

# **Hoosier Werewolf 3: Things That Go Grr**

## **Kate Steele**

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**Never show weakness. For two men, human Nick Parks and werewolf Lucas Devereau, it's the creed they live by. Trouble is, just because something is hidden doesn't mean it's not there. With a little trust they may just discover in each other a mate who truly understands the heart and soul of an alpha.**

**In the final installment of this series, Nick and his brothers Ethan and Dustin are on the verge of discovering a world few humans see. Secrets are about to be revealed and an unforeseen danger faced. The Parks brothers will need every ounce of family loyalty and love they possess to see them through the gathering storm.**

## Prologue

Inner debates could be a real bitch. Lucas Devereau took another sip of fifteen-year-old single malt scotch while musing on that very true but frustrating fact. This should have been one of the happiest days of his life. He'd found his mate and yet he wasn't sure whether to curse or thank his lucky stars. His thoughts returned to the moment he'd met Nick Parks.

Luc had been crossing the floor at his club, Midnight Howl, when a mesmerizing scent captured his attention. It was male, arousing and drew his attention like nothing he'd ever experienced in his life. Thoughts of the conversation he'd wanted to have with one of the bartenders were swept from his mind in the wake of that tantalizing aroma. With the heavy weight of sexual desire building in his groin, he'd unerringly followed the scent to its source, coming face to face with Nick.

A low, involuntary rumble sounded deep in Luc's chest, one that at once expressed lust, approval and pride. Shifting in his chair he contemplated his memory of the man, his mate. Nick was everything he could have wished for. Not only was he handsome and strong, he was a true alpha, a mate who could stand by Luc's side as an equal, not a subordinate.

Nick's dark hair reminded Lucas of nights brightened by moonlight while his fathomless blue eyes brought to mind mountain lakes under clear, cloudless skies. Physically they were a match, although being a werewolf gave Lucas quite an advantage as far as strength was concerned. It hadn't taken long to ascertain Nick's status as an alpha. Even Crewe and Chad had shown slight deference to the man.

While more than willing to treat humans with respect, this kind of regard, a nearly invisible form of subtle submission, was something most werewolves would not

accord a human. It was only another werewolf who could detect the minute nuances of body language that broadcast their regard for Nick.

It had surprised Lucas to no end that Nick was a brother to Ethan and Dustin. It also, at first, set off a split second flare of anger and jealousy that two of his wolves would show a human the kind of deference that only he as their alpha should receive. His inner wolf had raised its hackles and growled, preparing to fight the interloper who dared insinuate himself between Lucas and members of his pack.

It was only Luc's human side that kept the wolf at bay by means of logic and reason. As his mate, Nick must be accorded such respect, but the wolf, in his pride, was not above chastising for even imagined slights. Such was the way of wolves. The alpha maintained his place by physical strength and cunning. Periodic shows of that strength were called for to keep his subordinates in line.

Luckily for both Nick and Luc, the wolf within was amendable to reason. The line between man and beast was a finely drawn one at the best of times. Every human had a primitive side. Couple that with the instincts of the wolf and the balancing act between peace and aggression became that much more precarious. It was, in the end, the very fact that Nick was his mate that made the wolf subside. The inner animal became much more interested in mating than fighting.

Lucas sighed at the memory. Finding Nick held a possible solution to the biggest problem he'd faced since becoming alpha of his pack but still he debated. To court Nick now, to let it be known that Nick was his, would put the man in danger.

*But what choice do I have? Who better to trust?*

The answer was clear. No one. A wolf instinctively trusted his mate and Lucas trusted his instincts, both human and wolf. He lifted his glass and finished the last swallow, savoring the whiskey's smoke and peat burn. Tomorrow he would call Nick.

Decision made, he sat back in his chair and breathed a heavy sigh. *Just please let there be time enough for me to make him mine before I have to send him away.*

\* \* \*

Nick hung up the phone. "Well that's a new one."

"What's a new one?" his brother Ethan asked, wandering in from the kitchen.

"Someone asking *me* out. It's usually the other way around."

"Let me guess. Lucas Devereau. Am I right?" Ethan asked with a pleased grin.

"Nickie's got a boyfriend," he sing-songed.

Nick narrowed his eyes, made a grab for Ethan and wrestled him down to the sofa. "You know what happens to smartasses, don't you, little bro?"

Catching Ethan between his own large body and the back of the sofa, he proceeded to tickle his brother until Ethan had tears rolling from his eyes. Ethan manfully fought back, getting in more than his share of tickles before Nick overwhelmed him. When Ethan was finally begging for mercy Nick let up and lay there, cuddling his brother while the two of them regained their breath.

Crewe chose that moment to appear from downstairs where he'd been working out. Stopping in front of the sofa, he raised an eyebrow and gave Nick a faux glare. "What have you been doing to my baby?"

Nick snorted and sat up. "Nothing near as interesting as you've done to him, I'm sure. From the sounds I heard last night..."

Face flaming, Ethan slapped a hand over Nick's mouth. "Do *not* even go there," he ordered.

Snickering, Crewe took a seat on the edge of sofa next to Ethan and hauled him onto his lap. "Now, Ethan. Don't be embarrassed. Rather you should feel sorry for your big brother. That haunting silence coming from his bedroom is positively chilling," Crewe teased, shooting Nick an evil grin.

Nick flipped him off and rose to his feet. "I've been resting up. Besides, I plan to make some noise tonight."

"Oh *really*. Anybody I know?"

"Lucas Devereau," Ethan revealed, beating his brother to the punch.

Nick made a mock feint toward Ethan who yelped and nearly knocked Crewe backward with his desperate lunge to wrap himself around his lover. Righting himself

and his mate, Crewe managed to gasp past the stranglehold Ethan had around his neck.  
“Lucas?”

Something in Crewe’s tone drew Nick’s attention. “Something wrong with that?”

Crewe shook his head while loosening Ethan’s grip. “Nooo.” His lips twitched.  
“It’s just that you being you and Lucas being Lucas, I’m wondering at the logistics of this supposed noisemaking.”

“What the hell does that mean?”

“You ever bottom?”

“No.” Nick’s single worded answer was cast iron, sure and unshakable.

“Neither does Lucas.”

“How do you know?”

“I’ve known him for years. His reputation isn’t exactly a huge secret.”

Quirking his lips, Nick nodded. “Well, this should be interesting.”

“You’re still going?” Ethan asked.

“Of course. No one’s ever resisted the Parks charm.”

“I’ll say one thing,” Crewe admitted. “I admire your confidence.”

“I’ve never been shot down.”

“You might want to pack your parachute this time.”

“Says you. I’m going down to the basement to work out for a while. You children behave,” Nick admonished.

Crewe took his gaze from Nick’s retreating back and turned it on Ethan. Ethan was giving him a very solemn yet speculative look. “What?”

“I bottom. All the time.”

Once more Crewe found himself struggling to still the smile that threatened.  
“That’s true. You ready to top?”

Big blue eyes widened in disbelief. “You’d let me?”

“It’s not a question of letting you. It’s a question of what you need, what we need.”

“You need me to top you?”

Crewe kissed Ethan soft and slow before drawing back. He looked deep into his mate's eyes. "I need to do my best to make you happy, just like I know you do for me. If that means letting you top me then, yes, I need it. It doesn't really matter, baby. I know you'll take care of me, make me feel good. All that really matters is we love each other, that we give and take in a way that's acceptable and pleasurable for both of us. Doesn't that make sense?"

Ethan nodded and leaned his forehead against Crewe's. His arms tightened around Crewe's neck. "I love you so much," he murmured.

"How about we go upstairs and you show me?" Crewe returned.

"Whatever you need, lover."

Crewe laughed, lifted Ethan off his lap and the two of them headed upstairs.

In the basement doorway, Nick stood with a pensive expression on his face. He really hadn't meant to eavesdrop but Ethan's declaration that he always bottomed stopped him before his foot hit the first downward step. He had to admit there was a lot of truth in Crewe's words. Love and fulfilling your partner's needs were the deciding factors when it came to who topped or who bottomed.

Nick had never felt that connection with anyone. He'd never gotten close enough that anyone saw beneath the tough exterior. Guys took one look at him and there was no question he was the top, which suited him just fine. There was no way any casual fuck was getting his ass. Nick had pretty much come to realize that his heart and his ass were a package deal. Trouble was he wasn't sure there was anybody out there capable of winning them.



## Chapter One

This was a mistake. Everything was just as it should be. Almost. The conversation, the food, the company, all were top notch but Nick was struggling with an amount of tension the likes of which he'd never felt when on a date. Normally there were signals, gestures that hinted at his partner's willingness to submit. A coy lowering of lashes, a shy turn of the head, a look that just screamed "take me."

Not this time. Neither he nor Lucas was giving the least indication of succumbing to the other. Oh, there was plenty of sexual tension. Nick could practically smell the testosterone swirling in with every breath he took, but he was beginning to believe what Crewe had said. Lucas was no bottom. Well, neither was Nick. So where did that leave them? It certainly looked like his intention to make noise tonight was going nowhere.

At least the surroundings were nice. It wasn't often Nick found someone who appreciated fine dining. The restaurant was elegant. The booths were high-backed and placed in such a way that provided privacy and invited intimacy. A lit candle flickered and reflected off the plates which held the remains of their meals, prime rib with all the trimmings. Most guys Nick met were content with a burger, if they actually shared a meal at all. Lucas obviously enjoyed employing a little finesse with his seduction. Too bad it looked as though that seduction was going to end in a draw.

Both men turned down the offer of dessert from the waiter who arrived to clear their table. At Lucas' direction, he returned with the bill to which Lucas offered a credit card for payment. The waiter retreated, leaving them alone once more.

"So you travel quite a bit," Lucas commented.

Nick turned his gaze from the candle flame, bringing his attention back to his companion for the evening. He had to admit, mistake or not, Lucas was one fine

looking man. They were evenly matched in height, something that Nick found unusual. He'd never gone out with anyone who equaled his own height of six-feet-five.

"Yes," he answered, "although that will be changing very soon. My business is doing well. Enough that I've hired someone to take on some of the road trips."

He watched Lucas nod and admired the light as it played over the multicolored strands of his blond hair. Lucas reached up and nonchalantly brushed a stray lock of hair back from his face. The gesture was graceful but there was nothing willowy about it. The move was pure male. Nick let his gaze meet Lucas'. There was unmistakable heat in those strange eyes. They were amber, rich, molten, golden honey that fastened on a man and seemed to look below the surface. Or they tried. Nick was very good at hiding things he had no wish to share.

The waiter returned with Lucas' credit card and left after wishing them a good evening.

"Owning Midnight Howl must bring its share of excitement," Nick observed.

Lucas reached for his wineglass and took a sip. His lips came away from the glass moist with a shine Nick wanted to lean across the table and taste. To run his tongue over that full bottom lip, to suck it into his own mouth to nibble. The thought was more than tantalizing. The heavy, persuasive ache of sexual arousal that had settled in his groin gave a sharp throb of anticipation when the tip of Lucas' tongue took a shallow swipe at his lips before he answered.

"It can be exciting. I love those nights when everything is going fine and I can wander out into the club, sit at the bar, order a drink and just watch the fun unfold. Then there are the days when shipments are delayed or the wrong order sent. The bartenders might be feuding or the complaints about not being able to use the restroom because it's turned into a whore house have piled up and I have to send the bouncers in to clear the place out. And then there are the customers. So many people with so many reasons to be there. Some looking for sex, some for love, others just come to dance. They score drinks, drugs, and companionship in as many varied combinations as there are

people wanting those things. It can be fascinating, amusing, in some cases heart wrenching. But it's never dull."

Fascinated, Nick watched Lucas as he spoke, noting the brief smile, the flash of annoyance, the haunting sadness and finally the acceptance. "You can't give everyone a happy ending," Nick said, softly offering the remark. "And yet you wish you could."

Lucas's eyes widened ever so slightly before resuming their steady regard of Nick. "You're very observant. No one's ever picked up on my maudlin need to make everything right with the world. We each have to fight for our own happy endings."

For Lucas to so readily admit to what he must consider a weakness gave Nick pause. This man, by Crewe's description and Nick's own impression, seemed to be in the very same boat Nick was. Outward appearances had placed him in a mold of others' making. He was supposed to be tough, strong, always in charge, always on top and never touched by the vulnerability of others. Perhaps this wasn't a mistake after all. Lucas Devereau might be the one man who could truly understand what lived under the surface of someone who was expected never to be weak or to want someone else to lead, to take control, if only for a short time.

"It's easy to recognize a fellow sufferer. I don't have a club full of people to worry about but my brothers have given me more than enough to handle."

Lucas smiled. "Ethan and Dustin. Yes. I like them both. Two very different young men and they've captured the hearts of two of my best."

"Your best?" Nick asked with an inquiring tilt of his head.

"I consider both Crewe and Chad a part of my extended family. If things continue in this vein I'll want to introduce you to my, for lack of a better word, clan. They're a very diverse and unique bunch of people."

"Sounds intriguing."

"I was hoping you'd think so. I'm looking for ways to keep you interested," Lucas baldly stated.

Nick's brow rose. He let Lucas see the amusement he felt along with the desire. "Oh, I'm definitely interested."

Lucas' grin was unashamedly sensual. "Shall we go? I have some nice, thirty-year-old tawny port at home with a sweet, nutty flavor that goes well with the flaky pastries that are right this minute sitting in my kitchen. Or I've got several varieties of beer from some of the more popular micro breweries that might be more to your taste."

"What I'd really like to taste is you," Nick answered. He saw no reason to be any less candid than Lucas was proving to be.

Without batting a lash, Lucas rose from his seat. "I'll be more than happy to help you with that."

The two of them left the restaurant, stopping only long enough to retrieve their coats from the coat check attendant. Nick left the young man smiling as he pocketed a very nice tip and Lucas did the same with the valet.

Once in Lucas' car, Nick sat back with sigh of satisfaction. "Thank you for the meal. The last time I went to the Carriage House was to celebrate Ethan's graduation from college. Our parents insisted on splurging. They were so proud. Ethan was valedictorian of his class." Nick smiled in remembrance. "He was terrified at having to make a speech."

"I can just imagine. He's rather shy. Although he seems to have gained a measure of confidence since he's been with Crewe," Lucas observed as he got them started on their journey to his home.

"He has," Nick commented, pleased that Lucas had noticed. In the dim dashboard lights he noted the long, tapered length of Lucas' fingers where they gripped the steering wheel. Thoughts of what those fingers could do made him half hard with growing arousal.

"And was he able to make his speech?"

"He did. He was white as a sheet and shaking like a leaf until he got a grip on the podium, but he did very well."

"Poor kid, I'm glad he got through it all right. If it had been your brother, Dustin, I doubt he'd have had so much trouble. He's more like you. There's no lack of confidence but unlike you, Dustin is trusting, even somewhat naïve it seems."

"That's true. I've come to realize that it's just part of Dustin's personality. He always sees the best in people. I'm glad he found Chad. Chad's had enough experience as a lawyer to be cynical enough for the two of them. I think he'll keep Dustin out of trouble."

Lucas chuckled. "Chad would be pleased to have your vote of confidence."

"You seem to have learned quite a bit about my brothers in the short time you've known them," Nick remarked with a slightly puzzled frown. For some reason his protective instincts were sending him a signal he couldn't ignore. His arousal retreated while suspicion took its place.

Lucas gave Nick a quick glance. "As I said in the restaurant, I consider Crewe and Chad to be family. Naturally Ethan and Dustin are now included."

"Just how large is this family?" Nick shook off sudden thoughts of some odd cult having gotten a hold of his brothers. Silently he scoffed at his own imagination. Crewe and Chad were about as un-cult-like as any two guys could be.

"Well, I've never taken an actual headcount. I could name names if you like and we'll count them together."

Nick snorted. "I don't think that'll be necessary, but just for the record, anyone who messes with my brothers messes with me." His voice had gone solemn and serious.

"I feel the same about those under my care, which means Ethan and Dustin are doubly protected and more. Relax, Nick. Do you honestly think Crewe or Chad would let any harm come to their lovers?"

"No, and I don't know where the hell this is coming from. If Ethan was here he'd be telling me to chill. He says I'm overprotective. It seems he's right," Nick admitted with a self-deprecating smile.

"I've been accused of that a time or two. Better that than uncaring. I happen to think it's an extremely good trait."

Lucas steered the conversation in other directions and Nick relaxed, unsure why he'd felt the need to make it clear that his brothers were watched over and would be

defended. He mused that perhaps it was because he'd never really had to share them before.

Crewe was Ethan's first and, Nick was willing to bet, would be his only lover. Dustin had never been with anyone long enough to make meeting them an issue. Now here they were with Crewe and Chad both important parts of his brothers' lives. Lucas, by his association with his brothers' lovers, had also become a part of their lives as well. There were a lot of changes taking place, many that Nick had no say over. Though he'd never tried to run his brothers' lives, it was a little disorienting to have so many things out of his control. Life had been so much easier when Ethan and Dustin were little.

He smiled at that thought. *This must be how parents feel when their children grow up.*

It wasn't long before Lucas was steering his car down the streets of a quiet, old and elegant neighborhood. The houses were a fair distance apart with stands of trees and brush separating them. Lucas' home was far beyond and completely out of sight of any others. It rested in a large clearing at the end of a long driveway that split and ran in two directions. One fork led to a four car garage, the other passed in front of the house then circled back to rejoin the main stem.

Lucas pressed a button on the garage door opener attached to his visor and drove in. Lights came on automatically. "Chad lives just a few miles from here. Have you been to his home yet?"

"Not yet but I'm going Wednesday. He and Dustin are cooking dinner for Ethan, Crewe and me. I'm allowed to bring a friend. I'm sure they'd be glad to see another familiar face if you'd care to go," Nick offered.

"I'd like that," Lucas replied with a smile. He parked the car and the two of them got out.

Lucas led the way while Nick admired the large, neat garage. In addition to the car they'd arrived in, a black SUV also made its home there. Keys jangling softly, Lucas unlocked the heavy, wooden door that stood between the garage and the house proper. Opening the door he took the single step up and in and, with a few fluid taps on a lighted keyboard, disarmed the security system.

Nick followed and found himself in a short alcove-like hallway. At one end stood an antique mirrored coat rack and at the other were stairs leading up. With two large men taking up space, the hallway felt nearly cramped. Not that Nick was complaining. Being in close proximity to Lucas was no hardship. While they shed their coats, Nick took note of the large, open doorway situated another step up that revealed itself to be the entrance to the kitchen.

"Those stairs lead up to my office slash den," Lucas explained, flipping on a light while leading the way further into the house. "This is obviously the kitchen. Straight ahead through the far doorway is a combination dining room, living room. Down that hallway to your left is the guest bathroom and further down is a guestroom. If you look down the hall to the right, facing the front door there's another set of stairs that lead up to two other bedrooms. Both have their own private baths."

"Very nice," Nick commented.

The room was large and airy. The kitchen floor was tiled in cream with subtle light gold and green patterns decorating the tile. Counters of dark green granite went well with the wood cabinets in a medium maple stain. There was a dishwasher but several clean glasses and a plate rested in a drainer above it. All of the appliances were modern and shiny in black and white.

Nick walked over to the doorway that led to a living room that encompassed the entire length of the house. At one end near doors that opened out onto a back porch, there was a large dining room table and chairs with a matching china cabinet. The dining area was casually partitioned off by a loveseat which was positioned with its back to the table. In front of it was a long coffee table that held several magazines and books. A matching sofa sat near the inside wall and faced the huge brick fireplace on the opposite wall. Even with several other comfortable chairs with matching ottomans, an antique bureau and end tables at either side of the sofa, the room was far from crowded.

He turned when he felt Lucas at his back.

"How about that drink?" Lucas asked. His gaze was intent, his voice low and controlled.

"I'd rather have a kiss," Nick answered honestly, his own voice a husky rasp.

"A kiss it is," Lucas answered and leaned in.

Without hesitation Nick moved to meet him. Their lips met, parting and sliding ever so subtly to find just the right fit. Once it was found the kiss was truly born, bringing to life and freeing all the passion that waited beneath the surface. Warmth blossomed into heat, attraction became desire. Bodies that were clinging to a slight control of arousal tensed, tightened and broke their restraints. Hearts raced and breaths sped. Blood rushed through veins to fill two cocks that brushed against each other behind the fabric barriers that held them.

Nick wrapped his arms around Lucas and was in turn folded into strong, muscular arms. Everyone he'd ever kissed had their own unique taste and Lucas was no exception. The only difference was this taste, this flavor that filled his mouth and danced on his tongue, made his head spin. There was no way to describe it or explain its power, not that he was concerned about such things at the moment. All he wanted now was more.

Lucas pressed forward, applying a slight pressure that Nick allowed by retreating one step then two until his back met the wide frame of the open doorway between the kitchen and the living room. The kiss deepened, their warm breaths mingling, firm lips clinging and tongues teasing, learning, exploring. A deep rumble vibrated against Nick's chest and he echoed the sound with a groan of his own.

Nick slid the fingers of one hand into the silky heat of Luc's hair, curving them around the base of Lucas' skull to hold him right where Nick desired. His other hand skated slowly down Lucas' back and came to rest on the curve of his ass where he gripped it firmly. Using the doorway at his back for leverage, he pushed his groin forward, grinding their erections together. His action brought another groan from both himself and Lucas.



Lucas pulled back from the kiss, his eyes glittering with heat. He released his hold on Nick, his hands going to the buttons on Nick's shirt. "I want skin. Need to feel you," he growled.

That rough sound conveyed Lucas' need and resonated within Nick. Not content to let Lucas take the lead, Nick echoed Lucas' actions. His fingers worked the buttons of Lucas' shirt, warm skin and a light dusting of chest hair being revealed with each inch of parting fabric. His fingertips glided over a flat male nipple making it harden in reaction. Lucas hissed at Nick's act, his mouth slamming down on Nick's once more. Even engaged in another drugging kiss, Nick continued to work at random buttons, his own and Luc's.

Their shirtfronts finally parted and once more they put a slight distance between them in order to examine what was exposed. Nick noted the appreciation in Lucas' gaze and knew his own approval was evident. Lucas was every bit as hard and muscular as Nick had imagined him to be. His broad chest, bulging pecs and rippling abs were covered with patterned whorls of silky, honey blond hair. Nick's eyes followed the tantalizing treasure trail that disappeared under the waistband of Lucas' slacks.

"I'll show you mine if you show me yours," Lucas teased, his voice a growling rumble.

A smile tugged at Nick's lips as his gaze lifted to meet Lucas'. "Deal," he replied succinctly, reaching for the button on his own slacks.

Two sets of avidly eager eyes watched while the other opened the button on their own slacks and slowly slid the zippers down. Nick tucked his thumbs under the waistband of both his slacks and briefs, lifting them far enough from his waist to clear his erection then sliding them down his thighs. Lucas did the same. Separated by mere inches, they each took in their fill. Lucas' cock fulfilled the promise of his body. Long, thick and utterly gorgeous. Nick noted the clear drops of pre-come that trembled at the slit in the plump, reddish head and his mouth watered for a taste.

He reached out and Lucas stepped forward until their bodies were plastered together, their mouths connecting. Both men moved, pushing, undulating until their

cocks were rubbing together side by side. Deep groans reverberated in their chests, throats and mouths until they broke the kiss. Nick slid a hand between their bodies, his fingers curling around their cocks on one side as Lucas did the same on the other.

Together they pumped and pulled at the thick, hard columns until the world dwindled down to one thing. The need to come. With every upward move Nick brushed his fingers over the swollen heads, the touch making him jerk against Lucas. While Lucas did the same they stared at each other, eyes reflecting the pleasure and their growing desperation for orgasm. Nick fought to hold on, waiting for Lucas to surrender. When this encounter had become a contest of wills he wasn't sure, but he was determined not to break. If he hadn't been so focused on keeping his climax at bay, Nick would have been laughing. This was one kind of competition in which he'd never participated.

"Come," he finally ordered, fixing Lucas with a commanding gaze. "You know you need it."

"You first," Lucas shot back. "I'm not the only one in need."

Nick's own fierce grin matched the feral showing of teeth Lucas' smile revealed.

"Together," Nick compromised.

"All right," Lucas agreed.

"Ready?"

"Yes."

"Now?"

"Yes."

"Now!"

Harsh, guttural groans accompanied the thick sprays of semen that spattered their abdomens and coated their still stroking hands and fingers. Nick clenched his eyes shut, panting with the pleasure that twisted his gut with exquisite, near-painful precision. Each spurt of seed was accompanied by a jolt of sensation that gentled to faint aftershocks. Gradually his body relaxed and he was grateful for the wide doorway at his back, especially when Lucas' weight came to rest against him.

Both of them remained quiet for a moment as their breathing steadied and their heartbeats returned to normal. Nick drew his hand from between them and took a deep breath of their mingled scent. If he hadn't just come, the heady aroma would have made his cock hard. As it was he felt a faint twitch of interest and smiled when Lucas answered with a tiny twist of his hips.

Lucas too was smiling when he lifted his head and met Nick's gaze. "You're very competitive," he noted, "and hot as hell. Stay the night?"

"Look who's talking," Nick replied with mild sarcasm, "and yes, but I have to tell you something."

"Umm?"

"I don't bottom."

Lucas considered his words for a moment. "Neither do I but there are other things we can do." His fingertips ran lightly over Nick's spent cock. "How do you feel about sucking?"

"Giving or receiving?"

"Both."

"That I can handle."

Lucas grinned. "I'm sure you can. How about we clean up a little first before you stain your clothes? Bathroom's just down the hall." Lucas toed off his shoes, shed his pants and picked them up.

Nick took off his own shoes and pants as well before following Lucas down the hall. His eyes traveled the length of Luc's body and settled on his sculpted backside. "I've never seen a finer ass. It seems a shame to waste it," he observed, unable to keep the comment to himself.

Lucas looked back with a raised brow. Tilting his head he gave Nick a look of consideration. "Anything's negotiable. If you want it bad enough and the price is right." He winked and disappeared into the bathroom.

Nick paused for a moment. He was sure the right price would be his own ass in exchange. Was he even willing to consider it? Following Lucas into the bathroom in

time to get another eyeful of taut curved cheeks with tempting indents at the upper, outer quadrants, he knew it wasn't out of the question. It was undeniable that Lucas had a fabulous body, but there was more. Nick liked him and by Lucas' own admission the feeling was mutual. These feelings definitely deserved deeper exploration.

He smiled at the thought. *I know what I'd like to be deeply exploring.*

Lucas turned at that moment to hand him a washcloth. Seeing the look on Nick's face he said, "I bet I know what you're thinking."

"I'll bet you do." Nick took the washcloth and turned the water on at the sink, wetting it down. In the mirror above the counter he watched Lucas with thinly veiled interest.

Easing in behind him, Lucas nuzzled the back of his neck. "You're wondering if an exchange would be worth it."

Lucas' hands pushed up Nick's shirttail and he edged closer, his swelling cock resting against the crevice of Nick's ass. Nick could feel the cool semen that still coated Luc's cock from their mutual release. Lucas rested his hands on Nick's hips and rubbed his cock up and down, the smooth friction warming their connection.

"Will you take my word that I'm clean?" Lucas murmured against Nick's ear before probing with his tongue.

A thrill of sensation tightened Nick's stomach. "Yes. I am too."

"I've no doubt. You're definitely a careful man. Maybe it's time to be a little carefree."

Lucas increased the pressure against his body and Nick braced himself. Using his thumbs, Lucas eased them between his body and Nick's then applied a little pressure to part the cheeks of Nick's ass. His cock insinuated itself in the warm valley, resting flush against Nick's virgin anus. With an indrawn breath, Nick felt his hole spasm at the contact but allowed it. In this position there would be no penetration merely stimulation. He flexed his gluts, pulling a grunt from Lucas.

"Unh! Oh yeah. Hold me tight," Lucas breathed.

Nick shuddered at the warm, misty caress of Lucas' breath against his skin then groaned when Lucas slowly drove his cock up and down the length of Nick's parted cheeks. The sensation imparted by the slide of wet, warm and silky skin over the highly sensitized nerves of his entrance caused Nick to spread his thighs a bit wider. His anal muscles fluttered with each teasing touch. Lucas released his hold on one of Nick's hips and reached around, his questing fingers finding and wrapping around Nick's renewed erection.

"Oh *fuck*, Luc," Nick groaned pushing into the pressure that surrounded his dick.

"Mmm, I like the way you say my name when you're all hot and horny," Lucas growled before inflicting stinging nips followed by teasing licks over the skin of Nick's shoulders, neck and back. "Just imagine how it would feel to have my cock buried in your tight little hole. Has anyone ever put so much as a finger in there, Nick? Have you felt that electric tingle that makes you feel like your cock is going to just explode when someone brushes across your prostate? Has anyone ever eaten your ass? I'd do it for you, babe, lick and suck at your hole until you'd beg to be fucked."

"Fucking teasing-ass bastard," Nick ground out before tearing himself away from Lucas' grip. With one smooth move he had Luc held securely in the position he'd just vacated. "Let's see how you like it, *babe*."

"Wait," Lucas ordered though he made no attempt to fight Nick. He reached for a bottle of lotion on the counter. "Slick us up."

Nick didn't question the request. Automatically he pumped out a handful of lotion, slicked it over his cock and wedged himself between Luc's taut cheeks. Lucas' groan sent a shaft of satisfaction knifing through Nick's gut. Emulating their earlier position, Nick reached around to pump the thick, vein-wrapped column of Lucas' shaft. Luc's head fell back on Nick's shoulder while Nick sucked at the side of his neck.

"Oh, yeah, fuck that's good. Someday I may have to let you do that for real, Nick," Lucas groaned, "but for right now, why don't you slide your cock between my legs?"

Lucas leaned forward, arms stiff, hands braced on the counter, offering himself. His eyes met Nick's in the mirror. Nick held Luc's intense gaze while he slid his cock down the length of Lucas' crevice. Both of them tensed, mouths opening and breaths coming harder when Nick teased the plump head of his cock directly over Luc's anus. After a few electrifying strokes, Nick pushed his cock down, found the space between Lucas' tightened thighs and slammed between them.

Both men groaned. Luc's head dropped down and he pushed back into every forward thrust of Nick's hips. Nick set a counter rhythm with his hand that slid Luc's cock through his fist in time with each stroke of every firm lunge. They settled into the steady, repeating cadence of the movement, their bodies slapping together, their grunts and groans mingling while the tension grew and the pleasure climbed toward its peak.

Having just come, Nick was having an easier time staving off his climax. He reveled in the varied sensations that bombarded his senses. Sweat formed on his skin, small trickles wending down his back and belly making a marked, tickling contrast to the heavy glut of feeling building in his groin. The moist heat produced a wafting veil of aroma, earthy, male musk mixed with the subtle spice of the lotion that he'd used to slick the proper parts.

His gaze moved from Luc's bent head to the moist flesh of his shoulders. Luc's skin bore a rosy flush from their efforts. Nick couldn't resist tasting. He kissed one broad shoulder then licked the faint tang of salt from his lips before letting his tongue take a larger taste. His action brought a rumbling groan from Lucas and he looked up, meeting the man's amber gaze in the mirror.

"Bite me," Lucas demanded, tilting his head to the right to bring into greater prominence the curve where shoulder met neck.

Luc's insistent request caused Nick to jerk as a deeper bolt of need made his balls tighten. "Are you sure?"

"Oh yeah. Do it, Nick. I'm almost there. Bite me. Send me over with your teeth on my flesh."

"Oh, fuck," Nick growled. He found the place Lucas wordlessly indicated and bit down.

Lucas' cock jerked in Nick's fist and spewed. He held Luc in place, his hips slamming hard and fast a few more times before his own orgasm burst free in a rush of warm seed that coated Lucas' balls and inner thighs. Nick released the bite, closed his eyes and rode the receding pleasure while his lungs fought to keep up with the increased need for oxygen. He leaned against Luc, his chest flush with Luc's back. He could feel the multiple thuds of their racing hearts. A smile curved his lips where they rested against Lucas' shoulder. It was good to know he wasn't the only one so affected.

"What's funny?" Lucas asked, his voice gravelly and rough.

"Not a damn thing. Just... feel good."

"Feeling good is... good."

Both men started to shake with low rumbles of laughter. Nick leaned weakly against Luc, eventually brushing moisture from his eyes. When the laughter ended, Lucas straightened and turned around. His gaze met Nick's full on and Nick complied with his silently expressed need. Their lips touched in a warm kiss that ended with mouths parted and tongues languidly exploring.

It was Luc who disengaged. He gave Nick a cocky grin. "How does a shower and bed sound?"

"Just right."

"Let's go upstairs to my room. The shower's way bigger than this," Lucas said indicating the simple tub shower in the guest bathroom. "And the bed's a California king."

"Now you're talking. We're definitely going to need room to maneuver," Nick teased.

"I like the way you think," Lucas replied with a chuckle and led the way upstairs.

## Chapter Two

Nick woke with a full bladder and a warm weight at his back. With a groggy smile, he recalled whose arm was slung over his waist and whose semi-hard cock was nudging his backside. The previous night had been amazing. After their shared shower in which they'd become even more familiar with each other's anatomy, they'd gone to bed.

Sometime in the night Nick woke to find Lucas bent over him, his hardening cock in Luc's mouth. With a little maneuvering he'd turned Lucas's blowjob into a mutual sixty-nine which sent them both back to sleep after a third explosive orgasm. Nick's smile widened. He'd certainly lived up to his intention to make noise and if that didn't include actual fucking, well hell, he was more than satisfied with what he and Lucas had done together.

Carefully lifting Luc's arm, Nick slid from beneath it and made his way to the bathroom. He used the facilities and looked around while washing up. There were disposable cups in a dispenser on the marble counter and pouring a measure of mouthwash into one from the bottle that rested nearby, he quickly rinsed and spit. Yawning, Nick tossed the cup in the trash basket he found at the side of the vanity and returned to the bedroom.

Lucas had rolled to his other side taking the sheet with him. The entire length of his back, including his tight, gorgeous ass was exposed. A lazy grin curved Nick's lips as he slid back into bed and snuggled tight against those tempting cheeks. He nibbled the back of Lucas' neck.

"Mmm," Luc rumbled and twisted to face Nick. Eyes still closed, he invited Nick's kiss. "Minty," he commented when the kiss ended.



Nick sent one hand exploring the firm terrain of Lucas' chest and paused at one tiny nipple, giving it a firm tweak.

"Hey, watch it," Lucas protested, his eyes flashing open.

"I'd rather lick it," Nick shot back, smiling at the sound of Luc's rusty morning chuckle.

"Let me use the bathroom real quick and you can lick anything you want."

"I like the sound of that. Hurry up."

Nick lay back with his eyes closed, eventually hearing the toilet flush and water run in the sink. He felt the bed dip moments later with Lucas' return. Hot breath and a warm, wet tongue slid over his nipple causing him to jump.

"Fuck!"

"Exactly," Lucas breathed against his skin before rising up to take Nick's mouth in a long, leisurely kiss.

Nick wrapped his arms around Luc and pulled him down, their bodies coming together with an ease that spoke of years together rather than a single night. The way their lips met could be compared to a million other kisses and yet this melding of mouths held the magic of something unique and matchless. The feel of their tongues twisting against each other was more than familiar, but the taste that accompanied this act with Lucas was new. It was wild and more exciting than anything Nick had ever experienced. Old and new mixed to become pure excitement, desire, and the beginning of something truly exceptional.

"What is it with you?" Nick asked when their lips parted.

"What do you mean?" Lucas' questioned, his eyes darkening to a rich, tawny gold.

"Not to get all sloppily sentimental or anything but this thing between us, it feels different."

"Right?"

"Natural. Familiar."

"I know what you mean." Lucas looked away for a moment, eased back until he was leaning on one elbow then met Nick's blue-eyed regard. "You're not like the guys I usually go out with. They're always..."

"Submissive? Bottoms?"

"Not always strictly bottoms but yeah, submissive to me," Lucas admitted, flashing a cocky smile. "You're not like that. You know what it means to be the guy in charge. To be the one who gives the orders and expects to be obeyed. When I first met you I have to admit the thought of being with you represented something of a challenge. I found it very appealing. At first I wondered if I could best you, make you yield to me. But now," Luc frowned a bit while searching for the right words, "now being with you, in just this short time, it's more like a kinship, like finding someone who knows what my life is like. Someone who knows what a burden it is to be the top dog."

"I do know," Nick admitted, his heart suddenly pounding faster. "Did you ever want to just stop?"

"You mean let it go? Let someone else take charge and just fucking rest for a little while?"

Nick nodded.

"Oh yeah. You have *no* idea." Luc stopped short and smiled again. "What the hell am I saying? You know exactly what I mean."

"Maybe there's more for us to exchange than asses," Nick answered with a smile of his own.

"I think there's definitely more." Luc agreed.

"Let's start with this." Nick came up on his elbow and leaned in, meeting Lucas' mouth with his own.

The kiss started slow and was just beginning to intensify when an unexpected sound came from downstairs. Nick drew back and blinked as the high pitched noise of children's voices reached his ears. A muffled pounding started as little feet hit the stairs.

"What's that?"

Lucas gave him a tentative grin. "I hope you like kids, Nick. You're about to meet mine."

Nick sat up, pushing back against the headboard while securing the sheet over his lower body. Luc jumped out of bed, dashed to a nearby dresser and pulled out a pair of sweat pants. He donned them in record time just as his bedroom door burst open.

"Daddy!" A pair of voices shrieked a split second before two little boys rushed into the room.

Both little ones stopped dead in their tracks at the sight of the stranger in their father's bed. Nick couldn't help but smile. They were adorable. They appeared to be approximately two years apart in age with the oldest one being perhaps six or seven. Both of them had Lucas' honey-amber eyes and blond hair. Though the youngest one's eyes held a tinge of green and his hair was that beautiful baby white-blond. They stared wide-eyed at Nick until Luc called their attention to him.

"Justin, Ryan, don't I get a hug?" He squatted down and the boys rushed to him, nearly knocking him off his feet.

Nick felt his chest go tight at the sight of Lucas hugging the boys and listening to them as they chattered about Mommy and Tony taking them to breakfast. The three of them looked so right together. Lucas looked over at him and gave him a smile filled with an almost bashful pride. He stood up and brought the boys to the side of the bed.

"Nick, I'd like you to meet my sons. This is Justin," he said, indicating the older boy, "and this is Ryan. Boys, this is Nick."

Nick smiled at first one boy then the other. "It's very nice to meet you Justin and Ryan."

"Are you Daddy's mate?" Justin asked.

Nick's eyes widened. *Mate? That's an odd way of putting it.*

"Justin! That's none of your business."

The admonition came from a tall, striking woman with long, glossy, light brown hair and green eyes who entered the bedroom. She was casually dressed in jeans and a thick cherry red, cable knit sweater. In her arms she carried a little girl of about two.

She sent Nick a rueful smile. "We seem to have come at an inopportune moment," she apologized before turning her gaze to Lucas. She chuckled softly. "I'm so sorry, Luc. Boys, please go downstairs while I talk to Daddy. We'll be down in a few minutes."

"Dad, can we get the Legos out?"

"Yes, you can," Lucas said, granting the older boy's request. "And you, young man," he said, lightly pinching the younger boy's chin. "Don't put them in your mouth. Okay?"

The little one nodded vigorously before running after his already retreating brother. Lucas spun around and taking a few steps, met the woman and held out his arms for baby. With an angelic grin, the little one practically launched herself into Lucas's arms. He laughed and tucked her safely to his side while kissing the top of her downy head.

"How's my little sweetheart?"

"She's a handful as you well know but she certainly does love her daddy," the woman answered then turned to Nick. "I'm Pamela Drake by the way and this is Alecia."

"It's nice to meet you both. I'm Nick Parks."

"Another Parks brother?"

Nick's brow rose. "You know my brothers?"

"I know *of* them. Chad and Crewe have never been happier. They can't say enough nice things about your brothers."

"That's good to know."

"I look forward to meeting them." She gave Nick a bold look. "If they look anything like you, it's no wonder Chad and Crewe are crazy about them."

"Pam," Lucas growled.

"You know I can't resist teasing," Pam admitted with a placating grin. "I'm really sorry to interrupt things but I was hoping you could take the kids for the rest of the day. Tony's grandfather is ill. We got the call while we were at breakfast. We'd like to visit with him and Lucia. Neither of them is up to having the boys romping around today."

"I'd be happy to take them," Luc assured her.

"Wonderful. We'll be back to pick them up at about five. Tony's waiting out in the car. He's so worried and anxious to see Gerald he wouldn't even come in."

"It's all right. Come on, let's get you on your way."

"Nick, it was nice meeting you. I hope to see you again," Pamela called out as she headed toward the door.

"Nice meeting you too, Pamela. I hope your, uh, boyfriend's grandfather will be all right."

"Husband actually and thank you!" Pamela called while heading down the stairs.

Lucas sent Nick a look filled with sympathy. "Feel free to use the shower. You probably won't feel so shell-shocked afterward. And help yourself to some sweats and whatever else you need. There's a new toothbrush in the medicine cabinet." Lucas paused in the doorway, one hand gently smoothing back the baby's fine blonde hair. His expression had sobered. "If we haven't scared you away I'd like you to stay for a while, unless you need to get home."

Nick met his hopeful gaze. "I can stay."

"Great." Luc flashed him a smile and followed Pamela downstairs.

Nick stared at the empty doorway for a moment before throwing back the sheet and sliding out of bed. He rummaged through the dresser drawer he'd seen Lucas in earlier and liberated a pair of black sweats and a light gray T-shirt then walked to the bathroom, ruefully shaking his head as he went. *Lucy, you got some s'plaining to do*, he mused while wondering which question to ask Lucas first.

That Lucas had children was totally unexpected, though not necessarily unwelcome. Nick did love kids but where did Pamela fit in? She admitted to being married to the as yet unseen Tony, but what was the story between her and Lucas? If this beginning that he and Luc had made was indeed something special, then the two of them had a lot of talking to do.

Nick came out of the bathroom fifteen minutes later rubbing a towel over his damp hair. He found Lucas on the bed, relaxing back against the headboard, playing patty cake with Alecia. Or perhaps it would be more accurate to say he was guiding her in the movements of the game, since the little one didn't have a clue what she was doing. That didn't, however, stop her from enjoying her father's demonstration. She was wide-eyed and giggling with glee.

Luc looked up at Nick's entrance. "There you are. Feel better?"

"I feel fine except for the way my head's spinning. But then I suspect you can help me with that."

"I suspect I can," Lucas agreed. He stood and brought Alecia with him to where Nick waited. "I'm really sorry this was sprung on you so suddenly." He reached out and brushed two fingertips over Nick's cheek. "I had hoped to have more time."

Nick captured Luc's hand and brought Luc's fingers to his lips. He kissed the pads and let them slide over his bottom lip several times before lowering them but keeping hold of Lucas' hand. "It's all right. It was unexpected and I have questions, but I love kids." He looked down at the little one who had one hand planted on her father's chest. Her other hand had reached out to Nick. Her chubby, little fingers were patting and rubbing over the fabric of his T-shirt. He smiled and chuckled softly. Lucas' hand tightened its grip on Nick's and Nick looked up to meet his eyes.

"I love the way you look at her. I can see the caring in your eyes," Luc said softly.

"Now who's getting sloppily sentimental?" Nick teased.

"That would be me."

Moving simultaneously the two of them leaned in for a kiss that was short and borderline tender. Nick felt an uncharacteristic flush building under his skin at the

sensations the kiss engendered. This was a definite step into new territory for him. He had the strength of mind to admit it was a bit scary as well as good.

"I need a shower. Would you watch her while I get cleaned up?" Lucas asked.

"Sure. Where are the boys? Shall I go downstairs and keep them company and out of mischief?"

"They were busy building with Legos when I came up, but yeah, if you wouldn't mind. I'll be ten, fifteen minutes tops."

"Take your time. I think I can handle a couple of kids."

"Oh, I know you can handle them and many other things as well."

Nick's stomach tightened at the heat in Lucas' eyes and he smiled. "Later, babe. Take your shower."

"Yes, dear," Luc replied with an exaggerated sigh and handed Alecia over into Nick's capable arms.

With a laugh, Nick took the baby and left Lucas to his shower.

As it happened, the children kept them fairly busy the entire day. There was little time for intimate chats. The boys played with Legos and other toys that Lucas obviously kept for them. Alecia had her own toys to keep her busy. When the time was right, Lucas and Nick fixed lunch and Nick had the very great pleasure of watching Luc trying to spoon feed a toddler certain nutritious items that she had no intention of eating. It was the most fascinating and fun lunch he could remember having in quite some time.

After lunch everyone bundled up against the late winter chill and they wandered around outside for a while, letting the boys blow off their excess energy. Alecia managed a few unsteady steps, but after having to relieve her of rocks, twigs and bits of mud that were headed for her mouth, Lucas elected to carry the inquisitive little one as they wandered around. Both men kept a sharp eye on the boys, making sure they didn't go out of sight amongst the trees and underbrush.

The area around Lucas's house was heavily wooded. "There's seventy acres of undeveloped land beyond the house," he told Nick.

"Nice. I'll bet you've had offers for it."

"Oh, yeah. There's always some land developer trying to persuade me of the need for expansion in this area. As far as I'm concerned they can expand in another direction. I like my privacy. The nearest neighbor is two miles away and that suits me just fine."

"I can understand why you love it here. It's very peaceful."

Before Lucas could say anything, Ryan came running up to him and grabbed him around the knees. "Make the woof, Daddy! Make the woof!"

Nick's brows drew together in confusion and he laughed. "The woof?"

"Um, yeah. It's a game we play sometimes," Luc answered giving Nick a tense smile. He squatted down. "No woof right now, baby. Run and play with Justin. See look," Lucas drew Ryan's attention to a tree a dozen feet away and whispered, "he's hiding behind that tree. Go get him."

Gleefully, Ryan took off across the open ground between them and the tree where he flushed his brother from his hiding place. The two of them cavorted around like little wild men then rushed off in opposite directions to hide. Moments later, a high pitched and childish imitation of a wolf's call rang out. It was answered a second later and Nick actually felt the hair stand up on the back of his neck.

"Is that what Ryan meant by woof? A wolf?" he asked Lucas, turning his gaze on the man then pausing at the look on his face.

Lucas had his face pointed into the slight breeze that was blowing, his nostrils were flared and his eyes glittered. His head was turned slightly, his expression intent. It was as though he were experiencing things that Nick had no sense of. Under Nick's scrutiny he seemed to snap back from that temporary distraction. "Yes. Wolf."

"Surely there aren't any wolves in these woods. I've not heard anything about wolves being reintroduced anywhere in Indiana."

Lucas gave a short laugh. "No, of course not. I think it's time we go in, don't you?" He put a hand to Alecia's face. "These little sweet cheeks are getting kind of rosy. Let's round up the boys."



Lucas walked away, leaving Nick feeling at a distinct loss. He frowned at the man's retreating figure. Luc seemed almost nervous at the mention of wolves. The boys had obviously seen them or heard them somewhere at sometime, most likely on television. Why would that make him uneasy?

*Unless there's some other explanation.* Nick followed Lucas, berating himself for imagining things.

Once back in the house Lucas dragged out a thick, fluffy sleeping bag and several pillows, laying them out in front of the television. All three children snuggled down on the floor. Alecia conked out immediately while the boys watched a Disney movie. Ryan was fighting sleep while Nick and Lucas, lounging against each other on the sofa were smothering a few yawns of their own when the children's mother and stepfather returned.

Pamela and Tony stayed long enough to exchange hellos and pass on the condition of Tony's grandfather. Tony turned out to be a tall, quiet man with dark hair and brown eyes. He obviously cared deeply for the children, a fact clearly demonstrated by the tender way he scooped Alecia up and placed her in her mother's arms.

Lucas had picked up a sleepy Ryan and after hugging and kissing him goodbye, handed him over to Tony. He put his hand on Justin's shoulder squeezing it lightly before bending down to place a kiss on top of the boy's head. "I'll see you tomorrow, buddy, all right?" Justin nodded and gave his dad a hug which Lucas returned.

The goodbyes were as quickly taken care of as the earlier hellos and the ensuing quiet felt almost loud in the wake of their leaving. Nick followed Lucas' lead and returned to the living room. It had been a pleasant day, though somewhat surreal in nature. A hot Saturday night date had turned into a hotter night filled with sex which then turned into the most domestic of Sundays he'd spent in ages. On top of that, not only had both of them revealed the presence of deeper feelings but Lucas had presented an even greater surprise. His children.

"Please sit," Lucas offered quietly though he remained standing.

Nick took a seat on the sofa and waited.

"We haven't known each other long."

Nick nodded. "True."

"From what you've seen of me, do I strike you as a sane man?"

At first all Nick could think was, *Uh- oh*. This was one of those questions that was asked right before something you wished you hadn't heard was revealed. What was it they said about serial killers? *He was a nice, quiet man who never bothered anybody*.

"You've got to know that's a loaded question," Nick informed him with a raised brow.

"I can see how you'd think so, but just base it on what you know about me. We've talked, we've been close to as physically intimate as two people can get, we've showered and slept together. You've met my children and their mother. Does my behavior all seem reasonably normal to you?"

"Based on all of that, I have to say my answer is yes."

"Good because I've never been one for beating around the bush and I don't have time to do it now. I'm a werewolf, Nick."

Nick felt a split second jolt of shock and a tiny voice inside began yammering *I told you so* before his usual calm in the face of adversity settled over him. It was always this way whenever something challenged his equilibrium. Anything that could have a profound affect on him enhanced his control. Others might panic, but Nick automatically immersed himself in a pool of serenity. He was not the kind of man who was easily shaken or who made snap decisions unless it was an emergency. It was never his way to dismiss anything out of hand, therefore he silently made up his mind to let Lucas have his say.

"That's quite a claim. Anything else?" he asked, easily keeping his manner unruffled.

Lucas shot him a look filled with suspicion then frowned. "A couple of things. For starters, you're my mate. That's why our being together feels so right. There's no mistaking it. We're meant to be together."

"I see. And what else?"

"No, I'm not saying another word until you tell me what you're thinking. I can't believe you're as calm as you appear to be. Talk to me, Nick."

Nick could hear the frustration in Luc's voice. "What am I supposed to say? You tell me you're a werewolf." Nick shrugged. "What's the correct response? Just what exactly are we talking about here? Do you do a Lon Chaney when the moon goes full? Is this like *Wolfen* or closer to *The Howling*? Do I stick you in a cage a couple three days a month or are you allowed to roam free on your own recognizance?" Nick fastened his gaze on Lucas and let his own frustration show. "I'm trying to be reasonable under very unreasonable circumstances. At this point I don't know what else to do."

Lucas sighed and took a seat next to Nick, close but not touching. "I know this sounds crazy and I appreciate you giving me the chance to explain." He clasped his hands together and kept his gaze fixed on them as he spoke. "I don't lose my sense of identity nor do I randomly attack people. I don't have to change during the full moon but the urge to do so is stronger at that time. I don't become a hairy man with big scary teeth. I become a wolf, an actual four-legged wolf. As the wolf I know who I am, but I also feel the needs of the wolf. I run, I play, I hunt. Sometimes alone, most of the time with my pack. We don't harm humans. Why would we? We're human ourselves with just an added something extra."

"I'm the alpha male of my pack. Pamela is the alpha female. That's why she's the mother of my children. Our children were conceived when Pamela and I mated in wolf form. She's the only female I've been with since I was a teenager. I discovered a long time ago that I prefer men but as alpha of the pack I was expected to produce heirs. It's tradition and even though I had no choice in the matter, I wouldn't change that part of my life for the world. I love my kids."

"Pamela met and married her mate right after Alecia was conceived. Coincidentally we'd already decided that three children were enough. Now she, Tony and I all take part in raising them. I'm hoping, as my mate, you'll share that joy with us. Pack children are loved and protected by every member, no matter who their biological parents are."

"I've told you you're my mate. For us it's an instinctive knowing. I don't know why it happens or how to explain it. Initially your scent called to me. It touched something inside me on so basic a sublevel I can't describe it. All I know is that this part of us follows our wild counterparts. Where finding their mates are concerned, wolves don't make mistakes and they mate for life."

Nick listened to Lucas' matter of fact recitation. Incredibly, the more he heard the more he believed. There was no way anyone could make up such a tale and tell it with such sincerity unless it was true. "When you spill the beans you don't fool around, do you? That's what Ryan meant when he wanted you to make the wolf. Your boys have seen the real thing up close and personal and your pack, it's what you meant by extended family... Jesus Christ," Nick breathed as the thought hit him squarely between the eyes. "Crewe and Chad."

"Yes."

Nick felt a ripple in the quiet mantle of peace he'd pulled around himself. "Ethan and Dustin, they don't know, do they?"

"No. Crewe and Chad have been hesitant about telling them."

"Gee, I wonder why," Nick snapped, then tamped down the anger that began swirling deep within. "You know it's one thing to tell me all this and expect me to simply believe it. Show me."

Lucas ignored Nick's demand. "But you do believe me. I can feel it. I can hear it in your voice."

Remaining silent, Nick closed his eyes. It seemed he wasn't the only one with a talent for reading people. In the short time they'd known one another, each had gotten a handle on the other. Nick knew with absolute certainty that Lucas would never be able to lie to him. He somehow knew he'd feel the lie in his very bones. Still, to believe was one thing, to accept another. He needed time to assimilate the knowledge he'd been given. His brothers' involvement was an added complication and of greater importance to him at the moment than his own need to work through this.

Slowly he nodded. "I do believe you, but I need time to think about this. I think it's time for you to drive me home."

"Of course. Whatever you need."

The two of them rose and without a word got ready to go. Nick went upstairs and changed back into the clothes he'd worn the night before while Lucas threw on his coat and a pair of athletic shoes and pulled his SUV out of the garage. Nick returned downstairs, grabbed his own coat and joined him. The trip was made largely in silence with only the radio filling the tense stillness that had settled between them. They arrived just after dark, Lucas parking out on the street in front of the Parks' house.

"I'll call you when I'm ready to talk," Nick told Lucas, his hand going for the door handle.

"Nick," Lucas turned his gaze toward him. "I'm sorry."

For the first time since they'd talked, Nick met Lucas' eyes full on. "I'm not. I just need to let it sink in for a little while. And I have to tell my brothers. I can't let them remain in the dark about this. They deserve to know."

"You're right, they do," Luc agreed. "Could I ask... do you feel I'm at least partially to blame for the fact that they don't know?"

"Are you?"

"No. I don't interfere in the love lives of my pack. How they handle themselves when they find their mates is up to them."

"I'll admit I wanted to be angry with you, but what you said earlier about wolves instinctively knowing their mates. You couldn't interfere, could you?"

"Not really. I suppose I could impose a rule that a were must tell their human mate about their true nature within a week or whatever, but that doesn't allow for the individual circumstances between couples. Where one might reveal all after a day," Lucas gave Nick a rueful smile, "another might need more time to give their partner a better chance at being able to accept the shock. You have to admit, telling someone you're a werewolf is not an easy thing. I hope you'll cut Crewe and Chad some slack."

"I'll consider it, and I'll call." Nick started to turn away but hesitated. Though it seemed they'd reasonably handled things, he needed the reassurance of touch. "I could use a kiss to tide me over until I see you again."

The two of them stared at each other wordlessly for a moment then came together in a rush that drew grunts from both of them at the impact. Each wrapped strong arms around the other with a force and strength that bordered on desperation. Their mouths met, their teeth clicking as lips parted and tongues vigorously dueled and fought to seek out every touch and every taste to be had. Eventually the needful abandon calmed, the kiss becoming languid and nearly tender before they reluctantly parted.

The uncertainty between them disappeared. What remained of the barrier between them, erected by Lucas' revelation, had been broken. It felt as though a crisis had been faced and surmounted. All that remained was to smooth the rough edges away. Nick felt the hard knot of tension dissolve in his stomach. He looked at Lucas, immersed himself into eyes the color of warm honey and smiled. Here, very possibly, was his future, this man and his children. A rush of warmth and affection swept through him. As for the werewolf thing, well, every relationship had its quirks. He smiled and shook his head at the thought.

"What?" Lucas asked, his eyes searching Nick's.

"I'll tell you later. I've got some sorting to do."

Lucas nodded thoughtfully. "Would you be pissed if I warn Crewe and Chad?"

Nick considered for a moment. "No, but you'd better do it quickly. I'm not going to waste time. I'm calling Ethan and Dustin tonight to ask them to come over. I'd tell them tonight if I could, but tomorrow will probably be the soonest I can get them both here." Nick tilted his head. "Would you like to be here when we have our little chat?"

"To face the firing squad with Chad and Crewe?"

"In a manner of speaking."

"I suppose as their alpha it's the least I can do for two of my own. Let me know when you want me to be here. I'll be spending at least part of the day at Pam and Tony's with the kids and I'll need to be at the club by ten p.m."

"I was thinking late afternoon. I'll call and let you know for sure."

"You still have my cell number?"

"Of course."

"Tomorrow then."

"Tomorrow."

Nick got out and made his way to the front door, stopping for a moment to watch the taillights of Lucas' SUV retreat down the street before he let himself inside.

## Chapter Three

"You told him already?" Pamela asked Lucas before taking another sip of the decaf coffee in her cup.

"I had to tell Nick. You know what's coming. Lyle Compton is readying himself to challenge me at the rising of the next full moon. That's only nine days from now. If he wins, he won't stop short of merely defeating me. I don't believe I need to remind you that this man practices the old ways. He kills his opponents. He'll not only eliminate the competition but anyone he considers a threat, especially any who might cause a division of loyalties."

Lucas and Pam turned their gazes to the three children who played quietly in the living room. Lucas felt a burning red rage build behind his eyes at the thought of the danger Compton represented to his children. The man wouldn't hesitate to slaughter even such innocents in his bid for power. Fortunately Lucas was no stranger to defending his position. He'd had to fight all challengers when his father abdicated his position. Even though he was son of the pack alpha, he'd still had to prove his right to lead. While he was confident in his ability to fight, all it took was one slip, one wrong move and not only would he pay with his own life but his children's as well. He couldn't let that happen.

"I'm going to ask Nick to become one of us. I'm going to ask him to take the children away if something happens to me and I want you and Tony to go with him. You know Compton won't respect your mate bond with Tony. You're the alpha female. He'll try to make a claim on you."

"I know. I've thought about that. Tony and I have already discussed it. We have plans in place to leave." Pamela fisted her hands on the table. "Jesus! It sounds like we have no faith in you. We do, Luc, but there's too much at stake to take chances."



Lucas reached out and placed his hands over Pam's. "It's all right. I know you have faith in me and I'm going to do my damndest not to let you down, but I'm *glad* you're preparing," he said forcefully. "The children's safety is the most important thing."

"In that we agree but I have to ask. Do you honestly think Nick will just walk away? He doesn't strike me as someone who'd let a loved one walk solo into a dangerous situation. He'd almost certainly want revenge if that loved one was deliberately injured or killed. I've talked with Crewe. His mate, Ethan, has told Crewe how protective Nick is of his loved ones. If you're defeated, I think it's more likely he'd challenge Compton himself and as Nick is your mate I don't believe Compton will have it any other way. There's no guarantee Nick will accept your offer to make him one of us. Not every human who's fallen in love with a were does, you know. Nick is in just as much danger as the children."

"I know the dangers. Nick won't challenge Compton. Not if I ask him to protect the children. The danger won't exist if he's gone before the fight takes place. Besides, we've only known each other a short time. His feelings for me aren't such that he'd want vengeance for my death. If I charge him with caring for the children, his protective instincts will kick in then you'll all leave. You'll all be safe."

Pam gave him a look filled with skepticism. "If that's what you're counting on to keep him from fighting Compton if you're defeated, I think you're fooling yourself. If Nick accepts and you make him one of us, he's going to feel the bond soul deep no matter how long the two of you have been together. I hate to burst your bubble but he'll challenge Compton."

"And leave the children unprotected? He wouldn't do that."

"You know perfectly well if Tony and I take the children far enough away they'll be safe. Compton won't follow us as long as we're far out of pack territory which is exactly what we plan to do. Nick will be free to come back and issue challenge."

"I know that but Nick doesn't."

Pam's eyes opened wide with disbelief. "Pardon my French, but fuck, you'd better hope he doesn't find out before the fight takes place. The man's going to be seriously pissed if he discovers you're trying to pull one of those 'I'm doing this for your own good' scenarios on him. He's a natural alpha. That kind of manipulation is *not* going to go over well. Are you sure giving him the chance to be one of us is the right thing to do? You're going to bring a whole new set of instincts into play. If he remains human I'd say there's a better chance of him doing as you ask and as a human, Compton may overlook the fact that he's your mate. As a human he'd be no threat to Compton's pack alpha status."

"As you said, Compton *may* overlook Nick because he's human. But what if he doesn't? Nick would be utterly vulnerable. I want him to be able to defend himself against Compton should the need arise. I can't leave him unprotected. *I can't.*" Lucas closed his eyes and rubbed the furrow between his brows.

"I should never have started this with him. I should have just settled for sending you, Tony and the children away but I have this vision of Compton hunting you down. Yes, you most likely will be safe if you go far enough away but I don't trust in that knowledge. Compton's a borderline old-school fanatic. He's unbalanced. I wanted Nick's strength and the protection he could offer all of you. If I put emphasis on the possibility that Compton might follow you when I tell Nick all this, it should keep him at your side instead of returning here to challenge Compton. I've thought this over so many times. There are so many variables, so many possibilities. I've never had so much trouble making a decision in my life." He opened his eyes and looked at Pam. "Whatever I do has the potential to go so wrong."

Pam gave him a commiserating smile. "Things were certainly much easier when there were no personal entanglements in your life. You could have just gone into this thing believing in yourself, knowing that you'd be the only one to suffer if something went wrong. Now you have to carry the rest of us. I wish it could be easier for you."

"Maybe it's a good thing it's not. I don't doubt my strength or agility. Physically I'm more than a match for Compton. But knowing what's hanging in the balance is

going to make me that much more cautious, that much more determined. It's these things that are going to decide who comes out on top. It's the wolf who uses not only brute strength but intelligence who's going to win this fight."

"Then we should have nothing to worry about. We all know what a smartass you are," Pam quipped.

"Is that any way to talk about your alpha?" Lucas asked, letting free the smile that tugged at his lips. It was relief to be able to smile.

"I like it."

Before he could say anything, Lucas' cell phone rang. He answered then listened for a moment. "I'll be there in an hour. Bye." Rising from his chair he dumped his now cold coffee in the sink and rinsed out the cup. "I have to go. The shit is about to hit the fan."

"Werewolves beware. The Parks brothers are about to go on the warpath. Give Chad and Crewe my condolences."

Lucas grinned. "Hopefully it won't come to that."

He said goodbye to the children, planted a kiss on Pam's cheek and hustled out.

\* \* \*

Nick looked at the group assembled before him. On the sofa Ethan and Crewe sat together and next to them Dustin and Chad. Ethan and Dustin both had slightly puzzled expressions while Crewe's and Chad's were a mixture of chagrin, dread and defiance. Sitting in the recliner positioned at a right angle to the sofa was Lucas, his expression giving nothing away.

Nick understood the ramifications of what this revelation might bring about, but he couldn't let it go. Perhaps it wasn't his place to interfere but all his life he'd looked after Ethan and Dustin. They needed to know. They loved Crewe and Chad. If they had problems with it, Nick would help them. Together, he was sure they could surmount any difficulties. The last thing he wanted to do was come between his brothers and their lovers, but this was a secret whose time was done. Even without knowing the specifics, Nick realized that it could be hazardous for them. There had to be a certain amount of

danger in being a werewolf, even in just being involved with one. He wouldn't let his brothers continue on unaware of those possibilities.

Nick cleared his throat. "I've called you here today because there's something of a serious and unexpected nature that we have to discuss. It's come to my attention that some of us are hiding things that others of us should have been told about." Crewe and Chad both shifted uncomfortably, Nick expected as much. What he didn't expect was the odd look that passed between Ethan and Dustin. A slight frown beetled his brows as he continued. "I think it's time to put our cards on the table."

There was a long, uncomfortable silence when the last person Nick expected to hear from spoke up. "Okay, we should have discussed it with you but we were only guessing and we just recently began comparing notes," Ethan admitted. Dustin nodded while everyone else turned puzzled eyes on both brothers.

"Guessing what?" Nick asked.

"That Crewe and Chad are werewolves."

"What?"

"You knew?"

"Why didn't you say anything?"

"I'll be damned."

Everyone began speaking at once and not a question was being answered nor any headway made at all. It was finally Lucas who stood and captured everyone's attention. "A little order please, gentlemen. Let's do this the easy way. Ethan, what made you think that Crewe was a werewolf?"

Ethan grinned. "It was little things. Muddy paw prints on the garage floor after Crewe would come back from his nightly run. And, I'm sorry, lover," he said apologetically to Crewe, "you smelled like wet dog those times when it had been raining and you'd gotten wet when you were out running."

Crewe clenched his eyes shut and hung his head at Lucas' snort of laughter. "I take it you 'ran' as a wolf?"

"In the park across the street. It's huge and I always made sure no one was around," Crewe confessed.

"I kept finding huge paw prints in the dirt behind Chad's house and tufts of hair snagged on the bushes," Dustin revealed. "And occasionally the same gray hairs somehow found their way inside the house."

Together Ethan and Dustin tallied up the clues.

"I saw Crewe lift one end of the workbench in his garage to retrieve a screwdriver he dropped behind it. That workbench is loaded with tools and stuff. It has to weigh a ton or close to it. It would take someone with an enormous amount of strength to do that."

"Chad was out in back of the house picking up stray branches from the yard after a storm. I stopped in front of the window for a minute to watch him work while I was putting my coat on to go out with him. He was breaking the longer ones up and putting them in the wheelbarrow. There was this one really big one, about three inches in diameter. He snapped it like a twig."

"Crewe sniffs things. A lot. He talks about smelling things that I can't catch a whiff of."

"Yeah, there's that and Chad eats meat so rare you can barely call it cooked."

"Crewe too and he growls during sex."

"So does Chad and he bites... not that I mind," Dustin admitted with an impish smile.

"Neither do I," Ethan revealed shyly, his cheeks flaring red. "And when he gets really excited, his eyes glow."

"Like fireflies in the dark."

"The night I met Crewe a big dog was following me, a big dog that happened to look exactly like a wolf. A little while later, Crewe showed up."

"During last month's full moon I woke up in the middle of the night," Dustin turned to Chad. "You weren't in bed with me. I got up and looked around the house but you weren't there. The back door was unlocked. I was just about to go out when I

saw a movement at the edge of the yard. I thought it was a dog, a really big dog, until the clouds that had been obscuring the moon parted and I realized it was a wolf. It was you, wasn't it?"

Chad nodded.

Dustin grinned, his eyes bright. "I knew it. You were beautiful."

Chad opened his arms and they hugged each other. "Thank you," Chad murmured against Dustin's cheek. "I should have told you."

"It's okay. Ethan and I figured you guys would tell us when you felt ready."

Ethan nodded his agreement and Crewe turned to him. Cupping Ethan's face in his hands, Crewe kissed him deeply then pulled away and whispered, "I love you, baby."

"I love you too," Ethan returned and snuggled into Crewe's encircling arms.

Nick looked at Lucas. "Well this is rather anti-climactic." He turned back to his brothers. "Aren't either of you upset? Angry? Feeling like you've just stepped into the Twilight Zone?"

"Well sure," Ethan admitted. "When I started noticing stuff I got a little freaked out but I just kept in mind that it was Crewe. I know how much he loves me. I knew he'd never do anything to hurt me and I didn't care what extras he came with. I love him."

"I feel the same way about Chad. He's my family now too. There's no way I would turn my back on him. Then Ethan and I started talking to each other about it and we both felt even better. We agreed that whatever it was, we could handle it," Dustin added.

"So neither of you feels the need to kick some werewolf butt?"

"Come on, Nick. Don't be mad," Ethan coaxed. "I mean it's not like it would be easy for a person to just blurt out that he was a werewolf. What would they say? By the way, honey, would you mind picking up a bag of dog kibble at the store today? I'll be needing it later this evening 'cause, you see, I'm a werewolf."

"Maybe you should have tried that," Nick said, directing his sardonic comment to Lucas.

"I don't eat kibble. Now a nice rare steak I could handle."

Everyone was smiling, if not openly grinning at the two of them.

Dustin set his gaze on Lucas. "So you're a werewolf too?"

Lucas nodded.

"Lucas is our pack alpha," Chad told them proudly.

"Just like Nick is ours," Ethan chimed in, giving his brother a grin.

"You're not far off the mark, Ethan," Lucas answered. "Although my pack is a bit larger."

"How many?"

"Forty-three."

"That's a lot of wolves."

"Strictly speaking they're not all wolves. That number includes non-were mates and children but they're all included in our family."

"Are we included in that number?" Dustin asked.

"You are."

Dustin gave his older brother a speculative look. "Am I wrong in assuming that because he's here, you and Lucas are together?"

Nick found himself under the scrutiny of five pairs of expectant eyes. He'd done a lot of thinking the previous evening and for a good part of the day before everyone had arrived. He'd logically considered all the things he knew about Lucas and how their lives might fit together but in the end, he realized logic wasn't really needed in this situation. It was emotion. It might be a wiser thing to let his head decide in this case but the truth was, his heart and the hope that filled it wouldn't be denied.

He turned his gaze to Lucas. "You're not wrong. We're together."

At the look that filled Luc's eyes, Nick knew he'd made the right decision.

\* \* \*

Several hours and one mind blowing orgasm later, Nick and Lucas lounged in Nick's kitchen. Both were bare-chested and wearing pairs of Nick's sweats. After the group consisting of Nick's brothers, their lovers, Lucas and Nick had spent a couple of hours talking, they had dispersed. Lucas called the club to tell them not to expect him and had remained with Nick. The two of them had retreated upstairs to mess up the sheets in Nick's bed. While neither had yet to make the ultimate sacrifice of giving up their anal virginity, they'd had no problem pleasuring each other.

After a short nap, both of them woke hungry and decided to raid the kitchen. Together they'd settled on breakfast food and ended up fixing pancakes, bacon and eggs. Between bites, they'd talked about the earlier meeting and Nick asked Lucas questions about his pack and what it meant to be a werewolf, especially an alpha.

"Being weres, we are a mixture of animal and human. For the most part the human side rules, primarily because that's the physical shape that we spend the majority of our time in. But the wolf is always there, always ready to guide in subtle ways. The wolf's instincts influence the way we make decisions or do things. Wolves are naturally cautious, keenly intelligent and aware of their environment. They intuitively look to their alpha to lead them," Lucas told Nick, his expression intensely thoughtful.

"For werewolves, it's not so much needing someone to lead them through their everyday lives, but someone to be there for that part of them that's ruled by the wolf. I fulfill their need for a leader. We meet regularly, change and run as a pack. It satisfies the instinctive need for cohesion and family that wolves possess. This secret we carry can be a burden. From the time we're old enough to understand we're taught caution, we're taught never to reveal our other nature to outsiders. We rely on each other, but most importantly, each pack member knows that I'm here for them should they have need of me."

"Ryan and Justin, they weren't overtly revealing anything, but they did let a few tiny hints slip," Nick commented before taking a sip of orange juice.



"Yes, they did, but you weren't exactly an outsider. You were in my bed. You wore my scent. The part of them that's were trusted you."

"You've never exposed them to any other lover?"

"No. I've never taken a lover to my house until you."

"Because I'm your mate?"

"Yes."

Nick smiled, finding an odd sense of satisfaction in Lucas' confession. "This seems so... beyond strange. This whole werewolf thing. I mean, you hear stories, you grow up with the movies and legends, but you never really contemplate the possibility that it all has a basis in fact. Can the children transform?"

"No. Not until they've gone through puberty. Can you imagine the mischief children who could transform into wolf pups would get into? I've heard it's bad enough dealing with the adolescents. None of it bears thinking about."

The two of them chuckled. "I would imagine not," Nick agreed. After a moment's silence, he asked the question that had been on his mind since the day before. "So why *did* you tell me so quickly? Why didn't you wait until we got to know each other better?"

"I knew you'd pick up on that," Lucas admitted. "I didn't wait because there's no time. Something is going to happen at the rising of the next full moon and I need your help. The lives of my children could depend on it."

"When you throw a man into the middle of something you don't fool around, do you?" Nick responded, mentally bracing himself for bad news. "Okay, let's hear it."

"There's a man named Lyle Compton. He moved here about a year ago and asked permission to join the pack. I granted him admission. At first he seemed all right. He settled in, he ran with the pack, he was pleasant, but then a few months ago he started making trouble. He began intimidating lesser members during hunts, started fights over downed prey. He's become more and more aggressive, not only with other pack members in wolf form, but in human form as well. As alpha, I chastised him. He

didn't take it well. His anger and resentment has been building. Three weeks ago he issued challenge for control of the pack."

"Challenge? You mean you have to fight him?"

"That's exactly what I mean. I've been expecting it since he joined the pack."

"Then why did you let him join?"

"I had no choice."

"Why was that?"

"Compton's been drifting from pack to pack and the story's always the same. He fits himself in and then the trouble starts. He's been in quite a few fights. In a pack in Michigan he challenged the beta and killed him."

"He killed a man? Why isn't he in prison?" Nick asked, appalled at the thought.

"Because we couldn't risk the exposure that could bring. In times past this was the way it was done. Just like our wild brothers sometimes do. It's just been in the last fifty years or so that attitudes have changed. To defeat your opponent was considered good enough, but there are some very few who think a return to the old ways is in order. Most of them are outsiders, troublemakers, near rogues who are carefully watched. Compton is one of them. The reason Compton isn't in jail is because it was a challenge duly issued and accepted. Though we don't condone the killing of one's opponent, it's never been formally outlawed among us. Not long after that, Compton challenged the alpha of that same pack and was defeated, barely, but he was driven out. Ever since then he's been a danger to us. He's on the verge of going rogue and it's been decided that he has to be taken care of before anyone else dies."

"But why you? Why do you have to be the one?" Nick was trying to remain calm but was suddenly finding it hard to breathe. His heart was thumping and his stomach felt like a lead weight had settled within it.

"The Alphas' Council agreed. The next pack Compton joined, the next alpha he challenged would finish him."

"Jesus Christ! Are you listening to yourself?" Nick rose from his chair and started to pace. His usual calm in the face of adversity had deserted him. He found

himself fighting rising panic and the feeling was not a comfortable one. "What's this Alphas' Council? Who are they to decide it's up to you to kill a man?"

Lucas deserted his chair and went to Nick, standing in his path to halt his pacing. "The Alphas' Council is just that. Alphas from every pack in the United States. We know each other. Discuss problems, offer solutions, support each other and our pack mates. The world has become a dangerous place, Nick. Where once it was possible to easily keep secrets, it's becoming more and more difficult," Lucas earnestly explained.

"We've developed a network not only for support but to police ourselves. We can't let a rogue werewolf expose us to the public. Can you imagine the outcry should it become known that werewolves truly exist? With all the bad publicity we've received, we'd be actively hunted. You know there are men capable of such, men who would find it a challenge or look at it as a sport. Knowing our government, they'd probably condone, or even endorse their actions.

"As for the other, my having to kill Compton, it was pure bad luck. Plain and simple. I can't shirk my duty no matter how distasteful it is. I'm locked into this action not only for the protection of all weres but for that of my children. If he defeats me, Compton will kill them."

"Why? Why would he kill innocent children? What harm could they possibly do him?" The very idea sent a wave of revulsion and outrage through Nick that burned him to the core.

"He'll look upon Justin and Ryan as possible rallying points for the other members of my pack who object to him. We set great store in family and although each alpha must prove himself capable of leadership, alpha status is generally passed from father to son. As for Alecia, just the fact that she carries my blood will be enough. And he won't stop there. He won't honor the mate bond between Pamela and her husband Tony. If Pamela stays, he'll claim her. He'll force her to bear his children even if he has to use rape to accomplish it."

"I don't fucking believe this. This is like something out of the dark ages. Surely Pamela would have some recourse? She and Tony could seek protection for her and the children."

"And tell the police what? That they're being stalked by a werewolf? That I was killed fighting for alpha status of our pack and now Compton is after them? It's impossible. There's nothing they could say that wouldn't rouse suspicion in the very manner we've striven to avoid. Being a werewolf has great advantages but it also can exact a terrible price. There are rules, conventions that have been in place for generations that allow us to keep ourselves hidden but there is one simple solution to prevent some of this from happening."

"And that is?"

"If I should lose to Compton, Pamela and Tony are leaving with the children. Once they're far enough away they should be safe."

"Should be safe?"

"In this instance, with Compton being the fanatic he is, we're not sure that will be the case. He could take it in his head to hunt them no matter where they go. That's why I want your help. I don't have the right to ask you this but I have to. If I'm defeated will you go with them, keep my children safe from harm?"

Nick felt his chest tighten until he thought his heart would burst. Lucas' request had taken him by surprise. While it filled him with pride to know that Luc would trust him so implicitly, if ever he had to fulfill his request it would be because the man standing before him would be dead. There seemed so many things that needed to be said but his thoughts would not take coherent form and no words would come. He merely nodded and stepped into the space between them to be met by his lover.

The two of them held each other for endless moments. Nick concentrated on breathing, on being, on swallowing the lump in his throat, on feeling the pounding of his heart slow and take on its normal beat. In Luc's arms, Nick's body gradually relaxed and his head cleared of the horrific images which so short a time ago had filled them.

An idea took root in his mind, one that could give them a twofold advantage. His usual calm reasserted itself in the wake of the plan that was forming.

He lifted his head from Luc's shoulder and capturing his gaze, voiced a question. "What good will I be against Compton's strength if he comes looking for us? I'm strong but according to what Ethan and Dustin said, I'd be little impediment to a werewolf."

"I can give you our strength, make you one of us."

"You can make me a werewolf?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"As trite as it may sound, a bite, a breaking of the skin and my saliva in contact with your bloodstream will bring about the transformation."

Nick tamped down on the triumph that surged within him. "How long before the transformation is complete?"

"A couple of days."

"Let's do it."

"You're sure? Once done, there's no going back."

Nick took a deep breath, slowly let it out and stepped back. He left Lucas, walked to the kitchen window and looked out at the backyard illuminated by the security light that shone from the tall pole to which it was affixed. "From the moment we met I knew you were different, special. You reminded me of me," he admitted with a chuckle. "I can relate to you like no one I've ever met. You know me because we're the same. We deal with the same issues of protecting those we love, of assuming responsibility, of leading."

Nick twisted back to face Luc. "Just like me, you've been looking for someone to share the burden. You tell me I'm your mate. Well, I'm telling you here and now that you're mine. You made your choice in your way and I've made my choice in mine. I'll do whatever it takes to help you in this and in anything else that comes along. So here's the plan. You're going to make me a werewolf. You're going to teach me whatever I need to know to protect the kids but you're also going to concentrate on winning.

You're no lightweight and I'm willing to lay money on the fact that you can take this guy. We're going to go upstairs now and get down and dirty. You're going to bite me and I want you to be fucking me when you do it." Nick had the very great satisfaction of seeing Lucas boggle with surprise.

"You want me to fuck you?" Luc's voice conveyed his astonishment.

"I do." Nick grinned and sauntered back to his lover. "Think you can handle it?"

Lucas recovered his composure. He reached for Nick's hand and placed it on his rapidly swelling erection. "The question is, can you?"

Giving it a squeeze, Nick let go and grabbed Lucas' hand, pulling him out of the kitchen and leading him up the stairs. "As long as you know what you're doing. Come upstairs and demonstrate your skills, babe."

"As long as I know what I'm doing," Lucas scoffed. "I'm gonna have you regretting we didn't meet years ago. You're going to be begging."

"As long I'm not begging you to stop 'cause you're so inept," Nick laughed.

"Inept! I believe I've proven myself to be competent so far. You want testimonials from satisfied customers?"

Releasing Luc's hand, Nick entered the bedroom and crossed to the bed. With his back to it, he turned his teasing grin on Lucas. "Now, now, big bad wolf, don't get bent out of shape."

Lucas stalked up to him, placed his hands on Nick's shoulders and shoved. Nick landed back on the bed with a grunt, his grin still in place. "I'll show you big bad wolf," Lucas growled, joining him on the bed.

"Are you gonna huff and puff?" Nick was barely containing his laughter.

"Yes. And you're gonna grunt and groan. Now shut up."

Lucas planted his mouth over Nick's and neither one did any talking for a while.

## Chapter Four

Nick lay still for Lucas' kiss. It never occurred to him to question the decision to let Lucas fuck him. In the wake of what his lover had told him about Compton, it suddenly seemed imperative that Nick have more, all of Lucas, in whatever way he could get him. Having made up his mind to do it, for the first time, in a very long, long time, he felt a bit uncertain about what to do. It was only when Luc's kiss had him on the verge of going temporarily brain dead that he realized the truth. Just because he was going to be the catcher didn't mean he couldn't join in the game.

He wrapped his arms around Luc and pushed until he was on top. Luc growled wordlessly into his mouth. The sound vibrated against the roof of Nick's mouth and made his cock jump. Nick wasn't sure if the wolf was protesting or approving but he didn't give a fuck. Either way he was one sexy bastard and Nick was going to enjoy every minute of this. Their tongues twisted together then separated to go on their own explorations before returning to each other.

Nick pulled his mouth from Luc's and let it wander over his stubble-dotted jaw line to Lucas' ear. Once there he let his tongue bathe the whorls of Luc's ear before probing with his tongue. Lucas' body went tight and he groaned.

"Ah, you like that," Nick breathed, letting the warmth of his breath caress the moisture he'd left behind.

"Fucker, let's see how you like it."

Lucas pushed Nick over and treated Nick to the same caresses until Nick was panting and twisting his head away from Luc's grip. In this same manner they continued on and on. Nick discovered the sensitivity of the hollow above Luc's collarbone. Luc found that teasing the delicate flesh at the base of Nick's throat with tiny, stinging nips drove him crazy.

Lucas had a way of putting his face against Nick's flesh and breathing deeply that made Nick sprout goose bumps. He buried his nose in Nick's armpit, and Nick's snort of laughter became a surprised groan when Lucas' tongue probed the hair-covered flesh. Nick would never have guessed such a thing could be arousing but Lucas made it so.

Nick had Lucas twisting and groaning when he delicately pinched the tight flesh of one of Luc's tiny nipples between his teeth and lashed it repeatedly with his tongue. When he released it, the little nub was red and swollen. Nick looked at it with satisfaction and went to work on its mate, making them match. Lucas returned the favor to the point that Nick nearly regretted being so thorough, although the near pain of it made his cock pulse and ache.

Their hands and mouths stayed constantly on the move, one leading, the other following then turning it about again and again. It changed when Lucas captured Nick's cock in his mouth. From that moment on, Lucas took the lead and Nick was so inundated with pleasure he didn't give a damn. With Nick's cock held deeply in his mouth, Luc's tongue performed magic.

That tactile muscle caressed Nick's wet silky flesh. It found the prominent veins, pushed and rubbed against them, the pressure and tease nearly maddening. With his lips tightly pursed, Lucas slid slowly upward until he held just the top third of Nick's cock in his mouth. His tongue stroked the curve where cap met stalk, strummed the sensitive vee under the head and probed the tiny slit. The resultant pleasurable burn had Nick nearly growling himself.

It was a short-lived relief when Lucas deserted Nick's cock to concentrate on his balls for a time. He took the delicate sacs into his mouth to roll them in the wet heat. Once released they were treated to puffs of hot breath that made them tighten and throb. Lucas didn't stop there. He let his tongue caress the fragile flesh of Nick perineum and follow the trail to his tightly clenched entrance.

Nick wasn't prepared for the shock of Luc's tongue on his anus. He attempted to twist away only to find himself held firmly in place. An involuntary protest was on his



lips when wet heat laid itself over his entrance. For just a moment there was no movement, just his own awareness of the intruder at his door. Slowly he relaxed and Lucas moved, his touches at first tender and barely there, then more forceful until his tongue was actively pushing, seeking entrance.

“Oh, God, oh, God, fuck!” Nick was losing it, going under with the pleasure and heat building in his groin.

He felt the first finger enter and pushed into it, welcoming the small pressure that promised release. A second finger entered and he rode it easily, feeling the stretch, shuddering at the near electrical jolt of sensation that pierced him when Lucas found his prostate. By the time the third finger joined the first two, Nick was lost between the sensation of needing more in his ass and the need to bury his cock somewhere. He’d tried jacking himself, but Lucas was having none of it.

“Son of a bitch, fuck me, you bastard!” Nick finally yelled in desperation.

Lucas’s face appeared before him. “I thought you’d never ask. I want you to turn over and get up on your knees. Grab the headboard.”

Vibrating with arousal, Nick didn’t let himself think about anything but the need to come. He followed Luc’s instructions and pushed the pillows away until he was close to the tall, solid headboard. With his hands gripping the edge, he leaned slightly forward and pressed his cheek against the cool wall. He heard the snap of the cap on the bottle of lube they’d used earlier and the slick sound of wet against flesh.

On his knees, Lucas insinuated himself between Nick’s legs and crowded close. Nick’s cheeks were parted and Luc’s cock came between. Lucas eased the soft, plump tip over and over Nick’s anus, then centered it. “Push out,” he ordered and Nick obeyed. The head pierced the taut ring of muscle. The burn was hot and immediate but quickly diminished thanks to Lucas’ earlier preparation. His arm came around Nick’s waist and he pressed closer with every inch that slid within Nick’s hot, clasping channel.

Nick couldn’t help the groan that forced its way from his throat at the thick, solid column that stretched and filled him.

“That’s it, babe. Take my cock. God, you’re incredible. So fucking tight.”

Luc’s breath was hot against the skin at the nape of Nick’s neck and he shivered. In seconds Luc was buried to the root and they rested together both panting and sweating with the heat building between them. Lucas moved his hands until they were planted on Nick’s hips. Slowly he eased back then pushed forward.

With his eyes closed, Nick groaned. “Oh, yeah, feels good. Do it again.”

Lucas took him at his word and by gradual increments built up the speed and depth of his thrusts until their bodies were slapping together. Gasps, grunts and curses were wrung from their lips with every stroke. Luc released his grip on one of Nick’s hips and placed it against Nick’s head urging him to tilt to the side. He ground his cock deep, pressed as close as possible and fastened his teeth to the flesh at Nick’s shoulder. Dropping his hand he slid it around Nick’s waist and reached for Nick’s near-bursting erection. Holding Nick at all points as tightly as possible, Lucas thrust rapidly as hard, fast and deep as he could drive himself within Nick’s body. He pumped Nick’s cock in time and with a guttural growl bit down.

Nick felt his world explode. The angle of Luc’s cock caused it to slide against his gland with every thrust. When Lucas’ fingers wrapped around his cock, his balls drew up so hard Nick saw stars but the bite was the final straw. The sharp piercing pain jolted through him from his head to his toes. His entire body felt the shock and jumped, wrenching his climax free with a force that made the edges of reality go gray and indistinct. Semen burst forth from his cock again and again in streams so hard it almost hurt. The combination of pain and pleasure was a confusion of feeling so unique there was no denying it, no hiding from it. The pain somehow enhanced the pleasure while the pleasure negated the pain. All he could do was hold on and accept the sensation ravaging his body, leaving him weak and shaking.

When the world righted itself, Nick became aware of Lucas holding him. Lucas was licking his shoulder and Nick leaned back into the arms that held him. He sighed, letting the warm rhythm of Luc’s tongue hypnotize him for a few moments before slowly becoming aware of the discomfort in his knees. He shifted.

"Gotta move," he told Lucas, his voice gravely and dry.

"I'm game if you are."

Nick mustered a weary smile then shivered at the trickle of sweat that rolled down his back when Lucas moved away. Groaning, he eased back enough to flop down on his side and stretch his legs out. Lucas had done the same and the two of them lay face to face watching each other.

Nick reached out and ran his fingertips over the damp hair on Luc's chest. "Fucking amazing."

"That says it all."

"Almost."

Lucas remained silent, waiting.

The words love you, were on the tip of Nick's tongue but he couldn't speak them. He closed his eyes and whispered, "Soon." Just before sleep claimed him he felt Lucas move and reached out to pull him closer.

"Ditto." Luc's breath warmed his face just as that single word warmed Nick's heart.

\* \* \*

A few hours later Lucas woke. He and Nick were still lying face to face, arms, legs and bodies touching in several places. Luc studied Nick's face, the curve of his cheek, the clearly-cut and straight line of his nose, the stubble that rose from beneath the surface of his skin to flow like a faint shadow over his jaw. He loved the precise contours of his upper lip and the softer fullness of the lower one. Delicate eyelids under dark brows masked those intense blue eyes and for a moment. He wanted more than anything to look within their depths and see again the love Nick had shown him earlier. It was there, even though neither of them had found the courage to say the words.

His chest grew tight and his breath began to speed until he forced himself to relax. Nick had given him everything. His body, his trust, his love. It humbled Lucas to know that a man with so much honor and integrity, so much strength and compassion had found him a worthy recipient of all he had to offer. In the coming days Lucas was

determined to prove to Nick that he'd chosen well. If the thought of his children hadn't been enough to steel his determination to win the fight with Compton, finding Nick would have. There was no way in hell he was losing this man. No way in hell he was losing his family.

The thought had nagged at him that preparing for the worst, in some way weakened his resolve to win, but now he was certain that it only strengthened him. When the fight began, Nick and the children would be well away. That worry would be one less on his mind. Pam and Tony were required to attend as was every other adult. Pam especially, as alpha female, had to be there. No others but Pam, Tony, Crew and Chad would know that Lucas had found his mate and made him truly part of the pack. Lucas was willing to overlook this small cheat. It balanced the bad karma Compton was visiting upon them. Should the worst happen and he lose the fight, Pam and Tony would quietly slip away before Compton could recover enough to try and corral Pam. And Nick would join them.

Everything was falling into place. His family was protected. He was free now to put all his concentration on the coming fight. The remaining tension Luc felt, drained away. He'd done his best. What happened now was in the hands of God and fate. Settling back down, he yawned and smiled when Nick uttered a sleepy protest and moved closer, tightening his hold.

"I'm right here, babe," Lucas murmured.

"Big, bad woof," Nick muttered.

Lucas grinned and closed his eyes. Moments later both were again deeply asleep, their slow, warm breaths mingling in the cool quiet of the darkened bedroom.

\* \* \*

Nick stood over the bathroom sink brushing his teeth. His gaze was fixed on his reflection but his mind was far away. He was thinking about last night. The smile that formed in spite of the toothbrush in his mouth was tinged with irony. The guy in the mirror had never believed he'd find someone to love, let alone someone he'd trust

enough to make him feel as vulnerable as Lucas had made him feel the night before. Now he knew the truth of the saying that there was strength in weakness.

Lucas may have been the one seemingly on top but his need for what Nick was giving him was painfully obvious. Nick had to wonder why all bottoms didn't see it. If they did, tops everywhere would find themselves begging for the services of bottoms instead of the other way around. It was that realization that kept Nick from feeling what he'd feared most about giving himself in that way. That he'd been used, that he was now less of a man. He had to admit it was probably giving himself to the man he loved, knowing he was loved in return that also had a great deal to do with the fact that this morning there were no regrets.

His gaze slid to the mark on his shoulder. No regrets there either. He knew Lucas was counting on him and Nick had no intention of letting him down. He also had no intention of leaving Lucas to face Compton while he slipped out of town. His resolve was firmly set and his plan already in place. All that remained was securing his brothers' help and promises from Chad and Crewe. If worse should come to worse, the children and Pam would be safe and Nick would be free to kill the man who would dare shatter all their lives.

"Hey! You gonna dawdle out there all day or are you gonna get that fine ass of yours in here and scrub my back?"

Nick came back to himself, his solemnity replaced by indulgent amusement. His lover, obviously and impatiently awaiting Nick to join him in the shower, wasn't going to be shy about letting him know. He took the toothbrush out of his mouth. "Did anyone ever tell you that patience is a virtue?"

"I'd rather work on my vices. With you. I've got this really good one that involves my mouth on your dick."

Nick sputtered, toothpaste spattering the mirror. "Hold that thought. I'll be right there."

In record time he rinsed his mouth, wiped down the mirror and joined Lucas in the shower.

\* \* \*

"Now watch me," Lucas instructed.

"If I watch you any closer I'll be throwing wood," Nick warned, a leering grin on his face.

Lucas shook his head and rolled his eyes. He and Nick were standing in his living room, both of them totally nude. It had been five days since he'd bitten Nick and after spending quite a bit of time explaining the mechanics of the change, his lover was about to try it himself for the first time.

"Quit being a smartass and pay attention. You don't want your tail growing out the top of your head, do you?"

"That could happen?" Nick asked.

Luc took one look at the utterly appalled expression on Nick's face and burst out laughing. "Scared you, didn't I?"

"Now who's being the smartass?" Nick aimed a swat at Lucas' ass which he avoided by dancing neatly out of range.

"All right, all right. Come on. Get serious. I want to see you on all fours."

"We did that last night."

"Nick."

"All right. I admit it. I'm stalling. It's not everyday a guy attempts to turn into a wolf you know. Except for you. And Crewe. And Chad. And anyone else who's a werewolf."

Lucas planted himself in front of Nick and placed his hands on his lover's shoulders. "I know you're nervous. It's okay. Just take a deep breath, let it out slowly and keep breathing. We're going to do this together." Both of them took deep breaths, letting them trickle out then continued breathing together until Lucas spoke. "Since the night I bit you, you've felt the wolf awaken inside, haven't you?"

"Yes."

"Tell me how the wolf feels."

“Powerful, adventurous. He wants to run, he wants to hunt. We can smell the rabbits and deer in the woods. It makes our mouth water.”

Lucas nodded, pleased to hear the change in Nick’s pronouns. He was binding himself to the wolf. Instead of he, it was now we. Lucas led Nick to the open door beyond the dining area. Outside was the porch, the backyard and finally, the woods. “Close your eyes, babe. Breathe in. Tell me what you smell, what you sense.”

“The grass, dirt, pine, leaf mold. So many little things, birds, squirrels, rabbits, mice. There are moles digging. I can hear them. I can smell the fresh scent of newly exposed earth.” Nick turned his head slightly. “Did you hear the owl? It’s going to rain in a few hours. The ozone’s starting to permeate the air. There’s a skunk to the west. We shouldn’t go that way.”

“No, we won’t go that way. Go inside yourself, Nick. The wolf is waiting. Can you see him?” Lucas watched Nick carefully. He felt the small jolt that shook Nick, felt the wave of excitement roll beneath his skin the moment Nick connected with his wolf. Nick nodded, his eyes opening, their glow making Lucas want to howl in celebration. Instead he captured Nick’s gaze and softly demanded. “Run with me.”

Seamlessly Lucas made his transformation and Nick followed with ease. Two wolves, large, powerful and prime stood face to face. Necks stretched and noses touched. The lighter colored of the two trotted down the porch steps and crossed the yard glancing back to make sure the darker one followed. Together they reached the woods and eased within the shadowy brush.

For several hours they explored the woods. For a time the lighter-colored wolf led then seemed content to let his partner explore as he would. They walked, trotted then ran. They stopped at a trickling stream and panting, dipped their tongues into the cool water to drink. The dark wolf paused along the way to dig, nose and examine anything and everything that caught his eye or tickled his nose with its scent. A startled rabbit broke cover and they gave chase, the lighter wolf neatly making the kill.

He picked his prey up and dropped it at the feet of his mate who looked at it with hungry puzzlement in his eyes. He uttered a questioning whine. His mate tore into

the rabbit, exposing the choice bits and the darker wolf, driven by his instincts, stepped in and fed on the warm flesh and blood. Afterward they stopped again at the stream and drank once more before heading home.

Back on the porch, Lucas easily shifted and waited expectantly for Nick to do the same. The dark wolf stood uncertainly until Lucas squatted down. He placed a hand on either side of its shaggy head. "It's time to come back. Come back to me, Nick."

The air shimmered. Lucas felt an almost electrical shiver radiate up his arms and a nearly intangible shifting of matter under his hands. Within seconds it was gone and Nick squatted before him. The two of them slowly rose to stand upright.

"Are you all right?" Lucas asked, seeing the stunned wonder that filled Nick's eyes.

Nick seemed beyond words but managed a nod. It was not an unusual reaction after a first transformation. Lucas urged him inside then closed and locked the door behind them. Quietly praising him, Luc led Nick upstairs. What his lover needed now was a hot shower and a good long sleep. Lucas was going to make sure he got both.

Sometime in the night Nick thrashed around under the covers, woke and sat up. "Oh, fuck. I ate a rabbit."

Lucas, pulled instantly from sleep by Nick's movements, uttered a rusty chuckle. "How do you feel about that?"

"My head tells me I ought to be puking my guts out but my stomach's not cooperating."

"The wolf enjoyed his meal. He's not going to let you waste it."

"I guess it beats throwing up."

\* \* \*

The day of the full moon arrived. Everyone attempted to go about the day in as calm a manner as possible but the knowledge of what would take place that night hung like a pall over their thoughts and actions. They were unusually quiet and subdued.

Ethan, Crewe, Dustin and Chad gathered together. They watched television together, cooked and ate lunch together and clung to each other with a subtlety few



outside their circle would recognize. As night approached, the four of them piled into Chad's car and headed for their prearranged destination.

Lucas, Nick, Pam, Tony and the children spent the day at Luc's house. The children, picking up on the tension, played quietly while the adults talked about everything but the coming evening. There was no need to rehash, all that was needed was to put into action the plans that had already been laid out. Eventually, as always, the sun went down, the darkness deepened and the moon rose majestically overhead. Lucas and Nick sought a moment's privacy in the guestroom where they kissed and hugged each other until their ribs creaked in protest. Everything they needed to say to each other had been said the night before. Wordlessly they left that temporary sanctuary.

Pam, Tony and Luc helped Nick settle the children in his car, kissed them goodbye and watched Nick drive away. Vehicles began arriving, members of the pack presenting themselves as required to witness the contest for pack alpha. As the time approached, they began to strip and transform, each of them making their way to the appointed place deep in the sheltering woods.

Arriving at the place he'd arranged to meet them, the parking lot of a local Denny's, Nick got out of the car and greeted his brothers, Crewe and Chad.

"Uncle Crewe!" Justin shouted from the backseat.

Crewe opened the back door. "How you doin' kiddo?"

"Fine."

Ryan and Alecia were fast asleep.

"I need you to do something for me, Justin. Okay?"

"Okay."

"This is my mate, Ethan, and this is Uncle Chad's mate, Dustin," Crewe explained as the men gathered around. "They're both Nick's brothers and they're going to take you to my house and watch you until Mommy and Tony come to pick you up. Is that all right?"

"Will Mommy and Tony come soon?"

"Yep. In about the time it would take you to watch Nemo two times."

"Is it okay, Nick?"

"It sure is. Mommy and Tony will be there before you know it and my brothers will take good care of you. I promise."

"Okay."

The men withdrew from the car and gathered together. "He'll be asleep before you get there," Crewe told Ethan and Dustin. "Just take them inside and wait for us. I honestly don't think we're going to need to implement any more of this plan we've put together but you know what to do, just in case."

Ethan and Dustin nodded. They kissed their mates goodbye and took their places in the car with the kids and headed out.

"I'll drive," Nick bit out shortly and slid in behind the wheel of Chad's car.

"Let's go," Chad said with a shrug as he and Crewe took their places.

Nick put the car in gear and headed back to Lucas' house.

## Chapter Five

Cool, damp grass crushed underfoot as the clearing filled with wolves and people. In another gathering, such casual nudity might not have gone without remark but here it made little impression on those assembled. To those born were, it was never something that caused discomfort and for those made, something about the wolf that was created at their induction into their pack made the nudity easy to accept.

Lucas stood, unmoving and unmoved by the activity around him. His gaze rested on the man who faced him across the clearing. Lyle Compton. Icy calm filled Lucas. All the problems this man represented disappeared. There was no anger, no fear, merely iron hard determination. All the negative emotions had been tamped down and relegated to a place that prevented them from interfering with his concentration. He'd seen this person as man and wolf. He knew the way he moved, the way he ran, the way he took prey. Lucas had even seen the way he fought when he'd started trouble with other pack members. All the knowledge he possessed of Compton was there to be drawn upon.

Compton was shorter than Luc, compact and burly. He moved with the grace all their kind possessed. He was naturally aggressive, though at the moment he too was still, conspicuously so in the empty space that surrounded him. It was clear by the way they were aligned, who the pack endorsed as their choice. Lucas too was accorded space but those present were obvious in the way they gravitated toward Lucas' side of the invisible circle in which the fight would take place.

The pack would obey Compton should he win, but until then he was without support. A pack alpha could win obedience through intimidation but such a leader never truly ruled. Lucas was revered not only for his strength, but for his compassion. Anyone in a position of power with a modicum of sense came to learn that a great deal

of his effectiveness and strength came from the respect and help of those in his hierarchy. Lucas was well aware of that fact.

Behind him, Lucas sensed Pam and Tony. Their presence was one he could have done without, preferring that they be away with the children but it couldn't be helped. As weres, they were required to attend. A pair of scents tickled Lucas' nostrils. That tiny part of him not submerging into calm detachment noted the arrival of Crewe and Chad. A third scent, faint and fleeting made his nostrils flare but other than that brought no other reaction. Nick was somewhere close. Luc had nothing to waste on railing against that inevitability. The wolf accepted the presence of his mate with satisfaction. The human could do no other.

Without fanfare the time arrived. Those standing outside the circle quieted. Luc stepped forward as did Compton. Pam had moved to a position midway between them at the edge of the circle.

Into the silence, she spoke. "Begin."

The change swept through Lucas. In his wolf form, Luc's coat was predominantly antique ivory in color with dark blond and pale chocolate accents along his back, shoulders, and head. His muzzle was creamy pale, the edges of his ears and the end of his tail accented again by shades of blond and brown. His normally honey-amber colored eyes had darkened. Under the moonlight they were the rich golden-orange of a fiery Madeira citrine. His legs were long, his body well muscled and sleek under the thick cover of his coat.

Compton's wolf form resembled that of his human shape, shorter, compact and muscular. His coloring was predominantly light gray accented by black and his eyes too had filled with the fire of battle. The wolves met each other in their first clash. It wasn't long before both wore highlights of red, blood spilled by tooth and claw.

Compton was strong and fast. His attacks were lightning quick. Lucas was agile, inviting attacks, teasing his opponent into wasting his energy while sinuously avoiding severe punishment. Together the two wolves orchestrated a dance of deadly intent. They circled, rushing in, feinting back, each seeking to find some vulnerable place to

bite or claw. The otherwise eerie silence was broken only by their vicious snarls, snapping teeth and panting breaths.

Compton pushed the contact, attacking again and again as Lucas dodged to avoid the worst of it, all the while managing to inflict his own share of damage. Where Compton sought to win with brute strength, Lucas fought a battle of strategy. Compton's constant push and rush was taking a toll on his energy. As the fight progressed his panting became louder, his sides heaving. Several times he'd rush in low to make a grab for one of Lucas' legs, only to be met by savage teeth instead of vulnerable flesh and bone.

At one point they came together in a headlong crash that sent them rolling across the grass, claws and teeth finding places to inflict damage. Neither came away unscathed. Compton sported an ugly bite to his flank which was oozing blood and exposed where the fur and flesh had been ripped free, while Lucas dripped blood from a wide slash across his shoulder and chest. An involuntary murmur of dismay rippled through those watching when Lucas came away from the engagement favoring his left front leg.

Seeing the damage and determined to exploit his opponent's obvious handicap, Compton redoubled his efforts. He rushed at Lucas time and again, pushing him around the circle as Lucas fought to protect his wounded shoulder and avoid more injuries. To those watching it seemed as though Lucas' strength was draining away with each drop of blood that anointed the grass beneath his feet.

Compton grew bolder and bolder. Another rush caused Lucas to whirl away but in doing so he lost his footing, stumbled and fell. Compton darted in for the kill but instead of meeting the fading struggles of a flagging combatant, he was met by a strike that would rival the deadliest of snakes. Lucas had lured him in with the semblance of weakening due to his wounded shoulder. Gathering his hind legs beneath him, Lucas launched himself and struck from below, his jaws closing on Compton's throat.

In his surprise, Compton attempted to break free and succeeded only in tearing his throat open. For a moment he wavered, clearly stunned as blood poured from the

wound, before his body collapsed. The light in his eyes dimmed then extinguished as he silently died. Those of the pack who had remained in wolf form lifted their muzzles to the sky. Their eerie howls a tribute to the passing of a pack member. It was fitting, even for one who would not be mourned.

Lucas resumed his human shape, his wounds healing with the transformation. His breathing was labored and he was clearly weary, though his body seemed to recover with each passing moment. Each and every member of the pack came to him, silently touching and being touched, once again offering their allegiance to their proven alpha. Several volunteers carried Compton's body away to the place that had been prepared for the loser. Contrary to popular mythos, once dead he did not resume his human shape. A wolf would be buried in the ground that awaited.

Pam, Tony, Chad and Crewe were among the last to re-offer their loyalty and commitment to Lucas as the others drifted away. Lucas had assumed a mien of calm, but beneath the surface the others sensed the vibration of emotion held firmly in check. Pamela hugged him fiercely. There seemed no appropriate words to be said. A victory had been achieved but at a terrible cost. To offer congratulations would be inappropriate. No one made the mistake of doing so.

Pam broke the silence in a way she hoped would offer comfort and remind Lucas why this battle had been fought. "We're going to pick up the kids. I'll tell them you'll be around to see them in a few days."

Lucas nodded and watched the last of his pack but one, walk away. When they were out of sight he spoke into the silence. "You may as well come out. I know you're there."

A dark wolf glided from between the trees. He was nearly black, his face, chest, underbelly and legs lightened by touches of cream amongst the dusky hair. He met Lucas at the edge of the clearing and transformed. "I tried to stay downwind, but I knew you'd caught my scent before the fight started."

With a sigh, Lucas rolled his head, loosening the tight muscles of his neck. A fine tension shivered through his body, the beginnings of arousal heating his skin. His gaze

fastened on his mate. Savoring Nick's unselfconscious nudity, Luc's mouth began to water. "I had a feeling you wouldn't stay away. Where are the kids?"

"With Ethan and Dustin. They've both joined the pack."

"I see," Lucas replied, edging closer. A heavy throbbing grew in his groin. "And what was your plan?"

"If you lost, Pam and Tony would take the children away. I'd challenge Compton. If I lost, Crewe, Ethan, Chad and Dustin would make sure he didn't enjoy his position for long." Nick held his ground.

"Four against one. Not very sporting," Lucas felt the pulse of blood moving to his cock. Nick's scent was heavy in his nostrils and as he watched, his mate's cock began to fill. The scent of their mutual desire perfumed the air between them.

"Better than letting a rogue have free rein."

"True."

Lucas watched the fire fill Nick's deep blue eyes and knew his own burned as well. He reached out and was met. This time when two bodies slammed together it was for pure pleasure. All the aggression Lucas had repressed before and during the fight came to the fore. He was on fire with need, an unspecified rage pulsing through his blood. Using his strength in a way he'd never used it on a lover before, he shoved Nick against the nearest tree and ground their torsos together.

It dimly occurred to him that Nick was choosing to humor his need. Now that he was a werewolf, Nick would be more than a match for Lucas. He wouldn't be pushed unless he allowed it. Uncaring of the niceties, Lucas invaded Nick's parted lips and ravaged his mouth while grabbing his ass so hard he was sure to leave bruises. Without a protest, Nick met his savage passion head on. Their cocks were crushed together, rubbing with the wild incessant rhythm of Luc's hips as he thrust against his lover.

The need to come was a deep, urgent and aching thing. He savagely bit Nick's lip, drew blood and sucked at the drops that flowed free. The rich copper-salt flavor filled his mouth, taking away the lingering traces of Compton's body and blood. Luc

clenched his eyes tightly shut, struggling to slam the door on any thought but those of Nick and the need that pulsed through his body like a drug that ate his very sanity.

Every panting breath filled his lungs with Nick, every touch was his mate. In desperation, he drove everything away but Nick, his scent, his taste, the sound of his groans. With one last heave of their bodies together, Lucas came with a guttural wail, shaking, shuddering with the pleasure that surged through him. Wet heat sprayed between them. The scent of fresh semen, first his, then Nick's registered in that same instance and he breathed it in, savored it while his body gradually sought to relax.

Eventually it dawned on him that Nick was murmuring softly. "It's all right, baby. I'm here. I'm right here."

Lucas frowned, his tongue coming out to wet lips gone dry. The moisture on his lips made him realize there was moisture of another kind on his face. Dazed, he reached up unclenching one fisted hand to touch his own cheek. His fingertips came away smeared with moisture, clear and salty. Tears. Without permission, his body was attempting to purge the emotions Lucas was holding tightly in check. He stepped away and turned his back to Nick, struggling to tamp down the feelings that were threatening to unman him.

Nick was having none of it. He crowded close from behind, his arms circling Luc's waist while bringing them tightly together. "There's no shame in crying. I've done it myself a time or two. Everyone does, you know. You've been through a traumatic experience. Even the strongest of men would crumple a bit around the edges after going through something like this."

Lucas nodded and swallowed around the lump that formed in his throat. "I know what it's like to kill prey. As a wolf I've never felt remorse for doing so. It's nature. It's the way things are meant to be. But this," Lucas felt every muscle in his body go rigid once more, "this killing was so wrong. I keep telling myself there was no other way and I know, *I know* it's the truth, but I feel hollow inside like I've lost a part of myself."



"This is the kind of situation in which even the victor loses. Come on, standing here's not helping. We both need showers and you need sleep."

"I don't think I can sleep."

"What would you like to do?"

"Run, just run."

"Then that's what we'll do."

Nick released him and Lucas spun, his gaze finding Nick's. What he saw went a long way toward healing the wound in his soul. Everything he'd ever hoped for, acceptance, sympathy, understanding and love, all were there reflected in a blaze of blue-eyed fire. A tentative smile curved the outer edges of his lips. He transformed, found his mate at his side and the two of them ran, side by side from the clearing.

\* \* \*

Several hours later with the sun about to make its appearance on the horizon, two weary wolves appeared at the edge of Lucas' back yard. Lucas and Nick transformed and made their way inside. They climbed the stairs and gathered enough energy to shower before pulling the drapes and falling into bed.

The sun was dimming when Lucas woke with Nick spooned at his back. Before he was fully awake, memories from last night inundated his thoughts. The reality of what he'd had to do shortened his breath until he was softly panting. Even with his eyes opened wide all he could see was black, a pit of guilt and self-loathing waiting for him to fall in. Lucas shook his head, knowing the trap that waited. If he gave in to those feelings, he'd be lost. He struggled against it until an unconscious movement brought him closer to Nick.

The contact with his mate chased the darkness away. His breathing eased and by measured increments his body relaxed. Slowly he became aware of the way their position made him feel. The word that came foremost to mind was safe. He was cocooned in Nick's warmth and scent, cared for, loved. Safe. Being here with this man, he could never truly be lost. Thoughts of a more basic nature began to brew in his mind.

Lucas deliberately tightened his sphincter, imagining what it would feel like to have Nick inside his body. Just the thought made his own cock twitch and he uttered a small groan, taken by the idea as never before. Aware of the proximity of Nick's cock to his ass, Luc wiggled experimentally, pushing back while adding a little twist that soon brought results. Nick uttered a sleepy growl, his arm tightening over Luc's waist while his cock grew hard against Luc's backside.

"You want something?" Nick breathed against the back of Luc's neck.

The warm mist of Nick's breath sent a shiver down his spine. "Want you. Want you to fuck me," he answered and felt the truth of it soul deep.

Lucas wanted it, needed it, needed to feel the anchor of his mate's loving regard to combat the ugliness from the night before. Nick answered his need by kissing his nape and more. He encouraged Lucas to move to his back. With lips and tongue Nick kissed, licked and tasted while his hands roamed and caressed. Luc lay quiescent, breathing deeply, groaning softly at the light touches. The sucking nip at his earlobe, the teasing pinch to a nipple, the gentle tug at the curls that surrounded the base of his cock. Every part of him was petted and stroked. To lie still and be taken care of was a luxury he'd never before experienced. It was surprisingly enjoyable he decided, then put his thoughts on hold when Nick's fingers curled around his erection. Luc's hips moved slowly in rhythm with the languid pulls of Nick's hand on his cock.

Nick urged him to part his thighs and Lucas was soon writhing to the feel of Nick's hot, practiced mouth on his cock and balls. While the arousal grew, Nick kept the pace deliberately slow enough to light the fire and keep it burning but never enough for the flames to go out of control. When Nick pulled away, Lucas nearly howled in frustration. He gathered his control enough to see Nick searching for the lube in the bedside table's drawer.

Nick returned and smiled at Lucas' frowning face. "Still haven't cultivated the virtue of patience."

"This is no time for patience."

"Now there you're wrong." Nick leaned over him and slanted his mouth against Luc's. Their tongues did a quick meet and greet before Nick pulled back a bit. "I'm about to stretch your tight, little hole so you can ride my big, hard cock. This is the exact time for patience."

Lucas was given no time to reply before Nick was kissing him again. The urgency returned full force when lube slick fingers slid down his cock, over his balls and beyond. Luc groaned and followed Nick's guiding hand when it urged him to roll his hips to the side. He draped his leg over Nick's hip and gasped when warm, oily fingertips glided through the crevice of his ass to tease the tight bud of his entrance.

"Relax. It's surprisingly easy. You taught me that," Nick whispered against Luc's lips.

"As I recall you liked that lesson."

"I did. Very much. You're the only one who'll ever teach it to me."

Nick's words made Luc's chest go tight. He voiced the question that was weighing so heavily on his mind. "Am I less in your eyes for what I've done?"

"You could never be less. You're an honorable man, Lucas. You protected your children, your pack and all other werewolves who would have been endangered by Compton's disregard of caution and sense. I'm only sorry you're paying the price for it."

The relief that swept through Lucas was monumental. "Remember when I said I felt as though I'd lost a part of myself?"

Nick nodded.

"You can give it back to me."

"How?"

"Like this." Lucas, with one hand at the back of Nick's head, brought their lips together. The kiss was easy and open with nothing held back. A giving, a taking, a surrender, each to the other. "Need you," Luc growled.

"No more than I need you," Nick returned. "Now hold still. I'm gonna fuck you till you howl."

Lucas' chuckle turned into a gasp when Nick's finger penetrated his anus. He narrowed his eyes at his mate, but pushed back into the small invasion. To his surprise he found the slick friction pleasant. The underlying tension that had ridden him since the night before bled away until his muscles went lax. As though sensing his ease and acceptance, Nick went forward with his preparation and added a second finger.

Eyes closing, Lucas let his head fall back against the pillow. His exposed throat received a thorough examination via Nick's lips, tongue and teeth. Every touch merely increased his arousal. Luc's hips had assumed a languid rhythm. Pushing back drove Nick's fingers deeper, thrusting forward slid his rigid cock against Nick's firm belly. He was wrapped in his lover. The pungent scent of male arousal was accented by the slide of hair roughened skin against skin. Hard breaths and rumbling groans accompanied the tang of musk and salt gleaned from that same skin by exploring tongues. Hard muscles shifted and stretched with elastic ease when their bodies moved together, building the heat and need.

Lucas had welcomed the burning ache of Nick's three tightly fluted fingers and wanted more. When Nick found his prostate, Luc jerked in shock at the sensation. Drops of clear pre-come welled from the plump cap of his cock as he struggled to keep his orgasm in check. The repeated contact was almost more than he could stand.

With fingers digging into whatever part of Nick he held onto, he finally managed to ground out, "Stop teasing and *fuck me*."

Repeating the line Lucas had used on him, Nick captured his mate's gaze. "I thought you'd never ask."

"Bastard," Lucas snarled.

"You'll love me in a minute," Nick promised.

He unhooked Lucas' leg from over his hip and followed it over until he was between Luc's spread thighs. Lucas automatically bent his knees and raised his legs to cradle Nick between them and Nick crowded close, lifting Luc's hips to expose his entrance. Lucas didn't have long to wait until he felt the bulbous head of Nick's cock

pressed against his anus. He pushed out, opening himself to the pressure Nick applied and fisted his hands in the sheets when Nick's cock breached the taut muscle.

Breathing through the quick bite of pain, Lucas relaxed then groaned with pleasure when Nick slid forward several inches. "Oh fuck, that feels good."

"Ready for more?"

"Oh, yeah. Bring it."

Nick managed a strained chuckle and pushed.

Both of them groaned at the sensation. When Nick began slowly gliding in and out Lucas was sure he'd never felt anything that was at once so satisfying yet so frustrating. The glide of Nick's cock inside his body was maddening, especially each time it slid across the small gland that brought such aching pleasure. At the same time his cock was pulsing, begging for attention. The friction between their bodies brought some relief but it wasn't enough.

Lucas reached for his cock only to be stopped by Nick's hand clamping around his wrist. Nick shook his head. "No touching. This is my show."

Lucas snarled. "You know I'm going to make you pay for this, don't you?"

Nick's grin was positively feral. "You'll try."

A hard thrust tore a growl from Lucas and he cursed, desperately pushing his body to meet it. Nick increased the pace, stroking his cock in and out with escalating speed and power until the bed creaked and shook with it. Lucas was at the brink, head thrashing on the pillow, body straining for every bit of contact when Nick finally wrapped his fingers around Luc's cock. A half dozen firm pulls pushed Lucas over the edge.

A deep, powerful keening wail and rapid pulses of semen shooting forth, heralded the arrival of his climax. Luc's stomach muscles rippled and clenched with jolts of exquisite release. Deep inside he felt the pulse of Nick's cock as he rode his own orgasm and it merely added to Luc's pleasure. He collapsed back against the bed, taking Nick with him, muscles going lax, his mind and body drifting in a haze of satiation.

With his arms around Nick and Nick's weight resting against him, Lucas had just about decided he was near suffocating when Nick lifted himself and eased over. Luc took a deep, audible breath.

"Why didn't you say something?" Nick asked with a yawn. "Didn't mean to smother you."

"Felt good. Wanted you there." Luc came up on his elbow and leaned over Nick. Their eyes met and Lucas could feel the invisible link between them. "I used to wonder if I'd love my mate or if it would just be some compatible, biological pairing."

"Did you learn the answer?"

Lucas smiled and nodded. "It's love."

Nick laughed. "Yeah, it is."

## Epilogue

With so many people in the house it seemed almost crowded and yet it was a welcome group. Nick watched the various pairings with interest. His parents and Luc's were sitting in the living room talking, with Alecia currently being held by his mother. Nick's parents had taken to Lucas' children like a house afire. Justin and Ryan called them Grandpa and Grandma which thrilled them both to no end.

Nick's parents got along well with all their sons' in-laws which was a good thing as they were a close-knit bunch. Chad, Crewe, Pam and Tony's mothers, along with Crewe's dad, who was a professional chef, and a pregnant Pamela, were in the process of moving various bowls and platters to the long picnic table on the back porch. Tony was helping and making sure Pam didn't lift anything too heavy. The two of them had proudly announced the future addition to the family and everyone had received the news with pleasure.

Most of the men were outside. Chad's father, along with Pam's, and Tony's were presiding over the grills. Crewe, Dustin, Ethan, Chad and Luc were good naturedly teaching Justin and Ryan the finer points of touch football while they took a break from the more strenuous activity of the actual game. Nick had taken the opportunity to go inside to use the bathroom. He'd just rejoined the guys outside when Crewe's dad announced that lunch would be ready in a couple of minutes.

"I figure we have time for one more play," Luc announced as they all gathered around him. Lucas, Crewe and Chad had teamed up against Nick, Ethan and Dustin. Both sides had held their own and the score was tied. "I think we should make this last play worth something extra special," he said, aiming a wicked smile at Nick.

Nick's brow rose and he returned the smile with interest. "Just what did you have in mind, babe?"

"First team to score on the field, scores in bed tonight too. A-one, guaranteed-to-blow-the-top-off-your-head blowjobs for the winners. From their own mates, of course."

Lucas' proposition brought a chorus of titillated laughter from the rest of the guys. Mates gave each other questioning looks and nods of heads sealed the agreement. Even Ethan agreed though his cheeks were slightly flushed, especially when Crewe leaned in to whisper something in his ear.

Nick neatly peeled Ethan out of Crewe's grasp. "No influencing my team member. Come on guys, let's huddle up."

Both sides separated, worked out their strategy then faced off, ready for the final play. Nick's team had the ball and Nick counted out a short cadence before Ethan snapped him the ball. Dustin was running interference when Ethan made a run down the field with Crewe hot on his heels. Nick faked a throw to Ethan, causing a momentary distraction. He swung around and faked another pass to Dustin, who momentarily drew Chad and Luc's attention until they realized that Nick still had the ball. Nick, clearing the tangle of bodies started down field with Crewe coming at him from ahead and Chad and Luc closing in from behind. He drew his arm back and threw a perfect pass on the fly. Ethan caught it and scored.

A cheer went up from the porch where everyone had gathered to fill their plates and watch the final play. Ethan, Dustin and Nick whooped and hollered, patting each other on the back while exchanging rough hugs. After they calmed down, the six players huddled together where grins, winks and words of congratulations were bestowed.

"Well, it looks like the Parks brothers are scoring big tonight," Lucas admitted with a wry grin.

Nick slipped an arm around Luc's waist and looked at each of those gathered around him. Ethan and Crewe, Dustin and Chad, and finally his gaze found and met his lover's. "I think the Parks brothers scored more than any of us could possibly have imagined."



"You got that right," Dustin added.

"Yeah," Ethan agreed softly. "But I still want my reward," he announced, his cheeks blazing bright.

Everyone laughed.

"You'll get it, baby. I promise," Crewe assured him.

"Good," Ethan replied lifting his face for a kiss which Crewe bestowed without hesitation. "Can we eat now? I'm starving."

Nick and Lucas lagged back a bit to let the others go ahead of them. Even with such a small courtesy they were alphas to the core, looking after their own. They joined those gathered on the porch to eat and celebrate the simple joys of life.

## **Kate Steele**

What is it they say? Watch out for the quiet ones? Kate Steele has found that writing is the ideal way to release all those wild inner urges and she's just getting started. "I'm aging in reverse. With the help of lots of plastic surgery and vitamins I fully expect to have my own male harem by the time I hit 90." For now she's settling for the quiet life in rural Indiana with family and pets. Guilty pleasure: Singing in the car. "With the volume loud enough I sound just like Celine Dion!" You can contact Kate and sing-a-long at [katesteele27@yahoo.com](mailto:katesteele27@yahoo.com) or visit her website at [www.katesteele.com](http://www.katesteele.com)