

Changeling Press

B.J. McCall



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ISBN: 978-1-59596-684-1
Formats Available:
HTML, Adobe PDF,
MobiPocket, Microsoft Reader

Publisher:
Changeling Press LLC
PO Box 1046
Martinsburg, WV 25402-1046
www.ChangelingPress.com

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Cover Artist: Bryan Keller

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Veda Pearl left her pack, rejecting its edicts, its laws and the lycan rituals. Embracing the freedom of a human lifestyle, she lives alone, loves working as a bounty hunter and finds pleasure with human lovers. The last thing she wants in her life is an alpha wolf.

Banished by the pack three years ago, Kane Ryland returns to claim the she-wolf he loves. Since leaving the pack Veda has refused to run in the annual Lycaon Moon claiming ritual but Kane is determined to rekindle the passion and mate by pack law.

Veda's having none of it, but the heart surrenders to no rules but its own.

Chapter One

A pair of handcuffs tucked in the side pocket of her dark green cargo pants, Veda Pearl stepped out of her SUV. A spiky hairstyle, plum colored lipstick and heavy eyeliner completed the militant look. Intimidating her prey gave her an edge and tonight her target was sucking down beers in McDougal's Tavern. Veda had learned the hard way, never wear anything she wasn't willing to burn after apprehending a fugitive.

When it came to bail jumpers, fear and anger went hand-in-hand with spit and vomit.

Wedged between an appliance store with going-out-of business signs plastered across its dirty windows and an unoccupied storefront, the tavern's door declared *Established 1964* in peeling gold paint. A neon beer sign burned brightly in the tavern's solitary window.

Veda looked up and wrinkled her sensitive nose.

A waxing moon hung in a sky broken by thin wispy clouds and the light breeze carried the stench of unwashed human. Twenty feet away a man was huddled in a doorway hugging a filthy duffle bag to his chest. Beyond the doorway a shiny black pickup, too new and expensive for McDougal's usual clientele, was parked beneath a streetlight.

Shoving her keys into the front pocket of her pants, Veda crossed the street. The thrill of the hunt heightened her senses and heated her blood.

Veda preferred to hunt after sunset, and tonight her prey, a small time hustler called Jesse Lee, should be easy pickings. She'd deliver the bail jumper to the police station and be home by three.

Old man McDougal gave her a brief nod as she stepped inside. The stink of stale cigarette smoke and spilled beer didn't disguise the heady primal scent of wolf. Discounting the humans sitting at the bar, Veda's gaze settled on a man standing at the jukebox on the opposite side of the tavern.

He lifted his head but kept his back to her. Veda knew he'd caught her scent. The time of the Lycaon Moon approached. Even in human form her mating scent grew stronger with each passing day.

Fuck! The last thing she needed was a horny *were* dogging her steps.

Familiarity stirred. Something about his scent tapped her memory and set her heart racing. Her nose had to be playing tricks on her.

The bail jumper slid off his bar stool. His eyes darted away from her to the back door, telegraphing his intent to run.

"Jesse! Don't do it."

He flipped her off and spun on his heel. Lunging forward, Veda caught him by the collar and slammed his gut into the bar. Planting her knee to his ass, she grasped a wrist and pulled it behind his back.

"Come on, Veda. I'm gonna do real time. I'll pay you whatever it takes."

Reaching into her pocket, she yanked out the cuffs. "Hey, McDougal, has Jesse paid his tab?"

"I don't have the money on me now. Mac knows I'm good for it."

The old man shook his head.

Jesse tried to slip out of his jacket but Veda kept a firm grip on his wrist and snapped a cuff in place. She grasped the other wrist and secured him while a stream of profanity spewed from his mouth. "Shut up, Jesse."

At the far end of the bar a big guy with hair hanging halfway down his back rose from his stool. His stained white tee shirt sported a motorcycle logo. Using Jesse as a shield, she hooked a hand in his belt and backed toward the door.

The big guy's upper lip lifted in a contemptuous sneer. "Let him go."

"Jesse, tell your friend to back off."

"Why don't you tell him?"

Taking a step back, Veda dragged Jesse with her. "Motorcycle guy, what's your name?"

The guy fisted his hands. "Frank."

"Look, Frank. Jesse didn't make his court date. If I don't take him tonight, I'll have to get him tomorrow."

"I don't give a fuck about Jesse. I don't like bounty hunters. I especially don't like cunt bounty hunters." Frank charged. Then he dropped to his knees, hitting the scarred plank floor with a heavy thwack. The big guy's face contorted in pain.

The *were* stood behind Frank holding his ponytail like a hangman's noose. He released the hank of hair and rubbed his palm on his jeans. Veda's breath froze in her lungs as amber eyes locked gazes with her. Her nose hadn't been lying.

Kane!

The last three years had given his face a sexy maturity and his eyes an intensity she felt down to her core. He'd cut his beautiful long hair and wore a shorter, more conventional style. Faded jeans hugged his lean hips and a dark tee shirt clung to his muscled chest. He wore flip-flops.

Fuck! Why him? Why now? "Hello, Kane."

"Veda." Her name sounded sultry on his lips. "It's been a long time."

Not long enough. "You got my back, Kane?"

He nodded.

She turned Jesse around and shoved him out the door.

"Who's that guy?" Jesse asked. "Nobody challenges Frank."

Veda dragged Jesse across the street to her SUV. "Someone you don't want to know."

"Why's that?"

She opened the back door. "He'd eat you for breakfast and spit out your bones. Get in. You know the drill."

Like the fool he was, Jesse started laughing but he climbed in the vehicle and sat in the single rear seat. "I bet Frank's making that guy wish he hadn't interfered."

Leaning into the vehicle, Veda snapped the shackles attached to the seat to each of Jesse's ankles.

Nostrils flaring, her senses went on full alert.

"I think Frank's the one having regrets. You look good, Veda."

She straightened, closed the back door and turned to face Kane. "Thanks. For taking care of Frank."

"Got a few minutes for an old friend?"

Friend. Is that what he thought they were? She yanked open the driver's door and climbed in. "Sorry, Jesse and I have a date with the booking officer."

"A group of us are running tonight. Join us."

The memories of Kane running in the moonlight leading the young wolves through the wooded hills washed over her, but the days of youthful freedom and yearning were over. She dug out her keys and started the engine. "I don't run with the pack."

"So I've heard."

Veda closed the door and stepped on the gas. Unable to resist, she glanced in the rearview mirror. Kane stood in the street watching her.

What the hell was he doing in a dive like McDougal's in the wee hours? After all this time, why had he returned? Why did she care?

"Goodbye, Kane."

Chapter Two

"You're restless as a cat tonight."

Veda swirled the ice cubes in her glass and looked at Farrell. Sliding toward forty, the police detective had brown eyes, sandy hair, a decent body and a great sense of humor. Twice divorced, Farrell never mentioned marriage, never used the word relationship, and that suited Veda just fine.

She felt comfortable in Farrell's home and at ease in his company. A decent lover, he didn't try to change her.

Best of all, he wasn't a wolf.

She sipped the cold vodka and toed off her shoes. No matter the temperature, Veda preferred her feet bare and unrestricted. An old image of Kane wearing nothing but flip-flops came to mind. She pushed the memory away and drained her glass.

"Bottle is on the counter."

Veda poured a double shot and opened the sliding glass door. Moonlight spilled onto the deck and silvered the trees screening the house from the golf course. Farrell loved the game and encouraged her to take up the sport. So far she'd managed to resist.

Stepping outside into the moonlight, Veda crossed the deck and planted her elbows on the banister rail. The heat of the day had given way to a cooling breeze. She closed her eyes and welcomed the caress of soft wind over her skin.

Farrell joined her. Sipping his beer, he leaned against the railing.

After several minutes of silence he asked, "You want to talk about what's bothering you?"

Veda shook her head. "I'm fine."

"Like hell you are. You catch me dead tired at the end of the shift from hell and give me that look."

She straightened and turned. His face was in shadow. "What look?"

"The one that says take me home and fuck my brains out. By the way, it's my favorite."

Veda grinned and lifted the glass to her lips. The vodka slid down her throat and glowed in her belly. Her skin felt hot and tight.

"Now, instead of jumping my bones you're sucking down vodka and looking like your pet just died."

She couldn't tell Farrell that the man who haunted her dreams had returned in the flesh and managed in one short conversation to tilt her world. It wasn't the detective's bones she wanted to jump, but she'd sought the safe harbor of his home and the expensive vodka he kept in his freezer just for her.

If she were alone, the desire to strip off her clothes, shift and run in the moonlight might overtake her. Damn Kane for awakening her lycan psyche.

Farrell moved behind her and slid his hands around her waist. "So, what gives?"

She leaned back and rested her head against his chest. "I'm just tired."

"I've seen you tired." He slipped a hand beneath her tank top and caressed her breast. "Maybe it's the moon."

"The moon?"

"During the full moon, you're either extra horny or down right depressing. Since it's almost full moon, I was praying for horny."

Maybe she was letting Farrell get too close. "You're making that up."

"I notice things. I'm a detective. It's what I do. Drove my second wife crazy." He placed a kiss below her ear. "So what's so depressing you'd rather drink than make love?"

Work, vodka and sex made her forget. Time marched on, the pain lessened and the memories dulled. Veda never regretted her decision to separate from the pack and abandon her lycan ways, but tonight she envied the wolves running with Kane and she hated herself for wondering which she-wolf would catch his eye.

After a run the shift back to human form left the heart pumping and hormones raging. The memory of Kane with his blood running high sent a bolt of pure heat through her middle.

The desire to shift and run in the moonlight rolled through her, clutched at her heart. As the months passed, she'd learned to resist and suppress. She finished the vodka and set the glass on the top rail with a decided thud. Damn Kane for tempting her and for reminding her of things she'd spent three years trying to forget.

"I don't know what it is about you, but you drive me crazy."

Veda reached up and grabbed a fistful of Farrell's hair and locking gazes with him. "Who says I don't want to fuck?"

His mouth fastened onto hers, hot and hungry.

Farrell pressed his groin to her ass, slowly gyrating his hips, letting her feel the hard ridge of his cock. He pulled up her stretchy tank and cupped her breasts. His hands were warm and his fingers agile. He caressed her flesh, tugging and plucking her aching nipples to hard sensitive points. "You feel so good."

Lifting the hem of her top, he pulled it up and over her head.

Veda arched her back and let the moonlight bathe her skin. Her blood heated and her skin burned. True to her she-wolf nature, Veda loved sex, the wild blood-pounding sex that left her skin slicked with perspiration and her breath burning in her lungs.

She wanted to howl. She wanted Kane.

No, she was done with *weres*, especially Kane.

"Your skin is shimmering and your hair looks all silvery. And I'd bet a month's pay you're already wet. Fuck, I love the full moon."

Farrell was too damn smart. Turning, Veda wrapped her arms around his neck and pressed her breasts to his chest.

He splayed his hands on her back. "You're so hot, your skin is on fire."

Veda closed her eyes. "Fuck me."

He grasped her ass with both hands and eased her back against the railing. Leaning back, Veda gasped as his mouth settled over a taut nipple and suckled deeply.

A familiar howl rent the night. Veda jerked and straightened, pulling her breast from Farrell's eager mouth.

"What the fuck!"

She turned and scanned the two hundred yards of tree-lined fairway running behind the detective's home. A shudder slid down her spine. "Sounded like a wolf."

"No wolves around here. Must have been a dog."

A flicker of movement caught her eye. A large wolf loped across the open yards of the fairway and disappeared in the deep shadows. Veda picked up her discarded tank top and hurried inside. Farrell followed and closed the slider.

"I don't get it. We're hot and heavy, and some damn dog howls at the moon and you walk away. What's going on, Veda?"

She pulled on her tank top and stuffed her feet into her shoes. "I'm sorry. I'm not good company tonight."

Farrell had no idea he was fucking a wolf, and Veda intended to keep him in the dark. She liked him, and she'd make it up to him another night. Grabbing him by the collar, she brushed her lips against his. "Thanks for the vodka."

He caught her by the hair and pressed his forehead to hers. "Veda, if you need me I'm here for you."

She nodded and he released her.

Outside Veda sucked in a deep breath. She wanted a shower and needed another vodka. As she started the engine of the SUV she glanced into the rearview mirror half expecting to see Kane.

The son of a bitch had watched her and Farrell from the shadows. His howl of protest had shattered her desire. He had no right. Farrell was her choice and she wanted no part of a traditional wolf bonding. Even if the wolf was Kane.

Veda liked the freedom of living as a human. She did what she wanted and fucked whom she desired. Never again would an alpha wolf rule her life or her heart.

Chapter Three

"Have a good run, brother?"

Kane Ryland shoved his fingers through his sweat-soaked hair and nodded to his older sibling, Jance. "Good enough."

"Grab a cup of coffee and join me in my study."

After running hard for hours and working through the frustration of seeing Veda and the human together in the moonlight Kane needed a shower and a couple hours of sleep, but even a sibling didn't ignore protocol and refuse the alpha male.

Kane strolled through the spacious old house to the kitchen. Not much had changed in the last few years. Jance believed in tradition and unlike Kane he'd always followed the rules. He'd claimed his alpha female, even married her in a civil ceremony, and fathered four children.

Mug of coffee in hand, Kane entered the study. His brother sat behind the massive desk where their grandfather had ruled for decades. Although Jance now ruled and ran the pack's business, Kane still felt his grandfather's presence. These were his books, his antique lamps and crystal decanters. The memories washed over Kane and clutched at his heart. Although he'd hated the old wolf for banishing him from the pack, he missed the man who had raised him and at one time had loved him.

Kane glanced at the framed photo of the smiling couple sitting on a shelf of the floor-to-ceiling bookcase. Four years old at the time of the auto accident, Kane couldn't remember his parents.

Jance stood and walked to the window. Kane joined him. The first light of dawn lit the sky, but a pale streak of pink boded a change in the hot, sunny weather. "Rain coming."

Kane glanced at his brother. Although Jance wore his jet-black hair slicked back and tied at the nape and sported a diamond stud in one ear lobe, he looked like a rich, powerful executive in his dark gray suit, white shirt and striped tie. The pack owned a myriad of businesses all of which Jance oversaw in his capacity as the alpha wolf.

Time to get down to business. "I didn't come back to challenge you."

Jance turned and his dark brows drew together. "I am pleased you have finally chosen to come home and take your proper place in the pack."

Home. Kane looked out upon the manicured lawn stretching a hundred feet to the trees. Beyond the trees were acres of forest owned by the pack. Although he'd run in these woods throughout his youth, this place was no longer his home. "I haven't."

"Then why are you here?"

"The Lycaon Moon." The memory of one female remained in his heart. "I've chosen a female to claim. I intend to take her north to my home."

"But this is your home."

Kane shook his head. "I love you brother, but I can't live here."

Jance looked out the window, but Kane saw the set of his jaw and the stiffening of his shoulders. "You refuse to live under my rule."

Kane placed a hand on his brother's shoulder. "I can't live here. I've made a new life. I want my own pack."

"You should have come home for the funeral."

After hearing of his grandfather's passing, Kane had contacted Jance's wife. He'd been close to Aislyn for years, and when she'd told him that Veda had refused to bond with Jance or any wolf he'd decided to return and claim what he considered his. "I wasn't ready."

Jance expelled an audible breath. "The female?"

"I want Veda Pearl."

Laughter exploded from Jance's chest. "Brother, you're a fool. She's left the pack, rejected our ways. Veda fucks humans. Her current lover is a police detective."

Watching the blonde guy and Veda had cut deep. He'd crept close enough to smell the lust. The hot scent of Veda's pussy had penetrated his soul. Last night she'd rejected him and sought out a human for pleasure. "No *weres*?"

"A few have tried."

Had Veda rejected Jance? The thought of Veda with anyone, especially the brother he loved, tore at Kane's heart. "Ancient blood flows in Veda's veins. I want her."

"Grandfather chose her for me, to be my alpha mate, bear my offspring."

"Then you should have claimed her."

Jance glared at him. "You shouldn't have interfered. Veda might have been more manageable if you hadn't challenged our union."

"I doubt it."

"You dishonored our grandfather."

"Veda is mine. She always was."

"She has to run to be claimed. Every year since she rejected our grandfather's edict Veda has refused to run beneath the Lycaon Moon."

"She'll run."

"Let's assume by some miracle she does. Every ambitious wolf will catch her scent and race you for the right to mount her."

Kane turned away from the window and headed to the door. "Let them run. Veda is mine."

"Tell me, brother. Where have you been during the last three years?"

Since Aislyn had held her tongue, Kane didn't bother to answer. One of these days he'd tell Jance about the life he'd established in Alaska. He missed the island. He loved the pounding ocean, the long dark winters, the snow and the isolation. Now he needed a partner, a wife, and his mate, Veda.

Chapter Four

The brunt of the fast moving storm had passed through. The moon was obscured, the wind light and the rain gentle. Kane recalled Veda liked to run in the rain. At least she used to like it.

Kane parked his truck and gazed up at the square four-story building.

Why Veda chose to live in the industrial section of the city without grass or trees eluded him. Except for a couple of lighted windows on the top floor, the old building appeared abandoned. At this hour the street was deserted, but a few blocks away traffic rumbled and a siren wailed.

Kane climbed out of the pickup, locked it, and walked to the street-level door. He pressed the buzzer and wondered if Veda was alone and if she'd invite him upstairs. He pressed the buzzer again.

"State your business." Her voice had a matter-of-fact tone.

"It's Kane."

"What the fuck do you want?" Disinterest changed to anger.

"Buzz me in."

"I don't feel like company."

"Don't make me stand in the rain."

"Your choice."

"Veda, talk to me."

His heart leaped when she didn't fire back at him.

"Go away, Kane."

The disinterest and anger faded into a soft plea, but Kane wasn't about to give up. He'd stand here all night if necessary. "Not this time. I'm not leaving until it's finished between us."

"It is finished. It's been finished."

"Veda, don't make me beg."

"Fuck!"

A buzzer sounded.

Kane opened the door and stepped into a foyer lit by dusty wall scones. The carpet was dingy and the walls stained. Directly across the space was an elevator and stairs to his right. Kane took the stairs two at a time. By the time he reached the fourth floor and another locked door his heart was pounding more from anticipation than exertion. He pressed the doorbell. The lock disengaged and he stepped into another world.

Instead of the gray walls and worn carpet of the first floor, this foyer was painted a soft green and the polished wood floors gleamed beneath a circle of recessed lights. Two white leather and chrome chairs stood opposite one another and several ferns hung from white wall stanchions. Directly above was a large circular skylight.

A set of open French doors led into a spacious room, dramatic in its stark simplicity. A white leather sofa, a matching chair and a couple of lamps were grouped in the area near the windows. Between the foyer and the living area a large patterned rug in greens and grays covered the wood floor.

He inhaled deeply, seeking out the scent of man or wolf, but caught only Veda's provocative scent. Need shot through him, the deep ache brought about by yearning and three long years of celibacy.

Dressed in a white tank top and a pair of gray sweat pants, Veda moved into his line of vision and stood in the center of the rug. Her platinum blonde hair fell in soft layers to her jaw and her beautiful face was freshly scrubbed. Her lips were pink and shiny as if she'd just applied lip-gloss. If she had perhaps things were looking up.

Last night's spiky hair, heavy makeup and hard edge had come as a shock to Kane. As was her career choice. Although her ice blue eyes held no welcome, this was the Veda he remembered. As usual her feet were bare.

Seeing her like this was like stepping back in time and for a heartbeat the last three years dropped away. Kane shoved his hands in his pockets so she wouldn't see them shaking. When he'd made the decision to come back, he'd worried that her feelings had changed. Last night's events weren't promising, but as soon as Kane had laid eyes on her he knew he'd do anything to get her back into his life. He loved her. He'd never stopped loving her. Everything he'd done in Alaska was for her. "Veda."

She folded her arms before her. "You could have called."

"Would you have answered?"

The look on her face said no. Kane shook his head and walked toward her until only a few inches separated them. "The rain is warm and the wind is light. Run with me."

"I told you I don't run with the pack."

Kane's keen nose hadn't picked up a single male scent. That knowledge pleased him beyond measure. Although Aislyn had assured him Veda had not taken a mate, Kane understood how her scent affected a wolf. A human male might be entranced with her and never understand why he craved her. Kane understood and still she mesmerized him.

"Just the two of us. Like it used to be before things got complicated."

Her eyes narrowed. Maybe he should have chosen a better word, but forbidden love was anything but easy. "Forget it, Kane. We were foolish. We thought the rules didn't apply to us."

"We were best friends. We were in love."

"We can't go back." She looked away. "I can't."

"One run. Is that so much to ask?"

She stuck her face in his. "I don't owe you."

His grandfather hadn't managed to break her will, but had time destroyed the passion they'd once shared? Or had another captured her heart? "Are you in love with him, the detective?"

Eyes flashing, she curled her hands into fists. "Leave, Kane. Before I throw you out on your ass."

She didn't have a chance in hell of pulling off her threat but that didn't mean Veda wouldn't try. "Sorry."

"Are you?" She poked his chest with her index finger. "You watched."

Kane dragged his fingers through his short hair. He'd run for hours until the anger and jealousy had subsided. Time to speak the truth. "I envied him. I wanted to be the one touching you."

"That's not going to happen."

Grabbing her wrist, Kane pulled her toward him and locked his arm around her waist. The touch and heat of their bodies an erotic caress. "I've missed you."

Her eyes were the color of an arctic lake but the fire burning within them was his undoing. All the words he'd rehearsed in his head melted away, leaving the raging heat of suppressed desire. Heart thundering, Kane buried his face in her hair and inhaled deeply. Her scent triggered a need, basic and elemental, deep within him. She jerked her head away and pushed at his arms. Lifting his head, he met her defiant gaze.

Tightening his hold he kissed her hard, almost brutally, then caught himself and reined in his emotions.

Kane eased his fierce hold. Gentling the kiss, he savored the contact and the sweet taste of her. Soft and full, her breasts pressed against his chest. He wanted her so badly his whole body shook, yet Veda remained stiff and rigid. Her lack of response came as a cruel culmination of years of waiting.

He released her, lifted his hands and stepped back. "I've wanted you for so long. I'd hoped you'd still feel something for me."

Her palm connected to his cheek, stinging his skin, rocking him back. "Get the fuck out of here!"

He rubbed his cheek. She packed a wallop. He was damn glad she hadn't hit him with her fist. "Veda."

"I don't want you. I don't want any wolf. You got that, Kane?"

"But I want you, Veda, and I intend to have you."

"So did Jance, but that never happened."

"You never loved Jance."

When her fist came at him, he caught it, trapping it in his hand. "Get out." Her eyes glistened with tears, but none spilled. "Leave before you regret it."

"I'll never regret loving you."

A single tear slid down her cheek. "Fuck you, Kane!"

"Run with me."

She sucked in a breath. "No."

"Just a few miles. I won't leave until you agree. Don't you miss the wind in your fur?"

Her eyes widened. Kane lowered his voice. "First to the goal wins."

"If I win, you go away."

Veda always loved a challenge. They'd spent their youth racing to a selected finish line, leaping the highest fences and widest streams. And just a few years ago they'd made love in the grass. "And if I win, I get you."

He turned, walked through the foyer and into the elevator. Heart pounding, he waited. When Veda finally picked up her jacket and joined him, Kane resisted the urge to smile. It wasn't pretty, but he'd done it.

Chapter Five

What the hell had she done?

She'd gotten him out of the sanctuary of her home, a place without any lycan scent and nothing to remind her of her past life, only to foolishly agree to run with him. Her brain told her she'd made a big mistake, but her heart longed to shift and run in the rain.

She climbed into Kane's four-wheeler and clipped in the seat belt. The truck had that new car smell and comfortable leather seats.

No way would she agree to run on pack land. "Where are we going?"

The engine rumbled to life. Kane looked at her and grinned. "You know that golf course that runs behind Farrell's house?"

"The place where you hid in the shadows and watched?"

He ignored her remark. "In the middle of the night the course is deserted."

Somehow Kane had managed to make her break a three-year rule. Although she worked out and stayed fit, running in lupine form was confined to the empty third floor of her building. She never ran outside. The experience made her hurt too bad, remember too much.

Living as a human and away from the pack was Veda's form of pain management, but Kane had brought all the pain back.

And now she was going to try and outrun him.

"I'm challenging you to eighteen holes."

Veda leaned back and closed her eyes. How could she defeat him?

Unless things had changed, Kane likely worked out and ran daily. He looked good, lean and fit, sculpted, and hot.

Forget hot.

She had to dig deep, run till she dropped and beat him. Then he'd go away and she'd get on with her life. "Those sand traps can be tricky in the rain."

"But tonight the grass is soft, slick and very wet."

Opening her eyes, she glanced over at him. "Fuck you, Kane."

He smiled. "Fuck you, Veda."

The sexy tone of his voice sent a shiver down her spine. As usual he was so damn sure of himself.

They didn't speak again until he drove past the dark clubhouse, through the empty lot and parked at the edge of the driving range.

He pulled off his tee shirt and pointed out the windshield to the right. "Hole number one is right over there."

Veda removed her jean jacket and sandals. Taking a deep breath, she yanked off her tank top and knit pants. Before she opened the passenger door, Kane caught her by the chin. His fingertips slid along her cheek. "Just in case I lose."

His lips touched hers, gently at first, then urgently. For the briefest moment Veda gave into the delicious heat. His male scent sent hot waves through her veins, triggering her mating senses. Desire coiled tight and deep.

Kane released her. "But I won't lose."

Veda opened the door and jumped out of the truck. She ran to the first tee and fell to her knees in the soft, wet grass and shifted.

Bones reformed, muscles stretched and contracted, platinum white hairs sprang through her skin forming a thick, soft pelt. Veda shuddered and pawed the grass. She kicked up her back legs and ran in a tight circle then threw back her head and howled.

Already in lupine form, Kane joined her. Their howls rent the night. The duet became a joyful balm to Veda's isolated existence. For years her lonely howls had gone unanswered.

You're mine.

Kane nipped her haunch and took off. Veda leaped forward and followed him down the fairway. Nothing compared to a full run at night. Increasing her speed, she

caught up with Kane. He eased his stride and they ran side-by-side through the second and third holes. Approaching the fourth green, Kane leaped across a stream and rounded a sand trap. Feeling free and happier than she had in years, Veda nipped his shoulder, and with her tail high, she shot out in front of him.

Whether he let her take the lead or chose to pace his stride Veda didn't know or care. The rain slashed over her muzzle and down her back. The wind ruffled her wet fur and the grass felt slick beneath her paws.

The sixteenth fairway was long and bracketed by thick grasses. Without a thought to the goal, Veda tumbled onto the rough and rolled onto her back. Kane circled and came to stand over her.

Realizing her submissive position and her loss of concentration, Veda sprang at Kane and knocked him down.

Taking advantage of the situation Veda took off at a full run. Her heart thundered as she sped over the green, tore around the edge of the seventeenth tee and broke into a full out run down the fairway.

Blood pumping and muscles burning, she raced toward the eighteenth and final green. She sprang. One paw down and she'd win.

Kane shot past her and landed directly in front of her.

Her front paws touched grass a split second later but Kane had won.

Panting, she dropped to the wet grass. Barely winded, Kane sat beside her and licked her muzzle. Wisely he chose not to brag about his win.

Why on earth had she allowed him to goad her into accepting his challenge?

The rain stopped, and Veda sniffed the air. Clean and fresh, the light breeze carried Kane's heated male scent. The effect of that pure lycan scent rippled through her, touching her on the deepest level. Once she'd loved him beyond reason. The fact that he still had the power to excite her wasn't good. He'd broken her heart once and once was enough.

Rotten wolf. Like a fool she hadn't been able to resist a chance to run with him, alone and without a pack of lusty she-wolves nipping at his heels.

His sable brown coat was soaked and, whether in lupine or human form, Kane was handsome and strong. He'd make a fine mate, capable of siring offspring and providing for a pack of his own.

Realizing where she'd let her thoughts drift, Veda sprang to all fours, shook the rain off her coat and shifted back to human form. He'd won, but letting him mount her in lupine form would only stir the old fires. And when he left this time she wasn't sure her heart would handle it. She'd barely survived the first time around.

"Veda."

She raised her head. Kane had shifted back to human form and like her remained on his hands and knees. He crawled to her and cupped her face. Kneeling, a bare inch apart, they faced one another. He brushed the wet strands of hair from her forehead and cheeks.

"You're mine, Veda." He lowered his mouth to hers. Heat exchanged, hearts pounded, lips clung and tongues entwined. The yearning shook Veda to the core and the years apart peeled away as her heart rekindled.

Despite the cool breeze heat poured from his body, searing her skin as her breasts were crushed to his hard muscled chest. She ran her fingers through his wet hair, setting off another buried memory of a rainy night when friendship had given way to passion and her heart had learned the song of love.

Calloused hands stroked her back and hips, exploring her curves and making her quiver. Every place he touched burned and heated. When he grasped her shoulders and lifted his mouth from hers, Veda moaned.

He set her away from him, breaking the contact. "Not here."

Body burning and mind reeling, Veda's senses screamed in protest. "What?"

"It's not the right time."

She reached down, grasped his swollen cock and stroked him from base to tip. Thick veins ridged his length. Her sex clenched. "When is the right time?"

Kane stood.

Veda jumped to her feet and strode toward the pickup. She wasn't playing Kane's mind games.

Once inside the truck cab, Kane started the engine and turned on the heater. They hustled into their clothes. By the time they arrived at her home, Veda's frustration had subsided but her anger had not.

When she reached for the door handle, Kane grabbed a fistful of her tank top and yanked her toward him. "Forget it, Kane. You've lost your chance."

"I want more than you give your lovers."

"Let go of me."

Instead he sucked in an audible breath. The scent of their recent arousal filled the enclosed space. Damn, she wanted him.

"Sex is easy. Fuck him and walk away. Feel nothing but the pleasure. Give nothing of your heart and soul. Maybe that's good enough for your human lovers but I won't settle for a piece of you." He released her. His voice softened. "I want it all."

She'd offered that once and he'd shredded her heart. "Find another submissive bitch to satisfy your needs."

He grasped her hand and raised her palm to his lips. The last time Kane had kissed her palm he'd pledged his love. She yanked her hand away. "Don't do it, Kane."

"Tell you I love you?"

Shaking her head, Veda opened the passenger door and jumped out of the truck. Their gazes met. "We're done, Kane."

"We're far from done."

She slammed the door and walked away.

* * *

The moment Veda climbed out of her SUV and entered the apartment building Kane jumped out of his pickup and followed her. The rain had stopped and the night sky was clear and lit with stars. Soon the moon would rise.

He stepped into a dark, dingy foyer. Mailboxes lined one wall and a handwritten sign posted on the elevator door stated out-of-service. The six-story apartment building

had seen better days. He stood on the bottom stair and listened to Veda's faint footfalls on the landing above.

She'd chosen a dangerous profession and while Kane admired her grit, fear gripped his heart. All these years Veda had survived without him, but the urge to protect the woman he loved rose fast and furious when she left her home dressed like a mercenary.

Staking out her building, he'd felt like a stalker, but if he'd called or rung her doorbell Kane knew she'd ignore him.

He moved quietly up the stairs. No doubt Veda would resent his intrusion into her life, but he had to break through that protective wall she'd built around herself.

Looking up the stairwell, he saw her standing on the landing with her fists on her hips silently daring him to approach. She'd spiked her platinum blonde hair, applied her eye makeup with a heavy hand and painted her lips a dark plum. Veda looked ready to kick some serious ass.

When had she become so damn tough?

"I'm working, Kane."

"I like watching you work." He started up the stairs. "The mercenary look is a real turn on."

"How unfortunate for you."

He stopped on the stair below the landing. Her glacial blue eyes leveled a don't-fuck-with-me look. "Get your fugitive. The moon is rising and we have business."

"I work alone. Go play in the moonlight with someone else."

"I won't interfere but I'm not going away. Maybe I can help."

She turned and started up the next flight. His gaze fixed on her cute tush, Kane followed her to the third floor landing.

Veda turned and poked his chest with her index finger. "Stay. If she manages to get past me then you can help by grabbing her."

"She?"

"Dena Wilson. Five feet tall, black hair, weights about a hundred pounds. Quick on her feet and nimble with her fingers."

"What was she arrested for?"

"She's a thief. She picks men's pockets."

"Only men?"

"A man doesn't pay much attention to his wallet when a woman's hand is in his pants. And men carry more cash. Credit cards have to be fenced."

"Sounds like you know Dena."

"Repeat offender." She pointed at him. "Stay."

"I got your back."

He watched as Veda walked down the corridor and knocked on the door. Whoever answered remained out of sight. Veda stepped inside.

Worried, Kane resisted the urge to follow her and waited at the stairs. Although the fugitive was female that didn't mean she or a boyfriend or a husband didn't have a weapon.

Thwack! Fear fisting his heart, Kane raced toward the apartment. Tumbling through the doorway, Veda and a dark haired woman crashed into the corridor and rolled on the floor.

Grunts and curses filled the narrow space as the fugitive fought to get away from Veda. Grabbing the woman by her sweatshirt, Kane yanked her off Veda, spun her around and gave her a solid push. She stumbled, landed on her knees and cursed Kane's mother.

He turned to assist Veda but she scrambled to her feet, pushed past him and tackled the rising woman. Dena's belly hit the floor. Ready to jump in if necessary, Kane stood guard as Veda planted a knee in the small of Dena's back and cuffed her with swift efficiency.

Veda stood and wiped her face with the back of her hand. She smelled of beer. Dena stank of sweat.

Kane pulled his handkerchief out of his back pocket and handed it to Veda.

"She threw an open can at me. She missed and hit the wall next to my head."

Dena laughed and Veda glared at her. The fugitive shot Kane a curious look as he helped her to her feet.

"Let's go." Taking the lead, Kane walked in front of Dena to prevent another escape attempt.

After the fugitive was secured inside the SUV, Kane caught Veda by the chin. "Are you all right?"

"I'm fine. Thanks for helping, but I can handle it from here."

The moon had risen and its light silvered her hair. He leaned down and brushed his lips against hers. This wasn't the time or the place for kissing but he had to touch her.

She consumed his thoughts and filled his dreams. Since last night his frequent erections were becoming uncomfortable but painfully reassuring. Veda was the she-wolf he wanted. A lifetime with her wouldn't be enough. "Run with me tonight."

"No more games, Kane. I'm done."

"No games. No rules. No winner or loser. Let's just run."

She shook her head and grabbed the door handle.

"Veda, it felt so good last night. Meet me at Granite Lake. You remember the place." He slid his thumb along the line of her jaw. "I'll be waiting."

He released her. Walking back to his pickup, he wondered if she'd show.

Chapter Six

Driving along the narrow road leading to Granite Lake, Veda spotted Kane's pickup in the parking area used by hikers and backpackers. She pulled alongside his empty truck, shut off the engine and climbed out of her vehicle. Veda called out his name.

A thrill ran through her and curled around her heart when Kane broke through the brush and loped over to her. Greeting her, he rubbed his muzzle against her thigh and nudged her hand with his nose. She stroked his head and ears, relishing the feel of his thick fur against her fingers.

I'm glad you came.

I'm still asking myself why I did.

The moon is rising. You're lycan. You love the rush. Don't deny your nature.

Kane threw back his head and howled as the moon poked its face above the hills surrounding the lake. Light struck the granite outcropping, silvering the rock faces like reflective shields. The surface of the lake flickered with moonlight. The beauty of the night struck a deep cord. Memories of happier times surfaced and clutched at her heart.

How many moonlit nights had she and Kane run these trails?

I've checked the trail. We're alone.

Eager to stretch her legs, Veda stripped, tossing shoes, jeans and sweatshirt inside the SUV.

She walked away from the vehicles and stood in the moonlight to soak up the silvery light with the same eagerness humans sought out the sun. Skin and muscles heated. Blood roared through arteries and veins.

Kane brushed up against her thighs. Veda's skin tingled at the sensual contact of fur and bare skin. His long tongue lapped the length of one thigh sending a slow shudder sliding down her spine.

He nuzzled her ass, sniffing her scent, tickling her skin with stiff whiskers. Long and wet, his tongue licked a sensual trail along the crease between her butt cheek and thigh.

No wolf had touched her, not since she and Kane were lovers. When Kane's tongue slid along the valley between her buttocks and threatened to dip between her thighs, she shivered.

Let's run.

Shifting in the moonlight was a sensual experience. Every nerve tingled, every muscle stretched, and every bone altered. Follicles transformed and soft, silvery hairs sprang forth. Heart racing and blood thundering Veda welcomed the changes of bone, muscle and skin and the power and strength of the wolf.

Kane licked her muzzle and rubbed his broad chest against hers. Panting lightly, he moved around her, sniffing and nuzzling. Rearing up, he pawed her back. His wolveren foreplay tapped into her mating senses. She swished her tail and Kane nipped her haunch.

She and Kane were playing with fire. Within forty-eight hours her mating heat would peak with the rise of the full moon.

Growling she warned him away and raced toward the lake trail. They ran the entire trail surrounding the lake, each taking a turn at the lead and darting between trees and boulders. They waded, lapping the cool water before setting off on a steep trail leading to the firebreaks along the ridge. Veda chased Kane along a ledge and followed him through a maze of narrow fissures to the top of a granite outcropping. All around them jagged rock pinnacles reached for the sky.

The nearly full moon hung in the sky so close Veda felt she might reach out and touch it.

Kane brushed up against her, licked her muzzle, then tore off down another path. Playing in the moonlight with Kane was a dangerous game, yet she couldn't deny the joy of running with him. She raced after him.

Near the bottom of the trail, he took off through the trees. She followed him to another outcropping where a flat rock served as a diving platform for swimmers. Ten feet below, moonlight danced on the water.

Kane shifted and dove, disappearing beneath the silvery surface with barely a splash. Veda shifted and jumped in after him. The shock of the cold water brought her sputtering to the surface. Kane laughed as she sucked in a breath.

She shoved her wet hair out of her eyes. "It's fucking freezing."

"It gets better."

Her nipples were like points of ice. "When?"

Moonlight glanced off his wet shoulders as he reached for her. His hands found a home on her buttocks. "Now."

His mouth closed over hers, hot and lush. Skin slid against skin, hands explored and legs kicked as they bobbed in the water. Her blood heated, thundering in her ears as the kiss deepened.

She wanted Kane. She'd never stopped wanting him. He touched a part of her no other human or wolf ever had.

He hooked a leg around hers and held her body tight to his. She curled her arms around his neck. Pressed against one another they slowly slid beneath the surface into the cold, dark water. They clung together until Veda's screaming lungs forced her to push toward the surface.

"I'm not as good at holding my breath as I used to be."

"There was a time when you beat me."

As kids they'd competed in breath holding contests. As young lovers they'd added the kiss. Then they were so young, so sure of themselves. "Things change."

"True." He drew her back into his arms. "We've grown up. The old rules no longer apply."

He cupped her breast and slowly stroked her cold nipple back to life. With each rasp of his thumb, erotic tremors rocketed through her. Her toes curled. She wanted Kane, wanted him more than she'd ever wanted anyone, but making love wasn't going to be the result of some stupid race.

"It's too late to claim last night's win, Kane."

"No claims. Just you and me and this."

His mouth settled on hers and his hand tightened on her breast. She slid her tongue over his, inviting Kane to deepen the kiss. He suckled her tongue, sending fiery heat singing through her blood stream. Deep in his throat he groaned. She shivered.

"Too cold?" He glanced up at the diving platform. "Up there."

He released her and swam for shore. Veda followed.

"The brush is overgrown, but the path is still here."

Veda eyed his backside all the way to the top. Kane had a great ass.

He climbed onto the granite slab and turned to assist her. Moonlight bathed her body, heating her skin, penetrating muscle and bone. "I love the way your skin shimmers and your hair shines in the moonlight. It always turned me on."

Kane knew how the moon affected her. He grasped her hands and kissed her fingers. "Touch me, Veda."

He also knew the value of reviving memories and renewing bonds. Forbidden to mate, they'd played games of touch, pleased one another with their hands and mouth until quitting the game became more painful than the consequences.

She cupped his face, stroked his jaw and trailed her fingertips along the strong column of his neck. Placing her palms on his chest, Veda explored the hard, broad plane then moved over the rippled muscles of his abs and slid her fingers through the dark thatch of hair nestling his cock.

She wrapped her hand around him, stroking his length. His breathing pattern changed to short, harsh gulps of air.

Fingers of fire licked her womb. Thick veins ridged the shaft, and a tiny drop of moisture beaded on the tip of the velvety head. She wanted to lick the droplet. Instead she licked her lips.

An anguished growl tore from his throat as he gripped her ass and lifted her. She wrapped her arms around his neck and her legs around his hips. The hard ridge of him poked her belly. Her skin sizzled and her womb contracted.

“Veda.”

Using one arm, he braced her back against the rock face. Heat poured from his skin, scenting the air and tapping her lycan senses. Rocking his hips, he sought entry. She grasped his cock, seated the broad tip, gasping as he thrust.

Hot and hard he slid inside her, bucked his hips and buried his cock. Then he stilled.

Her pussy grabbed at his flesh, wanting, begging him to move, to jackhammer his big cock into her until she fainted with pleasure.

His chest heaved. “Look at me, Veda.”

She lifted her head. His eyes glittered, fire burning in their depths.

“I want you to know who’s fucking you.”

She knew. Every cell in her body responded to Kane’s scent, the heat of his skin and the feel of his length deep inside her. Looking into her eyes, he moved his hips, slow and easy. A shudder slid down his back and his arms shook.

Wet and aching, wanting action, Veda arched her back and rolled her hips. *Fuck yes.* That’s what she needed.

Growling, he pistoned his hips, driving into her, again and again. Lush, fast strokes that had her dripping wet and wanting more. The physical strain reflected in his eyes and the corded muscles of his neck.

He rammed into her, shoving her back against his forearm, her ass against the rock face. She tightened around him, clutching and releasing, riding the sharp edge of climax.

Heated and slick, skin met skin, her breasts slid against his thick pecs as her thighs threatened to slip down his lean hips.

Groaning, he gripped her ass tighter, shoved his cock deep and stilled. Veda convulsed around him, milking his climax, taking what she needed and giving what he wanted. Chest heaving, Kane held her tight.

Clinging to him, Veda buried her face in the crook of his neck. Her heart lurched at the thought of losing him again. Closing her eyes tight, she pushed the pain away. She'd handled it before, and she would again. Somehow.

"Veda, are you crying?"

Lifting her head, she blinked. Tears slid down her cheek. Fuck, she was crying! She shook her head. She never cried.

"Don't deny it. Tell me. Why are you crying?"

She unlocked her feet, letting her thighs slide down his and withdrew her arms from around his neck. Their bodies separated, but one big hand remained on her hip. "Don't go there, Kane."

He fisted her hair, forced her breasts against his chest and pulled her head back. "Look at me, Veda."

She glared at him. His lips curved into a grin.

"I'm the best fuck you've ever had."

"Is that a fact?"

His eyes danced. "You're crazy in love with me. Admit it."

She wasn't admitting shit. "Fuck you."

"Now you're getting the idea. I'm the only one you're going to fuck for the rest of your life. Get used to it."

She tried to push him away. "You don't own me."

He held fast. "I don't want to own you. I just want to mount that sweet ass of yours every day for the rest of our lives."

For a second the idea of mating with Kane clutched at her heart. Then reason kicked her brain. "Don't start that alpha wolf shit. I'm not your bitch."

His mouth slammed down on hers, the kiss possessive and thorough. Instead of resisting, she grabbed him by the hair and kissed him back.

His hold eased and his lips softened, molding to hers. She pushed her tongue into his mouth. He suckled gently, sending sweet ripples of pleasure all the way to her toes. Sexy, sensual, consuming and loving, his kiss wrapped around her heart. The ultimate combination no man or wolf had ever duplicated.

Kane ignited her desire, burrowed into her heart and reminded her that she was lycan. She'd chosen the human world, letting her lycan spirit slowly die, a lost she-wolf existing without a mate or a pack.

Fuck, she was crying again.

This had to stop. She pushed him away, ran to the edge and dove in the lake. The cold water engulfed her, washing away her foolish tears and stiffening her resolve. Kane would leave and she'd survive. As Veda rose slowly toward the surface, another force slammed into the water.

Kane surfaced beside her. "The moon is slipping behind the hills. Let's go."

Veda swam to shore, shifted into lycan form and ran. With Kane on her heels, she followed the lake trail to the parking area.

Pacing around her SUV, Veda panted, letting her heart rate settle down before shifting. Kane circled her. She assumed human form, jumped to her feet and opened the driver's door.

Kane rubbed his muzzle against her legs. She pushed his head away and dressed. Without speaking to Kane, she climbed into her vehicle, started the engine and drove out of the parking area. A mile down the road, she glanced again in her rearview mirror. The headlights of Kane's pickup were coming up fast.

Veda smiled. The son of a bitch wasn't giving up. She wanted him, but submitting to Kane carried a price. The idea of rejoining Jance's pack, even with Kane at her side, shook her to the core. Kane's grandfather had ruled her childhood, grooming her as the alpha mate for Jance and denying her the basic freedoms she enjoyed living as a human.

No way in hell would she submit to Ryland rule and pack law.

* * *

Kane followed her home. As the vehicles approached her building, a huge industrial roll-up door began to rise. Veda drove into the parking garage and pulled forward just far enough for him to park behind her. He punched the gas, sliding the pickup beneath the closing door with only a few inches to spare and slammed on the brakes. His front bumper almost kissed the SUV's rear end. She tossed him a grin and strode into a service elevator.

He jumped out of his pickup, slammed the door, and scooted into the elevator before she closed the gate. "Are you trying to get rid of me?"

"If I was, you wouldn't have made it beneath the door."

"We need to talk."

"No, we don't." He started to speak but Veda placed her fingertip to his lips. "You can stay as long as you don't speak."

He caught her fingertip in his mouth and suckled. He'd chipped away at her defensive layers, made her angry, made her cry. What he wanted to do now had nothing to do with words. She yanked her finger out of his mouth.

The elevator shuddered to a stop on the top floor. She stepped into the foyer and removed her shoes. Kane did the same and followed her through the living area and into an open kitchen. All the appliances and cabinets ran along one long wall in a modern linear design. The counter top was stainless steel. A series of polished industrial lights illuminated the space.

Kane appreciated the sleek contemporary style, the stainless steel appliances, especially the subzero refrigerator, but the place had no heart or soul. The space would never feel warm and cozy. The glass table and steel chairs didn't invite one to sit and enjoy a morning cup of coffee. He longed for home, his kitchen with its ancient appliances, wooden cabinets and breakfast nook with a view of the ocean. Kane wondered if Veda would love it as much as he did.

She removed a bottle of vodka from the freezer. "I like it icy cold. Want a drink?"

Straight vodka wasn't his preference but he nodded his acceptance. She poured the liquor over ice and held out his glass. The vodka felt good on his throat. Veda didn't drink cheap booze.

"I'm going to take a shower and wash my hair."

He lifted his eyebrow.

An inviting smile curved her lips. "You can watch if you want."

"I want."

Kane followed her through the living room, past the white leather sofa. The black and white photos on the wall were desolate landscapes of glaciers and frozen tundra. The furniture was expensive, the décor stark, the ambiance lonely, detached. The outside world didn't enter this space.

The bedroom had a touch of blue, but gray was the predominant color. Devoid of anything personal except a couple of paperback novels, the room felt unlivable, too sterile, as if one were looking at a display instead of a place where a beautiful woman slept. Made love?

Kane inhaled. No scent of human or wolf, none but Veda's.

She turned, took a drink and set the half empty glass on a chest of drawers. "I don't bring my lovers here."

Although he knew about the cop and Jance had mentioned her preference for human sex partners, Veda's verbal acknowledgement of their existence stabbed at his heart.

She pulled off her black sweatshirt, dropped it on the floor and unzipped her jeans. Kane's gaze fastened on her breasts then slid down her torso to the vee of the open zipper. With slow deliberation she removed her jeans.

Did she have any idea how beautiful she was? Her pale skin was flawless, her breasts high with dark pink nipples, her waist small, the slope of her hips gentle. Her legs were slender and long. Kane bet she chose vodka over a healthy meal on far too many occasions. His gaze slid up to the thatch of dark blonde curls between those long legs. He swallowed.

"You'd better remove those jeans before your cock pokes a hole in them."

He glanced down at the obvious bulge. Setting down his drink, he stripped off his clothes.

"My turn to stare."

Her gaze on his erection, Veda slid her tongue along the rim of her glass then downed the vodka. She walked backwards into the bathroom. Cock leading, Kane followed.

Like the kitchen, the bathroom was linear in design. The walls and counter were tiled in gray stone and a huge shower consumed the far corner. A tiled bench ran along one side of the shower.

Veda stepped into the shower and turned on the water. A series of nozzles sprayed water in a myriad of angles. He watched her wash her hair and rinse. Rivulets of shampoo ran down her neck to her nipples. She filled her palms with gel and soaped her skin, using her hands to gently cleanse her arms, breasts, belly and sex.

Stone hard, Kane stepped into the shower. Hot water drummed on his head and torso. Soapy and slick, Veda's hands grasped his cock and cupped his balls, the contact provocative and promising, lingering. Stretched to the point of pain, he reached for her.

She pushed his hands aside, pumped more gel from the shower applicator into her palms and washed his chest and arms. More gel, she scrubbed his back and fondled his ass. Slick fingers slid between his legs.

The hot spray pummeled his body, rinsing the soap from his skin. Balls humming, Kane groaned and shoved his hair off his forehead and opened his eyes. She knelt before him, stroking his swollen cock from base to head and back again, driving him insane.

He ached to grab her by the hair and guide her beautiful lips. Instead he gripped a shower nozzle and let her torment him with her sensual hands. Damn, his balls ached. The kind of ache he'd dreamed about for months, tight, thrumming, full, ignited by Veda's erotic touch and her mating scent. She knew how to make him suffer, make him want, a master at bringing him to a fevered pitch. Then she'd --

Ohhhh.

Hot and moist, her mouth closed around him, bringing instant relief and exquisite torture. Her tongue swirled around the crown, suckled, and slid along the underside as she swallowed his length, tugged her way back to the crown and took him so deep he reeled from the impact, almost climaxing.

She gripped the root of him and squeezed, held his balls, sealed her lips around him and devoured him, up-and-down, faster, tighter.

The deep thrum in his balls increased to delicious pain and beyond until his knees threatened to buckle and his breath froze in his lungs.

He inhaled, taking in her lush scent. His blood heated and need raged. Kane ached to shift and mount her, but the timing wasn't right. He needed to come inside her, fill her hot pussy, ease the intense pressure building in his balls.

Gripping her hair, he stepped back, popping his cock out of her mouth before he came. Riding the edge, Kane sat on the bench and grasped her by the thighs. Shoving his knees between hers, he drew her onto his lap.

Her eyes burned blue fire as he fisted his cock and sought entrance. Pushing between her wet pussy lips, he slid inside. Gripping her hips, he pulled her toward him, shoving his cock so deep she gasped.

Hot pulsing waves shot from his balls. She throbbed around him, clenching, grabbing, milking his climax.

Several minutes later Kane smiled. "We should try this in a bed."

Veda laughed. They'd never made love in a bed. Fields, meadows, vehicles, rock face, shower, everywhere but on a bed. At least they'd moved the action inside. "Did we do it in a shower before?"

"Yeah, remember the shower room at the lake? I got the key and we... This is cleaner."

"We should try it with a cock ring."

His eyebrow arched up. "Cock ring? When did you get into toys?"

"Where have you been? Living in a monastery?"

He might as well have. Reaching up, he brushed her wet hair off her forehead. "When we're like this, it's like those years never happened."

"They happened, Kane."

"I love you, Veda. That's never changed."

The words she'd lived for once were like a harsh slap. He loved her and that meant she should roll over and expose the soft underbelly of her feelings, her heart and submit to the alpha male and pack law? Fuck no! "I can't go back."

She scrambled off his lap and rinsed away the come running down her thigh. Stepping out of the shower stall, she grabbed a towel and wrapped it around her. Without looking at him, Veda grabbed her glass off the tiled counter and rushed to the kitchen.

What the hell had she been thinking, letting him into her sanctuary, fucking him again? Open your legs and male wolves thought they owned your soul. She poured a stiff one and took a long drink.

"Vodka's not going to change how I feel."

Spinning on her heel, she challenged him. "And your return isn't going to make it all go away."

He stood in the living room with a towel wrapped around his lean hips. "I love you."

"You're in love, so that solves everything?" She took another drink and slammed the glass down on the kitchen counter. "It didn't help me when you took off and left me to face Asdon's wrath!"

Eyes narrowed he stepped toward her. "You think I --"

"You left me, you bastard! You told me you loved me then you gave me to Jance and walked away."

"My grandfather selected you for Jance before you could walk." He moved closer. "He knew how much I loved you. He didn't care how we felt. He had plans for you."

"His plans. Not mine. I refused."

"He never counted on your strength or the depth of our feelings." Kane reached out and ran a fingertip along her bare shoulder and down her arm. "Did you tell him you loved me?"

She'd screamed her love to no avail. "He knew. The pack wanted me to mate with Jance. After you left, I had no one."

"I wanted you, Veda, more than anyone or anything." He grasped her by the hips. "I demanded my right to challenge Jance for mating rights, to run beneath the Lycaon Moon and claim you, but grandfather refused and the elders wouldn't defy him. He banished me!"

"*Banished?*" A banished wolf was taken by force and dropped in the wild far from civilization and his pack, left to survive on his own.

"I was drugged, flown to Alaska, and dropped naked at the edge of a glacier. I lived on the tundra with an arctic pack."

"You're lucky you survived."

"I don't think grandfather wanted me to die. He wanted me out of the way long enough for you to accept your proper place and give birth to Jance's child."

She caressed his jaw, letting her fingertips slid over the dark stubble shadowing his cheeks. "Why didn't you contact me, let me know where you were?" *I would have come.*

"As long as Grandfather lived I was forbidden to return. I had no assets, no home, no future, nothing to offer until I met an old wolf who took me in and changed my life."

"Asdon's been dead for over a year."

"The news took a while to reach me. I didn't want to talk to Jance so I contacted Aislyn. She told me that you had left the pack, and I began making plans for my return. I swore Aislyn to secrecy."

"Where have you been living?"

"A remote island in Alaska. The owner was the old wolf. He passed away a few months ago and since then I've been taking care of the place for the heir."

"How do you make a living?"

"The island has a main lodge with a restaurant, a bar and six cabins. I cook, tend bar and rent the cabins to fishermen during the summer. The fishing is unsurpassed. I've remained close with the arctic pack. During the long, dark winters many seek sanctuary on the island."

Veda was surprised he hadn't mated with a member of the pack. "If things are good, why leave your island? Why come back?"

"Grandfather had no right to banish me, to disinherit me and tarnish my name. I've been planning, working toward this day. I came back to right those wrongs."

"When I left the pack, he disinherited me, too. But I don't care. I've made my own way."

He pulled her closer and wrapped his arms around her waist. Her breasts touched his chest. "I need your help, Veda."

The hairs on the back of her neck stood.

"I want you to run beneath the Lycaon Moon."

The claiming moon! Was he out of his mind? She tried to break free, but he held her tight. "No fucking way! How dare you come back and use me to have a pissing contest with Jance. You're not putting my freedom on the line because you want Asdon's money."

He looked around. "This place is freedom?"

She pushed at his chest. "You're pissing me off, Kane."

He pulled her into the living room. "Take a good look, Veda. This is only existence!"

"This is my sanctuary."

"It's a tasteful prison of expensive leather and chrome. But it's still a prison. You're lycan. You might as well be in solitary."

"I chose solitary."

"Because you had nowhere else to go. I love you and I'm offering you more than bail jumpers, vodka and an occasional fuck."

She slapped his face. "I'm no wolf's bitch!"

He shoved her onto the leather sofa. The towel fell away as she landed on her butt. She tried to get up. He pushed her back down.

"You fuck humans. Men who don't know who or what you are, men that will never understand you or have any appreciation for the ancient blood flowing in your veins."

"You ambitious fuck!"

She scrambled onto her knees seeking escape over the back of the sofa. He fell against her, trapping her against the soft leather. He grabbed her wrists and his knees slid between hers. "Don't deny our love, our future."

His groin pressed against her butt. "This has nothing to do with love! You just want Asdon's power and his money."

"I just want you."

The head of his cock probed her center. She tried to resist by moving her hips. He slid inside, dipping into her with short strokes, teasing her to near madness. "Fucking me isn't going to change my mind."

"Your scent would drive any wolf beyond reason. You're in my blood. A night hasn't passed without you in my dreams. I awaken hard, aching for you." He thrust deep, stretching her, filling her. Rubbing his face in her hair, he whispered, "In a few hours you'll be fucking me."

The truth of his words careened through her as he released her hands and gripped her hips. Her blood ran hot, needy. Desire, driven by her lycan mating time, overwhelmed her anger. Her pussy ached.

His groin slapped against her ass, driving his thick cock deep inside, fucking her hard, grinding her clit against the leather.

Veda wanted to scream, demand more. She gritted her teeth. "I won't run."

He nipped her shoulder. His breathing came harsh, lusty. "I want a mate."

"I won't be forced."

He slowed his wild pace, but each thrust came fast, deep, a short pause, a thrust, a pause, another deep thrust. His fingertips dug into her hips. "I love you, Veda."

Another fast thrust, and another, each demanding and driven. His arms shook.

She rode the edge.

"Your pussy is dripping wet." He growled. A ripple moved along his length signaling his climax.

She clenched, came. Her breath caught and her heat poured from her body.

His chest heaved. "Face it, Veda. You like me inside you."

"It's not desire for you. It's my moon time."

"I'm gonna fuck you, love you, fill you with come until the moon is high. And you're going to enjoy every minute of it."

Damn him, she would.

A few minutes later he withdrew. Pulling her down on with him, he stretched out on the sofa. "It's dawn. Maybe we should rest."

She pushed his damp hair off his forehead. "Tired?"

"Veda, you'd exhaust man or wolf. I need fuel, energy to burn."

"How about a steak, very rare? There are other things besides cock I crave during my moon time."

* * *

Veda loved looking at Kane's handsome face and sleek, muscled body. To her he personified male perfection and during her moon time she intended to make use of his amazing cock. The breeding instinct ran high in *weres*, and given her fertile state Kane's olfactory system had to be doing cartwheels.

Kane believed the more they fucked, the more her resistance to his plan would wane and by moonrise she'd be putty in his hand. If he mounted her during her moon time, took her in lupine form, she'd be his forever. But Veda had no intention of running beneath the moon and living by pack rule.

She wanted Kane, but on her terms. And right now she wanted him inside her. For years, she'd suffered through her moon time, horny and wanting, but she'd resisted

the temptation to shift and seek out a wolf. As long as she remained in human form tonight, she was safe and free.

Rising on her knees, Veda positioned her pussy above Kane's face and waited for his acute olfactory system to go on alert. She didn't have to wait long.

He inhaled and his eyes opened. "I love your scent."

She fisted his silky hair and lowered her pussy to his mouth. He gripped her ass, dug his fingers into her buttocks and licked her. Kane knew how to use his lips, tongue and teeth. He licked her pussy, sliding his tongue over her slick walls and sucked her clit. Veda gave into the magic. Sweet and sharp her climax overtook her.

Looking up at her, Kane gave her a crooked smile. "I'm crazy about you. Marry me."

She laughed and straddled his chest. Loving a strong *were* like Kane would be more than mere words. It was all consuming, binding her to him forever. Once she'd wanted that lycan bond more than life itself until she'd gotten a taste of freedom. Yes, her life was lonely, but she was her own woman, and she liked it.

Would Kane accept a life together outside the law of the pack?

Reaching between her legs, she stroked Kane's cock. He cupped her breasts, raking his thumbs over her nipples. Her flesh went tight and hard. Fire licked through her. She gripped his cock and pulled, sliding her fingers up to the crown and back down to the root.

"Marry me, Veda. Be my wife, my mate."

"Your bitch?" She touched his balls with her index finger and carefully stroked his sac.

"It's always been you." He licked her nipple. "You're in my blood."

She gripped his cock. "Let's not complicate things."

"Complicate things? It's been three years for me. There's been no one else."

Was it possible? "No one?"

"I love you so much. I couldn't. I've waited for the right time to come back for you. I want to marry you, Veda. I want my own pack."

Her hand froze. There it was, the thing she feared most. "With my bloodline?"

"With the she-wolf I love."

Shaking her head, she released his erection and scrambled off his chest. "That's why you came back."

"I came back for you, to claim you by pack law so we can be together." He sat up and reached out. "No wolf could challenge our love."

Needing to distance herself from his touch, she moved to the edge of the bed. "Pack law has nothing to do with me, not any more. You don't need to claim me for us to be together. Admit it, Kane this is about your inheritance and using my bloodline to breed. You want to be the alpha."

He ran his fingertip along her jaw. "I love you, Veda. Together we can have it all. Everything we dreamed of."

The wound she'd managed to close ripped open. "All I wanted was you."

"Then run tonight."

Asdon had reminded her of her duty to the pack and threatened to disinherit her. Jance had tried to seduce her with the power and status of being his alpha mate. She'd rejected the money and the status. What she'd wanted was Kane. One wolf. One love.

But her love wasn't enough for Kane. "No." She rose from the bed and grabbed a clean tank top and sweat pants from the chest-of-drawers. Kane sat in the center of her bed watching her dress.

"Everything we've ever wanted is within our reach."

"Everything *you* want."

"What is it you want, Veda?"

I want you to love me more than money, more than power and not for my bloodline. "I want you to leave."

"What the fuck is so great about your life? No friends. No family. Once I claim you, the pack elders will have no choice but to rescind my banishment and consecrate our union."

"What the fuck is so great about pack life? I've done well despite Asdon and the pack elders. I make a good income, and I'm free for the first time in my life."

"You're not of the human world. You're lycan. It's who you are."

"You don't need me, Kane. Others will run tonight, choose one of them and live the life you want."

"I do need you."

"Me or my bloodline?"

A deep growl came from Kane's throat. He scooped his jeans off the floor and yanked them on. He picked up his tee shirt and leveled a fierce gaze at her. "I didn't spend the last three years hiding out. You did that. Every day I thought of you and I together, leading our own pack, creating a new breeding line."

"You're talking about our babies, our children, as if they were specimens. You're no different from your grandfather."

"That's right, Veda. Our babies. The joining of two ancient blood clans blessed by the elders."

"I heard all that crap about a super lycan race years ago. I won't be used."

"I don't want a super race. I'm trying to save the arctic pack that saved my life. You're one of them. The pack of your mother and father, grandparents, ancestors. Your bloodline is dying."

"What?"

"The old wolf on the island was Marcand Pearl, your grandfather. He made the agreement with Asdon to revive the pack. Your offspring were to be split between the two packs."

Anger burned in Veda. "Power plays of old wolves."

"If you were the alpha and your pack was dying, what would you do?"

"I'm not the alpha."

"But you are. You have the pure bloodline and are a descendent of one of the most ancient ruling alphas. You can save the pack or let it die."

"Why didn't you spread around some of the strong Ryland semen and save them yourself?"

"The females are beyond their breeding years and you were the only female of your generation to survive because your grandfather sent you to Asdon. The fever that took your parents wiped out the pack. Only a few survived. Your grandfather was desperate, mine was simply greedy."

"Greedy?"

"Your grandfather paid handsomely for your safety."

"He paid Asdon?"

"He also gave up the only female grandchild he had. It wasn't easy for him to send you away. He saved your life and he sacrificed for the pack."

"Why didn't Asdon tell me this? He used every other method to coerce me. Why not this?"

"I think he feared you'd take off and seek out the truth. If you had, you would have found Marchand and me. The last thing Grandfather wanted was for you and I to be together."

"I'm asking you to run tonight. Maybe I'm not the wolf of your dreams but you owe it to your blood clan to mate. You're the heir, Veda. The island, the sanctuary of the arctic pack, belongs to you."

To Veda's shock, Kane strode out of her bedroom. She hustled after him. He couldn't dump all this on her and leave. "Kane?"

He stepped into the elevator and pushed the button. "Run tonight and may the best wolf win."

Chapter Seven

A flash of silvery fur set Kane's heart pounding.

Her white coat silvered by the Lycaon Moon, Veda raced to the top of a small rise, stopped, threw back her head and rent the night. Several wolves answered her mating howl.

Kane leaped forward, running the race of his life. Instead of following Veda's scent along the winding trail to the top of the summit, he took an alternate route.

He'd waited so long for this moment his blood sang as he darted around tree trunks and crossed lazy streams. Most wolves would follow Veda's scent, but Kane opted for the shorter, steeper climb on the backside of the mountain. Veda would force her pursuers to follow her to the highest summit.

Mating howls filled the forest and small nocturnal animals scurried out of Kane's path, seeking the safe refuge of their burrows.

The climb tested his strength but Kane had spent hours running steep grades and rocky hillsides preparing for this event. His lungs burned and his breath exploded as he raced time. His paw caught on the edge of a stone, the pain ignored as he pushed on.

Cresting the last rise he leaped forward over the dark pit between two boulders. His front paws landed on the rough surface, skidding as his back paws touched down. He'd run this route in both daylight and darkness, taking the long, dangerous leap between the boulders, becoming familiar with the terrain.

He raced around the jutting summit to the softer moonlight drenched slope. Tail high and white coat gleaming, Veda paced in a tight circular pattern.

Her ears pricked forward and her muzzle lifted.

Panting, Kane sucked air into his burning lungs. The scent of her ripe womb beckoned, triggering his mating receptors. Between the exertion of the climb and her

musky scent, his blood ran high and the primal need to mate pounded at the base of his cock, knotting tight and painful.

She glanced over her shoulder and swished her tail.

Kane approached and pawed her hip. She skittered away and circled back, rubbing her side against his, scenting his fur.

The yips and snarls of approaching wolves warned him time was short. Leaping on her back, he bit the ruff of her neck and forced her down into submission. She snarled. Hips rocking, he nipped and growled. She pushed up onto her four paws and Kane mounted her. He probed her swollen entrance and pushed inside the soft, hot flesh, sliding deep into her pulsing sheath.

She danced beneath him, reacting to the arrival of four competitors. The wolves circled them, licking her muzzle, pushing their noses beneath her belly. A long wet tongue slid over Veda's sex and Kane's balls.

Veda growled in warning and nipped one of the wolves.

She clenched around him, holding him tight, aiding him. Kane thrust deep, seating his swollen cock, locking them together in a climactic knot. A brown wolf with yellow eyes bumped him, trying to force him off. Another bit Kane, viciously sinking a canine in his hip.

Locked together, Kane and Veda moved in unison, baring their teeth and sidestepping the aggressive tactics of the scent driven wolves. Veda nipped one young wolf's ear, sending him away with his tail between his legs.

The others appeared determined to interfere until another female's mating howl rent the night. With tails flying, they raced off into the brush and toward another inviting howl.

Kane braced his paws, digging into Veda's soft fur, thrusting quick and shallow, filling her with spurts of hot wolven semen. Finally, the painful knot eased.

You had me worried, Kane. I had a devil of a time shaking off that young wolf. Thankfully, he's easily distracted.

You did the right thing. You honor your ancestors.

I didn't do it for them.

Kane's heart lurched. *Then why?*

I love you, Kane. And if I'm to save my pack by having wolf babies, they might as well be yours.

Chapter Eight

Waves pounded the rocky coast, and silvery moonlight glanced over the dark water. The cool night wind slid over Veda's hot skin. She braced her hands on the deck railing and lifted her face into the tangy salt air.

"I thought I'd find you here." Kane wrapped his arms around her and splayed his hands over her rounded belly. The baby kicked. "She's as restless as her mother."

"It's the moon." Veda leaned against Kane's solid chest. A fiery ripple slid through her as her husband massaged her swollen breasts and teased her nipples to aching points. She moaned.

"Horny?"

She reached up and rubbed her palm against his cheek, loving the rough feel of his stubble. "What do you think?"

He laughed softly and kissed her inner wrist. "Happy?"

She loved the isolation of the island, the ocean and the trees. When the elders had blessed their union, the monies set aside by Asdon were released. They had closed the island to tourists, opening the doors of the lodge only to wolves. A few visited, but most left the honeymooners in peace. She had Kane all to herself. Yes, she was happy. "Very."

"I love you, Veda." His hand slid over her belly, down to the soft curls between her legs. "I can't imagine life without you."

The pad of his thumb skimmed over her clit, back and forth, stroking her, adding kindling to the fire that had awoken her. Pregnant and aroused, she used Kane's hard body with wanton abandon. He never complained.

Easing his forefinger inside her, Kane fucked her with slow precision. He stroked her clit with his thumb, taking his time, making her burn, while planting soft, sensual kisses on her shoulder and sexy nips on her back. "I'll always love you."

Veda closed her eyes to the moonlight, to the past, to everything but Kane's sweet lips and caring touch. Love for Kane and her baby swept through her ripe, lush body. Like a smooth, rolling wave her climax overtook her, rocked her and left her wanting more.

Aching with need, she rubbed her ass against Kane's groin, letting him know she wanted him. He ran his fingers up her spine, bent her forward. She grabbed onto the railing and arched her ass high. Reaching between her legs, he caressed her pussy, gently fucking her with his long fingers. Already hot and creamy, she needed to put out the fire Kane had ignited.

The broad tip of his cock replaced his finger and slid smoothly, deeply inside her. He rocked his hips, measuring his strokes and growling low in his throat. Veda knew he was holding back, taking care not to thrust too hard.

She moaned when he withdrew all the way to the tip and eased back into her. He slid deeper, withdrew and pushed again, torturing her with careful, easy strokes. She pushed back, forcing his cock deeper. "I'm lycan. I'm not going to break. Fuck me, Kane."

Growling, he gripped her hips and pistoned his cock, in and out, harder and faster, hotter, wetter giving her what she wanted, needed, taking her to the edge. Kane pushed deep, stilled. His climax took her over the edge.

Together, they lifted their faces to the moon and howled.

B. J. McCall

A multi-published author of contemporary and futuristic sensual romance, B.J. McCall is a West Virginia native now residing in Northern California. Thanks to an older sister who was a librarian, reading became B.J.'s favorite pastime. B.J.'s idea of the perfect way to spend a rainy afternoon or a day at the beach is reading a Romance novel. The phrase "Do what you love," applies to B.J. -- she loves to write and each story is special. She hopes her readers will enjoy each and every one of them. Visit her website at www.BJMcCall.com