



# A WALK IN THE WOODS

Kirra Pierce

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## Dedication

*First time author excitement! Thank you to my wonderful critique group and especially Barbara Karmazin for asking me to join. A big thank you also to Angela Knight for her Golden Stiletto contest last year that got me started. And big kisses to my husband, mom, and sisters who said, "Go for it." Thank you to Treva and Judi at Loose Id for their faith and this opportunity.*

## Chapter One: First Night

The dungeon door slammed shut behind her. His eyes glowed yellow in the firelight.

“So you’re what they’ve found for me. You can come closer. I’m bound...for now.”

He was propped up on pillows at the head of a large four-poster bed that dominated the room. Her eyes adjusted to the near-darkness. She could just barely make out a small table beside the bed, on it some roasted meat...fruit...wine...and before the fire a small rug. As the bed dominated the room, so the man dominated the bed. He was huge. She dared a step closer. Manacles tightly wrapped his wrists and were attached to chains that bound his arms to the upper bedposts. Similar chains on the foot posts disappeared under the cover, indicating his feet were also chained to the bed. The firelight flickered over him, highlighting a face of predatory male beauty: high cheekbones, slightly tilted eyes and a long straight nose above a beautifully shaped mouth. His long hair appeared black and trailed over shoulders to mid chest. Naked, dark honey skin covered his well-muscled chest and abdomen. She had the oddest urge to pull back the cover and see what lay beneath and fisted her hand to control the impulse.

His gaze returned her frank assessment. She knew he would see a face that hinted at shared ancestry. Her dark hair was pulled back in a loose braid away from a lean face. Like

him, she also had high cheekbones below slightly tilted eyes. Her much shorter straight nose was above a full bow of a mouth. She wore a knee-length tunic with side splits and loose pants that only hinted at the possible curves beneath. They were the common clothes of a trader.

“Where did they find you? I recognize most of the local people, but I’ve never seen you.”

She straightened her spine even further and took a deep breath before answering. “I stopped at the inn for the night. They grabbed me when I stepped outside. I was tied up before I knew there was danger. My name is Cassandra. Why am I here, with you and *why* are you chained to that bed?”

“My name is Tyler, Ty to my friends. A raver attacked me, the first here in many years. I killed him, but was bitten and infected in the fight. Tonight will be my first moon. We have no brethren to watch me so they’ve locked you in here to see if I become a raver to kill or...” He looked away. His jaw hardened.

“...or become a brother wolf,” she finished.

“Yes.” A faint flush darkened his face. “I am the duke’s man. I visit here often for him, but have no kin or woman of my own to stand with me.” He paused, giving her a significant look. “There is a silver knife on the table. You could kill me before the change begins, but, since I am the duke’s, the local guard would likely kill you on the morrow to try to avoid his wrath. I think the chains will hold me through the worst of the change, but not during the final transformation. If I go mad, and kill you, they will kill me, but, if we both survive the night, we both continue to live.”

Cassandra was shaken. Alone, with someone whose beast was coming for the first time? She always considered herself a practical woman who could find solutions to whatever the road threw at her -- but this was truly unusual. She drew a deep breath, reviewed her knowledge of the brethren, and forced a smile. “So I should make you want to keep me alive.

I do know something of the brethren. You and I have some time yet before the change takes over; let's see what we can do."

Cassandra sat on the edge of the bed. Not touching, but close to the male body that seemed to give off as much heat as the fire.

"Ty, are you hungry?" She took a bit of meat from the table and offered it to him. While his chains were actually loose enough for him to reach the food, it was obviously untouched. Still, from her he took the meat, and then licked her fingers clean. A shiver ran down her spine despite the heat.

"I can taste you under the food, Cassandra. Are you sure it's a good idea for me to associate you with food?"

She pushed away the thought of his soon-to-be-fanged mouth tearing into her flesh and continued to feed him. "Oh yes, I'm going to feed you and take care of your body. You will learn to associate me with pleasure before the moon rises."

Ty took her fingers into his mouth, biting just enough to prevent their escape then sucking and licking more as he watched her intently. Her breath quickened and she unconsciously licked her own lips. He released the fingers with a final lick. "What *do* you know of the beasts?"

"I am a trader. I specialize in spices and medicines. I know of the beasts, the brethren, from my travels. I have even camped with them on occasion. They call me friend. What do *you* know of what will happen to you this night?"

He swallowed the wine she offered. She watched his throat work. She held herself carefully straight and away, although her fingers itched to touch him. She would give him what choices she could. His courage and calm only added to the pull that she had felt just looking at him. He was already incredibly attractive to her as a man and would become only more so with the scent the beasts exuded.



His mouth pulled back into a bitter smile. “I know some: that there will be a fever first, some madness during the change and then the beast will remain. After that I will either kill you as prey or not.”

She swallowed. *Well, that was the bald truth.* “That’s pretty much correct. The brethren also treat those affected as pack until they go through the change. The bonding helps to control the beast. I’m going to do something of that with you. You’ll have my life in your hands; trust me with your body until then. It will give us a bond to help us get through the night and make you brethren, not raver.”

Ty’s eyes measured her again as she sat next to him and waited. Cassandra was a good trader and knew how to project confidence. She put that confidence into her face now. A small smile formed on Ty’s lips. “I am not usually one to give up control, but...tonight, lady, I give my body over to your care.” His voice trailed off, and he visibly forced the muscles clenched in his shoulders and arms to relax. It was the first sign of weakness or fear he had shown, the first sign of trust.

“Very well, Ty.” She gave a smile of her own. It warmed from one of relief to one of possession. She reached into the small purse tied to her waist and pulled out a comb.

“This room is nicely warm.” Standing, she placed the comb on the table and turned her back to him. First she untied the purse and dropped it to the floor, and then, gathering her courage, she pulled off her tunic. Her hand loosened the tie holding her pants. Bending to remove them, she displayed her round ass and grinned as she heard his breath hitch then deepen. Standing, she turned back to face him and revealed a body that was slim but muscled, suited to the physical demands of one who constantly traveled. She considered her breasts well rounded, but not overly generous. Her whole body glowed with a light sheen of sweat, both from nerves and the heated room.

His voice came out in a whisper. “You are beautiful.”

She flushed, but her voice was firm when she spoke. "Sit up, Ty. There is enough slack in your chains for that."

He silently obeyed her and sat straight up. The chains forced his arms back at an awkward angle.

Naked, she slipped under his arm and into the bed behind him. She took the comb from the table in a hand that only shook a little. "You may sit back."

Tensely, he leaned back into her body. She reached up and began to comb his hair with gentle tugs to remove the snarls, then long soothing strokes. The tension that had gripped his body faded away.

Even before he relaxed, the seductive scent of the beast had begun to fill the air around him. It, the heat of his body, and touch of his skin worked to relax her as much as him. He let his head sag forward. The movement pushed his ass tightly against her cunt. Cassandra muffled a moan as the heat of his body contacted her just *there*.

She discarded the comb and began to run her hands through his hair, her fingers lightly rubbing his scalp. He sighed contentedly. Keeping her touch light but firm, she moved her hands down so the nails and tips of her fingers stroked over his neck and shoulders. She pressed a kiss into the center of his back. His breath caught and then he slumped more, relaxing further into her control. She noted his rising body temperature and felt a tremor of her nervousness return.

The change fever was beginning. It was time for more.

She reached round his chest with her hands. Her legs kicked the covers down. Her feet then curved over his legs, pulling in toward his body. The action pushed his legs open further. She held him there and his breath quickened. Her finger kneaded the flesh around his nipples while her feet pulled all the way up inside his legs to surround and cup his balls.

"Uh, Cassandra, what are you going to do?"

She grinned into his back, guessing what he feared. “No harm Ty. I do not intend to geld the beast to control his aggression. Remember, I intend to bind you with pleasure.” The promise in her voice brought a swift rush of blood to Ty’s cock. She skimmed one hand down his stomach to grasp it, sending a small shudder through him. She stroked the hardening flesh with a firm grip while tweaking a nipple with her other hand.

She smiled into his back. “Ty, I think there’s one beast already present in the room.” She gave his cock an extra squeeze for emphasis. “Perhaps I should take a look.” She wiggled free from his back and crawled round to kneel between his legs and face him.

She took her first look at the cock she had uncovered. It was beautiful -- long and thick and firm. Ty’s eyes hooded as she looked. Passion and self-control were evident in the harsh lines of his face. She heard him mutter *patience* to himself and wondered if he knew he spoke.

Cassandra smiled again as she leaned over and gave the cockhead a gentle, suctioning kiss. Ty pulled in a breath and let out a low groan.

She pulled away with a slight pop and continued to look with admiration. “Lovely.” His cocked twitched. It seemed to preen and swell even more at her praise.

Ty tensed again and gasped, “The fever is increasing. The change will be coming soon.”

She placed her hands on his chest again, urging him to lie back on the pillows. He shuddered and drew a deep breath to ride out the heat wave.

“Cassandra, your scent is becoming stronger -- no, my senses are beginning to change -- you smell so good! Give me your body.” His arms flexed, pulling the chains, and his eyes glinted with the combined hunger of the man who was present and the beast who was coming.

“No, Ty. Remember you’ve given your body over to me tonight.” He nodded, visibly commanding himself to relax, and sank into the pillows.

Cassandra ran her hands up and down the inside of his thighs then reached out for an unused pillow. “Raise your hips, Ty.” She placed the pillow beneath him so that his cock was thrust even further out with his balls displayed beneath, completely vulnerable.

Gently cupping his balls in one hand she leaned down again, this time fastening her mouth to the tender skin at the juncture of his leg and hip. She suckled it, and he gave an involuntary twitch. She wrapped as much of the thick penis as she could hold in her grip. She moved to suck and lick each ball in turn and then the sensitive skin behind them. His cock wept for her. She let her grip slide over the tip, using his own liquid to lubricate her palm, and then stroked him again. He moaned like a man in pain and moved helplessly in her hand.

“Ty, do you want to come now?”

“Yes.” He spoke harshly and Cassandra’s second hand joined the first in a squeezing twisting dance. She stretched her mouth open wide to take just the tip of his cock and roughly ran her tongue round and round over the head.

With a cry between a shout and a groan he came, shooting the hot cream into her mouth. She continued to milk his shaft. The hot stream overflowed her lips and ran back down over her hands and onto his belly.

He was breathing in small gasps when the shudders stopped and his cock softened.

*Gods, his taste, the scent of his skin, I want him inside now. But I must maintain control.* Cassandra sat back on her heels and, catlike, licked her hands then leaned down over his chest. She held his head between her hands and, finally, kissed his mouth.

At least she began the kiss, but he took it over. His tongue aggressively filled her mouth, caressing and tasting every surface. His mouth moved over her own in a display of possession and pleasure, and then broke away.

Cassandra pulled back and another spasm wracked his body. He burned beneath her.

“Soon, Cassandra, very soon. Take me, before I change and take you.”

Cassandra felt as though the fever had taken her as well, and she shifted back over his semi-hard cock. She parted her labia and rubbed her delicate folds along his cock without taking him into her body, increasing both her excitement and his with this teasing, intimate caress. Then she placed her knees outside his hips and rose above him. Ty's hips twisted and arched beneath her as he tried to reach her with his cock. His eyes glazed with a combination of the change fever and lust. He arched his hips up in a mindless attempt to penetrate, to fuck.

"Ty." Her voice commanded attention. She drove the palm of her hand hard onto the center of his chest. The blow barely fazed him, but when she grabbed his cock with her other hand, he froze. "Ty, let me pull the pillow back out from your hips. Then, relax down on the m the mattress and pull your legs up as much as the chains allow."

Ty shook, but he complied. A low growl rumbled continually from his throat. His eyes had a glassy look and remained fastened on her face.

Cassandra shook softly. His scent affected her terribly, now. She could barely think past the lust that gripped her and the fevered ache that her sex had become.

Cassandra raised her hand up to her face to make sure he saw, then lowered it to reach between her legs to rub the tender flesh and gather its moisture. She allowed herself the decadent pleasure of enjoying his eyes burn for her, and she couldn't hold back the soft moan that fell from her lips. With her other hand she grasped the base of his cock while one finger of the hand she'd moistened reached back behind his balls to circle then push into his anus. She lowered her cunt over his cock and slid down, her tissues stretching to give way.

A cry from Ty's soul screamed out. He became lost to the sensations of Cassandra fucking his cock, her finger fucking his ass, and the change fever continuing its climb. He bucked wildly beneath her, thrusting up harder and harder. Her keening cries joined his until she froze and began to shake with her own contractions. Her inner muscles locked down on him, pushing him over in a final cry that became wilder as he shot himself into her.

Then the change began in earnest.

His cock expanded even further within her and she looked down at his body, watching helplessly while his flesh seemed to roll and reshape itself. In rapid succession, hot oil covered his skin, then fur appeared, and his limbs began to transform. While he changed, Cassandra could only watch, still trapped on his cock. Then between one breath and the next she was thrown onto the bed beside a giant, fully formed wolf that was free from all chains.

The wolf panted. His muscles bunched, ready to fight or pounce on anything that moved. Cassandra lay where she had fallen, still but for her rapid breath and pounding heart.

The wolf growled. He looked around the chamber and down at Cassandra. The growling grew louder, then he stopped and smelled the air deeply. He lowered his head to smell her.

Cassandra's fingers dug into the sheet as she tried to hold in her terror, to not send the wrong response. But she couldn't hold back all the emotion. The wolf was frightening. He was large and aggressive in his confusion after this first shift. The man within the beast would be equally confused and overwhelmed by the changes. Attack would be a natural response.

He continued to growl a warning, but still sniffed almost daintily about Cassandra. His snout brushed her throat where her pulse beat fiercely against her skin. She was paralyzed with fear. The jaws opened, but did not snap shut. Instead his tongue drank the sweat off her neck. Her breath caught, startled in her chest. Would their combined scents and the association with pleasure be enough to calm him or would the beast attack?

He stepped over her body, tickling her with the brush of soft fur. He licked her face and took in their combined scents still clinging to her skin. He continued bathing her, running his tongue around a nipple before moving over her abdomen and finally down to her cunt. There he stopped again then pushed his snout up between her legs to lick their combined juices. The beast tasted, paused, and made a soft whining noise. Then he began

licking Cassandra's pussy with a will. Already drowning in his scent, Cassandra was pulled into the liquid heat of his mouth. His front paws settled on her wrists, eclipsing them and holding them in place. She first sighed and then began to writhe. The sweet ache centering just *there* was taking control of her mind. A gasping cry broke from her as her muscles clenched and locked in the possession of a hard climax. Her body gave forth its liquid silk and the lapping increased as if the beast were very thirsty and she was all there was to drink. Finally her muscles relaxed from their spasm and her hips dropped onto the bed.

While Cassandra lay panting, she felt a new wave of heat coming from the beast. He groaned and shifted again. The wolven face seemed to almost melt back upon itself and assume a man-like appearance. As quickly as the face changed so did the body. Suddenly she was being pressed into the bed by his new form: a huge man-beast. This was the most dangerous form; the fur covered a man-like body with clawed hands and fanged teeth. He would be much stronger than a man, have a man's cunning -- but much of the beast's instincts would remain. It was precarious at best whether he would retain any self-control in this half state.

The man-beast's fur-covered hands still held Cassandra's wrists and the grip tightened. He licked his lips, still tasting all she had given him before. Rising to his knees he inhaled deeply. The look in his eyes was knowing and purely carnal. He lowered himself again to rub his face and body along hers, covering her again in his scent. The beast was following his instincts to let his scent overwhelm and drug Cassandra. Her mind was wiped of all but a blinding need to mate, and she struggled to free her arms and grab him closer.

Instead he flipped her over and grabbed her hips, pulling them up for his use. She felt him nudge and twist to start forcing his enlarged cock into her slick cunt. Although painfully stretched she longed for more and, whimpering, pushed back toward him. She heard him snarl. His claws marked her as he tightened his grip on her hips, asserting control. He thrust in harshly and without mercy.

His beast was in control of them both. He continued to slam into her body. His cock grew even larger, and she whimpered then let out a long keening cry. Her body clenched again and again in helpless spasms around his cock. Her head dropped to the bed, arms uselessly spread beside her head, while she continued to spasm, lost to the climax that would not release her. He continued driving in and out of her flesh. Falling to his elbows, he covered her back. With another snarl he bit into her shoulder and, at last, came with a series of short, jerky thrusts. With his cum the climax that held her finally released and subsided, leaving her shaking with the aftermath.

He continued to cover her, cock still firmly embedded in her body. He began to relax, then his body seized up, grinding more deeply into hers as he shot more cum into her body. Her body reacted by rippling around his cock in an answering peak. The series continued on into the night; Cassandra and the man-beast that was Ty were lost in a drugged haze of sensation without thought until finally they both collapsed into sleep.

\* \* \* \* \*

So weary were the couple that neither heard the faint echoes of a beast howling in the distance, its only audience the deer and rabbits that bounded away from the sound of a predator.



## Chapter Two: A Journey Begins

“Cassandra.”

She struggled to wake, cracking her eyes to see him looking down at her. He was once again in the form of a man although he would never be only a man again. He stared into her eyes. “The morning comes. I can feel the sun’s approach just as I felt the moon coming last night. You saved me, you know. Held me anchored while everything went mad.”

Ty pressed a kiss to her lips with the seriousness of an oath given. “I know you were brought here unwilling, not knowing why, but thank you.”

She looked at the beautiful male face above her. “At least in this form your scent is back under control. I don’t care to give the local guard a show when they come to check on us.”

Ty smiled in acknowledgment of her attempt to lighten the mood, but pressed on with his thoughts. “Cassandra, last night you said you know some of the brethren. I think...I need to spend time with them. The beast is still alive inside me.” Ty’s face remained in control, but she heard a ripping sound. His hands fisted and tore the bedsheet in the agitation he sought to conceal.

Compassion for the man filled her. She had witnessed the struggles of the newly made before, but then it was from the safety of a brethren campsite where there were many brethren to act as guides for them.

“Ty, you know there are no brethren camps near here; they haven’t been needed. Mythra was the last town I visited where there was a brethren campsite. It is likely they are still there. It is five days’ journey from here. If they have moved on, then you can be sure of finding help at the permanent community in the capital, but it’s about three weeks from there. Or you can go straight to the capital from here and take no chances. In any case, it is most likely that you will continue to change nightly to your beast form. Most men do for the month following their first moon. How far is it to the duke’s keep? Could he send a friend to go with you?”

“His keep is several days from here. They could lock me up nightly while I wait for help, but I feel savage at the very thought. I think if you had not been here with me, I would have torn the door off last night and then...” He shook his head not wanting to continue with that thought. “I need to go to the closest brethren camp.”

What Cassandra guessed was an unusual amount of emotion now showed in every line of the body pressed into hers.

He began an urgent plea. “Cassandra, come with me. Be my companion. I know you are a trader. I can pay you for your lost trade. I know I am dangerous, but both the man and beast know you -- your touch, your smell. You can help keep other people safe until I reach help. Stay with me.”

Cassandra braced herself to say *no*, to leave this problem behind, but when she looked at his face, the *no* wouldn’t come. She remembered another face and knew she had a debt to pay.

“I have what I needed most on this trading trip. I could start back, with you, toward Mythra. How soon can you be ready?”

She met Ty's surprised but appraising look with the steadiness of a warrior giving a pledge. With a nod he accepted it.

"I will see you honored for this, Cassandra. I don't know why you've agreed, but you have my pledge in return. I have the means to give you wealth and a boon of equal measure from me."

"I accept. Let's dress before the local guard decides it's safe to check on us."

Soon they heard footsteps. An anonymous hand pulled open the window on the door.

"She lives!"

While Ty wrote a message for the duke, Cassandra pulled aside a few of the town leaders who had finally shown up to see that their town was indeed the birthplace of a brethren, not a raver. She reminded them that the trader network would know that she had been there and if they didn't want their town blacklisted, they had better treat their guests much better. The mention of blacklisting caused paled faces all around. After repeated apologies and the receipt of a heavy purse -- she was a trader after all -- she graciously forgave their misjudgment, confident they would not make this mistake again.

Their steps made small dust clouds as they walked from the town. Cassandra's horse would be sheltered by the town sheriff since horses would not be likely to last the nights while Ty's beast ruled him. The town council did send a rider ahead of them to warn the brethren camp and, hopefully, persuade them to send help to meet Cassandra and Ty on the road. If the brethren were still where Cassandra last saw them, they should be able to meet Cassandra and Ty before the third night -- but that still left them alone for two nights.

In the woods outside of Howerth another beast was finally waking. Stealthy footsteps took it around the edges of the town unseen. Its ears cocked, it listened silently to the excited

voices of the townspeople. Their gossip was full of the raver attack and its murder by local guardsmen and Duke Cynbarion's man, Tyler. Even more, this Tyler was now a brethren. A lovely trader had helped make him so and was traveling with him to a brethren camp to make sure he did not turn raver.

The beast had heard enough. He turned to follow down the same road as the new beast and his trader. If he hurried, he would catch up with them before nightfall. He could always come back and take care of the two remaining local guards later.

\* \* \* \* \*

They had not stopped to talk much while they hurried to pack and now Cassandra wanted to learn more about this man for whom she had risked her life. She looked over her shoulder at the grim set of his face. He marched briskly down the road to her side, but slightly behind her -- almost like he was trying to herd her along.

"You know, we've got a looong walk ahead of us." Ty looked confused for a moment then slowed slightly to make allowance for her shorter legs.

"Sorry, I just want to be there and I wasn't thinking. Truly, I was taught better. I almost wonder if it would be better if I did just carry you. Since the change, I feel much stronger, but edgy -- like the beast could overtake me if I don't rush ahead of it." Ty shrugged, and then continued speaking the words that could no longer be contained. "I hear more, all sorts of little sounds and small animals. Everything smells so much more. Cassandra, I smell your skin and want to grab you. Even now, as a man, I feel like -- " Ty paused and took back control of himself. "Dammit! I don't want to scare you. I will control myself. It's just so much more than the changes that happen at night. It's more than I knew." He shook his head as if to say that he couldn't determine if the *more* was bad or good.

"Ty, I'm so sorry that you are going through this. I don't know all the details, but I do know that once some time has passed, the feeling of being overwhelmed will go and you will be able to function much like before. The brethren I've known...they seem to carry an extra

energy with them, but they trade and carry on with the town's people normally. What I've seen of their family life is excellent. Some even live separate from the clans, although most, of course, travel with them." Cassandra stopped and took both of Ty's hands, then looked up into his eyes. "*We* will make it to the camp and *you will* make it through this transformation."

Ty gave Cassandra's hands a squeeze in return and stared back into her eyes. The strength she had shown last night was there. The air of competence that she wore like a cloak was in every line of her body. Satisfied, he gave a nod.

Releasing his hands and starting to walk again, Cassandra continued. "However, we do have a few days to get through before we reach the brethren camp. Since you are so full of energy, you can do the talking. I know you serve the duke and your bearing is that of a military man. I could make more guesses about your background, but I'd rather hear what you have to say of yourself."

Ty looked at her as they walked, again surprised that she had agreed to risk herself and be his companion.

"The duke is a distant cousin. My family is minor nobility. Actually, we are traders of sorts ourselves; we are based out of the port of Sreen. My older brother runs the family business. As you noted, I studied at his majesty's military academy. I served for a time in the capital guard and was part of the company we sent to our allies in Birne when their neighbors were making hostile noises. Cynbarion -- the duke -- and I have been close since childhood, so after I got back he asked me to join his household as his personal representative. I've been there for a year now."

A wry smile played across his mouth. "I can say that I've done well with all I've tried. I'm discreet, trustworthy, good in a fight, and I honor my debts." This last was said with a significant look toward Cassandra. "I have an older and a younger brother and a sister. My parents are both alive.

“I’m incredibly grateful you would go with me, but why, Cassandra? Your clothes and manner speak of a comfortable living, so I don’t think you’re desperate for what I can pay you. Why risk your life this way? The night will almost certainly bring the beast and I will touch you and take you again. Although I don’t think I will hurt you -- I can barely keep my hands off you now -- why risk it?”

Cassandra looked at the intent face next to her, but only said, “Let’s just say there are times when we all desperately need help. This is my time to give it and your company is not so hard to bear.”

With that she turned her eyes from Ty and back to focus on the road ahead.

They walked quietly for the rest of the morning before stopping for lunch.

While Cassandra rested, Ty moved about restlessly. She could feel his eyes on her with each breath she took. It made her conscious of the way her clothes hugged her body when she reached for water or food. Finally she gave a heavy sigh. “Ty, do you realize you’re pacing around me like an animal deciding the best way to attack?”

Ty abruptly stopped and dropped to sit in front of Cassandra.

“I’m sorry. I feel like I’m burning with energy and it’s focusing on you. You know what will happen later? What I want from you now? Why, Cassandra? Why have you agreed to be my companion? If I was fully a brethren, I could guarantee pleasure, but with my beast newly made and not yet controlled -- I don’t think I will hurt you, but why do you stay? I’m afraid for what may happen if you leave, if you run.” Ty took her hands and searched her face.

Pain filled Cassandra’s eyes. A voice that sounded broken fell out of her mouth. “My parents were traders. They died in an accident when I was very young. I have no siblings, but there was someone like a brother to me. He survived a raver’s attack. He...killed after his first change. He had no guide. He killed himself before it could happen again. I will never let that happen if I can stop it. Is that enough for you?”

She yanked her hands free to wipe her face, but Ty reached out and pulled her into his arms, pressing her head to his shoulder. He rocked her as she shuddered with suppressed emotion. “Thank you,” he murmured. “I could see you here, with me, but...I needed to feel in my gut, I had to *know*, that you would stay.”

Cassandra gently pulled away, feeling embarrassed. She had developed a trader’s easy manner of talking with many people, but she rarely shared deep emotions.

Ty’s hand firmly held her chin and pulled her forward again as he leaned toward her. His lips pressed hers softly for a moment, then his hand reached around to grip her head and pull her whole body to his as he deepened the kiss and lay fully down. His other hand moved, pressing her from shoulder to hip into his body. His hand tightened on her hip and he ground himself into her groin. She opened her legs with remembered wanting.

He broke the kiss and buried his face against her neck with a groan. He put his lips against her neck in an open-mouthed bite that did not mark her, but promised things for later. Then, quickly he pushed her an arm’s length away.

“You promised to bind me with pleasure, remember?” he said with a self-deprecating pull of his mouth and a twinkle in his eye.

Cassandra returned the smile in appreciation. “Perhaps we should get moving; I had a better camp spot in mind for tonight that’s still some miles from here.” With that she moved to put away her lunch remains.

\* \* \* \* \*

Downwind, too far away for human ears to pick up the sound, a figure crouched behind a rock and listened intently.

*She sat with one of my kind when he needed help! But, no help with my hurts. Blood cries out for blood. Confused, he pondered what would be fair. I will grant both one more day and night, but then...then I will have my justice. Master will see.*

\* \* \* \* \*

Cassandra and Ty began moving at a swift pace, but with Ty seeming more relaxed than before. Cassandra sighed, hating to break the feeling of easy camaraderie, yet questions about the raver who attacked Ty were still eating at her mind.

“Ty, this may be difficult for you, but can you tell me how this came about? You must not have known about the raver when you went to Howerth or you would have brought more men. Did anyone know about him before you were attacked?” She paused. “Are you sure there was only one?”

Ty grunted and rubbed his shoulder as if remembering the now healed wound. “I was in Howerth on a routine visit, just there to show the duke’s interest and mediate any disagreements as necessary. I went on patrol with two of the local guards. We heard screams on the far west end of town and went as fast as we could. When we arrived, we could barely dismount; our horses began to buck and panic. Jarod, one of the guards, was thrown from his horse. Garran stopped to check him while I, foolishly, went inside alone. I expected to see a husband and wife fighting or maybe a robber, but it was...something else. The floor was covered in blood. A woman was dying, her husband already dead. The beast was next to him, tearing into his body. The damned creature! As soon as it saw me with my sword, he turned to jump out the back window. I threw a knife at it without thinking and hit it just behind the shoulder. It screamed an awful noise but still escaped.”

Cassandra’s eyes widened. She watched him breathlessly, although he seemed not to notice her. Ty’s voice retained the flat tone of someone relating a report, but his mouth tightened and pulled back when he spoke of the scream. Caught up in his memory, he kept speaking.

“I went to the woman as Garran and Jarod entered behind me. They got there just in time to see the creature jumping out.

“The woman died gasping for help before I could even find her worst wound.”



Cassandra sucked in a quick, shocked breath, living the horror of the moment with Ty. She laid a sympathetic hand on his arm. He covered it with his other hand and gave it a quick squeeze before continuing.

“Garran and Jarod were obviously shaken. They had never seen one before, but we all knew. It was a raver and it would keep killing until it died. Although both of their faces were pale, they still had nerve enough. Our horses had run off so we immediately left to begin tracking it on foot. Even out here people know the beasts heal quickly in any form and heal almost any injury when they change. We wanted him that night, before he could heal, while we could identify him and kill him.”

*Gods, to be forced to hunt a man knowing you had to kill him.* A grim sympathy filled her, while she also felt a moment of relief that such duties were not hers.

“The moon was almost full, and it was bright enough to easily follow the blood and tracks. The tracks began to look unsteady, like the beast was losing strength. It was, but we forgot its intelligence. The beast doubled back to an area that overlooked its trail and waited. As soon as I passed, it jumped me on my sword side, gouging my back with its teeth and claws while trying for my throat. My sword was knocked from my right hand, but my dagger was in my left and I thrust it through the beast’s neck. It fell to the ground. Jarod and Garran were immediately on it. The thing still fought back and Garran took a nasty bite before it died.

“Jarod hacked it to pieces so that we would know it was truly dead and then used his shirt to bandage us.

“We all limped back together.

“Garran’s bite is still healing, but I awoke fully healed. It was clear I had been infected. Just the word *raver* is enough to terrify the people. After everyone got a good look at what it had done, well, they didn’t want to take any chances. I let them prepare a cell and chain me as you saw. I was also frightened of what I might become. I didn’t know they would panic

more and grab someone -- you -- to test my nature. Jarod came to tell me after I was already chained and waiting for the moon. The rest you know.”

“Gods, I’m sorry Ty. There are no good stories when ravers are involved, but it’s so unusual for one to be this far within the borders. Does anyone know who it was or even have any idea how this happened?”

“No. It’s one of the things I wrote to the duke about. He will send investigators and messages to the brethren to send help as well. I wish I was able to do something, not just need aid myself.”

Cassandra stopped, grasped Ty’s forearms, and looked him steadily in the eye. “You know that in every war, there are different missions. This is yours. I will help you and you will succeed. You will be brethren. I won’t allow anything else and neither will you.” Ty nodded and gave her arms a brief squeeze in return, but didn’t speak

They continued walking without further discussion until late afternoon. As the day wore on, Cassandra began to really feel the long hike, while Ty continued to wear an aura of energy that hummed around him almost audibly. Finally, they topped a small hill and Cassandra’s face broke into a wide smile.

“There! I had hoped we would make it this far. I recognize that large oak. There’s a good spot to camp a short distance off the path from it with a stream nearby. I don’t know about you, but I’m used to riding, not walking all day. I need a chance to rest before night comes.”

Ty stopped briefly. “Damn! You should have told me sooner.” He tore her trail pack off her back, quickly marched past the oak, and disappeared in the woods.

Cassandra stood slack-mouthed in the path. Anger rose like warm bread dough pushing the weariness back. “Damn him and his royal blood attitude! I strain to cover more miles and make the journey faster and *he* complains.”

Anger sped her steps, but in the few minutes it took to reach him he had a small campsite laid out and was starting a fire in an old fire ring.

“Sit,” he ordered her without looking up. “If I’d known how tired you were, I would have stopped sooner.”

Cassandra still stood, torn between anger and exhaustion.

He looked up. “Sit.” It was an order from someone used to giving them and being obeyed. Exhaustion won out and Cassandra dropped to the ground.

Ty continued, “I will take care of dinner and the camp. I should have noticed your condition before now.”

Cassandra couldn’t speak. She wavered between outrage at this presumption and forgiveness as she saw that his anger was self-directed.

The fire started, Ty began to pull out cooking supplies. Keeping his eyes on his task he spoke. “This afternoon at lunch helped...to feel your commitment, the way you gave your body over to me even when you weren’t in danger. It helped, but the beast never truly went away. He’s been pacing inside me all day, watching you, waiting for his chance. He’s hungry and now that he’s been released once, I feel him even closer to the surface. I can just barely concentrate enough to do these ordinary things.” Finally he looked at her again. “So, please, rest while you can. I’ll try to hold him back long enough for that.”

With understanding, Cassandra felt her anger melt away. Her muscles quivering in protest, she pushed herself to a standing position. “I need a few minutes of privacy, a quick wash in the stream and then I’ll be back. I’ll be here for you.”

Ty tensed, watching her pick up some things and walk away. He wanted to make her stay. He wanted to take her now, to cover her body with his, to taste every part of her, and rub his scent all over her. He wanted to suck her mouth, her cunt, and hear her cries.

He could hear her splashing in the stream. That she was close by reassured his beast slightly, although he was startled to find himself emitting a low growl. She wasn't close enough to touch, to taste, to be possessed.

Soon her returning footsteps made soft crunching sounds. "I feel much better. Thanks for taking care of..." Her voice trailed off and she froze at the sight of the tense figure by the fire. Water glistened on Ty's shoulders. He had removed his shirt and washed by the fire. He was now sitting there, holding an iron bar from the cooking supplies. With his beast's strength he was twisting and untwisting it, apparently without thought or effort.

She took a step back. A part of Ty's brain screamed, *She's running. Catch her. Take her.*

The bar dropped from his hands and he moved into a crouch, ready to lunge and chase. Then Cassandra froze, and so did he.

She breathed deeply, clenching and unclenching her hands, then took a small step forward. "Ty. Ty! Focus; listen to me. I'm going to come sit by you and eat, all right?"

She began to move forward slowly. The actions and words came together in his brain and he pushed the beast back down within himself. "Here." He spoke with effort, indicating for her to sit on the pallet he had made in front of him.

With slow care she sat between his open legs. Giving into the need, he pulled her up close and bent his head to breathe in the scent of her neck and damp hair.

She stiffened then turned to press her face against his chest. "Ty, the scent, it's back. My gods, it's stronger than yesterday." Cassandra rubbed her face against his softly-haired chest.

Ty felt a moment of satisfaction at her surrender. It gave him back some self-control, enabling him to calm himself. With one arm holding her wrapped against his chest, he reached for the food with the other. Placing the bowl by her legs, he fed her bites of the traveler's stew he had made.

Cassandra moved restlessly, but Ty held her with a warning growl and continued to feed her until the stew mixture was gone. Pushing the bowl aside, he peeled off her tunic and then her pants.

The change heat was on him. The hunger that he had fought all day glazed over his mind, and coherent thought stopped.

His hand tangled in and then gripped her long hair, pulling her head back and exposing her vulnerable throat. He used his other arm to pull both of her arms behind her. The motion arched her back and thrust out her breasts. Pleased, he took one nipple into the heat of his mouth, pulling and suckling it roughly.

Cassandra jolted in his arms as the sensation struck her, and she let out a high-pitched animal cry. Ty continued worrying the nipple, alternately opening his mouth to suck in mouthfuls of the whole breast with tight suction, followed by pinching nips and licks to the tip. The beast within him took satisfaction at the helpless noises coming from his female.

He lowered them both to the pallet. After taking his arm from behind her back, he tugged her mouth open further for a hungry kiss that said he would not be satisfied soon.

His hand moved down to briefly tightly pinch the previously ignored nipple, then further down over her curves and to her center. His whole body burned with the change heat. His touch seared her mound with that delicious heat. Three fingers twisted into the wet, gasping opening and he raised his head to watch as he stroked her. Her body squeezed in tightly on him. A louder cry broke from her lips as she came.

The beast felt more satisfaction at this further surrender, but the beast and the man wanted even more. Ty was strangely unsurprised to feel himself calling forth more of his beast's scent, pulling his woman even further under his control. He removed the soaked fingers and pushed them further back to circle the rose of her anus. He removed the hand that had held her head bowed back and growled out a brief warning against her moving, but

Cassandra's eyes remained unfocused as she continued to moan with pleasure from the touch of his hand and from his scent that now drenched her.

Ty put both hands between her legs and spread them wide. His eyes glistened with lust as he looked down at what was his. Then his mouth followed his eyes. He devoured her pussy with the hunger of one who hadn't fed and was starved for just this taste. He lapped, sucked, nuzzled, and kissed every surface. Her back bowed and she pushed hard against his mouth for more. He let out a growling sound again then pulled at her pussy with the strong suction of his mouth and, holding her thighs, rose to his knees. Denying her even the leverage to push back against him, he reached into her passage and roughly tongue-fucked her until she came again with high-pitched moans. Laying her hips back down, neither man nor beast was yet satisfied.

He spread more of her wetness around her puckered rose then pushed in one finger, then two, scissoring them and stretching the opening while he watched with feral intentness.

Cassandra continued to moan and shudder, lost in a beast-scent lust haze. "Ty, please, please, fill me now. I need you inside, please."

In answer, he pulled up her hips so that her thighs lay sprawled open over his.

"Now. Fuck." The words were barely a discernible gravel sound from his mouth. The rounded end of his cock leaked fluid as he pushed into her ass.

She tensed, breath caught. Her eyes rounded in surprise at the incredibly stretched, full sensation. Then she relaxed back down, panting. The beast scent took over.

He pushed in further.

Finally fully in, he held one of her legs and reached round the other to stroke her clit in time with his strokes in and out of her body.

Suddenly he arched, crying out. The heat in his body ratcheted up another notch. First, his skin coated itself with oil, then fur appeared, and claws replaced the fingers that held her while he grew larger. The half form of his man-beast had appeared.

His cock, like the rest of his body, had grown even larger, straining Cassandra's already stretched tissues -- but the change also triggered an additional release of pheromone that drowned any possibility of pain and left only the need for more.

The man was fully submerged within the mating heat of the beast, but they were of one mind. Keep fucking. Harder. Faster. Make his female scream and then come himself. So he did.

The pads of one clawed hand pressing on her clit, the other leaving marks along her thigh, he thrust hard and fast like an animal that sees nothing beyond the moment it's in. In and out, again and again.

Breathing harshly, he watched Cassandra freeze then keel and shake through a merciless orgasm that would not stop until he did. His balls grew tighter and his strokes shortened in a last fury of effort as release came. His heated fluids shot out and filled her, allowing her orgasm to finally release its grip on her.

With surprising care he pulled free of her body and gently lowered her hips back to the pallet. From his position between her legs, he leaned over, caging her chest with his arms. He lowered himself to rest his head between her breasts.

Cassandra raised a shaking hand to stroke his head. A contented sound rumbled from the chest of the man-beast. Her breath was slowing when intense heat enveloped him and suddenly he changed again and the full wolverine beast covered her.

As he had the previous night, he sniffed her carefully. But tonight the creature was less frightened, less confused. Standing over the body that was now exhausted beyond fear, the wolf lowered his head beside hers and briefly nuzzled her before moving toward the trees.

He stopped once to look at Cassandra. He gave a growl and a short yip like an order to stay, then disappeared into the trees.



### Chapter Three: Decisions

Wrapped in warmth Cassandra fought to prevent the light from waking her. Shifting, she groaned, noticing a small stone pushing through the thin pad into her side. There was no help for it now; she was awake. The realization that her warm “blanket” was actually Ty also pressed in on her. The real blanket was a wadded mess at her feet.

She tilted her head up and saw his amber eyes awake and upon her. “Hello again,” she muttered, suddenly feeling embarrassment flood and heat her skin. Inwardly she mocked herself for this bit of modesty now.

Ty’s sharp eyes assessed her and crinkled briefly at the corners as she flushed, but he gave no other hint of laughter. “Good morning,” he returned, pushing himself to a sitting position. He gently ran his hands over her while watching her face closely.

“I was not gentle last night. How are you?”

She flushed anew, remembering his possession of the previous night. “Move back some and I’ll see. I need to get up anyway.”

Cassandra snagged the blanket and cautiously climbed to her feet with Ty rising and hovering over her. She took one step, a second, then smiled up at Ty. “I barely feel sore. I can’t believe it.” She felt another blush burn her cheeks as she glanced away. “I hadn’t tried

sex that way before. Your beast must, ah, impart some of its healing powers through its, ah, fluids or I would feel much worse. Um, please excuse me for a bit while I take care of some things and wash.”

With an attempt at her normal dignity, Cassandra wrapped her blanket around her and began to walk away, only to stumble before she reached the trees.

Ty moved quickly and caught her up in his arms before she had hit the ground. “Please allow me.” He smiled down at her and set off into the woods, carrying her. He looked pleased with himself, his hands gently squeezing her.

Wrapped in her blanket and held tight to his chest, she didn’t think there was much question of “allowing.” For a moment she fought an inner battle between pleasure at being in his arms and lingering embarrassment.

“I *would* like a little time alone. Could you put me down. Please?”

His face tightened as though he seriously considered whether he could put her down or not. He lowered his head to rub his face along hers as he released her. “Do not go far. I will begin breaking camp while you...take care of things.”

Cassandra walked through the morning dew-damp grasses trying to convince herself that his commands angered her -- while knowing she liked it that he wanted her close.

*I have been alone for so long and content that way. Why does this man and his struggle touch me? His troubles touch on my past, but no one else has pulled me like him; I must be letting his beast scent influence me.* Pushing aside the memory of how the first sight of him even before the presence of beast had affected her, Cassandra went to take care of “things.”

Although she returned with quiet steps, Ty’s voice called out as soon as she stepped back into the clearing. “Your clothes are lying over the small bush. I won’t turn if you want to go ahead and change into them here. When you’ve dressed, there are some traveler’s biscuits, cheese and tea for your breakfast. I, uh...ate while in wolf form last night and don’t want anything now.”

Watching Ty crouched by the fire ring, Cassandra saw his back stiffen slightly, as though he was expecting some sign of disgust from her. Keeping her voice carefully light she called back, "Well, perhaps you could train yourself to bring back something fresh for me."

She smiled seeing his shoulders relax again, although all he said was "Perhaps."

She joined him near where the small fire had been. Trying to sound casual, she remarked, "You appeared more in control last night. Could you tell the difference within yourself?"

Ty poked at the charred bits of wood for a moment before speaking. "In some ways I was more in control, yet still under compulsion. I couldn't stop myself from acting, but I was able to intentionally produce more of the beast scent. I did it both to make things easier for you and because I wanted -- no, needed -- to have you under my control." He stabbed the wood more savagely then stopped and shook his head. "The compulsion is unbelievable."

He paused, and she noticed his knuckles go white as he gripped the stick. "This morning, you shied back from me. Have I totally disgusted you?"

She laughed softly, and Ty's head snapped up.

Cassandra knelt beside him. "Oh no, I think my willingness to be seduced by your beast caused my embarrassment. In no way do you disgust me." His eyes widened then narrowed as a pleased smile took over his lean face.

"It's a good thing, my lady, because neither my beast nor I is willing to part with you." Ty placed a large hand around the back of her neck and gave it a small squeeze of possession. A shiver of delight ran down her spine before she firmly pushed the feeling back.

Cassandra tried not to think of what his remark might mean. Unlike their unusual -- for this trip only -- arrangement, there were women who were named as brethren companions in towns along their regular patrols. It was an honor to be named a companion. In addition to a truly smug look, the companions received compensation for themselves and

their village. In return, these companions provided care for the Brother Wolves without mates near full moon times.

Then there were the *chosen* companions. A *chosen* companion was kept by one of the Brother Wolves until she accepted mating or died. Why a Brother Wolf would become obsessed with one particular woman no one knew, but once the claim was in place he would not willingly give her up. If the family objected and took her away, he could always find his way to her no matter where she was taken.

Fortunately, this was rarely a problem. The brethren did not go where they were not invited, and keeping women away was more of a problem than keeping one with them. There was always, however, that rare occasion when a Brother Wolf might have to prove that the woman was bound to him and truly claimed. The thought of what Ty might do to prove his claim provoked a shiver to run through her.

On the heels of that thought came the old fear of depending on someone else, of being dependent on someone else to feel complete. *No*, Cassandra thought.

Aloud she said, "Remind your beast that I'm a companion for this journey only. After you are in the hands of the brethren, I'll be going my own way, although I wouldn't be surprised if I saw you among them sometimes."

Cassandra was flat on her back with Ty's face glowering above her before the last words were complete. One of his hands tangled into her hair and pulled her head back. He clamped one of her arms against her side and reached under her back to hold the second arm in place also.

"Mine." The roughened voice snarled out from his throat. Her mouth already opened on a gasp offered no resistance to the brutal kiss as he took her. His lips ground against hers and his tongue took possession of her mouth. Her body immediately remembered the pleasure associated with the taste of this man. She softened and molded to his body, her legs wrapping around his waist, as her arms could not. Moans broke from her throat and the

savagery of the kiss gentled. He released her arms to run his hand down under the waistband of her pants and slide through her labia with ruthless passion. Fingers slid into her vagina while a thumb stroked her clit.

Cassandra wrapped her arms around Ty, her fingers digging into his back. She was strung on a tight line of pleasure that built with each stroke from his tongue in her mouth and his fingers in her body. She wound tighter and tighter until she fell apart with a scream from pleasure so intense it bordered pain.

While Cassandra still lay breathing harshly in his arms, Ty pulled his head up and stated again, "Mine.

"Don't tease the beast or the man, Cassandra. This time there was no beast scent. I held it back. It was only your response to me. You came because of my touch and no other reason. You are my companion. Mine to keep. Mine to pleasure."

Cassandra opened shock-widened eyes to stare back up at Ty. This was not the brave, grim-humored man of the first night or the soldier who held tightly to his personal control the day before. He was changing.

As she realized it, he seemed to as well. Ty pushed himself up to a kneeling position, stared at his hands, and began to shake. "My gods, what am I becoming? It's full day and still I grabbed you like an animal. I can't trust myself, not even with you." He fisted his hands and looked her straight in the face. "Stay. I will go ahead alone. Maybe if I run all day, by night I'll be too exhausted to be a danger when I change, and I'll reach the brethren much faster by running ahead."

Cassandra knifed up and wrapped her arms around his neck to grab handfuls of his hair and pull his head down to her face. In a rush of emotion, she put aside her own fears.

"No! Anyone you met while alone would be in danger. And what would happen if the brethren were not in the town when you arrived? Me, I'm only in danger of extreme

pleasure from you. Yes, the beast is affecting you, but with me you have a safe place. I took on this journey with you. We stay together.”

He stared back into her determined face and, nodding, took her into his embrace again. “Very well, my beautiful, brave companion. We will stay together.” He pushed her head against his shoulder and rocked slightly while holding her.

Cassandra let out a breath, relaxing her body while her mind raced. Her beast. She didn’t want to think of the pain that gripped her when he had spoken of leaving. She was in danger from him, yes, but the danger was to her independence, her solitary heart. His honorable nature called to her spirit while her body was quickly becoming enslaved to his touch and his scent. The more he pleased her, the more she was exposed to his particular scent, the greater the chance she would become truly addicted to him. If his beast decided to make her his *chosen*, not just for the journey, but also for life, she feared she wouldn’t be able to put up much of a fight.

Scent addiction was a secret the brethren guarded closely. Extended exposure to any one beast’s scent would tie a woman to that beast more surely than any rope. For her own safety, she had not let on that she had learned of it through bits of overheard conversation and observation. She knew why the unmated never stayed long with a companion unless she became his *chosen*: if he did, the woman would become physically addicted to that Brother Wolf. It ensured that a *chosen* mate wanted him as much as his beast would demand her.

It was very unlikely that Ty knew any of this on more than an instinctive level and she couldn’t tell him. His honor would demand he leave, and that would be too dangerous for him and others.

*I’ll keep my secret and take the risk*, she thought as she nuzzled deeper into his shoulder.

“A charming scene. Do you two think you could tear yourselves apart and give me some tea before we *all* head out?”

A tall figure brushed around the branches of a large fir tree. The still early morning light revealed a long fall of auburn hair held back from a sharply handsome face by a golden circlet. The man had a blade of a nose marred by a single bump above a too-wide mouth that was pressed into a tight line. Bright green eyes focused on the couple before him as he stepped closer.

Ty stood. “Cassandra, let me introduce you to Duke Cynbarion.”

## Chapter Four: A New Traveler

She was just as his sources had said: lovely and strong. His aide and the Howerth counselors had described Cassandra as a scrupulously honest but clever trader with a disarmingly friendly manner and a beautiful face. In fact, it was her beautiful face and the fact that she had turned down a certain councilor's advances that resulted in her being selected as the test for Ty's sanity. The former councilor would have plenty of time to regret his action.

The duke looked over the couple as they gracefully broke apart and rose to their feet. He crossed the glade to take one of Cassandra's hands and bowed over it.

Using her free hand, she pushed back her thick hair and looked at the duke through eyes that sparkled with intelligence and a wary curiosity. He felt an immediate pull of attraction. It firmed his decision not to send her on her way with some gold, but to keep her with them.

A delicate pink-tipped tongue wet her lips before she spoke. "Your Grace, to what do we owe the pleasure?"

"Thank you, Cassandra, for choosing to save my friend and right hand. You have my gratitude. It is not inconsequential."



“You are welcome, Your Grace. I assure you, there was really no choice in the matter.”

The duke smiled at her wit, but said, “Perhaps little choice in going to him that first night, but how you handled it so you would both survive, and now traveling with him...those things took intellect and courage. I value both those traits, as I value Ty.”

Ty, who stood protectively close to Cassandra throughout the exchange, now gestured for them all to sit. He pulled a cup from a pack and poured some tea as he spoke. “Cyn, obviously you have, as usual, obtained the facts of what happened. But how did you reach us so quickly? My messenger should be reaching you just today with the news of the raver and his attack on me and the others. Even you can’t order the roads to shorten or time to stop for your travel. So how *did* you get here so quickly?”

Duke Cynbarion -- Cyn -- smiled and noted Ty did not ask how he found them. Among other things, he was well known for his tracking ability; whether it was information or a person, he could find it. “I was on my way to meet you when I saw your messenger coming the other way. I had thought we could take a break from duties for a few days to do some hunting. When I heard what had happened to you, I rearranged my schedule so that I could instead come with you to the brethren’s camp. My guard and aide are waiting on the road for us.”

Concern clouded Ty’s face. He took a breath to speak, but Cyn raised a hand that commanded silence. “I will not hear objections from you. You are my sworn man. You are my friend and one of the few I can trust.

“When a newborn beast, such as you, comes to the brethren they make him part of their community and treat him as a pack member until he is either judged brethren or shows himself lost to the madness of a raver. Having me travel with you will help you become part of a group. I do not intend to give you up to either the madness or the brethren. You will learn to deal with this new part of yourself and then we will find out how best to use these skills.

“As for you, Cassandra, called friend and sister by the brethren...”

Cassandra gasped.

“Yes, I know of your titles among the brethren. I don’t own the right to your loyalty, but you have committed to this journey with Ty. Will you accept my presence as well? It will help Ty to be part of a group, and *less tied to one person.*”

This last he said with a careful emphasis and then watched her pale as she caught his meaning. There followed an immediate abrupt nod of acceptance.

Cyn considered her subtle but urgent response. *She is quick. This is someone who warrants the time and effort to know better.*

Cyn had lived and prospered among the cutthroats at court. To do this, he learned to read the hidden meaning behind the smallest gestures. With her unquestioning nod, he was certain that she knew of the danger of addiction and that she had not told Ty. He was glad she had not fought his presence. On his land, he was the law, and he could have simply ordered her to travel with him until he, as judge, could determine how to “recompense her for what the people in his town had done.” Not fair, but he preferred to do what he thought was right and anything that would help save Ty fell into that category.

“Cyn, I am not sure of this.” Ty’s face was a severe mask. “You are my responsibility to protect. At the moment, I am unstable -- constantly on edge.” He placed his hand over Cassandra’s in her lap and looked at her before returning his focus to Cyn. “She can tell you how easily I am set off.” Ty shook his head as he stepped through his thoughts. “For once in my life, I cannot guarantee your safety with me. You must go.”

Ty’s words set off a cold fury inside of Cyn. “I’ve listened to you. Now you will hear me. I will go with you. If I must make it an order as your lord then I will do so. Remember this; before you swore an oath to serve me as the Duke of Cynran, we swore oaths as bond brothers to each other. I will not let you slip away. You are as much mine to protect as I am yours. I will stay to help with your transformation.”

With that, Cyn rose to stand over Ty then quickly knelt down, his legs bracketing Ty's hips. With forceful deliberation, Cyn pushed back Ty's hair and used both hands to hold his head in place as he pressed a kiss onto lips that were at first closed. A shudder ran through Ty until he moaned and grabbed Cyn closer to him. The moan became a low growl as he pushed Cyn back to the ground with the extra strength of his beast. Their bodies ground together in a struggle of passion until Ty pulled his head up and Cyn used the moment to bite into the juncture of Ty's neck and shoulder. Ty jerked like a bolt of lightning had gone through him and then he collapsed.

Cyn rolled the two of them over so that he was now on top of Ty. "You see, I have nothing to fear from you. Your body has been mine too long for that. No matter what form you take, you will know me for your bond brother and I will not be harmed."

Looking down at the surprised amber eyes below him, Cyn felt satisfaction at having won his point and reasserted his claim on Ty. He gave a tight smile that was almost gentle and pressed a soft kiss to Ty's lips once more before rising to return to his previous location.

\* \* \* \* \*

Cassandra watched in shock as the man she had first thought so coldly controlled ignite. The fierce passion of their embrace had initially stunned her then turned to heat. She felt her nails digging into her thighs as she held back the desire to touch Ty and this surprising man. She wanted to demand to be part of this moment, but, for all their fierceness, there was an intimacy in their embrace on which she could not intrude. Before she could formulate a response to what she had seen, Ty snarled and jerked up to stand over both her and the duke.

"Damn it Cyn! I won't be treated like a dog to be trained."

The duke regarded him with eyes that were once again cool and poised. "Sit down, Ty. You will frighten Cassandra with your outbursts."

“I did not and will not treat you as animal, but as my sworn man and my bond brother. As both, I have a right to be with you and care for you. Now sit down, and let’s discuss the rest of the trip.”

Cassandra once again felt the impact of those intense green eyes as the duke turned to look at her while Ty, surprisingly, did as he was ordered and sat. She had half expected him to attack Cyn with the beast controlling so much of his actions.

“Cassandra, since you have agreed to accompany us and since you, Ty, have remembered your place...”

“Bastard!” Ty interjected, although he otherwise made no aggressive move.

“Nice of you to remember. Now as I was saying, my men are waiting back at the road with horses for us all. Fortunately, the mounts I brought with me were originally purchased from a brethren group so they will not fear Ty’s scent. We can ride until a couple of hours before dark, then the horses and men will return toward Howerth. They will be well away before night falls and your change happens, Ty.

“This way we will cover much more ground today and be at Mythra that much sooner. Also, I have sent another rider on ahead to make sure your message was received and that the brethren are ready for you. Any questions?”

Cassandra liked the duke’s sharp-edged intelligence and the way he organized things like a master trader, but wasn’t sure she liked his presumption. It rankled, even though she knew, in his position, it was natural. “You were very sure of us, Your Grace. Did you forget that I am not one of your people to be summarily ordered around?”

The green eyes focused on Cassandra again with an intent heat that reawakened the desire she had felt watching him with Ty earlier. She fought not to squirm and to maintain a calm façade as she listened to him.

“No, lovely Cassandra, I forget nothing. But you did agree to include me and planning for all contingencies is a necessary skill for me. I will beg you, however, to please forget

formality and call me Cyn, as a friend would, as Ty does. If you would have me, I would be a friend to you, but, in any case, I will not forget my debt to you.”

“I will consider it, Cyn.” Heat filled her body at the promise in his look. *How had I thought him cold?*

A low growl came from Ty, whose eyes had narrowed at the byplay. Cyn looked at him sharply. “Ty, Ty, who am I?”

Ty looked briefly confused as he fought for control to answer. “Cyn, Cynbarion.”

“Yes, and what am I to you?”

“Bond brother, lord.” Focusing on Cyn and his answers seemed to calm the beast within Ty as the low growl stopped and he took a deep breath. “This will not be easy, Cyn.”

“No, I know my attention to your companion challenged your beast. I will do it again. It is important that you learn to operate within a group. And when you do take a *chosen*, remember she will be a part of us both.

“Come, finish packing your things and let’s be away. The morning is passing us as we speak.”

In a few efficient motions, Ty had the last of his and Cassandra’s things put away. “By the way, I notice life in the keep has not dulled your hunting skills. Although I was distracted, even with my improved hearing I did not hear you approach, and you came from downwind.” With that, the tension between the two was broken like it never existed.

Cyn’s face relaxed as he gave an easy laugh. “I told you I practiced my stalking skills at court. It’s amazing what a very quiet walker can hear about themselves and others.”

While Ty and Cyn laughed and shared a few jokes walking out, Cassandra lagged a few steps behind, feeling very confused. *Is Cyn’s show of interest in me only to get a reaction from Ty and teach him a lesson? Is he actually as cold as I first thought him?* At that moment she couldn’t tell. She decided to observe him carefully for the rest of the day, behaving in a

friendly manner, but still holding a part of herself back. The only thing she felt sure of was that he truly cared for Ty, which she could easily understand.

\* \* \* \* \*

None of the group realized that from high in the branches of a tall pine they were being watched by hate-filled eyes. *You've taken one of mine, now I'll take two of yours. You will suffer. Duke, your presence only delays this. I will not be stopped.*

## Chapter Five: Plans

Cassandra, lost in her own thoughts as they walked to the road, was startled to hear the duke -- it was difficult to think of him as Cyn -- speaking directly to her. "So it's agreed. You'll ride first with me and then later with Ty."

"Hold up. What are you talking about? Why would I not ride on my own?" Peering around the men's shoulders, she could now see three large men and one small figure standing by; she did a quick count, six horses. Ah, comprehension dawned before the duke spoke.

"Were you not paying attention to our plans? My horses, luckily, were purchased from the brethren so Ty's scent will not make them shy away, but when I set out from my keep to meet Ty at Howerth, I didn't know I would need a horse for an additional person. So that we may all ride, you will alternate between riding with Ty and me. In any case, the road is too narrow in areas for three horses to ride abreast. I would have thought that you would prefer to be with us to participate in any further planning, and, of course, I would like the opportunity to get to know you better before tonight, but if you prefer to ride with my aide or one of my guard..."

*Damn!* “No, I was thinking of other things before, but, of course, I would prefer to be part of any planning.” *Which should remind both of you to make sure I’m part of the discussion to begin with...oh, wait, tonight!*

Cassandra paled as Cyn barked out orders to his people while he mounted and Ty helped lift her to sit sidesaddle in front of Cyn. *Gods above, what have I done? I was thinking about preventing Ty from becoming tied to me as his chosen. How could I forget what else the duke, Cyn’s, presence tonight might mean.*

The group set off with two guards to the front, Ty, Cyn, and Cassandra in the middle, and the last guard and duke’s aide to the rear. They spread out enough to allow for private conversation, but stayed within visual contact.

She felt her cheeks heat and cleared her throat looking up at Cyn. “Umm, perhaps we should consider our plans for later.” Cyn smiled in a surprisingly charming and mischievous manner while slightly tightening his arm around her. The corners of his eyes actually crinkled and he grinned at Ty, who was looking at them both through narrowed eyes.

“Cassandra, I believe my presence disturbs you.” He bent to whisper in her hair. “I know well of the needs of the brethren when the change is upon them and that they have little control at first. Know this. Ty is my bond brother and my man in every way. I will not give him up, but I can share.” Cyn’s breath and the teasing touch of his lips as he formed words sent shivers down her spine. “I find you very attractive. If you would consider me also as a lover, I would make sure you would not regret the experience.” He continued to speak as he trailed whisper-light kisses from behind her ear and down her neck, ending with a small nip where her neck met her shoulder.

Cassandra was startled into a bolt-upright position. She was both shocked and tempted by his suggestion and the manner in which he delivered it. Before she could formulate a reply, Cyn raised his head and tilted her chin up so he could look her in the eyes. His face was now devoid of teasing and held a passionate sincerity. “If we all join this night, it will help Ty be part of a group and less linked to one person.



“That is not all. At the moment his beast is mostly warring with the man. Ty faces an additional challenge over most who *change*, who gain an inner beast. He lived as a soldier and became accustomed to killing. That alone will make it easier for the savage side of the beast to rule. I want to help him unite his halves and fully become brethren.

“Ty and I are paired. It was inevitable that what one of us found beautiful, so would the other. Beyond your face, that you were clever enough to save him and generous enough to continue on with him when none would force you is beauty also.

“I know what I’m asking from you goes beyond anything I have a right to, and there is some risk because Ty is only learning to control the beast. I can promise to give you every care possible. It could be pleasure beyond anything you have experienced.

“Don’t answer me yet. Just give us the day to get to know one another and consider it. You might also want to know this. The moment I saw you, I wanted you. Even if there was no issue of brethren or raver, I would have tried to tempt you to me, to us.”

Cyn’s hand moved behind her head to hold it in place while he kissed her. His kiss was devastating. He took control of her mouth without apology. There was an intense hunger in the kiss that surprised her even as her body heated in response. Cyn pulled back with a final press of lips that was amazingly tender after the roughness before.

Cassandra opened eyes she hadn’t realized she had shut to see Ty staring hotly at them. Both jealousy and lust were in his face. He had moved his horse to be within a hand’s-length of Cyn’s. He opened his mouth then closed it. She saw his throat move as he swallowed. He held out his hand, his arm shaking as he appeared to struggle with himself. When he spoke, the voice was that of his man-beast form, rough and edged with a growl. “Hand her to me.”

Cyn looked at Cassandra, who nodded her assent. He stopped his horse. He took hold of her waist and carefully lifted her toward Ty’s waiting hands.

Ty pulled her into his body with the ease of his new strength, wrapping her in an unbreakable cage as his head bent over hers. She felt an almost unbearable arousal fill her

body. She realized the scent of the beast was filling the air. "Mine." The gravelly voice spoke again. He raised his head to look at Cyn. "Gods, the beast is prowling within me. I need you both. Be prepared. Mine. Both mine."

Cyn's face was a mask of lust as he breathed the beast-scent filled air. His voice came out harsh and demanding, "Yes. Yes, Ty, we are both yours as you are mine, as you both will be." He pulled in a deep breath. "Damn it. Control yourself, Ty. We are here with you. We will stay." His voice grew loud with agitation.

Ty continued to stare at Cyn while rubbing his hands up and down Cassandra's body. He shuddered, shut his eyes and gave a single nod then started his horse moving again.

Cassandra buried her face against Ty's chest, her mind still hazy with desire when she heard Cyn cry out. "Stand down!" Looking to the front and around Ty's back, she saw the guards to the front and behind them had arrows drawn and pointed toward Ty, and, consequently, herself. With Cyn's command, they lowered their arrows. She had forgotten for a moment just with whom who she was traveling. It acted like a cold slap of water to clear her head. "Cyn, will your guard really leave you alone tonight with Ty's beast and me, a relatively unknown person?"

"My people do as they are ordered." He paused, and then allowed, "It also helps that they know Ty is my bond brother and I trust him above all others."

"Somehow I do not think that your "trusting above all others means" much in your world. I get the feeling trust does not play a large part in it."

Cyn's smile was as cynical as Cassandra's statement. "You are right. Perhaps it is more meaningful to say I trust Ty. There are precious few I would say that of. You are quick to notice the distinction."

Abruptly, Cyn changed the tone of the conversation and began to tell funny stories from court. Sensing they had passed too close to his soul for comfort, Cassandra listened to hear what his stories might tell of this interesting man without forcing further details from

him. As Cyn spoke, Ty relaxed his hold on Cassandra and even told a few stories of his own. But he did not return her to Cyn and frequently rubbed a hand along her leg or back as if to reassure himself of her presence. The morning passed swiftly and soon it was time for lunch.

“Hold up!” Cassandra cried. “There’s a blue and white striped painted arrow on that tree indicating a rest area with water. I don’t know about the rest of you, but I need a break.”

Ty pulled his horse to a stop while Cyn called to the rest of the party to stop as well. Cyn dismounted then helped Cassandra down, maintaining a grip on her waist until she made a face and gently pushed him back. She needed a minute away from these two.

While the rest of the group rode in, she rubbed the stiffness from her legs. Sitting sidesaddle in front of someone else was different than her normal riding.

Cassandra turned to really look at the others of their party for the first time. This morning she had been too distracted to pay much attention to them. There were the three mountains disguised as men and one slight figure wearing a wide brimmed hat who was still in the glare of the sun as they dismounted.

Cyn began, “Cassandra, let me introduce my guard Barak, Rhys, and Jaxon; and my personal aide, who is also my cousin, Adeena.” Cassandra was startled to realize the slight figure beneath the hat was female and she was no smaller than average. She had only appeared so next to the large guards.

“Pleased to meet you all and thank you for making this unexpected detour in your hunting trip,” she joked. Pleased smiles at her easy manner rewarded her. The guards all had honey-colored skin and long dark hair that was pulled back as though they were expecting a fight at any moment. She then noticed that they also wore tribal beads braided into one lock of their hair. This marked them as Chema, an independent mountain people who rarely left their hills. She wondered how Cyn had managed to gain their service, but only said, “I see you are as fortunate in your guardians as you are in your friends.” She briefly directed a smile toward Ty with this last before looking back. “And Adeena, it is also a pleasure to meet you.”

Adeena removed her hat to wipe her brow. "It is my pleasure to meet you Cassandra. Ty is precious to us all and I want to add my thanks for what you have done to help him through this time." Bright green eyes like Cyn's sparkled above a smile of blinding brilliance. Adeena's chestnut hair was braided and tightly wound round her head above a clear, cream-colored face with a small straight nose. Close up, there was no denying the femininity of this face that seemed so open and friendly. Yet she was Cyn's personal aide. Cassandra knew there must be more to this woman than her appearance suggested if she worked closely with Cyn, who obviously liked to know everything without divulging too much information himself.

The group walked down a worn path that stopped by a clear pool. Ty was beginning to exhibit the same restless energy that had surrounded him all of the day before. She saw Cyn watching him as well. When Cassandra sat on the grass in front of a wide rock, Ty sat on the rock behind her, bracketing her with his legs and gestured for Cyn to sit beside him.

While Jaxon got out some dried meat and fruit bars for a quick lunch, Rhys and Barak took care of the horses. Adeena plopped down on the grass in front of Cassandra and looked at her with a friendly expression.

"So do you think you might be interested in coming to the keep's fall trading fair this year? You would be a welcome addition."

Huh? Was she interested? She raised her brows in mock thoughtful expression. "Hmm, would I be interested in attending the invitation-only fall trading fair people plot to get into? Well, yes, I think I could make time for that."

"Good, as his grace's aide," she said in the sort of teasing voice that only relatives and close friends can get away with using, "I'm in charge of the organization of the event. Actually, your name was mentioned to me as a possible new trader to add this year before any of..." She looked at Ty apologetically, and continued, "...this happened. I think you'll find it a very profitable experience for you. Now, please excuse me while I prepare some

letters to send off when I get back to Howerth.” She rose, giving another of her seemingly guileless smiles and walked away.

Cassandra looked up at Ty, who had been absently stroking her hair, and Cyn, who was watching her face closely. “Your cousin is very kind.” She caught perhaps a flicker of disappointment in his face so she went on to add, “But she does not let on much of what goes on behind her lovely smile, either. Was the invitation her idea or yours?”

Cyn’s smile warmed as he slid off the rock to join her on the ground. “You are as observant as I first thought.

“No. The invitation was Adeena’s idea, but she knew it would please me. Although I like to know what is going on around me, I find it best to let everyone in my command actually do their jobs with as little interference as possible. I may be exacting in my wants, but actually I’m very easy to follow.”

She began to feel very uneasy with the direction of the conversation. Why was Cyn discussing what sort of leader he was? Was it just part of his “let’s get to know each other today” or was he hinting at something more? Her parents were long dead. She had no siblings and had guarded her independence jealously. Her membership in the trader’s guild served as a basic protection in most places and, those times she camped with the brethren, she knew no one would bother her.

While these thoughts quickly tumbled through her head, Cyn continued to speak. “There is something I would like you to accept from me.” He pulled a small gold medallion on a chain from his pocket. “This will mark you as a member of my household. Wear it as you travel and, as a member of a noble house, you will be granted extra protection from the legitimate authorities and, because it bears my mark, many less savory persons will avoid troubling you as well. Please take it with my thanks.”

Cassandra hesitated; this gift was unexpected and thoughtful. There were times when a little extra pull could be of help. She gave an assenting formal inclination of her head. “Thank you, Your Grace -- Cyn. I accept.”

“Excellent.” He fastened the necklace on her with a possessive look that again raised the hair on her neck in warning, although she couldn’t put her finger on a reason why. “Adeena!” he called across the glade. “Please add Cassandra’s name to my personal staff. She has agreed to wear my personal medallion and I want a proper record made.” To Cassandra he added, “This will also give me a clear legal right to intercede for you if ever you need me.”

*Personal medallion? Legal rights?* Cassandra felt more uneasy, but didn’t want to seem churlish. “Cyn, what do you mean your ‘personal’ medallion and, by the way, why doesn’t Ty wear a household medallion?”

Ty seemed to think he had been silent long enough, for he too slid to the ground while keeping her held between his legs. He pulled her close, and then pushed up his right sleeve to show her a tattoo of intertwining symbols on the inside of his wrist. She blushed, thinking that in their time together she had not noticed this. “I received this tattoo when Cyn and I swore a bond brother’s oath.” Cyn pushed up his left sleeve to show a matching tattoo on his inner wrist. Ty continued, “With this mark, no medallion is necessary. We are forever tied to one another beyond household or station. Although the bond brother’s oath is most often shared between warriors who travel together so that one has the right to care for the other as needed, we took the oath as young men so that no one could force us to stay apart or otherwise use me to manipulate him.”

Cassandra felt her chest tighten with remembered desire as she thought of how they had kissed that morning.

“Ahem.” She cleared her throat, which seemed tight and dry. “And is a personal medallion different than the ones worn by other household members?”

“Yes, it has my individual as well as the house mark. It indicates someone who is doing a personal service for me.” Cyn leaned in closer, trapping Cassandra between his body and Ty’s. Her lips parted and a melting heat began to take over her body. He whispered, “Only those who work very closely with me wear them.”

Leaning back again, he said. “For example, my personal guard and Adeena all wear them.” She closed her lips and tried to look like she hadn’t been expecting a kiss when Cyn leaned back in to teasingly whisper, “There are many personal services I would enjoy from you.” And then he did press a light kiss on her lips that was over almost before it began. Not to be left out, Ty gave her a gentle squeeze.

Cassandra barely noticed what she swallowed as Ty and Cyn took turns teasingly feeding her small bites and using any excuse to trail small touches down her arms or legs. With this activity, lunch was soon over and they were on their way once more. Cyn commandeered Cassandra, claiming that Ty had cheated him of his full turn before.

Cassandra noticed that Ty acquiesced with a strained smile. If she was not careful, his beast would not let her go. She would have to seriously consider Cyn’s idea of the three of them joining to keep Ty from bonding to her. *Hah!* She acknowledged, to herself at least, that the clever and manipulative Cyn attracted her. She wanted an opportunity to taste him as well.

The afternoon was pleasantly warm and Cassandra absently leaned against Cyn’s chest. The steady beat of his heart, the horses’ clopping made for a soothing monotony and the long nights caught up with Cassandra. Before she knew it, Cyn was shaking her shoulder. “Wake up, sleepyhead.”

Cassandra blinked and shook her head to clear away the sleep. The sun had moved below the treetops and Cyn was handing her down to Ty, who took her with a hug. Cyn dismounted and waited for the three mountains to ride in with Adeena.

They took the horses and handed Cyn, Cassandra, and Ty their travel packs. Jaxon paused a moment, glanced at the other guards, then dismounted.

“Your Grace, we feel that two of us should remain to watch over you. Barak and Adeena can take the horses back toward Howerth. Rhys and I would stay to walk with you. You know there are many who would love to catch you unguarded.”

He looked at Ty. “With respect, you will not be able to guard him tonight, and, even if she were able, Cassandra will not likely be in a position to guard him either.” Jaxon slightly blushed with his last statement, but stood his ground and looked Cyn directly in the eyes.

Cyn’s eyes narrowed. He radiated male anger and Cassandra held her breath. Even as she watched, she didn’t catch more than a blur of movement as a dagger seemed to just appear in Cyn’s hand that was suddenly pressed against Jaxon’s throat while Cyn’s other hand grasped the surprised guard’s tunic.

“Do not ever think I am undefended, Jaxon, and do not think to question my orders!”

“No, Your Grace.” A thin line of blood trailed down the dagger as Jaxon answered. He was somewhat pale, but his voice was steady and Cyn relaxed his hold on the guard. “Your concern is noted; however, my orders stand. This journey has begun within my own lands. The chance of an enemy learning of this opportunity in time to take advantage of it is very small and, even with the present distractions, I make a formidable foe. Go.”

Cassandra found herself admiring the young guard’s nerve and the sneaky way he appealed to the duke’s need to protect his people by bringing both her and Ty’s relatively helpless states into the argument, but this display of male temper made her second guess her acceptance of Cyn’s presence. *Gods, when had he truly become Cyn to me and not the duke? When he held me while I slept the afternoon away?*

Ty was holding her shoulders and rhythmically squeezing them. She tilted her head to see him better and he caught her look. “Do not be afraid. You will be safe with both of us. His youth taught him to always be strong and in control of all around him, but he wouldn’t



harm you.” She was astonished at the quiet confidence in Ty’s voice after this display, but she had already learned to trust Ty and knew that some part of her had decided to trust Cyn as well. Otherwise, she would never have slept so easily in his arms that afternoon.

Jaxon joined the others on horseback and, with a formal inclination of their heads, the guard turned their horses to leave. Adeena gave a smirk that said she was unaffected by Cyn’s display and added, “Regardless of your skills and those of your companions, be careful, cousin.” Then she too headed back toward Howerth, leaving the three travelers to head the opposite way.

Cassandra looked at Cyn again with new eyes. She had heard of him as a powerful man who was said to know everything. He had a reputation as a man who was tough but honorable in his deals -- as long as he wasn’t crossed. She hadn’t heard of his speed or fighting skill.

Now that the others were gone, Ty was looking at Cyn with disapproval.

“Cyn, even with our strengths, I am lacking my normal focus. My mind is already humming with the thoughts of the beast. Perhaps we should have let Jaxon and Rhys stay close by. They were willing to take the chance and you can’t be risked.”

“No.” Cyn locked his eyes with Ty’s. “I know no matter your state, I will be safe with you nearby and I would not have Cassandra conscious of the presence of any others tonight. Come, we will walk awhile before we camp.”

Cassandra rolled her eyes at the way Cyn gave orders without even thinking, but silently acknowledged that he had a reason to do so and that he did it well.

They hiked into the late afternoon. Finally, the late summer warmth gave way to the cooling breeze of the evening. Cassandra became aware of the increasing number of heated glances from both Ty and Cyn and began to feel like she was to be the main course of a banquet. She felt both nervous and intensely feminine as a sense of anticipation began to fill the air.

The aura of energy that Ty possessed had become more pronounced again. He moved like a barely caged predator. Just when she thought she could stand this quiet tension no longer, Ty spoke.

“How much further?” His voice was beginning to take on the rough tones of the beast and a shiver went down her spine at hearing it. Ty’s unique beast scent was now filling the air. It accentuated her already present arousal, but wasn’t enough to drown out her growing anxiety.

“Just a bit more,” Cyn replied. “There is a rock that looks like an old man’s profile. His nose points the way to where we will camp tonight.”

Ty’s tense body language broke. He tugged Cassandra’s pack from her back in a move reminiscent of the previous day, but then grinned and scooped up Cassandra as well. “Not far, eh? I’ll race you!”

And with that, he took off at a dead run holding Cassandra and her pack. She squealed and grabbed his neck in pure reflex. The trees were a blur as he raced down the road. Looking up, she saw an expression of wild joy on Ty’s face. *He and his beast are both loving this.* He turned sharply at a large rock and continued speeding through the forest.

He stopped in a small glade near a wall of rock that peaked to form the top of a hill far above their heads. Astonishingly, Cyn came in moments behind them. He shared the same fierce smile that Ty wore.

Ty looked down at Cassandra with devilry and began to spin around, still holding her tightly before finally halting to lower her feet to the ground. A little dizzy, Cassandra kept one hand on Ty’s chest. Leaning against him she realized he was heating up from more than the run; the change heat was beginning again.

Her face must have reflected the knowledge because Cyn’s watchful gaze became immediately serious. She watched him glide toward them with the controlled grace of a wary predator. His hand joined hers on Ty’s chest.

The scent of the beast filled the air. She looked at Ty's face and saw his eyes were glazed with lust. He grasped both her and Cyn tightly side-by-side against his body. Cyn's arm joined Ty's, crushing her tightly to Cyn's side and Ty's chest. Her hands were trapped between them. Every breath was filled with the scent of the beast. A melting heat filled her body where none existed a moment before. A moan broke the silence. *Gods, that was me.* It was followed by a low groan from Cyn, who pushed back against Ty.

Cyn's face was beaded with sweat and lined with strain. "Ty." His voice was a raspy groan. "Ty, this is your third night. You must begin to find control or the beast will own you, not you it. It will have its time later. For now, stop your scent! Take hold of yourself!"

Ty shuddered and started to slowly withdraw his arms, then abruptly stepped back, maintaining only the touch of his hand on each of them.

"A moment." His voice rumbled out barely understandable. He drew another deep breath and stepped away entirely.

Cyn wrapped both his arms around Cassandra and pressed her to his body. He ran one hand repeatedly over her hair. When Ty stepped away, the overwhelming lust-provoking scent eased, but she still was in its grip and could barely think past the feelings. Cyn smelled good too. Masculine. Enticing. His rigid cock was pressed through his pants into her abdomen. A patch of bare skin from the V of his shirt was pressed to her face like a gift for her hunger. She opened her mouth to run her tongue over the exposed skin and then take it between her lips in a sucking kiss.

Cyn's hand fisted into Cassandra's hair to first hold her closer, and then quickly pull back her head. "Help me, Cassandra. Hold on. We must help Ty learn control, not lose our own."

She opened her eyes. Cyn was looking at her with desperation. His urgent plea cut through the haze in her mind. She nodded, straightening her posture and gathering herself.

As one, she and Cyn faced Ty, who watched them. His hands were in a white-knuckled grip around his own body in a visible attempt to hold himself in check.

Cyn waited a moment, looking Ty over and, when he spoke, his voice had regained his normal commanding tone. "We will make camp before the night comes. Follow me."

He led them to what at first appeared to be only a crack along the solid stone wall. As they got closer she could see the crack was actually an entrance. Several slabs of rock had sheared off the face of the wall. They had fallen to create a partially covered space. Walking inside, she guessed that it was about twelve paces long by six paces wide.

Cyn walked to a ledge in the rock wall and gestured for Cassandra and Ty to follow. Curious, Cassandra obeyed. He lifted a wooden cover about as long as his arm that had been covered by a layer of fine rock dust. Beneath the cover, a bucket hung on a hook. Leaning, she looked, but could see nothing in the darkness below.

"This is a private well. My family has a number of...camping areas we keep secret. Sometimes being difficult to find is very useful." Cassandra wondered what circumstances would cause someone of Cyn's standing to hide, but then thought of the rumors she had heard of court politics and thought maybe she knew.

Cyn continued, "I'll go gather some firewood. Cassandra, come with me and I'll show you where some wild plum bushes are. If we're lucky, there will still be some fruit. Ty, get water and start setting up our camp."

She watched Ty while she walked away. He took the length of silvery rope that Cyn had handed him to walk stiffly back to the well and begin drawing up water. His face showed intense concentration for such simple tasks. She knew the beast must be riding him hard for the mundane to be so difficult.

Cassandra followed Cyn out to where, of course, the wild plum bushes still bore fruit. *They wouldn't dare be bare when Cyn expects fruit*, she thought a little wickedly.

Cyn spun around to face her. His face was tense and serious. “Cassandra, I promised you the day to know me and consider this night. While you did sleep part of the day,” she opened her mouth to protest, but he quieted her with a gesture, “I understand your exhaustion, and tonight will not improve that. What I was going to say was I hope you have gained some sense of me.” He raised his hand to allow his fingers to gently brush her cheek. “I loved holding you while you slept today. If you will further trust me, I will cherish your body and do all that I can to make this night one of pleasure you will not forget or regret.”

She studied the man before her. Intellect burned in his eyes. A fall of auburn hair caressed shoulders too wide for an indolent aristocrat. She recalled the strength of the arms and body that had held her securely throughout the afternoon. She studied him, but she knew her decision was already made. She gave him her hands.

“Yes, Cyn, I’ll trust you this night.” She allowed a wry smile to play on her lips. “Truthfully, I’m not sure Ty will accept otherwise.”

Cyn did not return the smile. “I want you, Cassandra. I make no secret of that, and I will not let Ty go, either, but, if you come to me only because you feel Ty would force the issue, then I’ll stay away from you.”

She felt more certain of her decision as Cyn, for once, did not manipulate or charm. Contrarily, she wanted to see how much he wanted her, wanted to feel he would fight for her as he did for Ty. “Kiss me then, Cyn. Let’s see how we respond only to each other without Ty or the scent of the beast.”

Cyn hissed and pulled hard on her hands, releasing them as she stumbled into his body. With one hand he grasped the nape of her neck while he used the other to pull her hips up to meet his. She wrapped her legs and arms around him in her own show of aggression.

She felt his hard erection grind against her while his mouth took possession of her. Her body still carried the unsatisfied longings from earlier in the day, and when he kissed her, it sparked into an immediate blaze. Cyn took full advantage of the moment to first claim her

mouth then press kisses around her face and onto her neck. He kissed and nipped until she cried out, writhing against him in frustrated need. Then he pulled back his head. The same fire she felt was in his face and harsh breathing as well.

“Tell me now, Cassandra,” he demanded, “is this only for Ty, or do you want me as well?”

“You, Cyn. You as well as Ty.” The words were surrender. Cyn looked at her with satisfaction before kissing her forehead and lowering her to the ground. Stepping back, he let his hands slide down her arms to take control of her hands again. “Then you shall have me. I will give you one word of warning, though it may be too late. I don’t give up what I’ve won. I hold onto what is mine.”

Recovering herself, Cassandra smiled confidently. “Ah, but Cyn, you asked for me only for tonight. By tomorrow night, there is an excellent chance one or a group of the brethren will meet with us to take over Ty’s transition period and I will be able to move on.”

Cyn stared at her for a split second. Then he arched a sardonic brow and smiled back with his usual confidence. “We will see.” And he left.

Alone with her thoughts Cassandra tried to ignore the confused twist of pain she felt at the thought of leaving them. *That is what I want, isn't it ? To go on alone as I always do.* Alone. It was safer that way. No one could die on you and rip your heart out. She ached again, remembering how the youth she loved like a brother had killed himself in the horror of what he had become. No, she never wanted to hurt like that again. Alone was better.

\* \* \* \* \*

In the distance, a solitary angry presence clung to the top of a tall pine, watched, and muttered. *So that's where they're camping. Perfect. I'll take out the beast first and then play with the two humans. They look so happy. I'll change that. They have no right to live. They will suffer and die for what he did.* He began to carefully scabble down the tree, ignoring the scraping bark.

*There's no need for it, but the Master ordered a labyrinth always be laid when we attack. I'll cross in and cross out, back and forth, and neither human nor beast will be able to follow me. I'll do it by the pond. The brethren will go there when he changes tonight. Do it just like the Master taught us.* He jumped the last few feet to the ground, landing on his bare feet with the innate grace all the changers possessed.

He started to quickly wind through the sparse grasses and shrubs toward his goal and then stopped as an unwelcome and confusing thought slipped into his brain. *Of course, Master also said to stay with his others. He thought I wasn't strong enough to come to the duke's lands, take vengeance, get more true brethren for us. I disobeyed. He will be angry.* His brows pulled together as he considered this. *But I will show him. He will be proud when he knows. He will want to listen to me after this.*

Satisfied, he started off again -- only to stop again. The shadows were growing deeper. The sun was creeping lower in the skies. *Huh, should I hunt before dark? Eat to be strong while I wait? Ah, no.* He licked his lips and smiled at the sweet picture of the brethren dead and the duke dying while he enjoyed strips of flesh torn from his body. *Oh, he'll scream and beg when I break open his bones. So sweet. So sweet.* He wiped the saliva drooling down his chin. And the woman... *Perhaps I'll rape the woman in front of the duke as he dies. Maybe the brethren too. He's barely in control of his beast. I'll rip him up so much he can't change then carry him back to watch what I do to the others.* He clamped a hand over his mouth to stop a chortle of happy anticipation.

*Must work now, fun, much fun, later.* He maintained the careful silence he had been taught and went to work. He twisted back and forth through the brush leaving few marks of his passing except his beast scent. While he worked, he looked for the best place to attack the brethren. *If I jump him from above, I can easily reach the neck and snap his spine. Yes, that's it...*

## Chapter Six: Third Night

Cassandra tried not to think too hard about the coming night as she worked, but the ache in her body wouldn't let her completely put it from her mind. Soon, Cyn was back for her. "This is my last armful of wood. Ty has used what I already brought to make a fire and start dinner." He looked at her basket. "You've got a good bit in there. They will be a nice addition. Come."

With typical arrogance, he simply expected her to follow, leaving Cassandra muttering to herself about presumptuous men. She was beginning to think he must do it on purpose.

Ty was crouched by the fire stirring the small stewpot. His head snapped up when they entered. His muscles were tightly bunched and his whole posture took on a tense stillness, reminding Cassandra of his near loss of control the previous night.

"We are here, Ty," she soothed, taking care to keep walking toward him. Cyn also walked straight over to Ty. As they approached, Ty removed the pot from the fire and set it aside. Cassandra dropped the basket she had been carrying and Cyn laid down the firewood. The light was fading. She had lost track of the time in the woods and it was almost dark. Ty's beast would surface very soon.



The heat emanating from Ty's body was like that of a second fire. Cyn felt Ty's forehead like a parent checking a child, but the look from Ty's eyes was anything but childlike. One of his arms snaked out, grabbed Cassandra's legs, and pulled her in close, while his other hand formed a bracelet around Cyn's wrist. He pulled Cyn's hand down and ran his tongue from the fingertips to the inner wrist then moved his hand to slip his fingers between Cyn's. Cyn's eyes widened and a gasp escaped Cassandra's lips as Ty took their joined hands and reached between Cassandra's legs to cup, then rub, her mound. Ty tugged Cyn down beside him and held him close with one arm so that their faces now met at the juncture of her legs. They both pushed in, breathing in her scent. The feel of the pair of them nuzzling caused her knees to buckle and the men each wrapped an arm around a leg to support her.

"Ty." Cyn twisted his head to face the other man, his voice hoarse with hunger. Ty grabbed the back of Cyn's head, pulling him closer for a ferocious kiss.

Desire like an arrow shafted through her body as she watched them kiss at her feet. She felt pain at seeing the beauty of them and pressed a hand on each of their heads to be part of this moment, to share in their unselfconscious love and devotion. As if they heard her wish, the men released her legs and pulled her down to her knees to join them.

Ty and Cyn each gripped a side of her face and leaned into her. Their mouths touched the corners of hers, teasing it open with the wet heat of their tongues. She first turned her head toward Ty to more fully kiss him and then Cyn. Their touch communicated mastery and an unexpected tenderness.

Ty pulled back, still cupping one side of her head and breathing hard. "Cassandra." His voice was a raw whisper that sent shivers throughout her body. "Do you agree to this? If you go now, I think I could just take Cyn. My beast – I -- could let you go for this night, but I want you, too. Will you willingly join with both Cyn and me or is being part of a bonded brother set, and with the beast also, too much for you?"

Through the fever of desire that filled her body, she marveled that Ty had found the strength to ask. "Yes. I already told Cyn the answer is yes."

Relief filled his face. "Thank you. I didn't know how I was going to not touch you, too." He took her mouth again in a kiss that held the joy in his possession of her.

When he released her, she saw Cyn had removed his shirt and was watching them both with a predatory expression. He reached over, his hands taking the place of Ty's to pull Cassandra across his chest into another mind-numbing kiss. When he pulled his head away, Ty had removed his shirt also.

Ty moved behind Cassandra and pulled her to her feet. He reached under her arms and cupped each breast. He flicked his thumbs to cover her nipples briefly before stilling his hands and lowering his head. He placed a small bite on her nape, and then soothed the hurt with the lap of his tongue. Throughout, Cyn kept his place by her feet, but took hold of both her legs and pressed his face against her while he looked up with hungry eyes. Cassandra felt an answering throb.

Ty whispered in her ear, "I want to watch Cyn touch you." Cassandra breathed in Ty's beast scent lightly perfuming the air. It was enough to wash away any embarrassment. Shivering with desire in Ty's arms, she nodded. He loosened the tie securing her pants before Cyn reached to pull them down over her hips. His eyes intent upon her, she felt her own need build beneath that look. She watched as Cyn pulled the pants down her legs, and lifted one foot then the other from them.

Ty's heated breathing in her ear told her he liked what he saw. Cyn placed her feet wide apart on the ground, exposing her to him, and began to slowly slide his hands up her inner legs.

"Put your hands around my neck and hold on, Cassandra." Ty's voice vibrated in her ear. Not thinking of anything but the touch of the two men she obeyed. "Don't let go." She gave another jerky nod of understanding while Cyn's hands continued their slow rise.

Cassandra felt Ty's hands slide under her shirt, skim over her stomach to intimately cup her breasts. Intense jolts of pained pleasure shot through her when he pinched the nipples that had already felt peaked and strained. She let out a sharp cry and convulsively dug her nails into the skin of his neck. His whiskers scraped her neck when he turned his face and she heard him say, "Now, Cyn, pleasure my companion."

A part of her was shocked when the arrogant Cyn obeyed and brought his mouth to her, parting her already wet labia with his tongue. She moaned as his tongue slid down one side then the other, not quite touching her where she wanted it most. He stroked from her vaginal opening to almost touch her clit then back and round the sides of it, driving her crazy with his teasing.

"Please, please." Her voice was a broken plea before she knew she spoke. Cyn pulled her legs over his shoulders and pushed up so her shoulders rested against Ty's chest while her hands remained around his neck. Cyn now supported her hips and legs totally. With one hand, he slid three fingers inside to stroke her pussy. She began to shake, she was so close to coming apart.

"Please, please." She pleaded without any thought. Cyn's touch, along with Ty's continued teasing of her nipples, caught her body in a firestorm of sensation. She was on the edge, wanting to fall and afraid she wouldn't survive if she did. Cyn pulled her cunt to his open mouth and sucked in her clit as his fingers continued stroking. The heat and pressure just *there* were too much to hold. She gave a choked scream as she shook and came apart in their arms.

Ty moved one of his arms down and pressed Cyn's head even more tightly to Cassandra. She tried to jerk back from the overwhelming sensation but Ty gave her no place to move. Instead, he used his other hand to pull on her hair, forcing her head back so he could kiss her as she spasmed helplessly.

Finally, Ty and Cyn released their hold on Cassandra and lowered her back to the ground. They stood, loosened their pants, and allowed them to drop to the ground before

they kicked them away. They stood there for a moment naked while Cassandra stared at them half dazed, eating them up with her eyes. Cyn stood slightly shorter than Ty, and unlike Ty had a chest shaven clean of any hair. It, and his abdomen, were even more muscled than she had guessed from the strength he had shown in handling her during their ride earlier. In one area, though, he and Ty were quite similar. Their cocks were practically twins for size and width, proudly jutting from their bodies with anticipation.

“You are both the most beautiful men I have ever seen.”

They smiled at her with male pride and Cassandra reached up to touch that most male part of each of them. They gasped as she held a cock in each fist, squeezing them in a firm but not cruel caress from root to tip. Ty placed an arm on Cyn’s shoulder for support and Cyn pulled Ty in for a kiss above Cassandra. She knelt between them, continuing her caress. When their mouths joined above her, she rose to her knees and ran her tongue over the hot satin tips of their cocks, loving the salty, slightly bitter taste of the pre-cum that wet the tips of their cocks. She used the saliva and pre-cum to add lubricant to the stroking of her hands. The men groaned above her and thrust into her sensual hands. She felt their leg muscles tighten on either side of her and looked up to see them holding onto to each other in a brutally tight embrace. Then they were both pulsing in her hands to shoot cum over each other and over her lips as she fiercely continued to tongue them. When the pulsing stopped, they collapsed, tented above Cassandra. She gave each cock a final fond kiss then released them. The men panted and she felt incredible satisfaction at having, momentarily at least, taken command of these two powerful men to give them pleasure. She smiled, looking at her messy hands with amusement and thought she probably didn’t look too commanding.

“Umm, I think parts of me need a rinse,” Cassandra murmured then started to scoot away. A hand dropped on her shoulder, stopping her.

“No. I am the one learning control. I will wash you. Lie here. Cyn, lie next to her. I think tending you both will help with my sense of control.” They did as Ty directed.

As she lay there, she became aware of how clear her mind was and what that meant.

Almost as though he heard her, Ty spoke conversationally while he wet some washcloths and put them on stones by the fire to warm. “Cyn and I talked while you were asleep today about how to master my beast. I was trying to hold back the scent, to control how much of it was released. It’s working, I’m getting more and more control over my beast, but I feel him pacing inside, impatient and waiting. What we just did eased the hunger, but the need to change is still there; the beast inside me is pushing and soon I must let him out.”

He picked up the first cloth and washed Cassandra’s face. He took the second and held it to her cunt, both teasing and cleaning her with the wet heat. While he gently wiped her, Cyn raised himself to one elbow and leaned over to kiss Cassandra again. “Thank you for sharing this night with the both of us.” Cyn’s face contained passion, anticipation. But she was surprised to find caring there as well.

Between the two men’s touches, Cassandra *felt* cared for, but a little frightened, as though they might reach out to take over her life as they had so easily controlled her body. Strangely, it *was* just a *little* frightened, another part of her felt...anticipation, longing? Before the thought could clearly solidify in her head, the sight of Ty pushing Cyn back distracted her.

He hissed as Ty carefully wrapped the warm cloth around his cock to clean it. Finally, Ty took the last cloth to wash himself. He rinsed all the cloths with more water from the bucket and put them aside.

“We must eat before the change fever starts again. The moon is starting to rise and I don’t have much time.” Ignoring the men’s nudity and her body only covered by her shirt, they quickly ate bowls of stew and handfuls of the small plums, then drank their cups of tea. *This must be the strangest meal I’ve ever had.* Cyn caught her eye and shared a smile as he seemed to guess her thoughts, but Ty only frowned and said with some urgency, “Eat,” then looked up at the darkening sky. Before the last sips of tea were gone he put his cup aside.

It was the look of a restless beast that peered out of the still human eyes. She was seated close to him on one side, and with Cyn on the other they formed a tight triangle of bodies by the fire. Ty laid a hand on Cassandra and Cyn's knees. "Mine."

"Yes, Ty, we are both yours." Cyn spoke in a confident reassuring tone, but Ty's beast was still new and not completely stable. Ty rammed the heels of his hands into Cyn's shoulders knocking him to the ground, and then was quickly on him, pinning down Cyn's upper arms with his knees.

Ty glowered down at Cyn. "My companion." He jabbed a pointed finger in Cassandra's direction. She sat frozen, shocked by the sudden violence when Ty had not shown it even on the first night. Cyn, however, maintained a calm front and pulled back his head to expose his neck while his eyes stayed on Ty's face.

"I am also yours, my bond brother. Will you kill me?"

"No. No! Not kill mine." Ty appeared confused and Cyn took advantage of the moment to bend up from the neck and take Ty's exposed cock into his mouth. Ty gasped and let his knees slide over Cyn's arms to surround his head. He grabbed Cyn's head and pulled him closer to brutally thrust into his mouth.

When Ty began to thrust, the scent of the beast grew rich in the air and Cassandra's shock turned to lust. Suddenly, she burned and ached with the need to be part of this...to touch and be filled, to drown in the passion. She pulled off her tunic and sat astride Cyn's chest behind Ty, shamelessly rubbing her body against his, seeking the source of the intoxicating scent.

A rush of heat flooded Ty's skin, and he released Cyn's head, arched back and knocked Cassandra to the ground alongside him and Cyn. Oil covered his body and fur appeared. Ty had assumed his man-beast form. His clawed hands gripped Cyn's head, holding it in place to continue thrusting until he suddenly stopped and shouted. When he pulled back, she could see cum overflowing the sides of Cyn's mouth.

Both men turned to look at Cassandra naked on the ground beside them. Ty moved from Cyn with the liquid grace of his beast to first stretch over Cassandra then lie along her back while Cyn rolled onto his side so that Cassandra was now pressed between the man Cyn and the half-beast Ty. Cyn held Cassandra's head as they shared a kiss that tasted of Ty's cum. The liquid burned down her throat, and her lust reached a new level. Vaguely, she noted that Cyn's eyes were glazed with lust. Ty's arms reached round her to pull her closer to his body then pushed down her body to part her legs, rubbing the pads of his clawed hands against wet, tender flesh. She shook with desire and felt her thighs grow wet with her cream. A pleased growl filled her ear, and lips too hot to be human pressed against her neck. Her body was one solid ache of need. Cyn pulled back free of the kiss and thrust, seeking to enter Cassandra, but Ty's hands were already there. She saw one clawed hand grip Cyn's cock and squeeze enough to cause the other man to jerk when he felt the warning, but then Ty guided Cyn's cock through Cassandra's slick labia to the opening of her vagina. Cassandra cried out in momentary relief as her tissues were stretched and filled. She felt Cyn take hold of her hips and hold her steady while he lunged all the way inside.

Ty pushed Cassandra's back, rolling her on top of Cyn, who maintained his grip on her hips and continued moving in and out of her body. Then Ty was behind her. He shoved her down to Cyn's chest, raising and exposing her ass. Cassandra lay pressed down, her arms trapped between her body and Cyn's with Cyn's hard arms forming a cage down the sides of her body and Ty's inescapable strength pressing her into the chest that smelled of Cyn and Ty's beast. She moaned in surrender and rubbed her face into the scent for more.

She barely noticed Ty removing his arm until she felt him parting the globes of her ass. His breath was on her, then the wet kiss of his tongue sliding from where Cyn's body joined hers up to circle the rosette of her anus. Cyn froze, and then shuddered as the hot tongue repeated its journey. Then she felt the blunt wet tip of Ty's cock nudging her anus. Ty was entering her, still wet from coming in Cyn's mouth. An inarticulate cry broke from Cassandra as Ty slowly forced the huge member into her body.

The feeling of him also pushing into her was too much and she sought to scoot away, but Ty tightened his grip on her hips, holding her in place. She had already been stretched by Cyn, who was as large as Ty in human form. But, in his half beast form, Ty was even larger. He leaned over her so that she was completely enveloped in his scent. Its drugging effect left her with no pain and only the need to fuck. He pushed in further.

Still not moving, Cyn groaned, "Yes, I feel you squeezing me." She moaned and dug her fingers into Cyn's flesh. When she did, he gave a keening cry and started fucking her again with short, hard thrusts.

Ty began to withdraw and return. He pushed in further each time until she felt his hips meeting hers. All the way in he gave a guttural cry of triumph and began to thrust in earnest.

Cyn increased his strokes in counterpoint to Ty's and Cassandra felt the pleasure build and build inside. It grew beyond her ability to hold it, when suddenly she shattered and let go. The orgasm took her and held her as her body clamped down on their cocks. Cyn ground his hips against her and began pulsing, filling her with his wet heat. But she still helplessly rode the peak that refused to release her. It held her while Ty continued to fuck her body until he finally shouted out with another triumphant cry. His clawed hands brutally tightened into her hips, holding her still for his final fierce thrusts while he filled her. His cum released her from the merciless orgasm and all the muscle tension left her.

Ty pulled free of her body, placing a kiss between her neck and shoulder, then stretched up to kiss Cyn's lips. "Mine." He spoke decisively to both of them.

Ty's eyes glittered in the firelight as, once more, heat burned from his body, and Ty assumed his full beast form. The giant wolf looked down at Cyn and Cassandra, and sniffed in their scents. Cassandra craned her head up to watch him run his tongue along Cyn's shoulder and down Cassandra's back.

"Ty," Cyn quietly called to the beast. He raised an open hand to the muzzle that had reached Cyn and Cassandra's still joined hips, and then sighed in relief or perhaps pleasure



when the wolf nuzzled his hand before stepping away. The large furred head turned back to look at the couple again before he continued, melting into the darkness.

She dropped her head down to Cyn's chest, collapsing in a boneless heap. He squeezed her in a hug before pulling her head up for an intensely tender kiss. "Thank you. Now you belong to both of us. My dear companion." Pulling her down to his shoulder, he sighed a contented sound while rubbing small circles on her back.

Cassandra felt a clutching around her heart. She had been so determined to hold her heart and body separate so she could leave Ty with fondness, but no heartache. She knew that Ty had touched some hidden part of her. In this moment of clarity, she knew he had been taking pieces of her heart from the first and this night had just cemented it. Now, after feeling Cyn's tenderness and seeing the love that caused him to risk his life for Ty, she knew he had come to claim her heart as well. For the first time since she had seen the boy she had watched grow to manhood, then turn raver and kill himself, she wanted to belong with another person; to not be alone. Did Cyn want her to stay with them? Is that what he meant when he said she belonged to them or were they only words of gratitude? She searched for a way to ask his feelings without making him feel obligated to lie.

While she was struggling with her thoughts, a horrible scream cut through the night. Cyn shot upright, still holding Cassandra close.

He spoke urgently. "That was Ty. Something is attacking him. Stay by the fire. Put some wood on it so that only one end is in the fire. If it's ravers, and one gets through, use the burning branches. Even the mad creatures fear the fire." Cyn stood while he spoke, bringing Cassandra up with him. He released her and stepped away.

"Wait, Cyn, you're naked and weaponless!"

He paused a second. "You weren't meant to see this," and then he *changed*. A giant wolf stood in Cyn's place. He barked an order to Cassandra who automatically backed up to the fire and nodded as though she understood, and then he was gone.

She collapsed to her knees, staring into the darkness. *A beast. Cyn is a beast, a brethren, but he's also nobility. How has this secret been kept? No wonder he was confident that he would be able to handle Ty.* She remembered how Ty had submitted when Cyn bit him that afternoon. *Cyn knew just what to do because he is a beast as well.* She remembered Cyn's surprising strength and speed and now knew the reason. *Tonight Ty's scent seemed even richer. Is it because some of Cyn's escaped and mixed with Ty's?* On the heels of these thoughts came another: *if Cyn hadn't meant for me to know about his beast then could he have meant for me to stay with them? Do I really love them or is this all a scent-induced illusion?* She shivered, chilled by her thoughts. *What attacked Ty? Are there ravers in the woods?* She stood and moved to put the fire between her and the entrance to the stone enclosed camp and quickly pulled on her clothes. No matter the answer to her questions, she needed to be ready for Ty and Cyn to return, or for whatever came to her fire. She began her preparations.

## Chapter Seven: Raver's Revenge

Cassandra knelt, staring into the darkness beyond the enclosure. To one side of her was the fire. A couple of longer pieces of wood about the thickness of her wrist stuck out; she touched them frequently for reassurance. On her other side was a small stack of similar wood, supplies to be lit later. She had quickly dressed for the night in dark blue tunic and pants, and over that a matching bandana, like a bandit. The bandana covered a leather thong with a short, single reed. The necklace medallion from Cyn remained next to her skin. After the initial shock of Ty's scream and seeing Cyn change, a strange calm settled over her. She welcomed the empty feeling, knowing that, if she allowed it, fear would take its place. *Ty is hurt, but Cyn will bring him back. They will return safely.* She kept repeating the mantra through her mind.

The soft puff of a padded foot hitting the dry dirt alerted her something was coming. A gray shadow stepped free from the blackness; another giant wolf, like Ty or Cyn, but a stranger and she was betting he was no brethren, but instead a raver come to call.

The creature's cold blue eyes focused solely on her. It was breathing heavily. The beast's lips curled up in a soundless snarl to reveal yellow fangs, while drops of saliva dripped

to the ground. With slow, limping steps it came toward her. The firelight revealed blood-matted fur at the top of one of its forelegs.

Fear shattered her wall of calm and filled all the space inside her. Without turning from the creature, she snatched the unlit end of one of the torches from the fire and waved it in front of her. “Just stop it. Keep it away.” She didn’t know if she was praying or giving herself orders.

The creature stopped for a moment and *changed*. A half beast she had never seen stood tall before her. The ragged ends of dirt-brown hair surrounded a square face lit by a menacing smile. He sniffed the air and looked at her with contempt.

His voice held the gravelly sound of the beast. “He’s had sex with you, but you still smell tasty underneath his scent. I’ll take what’s his as he took mine.”

An evil smile followed this announcement and he reached down to cup his balls and run claw-tipped fingers delicately along the full, heavily veined cock. “I could make you beg. Put my scent on you so you’ll beg to be fucked, and then, later, beg to die.”

She shuddered, remembering Ty’s story of the raver tearing into his victim’s body to eat and, worse, the victims’ bodies she herself had seen. Terror filled her mind. *Where are Ty and Cyn? Has this creature managed to kill them? No.* She refused to think that. Icy fingers gripped her heart and cold anger filled her, chasing away the fear.

She stared at the creature, willing all the hatred she felt to fill her face. In slow, precise movements she pulled the scarf up over her nose with one hand, and then rose from the ground.

He gave a short bark of a laugh. “You can only block my scent until I remove that rag. Perhaps I won’t kill you yet. Maybe I’ll take you to share with *my* brethren. We are the true brother wolves, not those others that call themselves brethren.”

Cassandra didn’t say anything but stepped behind the fire, putting both it and the torch in her hand between her and the creature.

His smile became even wider, and he advanced on her again. When he was no more than two steps away, she suddenly pulled the bandana away from her face to reveal the reed of the necklace held between her lips. She blew through it sharply.

The creature paused his approach again and looked down. A small barb was piercing his chest. "What?" He looked at it and then at her. His eyes widened with comprehension as the drug entered his system.

"Kill you fast then."

He lunged at her, but she was ready and darted to the side while swinging her torch down through the fire. Burning branches and coals were knocked out of the fire ring and over the beast. He screeched and bent to frantically brush the embers from his furred body. Cassandra shoved her torch into his face with all her strength, trying to blind him.

"Fall. Damn you! FALL!"

The drug should be taking him down, but he stood screaming in pain and blindly slashing the air. Cassandra lurched back to avoid the claw-tipped hands. Tripping over a stone, she fell to the ground. She rolled away as the blind creature dove with outstretched claws to where she had been a second ago.

"No!" He screamed his fury, and then just collapsed. The drug had finally done its work.

Cassandra tried to stand, but fell back gasping as pain tore through her leg. She looked down to see a long, deep gash across her thigh. His claws must have raked her in that last attempt to reach her. Blood poured from the wound. She pressed her hands on it, but the blood continued to seep out.

At that moment, two more beasts burst into the enclosure. Thank the gods! She knew these wolves. It was Ty and Cyn. One's form seemed to melt and grow, then Cyn stood in the place of the beast.

“Cassandra!” He ran to her, ignoring the still form of the creature. He moved her hands and tore off the pant leg.

Still in wolf form, Ty came up beside Cyn and whined, looking at Cassandra’s wound. It bled badly, but not with the rhythmic pulsing of a cut artery.

Beside them, the creature’s claws flexed in the dirt as the drug started to lose its effect. Ty growled and his muscles bunched to attack, but Cyn placed a hand on the furred shoulders “No.” He quickly pressed Cassandra’s hands back over the wound, and then jumped up.

He dashed over to the well, gathered up the silvery rope he had given Ty to use with the water bucket earlier, and ran back.

Ty positioned himself between Cassandra and the creature, watching it, and emitting a steady threatening growl.

Cassandra was muzzy-headed from shock and blood loss, but still managed to shake her head. “No, Cyn, the drug will wear off, and he will be able to shift to escape and heal.”

“Not with this rope.” Cyn’s mouth was pulled into a cruel smile. He bound the creature with lightning speed so that it lay on its side with its body forced back into a bow as he tied wrists to ankles. Then he wrapped the remaining rope around the body and under the arms and back around the leg to hip joints, and finally under the chin and back to where the wrists were tied so that the burnt face was also pulled back into the bow shape.

As he worked, Cyn briefly explained, “This is a living rope, made partially from spider silk and keyed by the Oryions to me.” He stopped talking, changed into his half beast form, bit off a small section at the free end of the rope, and put it aside. He made a puncture wound on his wrist, dripped a few drops of blood onto the rope and gave the end a sharp twist. He tossed the bundled creature out of the way with easy strength then changed back to his fully human form again and continued speaking. “I activated it. The rope will now adhere to him no matter what form he takes. He won’t be able to escape.”

Ty finally ceased growling, and then he too changed back to man form.

Cyn picked up the section of rope he had bitten off and knelt by Cassandra. Ty joined him and frowned, looking at the wound. "It's bad Cyn. If we don't get the bleeding stopped quickly, I fear she'll die."

"Cassandra, can you understand me?" Cyn's voice was urgent.

*They are safe.* She only wanted to close her eyes and rest, but she fought to focus and listen. She nodded. "Yes, I understand. What do you want now?"

"I can just bandage the wound and you *might* heal, or I can add my blood to your wound before I bandage it. If I do, you will definitely heal, but the blood will bind you to me. It will be like the chosen bond. You will be mine. I'm sorry to force this on you, but I will not risk your life. I just can't. You have filled what was empty in me. I can't lose you now." His words pled for her understanding even as he didn't offer her a choice.

Ty's eyebrows drew together in confusion. He grabbed Cyn's arm. "What do you mean she will be yours? Blood acts like scent?"

Impatiently Cyn explained. "There are things we haven't discussed about the beast, Ty. Things I had no reason to discuss with you before. The scent your beast exudes is not only an aphrodisiac for the night. Over time, your lover will begin to crave -- to even require your body, your scent. It is how the *chosen* bond is formed.

"Our body fluids will promote healing. My blood *can* heal her, but this much blood-to-blood exposure will bind her to me like the *chosen* bond."

"Mine!" Ty's beast was rising again then he shook his head in negation. "No, if she must belong to anyone, then it will be me, but it's wrong to force this on her."

"Stop." Cassandra had listened in silence. Now she was too weary to listen to them bicker. Her weakened voice silenced them like a shout. "Stop, I want you too, both of you. Heal me together."

Her words freed them to act. Ty released Cyn's arm and turned his wrist up. Cyn concentrated and changed to half form. He used his claws to tear open wounds on his and Ty's arms. They both pressed their bloody wrists to Cassandra's injured thigh.

"It burns!" Cassandra gasped and jerked, but both men held her in place. It felt like the burn of alcohol when she swallowed a strong drink, but the mouth it entered through was her injured thigh. The heat spread throughout her body, taking away the pain and leaving a gentle numbness.

"Enough." Cyn took away his wrist and Ty followed. Cyn changed back to human form, unraveled the section of rope he had cut, and stretched it over her wound, pulling the edges of the skin together before tying the ends and giving them a snapping twist. When he did this, she felt the rope twitch and adhere to her skin.

"The living rope will hold your wound closed while our blood helps you heal. It will hold fast and not come off until I release it." Cyn spoke gently and stroked the skin around the wound with tender care.

Ty leaned over to press a kiss against her lips. "Now you will truly be my companion. I'm sorry for how this happened, but I couldn't have let you go. If I had seen your life fading... I couldn't have let you pass from me."

Free from the pain, Cassandra gave a careless smile. "S'all right, Ty," she slurred. "I have you and Cyn. Fun, warm, happy, home."

Ty quirked an eyebrow and looked over to Cyn, who also raised mocking eyebrows and looked at Cassandra. "I do believe it's made you a little drunk, my dear. That's a side effect I didn't..."

"Arrgghh." A pained sound interrupted Cyn. The bound captive was regaining consciousness. With a reassuring touch on Cassandra's shoulder, the still naked Cyn stood and approached their prisoner.



## Chapter Eight: Interrogation

The creature strained uselessly against his bonds then changed to wolf form. White fur covered his previously burned face, but the cold blue eyes appeared healed. The rope held through the change, but now its limbs were pulled back as no wolf's were ever meant to be. The wolf screeched in pain. Rapidly he changed again to the half beast form. Now healed, he struggled against the rope, but still could not escape.

Cyn stopped in front of him. "When I interrupted your fight with Ty -- who, by the way, had managed to injure you even though he is only a newly made beast and you had ambushed him -- you ran immediately, like a coward." Cyn spoke in an easy, conversational tone that had only a slight edge to it. He looked back to where Ty still sat protectively beside Cassandra. "Ty, that's twice now one of these," he kicked the creature just below the ribs, "has jumped you from overhead. I expect better from you."

Turning back to the half beast, he squatted down beside him. The flickering firelight across his face gave away nothing. With studied indifference he raised one hand and, in a show of power, changed it to the claw of the half beast. He extended a claw tip and made a shallow stab into the creature's chest. "Most ravers are mad. They kill because their mind snaps, unable to handle the presence of a beast in them. But you're different, aren't you? You

fled when you saw a second beast. You ran straight to an area that was crisscrossed with your scent. You must have spent much of the afternoon winding in and out of that area. It would have made tracking you almost impossible had we decided to continue with that and not return to camp.

“Clear thinking for a raver,” Cyn continued, making short stabs in random patterns around the creature’s torso, gradually moving lower while he spoke. “And you didn’t just happen on us, did you? I saw where you waited for Ty by the pond. There were fresh deer tracks there. But you were waiting on another kind of beast, weren’t you? You were waiting for Ty.” The creature tried to snarl, but Cyn punched a claw into its diaphragm, forcing it to puff out its air instead. “Too bad you didn’t know my little secret as well.” Cyn’s lips parted briefly in an evil parody of a smile. “You weren’t much of a fighter. Even our companion, an untrained woman, was too much for you.”

Despite what Cyn had said about the creature’s sanity, it continued to uselessly pull at the ropes with even greater agitation. His chest and abdomen were dotted with blood from Cyn’s jabs. Cyn paused again, his claw just above the creatures’ testicles. “Now we’ll go on, happy and healthy, while you’re forgotten worm food. How does that make you feel?” With the final question Cyn stabbed a claw into the base of the testes.

The creature screamed its agony and changed to his human form. Healed, but furious, he screeched, “You will die! You bastard duke! You killed Timos! You hold yourself as noble, but you should be worm food! You will be! We are the true brethren, the wise wolves, not you fools. We will take control and you will suffer.” The words spilled from his mouth in a solid stream. Then he suddenly stopped.

“Timos?” questioned Cyn, his tone mild, civil.

Anguish crossed the raver’s face. He sagged in his bonds, his face lost the look of a fanatic, and, for the moment, he seemed rational. “Yes, Timos, son of Marion and Ryder. He came to you, he came to his duke for permission to go to the city and join His Majesty’s Guard Forces.

“You, who are supposed to know everything, let him go. Did you know he had the breathing disease? Did you?” The raver stopped speaking, clearly expecting a reply.

Sobered by the questions and the outburst, Cassandra watched in fascinated horror. To her surprise, she saw the raver’s words did affect Cyn, whose face had taken on a thoughtful, sad expression.

He cocked his head to the side. “I didn’t know. However, I do remember Timos, his grandparents, and even his father. His father was a member of the Royal Guard. He and Timos’s mother, a city girl, died one night during a robbery. Timos’s grandparents raised him in their home in my woods.

“When they passed away, he did come to see me. He was slight in size, but a man full grown and had every right to go learn more of the life his father had led so, yes, I gave him my blessing to go. I didn’t know he had the breathing disease. Neither he nor his grandparents ever spoke of it, but I would still have respected his decision.”

Cyn ceased his musing and stared at the raver. “Why do you care so?”

The sanity was fading from the raver’s face. “Timos should not have been there! You should have kept him safe. That’s your duty. He should not have died.

“He was my best friend. He took his medicines in secret; only I knew of his problem. He went off alone to get his supplies one night and I went with some others, drinking. They left, but I stayed. Timos came to find me.

“On the way back to the guard hall, a gang of thugs attacked us.” His face twisted in distress as he recited the memory. “A drunk and a small man, we looked like easy targets.

“We were fighting well and would have won, then Timos started gasping. He couldn’t catch his breath. They killed him. He hadn’t taken the time to make up his medicine and take it before he came to look for me, and he died.

“The duty guard arrived in time to save me, but not Timos.” Tears were now running freely down the raver’s face. “He shouldn’t have been there at all. It was your fault. You’re his lord. You should have protected him.”

“You, a wolf, you couldn’t have shifted to save him?” Cyn mocked, his face cold.

“I was not a wolf then. I could do nothing. I joined the wise ones later. I quit the guard and left the city. They took me then and showed me how to be strong. If *they* had care of Timos, he would have lived! No disease would have touched him.” The raver’s voice broke. “No disease. No disease. No disease.”

He seemed to have emptied his cup and kept muttering. Cyn motioned Ty to take over the questioning, and then moved out of the creature’s sight. Ty crouched down beside him.

“So you know what strength is?” Ty leaned in closer to the man’s face. “Tell me. Tell me how to learn to be truly strong and I will avenge Timos for you.”

The mention of Timos’s name caused the muttering to cease. “Timos? Avenge Timos?” Then he sniffed Ty and his still human lips pulled back into a snarl. “No, you belong to that other one and you killed my new friend. I’ll tell you nothing.”

Cassandra pulled in a quick breath. He must mean the raver who attacked Ty in Howerth. He was the cause of this whole trip! She looked at Cyn to see his reaction. He grimly nodded to her as if this confirmed his suspicion. Ty’s face, however, gave nothing away as he continued to hold the prisoner’s gaze. “It’s true I belong to him, but you know also that I’m newly turned.”

Ty’s look turned sly; he leaned slightly closer the raver, and spoke in a soft voice. “If I had true strength I could break away. I swear I would avenge Timos if I could. I was also a guard. I would avenge my own.”

The prisoner looked hard at Ty, then nodded. “You smell of the truth. True strength is found with the wise ones. If you go alone to the border, they will find you. You may tell them that Nastra sent you. Once you have learned, you will know what to do. We are many.

We are strong. Kill the duke. It's his fault. Kill him! Make him suffer! Kill him!" The raver was screaming wildly now. His mad eyes fastened on Ty then they shifted from side to side: searching. "Where is he? Where is the woman? Let's take her and make him suffer more."

Ty leaned away from him and looked up at Cyn. Cyn nodded his acceptance of the information. Now there was only one thing left for the raver. The duke's justice would be served.

## Chapter Nine: New Ties Explored

With some care, Ty picked up the man and carried him out of the enclosure. Cyn took his sword and a hinged folding shovel from his pack and followed. Sadly, Cassandra watched them leave. She knew the penalty for all ravers. Once the madness took them there was no turning back. They would kill and kill again and only be stopped by their own death. Even now, if they untied him, he would attack them, and, if he lived through it, he would kill others.

So she lay by the fire and said nothing. Although still weak, she could feel a buzzing sting in her thigh, like the flow of blood returning to a limb that had gone to sleep. That must be the magic of Ty and Cyn's blood knitting her tissues back together again.

Their blood in her. Her mind stuttered over the idea. The initial sensation of drunkenness had faded, but warmth still surged throughout her body. What she witnessed with the raver, Nastra, had taken her focus off herself, but now all the strange feelings had returned. A simmering burn inside the core of her being flickered into flames that left her twisting restlessly. Her mouth went dry even as moisture wet her inner thighs. *I shouldn't feel this way. Not after what happened. What I had to do. What I saw.* But telling herself she shouldn't react this way didn't change anything.

Their blood was in her. Now she needed their bodies.

Long minutes later Ty and Cyn walked back into the enclosure. They were both wet, as if they had bathed after they completed their duty.

“Ty, Cyn. I’m sorry, but I need you now.”

Her words were unnecessary. Both men stopped as if struck. Their nostrils flared as they took deep, deliberate breaths. She knew they could smell her arousal on the air. They stalked across the space to the fire that divided them from Cassandra.

With exacting control, Cyn returned his sword and shovel to his pack before turning back to her while Ty moved straight to her side.

Ty remained human, but his voice took on the rasp of the beast when he spoke, his beast scent filling the air around him. “What do you need, my companion?”

Fever-hot heat flushed her skin. She drank in the sight of his naked, hard body above her like the promise of water. “I’m burning inside. I thirst. I need.”

Ty stepped astride her body and knelt over her chest, presenting himself to her. “Then drink me. Take me.” Ty gasped as her lips surrounded him. She grabbed his hips and with a hard yank pulled him closer, sliding more of the smooth, hard cock into her mouth.

“Gods, Cyn, she’s hot like she’s going through change fever!” But he didn’t stop moving in and out of her mouth. He wrapped a hand around the back of her neck, both supporting her and to take some control of her movements.

Cassandra stopped thinking. She sucked and rubbed her tongue against the flesh in her mouth. Drops of pre-cum leaked out the small slit at the end of Ty’s cock and she needed more. She lashed round and round the head with her tongue before sucking him in further. She took him all the way, pressing her face to his groin and, still sucking hard, slid back, giving him no reprieve. Ty was overcome and shuddered out a release that she drank in quick greedy swallows.

It was so good, easing the burning thirst for just this taste while leaving her body still aching and unfulfilled. She kept hold of him using lips and tongue to take every bit of the clinging fluid. Finally, allowing the cockhead to pop free, she gave the slit one last lick and looked up at him with demand.

“More.”

Cyn, who had stood to the side watching them with his own lust-filled eyes, put a hand on Ty's shoulder, urging him to move off. “My turn.”

Ty slid over Cassandra's body and leaned down to share one brief kiss with her while Cyn knelt between her legs, his cock pointing up and leaking its own tears for Cassandra. Her eyes fastened on it then shifted up to Cyn's face.

Cyn looked down at her with hard, hungry eyes and allowed his own beast's scent to fill the air. Her thirst had eased, but the burning need remained.

“You.” Her look was squarely accusing at Cyn. “You did this to me. Fix it.” Pain beyond the need her body felt filled her chest. “Love me.”

Cyn's hard expression broke and a need twin to what Cassandra felt showed in his face. “With all that I have,” he replied, and leaned his long frame over her body to kiss her.

It began as a kiss of tenderness, his lips sliding over hers in a gentle seduction, but as her lips parted, their kiss became fiercely urgent. Their tongues battled to touch and taste. Challenged by her demands, Cyn pushed up until he was again forcing her legs wide open so he could kneel at the delta between her thighs.

Ty moved behind her and knelt, slipping his knees under her head and shoulders so she was propped up looking at Cyn. Ty pressed her shoulders down against his thighs while Cyn stared into her eyes.

“After tonight, you will not doubt again to whom you belong.” He cupped a hand over her mound so he touched and pressed just around the outside of her labia, holding her in



place, allowing her to feel his heat, but denying her the touch she really wanted. He smiled cruelly as she tried to buck up against him.

He echoed Ty's earlier words. "What do you need, my companion?"

The ache climbed to a new height inside her, a burning carried throughout her body by their blood within and air rich with the scent of two beasts that filled her lungs with each breath. "You, you inside me, Cyn. Please, I need you."

"And I will always give you what you need." Cyn positioned himself and pushed into her body in long, single thrust, then stopped. "Gods, your body *has* heated like you're in a change fever."

His eyes focused on hers intently. "And when I change, will you take my beast also as you've taken Ty's? Will you be my companion in every way?"

"Yes! Yes! Now. Anything, please move. Give me what I need. Now!"

"As you wish." Cyn changed to his half beast in a flash of heat and briefly oiled skin that became richly furred over steely muscles. Cassandra felt Cyn's cock further stretch her, but, there was only pleasure. The scent of Cyn's own beast scent now freely rolled from him, drenching both Cassandra and Ty in the aroma.

A roar sounded behind Cassandra's shoulder. Ty's heat boiled through her and the touch of fur beneath her shoulders replaced that of skin. Clawed hands pulled her up and pushed her firmly against Cyn's furred chest and down onto his cock. Cyn took hold of her, trapping her arms between their bodies. She buried her face against his chest and attempted to raise herself up on his cock, to begin the motion she craved. Instead, Ty grabbed her hips and stopped her when she had nearly reached the apex of her motion. She felt her ass cheeks being parted and the hot, wet tip of his cock pressed against her anus. His thick moisture wet her. She moaned her approval and let herself be slowly guided down, Cyn and Ty both filling her.

It was easier than the first time and felt so good. The hunger whispered in her mind. *Pump them. Squeeze them. Yes!* But it was the men who alternately hammered into her body. The coils of hunger wrapped tighter with each thrust until her orgasm hit and she melted and drowned in a river of pleasure. The squeezing of her muscles sent Ty and Cyn over. They groaned and each put a mouth to her shoulders.

She gasped and cried out as two sets of fangs sank into her flesh, marking her while their hot cum filled her. Finally, satisfied, the burning hunger released her.

Cyn withdrew his fangs and whispered, "Mine."

Ty withdrew as well, rubbing his face against the back of her neck and her upper back before placing a tender kiss and rasping out, "And mine."

Cyn leaned in to take a kiss, groaning again when she ran the tip of her tongue over his fangs, exploring and accepting all that he was. She was startled to feel wetness on her cheeks and looked to see the source.

Tears were escaping Cyn's eyes! "Thank you." His voice was raspy and thick like he could barely get the words past his throat. "I knew you had courage, but thank you for touching, for accepting the beast. I didn't know if I would ever be able to share this side of me with a woman."

She tenderly brushed her hand through the auburn fur and cupped his head. She then reached another arm back to circle Ty's neck. "You're both mine as well and I find every aspect of you beautiful and worthy. Your touch in any form is a thing of wonder. Never doubt you both deserve love and affection."

The men gave her a final hug between them and then eased free of her and lowered her to a blanket on the ground.

A new thought crossed Cassandra's mind that caused a shiver to run down her spine. "What of the others the raver spoke of? If he wasn't just creating them in his mind, then some of the ravers are maintaining some sort of sanity and are acting together. Something

will have to be done.” Cyn nodded and she continued. “And what of Timos? I heard you,” she looked at Ty, “promise to avenge him.”

Ty’s face looked solemnly back at Cassandra. “What the raver didn’t know was that I had already seen to it. We didn’t know about Timos having the breathing illness, but word was sent to Cyn about his death. The men that caused it are now dead also.

“We’d heard Nastra left the city right after the attack and disappeared. He never knew his friend’s attackers died. I never told him because it would have caused him more grief to know he did nothing to help avenge his friend. Although, in some ways I suppose, it wouldn’t have mattered since he blamed Cyn for allowing him to come to the city in the first place.”

Cassandra shuddered again, thinking of the twisted logic of the raver, then firmly pulled her mind back to this moment. “I know there is much for us to consider tomorrow, but I think you’ve worn me out for now,” she finished with a very sleepy smile.

Cassandra’s eyes were already closed when two damp cloths washed over her skin. “Nice,” she muttered. “Tomorrow, more explanations. I want to know...” She was asleep before the sentence was complete.

\* \* \* \* \*

Cyn and Ty changed and were once again in fully human form. The changing process cleaned their bodies, but the human side of them required the ritual of a wash, as well. Cyn looked over to Ty as they finished cleaning up. “How do you feel?”

A startled look passed across Ty’s face. He frowned while he considered his answer. “I feel normal, almost. Like I was walking a tightrope before, just barely in control of the beast, and now we’re at peace with each other. Is this going to last or will I be back to fighting to appear a normal human again tomorrow?”

Cyn nodded. This confirmed what he had expected. “By taking Cassandra as we did, you’ve given your beast a lasting anchor. As long as Cassandra continues to accept us and you

allow your beast some freedom, you should be fine. You'll still feel the extra energy and some restlessness, but you should be able to remain in control." He paused then added, "You do know what we've done tonight? By giving her your blood, she has become your *chosen*, as she has become mine. Much of our humanity, and for you, I think, even more so than me, will be tied up with her. The connection to her gives you stability that most turned brethren must work for years to achieve.

"What we did guaranteed she would live, but it was a rash decision. If she changes her mind it could bring your beast to the front -- in a very angry, ugly form." Cyn turned his head away, his voice harsh with self-recrimination. "I should not have let both of us be so bound." Ty laid a hand on his shoulder and turned Cyn back to face him. "And whose blood would you have chosen to save her? If not mine, we would have fought. If you had not already decided to keep her, you would not have allowed your safety, the dukedom, to be compromised for any one person." Ty shook his head. "Even you have individual needs and your own beast that must be satisfied, Cyn. Don't blame yourself because of it."

Cyn smiled softly and leaned to rest his head on his bond brother's shoulder. "Thank you. I don't know why she called to me so, but I couldn't have let her go, not for long. I tried to hold on to logic and only acknowledge attraction when I met her, but my beast doesn't know logic. It just recognized that she felt right, that she would be right for me.

"Her injury was truly serious, but I think, maybe, my own mind distorted the danger. I wanted her too much." He shook his head, no longer sure what to believe himself. "Let's get a little sleep before next light. The new hungers of a *chosen* will still be on her and, I suspect, she'll be demanding explanations and may not be fully pleased at how tied to us she will now feel."

Ty still looked troubled. "No one will care who I'm bound to. But you, Cyn...how will this play with those who have been angling for a marriage to strengthen our alliance with Birne? Do you think the king will interfere?"

“No, if the king was forced to speak truthfully, he would be happy to have a way to keep me out of that marriage. The alliance would give the dukedom even more power and he feels nervous about me already. So he would be pleased if something stopped the marriage without causing problems with Birne. It’s now common knowledge that you are brethren and she will be known as your *chosen*. Because we are bond brothers, many will expect that I will share a bed with you and Cassandra. The royalty of Birne will not find that acceptable. I can gracefully back away from the proposed commitment, and his majesty will be quietly thrilled. That is all assuming Cassandra doesn’t reject us after she wakes and considers the consequences of what it means to be bound to us.”

A soft growl came from Ty’s throat at the suggestion that she might try to leave them. His beast couldn’t accept the thought. He lay down next to her sleeping form and pulled her close. She would not escape him.

Cyn lay on her other side and stroked her sleeping head. “I need her too, but you know my family history. You can’t force a woman to want to stay with you.” Cyn looked sadly at Ty. “Do you know in the full day we rode together, she never asked or hinted for anything from me? The only thing she’s demanded was my person, not a favor, treasure, land -- just me. The only other person who ever did that is you.”

“Then we’ll just have to be persuasive. I know you can do that, you manipulative bastard.” Ty smiled to lighten his words and joined hands with Cyn over Cassandra’s sleeping body.

## Chapter Ten: Chosen Companions

Cassandra woke to the sky just changing from black to blue above her. She smelled the delicious spice of male bodies around her and felt a curl of sensual hunger inside her, already awake and taking interest. She slid her leg over the hip in front of her and began to play with the nipple at her mouth. A male groan rumbled from the chest and she tilted her head up to see Ty's amber eyes half open and staring back at her in the dim light. His cock also awakened and its heat nudged between her already wet folds as he slowly rocked his hips in a teasing motion.

"Good morning." Cyn tangled a hand in her hair to pull her head back for a morning kiss. His other hand ran firmly down her side and between her parted legs to softly join in the teasing. Cyn released her mouth to nibble her ear. Ty gave a short gasp and Cassandra realized Cyn was playing with them both. The thought was incredibly erotic and she felt her body give up more cream. Ty's cock nudged at her opening then smoothly slid inside. *Umm, delicious fullness.* Cyn played with her clit while Ty pumped with an unforgiving rhythm. Each stroke pushed her back against Cyn's hips. His erect cock nestled between her buttocks but he made no move to enter her there and just continued the teasing of her clit as she wound tighter and tighter.

Ty grunted with the driving effort of his strokes. “Cyn, make her come now. I can’t wait.”

“My *chosen*.” Cyn’s whisper was like the voice of every wicked temptation she had ever dreamed. “Come for us now.” He pinched the tight bundle of nerves he had so carefully primed and she screamed and came and came.

“Yes!” Ty’s shout was almost a growl as he stiffened and pounded in his last thrusts, filling her with his wet heat.

He fell back, still holding her, but Cyn tightened his embrace, pulling Cassandra back to him. She smiled, smugly looking up over her shoulder at him and undulated her body in a teasing motion. “Was there something you wanted, Cyn?”

He returned her look with a smile that promised delightful retaliation and then flipped her over onto her hands and knees. Her body still throbbed with hunger. She was eager for more. Cyn carefully forced her cheek down to the blanket. She looked at Ty, who lay next to them. He locked his eyes with hers while Cyn opened her thighs, putting her swollen pussy on display for his pleasure.

“Lovely.” Cyn’s voice took on a deeper rumble as if he and his beast were speaking together. She felt like a decadent goddess surrounded by her worshipers -- a very hungry goddess. “Touch me,” she ordered.

There was the hot, wet slide of his tongue repeatedly over her lips, suction as his mouth drank in the combined juices of her and Ty, then a moment of cool air. She let loose a soft cry before the round end of his cock pushed into her hot passage.

His hands gripped her hips with bruising strength. There was no slow beginning, just an urgent need that demanded fulfillment.

A long, wordless cry was ripped from her throat. She was thrown into another orgasm while the furious hammering continued. Ty grasped her hand in silent demand that she continue looking at him. She stared helplessly at Ty beside her while the long string of

unintelligible sounds came from her mouth. She was completely lost to the sensation until, with a last few grinding strokes Cyn gave up his cum to her as well, freeing her from the orgasm's fierce grip.

He freed her hips and she slid down, a boneless mass. He lay beside her. "Cassandra." He whispered her name and touched her gently now, his hands searching over her body. "Are you all right? Your need called to us, to me. I'm afraid I took you too roughly."

"No, s'all right," her satisfied voice slurred out from beside him. "Just let me go back to sleep a little longer."

He stood and shared a very male smile with Ty. Ty reached down and picked up another blanket to cover her. "Sleep for a few minutes, Cassandra. Morning can wait a little longer."

\* \* \* \* \*

The smell of coffee and bacon teased her nose. At least half her mind wanted to stay asleep, but her stomach overruled the rest of her body and dragged her to wakefulness. "Morning." She cracked her eyes to see...a veil? No, her hair was in her face. She shoved the strands out of the way and gave a jaw-cracking yawn only to see a very amused Cyn cocking an eyebrow at her then look toward an equally amused Ty. "What?" She grinned back at them. "Does no one ever dare yawn in your august presence?"

"Do I actually smell coffee? Please. A cup. Now." Secretly she was thrilled. The rich black drink was a costly luxury import. There were even special coffee bars at the big ports. Inland, only the wealthy could enjoy this delicacy. She sat up, wrapping the blanket around her like a toga. In the process, her hand ran over her bandaged thigh and brought a rush of memories from the previous night.

When her smile faded, so did those of the watching men. Cyn handed her a metal cup with some of the precious brew and a fresh biscuit with slices of bacon tucked within it.

He tried another small smile. "See, there are some advantages to traveling with a duke."



She laid the biscuit on her knee, her appetite suddenly gone, but continued to clutch the warm cup like a lifeline, staring down into its black depths. She relived images from the horrible creature's attack and the scream when she had burned him, Cyn and Ty's seemingly casual ability to pull the information needed, then dispose of the remains of what had been a man. She remembered them giving her their blood and apologizing, then the burning hunger they had fed last night and again this morning. "My leg doesn't hurt at all. If I remove this cover, how much of the wound will remain?" Her voice was stiff and lifeless.

She felt shame she had tasted such ecstasy after the raver's death and more shame that a part of her rejoiced he was dead and no longer a threat to them. Then she remembered Cyn's words when he and Ty gave her their blood. They called her their *chosen*. Her heart ached to stay with them and to flee at the same time. She tried to force herself into a calmness of mind, but her usual mental discipline failed her.

"Cassandra," Ty's voice called softly to her. "Do you remember all of last night?" His voice was hesitant as if a wrong word would send her running.

Slowly she raised her head to look at this man who had asked for a few days of her time, but now had taken her life. *Does he or Cyn, she darted a look to him as well, truly want me or am I just necessary baggage? Do I truly want them, both of them?* Her heart skipped a beat at the thought of going back to her safe, but solitary existence. *I must be a fool to consider such a complicated arrangement, yet I want them. Sometimes love is a fool. Love?* She shied from that word. Quickly she looked down at her cup, letting her hair fall once more around her face to hide her thoughts.

*Only three nights and two full days with Ty, less even with Cyn. I should barely feel I know them. That's not enough to form a lifelong bond. No, our time has been short, but I've seen what's beneath the surface of both. They are honorable; well, Cyn's conniving would challenge the best trader. I love a challenge. They are intelligent, brave and loyal. Ty risked his life by going the longer route of this journey to get help rather than expose Cyn's secret by turning directly to him for help. They could have let me die, yet bound themselves to a*

*commoner to save me.* She shook her head to settle the rush of thoughts. No, she didn't want to give up their company, their bodies, all that she had seen of them

*But what of them? Is their bond to me given in obligation for saving Ty from the fate of a raver? Is it just gratitude? Are their caring words just to soothe my mind? That would be unbearable. What of the bond? Is it a complete chosen bond after so short an exposure? How to find out?* It was time to use her one of her skills as a trader, the ability to listen past someone's words to discern the truth. *How to begin?*

She looked back up to see them staring intently at her, awaiting some response.

"I remember it all, everything that happened last night. Thank you both for saving my life." She stopped, unsure of how to continue.

Cyn spoke, his face softened into a kindness she guessed he did not show often. "You were amazing. You already had the raver down when we arrived. I saw the dart. I would dearly love to know what you used."

"My main trade is medicines." Some of the lost quality disappeared from her voice as she spoke of an area she knew well and she felt some calm return. "Most ills don't touch the brethren, but by the same coin, neither do most medicines help them when they do occasionally need it. Some of my brethren friends have done experiments with me to see if any of my medications could affect them. I dipped the dart in some concentrates I brought with me. The solution would have killed a normal man, but at least with the raver, it bought me some time. Although, without you two, it would not have been enough."

She pushed past the remembered horror, in a rush now. She continued looking to Cyn for answers. "How bound are we? Binding a woman as *chosen* is not usually done like this, an emergency. The binding, as well as the woman, is *chosen*. Can we part for a time, or, if we resign ourselves to a period of suffering, could we break the bond since it was so quickly made?"

She watched closely for his reaction. She needed to know what his first instinctive response would be. Did he truly want her?

Cyn ignored Ty's caught breath and stared intently at Cassandra's face, and then he looked down her body in a careful studying manner. "The blood bond is instant and complete. For the immediate future, you will need one of us with you almost all the time or you will begin to feel extremely uncomfortable. A fever and pain like a terrible flu will take you. If you survive it, you would be free of us. There is, however, a chance the separation would drive you mad; it could even cause your death."

In a stiff voice Cyn continued. "If you stay -- don't try to break free completely -- the amount of time we can be apart will continually build until you could resume, if you wish, your trading journeys."

His voice broke slightly; the emotion behind the restrained manner burst out. "Cassandra, I do not wish for you to go. I want you, and Ty...Ty needs you even more..."

"Stop. I will survive if she rejects me," Ty hissed. He turned back toward Cassandra. "What Cyn was going to say was that our binding has given me control over my beast. If you leave...it will be...difficult, but not impossible."

"Ty --" she tried to speak, but he cut her off.

"Wait. While I can let you go, I don't want to. My beast recognized you as a desirable mate right away. I certainly knew my human side wanted you as well, and everything I have seen in you only confirms that desire. In just these few days, I have grown to love you. If you can stand to be tied to a beast --"

"To two beasts" Cyn interrupted. "You should know it all before you decide what you want."

"As you have no doubt noticed, I have a secret," Cyn said with a self-deprecating smile. "I know you've shared some of the brethren's secrets, but, I think, this one surprised you. I am a beast born. I have never been fully human."

“My great-grandmother was said to be an amazing woman. She caught the eye of a brethren. Unfortunately for him, she was already married to my great-grandfather. The brethren was crazy with desire. He broke with tradition and kidnapped her. It was weeks before her husband, the duke, found them.

“By then, she was addicted to the beast’s scent. She was also pregnant. It wasn’t known which of the two was the father. She stopped the duke from killing the brethren and brought him back with them to keep her sane and healthy.

“The beast didn’t fight her wishes since he wasn’t being separated from her, but she was not kind. She hadn’t wanted to go with him and she was furious.” Cyn stiffened as if he was about to say something truly difficult. “She said he could stay, but he had to remain in the form of the beast that he truly was.”

He stopped for a moment and drew a deep breath before continuing. “He was willing to do anything to be near her so he changed and remained that way for months. Eventually, something, maybe his sad eyes, softened her heart because he was allowed to change back to human.

“It’s said the months living as nothing but a wolf changed him, the beast became even stronger and, even after he was allowed to resume human form, he mostly stayed in the form of a great wolf who shadowed the duchess everywhere.”

Cassandra watched with fascination as emotions played over Cyn’s normally unreadable face. His sympathy for the beast and respect for his great-grandmother’s strength were written there and in his voice. “When the child, my grandfather, was born, they arranged for his blood to be secretly tested. The results indicated the duke was his father and, later, his appearance said the same thing. When the change came to him as a young man, it was quite a shock.” Cyn smiled at this.

“The duke may have been his first father, but the brethren left something of himself also. Now it is in my bloodline.”

Breaking out of his storyteller mode, Cyn leaned toward Cassandra to speak with great sincerity. “The brethren are accepted as a small, necessary group, but my family believes if they grew visibly in power and numbers, they would become only feared. Admiration for their protection of the population from the ravers would turn to hatred of all who change.

“Because of this, our heritage is a secret my family guards with care. It also means there has been wildness in me since childhood. I’ve never been only a man.

“I knew almost immediately I wanted you for my *chosen*, Cassandra, and unlike Ty, there were no purely human thoughts that said you should be given a choice. But I can learn from history. I would not have you hate me.

“Please stay with me, with us. But I think I can let you go, if I must.”

If their beasts had already wanted her for their *chosen* then their desire to keep her was sincere, and, even with this, they fought to give her a choice in the matter; their human sides cared for her as well. The knot of protective ice around her heart melted and she allowed herself to believe what she felt to be true. She could trust them close to her heart. She could belong with them and they with her.

Cassandra looked from Cyn to Ty and back again. She had her answer. Their desire for her was as sincere as hers for them. She had been right to accept their blood and bind them together. Her eyes filled with tears, but she smiled and opened her arms to them. “Mine,” she said. And they both rushed to hold her. She shared kisses and tears with her men, her beasts.

Her lips curved up in a sloppy smile. “I will stay with you, *my* companions, but you must also learn to travel some with me. I do not wish to be locked away in some keep, and I love to bargain as a trader.”

Cyn smiled slyly. “If you wish, but you need not travel to use your bargaining skills. You may practice on me whatever form of barter you wish.”

Ty frowned and his fingers around her waist tightened. “Stop teasing, Cyn, she has only just agreed to stay.” He looked candidly at Cassandra. “To be with us, I know, will be

demanding and difficult. There are always political repercussions and sometimes court protocols to consider when dealing with that one.” He inclined his head toward Cyn. “But I have found him worth the trouble.”

Cyn nodded and his tone changed from teasing to sincere. “It is true things are rarely easy or straightforward for me. To have someone like Ty whom I can trust completely is a gift I never take for granted. To have that in you as well is more than I ever hoped for. I do have enemies who would be glad to hurt me through you, but I swear I will guard you carefully.”

She quirked an eyebrow. “Just remember not to smother me, both of you. We will have to learn to live with each other. It will be...interesting.” A wicked thought occurred to her. “Perhaps we could dress Cyn as a trader’s apprentice and then you two could easily travel with me as my guard and humble apprentice.” Cyn paled, then gave her a look that promised retribution when she could no longer hold back a smile to show she was teasing. He gave her a devilish smile of his own. “I expect the brethren we sent for will meet up with us later today and we can discuss the news of the raver with them then. For the rest of this morning, I want to just enjoy what we’ve found together. There will always be problems to deal with. Let’s hold this peace a little while longer.”

That said, he moved behind Cassandra and pulled her up close to him, which also presented her body to Ty. The air filled with the spicy rich scents of both men, her beasts. The heat of arousal ran through her, filling her body and mind. Ty gave the smile of a predatory animal about to feast -- a smile that Cassandra returned. “Problems later,” he agreed then closed the space between them and began to take care of things at hand.

 THE END 

## Kirra Pierce

Bio? Kirra is spy/secret agent who disarms nuclear bombs in her spare time. Uh, wait, what was that, Loowis? The real world me? But that's sooo boring. Oh, all right.

I am actually a mom who used to haunt the halls of corporate research and write excruciatingly boring technical reports, but who can now be found at PTO meetings, chaperoning school outings, helping with homework assignments — you get the idea. My homemaking seems to bounce between June Cleaver aspirations and Peg Bundy deliverables. A neat home is lovely, but wouldn't you rather be reading? I obviously would.

I've always loved fantasy and while my body may be in this world my mind is usually someplace much more interesting. I don't care for tepid *anything* in fiction. Hot heroes, savvy heroines, and an edge of danger are all things I look for in a book and what I hope to deliver to you.