truman rose to his feet. Sykes pulled on his shirt.

Lobo shook his head. "I cannot deal with her right now." Then he was out a window and escaping before his unorthodox departure was noticed.

Alessandra knew that someone had left abruptly but she made no comment. She sighed and regarded the two men who were still there with wariness. With her next words, she put them on guard. "I have been sent to you to send out a call to all the members of WSLP." Her voice was terse and aggravated.

"The situation that is calling us together has to do with the Ramirez woman and Reginald Loman." Her words were accepted. "The Ramirez woman has turned traitor to the pack. She is selling information to someone else other than the Lomans. Who and where, has not yet been determined," Alessandra paused to gain her breath back.

Then she continued. "What is known is that she will likely be turning Reginald over to some other captors before this day is over." She had nothing but admiration for Reginald by this time and outright hatred for the woman who had deceived their young liaison between the two ranches and the pack.

They were cursing their hot-blooded friend.

"If you can reach McKenyon, give him this message. 'He is no longer outcast.'" She looked at them quietly. "I do not know what that means." She stated. "I do not want to know." With that, Alessandra left the small house and walked away.

Truman dashed to his back window and was just in time to see Lobo approach the car that Alessandra had been driving. He shook his head. Sykes joined him and grinned.

"Wonder how long it will take them to finally ease the burning in their blood?" Truman speculated. He had noticed the sizzle in the air whenever the two were around each other.

"The woman drives him crazy." Sykes said mildly. "I hope that I don't end up in his situation." He admitted, when Truman slanted him an amused grin.

"My advice is this. Do not say things like that or they will happen." He advised.

"Too late." Sykes said.

"I know." Truman grinned.

"Bastard." Sykes grumbled.

"Well, we should contact the others."

CORRUPTION UNCONTROLLED

“Gotcha.”

“Who to start with?”

“You talk to Ramon. I’ll get on my cell to the others.”

The two men walked to different rooms and were confident that Alessandra and Lobo would deal with their relationship sooner or later.

Swearing beneath her breath Alessandra headed out to her vehicle. She paused when she heard the sounds of footsteps crunching and instinctively she crouched behind a different vehicle. As she watched, another shadow glided around a corner. It was a man and he looked eerily familiar and her eyes snapped with rage.

Slinking soundless from the southwest wall of Josiah’s house, Lou McKenyon became aware of trouble as soon as lights flared all along the road. He ducked behind a vehicle and realized that it was Alessandra’s.

Alessandra spotted him and glared in disbelief. “Asshole!” She snarled at him, her face was pallid with rage.

Undeterred by her rage, adrenaline was flowing through his veins, Lou merely grinned at her. Then he cursed lividly when he spotted Truman and Sykes at windows. “GET AWAY FROM THE WINDOWS!”

The two men vanished from sight, just as shots were fired at the house. None had spotted the vehicle that he was hiding behind.

Two figures appeared on separate ends of the roof. There they waved to McKenyon and he flicked a small light in response to their waves. Then a faint call came from Sykes’s end. His red mane flared around his face, rendering it demon-like, as it glowed white and green.

McKenyon shook a small light twice. Then his luck ran out, and gunshots and light flared around where he was hiding. Someone had caught his movements.

“Get her back to town, Lou!” Truman yelled, as he returned fire from the roof.

Sykes provided more cover, as Alessandra got into the front driver’s side.

Lou got into the backside. “Drive.” He unrolled a window and began returning the fire. “Why does this always happen around you, Morales?” McKenyon sounded wry as he moved to the opposite side of the speeding vehicle.

“It never had trouble before I met you, McKenyon.” Alessandra retorted, she grumbled under her breath as she narrowly avoided driving into a mailbox. There was more continuous fire crackling around them, but she drove swiftly and easily while he fired a swiftly drawn gun silently. It had a silencer attached to it. He thrust it out a window as the thing became less reliable and was hurting his ears and those of his woman.

Once they reached the limits of the town, the gunfire ended. The sounds of running feet could be heard though. They slowed as McKenyon watched everything going on while Alessandra kept going.

“Do you want to risk going to your hotel, Morales?” McKenyon asked calmly, icily as he looked up at her.

That was when she realized that he was shirtless. Her eyes roamed over his body, taking in the physique that was so boldly outlined against the gray leather of the backseat.

“Back to the present, Morales. Do you want to chance getting to the hotel?” McKenyon repeated patiently. He was well aware of the fact that his body was displaying obvious arousal.

Alessandra dragged her gaze back to his face. “No, I have clothing with me.”

“Do you mind roughing it?” He asked her.

“No.” Again her eyes traveled over his body, lingering at his thighs. Heat bloomed in her cheeks when she saw his erection bulging against his pants.

“Get your mind out of the gutter and get back to the present.” He muttered, though he was a tad flushed as he shifted to ease his discomfort.

She reluctantly dragged her eyes away from the rearview mirror and concentrated on driving haphazardly enough that they could not be found. The van had been ditched several days ago. Still she was hungry for the touch, taste, and feel of him beneath her once again.

Memories danced and tantalized her, making her body go moist. There would be stains on the leather interior she realized and shrugged it off with amused resignation. “So where do we go?”

“Straight. Left. Turn right. Go onto the gravel road and travel three miles. We walk the rest of the way,” he said and fell silent.

She followed his directions without comment. The man was a fascinating mystery to her. Not to mention a complete hottie. She squirmed in her seat, conscious of the fact that her body was demanding release from an unrelieved tension. Which she placed solely at his feet.

“All right. Stop the car.” Lou growled, unable to handle being in such close quarters with her, with her scent filling the air.

She did as he told her to and then yelped when he dragged her into the backseat without any warning.

“You have been driving me crazy.” He accused her, as he pulled her down so his lips could devour hers.

CORRUPTION UNCONTROLLED

She met his lips with equal fervor. With his hips grinding against hers, she couldn't stop the muffled shriek as her body bucked against him.

"McKenyon!" She groaned.

His hand found her pants and slid between the hem and her skin. His fingers teased the sensitive skin of her abdomen, causing it to draw inward. His fingers found her center. She was damp from desire. His eyebrows arched. No underwear. "Now isn't this convenient." He stared at her.

"I hate underwear." She mumbled. Her body shivered against his as first one, then two fingers plunged into her.

He kissed her again, as his other hand cupped one of her breasts. It swelled beneath his fingers fondling it, and then she shuddered, convulsed, and groaned into his mouth. He swallowed the sounds of her pleasure with enjoyment and his thumb manipulated her clitoris until she was thoroughly sated.

When she stilled, he removed his hand and tasted his fingers. She groaned because she could not move. He chuckled softly. "You are noisy, I like that."

She looked at him in puzzlement.

"What?" he asked her.

"Why haven't you, uhm...get relief?" She gestured at his still visibly aroused body.

"Oh that."

Alessandra narrowed her eyes at his dismissive tone.

"It will keep," he said calmly. "Now let's go."

She gave an exasperated sigh shaking her head as she failed to understand but finally hauled her body off him. Then she pushed the door open. Instead of getting out though, Alessandra dropped down to where feet normally went and gestured for him to get out first.

Smiling in understanding, he did so. Carefully he scented the air. No one was there. His keen hearing caught the sound of normal night creatures and was satisfied. "You can come out now."

There was a muffled grunt and then she slid out. His eyebrows rose in appreciation. She had managed to dress in something completely different during his two-second survey. "Come on." He began to walk away.

Alessandra followed him as she slung her bag over her shoulder. She locked the doors as an afterthought. "Where are we going, Lou?" she asked after about five minutes of silence. She had been too busy picking her way over rocks and jumping to avoid steep holes that could break a limb.

“To a camp that I have hidden away.” Lobo replied he glanced back at her. “Need to stop?” he asked with a slight frown.

“No not yet.” She rubbed sweat away from her forehead. “How much further?”

“Over the next hill.” Lobo told her.

“What is your real name?” Alessandra asked him suddenly shocking him into silence.

Lobo tensed and then rubbed his forehead. “We can talk when we reach the camp.”

She pressed her lips together but held back a retort. Alessandra would be glad when he finally called a halt. She was surprised when they stepped down from the last foothill. This was an extremely steep jagged cliff ledges and canyons. “I take it that you have different ways of getting in and out of here?”

Lobo grinned at her. “Well, generally it is easier reaching this place by horse than it is by vehicle.” He watched her lips curve into a slight grin though he knew she was mad at him. “As to your earlier question.” Lobo rubbed the back of his neck. “I am Lobo.” He waited for her reaction to that announcement.

“You bastard.” Alessandra scowled at him, realizing how he had her running in circles this whole time.

“Yes, I am that.” Lobo said mildly. “However, I think that we both had good reasons for not revealing more information about each other than necessary.”

Alessandra fumed while at the same time understanding. “You are right, but it would have helped if I had known earlier.”

Lobo kissed her and then he worked on gathering up different items from the campsite. “Sit and rest.” he suggested. “We have far yet to go this night.” Because there was nothing else that she could do without being an unnecessary nuisance, she did what he suggested.

“I need to go back to Abornia.” Alessandra said, as she perched on a rock, watching Lou as he sat and rested against an opposite one. There was a tent that was big enough for two. When she had first seen it and glanced at him.

He had shrugged. “I like my space and comfort.” She arched her eyebrows as she stared from his body and then pointedly at the tent. Lou chuckled but did not say anything to appease her unspoken desire. “Where is that and why?”

“My headquarters.” she said it briefly.

“Oh?” He shrugged when she did not reply. “Right.” he mused. “Confidential.” He closed his eyes and she smiled slightly. Then she dropped down from the rock and sat so that she was in front of him. He did not open his eyes. His voice however warned her that

CORRUPTION UNCONTROLLED

he was aware of her movements. “What are you up to now?”

“Stand up.” she told him.

He shook his head.

“Well at least get up onto your knees.” She rested her hands on his legs.

He opened one eye, which glinted at her. “No.” Then he closed it again.

“All right, be that way.” she said, and then attacked his belt and unfastened it. She did the same with the rest of his buttons of his shirt, and the zip of his fly. She discovered that he also was not an aficionado of undergarments.

Alessandra was amused by that discovery. Then she closed her lips on him, making his breath draw in on a sharp hiss. Alessandra slowly drew her tongue around the bulbous head of his cock.

He made a throaty sound, as his hands tangled into her hair. Lou rarely let himself become as vulnerable as he was now. He moaned as she worked his cock, and slowly took him inside her mouth, swirling her tongue around him. One hand delved into his pants and curved around a sac.

He hissed between his teeth as her fingers caressed the testicle. It tautened and became tighter with the suction that she was putting on his cock, that was becoming thicker with each swipe of her tongue and suckle of her mouth. She had nearly drawn him into her throat. His hips slowly moved against the sucking of her lips. He was nearly at the point of release.

There was a snapping of a twig. That snapped him out of his pleasurable haze with an agonized moan. His breathing was harsh as his head swiveled around. His eyes spotted movement not thirty feet away from where they were located.

“Stop,” he growled at her before he closed his pants up again.

She frowned at him. “Why should I? You do need relief.” Alessandra pointed out, and then reached for him again.

His eyes flashed at her, when his ears caught the sound of another twig crackling nearby.

That time Alessandra blanched. To be nearly caught in a town was one thing, being caught out in the wild where anything could attack at any second. Well, that was not an appealing thought. She pulled a weapon without anything else being said.

“We have company,” he said, as he reached for a weapon.

Stumbling a bit because his balance was off, Reginald returned to the Wako Springs brush lands with a heavy heart. He was worried about several things. Reginald

scrubbed a hand over his face and was well aware that his hair stood on end.

Reginald just prayed that he would be able to find his way back to the airport that would help him find Lobo and the others. He stopped several times, waiting for dizziness to pass.

He had a heavy concussion and at least four cracked ribs. Reginald was lucky that he had not had worse injuries after jumping from that damn helicopter. As it was, if he was walking on broken bones, he would not know until he was found by others and dealt with. "Lobo?"

Lobo got to his feet with a start. "Reginald? What the hell?" He stared at his friend in disbelief. "Alessandra do you have medical supplies?" he glanced back at the camp.

"Not on me, no." Alessandra said and appeared just in time to help catch Reginald before he fell down. "I do not think I want to know what happened to Reginald this time. He looks like he took a hard fall." Her eyes sharpened as she checked his multitude of wounds. "Does he have the potential to become a Lycan?"

Lobo shrugged his shoulders. "About that I have no idea," he admitted after a moment. "There were some things that not even Reginald knew about himself or his heritage."

Chantry listened to their conversation and was startled at the appearance of Reginald, how had he managed to escape? Then he remembered what Raquela had done to him. Chantry cleared his throat, and held up his hands, showing that he wasn't carrying any arms when Alessandra pointed a gun at him. "I am not going to hurt you."

Lobo stared at him, an evil gleam in his eyes. "Did you have any hand in what brought him to this point?"

Chantry shook his head. "No, but I know who probably inveigled the Loman's to get him. They've decided to get rid of him and the other brother. Gregory I think was his name." He shrugged. "I do not know why."

Lobo and Alessandra glanced at each other and sighed. So much for some time alone, Lobo thought with chagrin. "Well tell us what you do know."

Reginald was listening, despite having collapsed. He remembered what exactly he had been doing. It would be interesting to find out what Chantry had noticed. So he was the other one, huh?

Not involved with his cause, he realized, a bitter taste pervading his mouth. Chantry sighed and began telling them what he knew. "He had spent most of his time in the other place dodging assassins and advances from other women."

Reginald mentally rolled his eyes as he silently finished the explanation. That was

CORRUPTION UNCONTROLLED

when his bedamned brothers were not administering beatings and other charming tortures to get information out of him. So far, they had not managed to get anything except insults and other little things that he had hidden about their own natures and women.

Needless to say, his comments had started more fights among his brothers than he cared to remember. He was lucky he had not been detained for more than three days. He remembered that he had gained a couple of broken bones. For some odd reason, they had healed over night.

That of course had infuriated his brothers to no end. So of course they had had to inflict more broken bones on him than before. Reginald was astonished at the fount of information that this stranger had gleaned from all that had happened. Finally he stirred enough to speak. "Take me back to the ranch." His voice was a croak.

It certainly startled the other two.

Lobo glanced at him. "You have been busy, my friend."

Reginald shrugged his shoulders, even though the movement hurt like the very devil. "It is important that I go back," he insisted. "I need to be there. I have a feeling that something bad is going to have over at Aphrodite Bordello, in Callisto Heights."

Reginald's lips thinned when the others glanced at each other with distinct disapproval. When they finally got it through their heads that he did not want to go anywhere else, they took him back to the ranch. As soon as he set foot on the grounds of the ranch, Reginald sneaked past all the security measures and got inside.

He showered and dressed in clean clothes and walked around the nearly deserted ranch. Having lived on the ranch for all of his life, Reginald knew where all the different ins and outs were located. He hoped that he had warned the others in time. Sighing, Reginald sank down into a room that he occupied and scanned regularly for listening devices.

He hated this life of being one of the Loman's. His face darkened for a moment and then he relaxed. He bit back a curse when he heard a voice speak his name.

A slender young woman stood in the doorway. She was clearly startled when she saw him there. Clearly she had not been expecting to see anyone in the room.

"Mr. Reginald."

The voice was musical and brought him out of his light doze. Reginald opened his eyes and he surveyed the young woman warily. "Yes?" His tone was not all that friendly or polite.

"I was sent by Esme to find out if you wish to join your brothers for a meal." She hesitated. "Or if you prefer eating outside." The girl watched him uneasily. She had heard

rumors about him. She was surprised to see him there. She had heard that he would be gone for a couple of days.

“What is your name, Miss?” Reginald asked, well aware that she was leery of him. He was mortally tired of the distrust that he was forced to feel toward others. He knew though that it was a necessary precaution. His eyes grew distant as he remembered what had happened to his last friend.

“Lindsey.” She supplied, puzzled by his question.

“Thank you for mentioning my options, Lindsey.” He avoided looking at her. “I will take my meal outside.” He had a feeling that his brothers or whoever was the spymaster in the ranch. They were going to replace the bugs that he had gotten rid of after setting foot inside the room.

“You are welcome sir.” She left the room, wondering why he had been so standoffish towards her. Lindsey realized that he had been either embarrassed or insulted by her behavior.

“Lindsey?” Reginald looked out at her, as she turned back toward him. “I appreciate your efforts.”

She gave him a puzzled stare. “You are welcome sir.” Then she walked away back toward the kitchen where the cook was waiting impatiently for an answer.

“Well?” The cook asked, raising her eyebrows at the new girl. Clearly confused by the young master. She thought with amusement. The new ones generally were.

“He said he wanted to sit outside.” Lindsey told her. Her mind was trying to comprehend what Reginald had said to her. It had been filled with a double meaning. That she did understand, but why? “Mrs. Corey?” She asked tentatively.

The cook looked at her inquiringly.

“What do you suppose he meant when he said. ‘I appreciate your efforts’?” Lindsey asked, and the cook frowned as she realized what the young man had said. Oh dear. She thought. He must have had a rough time in the bordello. She shook her head.

“He is not well liked here, young Lindsey.” Mrs. Corey said softly. “He is spied on and often the servants go straight to his...brothers with whatever they find out from talking to him.” The outraged expression on Lindsey’s face was enough to tell Mrs. Corey that she was pissed.

“I think that he was mistreated out there. He was exhausted.” Lindsey said quietly, glancing warily at the office where Esme Gonzalez ruled the roost. She hated the woman and the other big men who watched her with lust filled eyes.

“You found him asleep?” her surprise obvious.

CORRUPTION UNCONTROLLED

“Yes.” Lindsey bobbed her head in response. “I guess I made him think that I did not trust him.” She frowned having glimpsed something in his eyes. “He almost looked hurt and then resigned.” Lindsey added. “Then it was like he pulled a mask over his face.”

“What was it?”

“Respectful and remote.” She glanced at Mrs. Corey. “That was when he was even looking at me. Most of the time he just stared at his hands or at the ceiling.”

Mrs. Corey nodded. “I think he was just trying to protect you in his own way.”

“How?” Lindsey inquired.

“If he shows an ounce of interest in you, his brothers will be all over you.” Mrs. Corey said after a moment. Her lips compressed when she remembered what had happened last time.

“Is that why my sister Raquela disappeared?” Lindsey asked slowly. She was becoming very uneasy about the entire situation.

“Yes.” Mrs. Corey told her, her eyebrows furrowing. “I am not sure if he was able to locate her or not though.”

“Mrs. Corey.”

The voice made them jump. It was Reginald, and there was pain in his eyes that told them that he had overheard everything.

“She is safe; I was able to prevent her from being executed with the help of another.” He said, and then walked away.

The two women looked at each other and sighed simultaneously. They flinched when they heard a raised voice suddenly make the unwelcome presence of a certain female known. It was Esme and she was clearly not happy with the way that he had managed to avoid her up till that point.

At the sight of the very last person she had ever wanted to see, Esme shrieked his name. “Reginald!”

Flinching because Esme was the last person that he had ever wanted to see again, Reginald glared at her. “What the fucking hell do you want from me?”

Mrs. Corey grinned when she heard his snap. His language gave her pause, even for Mr. Reginald that was extremely crude language to be using.

Lindsey’s eyebrows climbed to her hair. He was not being at all friendly now.

“My, my, someone has an attitude. What is the matter, finally lose your virginity?” Esme taunted him.

“Like you really didn’t know that already, Esme?” Reginald sniped back.

She backed off at that, biting her lip.

“Where is Raquela?” He demanded to know from her.

Esme snickered in response, but refused to say anything.

When he realized she was not going to give him help, Reginald walked past her.

“Wait, please.” Esme said, clearly something was on her mind.

There was an indrawn breath from they guessed Reginald.

He stood stiffly, and then got tired of her groping hands. “Go find someone else to sexually molest, Esme.” Reginald said coldly, there was a soft yelp, and they were fast enough to see Esme being shoved away from him.

“You will be in my bed, Reginald.” She screamed after him.

“I will be dead first.” Reginald’s voice held a meaning that chilled the listeners.

Even Esme looked a bit frightened at his tone of voice. She threw something after him and it missed, though not by much. “Hopefully you will, bastard boy. No one will ever believe you when you finally do get laid again. Even then the girl would have to be tied up to be able to stand your looks!”

Reginald brought forth a silver gun and he held it by his side. It was aimed right at the woman who had been a thorn in his side for as long as he could remember. “Do not tempt me to do anything rash, Esme.”

Esme stared at him and then laughed. “I do not believe that you will do anything with that weapon.” She taunted him. “You were not even able to properly rise for me.”

“You repulse me, Esme. Why would I want to rise for you?” Reginald said calmly.

With a shriek she pulled the trigger of a hidden gun.

Reginald’s shoulder blossomed red, but he pulled the trigger of his gun.

She gasped, the bloom of red covered her chest, spreading quickly as she fell to the ground, eyes now glazed with disbelief as she fell to the ground.

He watched her for a moment and then turned on his heel. He went to the bathroom and was sick in it. Then he cleaned up, dug the bullet out of his shoulder, and bound it up, a bit clumsily. Then he called the bordello. “Hello, Erasmus.” He laughed though it was a harsh sound. “I just shot your woman in self defense. Where is Raquela?”

The response he gained was surprisingly subdued and later nasty when he heard the news about Esme. “I see.” He glanced in the other room, Esme was still alive he thought and nodded as a plan began to form in his head. “Oh she is still alive, but likely bleeding to death.” Reginald said mildly. He merely smiled at the next question.

“I never said I had shot first, Erasmus. I am still standing which I cannot say for her.” He shrugged. “Let her bleed to death for all I care then. I never wanted her body to begin with.” Reginald made a rude noise. “No.”

CORRUPTION UNCONTROLLED

Reginald rolled his eyes. "I am not going anywhere, though I could call the cops." He said meditatively. "No? Then I suggest that you get your white hind end out here and do something fast. I cannot fly the damn chopper out there."

"Five minutes?" He thought about it. "Yeah, I can stabilize her for that long." He listened intently. "You can go to hell, Erasmus." He said pleasantly. "I have decided that I will not do your dirty work for you. She is your mess, you can get rid of her."

"Oh now you realize that I can be a cold blooded bastard?" He asked in surprise. "Right, whatever." He hung up.

Esme had heard every single word. "He wants you to kill me?"

"Yes, but I am not going to do it." Reginald replied. "Unlike some I can name, I do actually have a damn conscience." He didn't look at her while he cleaned and doctored up her wound.

"Is it bad?" Esme asked him.

"Yeah, but with professional medical attention, you'll live." He told her. Deciding on a split decision he placed a call to a friend of his. One who owed him a favor and now he was going to collect. "Gray?"

Gray frowned at hearing Reginald's voice. Something had changed recently. "Yes."

"I need you to come and get Esme Gonzalez. There was a little incident that befell her." Reginald said mildly. "Erasmus, when he heard that we had shot and wounded each other, told me to finish her off. I said no. Now I need someone to take her into protective custody."

Gray cursed softly. "I am on it." He glanced around and spotted one of his veteran detectives. "Max?"

The gray haired man looked up. "What?"

"Go get Esme Gonzalez, she's been shot."

The older man grimaced but did as he asked. He got up and disappeared.

Reginald paced quietly. He heard footsteps and looked up. It was Max, he saw and felt a chill of wariness go down his spine. Reginald pointed and Max cast him a nasty glare.

"Took a shot at you and you shot back eh?" He commented. "I shoulda known that you weren't no better than the rest of them fucked up Loman's." Max shot him a disgusted sneer then carried the unconscious woman to his vehicle and drove off with squealing wheels.

Erasmus showed up not ten minutes later. He cursed when he saw that Esme was

no longer there. "Where did you stick her, you stupid fuck?" Erasmus glared at his brother.

"Somewhere safe, you dickhead." Reginald replied harshly.

"Always were too soft-hearted for your own good." Erasmus said and yanked him by his wounded shoulder back into the copter. There he hammered him over the head and broke the other shoulder with a metal baton. With slow precision he set about breaking all his other bones.

Alessandra and Lobo hurried to a nearby campsite where they found Chantry waiting for them. "What happened?"

"Is this guy masochistic?" Chantry asked them, bewilderment showing in his eyes.

Lobo sighed and Chantry grumbled. "He saved that bitch from bleeding to death." He told them, "Then he turned himself over to Erasmus." Chantry was shaking his head. "You people are unbelievable."

Lobo was silent and then he glanced at Alessandra. "I will take you to Abornia. I just need to take care of some more details." He said simply. "You coming with me or not?"

Alessandra was surprised by the question. "Yes I am going with you." Ignoring Chantry they walked out of the campsite.

Chantry watched them leave, his eyes somber as he remembered what he had neglected to tell them.

Sighing Alessandra glanced around and then stopped. Lobo turned to face her, he said nothing but understood her look and held his arms out to her. She stepped into them. "Are we doing the right thing, Lobo?" She buried her head in his chest.

"Yes." Lobo said softly. He held her for a moment more, and then tilted her head up and kissed her deeply and tenderly.

Alessandra hugged him and then they began walking some more.

Lobo helped her over the rocks and then led her to the truck that he had waiting. "Our transportation, my lady." Lobo boosted her up into the truck. She stared down at him and then scooted over to the other side.

"Now we head out and see what else we can do." Lobo murmured, even as he spoke, he wrapped his arm around her. Alessandra yawned, the days catching up to her; she smiled to herself and pillowed her head against his shoulder.

Lobo smiled as he felt her relax and slide into sleep. She needed it and he hoped she would be able to gain more before the night was over. Otherwise there would be some difficult times ahead.

CORRUPTION UNCONTROLLED

Still would be, but at least she would be better prepared for when they reared their ugly heads. Lobo didn't drive to the hotel, or to Josiah's house. Instead he went to Gray's home and tooted his horn in a prearranged signal.

Gray appeared and stared at them, his face grim. "You all seem to be pretty damn active tonight." He said at last. "Is she all right?" Gray glanced in and saw Alessandra snuggled up against Lobo's shoulder.

Lobo glanced at the sleeping woman and then he nodded. "We just saw to Reginald, he was pretty badly hurt. He never told us what he was doing out in the brush land. I would have guessed that over half the bones in his body were broken but had healed."

Gray blanched. "Oh good lord. Where is he now?"

"He convinced us to take him back to the ranch."

Gray nodded slowly. "Then he and Esme had an altercation."

"Now he is back over at the bordello." Lobo finished.

"He was also extremely upset and I think he is worried about a woman." Alessandra yawned. "A woman who it seems is prepared to turn him over to something or someone else." Her eyes narrowed. "If Erasmus doesn't kill him first." Her voice was low.

Gray looked at them and then he sighed. "Do not tell me anymore, just get moving to wherever you need to go. At the moment, I do not want to know where you are."

"How many leaks, Gray?" Lobo understood the veiled warning.

Gray sighed. "Two, maybe three." He said tiredly. "I am slowly weeding them out." Motioning to the road he stepped back from the truck, "Just go."

Lobo and Alessandra both nodded. Then Lobo put the truck in gear and drove away.

"Where do you want to go, Alessandra?" Lobo asked.

"Back to the hotel for now." She said. "No where else to go at the moment." She glanced backward at the Gray household. Jason stood there on the stoop watching them. He looked almost as gray as his name.

"He looks tired and frustrated." Alessandra said after a moment.

"The stress is getting to him." Lobo said briefly. "He has been dealing with corruption for over twenty years in this area, Alessandra. Now it is coming to a head."

"Yes, well I am going to get some sleep." Alessandra stared at him. "Come inside so that we can spend time together, Lobo." She appealed to him.

Lobo hesitated and then smiled. "What the hell, soon we will need to come out into the open anyway." He climbed out to join her. He kissed her, his hands pressing her

against his body. She groaned softly, and he nibbled her ear. Then they entered the hotel and got to her room without incident.

“The security here is nil.” Lobo murmured.

“It usually is right around three a.m. or thereabouts.” Alessandra said quietly.

He kissed her neck, as she rubbed against his body.

“Let’s go to bed.” She said softly.

He unlocked the door and checked the room. No one had been in there thankfully.

“They search it whenever I am gone, but I take everything with me and make copies of it.” She nuzzled his shoulder, nipping the skin that pulled taut against his muscle and bone.

He growled softly in response to the stimulation. Alessandra growled back at him and they fell on her bed. The adrenaline was surging and they were soon tearing at each other’s clothing and not thinking about anything.

Their main focus was Lobo being inside her body and Alessandra’s legs wrapped around his waist, her arms wrapped around his body. Neither of them was able to speak when they climaxed together and panted heavily together. Then they fell asleep and only awoke when Alessandra’s alarm shrilled.

CORRUPTION UNCONTROLLED

Chapter Eleven

As soon as Erasmus arrived with Reginald to the bordello, he shoved the stumbling man out. Reginald fell flat to the floor. A high-pitched scream was heard from the doorway of the main entry. Then a loud cracking noise came and the noise ended.

Reginald gritted his teeth and forced himself to get up before Erasmus could jerk him up from the floor. Staggering to his feet, made a horrific sight for all viewers. He was slowly healing, that much was clear. What else was not clear was why. He set his sights on the front door and slowly limped cautiously to the entrance.

Raquela hid her face from the sight of others as her bloodied lip was healed within seconds. Her eyes were shocked at the sight of Reginald. She had heard of the beatings that he had gone through and now she believed the wild tales. There was nothing that Raquela could do now. The die was cast. She stared at him in silence.

Raquela no longer resembled the ingénue that he remembered. Reginald stared down at Raquela with glazed eyes. He ignored her briefly though he had taken in every aspect of her appearance. Her eyes were red-rimmed from crying and filled with fear and anguish.

Reginald who had managed to avoid traps set by others. Raquela, however, still had some other wiles and tricks that she could use to get into his heart securely and permanently. She mentally smiled at her own cleverness, then brought her mind back to the part that she was playing.

Shocked to his toes Reginald looked at her, and she at him.

"I am sorry." She murmured.

He merely nodded, though he grieved inside for the fact that she had been unable to escape like he had hoped. "It would have happened sooner or later." Reginald placed a hand on her shoulder. "I only wish that it had not happened with you, Raquela." He touched her cheek as he spoke.

She looked up at him, for a moment. Her eyes narrowed when she caught the tone of his voice. Then, apparently gathering her courage and a generous dollop of defiance, Raquela rose to her feet and brushed a swift kiss over his lips. She leaned against him then

pulled away, her face whitening.

“Well, well, is this not sweet?” A mocking voice intruded upon the bittersweet reunion. It was Erasmus Jr. He was looking extremely pleased with himself. Flanking his sides was Raymond and Ruiz. Gregory was nowhere in sight. Reginald did not let his guard down.

“It looks like little brother did have something going on after all.” Erasmus’ sneer was calculating. “How did she taste, was she good?” He glanced at his brothers. “Maybe we should try her out.” He eyed the girl who slipped away before they could grab her. No matter they would find her later on.

“I am afraid that I can’t answer your questions, brothers.” Reginald said, his eyes hard as stones, his expression not amused. He knew that Raquela was in danger. He only hoped that they would leave her alone long enough that he could facilitate her escape. He slid his hands into his pockets as he regarded his brothers. They no longer looked out of shape. “I see you have been working out.” He said with amusement flavoring his words.

“What if we have?” Erasmus was not happy about the fact that his youngest brother was not reacting with fear or wariness around them.

“You may actually be able to take my friend down when and if he arrives.” A devious smile appeared on his face as they registered his words. Confidence settled over their heads and shoulders like mantles.

“So why did your guard dog not come up?”

“He does actually have a life of his own.” Reginald replied after a moment of considering his words carefully.

“Really? That is a shock.”

“It should not be, but then you all were too busy with your own little power games to pay attention.” He shrugged negligently.

Their faces darkened. He merely showed amusement again this time with gleaming white teeth. His was a mood that was enigmatic to them. They hated it when they could not understand his actions. They never could. To justify their own rationalizations they had long ago decided that he was gay, though evidence pointed elsewhere. They did not care.

Reginald was well aware of the fact that they assumed he was gay. He had made sure that they suspected that, since he hung out with a bunch of admitted gay men. They knew him well, and all enjoyed the mischief that he was pulling on his brothers. They did not like the fact that the four burly morons were still using him as a punching bag on a regular basis.

CORRUPTION UNCONTROLLED

Reginald sighed. His mind drifted to a distant event that he knew he should not be remembering right then. Especially when he knew that his mother was roaming the halls with hatred twisting her perspective. Reginald did believe that his brothers and he were in grave trouble.

With an obvious shake of his head Reggie's thoughts were dragged back to the present. It was not a pleasant sensation to know that that could happen to him at any time. Especially since he did not remember knowing where his friend and guardian had been at the time. An unpleasantly smug voice broke into his thoughts, and he cleared his head with a clenched fist digging into his skin.

"By the way, Reggie, did you know that our mother came back to the ranch?" Erasmus spoke angrily and there was a glitter in his eyes as he spoke.

"How long ago?" Reginald had a suspicion that he was not going to like the answer.

"Oh...about two weeks after she went on a short vacation." There was vicious delight in the older man's voice when he finally succeeded getting a reaction out of Reggie.

Reginald's eyes flashed with violent fury that had the brothers backing up. However, Reggie had learned to control his temper and his thoughts. He just looked at them with a cynical expression. "I would watch your backs then. She is not the same person she was so long ago."

"Oh we know that." Raymond said with an evil grin.

"She is in charge of dealing with traitors and those who would escape." Ruiz said, cleaning his nails with a sharp knife.

"That is supposed to worry me?" Reggie's lifted eyebrows told them that he had already come to some kind of similar conclusion.

Their triumphant smiles wilted. The fact that he was not at all surprised forced them to realize that he was indeed not one to believe much on the surface. That warned his brothers that he had hidden depths himself.

Reggie just smiled at their sudden wariness. Twenty some years too late guys, he thought to himself, and something of his disgusted thoughts must have come through. Their expressions hardened and they would have probably beaten him on the spot.

"Boys, let him freshen up before you do anything drastic." Gregory showed up right then. He clearly had been observing everything that was going on.

"Besides, we can always use a certain leverage to make him do what we want." His eyes flickered slightly as he spoke. The others glanced at each other and smiled. The expression was not pleasant and Reggie stood still, hair rising on the back of his neck.

"Welcome home, Reggie, though the timing is not the best on your part." His

mother's voice was husky as it once had been.

He turned toward her; she stood alone, and was dressed neatly. It was as though she had lived in a time warp. Reginald merely inclined his head. "Hello, Mother, it has been too long." Now that he saw her, he was not at all thrilled to be left alone with her either.

Mirabella Estella Ruiz Loman stared at her youngest son. She realized somewhere in her brain that he truly did not resemble Loman at all. This one was all Ruiz and Castillo. Her eyes narrowed and she barely kept herself from snarling. Both men had betrayed her. This spawn, this filth was a blemish on her bloodline.

She composed herself when she realized that he was watching her with no emotion other than regret. He bore signs of beatings, old and new. That should not have bothered her but it did. Now he was speaking to her. She forced her wandering attention back to what he was saying.

There was something wrong with his mother. She was ill in a way that he vaguely remembered reading about. "Are you well?"

"I am fine." She snapped at him.

Reginald held up his hands in a gesture of peace. "I am only concerned about your welfare, mother." He spoke softly, and then lowered his hands to his side as he continued to watch her somberly. "I am sorry if I have offended you." A small smile flickered over his mouth and disappeared.

Mirabella was confused. He was nothing like Castillo or Loman. She watched him and then shrugged. She knew what she would be ordered to do eventually. She felt no regret in that she would have to destroy this cub. He was the weak link for them all.

"Come, I will take you to the room that is prepared for you." Mirabella said. "Would you like to have a woman come to you later on?" She hoped he would say yes. Otherwise the young woman Raquela would be put to death. They would force him to watch.

Reginald paused, turning to look at his brothers, and then he spotted Raquela. She gave an imperceptible shake of her head. He spotted the chains on her and knew what that meant. His eyelids lowered as he felt a streak of anguish roar through him. Then he turned back toward his mother. "No. I will be busy, I am afraid." He did not look at any of them, not even his mother.

Mirabella was chilled by what she had glimpsed. For a moment he had shown real emotion.

"I will have to go through the official and unofficial tour." His words were clipped. "For now I need to get changed." He glanced down at his suit. "I think this is not suitable

CORRUPTION UNCONTROLLED

for anything around here.”

Mirabella had disliked the suit on sight. Now she understood why. It did not fit him. Like the disguise of a businessman did not fit. She was puzzled by the conflicts that she was viewing in him. “Very well.” She shot the other men a venomous glare that quite plainly told them to shut up.

Erasmus glared back at her, his eyes glittering with warning. She was no longer a mother to him, and never had been. His contempt showed what he thought of her position for him and his brothers. The other brothers showed varying levels of the same responses.

Mirabella ignored them, certain they would be paying sooner or later. She walked up the stairs with a long brisk stride. Reginald followed her. There was a hissing noise and he flattened against one wall. Mirabella pushed herself against another wall. Two knives struck the walls by their heads. There was a muttered curse from below. Clearly they had not been meant to survive the walk up.

Reginald looked back down. There was black fury on the four men’s faces. Terror showed on Raquela’s face. Tears were streaming down her face. His brothers stormed out of the room, and she was dragged out of sight a moment later.

“I will help her get out.” Mirabella realized that this son was something different from the others. He just looked at her, distrust shining from his entire stance.

“Her, no other.” She cautioned him.

“I would sooner trust wolves.” He said coldly. “I will deal with them myself, Mirabella.”

“Why do you not trust me?”

“Why did you not acknowledge me the other times that I was dragged to this hellhole?” Reginald countered. For the first time there was no anger, no distrust, no hostility. There was only hurt and confusion in his gaze. Then that powerful emotion fled from his features only to be replaced by a remote mask.

She refused to speak for a moment as she gained back her formidable self-control. When she looked at him again there was hostility in her stance now. “I will get her out. You worry about your own skin.” Mirabella looked away her pride stung by his distrust. She understood it though and it hurt. She had abandoned him too long. “I could not. They would have killed us both.”

Reginald said nothing and then he sighed. “It no longer matter. Did he find my sisters?” That question had been bothering him for some time.

“No. In that he did not succeed.” She had heard about the punishment that he had endured and the years afterward.

“He killed a girl.” Reginald said remotely. “She had the guts to try and help me, but I could do nothing.” He found his room and glanced back at her. “I will not explain anything further.” If she believed him great, if she did not, well he didn’t exactly blame her. He had not exactly been the welcoming son that he probably should have been.

Mirabella watched him, shock clouding her eyes and face. Then she inclined her head and walked away. Different preparations would have to be made. Mirabella had lied about Loman not finding the girls. He had, but he was unable to touch them. They were in a safe place. They would be for as long as the Loman boys were alive.

Reginald made another call. “Secrets from the past are unraveling at a dangerous rate. Be wary of the female executioner.” He paused. “Do not try this number.” Then he hung up. After a few minutes he stood up and prepared for a few hours in the outside heat. He relished the time outdoors. Reginald no longer cared that he would be revealing what he had kept secret. Now he had some other business to arrange through other contacts.

In Abornia, Castillo and other Lycans were working round the clock to secure the territory around Wako Springs and the Aphrodite Bordello in Callisto Heights. When a number came in from a cell phone that could be located in Aphrodite Bordello, none of them knew what to think.

Serenity poked her head in. “Its Reginald.” No last names were needed after that announcement.

Castillo’s face darkened. “I will take it.” He picked up the phone. “Yes?”

“Castillo?” Reginald asked, as soon as the phone was answered.

“Yes.”

“Forget Wako Springs and concentrate your time over here on the bordello.” Reginald leaned against a wall. He could tell that most of his wounds were almost healed. “There were two women kidnapped on Wako Springs, but I think one of them escaped. The other one is here.” He paused. “Something else is going to go down. I am actually afraid for my family if that makes any sense to you.”

Castillo was silent. “What about yourself?” He sensed that Reginald was not telling all.

“My life is cursed, Castillo. Just concentrate on the future. There are small children here, infants.” Reginald’s voice wavered. “I think that they are planning to take out every female resident here, in order to avoid more raids. Hurry, please.” He hung up.

Castillo glanced at his lieutenants. “We need to regroup.” He said shortly. “Reginald thinks that there is going to be a massive massacre at the bordello. All the

CORRUPTION UNCONTROLLED

females.” Castillo drew a finger across his throat.

Tarlington scanned the photos and aerial surveys that Chantry had sent him. He nearly spat out his coffee when he saw what else had been detected in the grounds. Skeletons, several hundreds of them, his eyes glowed with outright fury. The Loman’s had cheated him and they would pay. “Aide, get the first flight out to Altagon that you can arrange.”

“Yes sir.”

Tarlington continued to read as he tried to figure out what the best strategy would be. Then he began reading the older reports that had been compiled on Raquela’s actions. His lips thinned when he realized that she had probably considered turning traitor on him about three or four times. Tapping his fingers he considered his options. Finally he shrugged. “Make sure that those tickets go straight to Callisto Heights.”

The aide listened to the orders and he nearly rolled his eyes. Then he said uneasily. “Sir?”

“Yes?”

“There no flights that goes directly out to Callisto Heights.” The man swallowed uneasily. “There is a different flight that goes into Artagna.”

“How far is that from Callisto Heights?” Tarlington asked. His eyes narrowed slightly as he spoke through clenched teeth.

“Three hours.” The aide dropped the phone as a knife sliced through the air and nailed him to the wall right through his jugular.

Tarlington picked up the phone and pleasantly said. “This is Tarlington.” He listened patiently to the rattled off information. “I do not give a damn about other options. I am sure that we can come to an agreement yes?” Tarlington relaxed against his chair. “Yes, that is satisfactory.” He now had his ticket in hand. He glanced through the door. “Chambers.”

The young man smiled at him attentively. “Sir?”

“Take care of Aide.” Tarlington motioned to the hanging man. “He proved himself to be rather incompetent in the extreme.”

Chambers nearly threw up but managed to keep his gorge down. “Right away sir.” He walked over to the man and wrested the knife out of the wound. He tossed it to the desk. Then he dragged the corpse out on some plastic that he had unfolded moments earlier. He signaled to two assistants and they silently took the body away. He glanced back at Tarlington who was watching him with a thoughtful expression.

“Very efficient, Chambers. Take him to the first morgue that is in the third door after you leave the elevator.” Tarlington said briefly. Then he strode away.

It was time for him to do some damage to the Loman’s. He thought about what he would do first and then decided to wait until he could assess their physical conditions. Tarlington did not want to murder them before he had gotten every single ounce of information out of them.

If there happened to be any females in there, well he would let his men make use of them. They had after all been working hard to prepare special rooms for future occupants. He smiled as he remembered the last deal that he had cut with Erasmus Raymond Loman Jr.

He was not half the man that he father was. Tarlington had no doubt that all the others were aware of that fact as well. Now it was off planet he had to go. He would no doubt be glad to return back to Matania soon.

Erasmus glanced into the room and saw Reginald slumped against the bedroom wall. He thought he had heard his brother speaking earlier. “So how are you enjoying your room?” Erasmus suspected that Reginald did not know what was happening in a different chamber elsewhere. Reginald had been pumped full of drugs to keep him woozy. However they seemed to be wearing off him already.

“Why the hell do you care, Erasmus?” Reginald asked, his eyes closed. He was still leaning against a wall and was watching Erasmus through his eyelids.

“Oh, I just figured that you would like to know that Ruiz and Raymond are enjoying Raquela right now.” Erasmus paused and then added for good measure. “She was not a virginal sweetheart. She has been enjoying them ever since they found her in the brushes all tied up.” He smiled mirthlessly. Reginald did not react at all and ignored him.

As Raquela was chained to a wall, she writhed and twisted as she felt a man tonguing her cleft. She clenched her teeth and refused to show that she was enjoying their attentions. There was laughter from Erasmus, Gregory, Raymond and Ruiz who were watching her. It would be fun to toy with Reginald’s woman. It surprised them that he had chosen her. She was not the beauty that the others were.

“So pretty girl. What did you do for Reginald, hmmm?” Erasmus asked his eyes were gleaming coldly as he eyed the girl. He was more than ready to ram into her and his intent showed.

“Nothing.” She spat at him. “All I ever did was give him his meals.” Her sneer made them pause and look at each other speculatively.

CORRUPTION UNCONTROLLED

“Why is it then that he seemed so protective of you?” Gregory asked, as he stood off to one side. He was wary of being kicked in the testicles by her.

“I have no idea.” Her lips curled in scorn. Her ears detected the sound of footsteps, and a low argument in the background. She kept her eyes on the men in front of her. So far the dreaded one, the executioner had not shown up yet

“Erasmus! Raymond! Ruiz!” It was a different voice.

“What?” Erasmus turned around to see who had summoned his brothers and not him. It was one of the other girls.

“Your mother said that there are intruders in the pastures. They are setting the hay and bales afire.”

There were vile, angry, nasty curses from all of the men. They ran out without a thought to their captive who rattled her chains vainly. The speaker, who was only a young child, stared at her in fright and wariness and then ran off when there were other shouts of anger and fury.

Scowling Raquela glared after her. So much for perhaps using her to get out of this hellhole, she sighed and wondered what else was going to happen. A rasping noise caught her attention.

A woman clad all in black entered the chamber. Her face was masked and her hair was covered. She unlocked the chains and massaged the woman’s arms. “You are Raquela?” The voice spoke in whispers.

“Yes.”

“My son wishes you out of this place. So out you are going.” The woman informed her. “Do not try to contact him until four months from now, do you understand me?”

Raquela nodded, her eyes wide with fright. “Yes.”

“Did they touch you in anyway?” The question was fierce in some way that the girl could not comprehend.

“No, though they wanted to. The oldest one would not let them. He wanted to have me first.”

“Good that they did not take you.” The woman spoke calmly as she gave the girl clothes to put on. They fit her well, but not enough to be uncomfortable. “Now I take you out of this hellhole.” The woman led her out, though there were shouts elsewhere.

There were even some screams. Raquela was frightened. She wanted her man, Reginald, and right then. He was the only stable presence there for her. She did not care that he thought he was too old for her. She was horrified at her own thoughts and shook them off.

Reginald was no longer her concern, as she knew that sooner or later, he would be left alone for Tarlington to get his hands on. He was the past. Raquela had to concentrate on the future that included getting out of this blasted state. She wanted to live somewhere that was civilized and where she could lose herself and get a new life going.

Erasmus was determined to not let others get away. With that in mind, he hollered. "Turn on the flood lights!"

There was a flurry of movement as men ran to obey his orders. The huge lights were rarely turned on because of the way that their location was spotlighted for other possible enemies, but Erasmus did not care.

Suddenly a bright light spotlighted them.

"Run!" The woman screeched shoving her in a particular direction away from the light.

Shuddering in shock and fear, Raquela took to her heels disappearing into the night.

When Erasmus saw familiar figures fleeing, his vision turned red. He was not going to let this night be a repeat of what happened nineteen years ago. His mother should have learned from past mistakes. Evidently, she had been contacted by someone who had more money than his father. Erasmus smiled grimly. She was not going to get away again this night.

"Oh no you don't bitch. You are not going anywhere!" A yell rang out.

Mirabella flashed a lightning glare and then used a rude gesture that was as old as time to let Erasmus know exactly what she thought of him. However, she had not counted on the other sons finding the passageways.

"Hello, mother." Raymond said with a cold smile. He pointed a gun to her head, and motioned for her to come with him. Then he had guards take her arms, while he reversed the gun and bashed her over the head and face with it. She was dragged off, barely conscious.

In that instant all her buried rage and hate swarmed forth and she broke free of the guards' hold. Then she shifted into a light gray furred wolf. She went for their necks and tore them out. A shot rang out and she collapsed. It had been a silver bullet.

Ruiz ran up and stared at the wolf. "Who was it?"

"Mother." Raymond said, and gestured to the guards who were unmistakably dead. "Take her to the containment center. The bullet needs to be removed so that she won't die."

Ruiz frowned and glared at the feral creature. "Why should I?"

Erasmus showed up at that moment. "Just do it, you dimwit. She is our mother

CORRUPTION UNCONTROLLED

even though she became one of those.” He sneered and spat on the fur. Scowling the brothers picked up the bleeding wolf.

“She will have company. I threw Gregory in there for safekeeping.” Erasmus shrugged when they looked at him. “He has become a liability.”

Ruiz rolled his eyes. Raymond just shook his head.

“I have to go back out and man the different posts.” Erasmus left, as his brothers did. Erasmus went to the top of the wall.

At his orders, more spotlights were turned on in a desperate attempt to prevent more escapees from getting to the underground tunnels. Seconds later, the spotlights were turned off by the operators who were having difficulties of their own.

“Dammit we’re being shot at!” Erasmus swore angrily. “Get down behind the containment blocks.” The men did what they were told, and were wondering what had possessed them to join this place anyway.

Experienced snipers were crouched in their positions. The fields had been burned bare by earlier fires. The orchards had been left alone. They still gave good cover to others who would rain protective fire later on in the week. That particular band of Lycans had gone ahead of schedule and begun firing on the men who were in sight.

Kerr glanced around when he heard someone arrive. “What’s the verdict?”

“She is gone.” Came the report.

“Good.” A voice rumbled. There were mutters of agreement.

As Kerr watched seven black clad men filtered into the building and headed straight for cells of the new girls. They knew there were more cells, but not all of them were as easily located as these ones. The new girls though would be more likely to want to leave.

“Which ones went in?” Kerr asked Serenity.

She gave him a dark glance. “Barnes, Forest, Nova, Tiesel, Gratz, Faust, and Arid.”

Kerr just looked at her. “Keep up the attitude and you won’t have to worry about the enemy killing you. One of the others will instead.” She shut up.

Scanning the area, Kerr’s eyes lit up and then he called out sharply. “Kraal! Lear!”

The Lycans had heard the sounds of a vehicle arriving and familiar faces began to melt into the crowd.

“We are on it.” They had heard gunfire and the sound of running footsteps.

A red wolf burst through the flaming haystacks and skidded to a halt in front of Kerr and the others. Seconds later, Sykes reformed into his human guise.

Kerr stared at him in shock. "Deja!"

There was another voice and gunfire rattled out of brush and aimed in the general direction of the bordello.

Sykes shrugged. "Others will be arriving soon." He said quietly. "More questions than answers have been raised." He added when Kerr would have shrugged him off.

Sighing Kerr gestured around. "We cannot talk about that right now."

Sykes nodded and frowned at the lower level cells.

"Pity that we must burn the place down." A soft voice murmured.

Sykes turned around and saw Serenity; her eyes were fixed on the building.

Kerr heard her comment and turned to look at the quiet men and women. He didn't have to say anything though.

A bizarre looking man appeared, and he was the most outrageous of the Lycans, not having been country bred. He stared at the others and then at the big beautiful but clearly obscene building before them. "Would you rather that young women were kidnapped as they turn sixteen and seventeen, and kept in training cells for one-two years before being inducted into high end prostitution?" That question reminded them what was at stake.

"Trust you to think of that, Gideon." Someone else muttered.

The blue haired man just laughed lightly. "They may call me Gideon, but I ain't a freakin' archangel." His sally earned snorts in response.

Kerr just rolled his eyes at their comments. As he lifted his night goggles up, he saw what was another signal. "The rest of you go now!" The order rang out, just as hay bales and other assorted neat stacks were set on fire. There were angry shouts from other directions and laughter rang out through the air. There were more actions taken and then someone said.

"Where are the others?" Kerr asked, seeing the original seven come back with empty hands.

They glanced at each other before the leader said. "Got caught again."

She ran a hand through her hair as she spoke. "They were waiting for us." She said briefly. "Someone managed to get a hold of our raid plans."

Kerr closed his eyes. "Well you got back out, Janis."

She smiled coldly. "It was fun." Janis chuckled her eyes glinting with hostility when she stared at the buildings. "Those idiot brothers of mine did not even see me." Her tone was cheerful, and then her smile faded. "They nailed mother though." Her fists clenched.

Then she sighed. "Ah well. Soon they will gain the retribution that they deserve."

CORRUPTION UNCONTROLLED

Her smile was harder this time. She turned away and went to a different location.

Kerr stared after the woman his eyebrows rose slightly. Then he shook his head. Questions could be asked later.

“Dammit!” Frustrated silence settled on the grounds. Then more figures entered. One with blond hair and an understanding of explosives, Josiah noticed how upset the others were and spoke clearly.

“That does not mean that we cannot keep them from being freed again.” A quiet voice spoke with amusement.

“Ash!”

“Well hell it’s about time!”

“Where is the backup?”

“Coming.” Ash replied.

“Who is coming specifically?” A lean white haired male was crouched on a wall, scanning the place that was now frenetically busy.

“Specifically, I do not know.” The voice replied. “Lobo was mentioned.”

Dead silence.

“Why the hell were we sent out first then?” Came an exasperated voice.

“To create a distraction obviously.” A dark husky voice informed them. “Now the fun begins.”

There were roars of laughter as a black haired man strode up with twelve others. They had come on foot the last ten miles.

“Sorry we were late, there were some unavoidable delays.” Lobo said huskily.

“Yeah right. How many women were chasing you this time?” A voice taunted good-naturedly.

“One but she gave me the shivers.” His voice was smooth as velvet and rasped over listener’s ears giving them goose bumps. The man was charismatic and there was no doubt that he knew what he was doing. He glanced at the man giving orders and his eyebrows rose in acknowledgement.

“Time to drive the horses away for a little fun.” The man said, and he whistled a piercing three-note command. Then he vanished from sight. There was a low growling, some snarling and then wolves howled and bayed as they streaked toward the barns.

Reginald ran from the room that he was supposed to be captive in, but the others had all since scattered. He was glad and knew that his own wounds were fully healed. He wasn’t dressed in more than a pair of tight shorts and was running easily through the halls.

The shorts were fashioned deliberately to look like they were all that he was wearing. In actuality he was wearing a full suit of tight fitting flesh colored leather. He had a gun in one hand and a knife in the other. As soon as he joined the others outside, there was another short cheer.

“Well glad that you are still among the living Reggie.” Ash said, shifting to half human form. He pointed to a different section. “Your lady is over there. I would watch your back though.” Then he streaked back into the fray.

His gaze searching around, Reginald spotted Raquela running toward freedom. Then he shouted her name. “Raquela!”

She stopped running, and floundered as she fell to the ground. Gentle affectionate hands helped her to her feet.

“You are all right?” His eyes searching hers with worry. Despite obvious hints of something not right, Reginald felt something for the woman who was shivering in his arms. “You need to get the hell out of Dodge.”

“I know that, but I didn’t think I would ever get to see you again.” Raquela had hoped she wouldn’t either. Now she almost felt guilty, almost.

“You know where to go?” He asked her.

“Yes.” Raquela held him close to her body, not caring about anything else for the moment. “Your mother told me not to see you. She said that I should not contact you for at least four months.”

At her words, Reginald drew back hastily. “She is right.” She snapped his attention back to the present and he waved over some other people, a woman and a man. There were others standing around who were keeping careful watch around the area. “Get her out of here, and out of the state.”

Raquela’s last view of him was a lean man standing alone. Light brown hair was blowing loosely around his face. His dark blue eyes were watching her go with anguish and she hoped love. His dark skinned features were taut with tiredness and a lack of proper sleep. She remembered his body it had been hard beneath the form-fitting outfit that he wore.

Lobo came up behind him and he sighed. He let the younger man brood and then cleared his throat, loudly, in order to be heard above the chaos. “Time to get back to work.”

A voice said behind him. “Right.” Reginald said, turning around. He faced the others without a word and inclined his head. They left and then he swung onto a horse. He kicked it without waiting for the others and rode directly for the barns.

As soon as the howling was heard, Reginald’s head twisted and he chortled. “Right

CORRUPTION UNCONTROLLED

on time.” Then he let out a sound that was unearthly and chilling to those around him.

The barn doors were thrust open as he galloped toward it. There were excited shouts as the horses whinnied and kicked their stalls. Horses streamed out of the fifteen barns and were driven by wolves that came out at them from shadows.

“What the hell was that?” Erasmus roared, when he heard the howling and screaming.

“Sounds like wolves, sir.” One of the men finally said.

“Get guns and put silver bullets in them.” Erasmus ordered. “Get rid of those menaces and round up what stock is left.” His eyes snapped with brutal resolve when no one responded. “Do it now!” He shouted when the others would have refused.

There was gunfire that rattled the windows and forced them to the floors. Nothing else was said, though more and more gunshots cracked the windows. Erasmus tried the phones. The lines were dead. He remembered the electrical thunderstorm that had passed over the mountainside and cursed.

There was distant thunder as another storm approached and lightning began to flare as men and creatures could be spotted once in a brief moment. Erasmus’ men chose that moment to run outside gunfire announcing their exit from the house.

Lobo was watching the action, but his heart was not in on it. He glanced around and saw Kerr and others watching him just as intently.

Castillo approached through the smoke and waved to Lobo. “Go home to your woman. We will not be burning down the bordello this night.” He hollered. “We will provide you enough cover to get back to the plane.”

Lobo nodded and waved back his thanks. The other Lycans elbowed each other and laughed. Lobo was looking around the different faces and then he found the one person who he had not been expecting to ever see. “Arid.” Surprise colored his voice as he stopped short.

Arid spun around, staring at the darkly charismatic stranger. “Lobo.” She forced smile.

Lobo stared at her for a moment and then shook his head. “I hope we can talk another time.” He left without another word.

“Lobo, we’re over here.” Sykes said, no longer a red wolf. He was at the plane was along with Josiah. They both looked as exhausted as Lobo felt.

“Where are you all headed?” Lobo asked them.

“To Wako. We definitely have to coordinate the rest of this attack with them.” Josiah said curtly. “Now let’s go. I miss my comfortable bed. I’m getting too damn old for

this.” He was limping and cradling an arm.

Sykes just shook his head when Lobo would have asked him more questions. The three men took off with another seven Lycans. The only thing they had in common was that they were tired and wounded. Lobo glanced downward wondering how Reginald was handling the active fighting.

“He is going to survive, Lobo.” Josiah said quietly. “Why don’t you focus on trying to keep Alessandra from separating your head from the rest of your body after this latest brouhaha.”

Lobo rolled his eyes. “What did you think I was thinking about, amigo?” Mild sarcasm flavored his words.

CORRUPTION UNCONTROLLED

Chapter Twelve

Tarlington looked outside of his shuttle from the rather dirty window. He wiped his fingers in a fastidious fashion after touching the glass, grimacing at the feel of dirt and grit. Tarlington sighed as he got up from his seat. Thankfully the shuttle had never had to stop for gas.

For once the pilots had managed to ensure that both of the tanks had been filled as well as three secondary tanks. As he gathered his bags, he noticed that there were some men who were watching the shuttle with interested eyes. However all but one of them dispersed from the small gathering, evidently they had been waiting to meet others.

Tarlington permitted a small smile to grace his mouth. He had paid the pilot to distribute all his other passengers elsewhere. He had not wanted to share the shuttle with foul smelling peons.

Tarlington glanced at the man who was still standing there.

“Tarlington?” The man asked.

“Yes.” He said, studying the man warily.

“Chantry sent me to meet you.” The man said coldly.

Tarlington stared at him closely. The man had blue hair? Tarlington frowned at him. “How do I know you are the one?” Tarlington did not remember any mention of a blue haired man being sent to meet him anywhere.

Gideon smiled faintly. “Perhaps because he had no time to let you know ahead of time.” He replied suavely. “I believe that you are trying to track down a man by the name of Reginald and bring him to heel?” Gideon asked. “I am a bounty hunter of sorts.” Gideon remembered all the information that Raquela had given him while he had been fucking her brains out the night before. He would have to pay her another visit.

Tarlington just watched him suspiciously. “I think not sir. Good day.” He would have walked away when the man spoke again.

“Perhaps you do not know that the woman, Raquela, has been put away.” Gideon said softly. “You could say that she was captured due to recklessness and stupidity.”

Tarlington merely gave him a dubious stare. “What is your name?” There was

something about him that niggled at Tarlington's memories.

Gideon chuckled lightly. "Vadim." He said amicably enough. "Chrysler Vadim." It was close enough to the truth that Tarlington would have a hard time finding what his true identity was. Hell he had concealed it well enough that only Lobo and Castillo knew his real name was. Neither male were likely to announce it to the world anytime soon.

Tarlington stared at Gideon with a skeptical expression. "Tell me why you wish to meet with me?" He was thinking that he had better fax a description of this Chrysler Vadim fellow to Chantry. His spy would be able to get the true facts soon enough.

"I think we would do better in more comfortable surroundings." Gideon said mildly. "It is rather bright out here and perhaps too cool for you?" He had noticed that the man's hands were slowly reddening from exposure to the elements.

Tarlington glanced down at his hands in surprise and found that he had difficulty flexing them. "Yes." He said and then glanced around. "Where is the hotel Altania?"

Gideon did not even blink. "It is not here. I am afraid. You will need to go to the other end of the city." He said briefly. "Fortunately, this city is not all that big. So you will only have to drive twelve miles in order to reach it."

Gideon hoped that everything he was saying was transmitting properly. Tarlington was clearly suspicious of what he was up to.

"If you seriously think I am going to believe you, young man, you are mistaken." Tarlington told him. "I already made sure to get directions." He eyed the blue-haired freak with disdain. "I will not need your help." Then he walked away without another word.

Gideon watched him leave and then shrugged. It had been worth a shot. He grinned fingering his blue hair and then strode away without another word.

Tarlington faxed his impressions of the young man and other ideas to Chantry who had been rather silent of late.

Chantry got the fax and he scanned it without a word. A smile quirked his lips when he saw that Tarlington had indeed run into Gideon. He chuckled as he remembered his first meet up with the blue haired man. It was natural color to, unless he was wearing a wig. He tapped in his response, along with the suggestion that he try to find Chrysler Vadim and use his contacts to set up a trap for Reginald.

There was a phone ringing and Chantry picked it up, as he continued to write up his report. "Chantry."

Tarlington raised his eyebrows in surprise. He no longer had that rude attitude from before. "I see that this time away has been good for you."

"It has indeed." Chantry replied shortly. Then he finished his last response and sent

CORRUPTION UNCONTROLLED

it out to Tarlington. At least he would have both a written and vocal report now. Chantry thought acidly.

Tarlington read the report and cocked an eyebrow as he thought about what he should say. "So you do recommend him then?" He was surprised that Chantry had the report ready.

"Oh yes. I was going to have it ready for you, but since I was not informed of when you would be arriving, I had to take a guess." Chantry said mildly. "Did you have to take out the latest aide?" There was no amusement in his voice now.

"Ah, the aide." Tarlington said thoughtfully, he had already forgotten about him. "He was being an incompetent fool."

"Do you want to set up a meeting, Tarlington?" Chantry asked.

"No I want to set up a trap to get Reginald into my grasp. This has dragged out for far too long already. I plan to take advantage of that last raid that you say is imminent." Tarlington paused. "I will expect you back at Matania within two days after the raid's ending." He said pleasantly. "Work must go on. I am assuming that you will be well rested from your endeavors."

Chantry scowled at the receiver, but his tone was neutrally polite. "Aye, I will." He would not be for long. He was now sure where he belonged but it wasn't in that high-risk, high-security hellhole that was Matania.

"Have a good evening then Chantry." Tarlington said genially. "I will speak to you tomorrow to find out what arrangements you have made concerning the trap."

"Right, sir." Chantry said politely. Not likely. He thought with disgust. If anything, he would try to trap Tarlington in such a way that he would never escape and would also die as well.

Chantry rubbed his forehead and then cursed beneath his breath. Now he had to inform Lobo. It was hell being caught in the middle. At least he knew what side he was on. He still had to gauge Raquela's loyalty towards Tarlington. How could he do that without his own neck being cut in the process? Chantry was not going to kill his shot at keeping his skin intact if there was a possibility that he could come out of this entire mess alive.

Chantry looked out the window and smiled when he saw someone standing off to one side. He had a hood over his head, and his face was half hidden. Chantry caught sight of a blue strand of hair and he watched the hands.

Gideon stood quietly leaning against a wall. He watched the people go walking up and down streets. Waiting for a good moment, he flashed a small signet ring at a window, twice, and then crossed to the other side.

Chantry frowned and hurried away from the window and walked down the stairs. Gideon looked at him his face expressionless.

“Well?” Chantry asked.

“He hasn’t contacted me.” Gideon said. “At least not yet. Soon he should find the little note with my number written on it.” He looked searchingly at Chantry. “Does Reginald have a death wish?” Gideon asked him after a moment.

Chantry shrugged. “I have no idea. I was just dragged into this by Tarlington being a complete ass.” He said with exasperation. “I had the other place bugged to hell and back. Then Lobo caught me.” Chantry chuckled at Gideon’s expression. “Yeah, even I can be caught at awkward moments.” He shrugged. “I had only been on the land for about three maybe four days.”

Gideon shrugged. “I wouldn’t know, never having been down there.” He admitted after a moment. “Nor do I care to, now that I’ve seen what they’ve done to Reginald more than a few times.”

Chantry looked at him soberly. “Tarlington will do worse.” He said flatly. “He takes Lycans and other supernatural folks and experiments on them.”

Gideon flinched. “Guess we need to take him down then, won’t we?” He considered Chantry’s words meditatively.

“Yes. Though solving the other problem of the Lomans needs to be done as well.” Chantry looked down, and missed seeing the pained expression on the blue haired man’s face.

“Right.” Gideon said dryly. “I do not know about you, but I have to get back to Judanya.”

Chantry nodded, his expression distracted. “I have to come up with some sort of bull shit plan that actually looks viable for Tarlington tomorrow.” He said quietly. “I do not have as much information as I could use.” His face chilled as he thought about what Tarlington wanted this time.

“What is he after now, besides Reginald?” Gideon noticed that Chantry was not too happy.

“Kids.” Chantry kicked at a small rock that he had spotted. “Though they would be a stopgap measure till Reginald is brought in.” His face was drawn and ill. “I don’t like the idea at all.”

“Neither do I.” Gideon’s face softened. “You really are stuck between a hard place and the devil?”

“Yeah. Not that it’ll matter.” Chantry said. “Didn’t have much choice after I found

CORRUPTION UNCONTROLLED

out just who my father is.” He shrugged at Gideon’s curious expression. “Not something I want to chat about.”

“Right.” Gideon murmured. He tossed Chantry a roll of papers. “Here, put something together with those.” Gideon said mildly. “I need to go seduce that little whippersnapper, Raquela, so that she’ll become chatty again.”

Chantry caught the papers and debated on asking. Then he shook his head. “Don’t want to know.”

“Good because I do not indulge in kissing and telling.” Gideon said cheerfully and sauntered away.

Chantry laughed as he watched Gideon leave. Smart-ass, he thought with a grin.

Gideon waited till he was out of the way of curious eyes and then he shifted into the form of a long extinct blue jay. He took off from a ledge and flew down the various drafts that carried him swiftly to the desert lands of Wako Springs. When Gideon landed, he managed to do so inside a barn. He found a spare set of clothes that he always left there and dressed quickly.

With a muttered curse, Gideon remembered at the last minute to do something about his hair. He had to tone down its odd color. After doing a bit of searching, Gideon found a small bottle of blackener and sniffed at it. His nose wrinkled, but he shrugged. If he lost hair after this, well he would know why.

Gideon brushed a small amount of it into his hair and it was now a black color, rather than dark blue. He checked his appearance. He had missed some spots and figured that if questioned he would just make a comment about splashing blue paint on his head. Then he placed the used bottle back in its place. Gideon would put in a second full bottle with a written note of apology when he came back later.

Satisfied with his appearance and somewhat disgusted by the fact that he had had to improvise at all, Gideon walked around the stable and strolled to a diner where he was able to sit and watch the other people of Wako Springs.

Kearney stumbled out of the small shed that he slept in. He had been kicked out of most places recently. The shed was all that he was able to find for sleep. Yawning, he splashed his face with water and then with a set of clean clothes, he headed to a nearby hotel where he was allowed to shower and change clothes. He dumped his dirty ones into a container that would go for washing. Then he strolled lazily into the diner where Gideon was sitting.

“Hey Kearney!” Max said with a speculative gleam in his eye. “You’re going to go try for Miss Morales again.”

Kearney walked past him. "Will think about it later." Kearney replied. "Too early for me to be thinking at all." It was indeed only an hour or so after dawn.

Gideon listened to the other taunts that the man had to put up with and he hid a smile behind a cup of coffee. This one, he thought, would do. The other one had been watching him ever since he had gone into the diner. Gideon figured that he would have to depart sooner or later, though he had only just begun on his own meal.

Max watched the strange young man who was clearly enjoying his meal. He could have sworn that the kid had blue hair, but he shrugged. Probably had paint dumped on him by some of the foolish pranksters around this morning, he figured he would stroll over and ask.

Kearney tried to decide where he wanted to sit and when Max waved him over, finally, though reluctantly joined him there.

"Got a good appetite there." Max said scrutinizing him carefully.

Kearney eyed him mildly. "Always do, Max." He said dryly. "Not that I can't ease off, but why should I?"

Max chuckled. "Still haven't had many chances to develop a gut, huh?" He sighed. "When you gonna find a woman to take off the edge, Kearney? Thought you had a good line on one?"

Kearney shrugged, his expression sullen. "It fell through thanks to those damn demon devils."

Max rolled his eyes. "Demon devils?" He sounded amused. "Guess those raiders must be really pissing you off." Max speculated after a moment of silence passed.

"Wouldn't be so bad if I could make sure that those damn Loman's would actually keep a promise." Kearney said. "They had told me that I could have one of the girls from that ranch of theirs but now they are making excuses and crap." He scowled. "I figure that something must have happened or else they got a better offer for the little widget." Kearney's leer accompanying his comments was coarsely voiced.

"Which girl?" Max asked. He could always use his clout in the police department to pull records.

Kearney shrugged. "Dunno, started with an R, or something. Quela." He looked at Max. "Never heard the full name, but that much I do remember."

Gideon nearly laughed, but managed to keep a straight face. Instead he finished his meal and put down change, after finishing his coffee.

The waitress walked over and smiled at him. "Need a refill?"

"No, but thank the chef for me, it was one of the best meals I've had in years."

CORRUPTION UNCONTROLLED

Gideon said with a straight face, when the waitress gave him a funny look. She caught the twinkle in his eye, and knew that he had actually dumped most of it.

The woman laughed heartily. "Tell me the truth now, what was the best part of the meal?" She coaxed.

"The coffee." Gideon grinned at her and then departed from the diner.

Kearney glanced over at the young man and then did a double take. "Who the hell is that?" He asked Max in a low voice.

Max shrugged. "Just walked in here outta the clear blue sky." He replied sarcastically. "A stranger." He clarified when Kearney looked at him foggily.

Kearney rolled his eyes. "Cute. I think I will talk to him for a bit. Eat the rest of this if you don't mind." With those words, Kearney was up and out of the diner before Max could protest.

Max just grinned. He had heard the byplay between his longtime woman and the stranger.

Ramon watched the stranger who was aimlessly walking around. He saw the blue, and then the ill applied blacking and thought of the blue jay that he had spotted earlier. Ramon decided that he should have a talk with the young man before anyone else realized that the black stuff was the paint, not the blue sheen that gleamed so vividly.

Bored, Gideon strolled around the square studying the window shops of stores that were still closed that morning, and then sat in the shade. A shadow fell on him. He looked up.

It was a complete stranger who stood there but he did not seem all that odd to Gideon. "Good morning, sir." Gideon said to him, rising to his feet politely.

Ramon eyed him carefully. "Respectful, and yet willing to try and disguise beautiful blue hair to avoid looking unusual." He said softly. "I have to wonder why a blue jay shifting man would want to do that."

Gideon eyed him warily. "I guess that was a sort of stupid way to try and change my hair color. I was going to replace the bottle of blackening."

Ramon just shook his head. "Come with me so that I can do something about that rough job."

Curious, Gideon rose to his feet and followed him.

Ramon took him to the hair salon and washed the blackening out. Then he carefully applied something to the glistening strands of now blackish blue hair that was extremely dark. "Dark blue, bright blue, gray and white hair. I think I can change that into something a bit more presentable." Ramon murmured to himself.

“Just as long as it is not permanent.” Gideon said calmly.

Ramon chuckled. “Oh no, I would not do that. I was just talking out loud.” He stopped fiddling around with the hair and washed it again. Then he toweled it dry and nodded toward the mirror that was perched on Gideon’s left. Gideon had been watching his movements through it without comment.

“Take a look.” Ramon suggested.

Gideon carefully scrutinized his appearance and gave Ramon a startled glance. “Dark gray now.” He said with a faint smile. “Gives me a much less odd appearance. Don’t need to put my hood up either.” That relieved Gideon.

Ramon shrugged. “Figured it was the least that I could do to keep the blackening from being used up.”

Gideon’s cheeks flushed. “As soon as the grain store opens.”

Ramon shook his head. “Just tap on the tack door in the stable. It is where I sleep.” He made a shooing noise at him. “Now get going and accomplish whatever mischief that you are about.”

Gideon laughed and then walked out. He inhaled the air and released it to get rid of the scent of chemicals that had filled his nostrils.

“Hey you with the gray hair!” Kearney called, hurrying after Gideon. He had not wanted to go into the hair salon with Ramon hanging around.

Gideon turned around to look at him. “Something I can do for you?” He shaded his eyes and looked at the man with a cautiously friendly expression.

“Yeah. You can tell me what you were sneaking around that stable for.” Kearney blustered.

“Oh get over yourself, Kearney.” Ramon said. “He was doing no such thing.” He scowled at them. “Now get going and finish whatever business you two have elsewhere. I don’t want anymore broken glass windows.” He shot a glare at Kearney who would have bristled right there and then but deflated at Ramon’s piercing stare.

“Yes, sir.” He said sulkily. He stared over at Gideon. “Let’s go.” Kearney did not attempt to grab the younger looking man. He had a wary gleam in his eye that suggested that he would run if he were handled roughly.

Gideon merely arched an eyebrow at Kearney. “Well?” He started walking again.

Kearney sighed as he matched the footsteps. “Was there any particular reason that you were in the diner?” Kearney asked. “Its nickname is poison.” He said it dryly. “Mainly because no one is gullible enough to eat the food, just the coffee and whatever other drinks they serve.”

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Gideon shrugged. "I have a strong stomach." He said flatly. "I was looking for someone to liaison between me and someone else." Gideon said mildly. "Someone who doesn't mind making a quick buck or getting revenge against a particular family just for the hell of it." He watched Kearney's reaction to his words.

Kearney eyed him suspiciously. "Who or what do you want me to contact mister?" He didn't care about money at this point. Kearney knew he was living on borrowed time anyway; the certainty was deep within his bones.

Gideon shrugged. "Walk with me for a bit and we can talk."

Kearney gave him a funny stare. "All right."

"Here is what I need you to do." Gideon laid out the proposal and Kearney was dubious. What Kearney didn't know, that Gideon did was that the blue jay had a trace on him that was recording everything that they were saying.

Jason got the entire conversation on tape and he gave Gideon a signal when he was done. He watched the two men and was only grateful that the Lycan avian had been willing to leave his high altitude roost. Gideon glanced upward and one eye winked before he switched his attention back to the other man.

Kearney yawned. "So that is all that I have to do huh?" It was what he normally would do anyway.

"Yup." Gideon said calmly. "Here is the number to call the man."

Kearney eyed the stranger. "You going to be here for very long?" He hoped not. Any more meetings with this bozo and he would become the town laugh.

"Nope, one time appearance." Not true, but Gideon had other guises that he could use. He was in no mood to put up with this piece of slime for longer than he had to.

"All right, get outta here." Kearney glanced around and his eyes became speculative. "I have things I need to get done."

Gideon glanced to where Kearney was looking and nearly swore. So it was true that she was stationed there. Damn, he had to get out of there fast. When Kearney had left the area, Gideon bent his steps out of that area fast, but was stopped by Jason Gray who had caught his dilemma.

"Vadim, in here." Gray called.

Gideon walked toward him, though reluctantly.

Jason beckoned to him again and smiled slightly. "So the blue jay can fly out without being caught." He said waving a hand to the stable.

Gideon blinked and then grinned at him in relief. "Thank you, Officer Gray." He said with a smile.

“It’s not a problem. I appreciate you putting up with all these annoying delays.” Jason replied.

Gideon shrugged. “Anything to help the cause, sir.”

Alessandra woke up with a bad headache and in a worse mood. It was dawn and as usual Lobo was nowhere to be found. She cursed lividly and then sighed. She should have been used to his disappearing acts by now, but it still hurt. Slipping out of bed, Alessandra decided to get ready for the day. As she walked toward the precinct she flinched when a recognizable voice called to her.

Kearney noticed that the lovely lady was not hanging around Lobo today. Maybe he could cozy up to her and try to shake a bit more information than she was telling about the investigation. With that thought, he hurried over to her. “Hey! Miss Morales, would you like to go for a drink later?”

Kearney, the obnoxious officer had managed to catch up her. One of his hands brushed across her hips.

She looked at him with a disinterested gaze. “No. Keep your hands off me, Kearney or else I will remove them.” She paused. “Permanently.”

Kearney glared after her. He swore that he would find her alone and when he did, she would pay for her insults to him. Kearney was angry as he headed toward the precinct that she had completely turned away from. He barged into Gray’s office and snarled.

“I want to be in on the next little outing that they plan on conducting.” He was furious.

Gray just looked at him. “On whose authority?” Gray asked him politely. “If you cannot give me a good reason, you are not in, got that?” He snapped, standing up and pushing him out of the office.

Humiliated, Kearney ignored the laughter of the other officers. He called a number that he had been given a few days ago. “Hello, Tarlington?”

“Yeah, I am at a public phone, didn’t want any others to overhear me.” Kearney listened intently and there was a shrug in his voice as he repeated what Gray had told him. “Yeah, I can do that.”

“What do I want out of it?” Kearney was thoughtful as he considered possibilities. “I want some of those specially trained girlies.” He said calmly. “Also a passport off this mud ball of a planet and a security guard job.” His eyebrows lifted.

“As far as I am concerned, I am likely going to be out of a job after all this crap goes down.” He replied. “No, they are not letting me into the loop.” Kearney replied peevishly.

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He shrugged. "Neither of the two head investigators have made any headway, too many roadblocks." Kearney laughed coarsely in response to what was said. "See if I care about their asses?"

He asked mildly. "Sure I can whale him over the head. I will be able to get access to him as long as he isn't placed in some high security building other than Wako Springs." He listened intently and grinned to himself. "Well now, I cannot rightly tell you that, sorry." He shrugged his shoulders.

"No." He listened some more. "No can do. They are incommunicado there was a big stink last night about some kind of raid." Kearney did not smile. "I will try to find out but my contacts do not extend to the police department. They do not welcome human interference." He massaged his forehead. "They are Lycans, sir."

He heard an indrawn breath. "That is all that I know. The ones who are doing the raiding are renegades." He caught the disappointment in the other man's voice. "I can see what I can do, but I ain't making no commitments on any amount of success." He smiled slightly. "Right, I will get on it."

He listened and fiddled with loose change in his pocket. "You have a good day now sir." Whistling, Kearney hung up and strolled down to a diner where he ordered up a meal and coffee. He did not offer any information about his activities and no questions were asked.

Tarlington tapped his fingers against his desk. Interesting developments he mused to himself as he leaned back against the chair. He would be making a trip down to Wako Springs again after all it seemed. A small chilling smile crept across his face. Of course, none of the others would have to be able to recognize him, so he would go as someone else.

Shrugging his shoulders, Tarlington decided that Raquela would have to be dealt with permanently. She was such an utter disappointment as far as getting anything done. She had been turned into the queen of sluts it seemed. Ah well, he shrugged. She would be paid off and give the usual blessings.

With those last discouraging words to the jerk, Alessandra walked away. She was in search of a particular man who was proving to be rather elusive. Her eyes searched all of the different rooms connected to the hallway and then spotted a flash of red. It was Sykes. She glanced at him as he headed past her.

"He has already left for the night, Ms. Morales." He said politely. "It would be best if you left him be."

"Why is that?" She asked him.

He looked at her. "You are a complication that he does not need to be distracted

by.”

She blinked at him. Well that was blunt. Alessandra took in a deep breath. “So why don’t you introduce yourself to me?”

“Kelloran Sykes.” He said briefly, not pausing.

“How long have you known him?” She persisted.

He stopped walking and then he eyed her. “None of your business.” He told her flatly. “You will have to ask the others if you want to find out more.” Then Sykes walked away from her.

They were closing ranks in front of her very eyes. Interesting. Most of them seemed uneasy and distrustful around the man. However if they were questioned about him, they formed a protective barrier around her. She scowled and hurried out to her vehicle.

Alessandra shrugged. She would get her answers about him sooner or later. He was too interesting a man to be a loner. Alessandra wanted him for her own reasons. She nearly jumped a foot in the air when two arms wrapped around her waist.

Lobo smiled to himself. He had enjoyed doing that especially after all the other times when she had managed to nearly startle him in the past. “You are asking questions about me again, Alessandra Morales.”

A husky rasp of a voice had her stilling. She nearly fainted from fright. He kissed her neck, as one hand slid over her breasts. He felt the tips harden beneath his searching hands.

“You are an interesting man, Louis McKenyon.” She replied, staring at him. What she saw was mostly shadows and gleaming eyes and teeth. Alessandra wondered if he had ever been compared to wolves before. She knew he was one but still it would not hurt to find out.

“Ask too many questions, Ms. Morales and you will likely find out more than you truly want to know.” His voice was cold, and then he turned away. Lobo needed her to follow him, and he was still tired from the drive back. He had managed to report everything to Gray.

No doubt some of the information would leak out by noon. At the moment though, he just wanted to lie down and take a nap somewhere. Particularly if he could have his luscious lady by his side and with that in mind, he did not care if he antagonized her into following him.

“Wait, please.” She said quietly.

He stopped, but said nothing.

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"I need to know why a young girl who was about ten disappeared twenty years ago." She said finally. "Her name was Mora Aless." His eyebrows rose slightly. "She disappeared from the Loman ranch and it is believed that she never left it."

Now that was wholly unexpected and very unpleasant to say the least. Lobo wondered why she had been sent out on that wild goose chase. Things were going to be tricky to say the least. "Why do you think this concerns me?" He was clearly in no mood to be pleasant.

"She was on that ranch out there, the Loman ranch, when she disappeared." Alessandra repeated. Her eyes narrowed when he merely regarded her patiently.

"You are going to have to tell me more, but not here." He said finally. "I know where we can meet, hopefully. I will not promise anything though."

"She was murdered." Alessandra said quietly. Her eyes burned with fury. "Her remains were found three months ago. Something or someone had buried her to keep the coyotes off."

He rubbed his forehead. "We cannot talk here. Too many possible eavesdroppers." Lobo said tersely. "Why are you so adamant to speak to me?" He growled softly, when she merely looked around with an arch expression. "If you believe that no one is listening right now, you are extremely naïve." There was no smile on his face.

Alessandra looked at him, her eyes narrowing. "Tell me where I can meet with you then." Her frustration was showing.

He pulled out a piece of paper and then drew a map. Then he wrote. "Here." He said. "Twenty minutes. You get there late, I will not be there." Lou McKenyon's face was expressionless as he spoke.

She put a hand on his shoulder.

He looked at her, his expression impatient and wary. "What?"

"Why are you being so uncooperative?" She asked him.

Lou just looked at her. "I have things to do, Ms. Morales and time is running out." He removed her hand from his shoulder and walked away from her. She watched him go, and he disappeared into the shadows.

Sighing she clicked her remote control and then was suddenly thrown to the ground by McKenyon. He dragged her away from the vehicle, just as there was an explosion.

"Care to tell me why someone would rig your vehicle to kill you, Ms. Morales?" He whispered into her ear. Filled with shock and fright, Alessandra shook her head mutely.

Lou sighed in disgust. He got up and pulled her to her feet. "Come on." He grumbled, and they ran from the parking lot.

B.L. Foxxe

After a moment, he picked her up into his arms and continued running. She had fainted, and he knew he had to get her to safety.

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Chapter Thirteen

Inside the small police quarters, the explosion shook up those who were still in their offices. Only Jason's sharp eyes caught movement. He knew that she had not been killed. It looked like there was something about the Morales woman that had scared some folks. He became thoughtful when he realized that Lobo must have suspected something was about to happen. The man seemed to have a sixth sense about people who were dangerous, not only to themselves, but to others as well. Jason sighed. He hoped that things would be smoothed out soon enough.

"Where am I?" Alessandra opened her eyes to find the man Lou seated on a chair. She realized she was on a bed, and that he had medical supplies.

"In my apartment." He muttered. "Be quiet." Lou warned her. She shut her mouth, her eyes watching his every move. Lou ignored her eyes as he tended to her wounds.

"Why did you help me?" She watched him warily. "I don't understand what is going on, McKenyon, what is happening this time?" Alessandra wasn't sure how to react to his remoteness. The entire situation was bothering her more than a little.

"Someone wants you dead." He replied coolly. "That means that you are an unexpected wild card." His eyes gleamed with anticipation of something about to happen.

"Is that all?" She was piqued by that response, felling insulted by his lack of feeling towards her and her charms.

Lou gave her a sardonic glance. "With all due respect, Ms. Morales." He said softly. "Right now, that is the only thing I want to concentrate on. Anything else can get us both killed." Lou finished cleaning her scrapes, bruises, and cuts. He wiped his hands off on a clean towel and inspected her face closely. His manner was impersonal as he did it.

"What if I think we could do more than just worry about the investigation?"

"You are not thinking with your head." He informed her bluntly. "Close your eyes." She did so, and he cleaned up the skin around her face. In doing so, he found three more scrapes, and a deep cut. He swore softly, and frowned at it. She had clenched her teeth at the sting of the antiseptic. "You are going to need stitches, or else get a nasty scar."

"I will take the scar. I hate being perfectly unflawed anyway." Alessandra muttered

angrily.

“Be quiet.” He snapped softly, his eyes flickering uneasily in the dim light.

“Kiss me.” She replied, testing his patience.

“You have a one track mind, Ms. Morales.” He was clearly amused by her tenacity. However he was not going to let it push him into doing something he knew he would regret.

“I have been nagged by that impulse since I set eyes on you.” She admitted finally. Alessandra was twisting a strand of hair around her finger as she watched him attentively.

“For three weeks?” He sounded skeptical. Lou was not impressed.

“Before then.” She said in exasperation.

His eyes met hers at last. “How?”

She felt a chill run down her back as she realized then how dangerous he could be. His very quietness could be intimidation.

“I was researching every man and woman who is involved in the investigation. I was authorized by Tavish Kintock.” Alessandra said when he would have gotten up.

“Who are you really?” There was no smile on his features. His features had altered and were saturnine, his eyes emotionless.

“That should not concern you right now.” Alessandra said calmly. She had said too much and now he was completely distrustful of her motives. Damn.

He rubbed his forehead. “You may need to check on your belongings, wherever you are staying at.” Lou told her, his eyes showing his reluctance to be around her any longer. “You are not safe here.” He said when she would have protested.

“You are no gentleman.” She told him, her eyes angry.

“You are a nuisance I cannot afford to have on my hands right now.” Lou told her.

“You are conducting your own investigation aren’t you?” Alessandra accused him.

He leaned over her, making her suck in her breath. “You talk too much and jump to ridiculous assumptions.” Lou McKenyon was radiating hostility and anger. There was something more that was hidden in his eyes. “Leave it alone Ms. Morales. There are times when too much knowledge, but not enough facts can get a person killed.” He spoke softly, his lips hovering over her mouth.

Her eyes widened at his words. Taking advantage of his position, she lifted her head and her lips connected with his. He would have pulled back but her arms wrapped around his neck. She pulled him down on her, and he made a frustrated sound.

His eyes flashed, the heat in them sizzling her nerve endings as he finally returned the kiss. It was devastating, but she would not give up the sensations for safety. Her legs

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twined with his, and then circled his waist.

He let his lower body grind into hers, though he knew it was a stupid thing to do. She gasped and then moaned as heat flowed through her body. He held her closer in his arms even as he tried to keep his mind on what needed to be done.

He groaned and pulled away. "You are dangerous to a man's self preservation." Lobo muttered. He was eyeing her warily. She merely sat up and then dropped back down as she was hit with several shocks of pain.

"What the hell happened to me?" Alessandra demanded, glaring at him.

"You are just now feeling the aftereffects of that explosion." He replied coldly. "I had to patch up several deep cuts where shards of metal and glass had entered your arms and legs." He cast a look at her face. "That one needs more delicate handling."

There was a pounding of footsteps onto his floor and a series of knocks. He listened as it was repeated twice. Lou walked to the door. It was Jason Gray. He let the man in.

Gray looked over at Alessandra Morales. "You have certainly set the cat among the pigeons, young woman." He said harshly, though there was relief beneath the harsh façade. "There is a leak in the investigation." Gray told him.

He glanced over at Alessandra with a sigh. "Both of you are going to need to get out of Wako Springs." Gray looked at McKenyon. "Let Reginald know the latest updates." He said briskly.

McKenyon inclined his head in response. "I will update my own investigation, and get it to you as soon as I can."

Alessandra looked at them. "Who is Reginald?"

"The Loman black sheep. Though they are going to reel him in sooner or later." Gray said impassively. "You will have to ask the man himself if you want more information." He cut off further questions from her.

Lou merely rolled his eyes. He left them alone while he gathered together what he would need for time in the bush. He did not truly care about what Alessandra would have to do.

"I will need to get to an airport." Alessandra said finally, noticing that Lobo was not talking, just doing what came naturally to him.

Gray rubbed his jaw but said nothing.

"I can drop her off to one that is not well known but can deliver anyone who can pay the fee so their whereabouts cannot be traced." McKenyon said without looking at Alessandra. Gray looked at him with raised eyebrows.

Lou shrugged. "I have connections." There was no need for more complicated explanations for the other man.

"Obviously." Gray commented wryly.

"I will try to contact you later." Lou said tersely. He was not happy about this detour that he would have to take.

"Right, see you around then." Gray said quietly. "It was good working with you, Ms. Morales." He smiled with genuine emotion.

"Thank you, Officer Gray." She said quietly, shaking his offered hand.

"Hopefully we will meet again under happier circumstances." Gray said quietly. His eyes strayed toward McKenyon who was standing near a window.

"Gray you had better get going now. We got unfriendly company gathering around."

"As usual." Gray muttered in disgust. "Who is it this time?"

"Looks like the Loman boys and some of their boys." Lou replied, folding his arms over his chest as he studied the problem.

"Don't worry about me, Lou McKenyon. Just worry about your own skin and Alessandra's." Jason told him.

"Like I could forget." Lou muttered, but an unwilling smile appeared on his face.

He heard her grouch. "I heard that!" She was watching though and caught the smile.

It made her shiver and understand why he was considered to be handsome by the other women. They had also said that he was literally a loner and had always worked alone. He had never given another name other than the single name. Nor would he take other names unless forced to.

She suspected that he would be taking one later on to complete this task. Alessandra was determined that she would be with him when that time came. It was past time that she was allowed back onto active field duty.

"You were supposed to." He said pleasantly, the smile disappearing as he turned back toward her. "We need to leave now."

"Fine with me." She said bluntly. "I have what I need; I can leave everything that was in the hotel." She had hated the clothes anyway. They reminded her of another past, something that had rubbed her raw.

McKenyon cast her an odd expression but he shrugged. "Fine with me." He picked up his bags. Alessandra followed him silently, not sure what he was up to.

Once they were outside of the apartment building, Lou led her to a vehicle that she

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had never seen before. She glanced at it in disbelief, but if the old rattletrap worked, she would deal with it.

“Get in.” Lou said. His attitude and appearance had been changing steadily within the last few minutes. She was not sure what to think, but she did what he told her to do. “In answer to some of your earlier questions—I am conducting my own investigation.” Lou said, he had scars on his face and tied back his hair with a kerchief. She eyed his hair; it was solid black, no gray or anything. Nothing matched with what she knew about him. “I am gaining information through someone who lives in the house itself.” He added.

“This Reginald?” She asked him.

“Yes.”

“I see.” Alessandra wondered what his explanation had to do with her current status.

“I will give you help out, Ms. Morales, but I would suggest that next time you find a way to stay out of trouble.” He informed her calmly. Then he started up the vehicle and it purred in a deep rumble. Her eyebrows rose when she realized that this thing had some horses in it.

“You should know better than to judge by appearances.” He said mildly. “Nothing is ever like it seems.”

“Why? It is so much fun.” She taunted him, sliding one hand up his thigh. At his other words, she arched an eyebrow at him. “I am going to assume that you are talking about yourself.” She ventured, noting that he had not shoved her hand away this time.

“Yes.” He said through clenched teeth. “Remove your hand, otherwise the jokers who are following us, won’t need to engineer an accident straight off a cliff.” She snapped her hand away. She did not look around and he continued driving. His eyes were constantly moving around as he drove swiftly and competently.

“How long have you been in this area?” She asked cautiously.

“Over twenty years.” He replied uneasily. “Why?” Lobo was definitely curious about her intentions.

She shrugged. “Just curious. You are driving like you know this area well. Especially with no lights on.”

He merely eased a glance at her. “None are left in here.” He told her bluntly. “Nor does it have identifiable plates.”

“Harder to trace it?”

“Yes.”

She watched him calmly. “You would not be planning to engineer something else

by any chance?" She asked with deceptive sweetness.

"Just shut up and get ready to jump out when I grab your hand." He told her. As soon as he pulled up to a steep angle, he grabbed her arm. "Now." Then he shoved his door open, and she jumped with him to the street. He reached in and put a brick on the accelerator and shoved the door shut. McKenyon rubbed his forehead. He wished he were alone right now.

Alessandra remained quiet, though from a quick glance, he was pretty sure that she was not happy. "What was the meaning of getting that vehicle only to make it go over the cliff-side?"

"Just remain on the ground." He was leaning over her again, and she grunted in disgust.

Alessandra grabbed his head and pulled it down to her own. She kissed him thoroughly and arched when one of his hands cupped her breast. It was an automatic reflex on his part, she thought, but did not matter now. His hips rolled against hers.

Lobo kissed her back and murmured softly. "I did not mean to be so obnoxious earlier, but I had to get you out of there." He nuzzled along her shoulder and nipped her shoulder.

Alessandra's eyes widened. "What do you mean?" She stopped when she heard the sound of another vehicle approaching at a dangerously fast speed.

Lobo winced as a vehicle zoomed past him, and they both heard laughter ringing into the air. The vehicle stopped a bit of a ways away. When Alessandra identified them, he could feel her shock and before she could speak he kissed her again, muffling her voice. She narrowed her eyes at him in response to that action. Voices could be heard slowly approaching where they were hiding.

Lobo listened to the footsteps and identified them as all four Loman brothers. How they had gotten back to the ranch so fast, he did not want to know. He just hoped that they would go back beneath whatever rock that they had crawled out from under. At least for another couple of hours, then they could go to hell with his blessing.

"They must have been too shocked from what happened earlier." One voice said.

She tensed. It was Erasmus Jr. She hated his guts. Lou put his other hand between her legs and kissed her when she would have gasped. She felt a welling of tension again and he muffled a groan with the kiss as one of her hands rubbed against his erection.

They stared at each other's eyes. Alessandra was puzzled by the fact that he was willing to go to such measures to keep her quiet. She was having a hard time stifling her instinctive moans and desire to nip him as he had her.

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“All right, there is no trace of them. Their bodies must have burnt in the vehicle during that explosion.” That was Gregory’s voice.

“Fine, let’s go.” That had to be one of the twins, Raymond or Ruiz. Neither of them had appealed to her. Though they had done their best to try and lure her into bed with both of them for an orgy. She had not been amused or interested.

“It is too bad. I wanted to get on her.” There was a fourth voice. That was Raymond.

Despite the circumstances, or perhaps because of them, Alessandra was having a hard time concentrating on what the men were talking about. Lobo had managed to distract her but good, though she did not mind this time. His hands were very knowledgeable as was his mouth.

He kept fencing with her tongue, even as he slipped it out and teased her ear with it, and traced patterns over her features. He was memorizing it by taste and touch. Unable to move because he had her pinned down, Alessandra gyrated her hips against his hands that were busy down below.

She grimaced slightly when she heard voices approaching again. Or were they leaving? Her mind was clouding up again and her body rippled in a climax. Lobo had managed to unfasten the buttons on her pants, then sent his fingers searching for her center. Her fingers loosed his buttons as well.

“Better luck next time. Besides she was trouble.” Erasmus said coarsely. “She was giving that bastard Kenyon the eye the entire time.” He shook his head in disgust.

Lobo watched them as they made their way back to the vehicle. Good thing they had not looked down or else they would have gotten an eyeful for sure. Just taken a shot at him just for the fun of it.

As he thought that, footsteps tramped past them, one had lingered a bit after the others. It had been Gregory, surprisingly enough. After some more cursory searching, the four men clambered back into their vehicle. Then they drove off without another word. Music and laughter belched loudly from the open windows.

Lobo rolled his eyes. He had no doubt that there were women in there to take off the edge of their quick and furious search that had given them zero results.

Once the threat of discovery had faded, Alessandra stared into Lobo’s eyes as he stared into hers. He swallowed, and then kissed her neck and shoulder. She shivered, and felt him thrust into her. She wrapped her legs tightly around his waist and he cursed softly. Lou could not stop himself from continuing his movements.

“Don’t stop.” She said her body was shivering convulsively.

"I cannot." His words were staggered. "You have pushed me far beyond the limits of my control."

She smiled, though she knew it was an empty victory unless she could find out his secrets. Her body arched into his as she felt herself climax, once, twice, and then a third time. She looked up at his face, and was shocked to see what looked like a wolf's muzzle superimposed over his face. Only the eyes, a gleaming black hue, could she make out?

He cried out suddenly, as his body plunged into hers. She pulled him down to her again and he buried his face against one of her breasts. Her body convulsed again when he found the nipple and licked it. He groaned again as his body thrust a last time, and he rolled to his back.

She found her body draped over his as a result. There was no wolfish cast to his face now. His eyes seemed to gleam ominously in the darkness however.

"Is this a dream?" She wondered.

"If it is, then it is an incredibly all too real one." He grunted and then let out a string of blistering oaths.

She glared at him. "Now what?" Alessandra asked in exasperation.

"I did not use protection." He said harshly.

"I did." Alessandra said bluntly. "I do not act completely like a fool, even around a man as desirable as you."

His eyes flickered for a moment and then he looked rueful. "Pardon my language. This has been a rough day for us both." He got to his feet, after having managed to slide out of her and get back into his jeans.

Her hands fumbled with her own clothing, and his hands took over for her. "That I can agree with, and it is not over yet."

"That is what you think." He countered softly. Then he whistled. There was the sound of hooves approaching through the brush. "I was unable to get a hold of Tilantos, so I am afraid that you will have to make do with Zeus and myself." He gestured to the horse. "Can you ride bareback?" Lobo asked her. "If you cannot, you will be getting your first experience tonight."

She looked at the magnificent stallion, and then at him. "Yes, I think I can handle that." Her eyes were speculative as she considered what they could probably do on a horse. However, that would be for another day since time was at a premium.

"Good." He said, and gave her a leg up. She mounted the horse with an expert ease that he admired. "Zeus is our transportation the rest of the way. Hang onto me." He rode away, and she was enjoying the ride.

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Alessandra had no intention of losing this man's embrace. She could barely tell when he was in the shadows during the day it was too easy to miss his presence being as dark as he was. Alessandra realized with a start that he was at home in the brush. Her eyes narrowed at the back of his head.

His hair was streaming behind him and over his shoulders. It was brushing against her shoulders now, but Alessandra had not been able to tell what length of it was and still couldn't. Now she thought it was roughly mid back, or even waist length. Alessandra wondered what else she would find out about him before the night was over. They were lovers, but not exactly chatty ones.

She hoped that he would eventually be able to talk to her about what he felt. Alessandra loved him and it was driving her crazy. He made her impatient with his gruffness. Alessandra was determined to shake his sense of superiority.

A smile creased his lips as he heard her striving to catch her racing thoughts. Alessandra Morales, he mused, would not be one to let a man force her to do anything. He realized.

Instinctively, Lobo knew that this would be the best time to talk, while they still had privacy. "Do you remember what I asked one night, I am not sure when." He brushed his lips lightly against her head.

Alessandra was surprised and she sorted through her thoughts. Finally she hesitantly nodded. "Yes I do."

"I know this is a bad time to ask, but will you be my mate?"

Alessandra's jaw gaped in shock and then she nodded, Lobo glanced down and saw the motion. His heart no longer felt like it was caught in a vise.

"Yes, I will be your mate." She was still surprised, but knew that he had something else on his mind, if he was asking her that question. "Do you love me?"

Lobo smiled at her. "I don't ask a woman to be my mate if I don't love her." He said mildly. "I have been in love with you since I first set eyes on you. I was just fighting what I was feeling." Lobo ignored the sensation that he'd forgotten something along the way. "I rarely talk about what I feel at any given time or show what I feel."

She laughed softly. "Yes, I suppose you were, but that did not last long." She was pleased and it showed. "Though you are an enigma when I least expect it."

"I would ask you something else but." He paused and shrugged his shoulders.

She sensed he was uncomfortable. "The timing is not quite right." There was an imperceptible waver in her voice.

Lobo was oddly quiet then he said. "That is right." One hand held the reins while

his arm wrapped around her waist. She leaned back against him.

Then Alessandra thought of something. "What do you know of your parents?"

Lobo was surprised by the question and somewhat uncomfortable. "I do not know who they were, Alessandra." He said at last. "I was dumped on a doorstep of a church."

"Oh." Alessandra bit her lip, as she turned her head to rest her cheek on his chest. She could feel his heart pounding against the flesh and material of his shirt. They lapsed into silence.

Four hours after midnight, they arrived at the airport. Alessandra dismounted and watched as Lou McKenyon disappeared. She began walking toward the single lit building that she could see in the distance.

"Wrong way, my love." His voice spoke calmly. His hand grasped hers. "We go this way." He headed to the unlit section where she could hear the sound of engines revving up.

"Here she is, Reginald." Lou said quietly.

She gasped when she saw a quiet, haggard looking young man appear from a dark building.

Lobo saw Reginald and nodded to him. "Reginald this is Alessandra Morales. Alessandra this is Reginald, my friend." He did not call him anything else and Alessandra smiled at Reginald whom she thought needed some rest. He did not look like he had had any better time than he had earlier. Though, he did not look like he had been as badly beaten this time around.

Reginald's features tightened when he saw her. He merely nodded. "We will speak another time, Ms. Morales."

Lou said. "Goodbye."

Before she could say anything, the young man hustled her aboard the plane. The door was sealed and within minutes it took off.

Reginald regarded his friend somberly. "We meet in Callisto Heights sometime tomorrow?"

"Yes. Sometime tomorrow. Be careful, there are leaks everywhere." Then Lou strode away into the dark, making no sound.

Reginald watched him leave. "Yeah, I know." He muttered. "I just do not know how to plug them up anymore." Reginald went into the small shed and collapsed down, falling into a deep healing sleep.

Castillo was silent as he watched a small plane descend through the air. He was

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relieved to note that only Alessandra Morales had left the plane. The others would come to Abornia later on. Those that did not arrive would go to Callisto Heights or else one of the other small towns that surrounded the steeply built ridge.

"So you reached them in time?" A white-haired man gave Morales a hard stare, though he was proud of her.

"Yes," she said, her face composed.

"Good, go to Kerr Truman for more orders." The man said calmly. "There will soon be more action down there."

"In Wako or elsewhere?" Alessandra asked carefully.

"Elsewhere. You will be told what to expect and where you will be assigned." He informed her.

Alessandra inclined her head. "Yes sir." She began walking away.

"Morales." The man said.

She stopped and looked back at him over her shoulder.

"You did a good job." He said quietly. "Under normal circumstances you would be given time off, but we need our best members on this situation."

"I understand sir." Alessandra said softly before walking towards the designated room to pick up her next assignment. . She was curious about this Kerr Truman. The name sounded familiar but she could not put her finger on to why. Shrugging, Alessandra opened the door and looked in. Only one man was there. She glanced around in puzzlement. There usually were at least three or four men and women in the room.

"You are Morales?" The voice was curt and gruff, and the man looked up.

Alessandra blinked when she thought that she was looking at a mirror image. She shook it off and replied. "Yes, I am Morales, Alessandra." Her expression was cool.

"I see you met my twin, Josiah." The man said and then returned his gaze back down to the papers he was looking over.

"Yes, if you are his brother." She said, well aware of the fact that impersonation of others was a game that was played by the Lycan Pack.

He shot her an amused grin, revealing the resemblance for the first time. Though she thought he was cold and hard. "Here is the assignment. Your identity will be Sara-Marie Trudlow." He said briefly. "We are keeping certain stats the same. Your age will remain twenty-five."

She had a feeling he was leading up to something.

He hesitated and then shook his head, clearly deciding against speaking more thoroughly. "You will be sent out to Callisto Heights on the Cumulus Range."

“When?” she asked.

“In two hours.” He glanced at her. Her brow pleated and then she finally blinked as she recognized why a call had been sent out.

Kerr nodded in acknowledgement. He saw the moment that everything clicked for her. “I know that you do not like being sent on messenger details.” Kerr shrugged his shoulders. “Sometimes though, it is necessary to use a person who is not suspected to be Lycan.”

Her eyes moved to his at that point. “Others were suspected?”

“Yes. So we had to draw on other resources.” Kerr replied. “Your background however tossed in an unexpected wrench to the proceedings.” He studied her carefully. “Do you want to continue with this operation?”

“Yes, though I was unable to speak with Reginald.” She said briefly, and caught an odd expression in his eyes when she said the name.

“Reginald?” He repeated slowly, looking at her.

“Yes. I had unfortunate contact with the other Loman’s.” Her expression warned him off asking for further details.

Kerr did not need to. He had reports filed from other sources. “I see.” He did and he was not pleased. “I would have tried preventing that occurrence had I been there.”

“McKenyon stepped in several times, as did Josiah Truman.” She said at last. “I was able to speak to some folks, though the rest were about as friendly as scorpions.” Alessandra watched him.

He grinned with wicked amusement. “Likely because the name Morales is shaking a nest of scorpions.” He said. “You will likely find out more at a different time.” He paused. “For now, get some rest and some sleep.”

“Yes, sir.” She saluted him with a grin, and strolled away.

“Cocky little thing, isn’t she?” Josiah said, emerging from a different door.

Kerr glanced at him with a raised eyebrow. “Yes.” He said meditatively. “When were you going to let me know that she had been hassled by the Loman boys?” Kerr was beyond pissed.

Josiah eyed him. “I had hoped to before this point.”

Kerr shrugged. “No matter. We will deal with the Loman’s.” His expression was cool.

“It does not matter to me that we share their father’s blood.” Josiah said. “I just do not want the more innocent women and children who may be there, hurt.” He told his twin.

“I cannot promise anything, Josiah. You know that.” Kerr said coldly. “Now get

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going.”

“Yes sir.” Josiah tugged a nonexistent forelock and then escaped before his brother threw something at his head.

Kerr laughed lightly, and then sighed. Another door opened and he looked up, his eyes cool and remote. “You know your orders?” He studied the woman who was limping, but clearly not injured anymore.

Mirabella Ruiz stared at him just as remotely. “Yes.” She knew she had to get back to the bordello, though she hated that place with a venomous passion.

“Then head out.” Kerr watched in silence as the older woman left the head quarters. He was worried about her sanity. She had been disabling the bordello for as long as he could remember. Also helping Reginald as an anonymous contact.

Now they had other worries. Ones that she had not wanted to send to him from the bordello and had risked her position of security to warn him and the others. Kerr was afraid that she had come to him with the news too late.

A week later, Alessandra stared at her small mirror as she prepared for this latest challenge. Callisto Heights, she thought was a frozen hell of a dangerous wasteland in the middle of nowhere. Alessandra sighed as she lightened her skin so that it was pallid and pasty, as though she had been released from a jail. Then she put a rinse in her hair that temporarily bleached it a dull blond color.

As for her eyes, she changed their color to a dark blue. The contacts drove her crazy, but she put up with them because she had to. She closed her mind to what she needed to do and hoped that her younger sister, aka Justiss Trudlow, knew what the hell she was getting into.

Then she attached fake lashes to cover her black ones. She dressed in the clothes that she had been given. She smiled appreciatively as the leather slid over her body like a tight glove. She frowned slightly, remembering someone who had fitted into her as well.

Wrong thing to do, Alessandra realized as she was forced to deal with the low heat pooling down at her core. She wondered if Lobo had been warned about her change in disguise. If he hadn’t, he was going to be in for one hell of a shock later on.

She shrugged and pulled on a protective helmet that covered her head to her neck and shoulders. Her hair she bundled back into a braid so that it would fit comfortable in the extra space provided in the helmet.

Alessandra left the room and headed out to merge with the several dark clad figures that carefully melted into a small town by the name of Judanya.

Judanya was the main source of supplies within Callisto Heights. There, a meeting of sorts was being conducted. One of the people was Sara-Marie Trudlow who stood off to one side. She was loose, limber, and scared to her toes.

It had taken a lot of time to pull together their resources, but everything was in place. She noted. All but the main infiltrators, who were late as usual, she thought sourly, had arrived. Scowling she turned when she heard someone speak to her.

Kearney had been watching Sara-Marie Trudlow since she had arrived a week ago or so, it was hard to remember the time when he was this far up into the mountains. Hell he was surprised that anyone could survive so high up there.

The most amazing fact of all was that the people were surprisingly well educated, though they were complete snobs. Just as he had warned Tarlington about earlier, Kearney shrugged. Well, he was going to do the best that he could to sabotage the operation the best that he could in order to facilitate the trapping of Reginald. "How you doing, Trudlow?"

Kearney, as frickin obnoxious as usual, she had noticed. Trudlow shrugged. "Fine." He had asked her that before, though she had given him no encouragement to keep on pursuing her. The man was just a nuisance, thinking that he was god's answer to females in general.

As she turned away from him, Alessandra was able to hide the curl of disgust that her lips twisted into. Then her face became polite and neutral once again. Man never noticed the difference anyway. No one had wanted him in, but the folks from Wako had been forced to ask that he be added in at the last moment. She had not liked the timing on that end. She glanced around wondering where the others were.

When Kerr Truman entered the small room, she cocked an eyebrow at him. He merely shook his head and she sighed in disgust. Kerr chuckled at her downcast expression. He knew she was trying to find Lobo.

However, the brooding loner had wanted to be left alone and out in the wilds. Kerr had never seen him so angry and upset. Lobo had also been trying to find Alessandra and was not taking the separation from her well. "Stop being so impatient."

Alessandra snorted. "That is easy for you to say." She muttered in exasperation.

Kerr just grinned and shrugged his shoulders. "We meet them after darkness, on the perimeters." His eyes narrowed when he spotted Kearney. He checked an instinctive snarl and she shrugged when he looked at her questioningly. "When was he included?" His voice was soft and irate. Kearney was the last person that Kerr Truman had ever wanted to see out there.

Alessandra eyed Truman warily and sidestepped him cautiously. Truman was not

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only upset he was downright pissed. “Just two days ago. I got the feeling that our Wako contact was not happy about including him.” Her eyes clouded as she thought about Lobo. She was lonely without him and had been tempted several times to travel back down to him in wolf form. Only the particular limits of her assignment had kept her from doing so.

He shrugged. “If he turns out to be not good for our operation, he will be dealt with.” In other words, Kearney would be extremely dead before he could ruin their work.

“Understood.” She said, a smile curving her lips. In that moment she looked more sinister clad in her black gear than the rest did.

There was motion a heightened sense of tension arose in the room as the other Truman walked in. For a moment there was startled silence. It was rare for other Lycans to see Kerr and Josiah in the same room, Alessandra realized with wry amusement, her eyes glittered with laughter, when she caught Josiah rolling his eyes at his twin.

The other man merely glanced down, but Alessandra caught the slight twitching of his lips. Evidently they were used to this happening whenever they were in the same room with others.

“Everyone ready to be assigned to the teams?” Kerr asked gruffly. His eyes touched on the woman, Trudlow as he asked.

She nodded slightly, but when she cut her eyes toward the newcomer, he seemed to stiffen and then relax. He merely inclined his head toward her in acknowledgement.

“We have twelve groups total. Seven have already been dispatched to the wilderness a week ago.”

Alessandra’s eyes snapped angrily but she held her silence.

Kearney listened and frowned. Clearly there were some smart ones. They had chosen to make sure that the numbers were staggered. He was going to need to figure out a way to make a report to others.

Josiah kept an eye on Kearney, having seen the way that he had quickly glanced at the different doors. The man would need to be watched to keep him from sneaking away.

Attuned to the nuances in the air, Kerr continued speaking. “Of the seven groups out there, there are only four leaders that are already stationed in the sectors.” He garnered the attention of all men and women who were prowling the confines.

No more motion just a listening silence descended on the room.

“Trudlow, you will be assigned with Kearney and McKenyon. McKenyon is already out on the ground.” Kerr said.

Trudlow flinched somewhat, at hearing the name. He was going to be pissed when he found out what had occurred in Abornia. Alessandra was not looking forward to what

would be going on. She had suspected something like that was going to happen. More fools are they, she thought wryly.

Kearney's eyes had widened when he had seen all who was there. Half of the men and women he recognized but the other half was unknown to him. Clearly they knew who the others were though. Only he was the odd man out and not particularly wanted around. Too bad, he thought nastily. Kearney would find some way of dealing with those who had snubbed him.

It would be fun to remove their hides while they were still alive in wolf form. He knew that there was a bounty on furs. Especially those of the Lycans, Kearney was not above finding other ways of getting a profit out of whatever was happening in the present.

Noticing that there was no disagreement about the rest of the assignments, Kerr glanced up, just in time to catch the calculating gleam in Kearney's eyes. His turned to pure ice as he watched the slime ball. Kerr had tried to give the man a chance. He had just screwed up.

"Good, I am glad that you are going to be reasonable about the assignments." The blond man said pleasantly.

There was a ripple of laughter that ran through the room. He continued calling out names and assigning them to different sectors. Alessandra smiled when she listened to the different assignments. They showed strategy and common sense. They would be overlapping each other. Alessandra wondered who all had been in the planning. She hoped that other Lycans would have joined them by now.

"Now go out there and do some damage." There was amusement gleaming in his eyes as he said the last words. Without comment the other members filed out of the room.

"Trudlow." Kerr Truman stopped her.

"Yeah?" She turned toward him.

"Be prepared, things will likely get ugly." He rubbed his jaw watching her carefully. She had yet to make any comment about the fact that no one had informed McKenyon about where she had been hidden away for the past week.

"When the odds are bad, stick by McKenyon's side." He said at last. "He will know how to get you in and out if you are injured. If not, then do what you can to make his way inside easier."

Trudlow eyed him with exasperation. "Of course." She did not tell him that she had not had any other intention otherwise.

"Get going then." He said mildly. She gave him a mocking salute and then headed out. He walked to the window and watched as the teams scattered. Then he got on a phone.

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He wanted some answers and wanted them pronto.

Chapter Fourteen

In the parking lot, seven jeeps were purring. All but one was pulling out. Though the rest of them were more than eager to get going. Idleness had a way of encouraging fights among the more hot-blooded and territorial younger Lycans who were born and bred in Cumulus, compared to those from Wako or Abornia.

However, none of them were willing to not share the duty of cleaning out the viper's nest that was the Aphrodite Bordello. Kearney was waiting impatiently in one of the jeeps, the last one, Alessandra noted with some asperity. Josiah was hanging around the last one, though he did not seem to be obvious about it.

Kearney was angry because the Truman had clearly been on to him for a while. They had had a chat and Kearney had been forced to tell him all that he had known but had refused to give out the name of his wealthy employer.

Truman was not satisfied, but when the woman came out, he finally stopped interrogating Kearney.

Trudlow jumped into the waiting jeep without a word. Her expression was remote and cold. "One ground rule." She looked at him. "No touching me unless you want a part of your body removed permanently. Got it?"

Kearney nodded, though his expression turned ugly. He disliked it when females were complete bitches. Clearly this was one of them. He would teach her a few things about treating him like he was slime.

She stared at him coldly. "Get the jeep going now." There was a soft click. He glanced down and had to swallow fear. She had a very lethal small gun pointed at his groin and testicles. "I mean business, I make promises, not threats." Trudlow's voice echoed the remote chill that was in her eyes.

"Whatever, bitch." Kearney snarled at her. His eyes held a gleam that warned Trudlow that he was not in a good mood, not anymore. He drove away swiftly, but in his mind he was definitely in a bad mood. He was going to get revenge on this woman if it was the last thing that he ever did.

Two hours passed and he finally arrived at the destination. Kearney was grinding

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his teeth. He had tried to stop three times before the meeting point, but Trudlow had forced him to keep driving. Kearney was going to need to improvise in letting his other contacts know where they were going since that asshole Truman had taken away his phone.

Scowling, Alessandra kept an eye on Kearney. He had been acting awful strangely even for one of his temperament. She dropped out of the other side with ease. He glared at her some more. Trudlow gave a piercing whistle and it was answered.

A man was silhouetted in the dark. At first glance Kearney dismissed him as a shadow. A second glance told him that he was no shadow but a real man.

“Kearney and Trudlow right?” McKenyon spoke in a rasp.

Trudlow stared at him, her eyes widening. Her throat dried up and she fought the urge to swallow. Lobo was a fine looking sight and she knew that sooner or later she was going to need to get him alone.

Lobo was glad that they had finally arrived. He had been in a brooding mood all week. Now they were there. He paid most attention to Kearney, though he knew he was getting conflicting signals from the woman. Lobo noticed that her scent was acutely familiar. Alessandra? Lobo stared at her in shock, and then shrugged in his head. He would pester her again when they were alone.

Kearney sneered at the man who was standing in front of them, he wore nothing but a pair of pants and had ammo strapped across his chest and wrapped around his arms and waist.

Trudlow nodded. “Yes, I am Trudlow.” There was a glint in his eyes. Uh oh, she thought, busted.

Kearney took one look at him. “Who the hell are you?”

Lobo stared at him in silence. It drew out and Kearney began to sweat. “I am McKenyon and you are pestilence.” Cold rage punctuated his words. “Now let’s go before more time is wasted.” With that scathing comment he disappeared off the ridge.

Trudlow was clearly amused as all hell since he was snickering softly. Pissed, Kearney swung a fist at her, and nearly got it sliced off for his pains. A silver glinting knife swiped at it.

“Hands off, asshole.” She said coldly.

Kearney backed off. He would kill them both. He knew now what he would have to do.

“Problem?” Lobo asked, eyeing them. He had seen what exactly was going on. Puzzled by the discrepancies, McKenyon watched Trudlow frowning. Different hair color, different eye color and the complexion had altered. Who was she really? He wondered

and then shrugged his shoulders. He would likely find out sometime later.

Now he had to get them to the starting point. Already time was slipping away. They had been the last two to arrive. He had already escorted the others to their contact leaders. Now to get these two out of sight of the other buildings that had nosy occupants within their walls.

"I am ready." Trudlow said behind him. She stood five feet away when he turned.

They stared at each other and he felt the familiar sizzle. She was definitely the same woman. He merely sighed. This was going to be interesting as all hell. They would not last the night without tumbling somewhere. The last week had been agony and now he was angry.

"Kearney, get your ass moving or your throat will be cut." His words were icy. There was a distinct curse in response and then Kearney appeared. He shot both of them venomous glares in response. He was ready though and without another word, McKenyon led them off the road to a rocky and dangerous hillside that they had to descend to reach their starting point.

Glancing at the sun, she thought that the time had to be around early morning. The air was blessedly cool in comparison to the heat that she and Lobo had generated in their reunion last night. Of course that had given Kearney too much time alone, but she didn't care.

Now Alessandra was crouched on a nearby foothill, shocked by what she was viewing through a pair of high-powered binoculars. "I had been hoping that Reginald had been wrong." She said softly to the others on either side of her. She was tight with tension that included several kinds.

"He told me several weeks ago, but I was unable to act upon the information." A voice growled to her left.

She suppressed a shiver. McKenyon was no youth, and he also had her wet for him each time he spoke. That drove her crazy. He ignored the attraction between them both during the day, but at night was a different story. There was a low curse from her right.

"Well what do we do next, McKenyon?" The male voice was a disgusted grumble.

"We wait till midnight, and then infiltrate, Kearney." Lou had no use for the idiot. He turned his attention to Alessandra. He noticed that she was dressed similarly to what she had worn the night before. "Likely you will be able to find your sisters, sooner or later. Sooner if Reginald can get me the proper info."

She nodded slowly, wondering how Justiss had managed to survive in that exotic pleasure palace below. Some of the activities had made her blush and wonder how it

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would feel if Lobo was doing them to her.

Kearney cursed again, and Lobo checked on his actions and was disgusted. The man was jerking off. "Take that somewhere else!" McKenyon hissed at Kearney who was in the throes of agony as he finally groaned in a low rumble and stopped cursing.

At ease for the moment, and in the mood to annoy Lobo and hopefully cause enough suspicious movement in the brush, Kearney ginned at McKenyon savagely. "Can't have that bitch since you got your piece in her, buddy, unless you would like to share?"

He backed up, nearly falling when Lobo lunged at him with murderous intent. Then he stopped and ignored Kearney's words. Lobo would not be baited by the jealous jerk. The man was a pain in the ass, always bitching and moaning.

Lobo glanced at the woman who had a somewhat glazed expression. She was watching him openly and he knew that she would need some relief. Right now was not a good time though. He thought of the small report he had been given on her. Sara-Marie was her name, Sara-Marie Trudlow. She met his eyes and a fiery attraction arced through the air between them. He shoved it out of his mind, for now other things were more important.

Like getting in and out of that damn fortified bordello ranch alive. He had a feeling that Kearney was only in for the chance at getting laid. From what he could tell, the man was a born chauvinist. He had nearly been shot three times and knifed twice, when he had tried to cop a feel off Trudlow. She was not one to put up with Kearney's bad attitude lightly. Especially when he felt he had the divine right to try and get some action.

"When will you get the information?" Trudlow asked. "Well, an estimated time at least." She amended her question when McKenyon eyed her again with his ebony gray eyes. His long black hair was tied with a leather thong. She noticed that he was dressed in camouflage gear and tended to melt into whatever surroundings he had.

Only some tingle, warned her when he was around. Generally it let her know when he was about five feet away from her. Sometimes that was good, other times it was not. Right now, it kept her from being surprised when and if he was about to touch her. Not something that happened very often.

"Two hours minimum, three hours max." It would be less than that, but McKenyon did not trust Kearney to accidentally transmit the information to the wrong signal. He had his suspicions about the man. Later, McKenyon would warn Trudlow about the man. If she did not just kill the obnoxious pervert in one of his dumber attempts to seduce her. That would make things easier in the long run.

Trudlow silently eyed McKenyon. She said nothing though as she returned her

attention back to the view before her. In the splendor of the Cumulus Mountain Range, that ranch was a blight upon the wild unfettered range. Her lips tightened and then a walkie-talkie crackled. Alessandra nearly jumped out of her skin when the noise shattered the quiet.

Kearney grinned, watching her reactions. He was making note of everything. Never knew when it would come in handy.

Reginald was crouched in one of the bunkers that had been built and avoiding any detecting for the past week and a half. He had refused to be barred from the action. He clicked on his radio, hoping that this time Lobo would have good news. Unfortunately he had some bad news this time. He spoke calmly, even as he peered outside. "Cat to Wolf, come in."

A voice spoke it was tired and fatigued. Alessandra listened intently and winced. It had to be Reginald, he had a distinctive voice, and she wondered if Kearney could hear.

Kearney strained his ears but all he could pick up was the static that was pouring forth.

"Wolf to Cat, coming through loud and clear." McKenyon said briefly.

Reginald drew in a deep sigh of relief, now he had to deliver what he had just learned. "Word just came in. You have a leak from one on your end. Watch the white snake." Then there was silence. Reginald winced and just hoped that he had helped in time.

"Right." McKenyon said after a moment. His expression was neutral as he eyed both Kearney and Trudlow. Alessandra was chilled by that neutrality of his gaze, it was not promising. She stared off into space. Something had happened and now there would be some kind of strain Alessandra suspected.

"Cat out." Reginald said softly, and then clicked his radio off. He stared at the ceiling as he lay on his narrow bed. He was bandaged from a nearly successful assassination attempt. The only reason why he was back at the bordello, Reginald thought wearily. He looked at the gun that was in his other hand and caressed it. Then he set it aside. It was not that time yet. Still too much to do, he was mortally weary of all that had gone on so far.

A snake in the grass, huh, now why does that not surprise me? Lobo wondered which one of his two so-called partners the snake was. There was another crackle on his radio summoning his attention.

"Ash to Wolf." The greeting was music to the listeners' ears. It was Josiah.

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Lobo smiled faintly. “Wolf to Ash, answer now.” He paused for a moment watching Kearney and Trudlow for a moment. “The two are here, though one is questionable.” Lobo had decided to take it on faith that Trudlow or as he knew her, Alessandra, would not betray him. Kearney was the wildcard.

“Here are your orders; they were modified a bit, when your particular addition was switched.” Josiah was mad as hell, when he had not been placed with Lobo and Trudlow. Now he had a feeling he knew why.

This time there was something more normal and he listened to his orders. There were separate orders going out to the other two. McKenyon would not be surprised to find it was a test of their integrity.

Later Lobo would confront Trudlow about why she was lying about her identity. Now however, it was time for action. “Ready?”

“Yes.” Trudlow replied. There was no response from Kearney. There was a low curse from McKenyon.

Kearney wandered off as he got his orders and smiled grimly. Fuck the orders and fuck those so-called lovebirds that had been humping each other this entire time. He was going to get himself some cunt and he prepared to call in on a different frequency, when he heard a rustle. Kearney turned and found himself surrounded by wolves. They stood watching him, and he lost his courage. Kearney broke and ran. There was a howl set up from the others as they went after him.

“Come on, he’s betrayed us.” There was bitter hatred in his low voice that had the hair on her neck rising. She followed him without a word. Then they spread out.

Tarlington was not in a good mood. All of his plans were being wrecked. Someone of his two plants was lying to him about what was going on. He had not finished interrogating all of the Loman brothers. He had not managed to get a hold of Reginald, though he could sense that the man was somewhere nearby. Pissed was not description enough for what he was feeling right then.

However, sacrifices had to be made and he decided that the woman, Esme would be his final gift goodbye. She had been fun to torture. The others however, he had only begun and now this. Tarlington could have sworn that he had had at least another hour to work with. Such was life; he shot bullets into Esme at specific points and then left her as she was.

Mirabella watched from the control room. She had made sure to save everything that she had caught on tape. They would be mailed separately to the Alpha and to Jason

Gray so that they could solve what had actually happened now and before. She could no longer handle the lie that her life had become. The ugliness, the deception, the killings, and now this complete desecration of young lives, she was not going to let it continue if she could help it.

Methodically, she silently finished her last tasks. Taking up the small gun she had at the ready, Mirabella placed the gun under her jaw and pulled the trigger.

As McKenyon ran in a low crouch, Trudlow watched him with admiration. He was practically on his hands and knees. Suddenly he let out a low snarl and she nearly screamed when a big black wolf leapt into the air. There were shrieks and screams from a small hallow.

No shots were fired, though there were audible growls and snarls. Then nothing. Trudlow swallowed and then she peered over the side.

McKenyon glanced up at her. "Keep going." His eyes were opaque.

Trudlow glared but she did as he ordered. He was going to be answering some questions later on. She kept going, doubly cautious. This time it was her turn to spring onto some guards. They were tied up and gagged. She heard a rustle, to her side, and she held a gun to the man's head.

"Wrong man, darlin'."

She put the weapon down.

It was McKenyon. He studied the men. "Have they been turned?"

"No." She said it coolly.

He rose and kept going. She followed him without a word. There was a low mutter. McKenyon called out a name. Then she called a name. They found themselves with the rest of the other in the infiltration group. She was oddly silent. Lobo? She swallowed hard as she glanced at the man who was by her side. He was a legend. He ignored her.

"You have your orders?" Lobo asked coldly.

"Yep. Good to have you back among us Lobo."

"Been too long, old wolf."

"If he's old, what are you, a spring chicken?"

There were muffled snorts of laughter. Trudlow rolled her eyes. She couldn't help smiling at the fact that he was so much at ease with the men. Clearly he had worked with them before.

"Good question."

CORRUPTION UNCONTROLLED

“It can be answered later.” Lobo said succinctly. “Now we penetrate this place once and for all.” His face was stony and she was angry.

“Where is Kearney?” One of the women asked. She had an odd note in her voice, as though she was glad he was gone, but unhappy at the same time. The others became quiet as they realized what some of the implications would be.

“He has ratted me and Trudlow to the authorities.”

There was dead silence, and a surge of anger. Trudlow looked at the other men and women. There was definite anger and hostility in their gazes. Not toward her though. She was relieved about that. A woman brushed back a loose strand of dark hair; she met Trudlow’s eyes. They stared at each other for a moment. The woman touched her forehead and then they returned their attention back to the men.

“Time to go hunting.” A blond man said softly. He was radiating menace and that more than anything scared Trudlow. She inched away from him.

He glanced at her and smiled slightly. It made his menace diminish slightly. “Not you miss. The others.” Then he faded into the darkness. As she watched, the others slipped off singly and in pairs. None of them were unsure as to what they were doing.

Lobo touched her arm and she followed him silently. She remembered another night when he had paired with her. Her body warmed, and her body tensed. Lobo glanced back at the woman and shook his head. He shifted the memories away. There would be a better time for them to hash out their problems.

“There they are!” The alarm was raised with the cry.

“Get ’em boys! We can’t let them into the ranch!” A bright flash flew up as gunfire began rattling. Those were not familiar voices that Alessandra heard. Who the hell had taken over that goddamned bordello? She wondered angrily.

“Now.” Lobo cut wire and she slipped into the fence. They worked together and cut away a sizable amount. If it were found, they did not care. Their focus was on getting into the ranch.

They reached the main building within the three minutes that they had been allotted. Then Lobo slipped in first. Trudlow began setting small little objects around. The explosives were activated and ready to be set off by remotes after it had been searched. The date would be two days from the official investigation by the other task forces, and then she followed Lobo.

“They are set?” Lobo asked her from where he had been putting in some extra devices. It never hurt to have backups.

“Yes.” Alessandra replied. She was surprised that he was not going back to check

on them, and then her eyes caught sight of the other ones that he had planted. Smart move, she conceded, and no longer felt insulted by his lack of interest in her movements.

“Good.”

Then they launched themselves running through the hallways, and eventually they split up. Trudlow found where her sister was held captive. She rapped on the door. A voice answered, bleary and slurred. Trudlow kicked the door open and looked in.

Her sister’s eyes were glazed, but she smiled seeing her sister. The girl struggled to her feet. Trudlow wrapped a coat around her, and the two females fled. Occasionally her sister would stop by a door. The ones that were unlocked, the girls joined them they were dressed in a variety of garments.

Clearly someone had been at work already before them. Alessandra was not sure whether they should be thanked or not. So far she had not seen any sign of children on the bordello. There was a sick feeling in her gut that they had arrived too late.

“Alessandra.” Justiss said, looking at her. “The children are safe. Other Lycans came in earlier. Reginald helped them.”

“How did you know that, Justiss?” Alessandra asked, as she found a cache of weapons. She handed them out to the girls who were nervous and jittery with anticipation.

Justiss grinned. “Because I was one of the team who went in.” She waved to the girls to move ahead of them.

Soon, the freed girls were armed with knives and their eyes were glittering with anticipation. They stood stunned when they spotted Lobo, who was surrounded by men. Next to him stood a redheaded man. A third man ripped a cry from one of the knife-wielding females. She threw it at the nearest armed man. It sank into his shoulder. The other girls followed her example. Over half the men were downed within less than three seconds.

Lobo blinked and then grinned when he spotted Alessandra she had wiped away some of the gunk on her face. The complexion was normal, but the hair and eyes was still alien to him.

Alessandra grinned back at him, but she wasn’t going to go to him right then.

The three men took care of the rest of the other remaining men. Reginald held the first instigator in his arms. Then he sighed. “Now we have to get out of here.” His voice held a rasp that had not been there before. He had clearly been through something bad.

“What happened?” The girl turned out to be Raquela, who had demanded the explanation as she ran her hands over his face and found his neck. It had a variety of burns, some deeper than others. Ropes and something else had been pulled taut against his neck

CORRUPTION UNCONTROLLED

several times by the feel of the welts. At her touch his face blanched from pain. Immediately she removed the wire that was around it. He collapsed.

“Bastards!” She snarled and promptly sat down next to him. The others glanced at each other uneasily. Clearly she was protective of him as a lioness would be of her mate. Raquela needed to be near him so that she could call in for reinforcements to deliver him to Tarlington. Someone else had apparently fucked up. Not that she was surprised.

“Kelloran, call for backup.” Lobo said tersely. His fangs were showing as he watched the different doors. Suddenly there were seventeen wolves prowling. None of the girls screamed, and then they faded away. Guards pounded into the main room. They were stopped short when wolves leaped at their necks. Needless to say, there were some scared guards. The men were bound up but not killed.

There were still more searches to be conducted. Lobo glanced at his friend. “We still need to find Erasmus, Raymond Ruiz, and Gregory.” Those asses would not be getting away from justice so easily. Not if he had anything to do with it.

Alessandra touched his shoulder and he glanced at her, his arm went around her waist. She remained at his side.

“Do you want to leave or stay?” He asked her.

“Stay, what the hell did you think I was here for?” She asked in exasperation. “Decoration?” Alessandra pulled away from him with a fiery glare.

He grabbed her back and kissed her hard. There was a clearing of one throat, and Lobo glanced around and then blinked in shock.

“Oh yeah, that’s Justiss, my sister.” Alessandra said with a laugh.

Justiss smiled at him, but she merely gestured towards the outsiders. “Planes are coming.” She glanced at them with a twinkle in her eye. “Introductions can come later,” she said and added. “Like at a wedding.”

Then she fled when Alessandra would have rattled her teeth together. “Darned, interfering little...” She stopped when Lobo kissed her.

“We will need to discuss it later on.” He said softly.

“Yes.” She said, staring at him contemplatively. “We will.” Alessandra smiled half-heartedly. “Seems like half the time we are in situations that are never the right time.” There was a hint of frustration in her voice.

“Well, we will have time together. I do not doubt it. Now let’s go.” Lobo grabbed her hand and they ran outside.

Outside the roar of engines could be heard as seven planes landed. The girls and Reginald were herded out of the ranch. The four Loman boys were found. They hung by

their arms. They were unconscious and clearly had been for some time. Esme was found lying on the floor, shot multiple times.

“Well, someone sure did not want the woman alive.” Trudlow said, her face green.

Esme watched them come into the room, but she knew it was too late for her. Still she would try to get some small measure of revenge. She hoped that the others burned in hell with her. They did not deserve to live after letting her be the first to go through that horrendous process. “It was Reginald.”

It was a soft whisper. They turned; Esme looked at them, her gaze hostile. “He killed them all because they refused to accede to any of his requests.” Then she died with a last gasp.

Lobo and Alessandra shook their heads.

“She thought they had been hung.” Alessandra murmured.

“Whoever had let them dangle for so long, knew what they were doing, but clearly did not plan to let them die. Just decided to put them through some torture it seems.” Lobo commented quietly.

There was a soft sound of sniffing and crying from another room. A black wolf cautiously prowled into the room. There was a boy-child it was only a few days old. The wolf sniffed around but there was no death in the room.

Curious about what the wolf had discovered, Trudlow walked in and found the wolf and the boy child. It was curled around the boy, and he nearly growled at her. Its ears flattened for a bit and then jerked its head toward them. She knelt down by the wolf. He nudged the child into her arms and then poked her knee with his nose. Disgruntled by the way that he had promptly moved away from them Trudlow eyed him. “You owe me.”

The wolf looked at her, and then his tail thwacked her leg. “All right, all right, I am going.” The wolf turned away from her and went into other rooms.

Trudlow appeared with the child in her arms, and the girl took him from her.

“Who found him?”

“Lobo.”

The girl’s skin drained of color. She just ran toward one of the planes. Three of the girls remained. They looked at Trudlow oddly. They didn’t say anything, for just at that moment there was an ear-piercing howl from another room.

Trudlow winced and ran to the room. She was not sure what to think, and gasped in shock. Someone had been in there recently. However, the girls who were still in the room; were no longer among the living. The wolf was pawing at something beneath a bed.

“Hello, anyone still here?”

CORRUPTION UNCONTROLLED

There was a scuffling sound.

“We are not going to hurt you.” Trudlow said cautiously.

One of the girls who had followed her spoke in a musical language. A small child crawled out. Its eyes blinked and then it wrapped its arms around the wolf’s neck and hid its face. The wolf sat and seemed to sigh. The child looked up again and the girl who had spoken said something again.

The child opened its arms to her. She scooped it up into her arms and darted out of the room. As the other girls watched, the wolf shook itself and then shaped itself into a man. Lobo. He stared at them silently. “There are no more children here.” His voice was flat. “Now we must go.” The others finally left. They were upset though, that was obvious.

Trudlow looked over at Lobo, and he held an arm for her. Shifting her precious little burden from both arms to one, she took it and they walked out together. Whatever had just happened, it had hurt Lobo in some way. She wondered if he would talk to her. Glancing around, she spotted Justiss who crossed over to her and took the child from her. The rest of the kids were herded away with Justiss shaking her head at her sister.

“I cannot talk now, Alessandra Morales or Sara-Marie Trudlow, or what ever your name truly is. We will do so later.” His voice was a deep growl as he spoke.

He bit her neck, making her growl back at him. She bit his at the same time. Powerful desire and need snaked through their bodies. There was a wall nearby and they leaned against it, all the while they entwined their arms and legs. He was able to slide into her with no discomfort to her. She gasped at the feel of his deep thrusts.

One of his hands plunged fingers into her hair and pulled her head toward his. He kissed her deeply. She growled again, taunting his tongue and chased it with her own. He was overcome with temporary insanity, he figured. Otherwise, he would not be risking their lives this way.

She nipped him as she felt herself climaxing, tightening around him. He thrust within her twice more. He released into her simultaneously. They stood there for a moment, panting heavily. He held her close to his body.

As they stood together regaining their breath back he cursed softly. Then he stepped back from her. Then he tidied up her clothing and he dressed in his. “You make me lose all control, woman.” He sounded mildly frustrated by the fact. He was buckling his belt.

“Good.” She said pertly. “We can talk more later.” She buttoned her blouse and tied the drawstring of her pants back into a knot.

“That we will do.” He muttered, as his body brushed against hers. Her eyes blinked

as she realized that he was aroused again.

She felt a tingle run down her body and she sighed. "We need to find a bedroom." She grumbled beneath her breath, eyeing him with a distinct gleam in her eyes.

Lobo looked at her over his shoulder. "Later." It was a growled promise. His eyes traveled up and down her body in a quick but all-seeing glance that had her shivering as fire ripped through her body.

"Promises, promises..." She taunted softly.

He kissed her hard, and then grabbing her hand, he tugged her out of the building. They were the last to arrive and board the plane. She plopped onto his lap. She was in the mood to torment him, and snuggled between his legs. When he realized it, he did not discourage her.

"Everyone here?" The pilot asked.

"All except for Kearney."

"He is dead." One of the blond men said softly, Alessandra was not sure but she thought it was Josiah, though she could not get a good look at him. There was a stony anger in his voice.

"That wraps up the roll call." The pilot took off, as did the six other planes. There were many items to be discussed as the truth came out for what had happened in the ranch.

"Is Reginald going to survive?" Trudlow wondered. She had liked him, despite everything that had happened.

"Yes." The pilot said. He did not look at any of them as he cleared the ground.

CORRUPTION UNCONTROLLED

Chapter Fifteen

Soon everyone was settled in rooms at a comfortable hotel located in Abornia. Then time was taken to separate them while they were questioned and debriefed. Gray was there talking with the women. When he saw who was there, he zeroed in on Trudlow. “Alessandra?” Gray was not sure what to make of her appearance.

Alessandra said nothing and just reached up and popped out the contacts and threw them into a trashcan. She smiled when Gray and the others winced. “Much better and yes, Gray, that is who I am.” She grinned, reassuring him. Then she was overtaken by an extremely hard yawn. Alessandra covered her mouth, but she was definitely beginning to look sleepy.

Jason’s lips twitched as he caught the action. “I don’t think I will keep you long. Lobo, escort her to the hotel.” Gray glanced at him. “You can take your time coming back.”

Lobo nodded slowly. “I will do that.” His teeth flashed as he walked out, accompanied by whistles and laughter. He had followed her to the hotel room, but had not joined her. He did keep an eye on all her movements. Still he felt disturbed by the way that she had changed her hair coloring.

Lobo just continued to watch her as he tried to work through his own discomfort. Giving it up as a lost cause, he waited until she had come out of the shower, with her normal hair color, and then all but tumbled into bed. He slipped away before she caught sight of him in the room. He’d chosen to disguise his presence and scent from her. It was not the right time for him to speak to her again. It was obvious to him, that she was beyond exhausted.

Alessandra’s head whirled with fatigue as she entered an anonymous but well equipped hotel room. All of that action had happened so fast that now with the adrenaline leaving her system she was exhausted. After showering and slipping beneath the covers nude, she shivered till the covers warmed. She drifted off to sleep and did not notice that Lobo had not arrived to the room yet.

Once he got back to the office, Lobo was checked over for injuries. When the field physician was satisfied, he and the other operatives were allowed to go speak to Jason

Gray.

Jason stood quietly, his eyes scanned the room and he frowned slightly when he realized who was not there. He glanced at the others who were watching him speculatively and he shrugged.

Josiah slid into a seat nearby.

Sykes found another seat and he realized he was flanked.

That was when Lobo knew that he would not be departing anytime soon. He mentally cursed his decision to go back and caught Jason's sympathetic stare. Obviously it had been a ploy on Jason's part to get him away from the rigmarole.

After a few minutes, all but Reginald had appeared. Then Kerr entered the room and he straddled a chair. His gaze was remote and tired.

Following his entrance were Reginald and an older man. They were clearly tired and not looking too good. Reginald especially was looking more than a tad haggard.

"I am glad to see that you made it back safe and sound." Jason said finally. "There were few casualties, but none that were missed."

As he spoke, men and women shifted. He was aware of the fact that there were some who would have objected to his wording if they were there.

"No casualties are ever good, Gray." Lobo said finally. "Even those who may have deserved what happened to them." His face was impassive as he spoke.

Gray glanced around and then sighed when he saw agreement. "I realize that, but I am also aware that some events are beyond our control." Jason said tightly. "Not even I could have predicted what outcome would happen last night."

"More to the point, why were the Loman brothers over at the bordello?" Josiah asked since he was perturbed by that circumstance. "They were not supposed to be there. As I recall." An uncomfortable silence fell over the room.

Reginald finally spoke up. "They were warned. I do not know who warned them."

"Either that or they were set up." Lobo said, his gaze piercing as he glanced at the men and women who were assembled in the room.

"Reginald, is there something you would like to tell us?" Gray asked the young man.

Reginald was silent. "There was a murder that took place on the Loman ranch twenty years ago. A girl named Mora Aless." He was visibly struggling to keep his emotions intact. "She tried to help me escape, but I was too weak in strength and spirit to accept her help." He looked at his hands then. "So she was killed, by my father's minions."

There were low murmurs from the other men in the room. Reginald's companion

CORRUPTION UNCONTROLLED

looked as though he wanted to refute the young man's assumption but stayed silent. He frowned at Reginald though. His eyes examined the young man more closely.

Jason eyed Reginald with unguarded dismay. "Well, that will be a different investigation to reopen at a later time then."

Lobo stirred uncomfortably in his chair. His eyes clashed with those of the white-haired, elderly looking man. The man had yet to speak, but he was powerful in his own way. Lobo looked away after a few minutes and remained silent.

"Please give me an accounting for the different sectors. I know some of you found young children. Tell me where and in what shape they were in." Jason said quietly. It would be a way for them to settle down again.

Lobo gave his report. He had found two children on his watch. When Josiah, Sykes, Arid, and three others spoke up, a total of twenty-five children had been rounded up. The rest where nowhere to be found, Arid looked around the meeting room. She hated being crowded like this.

Finally, Jason nodded with a thoughtful frown. He glanced up at the clock. It showed ten to six am. He looked around at those who were still there. "All right. For those of you who cannot sit still, take ten and be back on the hour."

They all filed out of the room and he sat for a moment. Jason was worried by the implications of what had been discussed so far. He had a feeling that a can of worms had just been reopened.

Lobo shifted in his seat, he wanted out of there, and departed without another word. Jason watched him, a grin tugging at his lips. He would not be back that morning. Turning to face the other grinning Lycans, Jason found himself wondering what he should do.

Kerr made a slight gesture at the papers that had been hastily assembled. Both men grimaced at them.

"Forget it. All of you go get some sleep or do something. Just do not vandalize or shoot up the city." Jason told them all. There was a burst of startled laughter from the men and women and then they departed.

Lobo found the room that he and Alessandra would be sharing. He peered inside and smiled a little when he saw that she was wrapped up in most of the covers. His eyes narrowed thoughtfully and then he slid beneath them at the bottom of where her feet were.

Then he began to work his way up. Lobo used his senses and his touch in order to titillate her desire and heat. Her scent was becoming clearer, the higher he crawled up her body. He breathed softly as his mouth pressed moist kisses up her legs from her toes.

Her skin was soft and smooth. She was also ticklish, much to his amusement.

Rubbing his hands over that same skin, he savored its smoothness and texture. Eyes toured the areas that he could scent but not make out.

As he began to reach her upper thighs, he became more aroused by the smell of her desire. His fingers parted her moist flesh and his tongue slid inside.

She squirmed making muffled sounds of shock and pleasure. His eyes darkened in satisfaction, as his hands moved over her dampening skin. It was becoming hot from her arousal. He was far from done yet.

Especially since he truly wanted to find out just how far he could push her. He continued driving his tongue into her, as she cried out with need and desire. His fingers began inching their way toward her succulent breasts.

Not too large, not too small. His fingers caught the nipples and tugged at them. Then soothed them with gentle strokes. His fingers moved all over her body. Finally, he just lay there licking and sucking her, and teasing the sensitive nub that was rapidly distended from his attentions.

“Mmm...ooohhhh...ahhhh!” The woman who went by the name of Trudlow was dreaming, and then her eyes shot open when she realized that she was being caressed. Lobo had finally returned to her side. “Lobo?” She asked, moving restlessly as he licked and then kissed her deeply. Her body convulsed in need. “Fill me completely, Lobo!”

“What is your true name, lover of mine?” Lobo panted in her ear.

“Alessandra Morales.” She promptly replied. She nipped his ear in retaliation as she twined her legs between his. They rolled over the bed, groaning as he ground his hips into hers.

When Alessandra rolled on top, she managed to capture him completely. He kissed her breasts, even as he trailed his fingers over the full lobes. His eyes were intent on her.

“Something you want to tell me?” Lobo asked her, as his fingers found the rounded bulge in her abdomen cavity.

Alessandra snapped her mouth shut. “Huh?” She blinked at him.

“Are you pregnant?” He asked her, as his fingers dipped below making her squeal softly, and buck against him. The subsequent action made him thrust hard up into her. He was intent on getting her response though.

“Yes, damn you, I am pregnant.” She groused at him.

“Good.” He smiled at her, and she was dazzled for a moment. One finger rose and traced the lips that had parted. He caught it between his lips and sucked on it. She shuddered in reaction. He made a muffled sound, as his hips pumped into hers. She enjoyed being on top, as she ground down hard on him.

CORRUPTION UNCONTROLLED

His eyebrows rose. "Is that a good thing to do while you are pregnant?"

"I don't know, is it?" She asked as her fingers prowled through his hair, loosing it from the tie that had held it shut that entire time. It spread beneath him. His eyes blinked at her action, and then he turned over. He was on top. His hair flowed over them. It reached his waist, she discovered.

"Satisfied?" He sounded amused as he watched the curious way she was fingering his hair.

"Uhm...not yet."

He gave her an insulted stare, and then his hips stilled, but he continued to stroke within her, using inner muscles that he chose to exercise. Her eyes widened, but her muscles tightened around his member. They were entwined together and he groaned softly. She gasped and moaned in throaty response, as his fingers played with her breasts.

Alessandra felt her body tightening as waves of desire soared over her body. He held her closer as he began thrusting harder, his eyes gleaming darkly at her. Then he bit the connecting area of her neck and shoulder. Stunned by the stimulus, she screamed and her body convulsed from the overwhelming pleasure, blackness enclosed her.

When she finally came back, Lobo was sitting next to her, and holding her hand. He was gazing upon her with a mildly sardonic grin. She eyed him for a moment.

"Haven't we met before?" Alessandra asked, her eyes glinting back at him just sardonically.

Lobo chuckled at that. "Why did you have your name as Sara-Marie Trudlow?" He slid back next to her beneath the covers.

"Using my true last name blew my cover." She said finally. "So I altered my hair and skin color a bit, used contacts and implemented an old identity." Her eyes traced his face. "You were not fooled were you?" Alessandra asked him.

"At first, yes." He admitted. "I followed you to one of the natural pools and got a shock I didn't expect."

She grinned. "Serves you right for hiding your true identity from me."

"How was I to know that I could trust you then?" He asked mildly. He was kissing her fingers.

"I guess neither of us gave each other a real chance, did we?"

"No, we did not." He looked at her quietly. "The time and circumstances were not optimal." He said at last, cuddling next to her.

She snuggled against him. "How is Reginald holding up to all this?"

"I think he will be all right. I am not sure though. He seems to be rather shaky right

now.” Lobo said finally. He was uneasy about the way that the young man was reacting to being bitten by one of the Lycan women. Finally Lobo nuzzled her neck. “So why is it me that you are drawn to?”

“The others scare me.” She admitted wryly, content to snuggle in his arms. “They are too rough-edged at least for me.” He made an odd noise at that. “What?”

“It is unusual since they are considered to be smoother than me.” He admitted with amusement.

“Well I only saw them on the field. Most of them I had never seen before this day.” She poked him with her elbow. He gave a muffled yelp then nipped her finger in protest. She giggled, and he rolled around with her on the bed. Then she burrowed into his arms. Neither wanted to let the other go. “Hmmm...well we will learn more in the morning, right?”

“Yes.” Yawning they fell asleep. Lobo silently thanked all the deities as he held his woman in his arms. The next thing he was going to do was make sure that she married him. Then they would talk some more about the future.

Raquela stroked the hair off Reginald’s face, as he lay quiescent on the bed. He had been strapped down to prevent him from moving. His injuries had been so bad this last time that he had not been able to heal as a proper Lycan would have by now.

She frowned, studying him. He should also have been able to change from man to wolf by now. Raquela shrugged at the oddities and then jumped when she heard a familiar chilling voice.

Tarlington had finally tracked down where all the injured Lycans were as well as Reginald. It was about damn time too. He was sick of this godforsaken place. Chantry had been busy arranging transport for all of the injured and uninjured suspected violent criminals that he would be taking back to Matania.

To say that he was surprised when Raquela had managed to smuggle a communiqué to him, was an understatement. However, it had given him a good feeling of well being that he had not had for some time now. “Well, well, what have we here?”

Tarlington walked forward. Studying the young man, he could see signs of the fact that someone had been trying to kill him and had not succeeded. Lines of a garrote, he noticed. Multiple ropes had been used to tie him down, and strangle him in an abortive attempt to kill him.

Tarlington looked at Raquela with opaque eyes. “I must ask something and I do hope that you are not lying.” He said softly. “Did you try to kill him, Raquela?”

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Raquela's eyes blanked for a moment as she thought about the past hours. "No." She said. "It was the brothers of his. They hate his guts because he isn't a Loman." Raquela told him.

"I think it was the woman, Esme who tried to use the garrote on him." She added. "He got away from her, though not without sustaining some bad knife wounds. She used silver blades on him." Raquela explained, though her unease was palpable.

"What else was done, Raquela?" Tarlington asked her, his fists clenched.

"I, I don't know. They wouldn't let me see him." She said hanging her head.

Tarlington shook his head and grunted. "Well, we take him out now and the others can be transported later. I do have a building to run."

Raquela eyed him warily.

"You will have to be transported elsewhere, but only after he is taken to Matania." Tarlington told her.

She nodded, but noticed that he had not specified a specific location for her transportation.

Chantry appeared. "Everything is ready to go." He did not look at Reginald or Raquela. Instead he concentrated only on Tarlington.

"Good. Good." Tarlington was practically beaming when he heard the news.

"Let us depart before anyone comes snooping around." Chantry suggested. He knew that Jason Gray and others would be coming bright and early at nine am. It was seven thirty am now. They did not have much time to act.

When there was a loud strident ringing of the phone, Lobo picked up, listened to it and then hung up. He curled around her and bent his head to Alessandra who stirred with a sleepy grumble when she felt light tantalizing kisses traveling up her neck. She smiled and turned her head and received a warm kiss from her man.

"Morning sleepy." Lobo said, wrapping his arms around her waist as she nestled into his embrace.

"Yes, it is a lovely morning." Alessandra noted that the sun was just beginning to rise. "I was too tired to go to the meeting."

"You did not miss much." Lobo wondered how much longer he would be able to last with the way that she was teasing him. "I ditched it right at the beginning though Sykes and Josiah had tried to keep me there."

Lobo lost track of what he was saying, when he felt her hands caressing his skin. They were very talented and were stirring him up to a high degree. His long legs spread

slightly and then bent upward. He grunted when she turned around and impaled herself on him. They groaned simultaneously and she smiled.

“Now this is the way that I wanted to be awakened.” Alessandra told him. She smiled when he eyed her with understanding.

“They did not want to let me go.” He grumbled, and there was a distinct flush mantling his cheekbones. Alessandra laughed, a throaty sound and then they began moving together. When their flush of passion faded, he sighed and then moved around more comfortably.

“I suppose we should begin talking a bit.” He said, at peace for the moment.

“I will start.” Alessandra told him a small bit about her family.

He listened intently, frowning a couple of times. “So your mother and aunts committed suicide and left you, your siblings, and your cousins alone to survive the best that you could?” His voice was laced with anger.

“Yes. I was the youngest at four. My oldest brother was seventeen. There were eleven other children between us.” Her face was drawn. “Mora Aless was my sister. Step-sister, yes, but my sister nonetheless.” Her eyes filled with tears and he hugged her gently.

He rested his chin on her head and softly encouraged her to let the tears come. She broke down and let the grief that had been bottled up for the past twenty years begin to flow.

Lobo pulled a blanket around them, giving her warmth all around. “I am sorry for what you were put through by the Loman’s.” He said finally. “However, I am beginning to think that she is not dead.” Lobo was silent as she stared at him in shock. “We can begin another search, Alessandra. I will not promise anything though.”

She nodded and dried her tears with one of the blankets. Alessandra moved over him and they loved again, though he understood that this time it would be for her. He was glad that she trusted him enough to do what she was doing.

“I love you, Alessandra.” He carried her hand to his lips and then kissed her startled mouth shut. Right then she climaxed and shuddered over his body and collapsed upon him.

“Why do we say this to each other when times are rough?” Alessandra asked him.

He regarded her with wry cautiousness. “If you recall we were in situations that did not allow for many tender moments or confessions.” Lobo reminded her, his hands stroking her back.

Then he sighed. “I was afraid to tell you.” He admitted finally. “Not to mention the fact that you were so insistent upon getting back to Abornia.” Lobo regarded her with a

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faint frown pleating his forehead.

“That did not do much to convince me that we could have something worth fighting for. Plus I did not know what I was feeling.” His eyes held wariness and love at the same time.

Alessandra studied the lean wolf-like man in the bed and glanced down at their entwined bodies. “I would not have chased you so hard if I had not had feelings for you.” She said after a moment. Then looked at him curiously, well aware that looks were deceptive, especially his. “How old are you?” She asked impulsively and he looked more than a tad uncomfortable.

“Thirty-nine.” He muttered. “Officially, I’m ten years younger.” His eyes held hers. “I do not age, Alessandra. I stopped aging ten to fifteen years ago.”

She nodded slowly. “When your Lycan blood was activated.” Alessandra smiled at him when she murmured the words.

He shook his head. “No, something else.” Lobo said. “I cannot describe it though. You would have to have gone through the experience.” His expression and tone let her know that it had not been a pleasant event.

She grumbled at that, but kept her other questions at bay. “Breakfast?” She hinted with arched eyebrows.

He chuckled at her hopeful expression. “All right. Would you like to shower first?”

“Yes.” She eyed him. “I think I will take it alone.” Alessandra decided, knowing he needed time to himself.

Lobo grinned at her. Then he murmured. “I will just use it briefly.” With that he left the bed and walked into the bathroom. There was a flush and he padded back in and pulled on a pair of sweats. Then he walked down the hall to the mini-kitchen.

Alessandra smiled and showered as soon as he left. Then she walked into the kitchen.

He glanced at her over his shoulder. “What would you like to munch on?”

“I would like to say you, but we should really finish up on all the meetings.” Alessandra said, though she was visibly reluctant to go to the meeting.

Lobo hugged her close. “I feel the same way.” He eyed her soberly. “Will you marry me after all this is over?”

She smiled, though her surprise was obvious. “Yes, I will marry you, Lobo.” Alessandra laughed when he caught her up and then whirled her around.

He carefully set her down and produced a small box from a pocket. “Open it.” He watched her cautiously.

Alessandra opened it and gave him a startled expression. Then she picked up the small ring that would fit her finger, and it sparkled. It was pure gold set with small emeralds and amethysts.

“It reminded me of you.” He said gruffly, his face turning dull red.

Alessandra opened her mouth and then shut it. Finally she cleared her throat. “Could you put it on?” Her hands were shaking too badly.

Lobo smiled and did exactly that. The ring fit perfectly. “We should go now.” He murmured, after they had tackled each other, in an embrace that had been wild and fast. He slid her off the table, and carried her still impaled on him to the shower. There the water rolled over them nice and warm.

She rubbed against him as she murmured. “This is not the way to cool me off.”

Lobo chuckled and murmured. “Who said I wanted to cool you off?”

Her indignant. “Lobo!”

He cut off with a searing kiss and thrust of his hardening cock that kept her occupied and screaming toward the end though the screams she muffled against his shoulder. He snarled at the end and gave a hoarse shout. She shivered the water was icy cold in sharp contrast to Lobo’s hot flesh.

“Now I am cold.” Alessandra complained, opening one eye to glare at him.

He gave her a sheepish grin. “I must have been holding onto the water controller.” He dried her off and chased her out with a swat.

Alessandra left with a squeal and threw in his clothes. He caught them before they landed on the soaked floor. His glinting eyes promised retribution when he heard her trailing laughter as she ran out.

When Alessandra and Lobo arrived at the meeting, they were over two hours late. Still, they tolerated the teasing that they were put through with good nature.

Jason Gray was grinning at the sight of the surly Lobo hovering over Alessandra with a distinctively possessive air. “So when is the wedding?” His question was asked cheerfully, even though he knew others had asked him that already.

Lobo just shook his head with a laugh. “We haven’t set a date yet.” His eyes were wry. Alessandra chuckled. They glanced at each other and were clearly amused at the barrage by the same question. Lobo had never known there were that many variations.

Luckily Alessandra seemed to understand how to field them. “I need to tell my relatives.” She said mildly. “They don’t know yet.”

Gray nodded thoughtfully. “Understandable.” He said distractedly and then thoughtfully looked at Lobo. “Do you still want to investigate further on the other

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matters?”

Lobo looked momentarily puzzled and then shook his head. “No.” He said abruptly. “Best concentrate on getting those Loman men back to the prime of health.”

Jason nodded. “The trial is being set for two weeks from now.” He hesitated. “One of them had gone into cardiac arrest but was saved.” He frowned. “They may have to be moved from the state for the time being.”

Lobo tensed. “Where?”

“Patoc.” Jason said. “We planned to move Reginald today, but he was not in the hospital room when I went in to see how he was doing.” He told them. “Why?”

Lobo just rubbed his forehead. “I just have a bad feeling about the fact that not everything was finished last night.”

“Tarlington?” Gray asked.

Castillo hissed at the name his eyes glinting angrily. “So that is why you warned me about him.”

Lobo nodded. “Yes. I had gotten the information from one of his--ah--spies.”

“Who?” Castillo asked.

“Chantry.” Lobo told him.

“Chantry.” Jason cursed. “He left Judanya this morning, saying that he had to take care of some business elsewhere.” He slumped into his chair.

Alessandra’s eyes went to the Alpha who seemed rather distracted. “Alpha? Castillo?” She called to him softly.

Castillo was sitting in a seat and watching them, smiling, but his eyes were worried. When he snapped to the present he raised his eyebrows at the young woman. “What was that, Alessandra?”

Alessandra just shook her head. “I was just wondering what was worrying you.”

Castillo was silent. “I still want to know who was after Reginald above and beyond Loman.” He told her. There was an uneasy silence that settled on the table.

Finally Jason asked softly. “Did either of you see Reginald this morning, err, afternoon?” There were hoots of laughter at his slipup.

Alessandra and Lobo exchanged glances uneasily. “No.” Lobo said slowly. “I did not hear him come to the room last night.”

Alessandra’s smile faded. “What happened?”

Castillo would have spoken but the phone rang.

Jason hit the speakerphone. “Who is this?”

Raquela frowned at the voice. She did not recognize it. Still, she shrugged. “You

will never see Reginald Castillo alive.” There was mocking triumph in the woman’s words.

Lobo’s eyes narrowed and fury bubbled in his veins. “What the hell have you done with him, Raquela Ramirez?”

Raquela grinned vindictively. Now that was more like it. “He is out of your reach.” Then she hung up.

A gunshot followed her actions, and Chantry glanced at Tarlington who held a smoking gun in his hands.

He stared hard at Chantry. “That is what happens when I am betrayed.” Turning away from him Tarlington called for Chambers who came running. He did not bother to say anything as he rolled the body into a pad of plastic and sent her below. Then he went back to business while two other men cleaned up the gore.

Chantry closed his mind off the sight of his dead lover. A painful regret swelled in his chest and that too was buried away. He knew what he had to do and focused on his present task.

Tarlington glanced at him. “You are updating the security around sectors BA, 25, and AA9, 12, and 17?”

“Yes I am, Tarlington.” Chantry replied. He was also transmitting coded copies of the measures to others. It was a calculated risk, but he had not liked what his life had become.

Castillo spoke quietly into a phone he had pressed to activate. “A correctional institute in Matania.” He had the line tapped.

Gray glanced up when the door opened. “Yes, Sykes?”

“Mirabella Ruiz’ body was found this morning.” Sykes said hoarsely. “Apparently she was never dead, just hidden and forced into a different life. She ended it.” He mimed a gun pulling the trigger.

“What else?” Jason hoped for better news.

Sykes shrugged. “Well, the Morales’ are on their way.”

Alessandra shifted uneasily and Lobo gave her a reassuring hug.

“Anything else?” Jason asked.

“No word on Mora Aless.” Sykes said though his expression was uneasy.

“Probably because I did not remember my own memories until six years ago.” Mora said, coming inside. Her eyes were guarded when she looked at Alessandra. “Seeing her helped, but I did not remember my name until I first saw Reginald.” She grimaced.

“Arid?” Alessandra remembered her from earlier days. Their training days for the pack, and the later combat missions.

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“Yes, I am Arid.” Mora was holding a large box in her arms that she dumped onto the desk in front of the Alpha and Jason. “This should help the investigation.” Her voice was brusque when she spoke.

Alessandra looked at Lobo and bit her lip.

He gave her a wry smile. “I saw her after all the ugly events went down that night.” Lobo said quietly. “I honestly didn’t know who she was. I knew her as Sheba Tolliver.” He shrugged looking uncomfortable.

Mora smiled at him. “You helped me though.” She said gently. “I appreciate that.” Then she headed out of the office.

Alessandra sighed, resting a hand on her abdomen. Lobo glanced at her with concern.

“You two just concentrate on your future and plan the wedding.” Leaning back in his chair, Jason Gray was smiling when the Morales came inside and hugged Alessandra. Watching Lobo grinned and looking on grunting when he was embraced in a big hug as well.

“We will take care of details since a little one is already on its way.” Castaneda said gruffly, though he was smiling at the couple. Then he shot a lowered brow over at Castillo. “Is there something you still need to tell him?” He gestured at Lobo.

Castillo shook his head. “Not a good time.”

Castaneda made a rude noise. “Good time it is.” He insisted. “He should know something of his roots.” He folded his arms and glared.

Castillo looked at Lobo who merely looked back. Neither man was pleased with this forced confrontation especially since Lobo didn’t care what his parentage was in general. He remembered all too clearly what happened when he met with other Castillo clan members.

“You are my father or grandfather?” Lobo asked.

“Your father.” Castillo muttered, casting Castaneda a glare. Interfering busybody, he thought angrily.

Lobo’s eyes flickered. “I did not ask before because I did not need to know.” He stroked Alessandra’s hair as she hugged him happily.

Despite his irritation she knew he was pleased to have confirmation. Snuggling against him Alessandra said with pleasure. “I am glad to know now.”

“Where do you want to go now?” Gray asked, knowing that they would not want to be in Altagon, or at least in Wako Springs. There were still different locations that were unexplored and wild on Beregonia.

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“Patoc.” Alessandra said.

Lobo slowly nodded his head in agreement.

“Done.” Both Gray and Castillo spoke simultaneously and they looked at each other. The others in the room began laughing loudly and clapping.

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Epilogue

“How are you doing this day, Alessandra?” The doctor asked her.

“Crabby, and labor pains started twelve hours ago.” Alessandra said, she was panting and Lobo was by her side. He spoke calmly, keeping her focused on his voice, which was soft and hypnotic.

Seven hours later...

Triplets were born to Alessandra and Lobo Castillo

Two boys and a girl

Gray Joseph Castillo

Leon Verde Castillo

Mirabella Raquela Castillo

B.L. Foxxe

About the Author

B.L. Foxxe is a newly published author. She lives in Newport News, Va with two roommates & three feisty cats. B.L. Foxxe loves reading, drawing, and taking long walks in her spare time.