

Solstice Craving

Silvia Violet

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Chapter 1

Jackson was the last of his brothers to arrive at the family farm. As he seated himself at the breakfast bar and grabbed a cup of coffee, his father pulled a pan of biscuits out of the oven and placed them on the counter.

"I've found a spell we can use," his father said as Jackson and his two brothers began filling their plates with biscuits, bacon, and eggs. Jackson froze, a biscuit halfway to his mouth. It was just like his father to drop such important information without warning.

His father smiled at him, knowing exactly what he was thinking. "Unfortunately, there's a catch."

"What?" Jackson's older brother, Malcolm, asked, not bothering to finish chewing first.

"It's a sexual spell that rekindles love between the two participants."

Jackson's excitement wavered. His mother had passed away three years ago, and no one could imagine his father loving another the way he had his wife. Malcolm never went out with the same woman more than twice, and Caden had just ended a relationship with a total bitch he never should have given the time of day. Jackson was no closer to finding his true love than the rest of them. "Can anyone in the pack perform the spell?"

His father frowned. "No, it must be done by the pack leader or his immediate kin."

Malcolm's lips curled in a wicked smile. "Cara Setley's back in town. I heard she's got a job at the Hedford Inn."

Jackson forced himself to unclench his fists. Hitting his brother would not be a good idea.

Cara had been Jackson's girlfriend for two years. He'd been on the verge of telling her the family secret and proposing when she'd told him she'd found a job in Charleston. She was finishing up her degree in baking and pastry arts at the local community college. The job she'd landed would provide excellent experience, doing baking for an exclusive bed and breakfast in Charleston's historic district.

Cara had asked Jackson to consider moving with her. From her perspective, his accounting degree and his two years of job experience with a large firm made him a great candidate for landing a job in a new city. But what she didn't know was that he couldn't leave his pack.

Like their fully animal relatives, werewolves need the support of others of their kind. Another wolf might have petitioned the Charleston pack for membership, but since Jackson's father was pack leader, Jackson had far too many responsibilities to consider leaving. Cara offered to look harder for a local job, but Jackson didn't want her to settle for less than the best.

He'd been a hot-headed idiot at the time, his body running on the raging hormones of a werewolf coming into his full powers. Instead of talking to her about how important the opportunity in Charleston was for her, he'd cheated on her and let her catch him. Fool that he was, he thought he was doing her a favor, encouraging her to do what was right for her career in the only way he could.

"Cara hasn't spoken to me since she left town three years ago. Considering how I treated her, I don't think she'll want to talk to me now."

Caden frowned. "But you did love her."

Jackson looked at his younger brother. "Yes."

"Do you love her now?"

Jackson drew in a long slow breath. "Yes."

"Then find out if she still loves you." His father's tone held the mark of authority. Normally Jackson wouldn't dare question his father about pack business, but if anyone thought Cara was going to perform a sexual ritual with Jackson, they were insane.

"This isn't going to work."

Rather than the explosion Jackson expected, his father sighed and sat down on one of the bar stools. "If we don't find a way to protect ourselves soon, Hanley's pack will gain control of us one by one until we're all slaves to his whim."

Already some of the weaker members of their pack had succumbed to the lure of Hanley's magic, allowing themselves to be used to perform criminal acts for the rogue wolf. The bastard and his pack of ex-criminals, all of whom he and his lieutenants had infected themselves, had been preying on small, weak packs in the Appalachian region for over a year.

This was the first time they'd taken on a well-organized pack with more than ten members. When wolves were born or created, they gained certain magical powers, but the strength of these powers varied widely. Hanley was an extremely gifted magic worker. Jackson, his father and brothers, and other strong workers in their pack had tried numerous protection and strengthening spells, but none were strong enough to block him.

Jackson sighed. "Why do you believe this spell will work?"

"Rather than simply adding strength to each pack member's shields, this spell uses the energy of birth and renewal available on the Winter Solstice. If one who has denied love agrees to surrender herself and allow the Lord and Lady to fill her with the energy of love, a burst of magic is sent forth. The magic will cover each pack member with a force field of their own, similar to that which closes around us when we cast a sacred circle. The shield should last until Ostara, the spring equinox. Hopefully by then Hanley will have moved on."

"The Solstice is in three days."

His father nodded. "So it is."

"Even if Cara will agree to see me, she's not going to accept what I am and agree to do the ritual in three days' time."

Malcolm clapped his brother on the shoulder. "You definitely have your work cut out for you."

Jackson gave him a look that said he'd get him back somehow. Cara had every right to slam the door in his face if he tried to see her, and the chances that she still loved him were nearly zero. How was he supposed to convince her to fall in love with him again, especially when he had to inform her that he was a werewolf in need of her magical assistance. Oh, and by the way, this assistance involves having sex in front of his entire pack. She'd probably call the police.

But the grief he'd seen on his father's face since Hanley had begun his pursuit of their pack had made Jackson's heart ache. And a week ago, Hanley had gotten to Jackson's cousin, Ian. The boy was only fifteen, but Hanley had convinced him to assist in a bank robbery. Things had gone bad, and two bank tellers had been killed. Ian was now in juvenile detention awaiting trial.

Jackson got up and put his plate in the sink. "Wish me luck. I'm going to find Cara."

"She bought the old Walker place on Elm Street." Malcolm called after him.

"Then that's where I'm headed."

As he left, Jackson imagined how his visit would go. With her long blond hair and pale, blue eyes, Cara looked sweet and innocent, but she had a fiery temper. As harsh as her anger could be, he'd rather feel her wrath than receive the cold reception he expected.

* * *

Cara looked at the maze of boxes still lining her living room floor. She'd only been back in Vanderbilt for a few days, but she'd made a lot of progress on the small house she'd bought. She'd painted the living room, dining room, and one of the bedrooms, and she was just getting to the business of hanging pictures. She was holding one up, testing it over the sofa, when the doorbell rang.

Cara rushed to the door, expecting to see her sister who'd promised to stop by that morning. Instead, she came face to face with Jackson Macray, the man who'd broken her heart three years ago. The man she'd never gotten over. The last man on earth she'd wanted to see. And unfortunately, he still looked every bit as delicious as he

had the day she found him fucking another woman when he was supposed to be taking her to dinner.

He was a few inches over six feet with short, auburn hair and chocolate eyes. He had thick shoulders, muscular arms, and the most lusciously formed chest she'd ever seen. She realized she was undressing him in her mind and started to close the door, but he stuck out his arm and held it open. He'd certainly not let his muscle tone go in the last three years. She couldn't have made the door budge if she'd had the help of two more people.

"Please leave."

"Not until I have a chance to apologize."

"It's been three years. Whatever you have to say, it's too little, too late."

"I was an idiot. I didn't want you to give up the opportunity in Charleston even though I couldn't go with you. I was stupid enough to think I had to pull a stunt like that to get you to leave town."

"It never occurred to you that I should be the one to decide whether I stayed or not?"

Jackson shook his head. "I wasn't thinking right."

She exhaled. "My sister is on her way over. I want to show her my new house. I have no desire to rehash our relationship."

"Please just hear me out."

"Jackson --"

"I've never stopped loving you."

"Jackson, I'm not going to fall for your bullshit again."

"Are you seeing someone else?"

She wanted to lie to him, tell him she had a boyfriend, hell, that she'd had a whole lineup of them. But other than a few failed first dates, she'd had nothing in three years. For some reason, she'd never been able to lie to Jackson. It was like he had some sixth sense when it came to her. "I'm not seeing anyone. Is that what you want to hear?"

That you affected me so deeply that I can't think about anyone but you, can't even go out on a date with someone because the man's not you? Would that stroke your ego?"

He shook his head. "No. But it would give me hope. I want a chance to talk to you, to explain my behavior."

"I don't need an explanation. I need you to leave me alone and let me build my own life here."

"Have dinner with me."

"No."

"Let me say my peace this once. Then, if you never want to see me again, I'll honor that."

There was something desperate in his tone, something that sounded so genuinely full of need she couldn't deny him though she wanted to. From the first moment she'd met Jackson, he'd been able to charm almost anything out of her. "My sister will be here all day, but I'll have breakfast with you tomorrow. Then I expect you to disappear from my life again."

Jackson nodded. "Thank you. Would you let me cook for you? The things I have to say shouldn't be discussed in public."

Cara could well imagine he didn't want to argue about his faithlessness in a restaurant, but she didn't think it a good idea to be alone with him in his apartment. An image of them on their last night together flashed through her head. He knelt between her legs, his tongue doing unimaginable things to her pussy. She hung on the edge of a fantastic orgasm. Then he'd glanced up at her, and she'd seen something in his eyes, pain, fear. He'd covered it quickly, but she knew what she'd seen. Later when she realized he'd been cheating, she'd thought it was guilt. But now, with his strange behavior this morning, she wasn't sure.

"Cara, are you okay?"

She nodded, realizing she'd zoned out on him. "Sorry. I'm just tired from fixing up the house and trying to settle in."

"So are we on for tomorrow?"

“Yes, but I want to make clear that I’m only coming over to talk. I have no intention of resuming our relationship.”

Jackson nodded. “Is nine okay?”

“Fine. I’ll see you then.” Jackson lowered his arm, and Cara shut the door before he could say anything else. What the hell had she gotten herself into?

Chapter 2

Cara admired the view of the mountains in the distance as she climbed the steps to Jackson's garage apartment. He still lived in the same place he'd rented when he graduated from the local university. It was small, just one large room with dividers, but he said that since his family owned such a large farm, he didn't need much space. He liked having a place of his own in town, but he spent a lot of time at the farm with his brothers and father and he could always store stuff there.

She loved the cozy feel of his apartment. She remembered lying in bed and watching him make coffee in the tiny kitchen. He would walk silently across the thick carpet to bring her a mug in bed. She forced herself to shake off the memory and prepare herself for seeing him again.

She took a deep breath and knocked on his door. He opened it, looking even more luscious than he had the night before. His hair was damp as if he'd just stepped out of the shower, and he wore tight jeans that had been well worn by actual work rather than by the company that manufactured them. His tight black T-shirt accentuated his pecs. She wanted to rip it off and admire his muscular chest. Not a good sign.

She could smell coffee and the salty tang of bacon. She tried to focus on the thought of food. That was why she was here, to eat breakfast and to listen to Jackson's excuses. Surely she could get through the next hour and get out without embarrassing herself by jumping him.

He invited her in, and she looked around the apartment, which had changed little since she'd last been there. She turned back to face Jackson, knowing she couldn't hide from him even if she wanted to. Her gaze locked with his. His eyes filled with

enough heat to scorch her. She tried to stop herself from taking the first step on a very bad road, but her feet would not obey.

One step was all it took to close the distance between them. Jackson grabbed her and pulled her against him. His mouth took hers ferociously. He'd always been a bold lover but now he seemed possessed, as if he were trying to pour every ounce of his passion into this one kiss.

He grabbed Cara's hips and pulled her against his body, grinding his cock into her abdomen. Cara's mind screamed for her to push him away, but her body wanted all he had to offer. She thrust her hips up to meet his, hoping he would shove her skirt up and plunge inside her.

Their tongues dueled. Cara pushed at his shoulders, making one last effort to resist the lust that had stolen her senses. He growled low in his throat and tightened his grip on her.

Panic seized her. She struggled, but he kept her tight against him. When he licked at the roof of her mouth in a way that always made her melt, a frisson of lust rushed through her, turning her legs to mush and making her lose her footing.

Jackson scooped her up as though she weighed nothing. All desire to protest left her as he carried her to the bed. She wanted him. Foolish as it was, she wanted to experience his incredible finesse in bed just one more time.

Jackson laid her down on the bed and pushed up her sweater and bra. He bent his head and drew one of her nipples into his mouth. She arched up as one of his hands slipped beneath her, pulling her to him while the other hand pinched her other nipple.

Sex had always been somewhat rough between them, something she hadn't known she'd liked until she met Jackson. From their first encounter, she'd been unable to resist the wildness in him. He was simply more primitive, more animal than any man she'd ever dated.

* * *

Jackson's heart pounded with the need to shift. He knew he should let Cara go. He'd planned to tell her what he was, but he didn't want her finding out because he lost

control. Still, he couldn't make himself release her. No other woman had ever tied him in knots like Cara did.

He needed her more than he needed to breathe. A whiff of her scent was enough to harden his cock. He'd been horny as hell since he'd left her apartment the day before.

When she'd stepped closer, offering herself to him, he'd been unable to resist. It was all he could do to keep from extending his claws and ripping off her clothes. He didn't want to truly hurt her, but he wanted to take her like he would another wolf, with all his barriers down.

She cried out again and again as he bit and sucked her nipple, but she arched into him as if begging for more. He kept his mouth tight against her, but he used his hands to push up her skirt until his fingers brushed her silky panties. He'd resisted ripping the rest of her clothes, but he didn't have the patience to pull her panties down her legs so she gave a hard tug and the seams gave. He threw the flimsy garment to the ground.

Once her flesh was bared to him, he teased her clit first and then moved lower. Her channel was slick and ready for him, and the sensation made his cock jump. He drove two fingers inside her, and she moaned and pumped her hips, trying to draw them deeper.

Goddess above, she was every bit as hot and needy as she'd been three years before. This time he wasn't going to be stupid enough to let her go. He released her and sat back, pushing her legs up to spread them wide. Her wet pussy mesmerized him and the tall, leather boots she still had on made the scene in front of him even more delectable.

His hands went to his pants. He could feel his pulse thundering in his head and in his cock. He was dangerously close to letting his claws and fangs free, and he couldn't be certain his eyes hadn't changed already. He forced himself to drag in a slow breath.

"If you want me to stop, you'd better tell me now."

Her chest rose and fell rapidly with ragged breaths. Her eyes were wide and her face flushed. "Please."

"Please, what?"

"Please fuck me."

Her words shattered the last of his control. He shoved his pants over his hips, unable to take the time to remove them completely.

He supported himself on one arm and used his other hand to guide his cock to her entrance. Then he drove himself home. The feeling of being inside her again was even more rich than he'd imagined.

The fog of lust cleared for a second, and he froze. "Birth control?" He managed to force the words out between ragged breaths.

"Pill."

"Not usually careless. Just today. You trust me?"

"Yes, fuck me now."

He pumped into her over and over with a fast, brutal rhythm. He wanted to fuck her until she submitted to him completely, until he possessed her. She was his, and he would never let her go. He reached for her breasts and pinched her nipples, knowing how she loved for him to treat them roughly. She whimpered and moaned. He flicked his thumb rapidly back and forth then tugged harder.

She arched against him, rubbing her clit against his pubic bone. He released her breasts and gripped her hips, holding them against the mattress so she couldn't get any more friction than he chose to give her. He liked to take a dominant role in bed with all his lovers, but Cara brought out the most vicious side of him. Of course she'd always loved it and asked for more.

He sat back and pulled her hips over his thighs, sliding her up and down on his shaft while using one hand to tease her clit. She was so close. He remembered the dazed look that came into her eyes right before she exploded.

He captured her clit between two fingers, determined to push her over.

She stiffened for a second, then she cried out. The convulsion of her body around his cock was more than he could take. He pulled her hard against him, ramming himself deep as orgasm took him. He shouted her name in a low, growling voice.

* * *

By the time the whirling pleasure slowed enough for Cara to think again, Jackson had rolled to the side and flopped onto his back. His chest rose and fell rapidly, and she could hear his shallow breaths.

Suddenly panic filled her. What the fuck had she done? *Exactly what you knew you would if you saw him again.* She'd even trusted him when he said he wasn't careless about birth control. How stupid could she get?

She pushed her sweater and bra down and struggled to her feet as she tugged at her skirt. But before she could take a step, Jackson's hand closed around her arm. "Don't you dare walk out on me."

He tugged on her arm, but she refused to turn around. She was afraid if she looked in his eyes she wouldn't be able to leave.

"Meeting you was a mistake. I knew better, and I should have listened to myself."

"You will never convince me you didn't enjoy this."

"Of course I enjoyed it. I've loved every minute we've ever spent in bed. But I can't trust you, and I'm not about to open my heart to you again."

"I had a very good reason for hurting you."

"Of course you did. You're a cold-hearted bastard."

"No, I'm a werewolf."

She turned to look at him then. At that moment she couldn't think of any words that would have shocked her more. Her mind reeled with possibilities. Maybe he'd lost his mind in the time they'd been apart, but he seemed as sane as ever. Maybe he was teasing her. But his eyes showed no mirth, only anger and a touch of fear.

"It's true. I know you don't believe me. Why would you? But it's true. My pack is in trouble, and we need your help."

"My help?" A werewolf? His pack? This was insane. Maybe she was dreaming. Maybe she'd fallen asleep after the blindingly good orgasm he'd given her. Then a thought hit her like a bolt of lightning -- his rough ways in bed, the way she'd always thought he was more animalistic than any man she knew. Could that mean... no. He wasn't a werewolf. The idea was completely ridiculous. "Look, you've already proven you can seduce me effortlessly. Why are you doing this?"

"Because you may be the only one who can help us."

Fear sizzled up and down her spine. Maybe he really was crazy. She needed to get away. She tried to pull her arm from his grip, but he wouldn't let go of her. His hand felt like a steel band around her arm. She'd always wondered why he had nearly superhuman strength. She shook her head. "This isn't true."

"Look at me."

She couldn't help herself. She looked up and saw his eyes shift from their usual dark brown to amber. The shape changed too. They became the eyes of a wolf.

Chapter 3

Jackson saw the fear in Cara's eyes, heard her heart rate increase. He let go of her arm, and she backed away. He couldn't stop himself from stalking her. His wolf longed for a good chase.

Every time he took a step, she moved back. The room was small, and she didn't have far to go until she ran into the wall. He pinned her there, bracing his hands on either side of her head. "When I see your chest rising and falling with quick breaths, hear your heart thundering against your chest, I want to chase you, bring you down, fuck you, eat you."

Her eyes widened. He smelled arousal mixed with fear.

"Y -- your eyes. They changed."

"I could change more of myself for you, but I don't have to. You know I'm telling the truth, but you still want me." He ran a finger across her cheek and down her throat, letting his claw extend and scoring her lightly. "No one would suspect how rough and wild you like your sex. I can give you exactly what you need."

Cara moaned as he found her nipple and teased it through the fabric of her soft, thin sweater. "You've missed me, haven't you?"

She nodded, eyes glazed with desire.

* * *

Cara struggled to fight the web of desire Jackson had woven around her. Emotions raced through her at an alarming rate: fear, anger, disbelief, lust.

He leaned forward to kiss her, but she turned her head and ducked under his arm. He caught her around the waist pulling her back against him.

She struggled. "Let me go."

"Never."

"Let me go. I won't leave, but I want to know more before I let you touch me again." She had to be crazy to stay, but she couldn't leave until she'd heard him out. She needed to know where this wild tale would lead.

"Why don't we eat while we talk? That's why you came here after all." She could feel his hard shaft pressed against her back. His voice was tight with tension, but he let her go and gestured toward the table.

She walked into the small kitchen on shaky legs. His didn't look much steadier. He poured batter into a Belgian waffle iron and closed the heavy lid. Then he placed two bowls of fruit salad on the island that also served as a table. He selected several slices of bacon from a large pile on plate by the stove and put them into the microwave to re-heat.

For those few moments while the waffles cooked and he bustled around the kitchen, Cara could imagine they'd gone back in time and that she'd never seen his eyes go wolfish.

Once he had the bacon on the plates, the waffles were ready. Jackson added a cruet of maple syrup to the table. Cara's stomach had been tied in knots since Jackson's ludicrous revelation, but when he set her plate before her, she realized she was ravenous. Sex with him had always done that to her.

After polishing off nearly half of her waffle without speaking, she slowed down enough to ask questions. "For right now, I'll pretend I believe that you are a werewolf, ridiculous as it might be."

He nodded but didn't say anything else.

"What did you mean when you said your pack needs my help?"

"I need to give you some background before my explanation will make sense. First of all, my father is the pack leader."

"Just how many werewolves are there in Vanderbilt?"

Jackson smiled. "Plenty. These mountains were once a natural wolf habitat so we feel comfortable here. Our pack has about fifty members, far more than any pure animal wolf pack would have."

"Pure animal pack?"

"Wolves that are one hundred percent animal, those that don't shift to human form."

Cara nodded, unable to believe she was having this conversation.

"Werewolves have the ability to shift from human to wolf form, but we have other magical abilities too. Those of us who inherit our nature follow a pagan religion."

"Like Wicca?" The head chef at the inn where Cara worked had been Wiccan.

"We practice a similar type of magic."

Cara ran her hand through her hair. "I'm either in a warped TV movie, or I'm dreaming."

Jackson reached across the table and took her hand. "No, you're not. I wanted to tell you this three years ago, but I couldn't bring myself to do it."

"Of course not. You were too busy fucking someone else."

Jackson closed his eyes and sighed. "I slept with her only that single time. I set it up for you to find us."

Cara jerked her hands away from his. "You fucking bastard!"

She started to stand.

"Cara, please. Hear me out."

"Fine. I suppose it's ludicrous that I can believe that you're a werewolf, but I can't believe you had a 'good' reason for cheating."

He gave a sarcastic smile. "Exactly."

Cara sat back down and nibbled on a piece of bacon.

"I considered telling you my secret back then, because I wanted to propose. Then you got the job in Charleston. You'd worked so hard, and you have so much talent. I couldn't take that away from you."

"Why wouldn't you agree to come with me?"

"I can't leave the pack. A wolf won't survive without others of his kind."

"You can't join another pack?"

"No, not with my father being pack leader. I have too many responsibilities here. One of the downsides of who I am is that I don't have the freedom to move. I didn't want to trap you like that."

"At least if you'd told me, I would have been able to choose for myself."

"I know that now. I was an idiot. I honestly thought I had to do something as drastic as cheat on you to make you leave. In my defense, I was coming into my full powers at the time. The hormonal shifts make puberty seem like a joyride."

Cara didn't know what to say. Could she forgive him? Or was his lack of trust in her even worse than the idea that he couldn't keep his pants zipped?

"I was self-centered and stupid. I hurt you and I'm sorry."

"You're damn right you were. And now you have the nerve to invite me here, tell me wild stories, say that you need me."

"I don't have a choice. The lives of my family and my fellow pack members are at stake."

"So I'm just convenient."

"No, you're the woman I love. That's why you can help."

His words made Cara's heart pound. She'd never stopped loving him, even when she hated herself for it. No man she'd gone out with since had come close to making her feel the way Jackson did. Now she knew why, none of them were werewolves. Could she risk her heart again, or was Jackson not only unfaithful but insane as well?

"You mentioned inherited wolves. Does that mean you are a wolf because your father is one?"

"Yes, werewolves are created in two ways. They are born to wolf parents or they are bitten by another werewolf."

Cara drew in a sharp breath. "You bit me plenty of times when we..." She let her words trail off as heat rushed to her cheeks.

"The bite must happen when we are in full wolf form."

Cara's momentary fear subsided. "Why is your pack in danger?"

"Another pack, led by a bitten wolf, one whose magical powers are incredibly strong, has been preying on packs in the Appalachians. He uses magic to make the pack members steal for him, deal drugs, even commit murder."

"Why?"

"Because he can, and he's power-hungry."

"How could I help you fight a magical werewolf?"

"We've tried protection spells and spells that boost our own powers, but none of them have worked. My father discovered a ritual that can be performed on the Winter Solstice. In the ritual, love is re-kindled, and its power both strengthens and protects."

Cara remained puzzled for a moment before she made the connection. "You think I'm going to perform this ritual with you?"

"I am praying that you will."

Cara felt as if she were outside herself, watching their conversation. The things they were talking about were too outrageous to be real. The only way she could deal with the situation was to forget the ridiculous nature of what they were discussing and ask objective questions.

"What does this ritual entail?"

Jackson took a long breath before he answered with a single word. "Sex."

She nearly choked. "In front of your pack?"

"Sacred sex is a normal part of our religion. We'll have sex within a consecrated circle but yes, the pack will be there. If all goes well, we'll send out the energy we create and strengthen everyone who is present."

Cara's pulse pounded in her ears and she looked down at her hands. Part of her was horrified, but another part of her couldn't stop thinking how hot it would be to enjoy Jackson's rough brand of fucking in front of an audience. She'd never thought of herself as an exhibitionist, but the idea of other men like Jackson, primal, animalistic men, getting off while watching her, was a huge turn on.

She looked up again, hoping to hide what she was feeling, but she didn't succeed. Jackson's eyes widened, and his nostrils flared. He knew what she was feeling, and she knew he wasn't gentlemanly enough to ignore it.

He rubbed his thumb against the underside of her wrist, and something tightened low in her belly. A small sigh escaped her before she could stop it.

"I should go." She pulled her hand from his grasp and stood.

He rose with the fluid grace of the wolf he claimed to be and circled the table until he stood in front of her. The door was behind her, all she had to do was turn and walk away, assuming he would let her, but she didn't. She stared at him, mesmerized by his wild beauty, and his eyes went wolfish again.

Chapter 4

Jackson knew he had to push his advantage. There were two days left before Solstice Eve. It might not be the nicest tactic, but seduction would be the quickest way to get her to comply with his request.

"I didn't want to scare you, so I held back earlier. Do you want to know what it's like to fuck a full-blooded werewolf?" He reached out and flicked his thumb across one of her painfully hard nipples.

She gasped but said nothing.

"Tell me."

She nodded, and that was all he needed. He grabbed the hem of her sweater, pulled it over her head, and tossed it across the room with a growl. Then he grasped her bra and ripped it in two, flinging it down to join her sweater.

Her eyes were wide, her cheeks flushed. He could smell her arousal. The powerful scent made him dizzy. Nothing could stop him from having her. He would win her back. No matter what he had to do.

He shoved her skirt down her legs thankful it didn't have any fastenings as he wouldn't have had the patience for them. "Get on your hands and knees."

She drew in a sharp breath and continued to stare at him.

"Now."

She dropped to the floor and arranged herself so her ass and her slick pussy faced him. His cock jumped in his pants.

He popped the button of his pants loose, shoved the zipper down, and stepped out of them in record time. He gave into the delicious buzz of power running through him and let himself make a partial shift. His claws extended, and a light coat of fur

grew on his body. He grasped her thighs and pulled them further apart, letting his claws graze her as he did so, not enough to hurt but enough to make her aware of them.

She turned her head. "Oh God."

He smiled, letting her see his fangs.

He felt a shiver run through her. He wrapped his hand in her long hair, holding her in place. "Don't even think about running." His voice was low and gravely. He felt her stiffen with fear. "I would never hurt you."

"But --"

"Don't talk, just feel."

He let go of her hair and grasped her hips. Then he pulled her back and drove into her. She cried out, a startled, strangled, sound. He smiled. "That's right. I'm even bigger in his form. Do you like it?"

"Yes," Her voice was ragged with need. "God, yes."

"Good. Get ready to be fucked."

She moaned and ground herself back against him. He reached forward and seized her nipples, twisting them and eliciting another cry. He thrust deep and hard, rubbing himself deliberately against the spot inside her that would make her explode. His claws bit into her breasts.

"More. Please, more."

He scratched harder. She went over, her body shaking and her hips pumping wildly.

He bit his lip, drawing blood with his fangs to keep from going over with her.

* * *

Cara's head spun. She'd barely slowed from the incredible climax, but Jackson was pushing her toward another one. Giving her no time to recover, he slammed his cock into her and worked her breasts, alternately scratching and pinching. The intensity stole her breath.

He leaned further forward, working his hips in a way that sent him even deeper and made his balls slap against her. She struggled to keep up with his punishing rhythm.

His fur felt like silk against her back. It rubbed her skin, stimulating her even more as if her back had suddenly become as sensitive as her breasts. His hot breath sent shivers across her neck a moment before his teeth clamped around her skin. She struggled under him. She didn't want to become a werewolf. "Stop. Please stop."

He stopped thrusting, but he didn't let her go. "I want to taste you."

Her heart skipped a beat, and cold fear warred with the heat of her lust. "Please."

"I must be full wolf to change you. This is about possession."

She nodded her assent, and his fangs pierced her skin, making her scream. His bite hurt but it also felt better than anything she'd ever experienced. He drove his cock deep into her, and she toppled over the edge once more.

When she bucked in the throes of her climax, he pinned her in place with his teeth. His hands tightened on her nipples, and his cock penetrated as deep as it could go. She was completely possessed by him, and in that moment she had no desire to be free. She soared with pleasure.

When awareness returned, panic set in. She'd just had sex with a man who could turn into a wolf, the same man who'd broken her heart. He wanted her to have sex with him in front of his friends and family. She really needed to get out of here.

He rolled off her when she stirred. She turned over and saw that he looked fully human once again.

"Will you help me?"

Anger boiled in her. The bastard thought that just because he was a good lay she was going to fall in with his plans. But if lives really were at stake, how could she say no? His family had been nothing but kind to her while she and Jackson dated.

"I need time to think."

"Cara, we don't have much time." He reached out, stroked her cheek gently with his fingers, and bent as if to kiss her.

She pushed at his chest. "No more seduction. I have to get away from you and process what you've told me."

"You still love me."

She reached for her skirt, surprised but thankful that he hadn't destroyed it. "I love fucking you, but that's not enough. Why should I trust you?"

Pain flashed in his eyes. "You saw me shift. You know I'm not lying."

"Maybe you're not lying about being a werewolf, but you still cheated on me."

"I love you."

"You also need me. I can imagine you'd say just about anything to get me to agree to do this ritual." She pulled on her sweater. The bra was a loss, but she would be decent enough without it, especially with her coat.

"The ritual won't work if you can't open yourself to accept love from me."

"If I agree to do what you've ask, what will happen afterwards?"

"That will be up to you. I'd like you to marry me."

Cara's heart pounded. The last thing she needed to think about was marrying a werewolf. She reached for her coat, which still hung on a hook near the door. "Give me the rest of the day. We'll have breakfast at my house tomorrow."

She couldn't believe how normal she sounded, as if she were simply asking an old friend over to share a meal. But after the revelations of this morning, she doubted her life would ever be normal again.

Chapter 5

Cara got out of bed around six the next morning. She was used to rising at three to start the baking for the inn where she'd worked in Charleston. But she hadn't fallen asleep until long after midnight, so she'd slept until what she still considered a late hour.

She pulled herself from bed and went straight to the shower. The warm water soothed the muscles, which ached from the workout Jackson had given her the day before.

She was no closer to a decision that she'd been the day before. How the fuck could Jackson be a werewolf? She'd seen the fangs and the fur and his wolfish eyes. Still, she couldn't really accept it, not on more than a surface level. Could he have possibly fooled her with makeup, a costume, or some strange sleight of hand? She'd asked herself that question thousands of times since she'd left his apartment. But deep down, she knew he'd used no tricks.

She stepped out of the shower, dried off, and pulled on some sweatpants, a warm sweater, thick socks, and hiking boots. It was cold outside, but she loved the clean brisk air that was so different from anything Charleston had to offer during the holidays. She didn't care how cold she got. She was going to lie in her hammock and enjoy the sunrise.

She'd made bread, scones, and muffins after she'd returned from Jackson's apartment the day before. She'd needed something to do with her hands to keep herself from going crazy. Breakfast would take only a few minutes to prepare. She planned to make scrambled eggs and fry up the apple cherry sausages she'd gotten at the local organic market.

Before heading out, she grabbed her fleece jacket, a hat, and a blanket. She settled herself in her hammock and listened to the sounds of the birds that would remain for the winter. The sun was just beginning to rise, and the sky had a pink glow along the horizon.

Her options circled in her mind, along with images of Jackson: the heat of passion in his eyes, his eyes going wolfish, his magnificent body naked. Between the chill wind that blew across her face and the tension in her, she wouldn't have thought it possible, but at some point she drifted to sleep.

An unknown amount of time later, something caused her to jolt awake. Her stomach knotted with unease.

Then she saw it, only a blur at first, as it leapt the privacy fence that separated her yard from her neighbor's. A huge black wolf. She knew immediately that it wasn't Jackson. His fur had been auburn like his hair, and she could feel the menace in this wolf as he charged toward her.

Her mind shouted, *run!* But where? No way could she outrun this beast. She balanced on the hammock, grasping the branch that supported it. Thankful for all the Pilates workouts she'd been doing, she swung up until she could grasp the branch with her legs and twine herself around it.

The wolf stood below, snarling and snapping its huge teeth. Its yellow eyes glowed like something out of a horror movie. She scrambled around until she was lying over the branch instead of hanging under it. At least she could hold this position for longer, but she had a feeling the wolf wasn't leaving anytime soon. She prayed one of her neighbors would see her hanging in the tree, and they would call animal control.

The wolf had its front paws braced against the trunk of the tree. It looked up at her with an evil that could not come from a purely animal mind. Did Jackson's enemies know he'd asked for her help? Tears formed behind her eyes. She wished she knew the time. If she'd slept for longer than she thought, then Jackson would find her soon.

The wolf's eyes seemed to glow for a second. Then light flashed, and she heard a crack. The branch that supported her was breaking. Another flash of light. Another

crack. She screamed, praying someone would hear her but believing she was about to die.

The branch cracked again. She was dead.

She heard a long, mournful howl and another wolf raced into her yard, an auburn wolf even bigger than the black one below her. Thank God, it was Jackson.

The wolf charged toward Cara's attacker. The black wolf turned and growled. She clung to her precarious position and watched as the two animals sprang at each other.

Terror gripped her as the wolves tumbled on the ground, teeth snapping. The tears she'd been fighting began to fall as she watched the rival wolf sink his fangs into Jackson's side.

Jackson kicked at the rival's underbelly. His claws connected with the vulnerable flesh, and the wolf let go.

Jackson flipped himself over and nearly pinned his rival, but the other wolf, jerked away just in time to save his neck from being pierced by Jackson's fangs.

Blood dripped from both animals where claws and fangs had made contact. Tears stung Cara's eyes. She desperately wanted to help Jackson, but what could she do against a wolf. She looked around for anything she might use as a weapon.

Before she could put together a plan, Jackson trapped the wolf underneath him. He took the wolf's throat between his teeth, but he didn't bite down. The rival wolf laid still, letting Jackson clasp him. He seemed to have no fight left.

Jackson snarled viciously. Cara was glad he'd gotten the advantage of his rival, but she wasn't sure she wanted to watch her lover rip a wolf apart even if he was a wolf himself. She started to turn away, but Jackson stepped back. The other wolf rose, and limped away, head and tail low to the ground. The rival barely made it over the fence.

Jackson took a few steps toward her, and then crumpled to the ground.

Cara swung down from the tree and ran to where he lay. She ran her hand along the side of his neck, desperate to feel a pulse. Tears fell so fast she was nearly blind. "Please be okay. Please be okay."

He whimpered when she brushed over one of his wounds. Her hands grew sticky with blood, but at least he was alive. "Stay right there. I'll be back."

She ran to the house to get her first aid kit. She didn't know much about caring for an injured wolf, but at least she could get some bandages and stop the bleeding. Her heart froze for a minute as she wondered whether any more of the enemy wolves were close by. What could she do if they were? Fight them herself?

She grabbed the kit from her bathroom, thankful she'd unpacked it already, and raced back outside. But instead of a wolf lying in her yard, Jackson sat on the grass in human form, utterly naked. She had cursed her privacy fence when the wolf had attacked, but now she was thankful for it. The elderly lady who lived next door would have a heart attack if she saw Jackson unclothed.

As she got closer, she realized his wounds looked better already. She could see red marks on his skin, but he wasn't bleeding anymore.

He looked up at her and smiled. "Changing form helps us heal, but it took me a few minutes to gather the strength."

She dropped to her knees beside him, fighting not to cry again. "Who was he?"

"One of Hanley's minions. I don't know his name. But I know he'd been sent to kill you."

"Why did you let him go?"

"So he could report to his master that we're not as weak as Hanley may think."

"How did he know about me?"

"Hanley must have someone watching me." Jackson paused, lifted his nose and sniffed the air. "I don't smell anymore of them in the area, but we can't be sure we're safe. I've got to ward the house, and I'll need your help."

"But I --"

"I'll tell you what to do." He tried to stand, but his legs threatened to give.

"I thought changing healed you."

"It heals the wounds, not the exhaustion. In fact, it saps even more of our strength. Can you help me to the house?"

She helped him up as best she could, and he looped his arm around her shoulder. They made slow progress, but finally she settled him on her couch. "Would you like a blanket?"

He shook his head. "I'm fine. Werewolves run hotter than humans."

Well, that would explain why he never needed a coat when they were dating. Not even in the snow. "Would you like something to drink or eat? Would that help?"

"I can't worry about myself until we have the house warded. Your protection must come first."

"But --"

"Do you have any white candles?"

Did she have any? Where would they be? She thought there were some in the boxes she'd unpacked into her grandmother's buffet. "I should have a few white tapers."

"They'll do." Jackson sounded even weaker.

"Are you sure I shouldn't call a doctor?"

"To treat a werewolf? I don't think so."

Right. Of course. That would be problematic. Cara tossed her coat and hat onto a chair, stepped into the dining room, and riffled through the drawers of the buffet. Finally, she found two white candles, candlesticks, and a lighter. She hurried back to the living room. "What else do you need?"

Jackson had laid his head back against the sofa. His eyes were closed. He stirred at the sound of Cara's voice, but he didn't sit up. "A dish of water and a stone."

She started to walk to the kitchen.

"Do you have any incense?"

Jackson's voice sounded so weak, she almost started crying again. "No. I only like the smell of baking in my house."

"We'll make do."

Cara wished she knew exactly what they were doing, but there was no time for extra questions. She had a stone on her kitchen windowsill that she had picked up on a

trip to Italy. It held a lot of sentimental value so she thought it would surely work for a ritual. She filled a blue ice cream bowl with water and brought both objects to the living room, placing them on the coffee table with the candles.

Jackson opened his eyes and sat up. His breathing was ragged, and he had dark circles under his eyes. "Light the candles, and place the water and the stone between them."

She did as he said.

"Now hold my hand, and do as I do."

She took hold of Jackson's hand. He waved their joined hands over the flames. "I call the elements of fire and air." He brought their hands down, dipping them briefly in the water then rubbing them over the stone. "I call the elements of water and earth."

He took a long, slow breath. "Lord and Lady, I call on you to join us, to work with the elements to lend us protection, to keep us from being vulnerable to the forces that work against us. My mate will walk the perimeter of this house. Please send your energy into her feet that they may form a circle of protection around this space."

Cara's heart hammered. *His mate*. What exactly was she agreeing to by helping him with this ritual?

"Cara, I want you to walk all the way around the outside of your house. I would like to guard your whole property but I don't think we can raise enough energy for that right now."

Cara got up and walked to the back door. Never had she imagined a day as strange as this one. Taking in the idea that Jackson was a werewolf was difficult enough, but now she had to accept his magical abilities and his religious beliefs.

There was only one thing she was certain of. She still loved Jackson. When she'd thought the other wolf would kill him, her heart had ached as if it might explode. No matter how strange Jackson's revelations were, she would do what she could to save him and his family.

Whether she'd continue her relationship with him afterwards remained to be seen.

Chapter 6

Cara began her circuit of the house, trying to concentrate on what she was doing. At first, she felt nothing. Then a tingling sensation started in her feet. The pleasant buzz of energy crept up her legs and took over her whole body. She began to feel warm despite the chilly air and her lack of a coat. Then she realized she was growing hot and hungry for more of Jackson. She envisioned herself pushing him down on the couch, climbing on top of him, fucking him until he begged for mercy.

She tried to ignore the rush of lust as she approached the back door once again. But she seemed to have lost control of herself as if the riot of sensations in her were being pressed on her from outside. All she could think of was how much she wanted Jackson.

When she entered the house, she felt a rush of energy as if electricity had just run through her. She shivered, stunned for a moment, then the heat returned. Without pausing to think, she pulled her sweater over her head, unsnapped her bra, and dropped both garments to the floor. Then she pushed down her pants and underwear, grumbling when they got caught on her shoes. After struggling with the laces, she got the shoes and the last of her clothes off. It felt wonderful to be naked, as if she were never meant to wear clothes. What on earth was wrong with her?

She entered the living room and saw Jackson seated on the couch, eyes closed, hands held over the flames of the candle. She knew instinctively that she should sit with him, hold his hands, and pass the energy she'd received into him.

When their hands touched, she gasped. Electric current rippled through her and out the ends of her fingers. Jackson's head dropped back, and he shuddered as he received what she had to give. When the exchange settled down to a warm buzz, Cara moved her hands to his chest, caressing him in languid circles.

He groaned and looked down at her, his eyes golden and fiery with passion. She leaned forward and ran her tongue down the center of his chest.

He pulled back. "We have to finish our spell first."

Cara moaned. She tried to clear the fog of desire from her mind, but her pulse pounded loudly in her ears and cream soaked her upper thighs. She needed to be touched.

"Focus, Cara. It won't take long. Can you feel the energy racing around us?"

How could he ask such a thing? The energy was hers. She had created it. "Yes."

Her voice sounded strange, not her own.

Jackson's eyes widened. "Cara, are you all right?"

"I'm fine," she said, but fear slithered along Cara's spine. What was happening to her? Her heart beat wildly, but the odd sensations racing through her felt so good she couldn't focus on her fear for long.

"Take my hands."

Cara did as Jackson asked.

"Concentrate on the energy rushing through our bodies and send it out to strengthen the circle around your house. Visualize the circle glowing brightly then becoming an impenetrable wall."

Cara ignored the part of her mind that protested the strangeness of what they were doing. Instead, she embraced the feeling that she was finally in her rightful place in the world. By the time Jackson released her hands, she could clearly see a high stone wall around her house. The structure was so vivid in her mind that she had to glance out the window to make sure it wasn't truly there.

When she captured Jackson's gaze, she couldn't hold back her hunger any longer. She pushed at his chest until he lay back on the couch. He bent one leg, resting that foot on the cushion while letting the other leg remain on the floor.

The position displayed his body beautifully. Cara licked her lips as she looked down at him. At least some of his energy had been restored because his cock was standing up, hard and ready. Cara grasped the base of his shaft and leaned over,

hungry for a taste. He groaned as she drew him slowly into her mouth, taking time to lick from every possible angle before sucking hard against him.

He cried out and shoved his hands into her hair. She slid her mouth up and down, alternately teasing him with light licks and sucking for harder contact. His hips pumped into her mouth, and he twisted restlessly against the couch. When she'd driven him sufficiently crazy, she let go and rearranged herself to straddle him.

He brought his hands to her hips and pushed, eager to have her take all of him. But she took his hands and pinned them against the arm of the couch so he couldn't touch her. For once, she intended to be in control. She had no idea where she'd gotten the strength to force him to release her, but she was much too horny to think about such practical matters.

He fought her, but she managed to hold him down. His eyes widened as he realized he couldn't escape, and she saw a touch of fear that only spiked her passion. "I'm going to fuck you Jackson. Are you ready?"

He growled.

She teased him by sliding up and down slowly, never quite taking him all the way in. He groaned when she finally slid the rest of the way down, letting their hips meet. Sweat covered his chest and forehead. He kept his hands still but the muscles in his arms bulged with tension. Cara smiled. He wanted to fight, but he was trying to let her take him like she wanted to.

She rotated her hips against him, moaning as intense pleasure radiated through her clit.

"More. Give me more."

"When I'm ready." Heat pulsed in her. She felt wild and free. She wanted to fuck him hard and fast, but she also wanted to torment him. She'd never imagined the high she could feel from having him vulnerable beneath her.

She made tiny circles with her hips. He drove into her as much as his position would allow. She leaned forward and lapped at his nipples.

"Cara!"

She smiled at the anguish in his voice. He was ready to explode, but he was going to take her with him. She teased his nipples with her tongue and teeth while keeping her hips still. Then his will broke, and he began to struggle. Claws extended from his hands, and his eyeteeth lengthened into fangs. Cara felt soft fur tickle her hips and belly.

"Look at me," he snarled.

She sat up looked into his amber wolf eyes.

"This is the real me. Do you want me? Even like this?"

Her heart pounded, terror creeping in to shake her bravado. But God help her, she did want him, no matter what he was. She ground her hips against his. "I want you, and I'm going to have you." The storm of lust inside her exploded. Her hips rose and fell as hard and as fast as she could drive them.

He groaned and met her stroke for stroke. "More. Faster."

She stopped. "You get what I want to give. Nothing more."

"Fuck me, Cara."

She tried to keep still, but she couldn't resist the look of need in his eyes or the screaming lust in her body. She slammed herself against him, knowing they'd both be bruised when she was done. Her orgasm took her like a roaring wave. She screamed as she convulsed against his shaft. Another hot rush of electricity poured from her hands into his.

Jackson cried out. She released his hands, and he pushed her down against him, grinding her still pulsing body onto his shaft. She felt him let go. He seemed to thrust all the tension from his body into her, lifting her high off the couch as his hot seed spilled inside her.

* * *

Several long, languid minutes passed before Cara sat up. Jackson's well-satisfied cock slipped from her as she lowered herself to the floor in front of the couch.

Jackson heard her draw a slow, deep breath before she looked around at him. "What the hell just happened?"

He smiled at her. "Some of the best sex I've ever had."

"I held you down. I don't have the strength to do that. And I..."

"You what?"

"When I was outside, I felt energy building in me. I got hotter and hotter. All I could think of was fucking you and --" Her eyes widened and color drained from her cheeks.

Jackson sat up. "What?"

"You're healed."

Jackson looked down at himself. Not one of the scratches and bites that had marked his skin remained. His energy had returned too. He felt well rested and as strong as ever. He knew of others who'd been instantly healed by magic, but he'd never experienced it himself. "For a few moments, you seemed... not yourself. Did you feel a presence within you?"

Cara opened her mouth as if to speak then closed it. She took a long, slow breath and exhaled. "I think I did."

"I believe the Lady used you as an agent to heal me."

"With sex?"

"With energy we transferred during sex, much the same way we'll use sex to build strengthening energy during the ritual."

"But how could that happen when I don't even believe in your Goddess?"

"She believes in you."

"Am I going to feel like that when I have sex with you in front of a group of your pack?"

Jackson smiled. "Does this mean you agree to help us?"

"Yes, but --"

"Trust me. Embarrassment will be the last thing on your mind."

Cara frowned. "Maybe not while we're fucking, but what about after?"

Jackson shook his head. "Everyone will be so awed by the beauty of our joining that there will be no awkwardness. Remember, the pack is used to sexual rituals."

Cara pushed her hair back from her face. "How can you expect me to take all this in so fast?"

"I can't. But once you let yourself go, didn't the magic we made today feel natural?"

She nodded. "I knew exactly what to do, as if someone were whispering instructions in my ear. I felt so strange, not like myself. And yet, like the best self I could be."

Jackson had wanted to take Cara as his mate when they'd been dating. But fear of how she would respond to his secret, and a desire to let her have the freedom she needed made him push her away. But now that he'd seen her magically transformed as they worked together, he knew with certainty that she belonged with him and his pack.

What would she say when she realized he'd omitted important details about the meaning of the ritual? He should have told her everything from the beginning, but he'd doubted his ability to convince her if he did. Why was he always such an idiot when it came to her? He had to come clean now. "Cara, I need to explain more about the ritual."

"I'm not sure I can handle any more right now."

Jackson's heart pounded. He took her hands. "This is very important."

"All right."

"Only mated werewolves perform sacred sex during rituals."

"Then how can we do this protection spell?"

"After we perform the spell, we will be mated in the eyes of the pack."

Cara jerked her hands back. "What? Why didn't you --"

"I didn't tell you, because I assumed you would say no without considering your decision."

"Just like you assumed I'd rather catch you in bed with someone else than consider staying in Vanderbilt when I finished my degree."

Jackson shook his head. "The life of my fellow pack members is at stake."

"And you didn't think I would care about that if you bothered to give me the whole truth?"

Shit, this was going just as poorly as he'd feared. "We won't be legally married. If you don't want to see me again after the ritual, you don't have to."

"What about you?"

He drew in a long breath. "Our wolves mate for life."

"So if I do this ritual with you, you are stuck being my mate for the rest of your life even if I leave town and never come back. But if I don't do it, your pack remains unprotected from a man who would like to see you dead or enslaved."

Jackson closed his eyes and nodded. A hard knot constricted his chest until he could hardly breathe, much less speak, but he forced the words out anyway. "You could agree to marry me after the ritual."

"Would you trust me then? If I married you would you give me the whole truth, or would you keep sheltering me from decisions you thought I couldn't handle?"

"I'm sorry, Cara. I should have told you about the mating yesterday."

"Yes, you should."

The coldness in her voice made him shiver. He never wanted to see her look at him with such disgust. Three years of regret hadn't taught him anything. Why the fuck had he let himself screw up again? He said the only thing he knew to say. "I love you."

"I love you, too. But I don't like being lied to."

"Even if you can't forgive me, please do the ritual. We do love each other. That should be enough to let the magic work. I'd rather be alone than have my pack suffer."

She pushed her hair from her face and gave him a weak smile. "That I do believe."

"Then you will help?"

"I need some time to think."

"Cara."

"I need some time *alone*."

"Hanley or his wolves could come back for you anytime."

"The house is protected now."

"Yes, but --"

"I've got all I need right here. I won't leave the house without calling you."

Jackson knew he had to agree to what she asked, but he didn't want to leave her. He closed his eyes and stretched his magical senses, canvassing the area for other wolves. He felt nothing. "My truck is parked in your driveway. I don't sense anyone near. Would you mind getting my clothes off the front seat?"

Cara looked down at his naked form as she pulled on her clothes and smiled her first genuine smile since he'd confessed the consequences of the ritual. It gave him hope.

"I'll be right back."

While she was gone, he wrote down his brothers' and father's cell phone numbers in case Cara needed help and was unable to reach him. When she returned with his clothes, he dressed quickly. "I love you, Cara. I'm sorry I hurt you again."

She nodded. "I love you too, but I have to know I can trust you."

"The ritual will begin tomorrow after dark. I need to pick you up around four if you are going."

"I'll call you before then."

He turned and left, afraid of the tears that were pressing against the backs of his eyes.

Chapter 7

Cara took a deep breath and dialed Jackson's number.

"Cara?" His voice was anxious, pained.

"I'll do it."

She heard a rapid exhale. "I'm out at the farm. I'll pick you up in an hour."

"I'll see you then." She wanted to say something to clear the air between them, something to make him understand her decision. But before she figured out what to say, he hung up.

He arrived less than forty-five minutes later. He must have hopped into his truck the second he hung up the phone and driven like a maniac on those windy mountain roads.

She'd gone three years without seeing Jackson, but being apart from him for the last day had been torture. She wanted to fling the door open, throw her arms around him, and devour him. But another part of her wanted to run and hide or tell him she'd changed her mind.

Her hands shook as she opened the door. They stared at each other for several moments before she finally spoke. "Come in."

He nodded and stepped over the threshold as she retreated. Her mind raced through all the things she needed to say to him, but she couldn't make the words come out. "Would you like some coffee or hot chocolate?" At least she could fall back on basic hospitality.

He shook his head "We need to leave soon."

Cara had never heard his voice shake so much, not even when he'd been injured. "I meant what I said yesterday. I love you. I'm scared of what that means, but I can't let the issues between us put your friends and family in worse jeopardy."

"Thank you."

Cara expected him to defend himself or assure her he wouldn't hurt her again, but he said nothing else. Her respect for him grew. Now was not the time for excuses or promises.

She opened her hall closet and extracted her coat, hat, and gloves. "I'm ready to go whenever you are." Her voice broke as she said the last words. The tension of the last few days had reached a crisis level. Hot tears stung her eyes.

Jackson reached for her, and she stepped into his arms. He held her tight while she sobbed against his shoulder. When her tears had slowed, she leaned back, pulled his head down to hers, and took his lips in the fierce kiss she'd fantasized about earlier.

Their tongues dueled and Jackson's hands slipped under her sweater to massage the tense muscles of her back. She groaned and pressed against him, reveling in the feel of his hard cock against her belly.

Her hands slid down his back and cupped his buttocks, kneading them the way he did her back. He nipped at her lips and tongue and let his hands slip around to her breasts. When he flicked his thumbs across her nipples, she shuddered and moaned.

She used her hands on his ass to force him hard against her. She slipped one hand between them and struggled with the snap on his jeans, but he pulled away.

"We can't. Not before the ritual. We have to preserve our pent up energy."

Cara scrubbed her hands across her face. Pent up energy indeed. Her body felt like it was on fire.

Jackson offered her the coat she'd dropped on the floor. As she took it from him, he flashed a wicked smile "Do you think you would have noticed if a crowd was watching us just now?"

Reluctantly, she shook her head. She wouldn't have noticed if the apocalypse had come.

* * *

Jackson and Cara rode in silence for several minutes. He smiled to himself as he wondered if Cara was too horny to form coherent sentences. He caressed her thigh and was rewarded with a sigh.

She drew in a shaky breath and exhaled slowly. "I'm scared."

He rubbed her leg and took her hand in his. "I know. Some of what happens may be scary, but remember that none of us would truly hurt you."

"What exactly *will* happen?"

"I can't tell you much because your surprise and anticipation will serve as a powerful conductor of energy as well as an aphrodisiac."

She laid her head back and closed her eyes. "Just tell me anything you can."

"Things will not be as they seem in our circle. You will not feel the cold as you expect. Things may feel or look different than they would at any other time. Enjoy what you're feeling, and don't try to analyze it too much."

"I wish I had more time to take all this in."

"I wish you did too, but this ritual must be preformed tonight."

He felt her rapid pulse where it beat in her wrist, and he could smell her fear. Lust mixed with it too. The combination made him want to pull the truck over and order her to get out and run so he could chase her down. He would capture her, then fuck her senseless. Only the greatest sense of duty to the pack kept him from fulfilling his fantasy.

When they arrived at the ritual site, Jackson introduced Cara to two women from the pack that would help her get ready for the ritual. She hugged him goodbye. It was all he could do to let her go without another kiss, but he knew where that would lead. He didn't need to be more distracted than he already was.

He watched Cara walk away and sent up a prayer to the Lord and Lady that the ritual would go well and that when the night was over, Cara wouldn't leave. He fretted that he should have told her more about what would be expected of her this night. But his father had assured him that the less she knew the more potent her reactions would be.

Chapter 8

Cara stepped out of the cabin where she had showered and dressed for the ritual. Evelyn and Cassandra, the two women who'd helped her, had left several minutes before. They'd told her that when she heard a bell ring three times, she should come out and approach the circle of wolves.

She wore nothing but a silky white robe with a bright yellow sash, which symbolized the light that would slowly return after this night. The cold wind bit into her legs as she stepped out, but the adrenaline racing through her kept her from feeling the cold too keenly.

She smoothed the silky fabric once more and walked forward. She'd been told Jackson would approach from the opposite side of the circle, but between the darkness and the people who stood in front of her, she couldn't see him.

Her heart hammered as she neared the circle. She wished she knew what was going to happen and why Jackson had needed to warn her that no one would harm her. But before her mind could conjure any horrible scenarios, she reached the edge of the circle.

As the women had instructed, she said, "I am here to bring the Lady's protection to the pack. I ask permission to enter your sacred space."

The people in front of her parted and she saw Gwen, the pack's priestess. "What is your purpose here tonight?"

"To offer myself to the pack."

"You may enter." Gwen waved her hand and bright light outlined a doorway in front of Cara. A buzz of energy raced through her as she stepped into the circle.

As promised, the air inside was noticeably warmer, and the wind and snow didn't penetrate at all. She looked up, expecting to see a dome above them. She heard Jackson ask for permission to enter as she walked toward Gwen.

The priestess granted his request, and he stepped through. Cara's heart rate increased when she saw him, and heat pooled in her low belly. He wore a white robe as she did though his was made with a coarser material. His sash was yellow, but he also wore an orange belt which held a sheath for a long handled knife.

When Jackson reached the circle's center, Gwen spoke once again in her commanding voice. "Lord and Lady, we ask that, on this longest night, love and light be rekindled and transformed to strengthen and protect our pack. We ask that you look on us with favor as we prepare to shield ourselves from our enemies."

Gwen reached out and clasped one of Cara's hands and one of Jackson's. "I charge you both to open yourselves as vessels of the Lord and Lady and to allow your love for each other to pour through your actions."

Cara realized that the two women who had helped her prepare for the ritual now stood behind her. Gwen inclined her head toward them. "Take her to the stone."

Cara found the courage to look into Jackson's eyes for the first time. He smiled at her and whispered, "Remember. You are safe."

Cara shivered as she turned to follow the women. Something big was about to happen, but what?

With only a few steps, they reached a large flat stone that lay within the circle. Cara couldn't understand how she had missed it before. It was enormous, perhaps seven feet in length, five in width, and two feet tall.

"Lay down on your back," Cassandra said.

Cara's heart skipped a beat. Was this where she and Jackson would have sex? It didn't look very comfortable. But the stone gave underneath her, conforming to her like the memory foam mattress she'd splurged on. And it was warm as if a fire had been stoked inside it.

The women stepped to either side of her. Her heart raced, and her hands and feet tingled. Fear suddenly stabbed through her, making her want to get up and run. The women took hold of her wrists and pulled her arms above her head. She struggled, but she couldn't break their hold. "We will not harm you," one of them said.

Cara felt soft cuffs snap around her wrists. The women let go. Cara jerked her arms, but they only moved a few inches. She'd been chained to the rock. Oh shit, what was going to happen to her? "Please. Let me go."

Evelyn shook her head. "We cannot, but we promise no harm will come to you."

"I can't do this."

"You must be willing to surrender completely or the spell will not work."

Cassandra spoke the words in a low, sultry voice. Cara realized that she felt a buzz of sexual energy around her like she had during the ritual at her house. She might be terrified, but lust was building in her so rapidly she couldn't hold onto a single thought.

She closed her eyes and took a deep breath. Jackson had picked one hell of a way to test her trust. Why hadn't he warned her she'd be tied up? They'd played with bondage many times when they'd been lovers, but he'd always explained exactly what he was going to do.

The women snapped cuffs around her ankles. Evelyn laid her hands over Cara's breasts, and Cassandra laid her hands against Cara's lower belly just above her pubic bone. Cara couldn't help but arch into their touch. She was growing hotter by the second, and a swirl of energy rippled across her skin.

In unison, the two women said, "Cara, offer yourself to the Lady, to our pack, to our salvation." They each bent and kissed her lips before walking away.

Cara had never been sexually interested in women before, but she found the touch of the women's lips incredibly sexy and wished they would return and kiss her again. Before she could process this new desire, Jackson appeared at her feet.

"Will you allow the newborn sun to rekindle the love that burns within us?"

Her breath caught. Passion flared in his eyes, and his wolfish energy crashed against the current that hummed along her skin. She tugged on her bonds, wanting to pull him down on top of her. "Yes."

"Will you freely give your energy to me for the protection of my pack?"

Blazing heat rushed down her spine, making her arch up. She spoke in a voice not entirely her own, in words that seem to come from the depth of her soul. "All that I am is yours."

He pulled the knife from his sheath, and Cara sucked in her breath. Her heart pounded relentlessly against her chest, and her pulse whooshed in her ears. Jackson captured her gaze with his and smiled.

She thought he was trying to reassure her, but the energy that had made her feel as if she were floating in a haze of lust had receded with her fear. All she could think about was the knife he held.

He lowered the blade to her chest. She struggled against her bonds, telling herself over and over that he wouldn't hurt her but unable to relax.

Jackson placed his other hand on her abdomen and pushed her down. "Trust me," he whispered, so low she couldn't be sure she'd truly heard him.

Five ribbon ties held her robe together. He laid the knife against the top one and sliced through it in one easy stroke. Cara didn't breathe as he severed the others and parted her robe using the tip of his knife. She felt the cool metal graze her skin, but he didn't leave a scratch.

He put the knife away, and Cara's chest loosened enough for her to draw in a deep breath. She also gained enough awareness of her surroundings to realize that everyone in the pack was staring at her naked body. But instead of embarrassment, lust rushed through her.

The sexual energy in the air increased exponentially. She heard the wolves who encircled them panting, some with canine tongues, either in partial or full wolf form. She could read their lust as if they spoke to her. Some of them wanted to fuck her, some wanted to be her, all of them wanted to come.

She focused on the need of the pack, trying to draw it all into herself, but Jackson leaned down and licked her from her pubic bone to her neck. Once again, she forgot everything but him.

His hands gripped her thighs, and his thumbs caressed her, close but not close enough to her pussy. She whimpered and tilted her hips, trying to encourage him, but he smiled and shook his head. His eyes had gone wolfish, and his fangs had elongated. The sight made her shiver.

He bathed her upper body with his tongue: her neck, her chest, the underside of her breasts, her belly. Her nipples longed to feel his tongue flick across them, but he wouldn't come near them.

"Please!" She arched up, pushing her breasts as far in the air as her bonds would allow, but he ignored her. A moment later, he released her thighs and ran his hand across her belly while shifting position so he could bathe her legs with his tongue.

She grew more and more desperate. The lines of energy running along her skin had grown so intense they were almost painful. She was on the verge of an explosion, but Jackson wouldn't give her what she needed to go over. She was afraid that if he wouldn't let her come, she would simply go up in flames.

Snow still fell outside the circle, but sweat dripped down Cara's chest and belly. She knew the rock must be damp beneath her back. The stone moved as she did, forming itself around her, caressing her like a lover. The out-of-control sensation she'd felt during the ritual at her house returned. If she could find the strength, she would rip her bonds apart and fuck him until he begged for mercy.

She could feel the lust of the crowd, and it only increased her own. She wanted them to watch her, to see Jackson fuck her. Why wouldn't he let her come for them?

Each breath she drew was more difficult than the last. She felt so full of wild, pulsing energy that she feared she would die if she didn't find a way to release it. She sensed each wolf, they all wanted to give themselves to her. She wanted to reach out and touch them, taste them, devour all they had to give.

"Are you ready?" Jackson whispered.

She realized he'd released her and was standing between her legs. He untied his knife belt and sash and dropped them to the ground. Then he grabbed the sides of his robe with his now clawed and furry hands and ripped. He lowered his arms and let it fall to the ground. She stared, wide-eyed at his luscious body. She wanted to lick his chest as he had hers. To taste him, to bite him. A snarl rumbled in her chest. Jackson smiled.

He climbed onto the table and positioned himself to fuck her. She raised and lowered her hips rapidly, wanting the wolves to see how desperate she was for his cock. Several high pitched howls pierced the night, and Jackson growled.

He lowered his body to rub his furry chest against her. She whimpered. "Fuck me."

"Louder."

"Fuck me."

A chorus of howls answered her.

He took his cock in his hand and positioned himself at her entrance. She lifted her hips to take him, but he pulled back. He pinned her hips with his hands, giving himself total control. He drove his cock deep with his first thrust, and Cara screamed. The energy inside her pushed against him, but he wouldn't swallow it.

"Not yet."

She snarled again. He pulled out and slammed back in, knocking the air from her with his force. He pounded her over and over. She took it all, lifting her hips. Snarling, growling, begging, as if she were also a wolf.

The lust of the crowd pressed against her, a suffocating weight. Her body felt as full as it could get, yet she longed to draw more energy into herself. She wanted the pack's lust to slip inside her until there was nothing left of her but burning, pulsing light.

She squirmed beneath Jackson, fighting her need. Her climax built, but she wasn't ready. She didn't know how to handle what was going on in her body.

"Let it in as you come. Open yourself and drink it all down."

His words made no sense. She tossed her head from side to side, assaulted by the need of the crowd, unable to stand the pounding of energy both inside and out. She had to escape, had to stop this. Jackson thrust harder and deeper. She would have sworn his cock grew larger. It stuffed and stretched her impossibly. "Come now."

He reached between then and grasped her clit. Her heart stopped. Everything stopped. Then she jerked and convulsed. She thought she screamed, but the sound could have been the rush of energy that suddenly found a way into her. She threw her head back and let it fill her, take her, rip her apart. Never had she felt such intense pain or such pounding pleasure.

Jackson took her face between her hands and held her head still. "Give it to me," he said and bent to kiss her. She struggled and fought him, trying to free herself. But when their lips met, the energy which threatened to split her apart, poured into him so fast his body bowed and bucked.

He never broke their hold, but she could sense his pain and shock. He hadn't expected she could hold so much. She arched her hips, hungry for another orgasm. He thrust frantically in short, hard strokes.

Then he released her mouth and screamed. She felt him pumping his seed into her as she went up and over a second time. He ripped the cuffs from her hands and grabbed them, pulling them up. "Let it go."

Bright light flowed from both their hands, shooting up to the top of the dome she'd imagined hanging over them. Then it fell like rain on the crowd. Howls and screams echoed around them. Everyone in the crowd writhed and screamed as the energy ripped orgasms from them. Several shifted to wolf form. Others grabbed each other and ripped their robes off, falling to the ground to fuck.

When every last drop of the energy she'd harnessed drained from her, she collapsed against the stone. Jackson fell on top of her. She lay there, drifting, unable to move, barely breathing. But she knew one thing for certain. She could never walk away from Jackson, not after what she'd experienced. She felt as if their very souls had touched.

Chapter 9

The last hour was still hazy in Jackson's mind. He and Cara had passed out on the table. How long they'd lain there while the sexual spell ran its course through the pack he didn't know. Eventually, Gwen and his older brother, Malcolm, had awakened them and helped them put their robes back on. Then they'd each gone to the cabins where they'd left their clothes. They hadn't spoken or even looked each other in the eye. Jackson hadn't known what to say, no words could describe their experience.

Once he'd showered and changed, he and his brothers had gone to the feast at the pack's meeting hall, which was located several hundred feet down the hill from their ritual site. At first he hadn't seen Cara. He'd assumed she was still recuperating. Then he began to worry. He knew she might be reluctant to face him and the pack, but she needed to eat to replenish herself.

Finally he saw her across the room, talking to Evelyn and Cassandra, the women who'd kissed her so beautifully before he'd approached. If she could face them, she could damn well face him.

Her back was to him, so she didn't see him approach. Evelyn and Cassandra smiled up at him and excused themselves. She turned and color rushed into her cheeks.

"Have you eaten?"

"Some, yes. Evelyn had a plate for me at the cabin."

He should have guessed they'd have thought of that. "Could we step outside for a moment?"

She looked around at the crowd as if hoping to find an excuse to say no. Anger rose in him, but he squelched it. She'd been through so much in the last few days. He was lucky she had agreed to go through with this at all.

Finally, she gave a weak smile and said, "Okay."

He opened one of the doors that led onto the large porch. He offered her a seat at one of the outside tables. "Are you cold?"

She shook her head. She was probably still running on such adrenaline that she couldn't feel the cold any more than he could.

Before he could ask the question that had been burning in his mind since he woke from their mating, she spoke. "Did the spell work? Can you tell?"

"We won't know for certain until one of us confronts Hanley or his men again, but my father and brothers agree they've never felt magic that powerful come out of a mating. Every member of the pack felt a shield form around them. Some even gained a higher level of magic when they accepted our energy. I have to believe it will be enough to protect us."

She smiled, and the sight made his heart skip. He'd rehearsed what he would say a million times, but nothing had sounded right. She said she wanted the facts straight from him, so straight it would be. "I want you to marry me."

Cara drew in a sharp breath but at least she didn't run.

"Promise me you won't lie to me again --" Jackson opened his mouth to speak, but she held up her hand to stop him. " -- or omit an important part of the truth."

He thought about his response for a few seconds. Could she understand what he wanted to say? Would a human feel the same thing? "I don't think I *could* hide things from you now, not after what we experienced. You would read the truth from me before the words were out of my mouth."

Cara's eyes widened as he spoke. "I feel connected with you in the same way, but I thought it was just an after-effect of the ritual."

"The spell will probably affect you for days, but our connection will not go away. We are bound by our ritual mating."

"Yes."

He raised his brows in questions, not wanting to assume what she was saying yes for.

She smiled. "Yes, I'll marry you."

“Thank the Lord and Lady. I couldn’t bear to be apart from you again, not after what I experienced with you tonight.”

She reached out and took his hand. “Neither could I.”

Silvia Violet

Silvia Violet can often be found haunting coffee shops looking for the darkest, strongest cup of coffee she can find. Once equipped with the needed fuel, she can happily sit for hours pounding away at her laptop. Silvia typically leaves home disguised as a suburban stay-at-home-mom, and other coffee shop patrons tend to ask her hilarious questions like "Do you write children's books?". She loves watching the looks on their faces when they learn what she's actually up to. When not writing, Silvia enjoys baking sinful chocolate treats, exploring new styles of cooking, and reading children's books to her wickedly smart offspring.

Silvia writes erotic romance and erotica in a variety of genres. She recently won Angela Knight's Golden Stiletto contest with a hot excerpt from her Shifter's Station series.

You can find Silvia on the web at <http://violet.chaosnet.org> or reach her by email at silviaviolet@gmail.com