



Going Nowhere 2:

Howling ^{at} Twilight

Brenda Bryce

Loose Id

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Chapter One

The scream ripped through the quiet forest, causing every muscle in Donovan Vitello's body to tense.

His exceptional hearing picked out what sounded like a fight coming from deeper in the woods. Heart pounding, he shot up the path in the direction of the noise.

"No, no, no, no, no!"

The woman's voice echoed through the dense forest, and his heart lurched at the pain he heard in it.

He ran through the woods until he found the clearing, a woman rolling around on the ground screaming in agony, and a dead man.

The man's head had been crushed in, and the woman...the woman was in the process of turning.

A foul scent struck him. It was one he recognized.

The killer.

Her?

No. Her scent was light. Fresh. Not the acrid scent he'd been searching for. The killer was the pulverized creature. The woman had done a thorough job on him, that's for sure.

Slow and easy, not wanting to startle her, he cautiously approached her.

She glanced at him with eyes the same color as those of the little angel in the doctor's office.

"Fuck. Are you Chrysanthemum Hollister?"

She had a wild look in her eyes as she reached out a hand to him. "Yes. Help me!"

"I'll help you, but you have to calm down and let the transformation happen. If you fight it, you'll only hurt yourself." He had to get her calmed down or they would lose her. She'd killed her mate, but she was still a werewolf and now part of the pack. "He won't hurt you anymore." He spoke gently. As non-threateningly as he possibly could, he got close to her and, as he passed, checked the man on the ground.

Dead. No question about it.

He didn't recognize the deceased werewolf, but he hadn't expected to. He kept to himself and only knew the alpha and a few other members of the pack. Not knowing this one wasn't a surprise.

He pulled out his cell phone and called the alpha male. "I'm on the path on the north side of town. The killer is dead at the hands of a human woman he turned moments before I got here. She's fighting the conversion, and I'm going to need help. Right, send Amalee. Maybe she can figure out what to do."

He disconnected the call and ran his hand through the woman's growing pelt. It was red as flame and thick. Beautiful. He could feel his cock hardening and cursed himself. Obviously she was the mate of the killer. He'd bitten her, given her the enzyme, and then inundated her with his pheromones. While his pheromones had surrounded her, she hadn't changed, and it was only after she'd killed him, and the pheromones had dissipated, that she'd started turning into a wolf. Damn. Poor thing. How was she to survive without a mate?

And she was the only living relative of the beautiful child that was in the clinic. That poor baby didn't deserve this.

The baby was a beauty. Poor sprite. Her family had been wiped out by the killer stalking the community. It looked as if her father had stopped to help someone on the side of the road and had been murdered. The baby had come out of the attack unscathed, but her parents and siblings had not been so fortunate. She'd been left alive, unharmed, sleeping in her car seat. A couple of the sheriff's men had found the scene and the sleeping baby, and she'd been transported to the local clinic for examination. Able to scent werewolf spoor, and looking for clues, Donovan had picked up the tiny, red-haired child and brought her to his chest, needing to smell her skin. He'd taken one look into her bright green eyes and smiling face and vowed that her family's killer would suffer. It wouldn't be a hardship as it was already his assignment to hunt this abomination.

Also, she had something extra adding to her appeal; she was genetically compatible to be a werewolf's mate. Not his, of course -- she wasn't of his generation. But some lucky wolf cub could be destined for her.

Eyes narrowing, he promised he would make sure the cub was worthy of her.

She wasn't alone in the world, though, and he was glad of that. The baby's aunt was to take care of the sprite, and he hoped the woman would make a good parent. Lizzy deserved nothing but the best. He just had to help her aunt get through the next twenty-four hours alive.

He watched as Chrysanthemum completed the change and lay on her side, panting. Apparently, the aunt was genetically compatible as well. Maybe it ran in their family.

Hell, who was he kidding? He wasn't a scientist. He didn't know dick about genes and family trees.

What's happening to me? she whined in wolf voice.

"You were bitten by a werewolf, and you've become one."

Werewolf? Bullshit! He was crazy, but he wasn't a werewolf and neither am I.

"Chrysanthemum," he said gently, "look at yourself. How can you deny that you've become a wolf?"

It's ridiculous. There are no such things as werewolves.

When she started to cry, he stayed silent, waiting for the storm to pass. She was scared and not willing to face facts right now, and he understood that. He could only be there for her when she was ready for answers.

After only a few minutes of jagged weeping, Chrysanthemum's howling sobs lessened until only hitching breaths were left.

He -- he said I would be his mate.

"Looks like you had other ideas." Donovan watched her closely. He didn't want her going into shock.

He killed my brother and his family.

"And you paid him back for that. Unfortunately, you've killed your mate, and you're going to need specialized help to return to human form." He kept running his hand through her fur, trying to keep her calm. "Others are coming, and we'll help you all that we can. Please, trust us."

How do you know so much? That man tried to rape me. He bit me and... She took a shuddering breath that rocked her whole body.

"Shh. It's okay. He won't hurt you again. You did what you had to do to save yourself."

Who are you?

"Donovan Vitello, and I was hunting this refuse. I can try to help you if you think you can trust me."

He was a hunter, and a prime one at that. Using his extraordinary tracking skills for the benefit of his people, the North American werewolf clan, had been the only thing that kept him from wandering off into the proverbial sunset and ending it all. The loneliness that had plagued him his entire life had become unbearable.

The sight of the pack alpha and his mate had brought that fact home with a vengeance. Donovan desperately wanted children, but he especially wanted his own mate.

His height and questionable looks conspired against him. Females were intimidated instead of interested. By the time he'd turned seventeen, he'd reached the lofty height of six-

six and, when around other werewolves he tried to look harmless, but he still saw the fear on their faces. He didn't think he was ugly, just dark. Sinister was the way one woman had described him.

Being the pack's hunter also played against him in a way. Most of the other wolves wouldn't associate with him. They considered him a throwback to a much more primitive time when werewolves relinquished self-control and had run down and killed humans. Yes, he hunted and occasionally killed, but he'd never eliminated an innocent. It didn't seem to matter to the pack members, though. His business had nearly turned him into a recluse.

It proved how unfair life was that the killer scum would have a mate, but Donovan himself didn't.

When he reached his hand toward the female's muzzle, she froze, but let him place his hand on her again without biting him. With the first sign of trust established, he started to ask her what had happened but was distracted by the scent of others coming up the path.

He instinctively moved to protect the female by placing himself between her and the newcomers. Donovan crouched low and prepared to defend her to the death. Nothing would harm her again.

When the alpha pair came around the bend, he relaxed minutely, but couldn't control the growl that rumbled from his chest.

Chrysanthemum crawled closer to him and whimpered, scared.

Donovan reached behind him and placed his hand on Chrysanthemum's back to calm her fears. "They won't hurt you. They're the alpha pair. Kyle and Lannie Sylia. They're here to help." Technically, the pair hadn't been legally married, but it was the easiest explanation.

The alpha nodded in their direction, then looked down at the killer. He growled loudly when he saw the dead man. "Pete!"

Lannie gasped behind him. "Holy crap! It *is* Pete. What was he doing out here, and eww! What happened to his head? Do you think he's dead?"

Kyle went to the body and kicked it hard. "Yes, he's dead, and it's a good thing, too. If I'd gotten my hands on him, it would have been worse."

"You can't go around kicking bodies, Kyle. Leave him alone. You said he's already dead, and you're messing up the crime scene," Lannie insisted.

"He deserves it. He was the killer," Donovan stated quietly.

Lannie's gaze shot to his. "You're sure it was him?"

"Positive."

Kyle nodded at Donovan, seeming to take his word as fact, and pulled out his cell phone. "Damn it, I had ruled him out as a wuss. Fooled my dumb ass, didn't he?" He dialed while cursing and then practically barked into the phone. "Kendricks, we have the killer. He isn't alive, and there will have to be an investigation. However, circumstances being what

they are, you'll have to come alone." He spoke for a couple more minutes, then disconnected the call and turned back to Donovan and the crouching female.

Chrysanthemum didn't seem to want their attention and stayed behind Donovan's back. He ran his hand through her fur soothingly to let her know he would protect her.

"Donovan, Amalee is on her way to help the female, but it may take a couple of hours. How about taking her somewhere safe until the doctor gets here?"

Donovan nodded and turned to speak to the beautiful red wolf gently. "Let's get you to a safe place."

She nodded and tried to stand. Her legs didn't seem to want to cooperate and she stumbled.

Smiling down at her, Donovan squatted and ran a gentle hand over her head before lifting her. "It will take a little practice to learn to walk while you're like this, but don't worry about it right now. I'll carry you to the house." He looked down at her lying in his arms. "You don't mind, do you?"

No. I don't mind.

Settling her comfortably against his chest, he turned away from the alpha pair. "I'll take her to your rental house, boss."

"Good idea. At least I'll know where to find you."

Donovan only sent a cursory nod to the alpha. He was busy watching the female in his arms.

She was staring back.

You said your name is Donovan?

"That's right. Donovan Vitello."

That's a nice name.

"Thank you. I like yours too, Chrysanthemum."

Her eyes closed briefly, as if embarrassed. *Please, call me Chrys.*

"Chrys, then."

Donovan had to be careful not to trip. He could easily look past her as she lay in his arms, but he couldn't take his eyes off her.

You're very strong.

"It comes with being as tall as I am."

It's nice. It makes me feel safe.

He blinked and stopped walking. "Really?"

Yes, really. It's weird since we just met, but I feel very secure with you.

What do you know? Donovan held in the smile he felt and resumed walking.

Chrysanthemum Hollister knew she was in shock. She had to be. That or insane. Werewolves didn't exist, but here she was, covered in fur, being carried by the sexiest man she'd ever seen.

He was a powerful man, stretching the seams of the black silk shirt he wore. The wind pushed his shoulder-length onyx hair into his face. As he blew the soft strands out of his eyes, he surveyed her through an obsidian gaze. Boy, he made her thinking very colorful. Yeah, she was dazed and confused.

Do you know what's happened to me?

The man, Donovan's, dark gaze went hard and his sensual lips turned down. "The creature that attacked you wasn't a man. He was a werewolf."

Yes, you've said that. She realized she wasn't actually speaking. More like barking and growling, but she heard herself clearly in her head. It was easy to ignore the animal sounds and only hear the words, so she did that. One less thing to worry about.

His hold tightened on her as he traversed the path. His long strides ate up the distance rapidly. "If a human carries a certain gene and is bitten by a werewolf, an enzyme enters their system which will make them a werewolf."

He did bite me.

"After the enzyme permeated your system, he inundated you with his pheromones. Did you smell anything?"

She tried to bring the whole attack into focus. He started ripping at my clothes and said that I needed to smell his pheromones. Something came from him that made my eyes water, and I held my breath so I wouldn't breathe it, but with him lying on my back, I wouldn't have been able to breathe it in anyway. Whatever he was doing, he stopped and turned to look behind him. I smelled something nice, spicy, like cinnamon, and I could breathe again. Then it went away and all I smelled was dirt. I was scared and mad and could only think that I had to get away from him.

"What did you do next?"

Donovan's attention never strayed from her. Even so, he didn't trip or stumble or in any way lose his balance. He was extremely graceful for such a tall man. And he wasn't lanky like other tall men she knew. His muscles rippled from holding her and she could feel that he was powerfully built.

She shook her head to dislodge the distracted haze that had settled over her and tried to remember his question. The cinnamon scent caught his attention, and while he was busy, I knocked him off me and got to my feet. He was looking away long enough for me to find a big branch and I grabbed it. I warned him that I'd use it, but he kept coming. I didn't have a choice.

"It's all right. It's over and you're safe now."

His voice brought the terror down enough for her to continue. *I was so mad. Mad and scared. I've never been so frightened in my life, and something started happening. My skin started to ripple and tingle. I looked down and hair was growing out of my arm. The man laughed. Laughed! Said I was changing and had to go with him. I wasn't going to. He couldn't make me.*

Once again, Donovan spoke gently and it calmed her. "Shh."

He got close and I hit him with the stick. He went down and I hit him and I hit him and I hit him until he didn't move anymore. After that, it gets a little confusing. I remember pain. Lots of pain. Then you were there.

"You were very brave to take him on." His silky voice wrapped around her and felt like a caress. "Here we are. Let's get you inside and comfortable."

He carried her into a small cottage-style house on the edge of town. Chrys recognized it. When she was growing up, she'd been here often. The owner was in the military now and rented it out while he was stationed overseas.

She tilted her head to look at Donovan's face and nearly laughed. He was so tall that his head nearly brushed the low ceiling. *You're very tall.*

Surprisingly, her teasing comment upset him. His face froze and the light that had been in his eyes drained away.

What did I say? I didn't mean to hurt you.

He plastered a painful-looking smile on his face and laid her gently on a couch in the living room. "You didn't hurt me. I'm used to people being intimidated by my height."

Chrys blinked, stunned. *I'm not intimidated.* She couldn't tell him that she actually found him quite appealing. She'd always been attracted to tall men, being a tall woman herself. Short men who stared at her boobs always turned her off. Donovan was tall enough that she'd feel more like a woman instead of a giantess.

"It's okay. I understand." He sat beside her on the couch and ran a hand along her side. "The doctor should be here soon, and hopefully she'll be able to get you to turn back to your human form."

That would be nice. I have to take care of my niece, and it would be hard to do it like this.

That startled a burst of laughter out of him. "Yes, I suppose it would."

Chrys scooted closer to him and laid her head on his leg. *I'm really scared, Donovan.*

"Shh, it'll be all right. We have people in the clan that deal with this kind of thing every day."

She watched him as he turned to stare at the fireplace across the room. Since she couldn't deal with any more bad news, she ignored the fact that he might not be telling her the complete truth. On the verge of total breakdown, she didn't think she could handle even one more thing that might get her crying uncontrollably -- again. *Is it very dangerous?*

Black eyes returned to hers, and he buried his hand in the fur at the nape of her neck. "It can be."

Letting her mind go blank, she closed her eyes. She didn't want to think that she was a wolf. That being a werewolf was dangerous and that monster had been her mate. *He can't be my mate. I know he can't.*

"Let Dr. Amalee get here before you worry about anything. She's a really good doctor and the top in her field."

What's her field?

He coughed, and a small smile broke across his rugged face. "She is a medical doctor and a veterinarian."

Both?

"Yes, well, when you have to deal with a population that is sometimes walking on four legs and the rest of the time on two, you have to diversify your education."

Slowly, Chrys nodded her head. *I suppose one would. Do you know her well?* She tried but failed to keep the jealous tone out of her question.

Donovan's smile grew until his eyes twinkled. "Not so much. I don't know many of my people. I'm a bit of a recluse."

Now laughter bubbled up in her. *A recluse, my foot. You're such a handsome man I bet you have women following you around like dogs in hea -- Oh, I'm so sorry. Didn't mean to say that.* Horrified, she tried to move away from him, but his grip tightened at her nape, keeping her where she was.

"I don't deal well with women. I've been told that I'm intimidating."

I can see that. But I'm not afraid of you. I find you... I guess I would call you comforting. I'm terrified right now, but with you here, I can handle it and not go into hysterics.

"And here I thought you were the imperturbable type." But as he said it, she saw amusement flash across his face.

Yup, that's me. Ms. Stoic. I can handle just about anything. The one thing I can't handle is fighting off known killers and getting turned into a werewolf. Oh, yeah, that's what just happened. Excuse me while I go have a hissy fit.

He laughed. His deep rumble washed through her like dark chocolate, making her insides melt.

"Let's wait until Amalee gets here before we get too excited." He ruffled her coat. "Tell me about yourself."

She looked down at her paws. Man, this was going to take some getting used to. She was an actual wolf. Fur, snout, teeth, paws, tail, and all. Everything was different. There were smells in this room that she'd never noticed before. She'd been in this room on this

very couch many times as a kid, and she'd never smelled what she smelled now. Layers of scents were embedded in the cushions. How she knew there were layers, she hadn't a clue, but it was so clear that she could practically picture it. The newest scents were the strongest and as they got older, they became weaker. Donovan's scent was the strongest of all and she really loved his odor. Closing her eyes, she inhaled him deeply. Manly, spicy, sexy. He really turned her on, and she wasn't even sure how a wolf was turned on.

How could the worst day of her life still be the best? Opening her eyes to stare dazedly at Donovan, she wondered if he would let her keep him.

"Chrys?"

His voice had come from very far away, but it jolted her back to attention. *Hmm?*

"I asked you about yourself."

Oh, um, okay. I just graduated from college. My degree is in computers and I'll be able to work from home, thank goodness. I got the call about my family as I was heading out the door with some friends to celebrate graduation. I packed and came right here. I'd only been in town an hour when I was attacked. How's that for luck? I did get to see Lizzy, though, and she looks good. She's all I've got now. That thought hurt. Little Lisianthus was all the family she had in the whole world.

"She's a pretty baby."

You've seen Lizzy?

His smile was slow and sweet. "Yes. I saw her a few hours ago. She had the killer's spoor on her, and I wanted to be able to follow it. You got to him before I did."

I wish you'd gotten there before me.

"What were you doing in the woods in the first place?" He didn't sound condemning, which made her feel better about the whole situation. She felt bad enough without other people telling her how stupid she'd been.

It's a shortcut I've taken all my life from town to home. I wasn't thinking.

He only nodded as if he understood. "Habits can get a person into trouble. Or it can save their life."

How so?

Rolling his head on the back of the couch, he hummed contemplatively. "Let's say you know self-defense. The more you practice it, the easier it is. If you're attacked and you've been practicing so much that it's natural, you'll not even have to think before your training kicks in."

Do you have that kind of training?

Again, his eyes darkened, losing the vibrant light that had been there. "Yes."

Well, I think I'm going to start taking self-defense classes so this never happens to me again.

"I would recommend it. However, you can't rely on it keeping you out of all trouble. Sometimes the bad guy knows how to fight as well."

Why are things never easy?

Her heartfelt sigh had him glancing at her. "If it's not worth the effort, it's not worth the bother."

Why, thank you for the sage advice, oh, prophet. She shook her shaggy head. *I'm sorry. I'm a little out of sorts. Talking to you is helping a lot, but I'd still like to be in my own body.*

"I do understand. There's no need to worry about my feelings."

Talk to me. How did you become a werewolf?

"Unlike you, I was born a werewolf. My parents were werewolves and my grandparents, and so on. Well, at least one of them in each generation was a born werewolf, and the other had been turned." His hand smoothed her fur.

It felt surprisingly good. Chrys wanted to arch into his hand, roll over, and let him pet her stomach, but she restrained herself. She had to get back on track. *So, there are two types of werewolves?*

"Born and made. Werewolves came to this world millennia ago, and to continue the race, we must find a human with an alien gene. Several different alien races came to this world and procreated with the humanoids here, and we need to find a descendant of those beings. You and your niece have that gene."

We're aliens? Cool. But can't you find someone without the gene to marry?

"It's possible to marry a human without the gene, or even another werewolf, but the species has a need which this won't fulfill. The need for children. The wolf in us craves a mate and offspring, and mating someone without the gene, or someone who is a born werewolf, would keep us from having cubs. Mating with someone who has the gene is the only possible way to procreate."

He leaned down and sniffed her neck. "You have the scent of a gene carrier. It smells very nice to all of werewolf kind, but to certain wolves, it's attractive beyond measure. The wolf will want to -- how do I put this -- want to jump the bones of the person he or she smells it on, the moment the scent is breathed in."

Chrys laughed. *I bet that makes for some interesting first meetings.*

"It does, especially if the human hasn't got a clue as to what's going on."

What if more than one person finds a human attractive and sweet-smelling?

Donovan studied her out of his black eyes. "Good question, as we seem to be having this very situation right now."

What situation?

"You killed your mate in the woods. He's the one that turned you and inundated you with his pheromones, but I find you attractive beyond measure."

Oh, sure. Like you want to jump my bones right here and now.

“Actually, I’m having to keep myself on a tight leash so that I don’t do that very thing. Your scent calls to me, and I’ve been feeling the effects since I came upon you in the woods.”

Effects? She really wanted to know because she was having a hard time not jumping his bones too.

“Can’t you smell it? I’m so hot for you I can barely sit here comfortably.”

Chrys’s eyes dropped unbidden to his lap. What she saw there astounded her. The front of his black jeans bulged with his erection. From the look of it, he was just as big there as the rest of his body was. He had to be sporting nine or ten inches of rock-hard man meat.

Her gaze shot to his, but he didn’t move, flinch, or even flush at her knowledge of his predicament. “You see what I’ve been dealing with?”

Um, yes. She took a deep breath and took the plunge. *I feel the same way about you.*

His hand tightened in her fur and she felt the light tug. It sent ripples of pleasure down her spine. Slowly, he leaned down and put his face in the fur at her neck. Rubbing his cheek and face in the fur, she could smell his scent mingling with hers. Her abdomen clenched with desire. The odor of their combined scents was so good, so marvelous, that if she’d found a perfume that smelled the same, she would have bought out the store and soaked in it.

Donovan growled. The sound came from deep in his chest and rumbled through her whole body. Her eyes closed in excitement.

She tried to move closer to him, needed to merge with him, and her hind end started to jerk spasmodically before sliding off the couch onto the floor.

Staring up at him, wide-eyed and stunned, Chrys had to lock her back legs so she wouldn’t slither all the way to the floor.

What happened?

As he looked her over, his mouth twitched. “I think your tail knocked you off.”

My tail? Chrys looked behind her, and sure enough, her long, bushy red tail was wagging away. *Well, crud.*

“We’ve all had to learn to control it. Males have an easier time living with it, though, than females.”

Interested, Chrys looked up at him. *Why’s that?*

“Because men are used to living with an appendage that does what it wants when it wants, so having one more doesn’t faze us much.”

Chrys fell completely off the couch and onto the floor as she barked out laughter.

You are too funny.

“You’re the only one who thinks so.”

Help me back onto the couch, please. I can't seem to make all these legs work at the same time. Her legs were flailing all over the place, and nothing she did seemed to make them cooperate.

She enjoyed the feeling of his strong arms wrapped around her as he lifted her easily back onto the cushion beside him. Resuming her position with her head on his thigh, she took a deep, calming breath. Now was not the time to get frisky apparently. She'd have to control herself, but it wasn't going to be easy. He was so macho. Big and buff and, boy, did he smell yummy. She was a big girl, though, and could restrain her baser instinct, which was to jump on him and ride him until he was drained. No, she had self-discipline and she could get through this without running her tongue along that really large ridge in his jeans.

Augh! It just wasn't fair.

Searching for something, anything to distract herself from his perfect physique, she latched on to the first thing she thought of.

What do you do, Donovan? How do you make your living?

His gaze dropped from hers. "I'm a killer."

Chapter Two

His quiet pronouncement caused her to pause for all of a second and a half. *Really? Who do you kill?*

Donovan's gaze met hers quizzically. "You aren't afraid?"

Yeah. I'm scared to death of the guy who's been helping me through my most difficult moment. Sorry, nope. Not scared a bit. Guess you're just going to have to try harder.

His eyes flashed black flames. Taking a deep breath, he visibly relaxed. "I'm glad you're not scared of me. That's not my intention."

So, I'll ask again, who do you kill?

Donovan couldn't take his gaze off her. She was an extraordinary woman. He could tell she truly wasn't afraid of him. Her heart rate hadn't changed and neither had her breathing.

Not many, humans or his kind, would have stayed after he told them he was a killer. Chrys only made a joke.

"I occasionally work for the clan leader. If a werewolf breaks the laws, I have to hunt him or her down."

You're like a cop, then. Taking bad guys into custody.

"If their crime is minor, yes, I bring them in. But if their crime is bad enough, say, murder, then I eliminate them."

She took a deep breath and let it out slowly. I see. *Judge, jury, executioner. Doesn't that bother you?*

"It's what I know. I was born with powerful hunting skills, and the added natural ability to fight, whether armed or unarmed, predisposed me to this position in the clan. While it may not be glamorous work, and the populous tends to avoid me, it's what I'm good

at.” He wasn’t going to pull any punches with her. He wanted, no, *needed* to tell her the truth about himself. He wasn’t sure why, but wasn’t going to fight the instinct.

Chrys’s head bobbed. *Okay, yeah. Good fighting skills, good tracking skills, I guess that would make you a good person to send after bad guys.* Her head tilted inquisitively. *Is that all you do?*

The smile slid across his mouth before he could stop it. “No. That’s not all I do. I also have a security business.”

What do you secure?

She looked so cute perched on the couch, barely staying still, tongue hanging out, eyes glowing mischievously, he couldn’t withstand her charm. “People, property, whatever we’re hired to protect.”

Ah, I get you. Aren’t you sweet? Protecting life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Do you work alone or are there others in the company as well?

Donovan nearly choked when she referred to him as sweet. He’d been called many things, but never sweet. “There are five people who work for me in one capacity or another. Four agents, and a lady to keep us all in line and where we’re supposed to be.”

Formidable, is she?

Donovan pictured Susan Marks and chuckled. “She’s only about five foot two in her stocking feet, and about that big around, but she’s as tough as a drill sergeant and won’t take any guff from my agents. She rules the roost and is happy to let everyone know it.”

Good for her. It’s probably difficult keeping adrenaline junkies out of trouble and I commend her.

About to question her on adrenaline junkie comment, he froze and his piercing glare turned toward the door. Shifting slightly, he blocked Chrys’s body.

A loud knocking preceded the turning of the door knob. The door swung open and framed in the doorway was a brunette carrying a bag. She was average height, average weight, and muttering to herself. “Damn, what a mess. Did you do that to Pete, Vitello? I could barely recognize him. Did you have to demolish him?”

Who’s she and why is she blaming you for killing that bastard? Chrys was growling softly, and Donovan put a restraining hand on her nape. Her fur was so soft it distracted him for a moment. He’d like to rub her fur all over his body...

“Doctor,” he greeted after he shook off the raging desire.

She’s the doctor? Great. A baby-faced know-it-all. And she’s the one who’s supposed to fix me? I’m doomed.

The doctor came the rest of the way into the house and gave Chrys a chiding look. “Yes, I’m a doctor, and yes, I have a baby face and do know it all. And finally, I’m the one who’s *going* to fix you.”

He wondered if he should break the argument up now, or wait until after the cat fight was over. Damn it, he couldn't do that to Chrys. She'd already been through enough for one day. Some other time, perhaps. "Chrys, this is Amalee Aimes, the doctor for the clan. Amalee, meet Chrysanthemum Hollister."

In unison, the ladies nodded their heads and muttered, ungraciously, "How do you do?"

Amalee set her bag on the coffee table and clapped her hands loudly. "Now that the introductions have been taken care of, let's get to work. So, your mate's been killed..."

By me. And he wasn't my mate. I refuse to claim him. He killed my whole family except one tiny baby, and I wouldn't have him on toast.

Donovan understood her reasoning. He wouldn't want to be in that situation either, but she would have to cooperate with the doc if she was going to get anywhere. "Is there anything that can be done, Doctor? I haven't heard of a case like this one, and to be honest, I'm getting worried. Already two hours have passed since she changed."

Nodding her head, Amalee reached into her bag and pulled out some instruments. "I understand, but some things can't be rushed. I'll need to examine the patient..."

"Chrys," Donovan supplied.

"Right, Chrys, and then I'll take a gander at Pete. I'll figure something out before time runs out."

Unwilling for Chrys to find out what Amalee meant by time running out, he shifted his attention to Chrys. What he saw caused him to clear his throat and whisper in her ear. "Quit baring your teeth. She's only here to help."

Well, she better not accuse you of anything else that you didn't do.

Donovan had to turn his head so that Amalee didn't see his reaction to Chrys's attempt at protecting him from slurs. He was used to them, but apparently, Chrys was one of the women who lived up to the myth about her hair. Seems she had a temper. "It's okay, Chrys. She didn't bother me."

It doesn't matter. She still shouldn't have accused you without proof.

Amalee interrupted them. "Look, you're right, of course. I shouldn't have blamed him, the clan's hunter, of something he's done many times before."

Donovan barely caught Chrys as she tried to leap for Amalee's throat. "Whoa." He was laughing as he held her tight to his chest. "Calm down, tiger."

I'll bite her, then I'll rip out all her hair, then --

She struggled furiously, trying to get at her adversary, but he didn't loosen his hold one iota. "Remember, you want to get human again. The doc is the only one who might be able to get you that way. If you bite her, she won't help you."

"And that's a fact." Amalee interjected, striding toward the couch with medical instruments. "Here's the deal. You either cooperate now, or pay the price later."

Are you threatening me? The growl in Chrys's chest was low and mean.

Innocently, Amalee gasped in fake shock. "Threatening you? Absolutely not. I'm telling you how it is. Be good or you'll die."

That's it. I'm going to tear her to pieces.

Donovan paid hell keeping her restrained. "Chrysanthemum Hollister, this is no way to act. Stop it right now. Amalee is right. You *have* to cooperate or you *will* die."

Chrys's movements ceased. Stock still, she slowly turned her head to stare into his eyes. *What?*

"I didn't want to tell you in hopes that this can be solved before it becomes a problem." Burying his fingers deep into the dense pelt of fur, he tried to bring her closer to his chest.

What becomes a problem? She resisted his pull and kept her gaze locked on his.

"If we can't get you back to human form within twelve hours of changing, you might die."

With a low, frustrated growl conveying she *really* hated this, Chrys lay down on the couch and closed her eyes. *Fine. Get on with it.*

"Excellent." Amalee didn't waste any time.

Blood was drawn, hair samples were taken, and what looked to be a painful process, fluids from glands were extracted with a special syringe. Chrys withstood it all stoically, only whimpering once, before gritting her teeth and staying still.

Donovan was alternately proud of her and furious that he couldn't do anything to help take away the pain she was undergoing.

"Almost done. This will be the last sample I need from you for now." Amalee capped the last vial and straightened. When she sent Donovan a speculative stare, he started to sweat. "On the off chance I can trick her system, I'd like a sample from you, too."

He would do anything to help Chrys, so he closed his eyes and clenched one hand tightly in Chrys's coat. Amalee stuck him and extracted fluids from his underarm ducts.

"Holy hell, that hurts." The clan's research and development department had said their little invention to extract the pheromone laced fluids from the lymph nodes under the arm was supposed to be light-years better than the old, but he was having a hard time believing it. He stayed as still as he possibly could, but he respected Chrys even more now that he'd felt the pain she'd withstood with grace.

The doctor wiped Donovan's wound with antiseptic and turned from them, putting her instruments away. "Why don't you two go out and burn off some tension? I'll stay here and run some tests, you go do what good doggies do."

Chrys didn't say anything, but she turned pleading eyes toward Donovan. He picked her up carefully and strode out the door into the cool night air.

"I'm sorry you had to go through that."

You went through it too, and it wasn't so bad.

He felt like ripping trees out of the ground and turning them to kindling with his bare hands. But for Chrys's sake, he stayed calm and in control.

Carrying her into the woods, away from the cottage, he found a downed tree and sat on it with her in his lap. Petting her and crooning soft, comforting words, he waited until her body stopped shivering in reaction to the pain she'd endured. Hers had been so much worse, and prolonged, while his had been relatively quick, but not painless.

After what seemed forever, she exhaled on a long sigh and relaxed onto his body. *That hurt.*

"I swear, if she comes at you with even a tongue depressor, I'll rip her arms off for you."

Deal. She snuggled into his arms for a moment more, then wiggled to be let down. *All right, hopefully the worst is over and the rest will be less painful. How about you teach me some werewolfie things?*

She wobbled on her four legs, staring up at him.

"Werewolfie things?" He had to laugh at her phrasing. "I can do that. Since you're on your feet, try walking."

Walking. She could do that. No problem. Piece of cake, especially after what she'd just been through. Her whole body shuddered in remembrance. Best not to think about that and concentrate on moving forward. If this was going to be her new life, it would be a good idea to get to know all about it. No way was she going to flip out and go insane when a little baby needed her. She could do this.

Chrys pictured in her mind how dogs walked. She'd seen them in the park and roaming around town, and it didn't look all that hard. As long as she kept three feet on the ground at one time, she should be able to do it.

One leg at a time, she moved forward. Alternating legs and sides so she didn't fall behind on any one leg, she figured out how to manipulate the muscles and tendons. Okay, she was moving. On her own, nobody helping.

Awkwardly, she conceded, but still under her own steam.

Trudging in circles around Donovan, she practiced. The less she thought about it the easier it was. Eventually, she felt comfortable enough to turn down the path, away from that needle wielding fiend, and deeper into the dark forest.

"Are we going for a walk?"

Donovan's voice was curious, and she laughed. *As long as you don't try to leash me.*

A mock look of shock crossed his features. "Why would I do a thing like that when I can do this?"

Before her very eyes, he started to change. Black hair bristled on his arms and he contorted a little bit, kneeling on the ground, arching into the transformation. It didn't look nearly as painful as when she'd changed. Maybe there was something to not fighting it.

Chrys blinked and when her eyes opened again, a huge, shaggy black wolf with a white chin stood in front of her. He stared at her with Donovan's ebony eyes. He shook sharply and the clothes slid off his body to pile on the ground underneath him.

On a long breathy exhalation, Chrys whispered her admiration. *Wow.* He was humongous and her wolf body went into overdrive. Heck, supersonic propulsion. Her tail went wild, whipping this way and that and even in large circular motions. She couldn't stop it no matter how hard she tried. As Donovan said, it had a mind of its own.

I know you aren't ready to run yet, so a walk would be nice.

His deep human voice hummed in her head, louder than his animal noises, which she was grateful for. At least understanding him wouldn't be a hardship. Or painful.

Sounds good. I know of a place we can go. It's a glade where nobody goes. Lee, my brother, and I used to go there all the time as kids. It isn't far, and it's secluded. She turned to lead the way and stumbled.

You haven't gotten your legs quite under control yet. Here, let me walk beside you so that if you start to feel weak, or wobbly, you can lean on me. He sidled his big body next to hers and pressed against her lightly, showing her what he meant.

Do all werewolves have to learn how to be one, or are the natural ones born with the knowledge? Chrys had regained her footing and started down the path to the glade. The night was so quiet she would have been able to hear a pin drop. Not even a cricket chirruped. It was a little creepy, but when she thought about it, she smiled inwardly. Two predators were wandering around in the forest. Smart creatures were in hiding so the big bad wolves didn't eat them.

Did you know how to walk when you were born?

Of course not. I had to learn, step by step.

He bumped his head into her shoulder playfully. *So what makes you think that cubs can walk at birth?*

He had a valid point. If all werewolves had to learn this, so could she. She knew how to be a student, and she would ace this werewolf stuff like she did all her classes.

Got'cha. So, what else do werewolves do? I have to tell you now, I'm not in the mood to pee on trees.

Donovan's laughter curled around her senses and seeped onto her soul. Potent. The man was so potent he should be locked up and not let out. Preferably in her bedroom.

She blinked at her lascivious thought and shook her head. What in the world was wrong with her? She'd never wanted to kidnap a man and keep him for sex. Although, she mused slyly, even in wolf form, Donovan Vitello was a hottie. Masculine out the wahzoo,

and tender enough to attract any woman. She still wasn't sure she believed that he didn't have women panting after him, begging for his favors. Maybe he was just oblivious.

Only males pee on trees, Chrys. Females squat. His tone was only a little teasing.

Well, that's a lovely picture. Hopefully, I'll be human again before I have to go.

He didn't say anything for a moment, but she could feel the worry that arose from the comment. *Yeah, me too.*

Purposefully, she misunderstood his meaning. *So, you don't like to pee on trees either, huh? I knew it wasn't all that it was cracked up to be.*

Normally, she wouldn't ignore an important subject, but she couldn't do a damn thing about it, so why stress? She'd worry about it when the time came. Until then, she was going to have a good time learning how to be a wolf.

So, how far is this glade? Donovan recognized her need to change the subject and he happily supplied an alternative.

As a wolf, she was an unusual color. Rusty-red all over and a few areas with black tips. The edges of her delicate ears were ridged in black as were her eyes. It gave the appearance of makeup. What was that stuff the ladies darkened their eyes with again? Eyeliner? Mascara? Something like that.

Chrys looked beautiful. No doubt about that, and now that he was in wolf form, he was having a harder time controlling his baser urges. He had the need to mount and impregnate her. Never before had he had the overpowering urge to jump a woman and force her into submission until she gave herself to him completely and forever. Naturally, he was a dominant in the bedroom. Hunters tended to be primitive, and he was no exception. Mentally, he was more powerful than the craving and never had a problem with it. Right now, though, he was having a nearly impossible time controlling himself. He wondered how far she would let him go if he approached her sexually.

Not far.

It took Donovan a long, shocked moment to understand that she wasn't answering his unasked question, but his inquiry as to where the glade was.

Thank the goddess. If she turned out to be a psychic he would be in deep trouble.

Lost in thought, and lust, he walked beside her, guiding her with small nudges around obstacles in the path and keeping her on task, since she would turn her head and ears toward each and every sound in the brush. He didn't want her running off after a small woodland creature and getting hurt or lost.

Here we are. Isn't it beautiful?

Chrys led him into a large clearing in what he could imagine was the middle of the forest. The glade had everything a loner could need. Running water supplied by a small river cutting through one end of the area and plenty of land to make a garden large enough to

keep a good sized family supplied with food and solitude. It was near enough to town where you could get the things you couldn't make, but far enough away that people wouldn't just drop in to say hi.

Beautiful, he concurred.

I always wanted to buy this plot and put a home on it. I could live happily out here, but I never had that kind of money. Shame though. I'm afraid it's going to end up a parking lot or something equally horrible.

Donovan flinched at the prospect. That would be a sacrilege. This was the most peaceful, lovely place he'd ever seen and the idea of over-developing it gave him a headache.

Chrys was starting to get her legs working the way they should and happily pounced on anything that moved. He watched her as she hopped on bugs, leapt after mice and squashed waving grass. Her laughter echoed in his head and he couldn't help but smile.

He realized he hadn't smiled so often in such a short time, even as a child. Chrys, though scared and worried about the future, was so happy that he had to smile.

Trailing after her, not wanting her to get too far away in case she faltered, he felt lighter, less lonely.

Donovan?

Yes?

Why did the doctor take the samples from under our arms?

Again she astounded him. He'd thought she was pretending the whole situation never existed, but here she was, wanting information and trying to understand.

Werewolves are attracted by scent. We have good olfactory senses and pheromones play a big part in mating. What Amalee took was fluid from the scent glands that excrete the pheromones.

Oh. Do pheromones have something to do with me changing back to human? Even now, questioning him, she wasn't still. She didn't go far, but she wandered to a pretty wildflower and sniffed it, then batted a grasshopper with her front paw.

It has everything to do with it. A newly turned wolf has to be with their mate while they are inundated with pheromones. After that it's easier, but the first time it's crucial that the mate's pheromones are present as they make love.

I'm sure it would be nice if one liked their mate, but what if they're stuck with the wrong mate? She turned from playing with the grasshopper and approached him. *I know that murderer can't be my mate. I felt nothing but terror of him. It seems that a mate would inspire something else, even if it were only animal magnetism, don't you think?*

I've always thought so. But I spend so little time with my own people, I admit, there's a lot I don't know. That bothered him. He wanted to answer her questions and fears, but because of who he was, he couldn't.

Maybe we can -- how did the doctor put it? Trick my system into thinking that someone else is my mate.

An unexplainable fury rose up in him. *And who would you suggest we get to use as your replacement mate?*

Well, actually, I was hoping you'd help me. I know it's a lot to ask since we've only known each other a short time, but you make me feel...I mean... Well, I'm attracted to you. Her head dropped as if she were embarrassed.

Donovan's rigid stance relaxed, and he exhaled softly. *I'm attracted to you, also. And I don't think I'd have any difficulty at all attempting to help you. But you have to be sure that's what you want, because sex is involved. I'll not force you on the off chance that this will work. Hell, there's every chance that it can't be done.*

You were there right after it happened. I tried not to breathe in his stench, and maybe it didn't take. Oh, Donovan. I can't die. Lizzy needs me!

Heart-wrenching sobs erupted from her. Her body shook as if she would shatter at the slightest nudge. He snuggled in close, draping his head over her nape and rubbing the underside of his jaw back and forth soothingly on her back.

Please, baby. Don't cry, you're tearing me up inside.

I can't help it. I'm so scared.

I know. So am I. Come lay down on the grass with me. He pushed his chest at her shoulder to turn her in the direction he wanted her to go.

Still crying, Chrys let him maneuver her toward the river's edge and she lay down dejectedly. Donovan curled his big body around hers, chest at her back, side legs draped over her body, chin rubbing on the top of her head. It was the best he could do for her right now, and he felt particularly helpless. It wasn't a feeling he was used to.

They lay like that for a long while. Even after she stopped crying, neither of them made a move to separate. Donovan enjoyed having her body close to his, her soft fur rubbing on his belly. She smelled so good. His body reacted to her nearness, muscles clenched, and his breathing turned ragged.

Chrys's voice sounded sleepy. *Mm, you smell good.*

You do too. She smelled like sunshine and fresh air. It emanated from her in waves, enfolding him in her scent. He was particularly susceptible to the odor because he loved the outdoors, and she had it seeping from her pores.

Are you sure you don't want to make love to me? I don't mean to pressure you, but you said werewolves are attracted to smells, and I'm sure attracted to yours. She rolled over to face him, and licked his chin with her long, rough tongue.

I'm attracted to your scent as well. I just don't want to get your hopes up.

At this point, I'm paying hell to keep any hope alive. Rolling onto her back she wiggled her bottom and rubbed the scent of the grasses and flowers into her fur. *If it weren't for the*

help you've already given me, I'd be curled into a ball, crying my eyes out. Oh, wait. I did that.

Her humor was a bit biting, but he didn't let it bother him because she was entitled to the bad attitude. *We could go find out if Amalee has any ideas.*

The breath left her in a rush and she rolled to her feet. *Anything's possible, I suppose. I really don't think I like that woman.*

He shot her a teasing glance. *No, really?*

She batted him with her front paw with a halfhearted swing. *All right, funny man. I guess we'll go talk to her.*

She didn't sound very enthusiastic, and he rubbed his bigger body along hers in what he hoped was a soothing gesture, and then nudged her in the direction of the cabin.

No matter what the doctor says, I'll help you. I want you as much as you seem -- As much as I definitely want you, she corrected.

Okay, as much as you want me. I don't want anything to happen to you. He felt his heart squeeze at the thought of losing her. There was no damned way he'd let her go without a fight. Every moment he was with her, his emotions grew stronger, but now wasn't the time to make promises he might not be able to keep.

I don't want anything to happen to me either.

Retracing their steps back to the cabin, they soon stood outside the back door. Donovan scratched the lower panel with his front paw and the door immediately swung open.

"Bout time you two got here. Get inside. I've got a great idea." Amalee was practically bouncing on her feet, she seemed so excited.

They entered the cabin and strode into the living room. *What did you find?*

"This is so great. Get this, Pete died while he was still excited and pheromones were still present in his lymph nodes. I extracted some and I think with a little manipulation, I can get them into the air. It'll have to be in a small room, but I think it'll be enough to get the job done."

That's all great, Amalee, but what about the secondary part of the process? Donovan couldn't help the flicker of excitement shooting through his body.

Amalee laughed. "That's the easy part. You'll fill in for the missing mate. Well, that is if it's all right. With both of you, as it were."

She didn't look happy that she had to consider their feelings on the matter, but was willing to, for form's sake if nothing else.

We've discussed this and I'm willing, and I think Chrys is too.

Yes. I am. She had sat very close to him and leaned against him as she answered.

He smiled inwardly and rubbed the underside of his jaw along the top of her head. *If you could do what you're proposing, we'll do the rest. Then we'll hope for the best.*

Amalee quickly outlined what she was going to do, then set about doing it. Donovan liked that about her. The doctor didn't mess around, or try to chat when there was work to be done. She worked fast and competently and soon, she announced she was ready for them.

Uh, Donovan? Chrys's tentative whisper drew his gaze to hers.

It'll be all right, Chrys. We are only going to do what you're comfortable with. That may not be completely true, but he wasn't going to rush her. They still had hours before things got dangerous.

Visibly, she relaxed and he felt better for his partial truth.

The doctor waved them into a small bedroom. She'd certainly set the stage for seduction. The curtains were drawn and the room was dark except for the scented candles lining the dresser. He smelled vanilla and fresh linens.

Chrys's groan nearly tore a chuckle from him. *She even turned back the covers. What? She think we can't handle this ourselves?*

I think she was trying to set the mood. He would have been smiling if he were in his human form, but he could only show teeth. *Should we try out the bed?*

Donovan, we're hardly in the shape to...

Chrys, we don't have to do this if you don't want to. I know I'm not your choice, but on such short notice...

To be honest, I'm more interested in you than what you can potentially do for me. Besides, even if it doesn't work, I'll go with a good memory.

He chuckled softly. *You have that much faith in my skills?*

Her heated green gaze roamed his wolfen body. *Even in the forms we occupy now, I'm attracted to you. I picture you as a human, all big and buff and sexy, and I can't imagine how you couldn't be skilled.*

You're trying to provoke me into making love to you. He wanted to kiss her. If they were in their human forms, he would, but in this form, the urge had to go unfulfilled.

Yes. Is it working? She had a teasing lilt in her voice that he couldn't ignore.

His tongue flicked out and swiped the tip of her sensitive nose. *Perhaps.*

Chrys leaned forward and nipped his shoulder with her sharp teeth, then backed away from him. Slowly, he turned and stalked her around the small room. *So, the little girl wants to play, does she?*

Her laughter washed over him, making his muscles clench. *I'm anything but little, Donovan. Stocking feet, I'm six foot.*

Compared to me, you're a shrimp.

Oh, I like that. He could hear the laughter in her teasing sarcasm. *At least I know you won't be staring at my chest every time we talk.*

He continued to stalk her, one measured step after another, while she retreated coquettishly. *I don't know, it sounds like a pleasant pastime.*

Silly, you haven't even seen my chest while I'm human.

I was there before you completed the change. I know what you look like and how well you fill your clothes. I'd stare. But I'd try to be discreet about it.

Donovan realized he was flirting with Chrys. He'd never flirted with anyone before because no one would get close enough to him to warrant that type of exchange. Hell, he didn't do relationships of any kind, but with Chrys, he didn't seem to have control of himself or her.

It seemed as if Nature was in charge and she was feeling frisky.

He could work with that. It would help immeasurably with what had to be done. The raging fire that swept his body called for the female in front of him. At this moment, no other would do, and he meant to have her.

Laughing and backing away from the stalking male wolf, she stumbled and bumped into the edge of the bed frame. With one struggling leap she clambered onto the bed. He took advantage of her distraction, pounced onto the bed, stood over her, and growled.

That made Chrys laugh harder. She bumped him with her nose and when he backed up a little, she started to roll off the bed.

The big, powerful black wolf leapt into the air and landed with his chest on her back, teeth gripping her by the nape of the neck, positioning her.

Chrys was surrounded by his cinnamon scent and danged if it wasn't a turn on and a half. She'd never been so aroused and even his forcefulness was exciting. Her eyes closed and she felt his body merge with hers.

He took her deeply, alternating his rhythm, fast and then slow. Chrys caught her breath on a gasp and groaned. *Yes, Donovan. Yes!*

Her head drooped and she pressed her bottom to receive his forceful thrusts. Chrys came unexpectedly, the sensation almost painful, but oh, so good.

Donovan released the grip he had on the nape of her neck and climaxed, hollering her name.

He didn't stop sliding in and out of her when he finished. His movements were slow and easy.

She inhaled deeply, wrinkling her nose at the acrid odor that permeated the air. "Phew! What's that stink?"

He didn't answer her, but started laughing. "What's so funny?"

“Chrys, look at us.”

“What?” Then she saw what he meant. “Wow, were back.”

Sure enough, they were both in human form. She pulled away and he slid out of her. To see better, she rolled onto her back and her gaze roamed over both their naked, sweaty bodies.

“How did it happen?”

He shrugged. “Maybe the trick worked.”

“Must have.” Chrys grinned naughtily. “So, want to do it this way, now?”

Shaking his head and chuckling, he dropped to the bed beside her. “I don’t know about you, but I need a few minutes recovery time.”

“Spoilsport.” She sighed heavily. “Well, if you really need it, I suppose I can go shower while we’re waiting. You might see what you can do about that stench.”

“Sounds like a plan. I’ll catch up when I’ve gotten some strength back in my legs.”

He sprawled right where he was on the thick, soft quilt.

Chrys’s attention was snagged by the masculine body splayed out before her. Even lying down, he looked formidable. He was so tall and had big feet, big hands, big chest, big... Well, big everything. His legs were lightly furred and muscled, his chest densely furred and rock hard, and his abdomen was ripped with one dark line of hair pointing straight to his groin.

“How come,” Donovan didn’t even open his eyes to look at her, “I feel like prime rib and you’re starving to death?”

Chrys snorted. “Probably because it’s true. I have this need to have you inside me. Now, not ten minutes from now, but right freaking now.”

One black eye peered at her. “That bad, huh?”

“Oh, yeah.” Her hand slid across his abdomen and he sucked in a breath.

“I thought you were going to shower.”

To her delight, his muscles rippled where she touched him. His skin was smooth and soft over the hard steel of his muscles. The hairs across his chest were silky and thick, and she didn’t stop herself from digging her fingers in and clenching her fist in that thick pelt. Not enough to pull it out, just enough to tease.

She could tell he liked it, just by his reactions. He arched up and hissed air through his clenched teeth. His eyes were tightly closed and the tendons in his neck stood out. Even his fists were clenched and his toes were curled.

Oh, yeah, she liked his reaction.

She really enjoyed the sight of him getting more and more ready for her. He grew right before her interested gaze.

Her hand slid down his hard abdomen, following the line of soft hair, to grasp his full member in her tight grip. Sliding the hard shaft in her closed fingers, once, twice, and a third time, she smiled very wickedly.

“Well.” She loosened her grip on his twitching cock and stretched. “I guess I’ll go shower now.

Chapter Three

He howled and reached for her, but she backed away quickly and ran into the bathroom, slamming the door behind her. Reaching for the water handles in the shower, she yelped as the door crashed open and a nude, dark god filled the opening. Pretending nonchalance, she casually turned the water on and checked the temperature.

“You didn’t say you wanted to shower too.”

He growled low in his chest in answer. Steely arms wrapped tightly around her. He lifted her and took her into the stall, soaking them both. “Bad girl.”

“I sure hope so.” It was getting difficult to talk, she was laughing so hard.

Donovan solved the problem by stealing the giggles right from her mouth with his. Just like that, she didn’t want to laugh anymore.

His mouth was masterful. It was hot, wet, and he sure knew how to use it. Her lips softened as his firmed, and when he parted his, she followed suit. She took his tongue into her mouth and tasted him for the first time. Sparkles flashed behind her closed eyelids, and her knees felt rubbery. Good thing she had her arms around his neck, or she would have slipped to the floor in a melted, gooey blob.

She couldn’t stand it. Her body was on fire and she needed him so badly. She wondered if the water was steaming around her. When she couldn’t take the ache in her center any longer, she tightened her abs and lifted her legs to wrap around his waist. The long, hard ridge of his cock rubbed perfectly between the folds of her swollen pussy.

His hips arched and the thick cockhead abraded her clitoris, provoking her to elicit a startled gasp at the sensations shooting through her lower abdomen.

Her mouth broke away from his in an attempt to catch her breath, but he didn’t stop the motions that bred overwhelming excitement. His name rushed from her on a breath of air. “How can I need you so much?”

And she did. The craving she had for him went so far beyond want or need, she could barely stand it. She'd just met the man, and while she wasn't a virgin, neither was she promiscuous. A couple of boys in school, but they'd been relationships, not one-night stands to scratch an itch. This felt more like obsession. She had to have him. Had to be a part of him.

As if to grant her wish, he slid into her, smoothly and deeply. Chrys's breath caught. He was so much a man, she felt full to bursting. Oh, and it was glorious!

Tightening her arms around his neck, she used them to slide up his hard shaft to sheathe him again. His groan delighted her. Riding him, she rubbed the tips of her swollen breasts against his chest. Oh, rapture! The pleasure she derived from such a simple touch was beyond belief. The rasp of her hardened nipples buried in the thick chest hairs elicited an electrical tingle that shot from where their chests touched to her clit. Her passage rippled around his stiff cock.

"Yes, just like that." His deep voice whispered in her ear. "So good, honey."

"The best." And it was.

She rode him, with the flashes of electrical current continuing to zing through her body. Never had she felt such ecstasy.

Chrys wanted the sensations to continue, for the rest of her life if need be, but higher and higher she spun toward that cliff.

Donovan's arms tightened on her and he pounded into her harder. With a hoarse scream, she went over. Flying, falling.

She floated forever in the netherworld, and when she opened her eyes again, Donovan had taken them out of the shower and wrapped them in towels. Without setting her on her feet, he carried her into the bedroom to lie on the soft bed.

"Too much of that, and I won't survive." She was still breathless, and her heart pounded. Not that she was complaining, but dayum!

His chuckle caused another ripple to traverse her body and she exhaled on a shudder.

"You got that right." He rolled onto his side, head propped on his hand. "I don't know what happened. How you were able to change back is beyond me. I was always told that only a mate could enact the transformation."

"Maybe." Chrys tried to engage her brain. It wasn't easy. "I did smell something awfully nasty before we went into the bathroom. It might have been that."

His hand skimmed over her abdomen and her muscles clenched. "Perhaps. I know Amalee said she'd introduce the pheromones when it was time, but I didn't notice." He sighed and rolled onto his back. "I guess we're going to have to break down and ask her."

Chrys bristled. "I really don't think I like that woman."

He shot her a teasing glance. "I think you've mentioned that."

She swatted him on his arm with a halfhearted swing. "All right, funny man. I guess we'll go talk to her, but we have a little problem. In case you hadn't noticed, we're buck naked."

"That does pose a problem." But the leer he gave her told her he didn't mind her nudity.

"Okay, let's just wander back to town where my car is. Since that's where my luggage and clothes are, I guess that should be my first stop. It's in the clinic's parking lot. Right out front, in the middle of town."

"You win." He was smiling when he stood and leaned over her, offering her a hand up. "No walking around town nude. I'll go get my clothes from outside. I'll dress and get your keys and grab your clothes. You can stay here and wrap a sheet around you if you're feeling exposed."

"My brother's house is at the edge of the forest. I can take the sheet and get there without anyone seeing me."

"Why not stay here?"

"Do you really want to leave me here with the good doctor when I'm still feeling...strongly about her?"

He lifted her to her feet when she took his hand in hers. "Good point. I'll grab my clothes, and take you there. You can borrow my shirt until you're indoors."

She wrapped the sheet tightly around her and tucked in the edge. Glancing down, it reminded her of the one toga party she'd attended at school. She felt very silly.

"Are you sure nobody will see us?" She wasn't much of an exhibitionist, she realized. "Your shirt will cover the important things, and we're unlikely to see anyone on the way to my brother's, but your boss and the doctor could be around."

"The clan doesn't see nudity the same way as humans. When males and females change shape on a regular basis, one never knows if it's going to be near their clothes or not. We don't think much of it."

"But doesn't it cause problems?" She took his hand as he walked from the bedroom toward the outer door of the cabin. She liked touching him. Now that they were both human and standing side by side, she could see how tall he really was. She liked that he was so much taller than her. As he curled an arm around her shoulders and pulled her into his side, she decided she really, really liked it.

"What kind of problems?" He paused by the front door, one hand on the knob.

"Well, humans wear clothes so randy people don't attack them. It seems that the naked body is irresistible to some, and incites riots or rapes."

Shaking his head, he looked down at her. "I can see your body inciting riots, but that's not how werewolves are. Rape is equal to murder, and I'm sure I've mentioned that no one of my kind wishes for me to hunt them."

“You’re that much of a badass, huh?”

The look he gave her made her blink. His whole countenance had changed. He’d become harder, his eyes had taken on a feral gleam, and he looked darned scary.

“Okay, yeah, I can see it.”

He smiled and the fearsome man turned into the one she knew. She blew out a cleansing breath. “Good grief. Don’t look at me like that again. You’ll give me a heart attack.”

“Don’t worry, I usually reserve that look for bad guys.” His lips touched her forehead, and she glanced up at him.

“Have you considered getting a poster made up of you sporting that face and a caption that says, ‘Be good, or else’? I think it would be a great deterrent.”

“Think so? I’ll talk to Kyle about it.”

He wasn’t serious, and she could tell by the droll tone of his voice.

She watched as he went outside and grabbed his clothes. The grouchy doctor was nowhere to be seen, thank goodness, and the view of Donovan’s tight, muscular butt was a sight to behold.

Standing in the doorway, nearly naked, was a new experience for her and she glanced around hoping nobody would pop up. How embarrassing would that be? With her luck it would be her first grade teacher, Mrs. Clark, and the woman would tell her how she’d known all along Chrys would turn out rotten.

She wasn’t rotten, just naked and a werewolf. Man, oh, man. She was a werewolf. What in the world was she going to do about that?

Donovan strode toward her, clothing in hand, and whoo-doggies, at the sight of his front end, she didn’t care if all her grade school teachers walked up and busted her naked.

Chrys reached for the shirt in his hand, but he shook his head. “I’ll do it.”

Gently, as if she were the finest china, he tugged the sheet loose and let it fall to the floor, then slipped the silk shirt up her arms and over her shoulders. It felt like magic and her skin tingled as he fastened the buttons up the front. “Nice shirt.”

His wink caused flutters to erupt in her stomach. “I like how it feels on my skin. Every time I move, it’s like a caress.”

Her heart went pitty-pat at that. He turned her on faster than anyone she’d ever met. Then her breath caught and her stomach clenched.

“I’m going to need to check on Lizzy once I’m properly attired. I’m supposed to pick her up and take her home tonight.”

His eyes glittered as he gazed down at her. “Tonight? We’d better hurry then. I’ll go with you to pick her up.” He paused and his eyebrows came together. “That is, if you don’t mind.”

"I don't mind at all." She liked being with him. Sure, she'd just met him over a dead body, had glorious, wild animal sex with him, and he might be the hottest thing since jalapeños, but she felt comfortable with him. She could be herself and not have to worry about not meeting some unknown standard. School had been just that. Everyone tried to be better than everyone else, or just better than the person in front of them.

Man, she had hated the games. Donovan, so far, portrayed himself as a stand up guy, one who said what he thought, shot straight from the hip and would cover your back if necessary. And he seemed to like her and Lizzy. That was gravy.

She sighed silently, thinking that since he wasn't her true mate he would probably move on. If he were a hunter of bad werewolves, he probably didn't stay in one place very long. She'd hate to see him go. But she wouldn't cling. She'd seen women go off the deep end, trying to keep a man who was ready to move on. The man ended up disgusted with the woman and the woman had been left devastated. It wasn't how she wanted to be. She had a whole life in front of her, and becoming emotionally handicapped at this stage of the game would suck.

She'd enjoy the time she had, and not ask for more.

With a plan in place, Chrys felt light hearted and ready to face anything.

"Do you have a wife or girlfriend?" Her eyes went wide with worry. "Geez, we talked and talked about my mate and mates in general, but you never mentioned if you were with someone. Just that women didn't chase you."

At first, he looked mad, his face tightened, his lips firmed and his eyes hardened. Then he took a deep breath and let it out slowly. "I know you aren't trying to offend me by suggesting I would cheat on a woman I was involved with, so I'll answer your question as it was meant. No, I don't have anyone in my life. If I had, I wouldn't have touched you."

Chrys felt like passing out, the relief was so great. "Oh, thank goodness. I'm glad you wouldn't betray a woman. I'm sorry if it sounded that way, it's just that monogamy wasn't terribly important in college."

Gradually, his face lightened and his lips curled into a small smile. "Well, just don't do it again. I would never do that to a woman, and I don't think a werewolf can cheat on their mate. At least, that's how I understand it."

"What do you mean, can't cheat? Everyone can cheat, it's a personal choice whether they do or don't."

He took her hand in his large one, pulled her to his side and resumed walking. "Point me to your brother's house." When she did, and they started in that direction, he resumed speaking. "Wolves in the wild are monogamous. Always have been, always will. We are similar in that we mate for life. No other will do, and we're incapable of desiring another."

She glanced up at him. "Incapable? A werewolf can't get sexually aroused? Turned on at all by someone other than their mate?"

"That's what I've been led to believe. Once the pair is mated, they won't even want to be that close to another being. Unless it's their own cubs."

"Cubs? Oh, children. I got it." Her confusion doubled. "But, if I'm supposedly mated to that asshole, how can I feel desire for you?"

"The only thing I can think of is that you didn't complete the mating with Pete. That left you unattached. Therefore, you are able to feel desire for me." He shrugged. "It's the only theory I have and it may be completely off."

Chrys ran her free hand through her hair. "Yeah, it's better than nothing, I guess. Maybe your doctor can figure it out."

"If she has any questions or answers when she finds us gone, she'll call my cell phone."

They left the forest and entered a large yard with a swing set, a wooden playhouse, and toys scattered everywhere. The house beyond it was a one-story home with a large deck out back. Chrys climbed the stairs to the deck and went to the outdoor gas grill and reached underneath the side. She came away with one of those magnetic key holders. Inside, Lee had kept a spare house key in case they were ever locked out. She smiled sadly as she remembered giving him crap about the location.

"I asked my brother what he'd do if someone stole his grill when I found out about his hidey hole." She pulled the key out of the holder and went to the back door. "He said that no one was foolish enough to steal his grill, everyone knew that he'd go after them with his shotgun if they tried."

Turning her gleaming gaze to Donovan, she laughed softly. "He would too. I've seen him do it. He loves that grill."

All at once, grief struck. Chrys's eyes welled up and a sob broke free.

Donovan reached around her, twisted the key in the lock, and pushed the door open. He wrapped one arm around her waist and lifted her completely off the ground. Placing a light kiss on her forehead, he strode into the dark, cool house.

He sat in a big, comfortable chair, and situated Chrys on his lap, handing her the handkerchief he'd carried in his back pocket. Susan's fault. She'd taught him that a man should never be without one, and now he was glad she'd instilled that habit. Chrys put her head on his shoulder, fisted her hand and placed it against his beating heart, and cried.

"It hurts so badly, Donovan. Lee, Anne, the kids... They'll never come back. I'll never see them again." The tears came hard and fast. "I'm sorry. I know I cried earlier." Her breath hitched but she continued, "But that was more about me. Oh, geez, too much has happened."

He let her cry it out. Damn it, he wanted to fix what was causing her to hurt, but there wasn't a damned thing he could do, except hold her while she cried. He desperately wanted to break things. A lot of things. Like arms and legs.

He rubbed her back and she put her face in the crook of his neck and shoulder. After a time, the tears dried and her breath evened out. When he was sure she slept, he lifted her

and took her to the couch. Stretching her out on the well loved piece of furniture, he pulled the afghan that was folded neatly on the back and draped it over her.

Stepping back, he let his gaze roam over her sleeping form. He'd never seen a woman so beautiful. Her inner self was as lovely as her outer and he found himself attracted to both.

Before he could talk himself out of it, he turned and walked out of the house, locking the door behind him and returning the key to its hiding spot. He was going to bring Lizzy home to her aunt. They needed each other and the sooner the better.

As he passed the scene where the werewolf had been killed and Chrysanthemum changed, he marveled at how benign it looked now. The body had been removed and after only a few hours, all traces of the attack had disappeared. Including Chrys's ruined clothing. The casual observer would never know anything had ever happened here.

Rubbing his hand against his bare chest, he made a detour to his hotel. It sat on the edge of the forest -- hell, everything sat on the edge of the forest in this town -- and grabbed a silk shirt and his leather jacket. He didn't linger. He didn't want Chrys to wake alone.

The clinic came into view only a little while later and he saw a couple of cars parked in front. He cursed himself for not asking Chrys what kind of car she had. Well, he had to see the sheriff anyway to get the keys. Her clothes and anything that was in her pockets -- such as her car keys and wallet -- had been left at the scene of the attack, and would have to be retrieved.

His cell vibrated and when he checked the caller ID, his eyebrow rose. "Sheriff, I was just about to call you."

"Yeah?" The hard voice was clipped. "Look, I need you to get to the clinic, now."

"Lucky you, I'm here." Striding through the doors of the clinic, Donovan glanced around, trying to locate the sheriff.

"You're at the clinic?" He actually sounded incredulous. Donovan's mouth quirked at the corner because he'd caused staid Sheriff Ross Kendricks to lose his self-possession.

"Yes. I just walked past the front desk. What's going on? The place is deserted." Usually, there were nurses and orderlies and various other personnel wandering the halls, completing their missions. Now the area behind the front desk was deserted. The halls were vacant. The only sound that penetrated the intense silence was the ding of the elevator reaching the ground floor.

"Just get up to the second floor. I'll meet you at the elevator."

The phone clicked off without any other directions. He shrugged and slid his phone back into its holder. Stepping into the elevator, he pressed the button for the second floor. The doors slid slowly closed and the elevator creaked upward. Idly, he wondered if it would even get him up there, or if it would crap out half way up.

Lucky for him, the car reached the desired floor and the ding was eventually followed by the doors sliding open. He breathed a sigh of relief as he stepped out and met the sheriff.

“What’s up?”

“I thought you said the killer was dead.” Ross’s eyes flashed hot flames. “I’ve got two dead bodies, and it looks like the same fucking killer did it.”

“Not possible. The body in the forest is the same man who’d been doing the killing. Let me see the bodies.”

After a long stare, Ross turned and stalked down the hallway and through an open door. The strong medicinal smell that saturated all clinics was overpowered by the scent of blood.

The bodies were laid out on metal tables and Donovan felt his stomach clench. This looked like a werewolf attack. The deep, ragged slashes appeared to have been made by claws.

He stepped closer and sucked fetid air through his nose.

“Not.”

“What the hell do you mean ‘not’?” Exasperated, Kendrick stomped up beside him. “Not what?”

“Not a werewolf.”

He was positive. The spoor wasn’t there. “This killer is human.”

“Then why the fuck does it look like a wolf attack? It’s a duck, damn it.”

Donovan turned to the sheriff very slowly to give him a cool, questioning glance. “A duck?”

“It looks like a duck, it smells like a duck, it’s a fucking duck.”

The laugh grew until it erupted from his throat. “A fucking duck?”

“Shut the fuck up and tell me what you smell.”

“Nothing. Human. Not wolf.”

“Succinct. You’re saying a human did this to these men?” Ross waved his hand over the tables. “Then how did the claw marks get there? Osmosis?”

“Probably not. They’re clean. No spoor. Not wolf anyway. The only ones who’ve been around these men have been human.” Donovan turned and exited the room.

Ross huffed out a long, pissed breath and followed him out, closing the door behind him. “All right. I’ll take your word for it. But what you’re telling me is that Nowhere has a second killer? Bullshit.”

“Yes.” Approaching the elevator, he shifted until he could see the sheriff. “Where is Lizzy Hollister?”

“Why?”

“I told Chrys that I’d bring her the baby. She’s human again and needs to hold the last of her family.”

“Glad Chrys is okay. I was worried that she couldn’t be turned back.”

“We weren’t sure either, but she did. Now she’s at her brother’s house, sleeping. She’s had a shitty day.”

“I can imagine.” A flicker of something unidentified flashed through his eyes then was gone. “The baby’s on five in the nursery. If anyone gives you trouble, call me.”

“Thanks, will do.” Pressing the button calling the elevator, he turned his back to Ross.

Ross might not know the extent of the trust he granted the sheriff by turning his back, but it meant a lot to Donovan to offer it. He did trust the sheriff, and that was damned strange. The people he felt he could trust could be counted on one hand, so affording Ross Kendricks his trust said a lot.

Before he could dwell on it, the elevator dinged and he stepped inside. As the doors slid shut, he turned and eyed the sheriff. The man stood staring at him, with a speculative expression, hand on his weapon, hip cocked. Donovan reached over and pressed the button for the fifth floor.

She glanced up as he exited the elevator, and held up one hand, finger pointed up. The nurse leaned over a computer terminal, phone caught between her ear and shoulder. Waiting patiently for her to finish her call, he ran his gaze along the hall.

He sighed deeply, sucking in air through his nose. The smell of dried blood hit him like a freight train, and for one second, he froze. The next second he was running full speed down the hallway. The scent grew stronger and he followed it to a closed door. Four dark red stripes slashed the door as if a bloody hand had been dragged across it.

Slowly, he pushed the door open, gun in hand, and entered the brightly lit room. Baby cribs lined the walls, and in one, a baby lay quietly on her back, staring at him.

Donovan tore his attention away from the green eyed, redheaded imp and examined every inch of the room for a threat. The baby was alone in the room, so he put his gun back in its holster.

He approached the crib, heart pounding. “Who was your visitor, pumpkin? Did they hurt you?”

Leaning over and reaching in, he blinked, stunned by the beautiful smile she graced him with. “Oh, baby. You’re going to break my heart.” He wrapped his big hands around her little body and lifted her gently out of the baby bed and pressed her against his chest. Her giggle shot through his heart and he nearly melted.

Donovan couldn’t stop the emotions that flared around this little girl. It made him soft, but there wasn’t a damned thing he could do to stop it. “You all right, baby?” He looked her over carefully, checking her for any wounds, lifting her and twisting her to see front, back, top and bottom.

Her laughter erupted, and he lowered her back to his chest when he found her untouched. She seemed completely unharmed. He breathed a huge sigh of relief. When he'd seen the blood on the door, he'd panicked. He never panicked, damn it.

"You are going to cause me all kinds of trouble, aren't you?"

Her response was to bounce in his arms, giggle, and whack him in the face with her open hand.

"I'll take that as a yes." He looked around, searching for anything that might be hers. Not seeing anything of a personal nature, he tightened his arms, and glanced back at her. "Ready to be sprung from kiddie jail?"

Lizzy's smile was contagious, and he felt a grin spread unbidden across his face. "Let's blow this joint."

He looked both ways when he entered the hall. Finding it clear, he bounced the baby on his arm as he passed the nurse's desk.

"Excuse me. Where are you going with that child?" The nurse had stepped in front of the elevator, blocking his way.

"I'm Donovan Vitello, and the doctor has released this baby to her aunt. The sheriff said I could take her. If you have a problem with that, talk to him." He waited impatiently, watching the halls for trouble, as the nurse called the sheriff.

"All right. Sign here and you can take her." The nurse sounded surly but he couldn't blame her. She was just doing her job. He signed the paperwork, folded the copies for Chrys, and stuffed them in his jacket pocket. Saying goodbye to the nurse, he turned and stalked away from the desk. He wanted Lisianthus out of the clinic as quickly as possible.

In the elevator again, he stopped at two and when the door opened, he pushed the hold button. "Kendricks." He had to shout to be heard over the numerous voices that were all talking at once.

"Over here."

"Got a situation on five, Kendricks."

The sheriff appeared in front of him with a pissed off expression. "Now what?"

"Check the nursery door. There's blood on it." He gestured with his chin toward Lizzy. "She wasn't touched, but it may have been a warning or a threat."

Nodding, Kendricks waved over an officer and then examined what he could see of the baby. "You're taking her to her aunt now?"

"Yes, can't leave her here. I don't think it's safe. Since this is a human killer, I'll not involve myself. I'll be around if you think I can help, though."

"Good. I'm not sure I like the idea of two killers in such a short time, but I know you're right about it not being a werewolf."

Donovan's curiosity was piqued, but he pushed it off. "If you hear any car alarms, ignore them. It'll be me, trying every vehicle out there. Chrys asked me to get her car and said she'd parked it in front of the building. You wouldn't happen to have the keys, would you?"

Kendricks answered by reaching into his pants pocket and pulled out a mass of key rings and keys. "These are hers. Which key is the car key, I don't have a clue. I don't even know which car it goes to. Since the attack happened in the woods, I haven't had to bother with it."

Eyeing the large mound in the sheriff's hand, he wondered why the woman had so many key rings. There were only about four keys, but there had to be fourteen or fifteen key rings.

He took the interconnected key rings and shook his head. "Chrys is also going to want to know when she can bury her family."

"I'll let her know as soon as possible. They're still being examined."

"Thanks."

"No problem. Take care of the tyke."

Donovan pressed the close door button and then lobby. The baby put her head on his shoulder, relaxed into him, and sighed.

"We'll get you home and you can get some rest."

Soon after, he was standing in front of the medical center and staring at the two vehicles in front of him. He had a choice between an old four door sedan and a four wheel drive truck with a lift kit and bull horns mounted on the front. He took the chance and tried the few keys on the sedan first.

Sure enough, the lock clicked and he opened the door. The stale heat rushed out at him, so he left the door open for a moment to air it out.

Rubbing the baby's back, he considered the dynamics of transporting an infant. The seatbelt wouldn't hold her, she'd slide right out.

"A baby car chair. That's what we need." Chrys didn't have one in her sedan. Damn it.

He slid his gaze from the car to the baby. She seemed to be happily snoozing against the silk of his black shirt. She was little. Really little. It could be done.

Carefully, not wanting to wake her, he tugged the edges of his jacket together and zipped it up around her. She was safely cocooned against his chest. He could do this. Slowly, he lowered himself into the driver's seat of the sedan and slid the seat back as far as it would go. The baby wasn't being crushed by the steering wheel, so he thought it might be safe for such a short trip.

The sheriff walked out of the clinic and up to the car.

"Not gone yet?"

“Almost.”

Kendricks looked at Donovan’s chest and laughed. The baby’s red hair was the only thing poking up from the top of the closed jacket. “I knew you were going to stuff her in your jacket and steal her away.”

“Ha, ha. Very funny. I have to get her home somehow and this was the only safe way.”

“It’s actually against the law to drive with a baby not in a car seat, but, if you promise to drive very carefully and don’t wreck, I’ll let it slide this time.”

“I swear.” He knew his eyes flared red. “Nothing and no one is going to hurt her. Especially not me.”

“Good enough.” The sheriff tapped a hand on the roof of the car and stepped back so Donovan could close the car door. “I saw the marks on the door, and I’ve got my people working on it. I’ll let you know when we’ve got anything. Oh, and don’t forget about the statement.”

“We won’t.”

He started the car, put it in gear, and maneuvered onto the road. He’d never driven so slowly in his life, but he got there, eventually. Parking in the driveway of Chrys’s brother’s house, he turned off the engine and slid carefully out of the car. One arm under the baby’s bottom holding the child against him, he rounded the car to the trunk and opened it with the key. Inside sat two suitcases and a briefcase. He grabbed the briefcase strap and slid it up his free arm and grabbed one of the suitcases by the handle. Loaded down, he went around the house to the back porch. Reaching under the grill, he retrieved the key and unlocked the back door.

He caught Chrys’s scent the moment he opened the door. With his foot, he pushed the suitcase into the house and let the briefcase strap slide down his arm until it touched the floor.

Not hearing Chrys moving around, he unzipped his jacket as he went into the living room where he’d left her sleeping. She was still asleep, which was probably the best thing for her right now.

He laid Lizzy on her stomach on the big reclining chair, She curled up, butt in the air, not waking. He stared down at her for a moment, before scooting the coffee table over so that she wouldn’t roll off. He glanced at both the girls and smiled. They were so pretty, laying there, sound asleep.

Quietly, he left the house, got Chrys’s other suitcase, locked up her car, and went back inside. After placing the suitcase on the floor next to the other, he went back into the living room, sat in a second recliner, and simply watched them sleep. He would have to go get his car from the hotel, but for just a moment, he wanted to be with them. The bloody slashes on the door of the nursery bothered him, and he couldn’t let it go. These two redheads had touched his heart and nothing would harm them and live. Nothing.

Chapter Four

Chrys stretched and yawned widely. Her body ached as if she'd run miles. She never ran miles. Heck, she never ran on purpose. Not unless she was in a hurry to get to class. Oh, my, goodness! She was late for class!

She lurched to her feet and opened her eyes at the same time. Instantly, she froze. Where the heck...

It hit her all at once. Her brother and his family were dead. Only Lizzy lived and was now her responsibility. She'd been attacked, bitten, and... Turned into something else. Not human.

She was a fucking werewolf!

Her attention narrowed and focused on the huge man sprawled in one of her sister-in-law's new recliners.

Donovan Vitello. Wow, he was even super sexy sleeping uncomfortably, because he was too tall and broad for the chair. She didn't know much about him, but what she did know inspired her with confidence. He hadn't lost his head when he'd found her and he'd been a big help.

A really big help. He'd been instrumental in getting her back into her real body. It didn't seem real, the things that had happened. She glanced at the clock over the mantel. Several hours had passed since Donovan had brought her to her brother's house, and morning had come.

The scuffling noise from the other recliner drew her attention. At first all she saw was a mound of blankets and for some reason the coffee table was pushed up against the chair, but then the bundle moved.

Red hair and green eyes peeked around the blanket at her.

"Lizzy. Oh, baby."

Chrys rushed to the baby and picked her up in her arms, holding her tightly against her chest. "I'm so happy to see you."

She put her lips against the baby's forehead, kissed her. Chrys rained kisses on both of Lizzy's pudgy, pink cheeks, and Lizzy erupted into giggles. When Chrys pulled back to see the child, Lizzy patted Chrys's cheek.

"I'm glad you're happy to see me too." The laughter bubbled out of her. She couldn't help it. Never in her life had she been so glad to see another human being. Even if she was less than three feet tall.

"Do you feel better?"

His deep rumble rolled over her, and she turned, a wide grin on her face. "Much. Thanks for bringing her back with you. I guess I passed out on you."

Adjusting the baby in her arms, she went to the side of Donovan's chair, sat on the arm, and perched Lizzy on her leg. Leaning forward, Chrys kissed Donovan lightly on the lips. He sucked in a breath, placed his hand on the back of her head and deepened the kiss. Oh, he tasted yummy. Lost in the kiss, Chrys barely caught the baby as Lizzy laughed and lunged for Donovan. Breaking the kiss, he took the squirming child and gave her a kiss on the cheek.

"How are you today, baby doll?"

The baby gurgled, blew a bubble, and grabbed Donovan's nose. Chrys had never seen anything as beautiful as the look on Donovan's face. He looked surprised, happy, and as if he weren't quite sure what to do about a slobbery baby hand gripping his nose.

"We just woke up. I slept well, and I think she did too."

"Glad you had a good night. I, however, had an interesting one. I got a call from the sheriff when I got to the clinic. There have been two more deaths. The killer tried to make it look as if a werewolf committed the crime, but the scent was human."

"I know that the man in the forest was the killer. I know it. He can't still be alive can he?" The memory of his foul scent and the feel of his breath on the back of her neck erupted full bloom in her mind and she nearly screamed at the possibility that he was still out there, somewhere.

"The werewolf who attacked you is very dead. He will never bother you again. This killer is human. One hundred percent *homo sapien*. The sheriff and his people are working on catching this person, and in a town this size, it shouldn't be hard to locate and arrest him."

Chrys let the fear wash away. She couldn't let her life be ruled by her fear of a dead man. She would get a handle on this werewolf thing and get on with her life. She had no choice but to deal with things. She was the sole provider for an infant. Lizzy was only six months old, and heck, she couldn't even crawl yet.

Standing, Chrys stared down at the man and baby. They looked like a picture. "I've got to change Lizzy, but after that, I'm free. Does anyone want some breakfast?"

Two sets of hungry eyes turned in her direction. Laughing, Chrys turned toward the kitchen. "I'll take that as a yes."

Rummaging through the refrigerator and cabinets, Chrys was able to whip up pancakes and sausages for the adults, and baby cereal for the munchkin. After a quick diaper change, they took turns eating and feeding Lizzy, who enjoyed her meal, both on the inside and the outside.

Chrys eyed the mess. "I wonder if she got enough in her to stave off starvation."

"Since she quit opening her mouth like a baby bird five minutes ago, I think she's full."

"I think you're right. But now she needs a bath." She looked around the kitchen. "I wonder how her mom did it."

Her eyes welled again. "Damn it. There's so much I don't know about taking care of Lizzy. I don't want to mess this up, but I sure wish..."

"You're doing fine, Chrys. She hasn't complained too loudly, has she?" Donovan took her fisted hand in his. "You'll do fine. From what I understand, all mothers go through this and you didn't have the nine months to prepare."

"Yes, all right. I can do this." Chrys stood and picked up the slimy, sticky baby. "You've been a big help, Donovan. I don't know what I'd have done if you hadn't stuck around."

"Believe me, it's been my pleasure." He rose to his feet and gathered up the dirty dishes. "You get her cleaned up and I'll get this."

"Oh sure. Take the easy job."

He eyed the messy baby. "Well, if you really want to do the dishes..."

"No, I've got the baby. Besides, I hate doing dishes. I don't mind cooking, but I really dislike cleaning up afterwards."

"Good. It's always nice to feel needed."

The way he said it caused Chrys to pause and stare at him. It sounded as if nobody ever told him he was wanted and needed. "Donovan, we need you. *I* need you. Not just for the werewolf stuff or for the baby. For *me*."

His head swiveled around so fast, she wondered if he got dizzy. "Really?"

"Yes. Really. I want to get to know you better. Relationship knowing." She paused. "That is, if you want the same." Just saying it scared the dickens out of her. She knew that a short-term relationship was probably all they'd get, but she would take anything he would give her.

"I do." He crossed the kitchen floor and wrapped her in his arms, totally ignoring the fact that Lizzy was covered in baby cereal and getting squished between them. His head lowered and he kissed her. Lips rubbed across hers until she opened for him and he took the

invitation, delving deep. He broke the kiss only when the baby squeaked. "I've never had a real relationship, but I want to try, with you."

Chrys examined his expression, and only found truth there. She smiled and stepped out of his arms. "Good then. We've made a start." She looked him over one last time, then turned and left the kitchen.

In the bathroom, while making a small bath for Lizzy to sit in, she wondered if he knew he was covered in cereal.

She wanted a relationship? Donovan shook his head, stunned, as he scraped the leftover food on the dishes into the trash. Could she be telling the truth? If she were, it would be his wildest dreams come true.

Filling the sink with hot, soapy water, he considered the merits of starting something with Chrys. There were so many. He wouldn't be alone anymore. He'd have someone to love. Two someones. Chrys and Lizzy were a pair now.

Since she wasn't his mate, he would lose the chance at children, but again, there was Lizzy. Who was to say that adoption was out of the question if they decided to have more children?

His whole body jerked, splashing water onto his shirt. He was getting way ahead of himself. She suggested getting to know each other in *hopes* of a relationship. It wasn't a done deal yet.

But damn it, he'd been alone so long, and as attracted to Chrys as he was how could he not take the chance on something that had the promise of forever?

He had to try.

When Chrys and a shining, sweet smelling Lizzy came back into the kitchen, he wanted to grab them into his arms and never let them go.

Yes. He had to try to make something lasting.

Lizzy held her arms out to him, but he glanced down at his shirt. "Sorry, baby. I need to go to my hotel and get cleaned up or your bath will have been in vain."

Chrys laughed. "Go do what you have to do. We'll get acquainted and see if we can find...well, everything."

He reached into a pocket and pulled out his business card holder. Taking a card out, he wrote his hotel and room number on the back. "If you need me for anything, here's where I am. My cell number is on the front. I won't be gone long, just long enough to clean up."

Donovan didn't want to go. He wanted to stay with the two females. His chest hurt when he thought about leaving them, and knew the wrench would be hard. He'd had a hard enough time getting his car from his hotel. He'd been gone a total of fifteen minutes, largely because he'd changed and ran on four legs to get there, and driven back as fast as possible. He

had not wanted to leave them alone but he had, and it had hurt. Because of that, he left quickly, barely saying goodbye.

He leapt into his car and practically squealed out of the driveway. The quicker he left, the sooner he'd get back to them. The houses and streets passed in a blur. In no time, he parked his car in the empty space closest to his hotel room.

Sitting behind the wheel, head down, he fought the need to return to Chrys and Lizzy. Reminding himself that she had his number -- in more ways than one -- he slid out of the car and strode to his room. Using the key card, he unlocked the door. When the green light flashed, he pushed the door open and stopped. His room was in shambles. Someone had been there and trashed the place.

Weapon in hand, he entered. Quickly, he scanned the area. No sign of life. Scenting, he caught the subtle fragrance of human.

Why would a human ransack his room?

The sheriff was going to be pissed. And he was. When Donovan called Ross and apprised him of the new development, he cursed, "Damn it. I'd just gotten to sleep. Who, exactly, have you pissed off lately?"

"No one in particular."

"I doubt that. Look, I'll send a crew over there now."

"Fine. I am going to inform Kyle about this. There's always a possibility this might be a human who knows about us and doesn't like the idea of our existence. We come across them once in a while."

"Out of curiosity, what do you do with humans who know about you and don't like you on principal?"

Smiling, Donovan answered, "We eat them." At the sheriff's indrawn breath, Donovan relented. "Nothing. We watch them and make sure they don't harm anyone, and that's about it."

The sheriff exhaled audibly. "Good. I don't want a bunch more dead bodies because the wrong person finds out about...you."

Donovan wondered why Kendricks had paused, but let it go when he continued. "I don't like the way things are going. Since the killer is dead, there must be a second killer. But who? Fuck. I came out here to get away from the stress of crime."

"Someone who heard about the murders and is copycatting?" It was a possibility. One they couldn't overlook.

"Maybe." Donovan could hear Kendricks moving around; getting out of bed and dressing most likely. "I just want the shit to stop."

"Don't we all?" Donovan closed his cell, terminating the call, and gazed around his room. He'd have to pack. Fuck.

Opening the cell again, he dialed the leader. When Kyle answered, Donovan told him what had happened and to keep on the alert. "I'm going to be moving out of this room as soon as the locals are done."

"Why don't you take your stuff over to my rental house? Amalee is only using one room for her experiments and the other room is unused."

"I could do that. I've been spending time with Chrysanthemum and Lisianthus Hollister, so if you need me, you can find me there most of the time."

"Is something going on with them?" Since Kyle knew that Chrys was now a werewolf, and the baby was genetically compatible, both were now under his jurisdiction.

"No. Nothing that concerns you."

Something in his tone must have given him away. "Be careful. If she is Pete's mate, you could run into all kinds of problems. If the obvious can be overcome, you won't be able to have kids. I know how much you want cubs. I've seen you watch the little ones when you thought you were alone."

Damn, he hadn't realized he'd been so obvious in his desires. Too late to worry about that now. "We're still discussing it. And, she has Lizzy."

"True. Be careful. Take it from me; relationships are chockfull of land mines. Take a wrong step and it blows up in your face."

"Got it." He knew about the misunderstanding that had separated the alphas six months before. He would hate to have, and then lose the woman he loved over a dumbass mistake.

Closing his phone, he stepped out of the room to await the police. It didn't take long for the cops to find absolutely nothing. He hadn't expected them to find anything, though. It was messy, but the perpetrator had left no fingerprints. He packed his things after the police left and drove over to Kyle's rental house.

A rental car was parked outside, and he guessed the doc was there. In deference to that, he knocked and waited for her to answer instead of just walking in.

"Hey, hunter. What's up? Your girl a hound again?"

For a genius, the woman was a pain in the ass. "No. She's fine. My room was tampered with so Sylia said I could stay here. I won't mess with your experiments; I'll stick to the other room."

"Works for me. I'm at a nice hotel in town. Good thing I'm not staying in that dump you were. Sheesh. You'd think you were broke the way you live."

She laughed when he shot her a fierce look. "I'm not broke. I just don't see the need to spend money on a bed and a toilet that's the same in any hotel."

"You could use a change of clothes too. What's that on your shirt?"

"Baby food."

Clumping across to the bedroom, he tried to ignore the laughing woman. She wasn't a bad female, just an obnoxious one. Not like Chrys, who was kindness itself.

At least, he thought she was kind. He'd seen her at her worst, and she hadn't blamed him or anyone but Pete. She could have been mad at his whole race if she'd been so inclined. And she had a problem with the doc, but that might be a female thing. He understood territorialism.

He wanted to get back to her as quickly as possible, but he really had to shower and change clothes.

Not bothering to unpack, he pulled out clean clothes and headed for the shower. A clean towel from the cabinet and he was set. He reached into the shower and turned on the water to a bearable temperature. Stripping out of his clothes, he thought about what Chrys had said. She was amenable to getting to know him. Him. She wanted a relationship with him. It boggled his mind. Women had wanted him before, but only to say that they'd had him. A loner, unsociable, quiet, described him and apparently, that was a challenge to some women. They weren't interested in a long-term relationship, just a one-night stand. He wasn't into one-night stands, and that perked their interest even more. The occasional night when he gave in to his body's lusts had left him feeling disgusted with himself.

He didn't feel disgusted after having been with Chrys. He wanted her again. Just thinking about it as he climbed into the steaming hot shower gave him a hard on. He wanted her *now*. The water felt good sliding over his skin and down his body. Warm and silky, it ran over his hard cock and trickled over his balls causing them to ache. He pictured Chrys sharing the shower with him, on her knees at his feet. God, he could see her there, wanting him, needing his cock. She'd grasp him in her hands and she'd squeeze. Pulling until he thought he'd explode.

He gripped his cock hard and tugged on it, hand sliding up and down the shaft. Cupping his balls, he rolled them in his hand, imagining what Chrys would do.

Her mouth would be fire on the head of his cock as she took him inside. Slowly, she would slide her tongue around the tip and down the shaft until her nose was buried in his pubes.

His cock jerked in his hand and he tugged his balls hard. Just fantasizing about Chrys set him off into a climax like never before. He spurted on the shower wall in front of him. Head bent, he tried to catch his breath.

Goddess, he needed to be inside her again.

Hurrying through his shower, he washed and rinsed. Time was passing and he wanted to be with her.

As he left the room, clean and dressed, he nearly bumped into the doctor as she came out of the other room.

"Doc, what can I do if Chrys changes again?"

“Very good question and one I’ve got an answer for.” She stepped back in to the room for a moment and came out with a couple of small, capped vials. “This is a derivative of Pete’s pheromones. If she changes, open the vial marked with the number one and she should change back. Each vial is going to have less and less of his pheromone in the off chance we can wean her from needing it. I’m hoping that in time she won’t need these pheromones and another of our kind can take her to mate.”

He had mixed feelings about that. He wanted her to not need the killer’s pheromones, but he didn’t want her mated to any other male. “What if she becomes accustomed to my pheromones?”

“Then you’d better be ready for a mate, mister.”

Nodding, he took the vials and left the house. Driving back to Chrys’s, he wondered how soon he could imprint his scent on her.

He parked his car behind Chrys’s. Something looked odd about her car so he got out and examined it. It didn’t take but one glance to tell what was wrong with it. The tires were flat and deep gouges had been scratched along the sides. Everything in him went cold.

Bursting into the house, gun drawn, he almost fired when he heard the scream. Chrys came running into the room, but froze when she caught sight of him.

“What? What is it?”

“Someone vandalized your car. I was afraid they’d come inside.”

Chrys glanced around the room. “No, nobody came in. We’re all right.” She went to the window and looked out. “What happened to my car? I just got the damned thing paid off.”

Carefully, he put his gun away and then approached her, wrapping his arms around her waist from behind. “Your tires have been slashed and your paint job is damaged.”

“Damaged how?”

She didn’t turn to look at him, but leaned her body into his, seeking comfort.

“They dragged something sharp along the sides. There are four grooves all down each side.”

“Shitfuckdamn! Who would want to do that to my poor car?”

He almost laughed at her cursing but the seriousness of the damage and the anger it signified worried him. “I don’t know, but I’m damned sure going to find out. This isn’t the only attack on one of us.”

Turning in his arms, she stared up at his face. “What do you mean?”

Time to come clean. “There were two murders at the clinic. I told you that. What I didn’t tell you about was the bloody slash marks on the door of the nursery that Lizzy was in.”

“What? Why didn’t you tell me?” The fire in her eyes beat at him.

“Also...”

“There’s more?” She was practically shouting, so he leaned down and placed his lips on hers. He couldn’t help it. She was so beautiful when she was pissed.

“Yes. My room was ransacked.”

“Holy crap, Donovan. Is there anything else?” Sounding as if she wouldn’t be surprised if there were, she put her hand on his chest and pushed.

He didn’t let her go. In fact, he pulled her closer so she could feel his growing erection.

She swatted his arm and huffed. “Don’t try distracting me, damn it. I need to know if someone is stalking us.”

“I’m sure someone is, but I don’t know who yet.”

He would find out who this person was and eliminate them. He didn’t tell Chrys his plans. Even though she bashed in the head of her attacker, he didn’t think she was the violent type. He was.

The baby started crying from somewhere in the house. Chrys pulled out of his arms. “Want to go with me to get the baby?”

“Yes.”

He followed Chrys to a brightly painted bedroom. The walls were pinks and blues with clouds, stars, and fairies. Toys were everywhere. On shelves, in wooden boxes, on tables. Clothes were tucked into dressers and hanging in the closet. The room wasn’t terribly neat, but it looked loved. It was definitely a girl’s room.

Lizzy was sitting in the crib, hands gripping the rail, face squished up against the bars. Poor thing had a red, wet face, drool on her chin, and snot running down her nose. It wasn’t a pretty sight.

Chrys grabbed up a soft towel on the way past a table and wiped Lizzy’s face then picked her up. The baby sniffed a couple of times, rubbed her face on Chrys’s shirt, then settled in comfortably. When she glanced over Chrys’s shoulder at Donovan, she shot him a two-tooth grin.

“Little schemer.” He narrowed his eyes at her. She only smiled wider.

“What was that?” Chrys sounded distracted as she hunted up a diaper and all the accoutrements that went along with making a baby comfortable.

“Nothing. Just having a conversation with the squirt.”

“And did she talk back?” The smile in her voice made him want to smile with her. He never smiled. Not until he hooked up with these two at least. They made him feel -- happy.

“Yes. She said that she knows she’s got it made.”

“Really. Strange, I didn’t hear her say anything.” Chrys laid the baby on a tall table that had a pad and some sort of seatbelt. Strapping the baby down, she reached for the clasps of the tiny body suit.

“She smiled. That said it all.”

He watched the process of removing the diaper, wiping, sliming white goo, powdering, and re-diapering with fascination. The baby didn't seem to mind it, and Chrys seemed to be pretty good at it.

“Have you done that often?”

When she glanced up at him, he waved a hand at the table.

“No. Well, I did help out when I was at home with the other two, but that's it. I've had a lot of practice since this morning though. We had a busy day. We got our bath, which you were around for, then several diaper changes, lunch, more diaper changes, one really icky. I wouldn't recommend those. We also played with some toys, listened to some music, and eventually took a nap. She did anyway.”

She blew on the baby's belly which made her laugh, and then snapped her clothing shut and unstrapped her from the table.

“I can hold her.”

Chrys handed him the happy, clean smelling baby and he pulled her in close. Before Chrys stepped away, he caught her hand with his and tugged until she leaned toward him. Her eyes twinkled as she accepted the kiss he gave her.

“Mm. I like kissing you.”

“I like kissing you too, which is why I do it.” The baby distracted him from offering another with a hand to the face. “Do you want a kiss too?” He gave her one on the cheek and she startled him by opening her mouth wide like a baby bird.

Chrys laughed. “Baby kisses. They aren't attractive, but they get the job done, I guess.”

He kissed the baby again, causing her to laugh. Donovan loved the sound of the baby's laughter. It warmed something deep inside of him.

They went back into the living room where he settled the baby in a swing and turned it on. “We have to call the sheriff.”

“It's becoming a habit.” She wandered around the room, picking up and putting away things that didn't belong on the floor. “He's going to put us in jail just so we don't bother him anymore.”

“Probably.”

The sheriff answered on the first ring. “I'm going to take your damned number off my phone and block it.”

“Sounds like a plan. Look, Chrys's car has been vandalized.”

The long, drawn out sigh sounded loud over the phone. “Shit. All right. I'll be over there in a little bit and I'll bring the damned paperwork you need to sign.”

“We'll be here.”

Hanging up, he ran his heated gaze over Chrys. He'd been watching her bending, reaching, stretching, and damned if it didn't give him another hard on. It was a wonder he could think, since all the blood rushed to his cock every time he was near her.

"The sheriff will be here soon." Maybe he had enough time to get rid of the erection before the man showed up, because, sure as shit, he'd comment on it. Hell, he brought up every other thing that Donovan didn't want to become public knowledge, what's one more thing?

"I'll go start lunch. I'm sure he'd appreciate something to eat."

Donovan watched her enter the kitchen and let his attention sweep the room. The house didn't have a security system. With the murders and the petty mischief that had plagued them in the last twenty-four hours or so, an alarm system would be prudent. He pulled out a small notebook that he always kept with him and started taking down information. The house had several windows, doors leading in from the outside, a skylight in the kitchen, and the basement had small windows and a large outside access. All of it needed to have alarms installed. It could be done in a day if he had enough people on it.

He dug out his cell phone again and called Susan Marks. She answered on the first ring.

"Susan. I need the company we use for installing alarm systems to do a rush job. Yes, I know I'm in the middle of Nowhere. lame joke by the way. There's been some damage done to property and I want to make sure a couple of females are protected, or at least alerted if someone tries to get into the house. Today." He sighed into the phone. "Yes, tomorrow should be fine. Tell them I'll pay extra for the job if they get it done before dark." He gave her the specifics of the house and what needed to have detectors installed. "I appreciate you doing this for me, Susan. Yes, I'll give you a raise."

He was chuckling when he hung up his phone. Susan had been his office coordinator for years and occasionally when she asked for a raise, which she inevitably did at the end of a phone call, he would give her one. She was skilled in her job and kept the business running. Paying her what she was worth was the least he could do after all she'd done for him.

Calling out from the kitchen, Chrys asked him to bring the baby. He gathered the tyke up and settled her into her high chair with some cereal O's to keep her happy. As Donovan watched, a couple went into her mouth, the rest of the ones in her hand went onto the floor or stuck to her face. Babies were strange creatures.

"I've decided on sandwiches and chips for lunch. The cupboard is nearly bare and I'll have to go shopping soon." Chrys didn't look up from her task of making the sandwiches, but he heard the worry in her voice.

"What's the matter?" He crossed to her and placed his hands on her hips. "Have I done something that bothers you?"

"No." She paused and stared down at her hands as she put the sandwiches on a platter. "Well, I did hear you talking on the phone about an alarm system for the house, but that isn't

what's got me feeling discombobulated. It's that I realized I don't know a whole lot about you."

"We don't know a whole lot about each other, but it will come. Learning about each other is what usually comes first, right?" When she nodded, he continued. "Our circumstances put the cart before the horse, and now we're dealing with this other thing. Getting to know about each other will take time, time we have, and will use, until it's no longer a question."

Chrys turned in his arms. "You're right. I just had a moment of panic. There is so much going on, I'm having trouble keeping up." She slid her hands up his chest, clasped her hands behind his neck and moved forward until her body was meshed against his. "After the sheriff leaves, we'll talk, all right?"

"Works for me." He dropped his head to take her soft mouth with his. They lingered over the kiss, tasting each other, delving deep, until a knock sounded at the front door.

"That'll be the sheriff." Donovan stepped back from her tempting body. "I'll go let him in." Glancing down his body, he groaned. "If he laughs at me, woman, I'm going to take out my frustrations on you."

Her happy giggle as she realized what he meant, winged its way through him. "I'll look forward to it."

"Into S and M are we?"

She slid her glance up and down his body so slowly he could practically feel it. "We could be if you do it right."

With that, he groaned long and low and turned fast to answer the door. She sure wasn't helping him battle his natural instincts to dominate. Damned woman would be the death of him. Or at least the death of his famous control.

Her soft, sexy laughter didn't help one iota.

He wrenched open the door, startling Kendricks. "Well, are you going to stand there all day, or are you coming in?"

The sheriff took a good look at Donovan and smirked. "Got your nuts in a twist, does she?"

"Fuck off."

Nonchalantly, Sheriff Ross Kendricks sauntered into the house. "You wish. Now, tell me what the fuck's going on in my town. This shit seems to be escalating." He entered the kitchen and caught sight of the baby. "Sorry. I'll watch the language. Didn't know she was in here."

"Hey, sheriff. Thanks. I don't want her first words to be four letter ones."

Chrys waved them toward the table and brought over the platter of sandwiches. She set it down in the middle of the table where everyone could reach it, except the baby. Not that

she noticed. Lizzy was busy staring at the sheriff. When she caught his attention, she smiled a big cereal smile which made the sheriff laugh.

"She's a flirt. You're going to have your hands full with her when she gets older." He chucked the baby under the chin, got a handful of half chewed cereal and went to the sink to wash it off.

Chrys laughed. "Yes, I know. She's going to be a trial, but a good one." Sobering, she changed the subject. "Do you know who's been doing all the...*stuff* that's been happening?"

"We don't even know if it's the same person." Kendricks dried his hands, then went to sit at the table. "So far, the only thing any of the scenes have in common is the slash marks. The perp has something that duplicates an animal's claws and is using it as kind of a calling card."

Donovan nodded. "It's not a werewolf, I'd know if it were. This is a human who's targeted us for some reason."

"Other than Pete, I can't think of anyone I've angered lately. Heck, I've been away at school for the most part of the year trying to finish my degree." Chrys reached for a sandwich and set it on her plate. "This seems to have come out of the blue."

"The bloody slash marks on the nursery door at the clinic worry me." Donovan stood and went to the refrigerator. "The room hadn't been entered, but it seems the marks were maybe a warning of some sort. What followed backs up my theory." He grabbed three cans of cola, returned to the table, and passed each adult one.

"Have you thought of security?" Kendricks popped the top and took a long drink of the cold soda. "The damage seems to be escalating."

"Got it covered. The company we use is coming out full force tomorrow to set us up."

"Glad to hear it." He took a bite of his sandwich. "Oh, I brought the paperwork I wanted you to fill out. I figured if I waited for you two to come in, I'd be old and grey."

"Sheesh, you'd think we were avoiding you or something, the way you talk." Chrys laughed.

He turned a serious gaze toward her. "Are you?"

Pursing her lips, she thought about it. "Not consciously. However, I will give you that I've had a bit of a rough time since I got home. Attacks, turning into a werewolf, car damage... I mean, really, how am I supposed to know if you're going to call in the guys with pretty white coats?" Chrys fluttered her lashes at the sheriff teasingly.

"After what I've seen lately, I'm more worried that you're going to call the white coats on me." His smile was wide and they both burst out laughing.

Donovan wasn't sure how to take the banter between Ross Kendricks and Chrys. He didn't smell attraction, but his body reacted intensely at their play. Muscles tightened, fists clenched, teeth gritted. "Can we get back to business please?" He didn't like his reaction, but there wasn't a damned thing he could do about it.

His reactions to her were uncontrollable, and he wanted her to never need Pete's pheromones ever again. Once was enough. He wanted *his* pheromones imprinted on her. No other male's, not even this human's.

And he really wanted to wipe that smirk off the sheriff's face. The pleasure it would afford him would be...

"Don't even think about it. I've got a gun."

Donovan's eyebrow rose. "So do I."

Chapter Five

Chrys giggled, causing the baby to bang her hands onto the table of the high chair. “Should I get the hose to break you two apart?”

“Gah!”

Turning toward Lizzy, Chrys pulled the tray off of the high chair and unbuckled the strap. Pulling the baby free of the chair, she took the squirming, sticky monster to the sink. As she washed the baby, she glanced back at the men who hadn’t said a word. They just stared at one another as if waiting for one of them to blink.

“I’m getting the hose.”

Donovan turned a sexy smile her way and damned if she didn’t melt inside.

The baby stole her attention, banging on the side of the sink.

“Okay, pumpkin. Let’s get you changed.” As she walked by the men, she glared at them good naturedly. “Be good.”

Lizzy’s room was right next to her parents’. It bulged at the seams with her possessions, and just looking around told Chrys how much Lizzy had been loved. Alex’s and Susan’s rooms were just as full. Oh, how she missed those two rug rats. She remembered one argument. Alex was mad because for generations all the females in the family had been given flower names -- Susan’s given name was B. E. Susan for Black Eyed Susan -- and how it wasn’t fair that he had a dumb old regular name instead of a special family name. Chrys had taken pity on him and explained that Alexander was a great leader and a king.

That might not have been the best idea, telling him that he was named after a king. He lorded it over his sister and told her she had to call him “Your Majesty.” That lasted approximately thirty-five minutes until his sister crowned him.

There would be no more sibling rivalry.

Damn it, she hadn't even had thought one about the funerals. She had to find paperwork and take care of so many things. Chrys choked back a sob. She wasn't ready to start crying again. Lizzy kicked and gurgled. At least the baby wasn't aware that her family was gone. Hopefully, Chrys would be a good substitute and Lizzy wouldn't feel as if she'd miss out on anything.

She took a deep breath and let it out slowly. *I can do this.* And she could. She just had to remember all the things that were important to her brother and sister-in-law. That shouldn't be too hard. They had been moral people and since Chrys had grown up with the same set of morals, raising the baby as her parents would should be a piece of cake. Right?

"Okay, enough. Let's get you changed and we'll go find out if those male types have rendered each other dead."

Lizzy cooed so prettily that Chrys had to give her raspberries on her tummy to make her laugh. The baby's laughter was one thing she'd never tire of.

Dressed, happy, and raring to go, the baby bounced in Chrys's arms as they returned to the kitchen. The men were still in their places at the table, which Chrys took as a good sign. Donovan was writing on a piece of paper and the sheriff was reading another.

They looked up when she strolled in with the baby. "Good. You can take some of this paperwork. I'll take the baby."

"Donovan, you always want to take the baby. But here." She handed Lizzy to him and sat at the table, sliding some of the paper her way. "What have we got here?"

Ross spoke up. "We have to fill out an incident report about yesterday. I need every detail you can think of, exactly as it happened. Then, I'll make a second set that eliminates all mention of werewolves for the official report."

"Oh, no problem, Ross. Let me write down what happened and you can use the information as you see fit."

He nodded, so she found some blank paper and got to it.

Reliving the attack was painful, and a couple of times her breathing accelerated as it got too real. Donovan was there to steady her with a strong hand on hers and a small smile. Just letting her know he was there helped.

It took a while, but she finally finished. The men had been passing the baby between them, Donovan getting more time, which they managed to argue about. "Give her to me already. You two are going to drive me insane fighting over her. Besides, I'm finished with this and am ready to do something else. Heck, anything else."

She turned Lizzy so she could look into her little face. "Want to go for a walk?"

The baby bounced excitedly. Chrys took that as a yes and glanced at the men. "We are going for a walk. Sheriff, go do something official. Donovan, if you're coming with us, better get ready."

And with orders having been handed out, she left the room in search of a stroller. Getting out of the house was becoming imperative. She just needed a breather from the memories.

“Aha.” She’d found the stroller in a logical place. The hall closet. Tugging it free of the jackets and coats that were crammed into the small space, she popped it open and locked the folding bars. Getting a good grip on Lizzy, she gave the stroller a good hard shake to make sure it wasn’t going to collapse, then put Lizzy inside it and strapped her in.

“Hmm, I think I should grab a bottle and a couple of diapers for you in case of emergency. Sound like a plan?”

The baby thought it was a great plan, so Chrys ran to Lizzy’s room and shoved things into a diaper bag. Once that was done, she rushed back down the hall and into the kitchen, where the men were finishing up, and grabbed a bottle.

“I’m outta here. If you’re going to join us, better get moving.”

Lizzy clapped when Chrys, who was panting over the exertion of moving so fast, rejoined her.

Ross passed her, giving the baby a chuck under the chin, and a nod to Chrys. He didn’t say anything as he stepped outside and closed the door behind him.

“Ready?” Donovan spoke from behind her.

Chrys about jumped out of her skin. “Darn it, Donovan. Don’t do that.”

He curled himself around her back, rubbing his cheek on hers from behind, arms wrapped around her waist tightly. “What are you going to do about it if I do?”

“The last guy who messed with me got his head bashed in.”

His laughter rippled down her spine like a caress. “I’ll have to remember that.”

She snuggled back into his chest, liking the feeling of his strong body against hers. He was so powerful, broad, ripped, that she couldn’t think of one man who appealed to her more, or got her as hot as fast. Not even the centerfolds in the magazines could hold a candle to Donovan.

Lizzy’s voice talking baby talk a mile a minute broke the sensual spell. Chrys sighed and reached for the stroller then glanced up at Donovan. “Let’s get out of here before I start tearing clothes off.”

The flare of interest and heat in his eyes had her lifting her hand. “Not so fast, big boy. The squirt here is ready for her walk and that means we have to wait. At least until after her bedtime.”

“And bedtime is what? Three in the afternoon?” he asked hopefully.

Laughter bubbled out of her. “Sorry. Nope. It’s at seven-thirty.”

Groaning, he opened the front door so she could push the stroller out. “That’s an eternity.”

"It's..." She checked her watch. "Six hours and thirty eight minutes."

"As I said, an eternity."

* * * * *

The town of Nowhere wasn't very big. Four miles from one end to the other, and only about three quarters of a mile wide. Main Street was where you went to see and be seen. Families, older people, groups of children, and young couples all promenaded down the wide sidewalks of downtown. There were several small shops, a few eateries, and a bank that all had the pretty, small town flavor. The businesses on this section of Main Street could have been here a hundred, even two hundred years ago, and they would have fit in perfectly.

These days, there were larger stores; grocery, home improvement, even a chain department store, but they were on the edges of town and not in the town proper. They might be necessities, but they weren't going to mar the "feel" of Nowhere. Not if the town council had anything to say about it. He'd heard all about it in the diner where everything was discussed.

"I'm thinking about moving my business here," he said, apropos of nothing, but wanting to know her feelings. He was gratified to see the huge grin that spread across her face. She didn't seem to be against his idea. Good.

Donovan watched the people watch him and didn't change his mind about transferring. He glanced up at one of the unused upper floors over a deli that made fresh bread daily. "I wonder if any of these buildings are for rent or sale. This one in particular is the right size and in a good location for my main offices. Susan would love the easy access to food since our current location is several miles from any type of eatery."

"Who is this Susan to you, exactly?" The smile drooped and he found that he liked her jealousy.

"Susan Marks is in charge of my security business. She keeps all of my agents in line and where they're supposed to be, and pays the bills so the electricity isn't turned off. If it weren't for her, I probably wouldn't have a business."

When her smile fell even more, he glanced at her out of the corner of his eye. "She's beautiful, too," he told her, deadpanned.

She scowled and he relented with a laugh. "And she's old enough to be my mother. Susan treats me as if she were one too. She practically raised me since my own parents wanted little to do with me."

"Oh, well. That's okay then."

Chrys said it under her breath, but he heard it nonetheless. Werewolf hearing was exemplary. His hunter skills, throwback that he was, meant his senses were better than even the best of werewolves.

"Donovan? Why did your parents, as you said, want little to do with you?"

As she was pushing the stroller, he couldn't take her hand, so instead, he wrapped his arm around her waist and matched his steps to hers. He had to feel her body against his, and this was the best he could do while in the middle of town.

"I'm a hunter." He said it starkly.

"Yes, I know, but what's that got to do with anything?"

Confusion colored her voice. She didn't understand the significance of his declaration.

"When I say I'm a hunter, I don't mean that it's my job. A hunter is born with extra-sensory skills and is considered a throwback, or Neanderthal, of our people. The skills that were necessary a million years ago are no longer needed in this day and age. Occasionally, a cub is born with these primitive -- enhancements -- and they can go either way. Hunt for the good of the clan, or live the life of a criminal."

"Those are the only options?"

"The strong senses can make a being feel indestructible. As if nothing and no one can defeat you. My teen years were...difficult. All my senses magnified and functioning became nearly impossible. I spent a lot of time alone in the woods, just to be able to stay sane. Susan kept me from turning feral. She found me dirty, naked, and huddled in a burned out tree stump. She pulled me out of there kicking and screaming and took me home."

Chrys gasped, but didn't interrupt. She only leaned into him so that her body had more contact with his. It helped to banish the memories.

"She cleaned me up, much to my consternation, and home schooled me. She even taught me how to channel what she called my powers, into a manageable state. She wasn't a werewolf herself, but she had grown up around them, and knew some werewolves she could ask for help. When I grew more comfortable with my control, she began handing me books and movies of people who did certain types of jobs. Security, military, detective, that sort of thing. If it weren't for her, I'd probably still be in the forest living as a wild man."

"She sounds like a smart woman. I'd like to meet her." The sincerity in her voice warmed Donovan.

"I'll make sure of it. So, do you think moving my company here is feasible?"

Chrys's gaze wandered over the buildings and nodded slowly. "I don't see why not, as long as you don't need privacy. The thing about small towns is that everyone knows everyone else's business. Security work, from what I understand, is supposed to be secret."

"On the whole, yes. However, as most of our jobs are out of the area, keeping what we do in-house shouldn't be a problem."

"What, exactly do you do?"

He looked down into her curiously sparkling eyes and sighed mentally. Here it comes. "We go into unstable situations and eliminate the threat. Occasionally, we serve as body guards for high profile people."

Squinting, she considered what he didn't say. "You're a..."

“Essentially, I’m a mercenary. I fix, or eliminate people’s problems for money.”

“Is it dangerous for you?”

He could only stare at her. She wasn’t shocked or appalled by what he did. She only showed fear that he might get hurt.

“My agents are highly skilled and are like me. Werewolves and hunters by birth. The danger is minimal usually.”

Her lips pursed. “Usually?”

Trust her to catch that. “Yes. Occasionally we do find ourselves in a bit of a bind. It’s rare though.”

“Hmm.”

Now, if that wasn’t noncommittal he didn’t know what was.

“What is it you do?”

“Fine, change the subject. I’m a graphic artist and do web design. Working from home really is possible with my chosen profession, which is a good thing. In fact, I’ve already started my business website and am looking into getting a license.” She sounded excited and nervous.

“That’s great. You plan on staying here, in Nowhere?”

“Absolutely. Even if it weren’t for Lizzy needing stability, this is home. I would have worked here regardless.”

One thought ran through his head. *Good*. He actually felt instincts he didn’t know he had ratchet back and go into stasis mode. If she stayed in proximity of him, and his pheromones, he wouldn’t have to take her away into seclusion and force her system to accept him as her mate. He had time. He only had to keep her close, and other males away.

She would be his.

Unaware of his licentious thoughts, Chrys grabbed his far hand and put it on one of the stroller handles. She maintained control of the other handle and wrapped her freed arm around his waist. They walked, sharing stroller duties, pressed against each other.

He could feel his body temperature rising with each subtle rub of her hip against his side. His hand tightened on the plastic covering of the stroller handle and he heard it crack from the pressure.

Subtly glancing around, he sighed. Didn’t anyone in this town watch television? The entire population must be wandering the streets, chatting, walking, laughing. Chrys wouldn’t let him get away with a quick kiss this public, much less a forceful fuck against the side of the bank.

The only thing that kept him from actually proposing it to Chrys was Lizzy. The baby giggled and waved at each passerby from her seat in the stroller, and ignoring the baby’s needs for his own was out of the question.

Chrys tilted her head and he saw the gleam in her eyes. "Wicked woman." She was tormenting him on purpose, knowing her nearness was heating him up to the point of eruption.

"What are you going to do about it?" she teased softly.

"Nothing."

Her sexy grin slipped. "What?"

He let his mouth curve in a wicked smile. "After the baby is tucked away for the night, I'll make you come so hard you'll scream."

When her breath caught and her entire body stiffened, he drew a long breath of air through his nose. He could smell her reaction. The scent of her juices leaking from her body hardened his cock until he ached with it. Glancing down, he saw the hard tips of her nipples straining against the thin barriers of her bra and shirt. He wanted to get his mouth on them and mark her with his bite.

His bite, no one else's.

The rumbling growl built in his chest and penetrated his heated fog. Now was not the time to let his instincts rule.

Donovan tightened the reins on the wildness inside him, inhaling and exhaling several times to regain composure. "Quit teasing me."

"Teasing you?" She pinched his side in retaliation. "You're the one teasing. Damn it, I could practically rape you right here and now."

"Shh. Don't talk like that in front of the baby. Later we'll deal with your uncontrollable urges."

Indignant, Chrys glared up at him. "My un... Look, you --"

He cut her off the most expedient way he could think of. By pressing his lips to hers.

Chrys stopped dead in the middle of the sidewalk to deepen the kiss. Her tongue wrapped around his, head tilted to just the right angle. If it weren't for the teenagers who snickered and whoo-whoood on their way by, he may have started stripping her.

Lizzy managed to make the whoo-whooh noise, and as Donovan and Chrys tried to pull themselves back together, repeated the sound over and over. She sounded like a very small train. It broke the tension between them enough that after a couple of moments, they were able to continue their walk.

Back at the house, the baby was oblivious to the adults' need. The few times Donovan caved and reached down to adjust the raging hard on in his pants, Chrys's eyes fired with heat and want. He thought he might pass out from lack of blood in his brain before the baby's bedtime rolled around.

They choked down dinner, played with and bathed Lizzy, then finally, it was time for bed. Donovan's heart rate had hovered at heart attack speed for so long, he wondered if he

would survive. As soon as kisses were given to the baby, her light turned out, and the door pulled so it was nearly shut, he reached out and lifted Chrys off her feet and carried her into the living room.

Trying not to rush, needing to make this perfect, he set her gently on the couch. He held up a staying finger then rushed into the kitchen for the wine and two glasses he'd set out earlier.

Back in the living room, he set his bounty on the coffee table and went to the CD player. Pressing the play button, he pivoted to return to Chrys.

"Kookaburra sits on the old..."

Donovan frowned and turned slowly to stare at the player. His brows rose and when he turned back to Chrys and saw the smile she tried to hide behind her hand, he sighed. "Barney?"

"It's Lizzy's favorite and she was feeling cranky this morning."

He sighed again and turned back to the CD player. Quickly he scanned the CD's on the shelf, and made his selection. Bluesy sax and strings filtered through the surround sound speakers and, as Chrys poured the wine, Donovan returned to her side. Sitting beside her, he accepted the proffered glass and took a small sip.

Without taking his eyes off her, he carefully set the glass on the coffee table and reached for her. Slowly, inexorably, he pulled her toward him until the tips of her breasts rubbed against the silk of his black shirt.

It wasn't enough. He had to feel her skin.

Sliding his hands down her sides, he tugged her tee shirt free of her jeans and lifted it over her head. The uniquely feminine, lacy bra cupping her pert breasts beckoned his touch. His hand appeared dark against the whiteness of the bra and the shiver that overtook her traveled up his arm into his own body.

His. Only his. He would make it so.

Seeping his pheromones into the room, slowly, a little at a time, he saturated the air with his unique scent. Her scent rose to meet his and they merged into a new, addictive perfume.

"Mm, it's wonderful. The smell, it's wonderful." The breath of her statement wafted across his neck and set the hair on his arms lifting.

He wanted, needed to strip her down, push her to her hands and knees, set his teeth into the nape of her neck, and take her from behind. The primitive instinct had him reaching for the fastenings on her jeans before he caught himself and backed off.

Donovan lowered his head, taking three or four deep breaths. That didn't help. Their mingled scent was an aphrodisiac, making him harder than he thought possible.

"Don't stop, Donovan. I need you now."

Looking into her eyes, he knew she didn't know what she was asking for, but he could make it good for her. He *would* make it good.

He returned his hands to her jeans and undid the button and the zipper. Even seated, she managed to help him tug the pants and her panties off her body along with her shoes. While he removed her socks, she reached behind her and undid her bra. As the straps fell from her shoulders, the cups caught on her hard nipples. She shrugged and the whole thing fell free. Naked, she leaned toward him.

His mouth touched hers and he felt the last shreds of his control fade away. The kiss deepened and his tongue dueled with hers. Her hot, wet mouth was a feast for him alone. He needed more.

Wrenching himself away and off the couch, he tore at his shirt. With her help, he finally got it off and started working on his pants. Soon, he stood before her naked, his cock red and hurting. He took it in hand and gave it two, slow, tight strokes.

"Take it, Chrys. In your mouth." His voice was a whisper of dark need.

Her moan sent heated air across his cock as she took his hips in her hands and pulled him to her. She rubbed her lips across the very tip of him, then her soft, pointed tongue lashed him over and over, never taking him in.

When he could take no more of her torment, he gripped the hair at the back of her head and pressed his erection past her pouty, moist lips. Slowly, inch by inch, he breached the dark cavern of her hot mouth. Her tongue wrapped around the invading spear and lavished it with slow, deliberate licks.

Her mouth was a marvel. She took him, all of him, and he was an overly endowed man. He could feel her throat as it clasped him before she pulled back for air. When she leaned forward again to take him deep, his eyes closed momentarily. He forced them open, needing to see her take him like this.

He'd thought he would have control of her if he insisted she suck his cock, but she was the one with the power. He stood helpless before her, offering all that he was, and needing her more than ever.

The sight of her lips wrapped tight around his cock, her throat moving with each swallowing motion, and her nose buried in the hair at the base of his shaft, had his balls tightening before he was ready. Tugging on her hair, he slipped out of her wondrous mouth, despite her objections.

"On your back. Now."

He helped her situate herself on the couch on her back, knees raised and open, waiting for whatever he wished to do to her. He sat between her separated feet, taking in the view of her open, pink labial lips, her clit peeking from the small hood that meant to protect it. Juices dripped from her cunt, sliding between her ass cheeks and to her anus. Never had he seen anything so beautiful.

She moved her hand, blocking his view and he growled low in his chest. "Move it. Hands on your knees."

With only a small hesitation, she placed her hands on her knees and waited with wide eyes for what he would do next. His forcefulness didn't scare her. In fact, it was such a turn-on that she thought she might come just knowing she was under his control. Who knew she was such a submissive? Hell, who cared as long as he put that huge cock inside of her where she hurt from wanting him?

Tightening her fingers on her knees, she pressed her fingernails into the skin, waiting, wishing he would do something, anything. "Donovan. Please."

"Yes, I can see how much you want me. How much you need me." His eyes flashed to hers. "It's not enough."

She actually whimpered, and she wasn't sure if it was a good whimper or not. Not that she cared.

He placed his hands on hers and parted her knees further, fitting his broad shoulders between them. Sliding his palms down the inside of her thighs, he leaned in close to her pussy and breathed in deep. She thought she'd faint when he moaned his pleasure.

Damn it, he hadn't even touched her yet and already she was on the verge of coming.

When he finally did, she had to bite back a scream. He slipped a single finger down her slit, touching her clit, dipping lightly into her dripping cunt. Any second now, she was going to start cussing.

He lifted his hand and slid his tongue out of his mouth. That single digit spread her juices across his tongue and he groaned.

"Ah, fuck, fuck, fuck." He was just too hot for words with more than four letters.

She lay there, open for anything he wanted to do to her, and damned if she wasn't going to let him. Anything he wanted. Any way he wanted. She was his and damn it, he was hers.

A low rumble erupted from her, not a purr, not a growl, but something animalistic and menacing. She didn't care. Especially when his eyelids narrowed and his lips pulled back and showed sharp, white teeth followed by a loud, warning growl.

Chrys couldn't move. If she did, she'd jump on him, tear at him with her nails until she drew blood, and impale herself on his cock until she came. One tiny movement on her part would change what looked like was going to be the fucking of her life. She didn't want to mess that up.

So, she stayed where she was, frozen, waiting for whatever he wanted to do to her next.

To her everlasting gratification, he pushed her knees far apart and put his mouth where she needed him. His long tongue licked her, taking in her juices, flicking her clit until she

moaned in agony. In ecstasy. The tips of his fingers parted her folds so he could get a good, long look, then went in head first. Licking, sucking, biting, until she could no longer breathe. He took her clit between his teeth and pressed two long fingers into her. Her body arched at the dual sensations of near pain and fullness.

“Oh, fuck!”

He didn’t relent; he slid his fingers out then added a third and pounded them into her, releasing the pressure on her clit so that the blood rushed back into it. She moaned as her orgasm washed over her.

Donovan looked up her body as she tried to catch her breath. His eyes glowed a feral red and he showed his teeth again. “More.”

Anything for him. She would offer him anything.

Still tonguing her clit, he kept pace with the fingers in her pussy. His other hand slid between them and she felt him gathering moisture from her body. Pressure on her anus had her gasping in shock. At his quiet order she pushed out and his long, thick finger slid into her tight hole with only a bit of a sting.

Her eyes actually rolled into the back of her head. She couldn’t fight the need to pull her knees toward her chest, giving him complete access to her nether regions.

He took full advantage, both hands worked furiously at her openings and his mouth drew tightly on her screaming clit.

Another wave hit her, then another. Each one stronger than the last until sparkles flashed behind her eyes, then blackness.

She came to with him climbing up her body. Emptiness in her cunt and anus had her arching her hips. “Please.”

It was all she could manage.

It was all it took.

He slammed his cock into her. Deep. Inexorably. Completely. Never had anything been so perfect.

Her hands slid up his back and she dug her nails into the slick skin covering hard muscles. The scent of blood wafted to her and fired her senses. As he pounded into her, over and over, she reached up and clamped her teeth on his shoulder.

He went wild.

Hands cupping her ass, he tilted her hips toward him and ravaged her with his cock. She felt him knocking against her cervix and the pain was fabulous.

He swelled within her, and they both shouted as they came.

Chapter Six

They lay quietly for a long time, savoring the sensations as if to hold on to them as long as possible.

“Have I mentioned, *wow?*”

“I’m sure I heard a lot of things, but no wow. Not exactly.”

Breathy laughter escaped her. “Well then, let me rectify that. Wow!” The last was long and drawn out.

His body quaked on top of hers in laughter. Slowly, he levered off her and looked down at her.

“I didn’t hurt you, or frighten you?”

He looked so worried and repentant, she couldn’t even bring herself to tease him about it.

Much.

“Oh, you mean the alpha male, I’m the master, do as I say or get punished thing? Nah, that didn’t bother me, I found it really sexy. Nor did you hurt me in any way. In fact, I think I hurt you.” She indicated the bite mark on his shoulder. “You might have claw marks on your back too.”

“I do. I can feel them.” Surprisingly, she felt his cock growing hard again.

“Like the pain, huh? Boy, you’re a kinky fellow, aren’t you?” Arching her hips, she moaned at the sensation of him filling her again.

He slipped out of her, much to her consternation. “Bedroom. There’s a comfortable bed there, right?” Pausing before he stood, he glanced down at her. “If you don’t mind me staying the night.”

“You’d better not leave. I’m warning you, I don’t play games. Especially not now that I have Lizzy. If you’re playing me...”

He stopped her building tirade with his mouth. She sighed into his kiss and opened enough for him to penetrate.

Every nerve in her body started to tingle. Tiny electrical sparks gathered and traveled through her system. She wondered if he was about to get all dominant on her again, and she actually felt her breasts swell at the possibility.

Their lips clung, even as he pulled away and stood. Holding his hand out to her, he waited until she took it, and pulled her to her feet.

“Lead the way.”

Donovan turned off the CD player that had been virtually ignored and they scooped up their clothes on the way out of the room. Chrys led him to her room, knowing he was staring at her backside. She could practically feel his gaze raking her body, settling on the interesting parts.

Damned man. He only had to walk behind her and she got excited.

She felt their combined juices start to seep down the inside of her leg and, fuck if that didn’t make her feel sexy. This man, this werewolf, had her acting and feeling very different than before she’d come back to town.

Chrys had so many questions for him concerning the changes in her body and her reactions, but didn’t have a clue where to start. And now wasn’t the time to ask them anyway.

Donovan pressed his body to her back and wrapped an arm around her waist. “What’s bothering you?”

“How did you know?” She tilted her head back to look into his black eyes.

“You stiffened and your scent changed.”

“I can see I’m not going to pull the wool over your eyes about anything, am I?”

Chrys ran her hand over his forearm, enjoying the rasp of the black hairs that covered the silky skin and hard muscles. “It’s nothing. I was just thinking that being with you makes me feel wild, dangerous. I don’t know if that’s just my reactions to you, or if it’s a werewolf thing.”

He spun her slowly in his arms until she faced him. “I think it’s a bit of both. I react to you -- primitively. I can’t seem to help it. But I swear to you, I’ll never hurt you. Not intentionally. At least not more than you can take.”

She cupped his clenched jaw with her hand and stood on tiptoe to kiss him lightly. “I know. Heck, I’m more worried about me hurting you accidentally than I am of you hurting me.”

In the sliver of light from the street she saw a flicker of -- could it be vulnerability? -- cross his face. "Do to me what you will, just don't leave me."

"Oh, Donovan. The way I feel about you, leaving you should be the least of your worries. I think you should be more worried that I'll cling and make a complete nuisance of myself."

"I would enjoy that."

He lifted her into his arms, her body pressed tightly against his, and carried her to the bed. They dropped their clothes where they were and he laid her in the center before climbing in beside her.

She could only watch his expressions in the near darkness as he ran his hot hand over her stomach. The muscles under his palm quivered and she sucked in a necessary breath.

His gaze lifted to hers and she could see the heat building inside him.

"You're so beautiful, Chrys. I could spend all night just looking and touching."

"God, I hope not. I need more than that, Donovan." And she did. Already her body was heating to such a point that she could hardly bear it. Everywhere his hand touched, burned. His breath scorched her. Her breasts ached for his mouth, his touch. Hell, she wanted to beg for his ravishment.

She put her hands against his chest, combing her fingers through the thick patch of hair across his pecs. "You're so masculine. I want," she paused, not knowing how to put her feelings into words. "I want to be everything to you. Everything for you. And I want you to be the same for me."

Twirling her index finger in his chest hairs, she suddenly became shy. She couldn't help it. She'd just asked for a relationship with a capital "R" and now, only after she'd asked, did she remember she was a twosome and not a single, carefree woman anymore. "I... Don't forget Lisianthus. She'd have to be part of this too. So, when you make your decision --"

"I've already made my decision."

Her heart dropped to her feet. "Oh?"

She took one long slow breath, then shifted uncomfortably, afraid to ask in case it wasn't what she wanted to hear.

"On your knees, Chrys."

"What?" Shocked, dismayed, appalled, titillated. Well, crap, she didn't know how to feel.

"I said get on your hands and knees." When she didn't move, he growled low in his chest. A dark, feral rumble that shot a bolt of fear through her.

"Um, Donovan?"

"If you can't do as I say, then I'll help you." He grasped her hips and flipped her whole body over onto her stomach, and then lifted her to her hands and knees.

She glanced behind her. "I'm not sure I appreciate you giving me such a noncommittal answer, then forcing me into this position."

"Exactly what did I say to you?"

"You know what you said." Indignant, she tried to turn to face him, but he held her in the position he wanted her in.

"I know what I said, but I want to hear it in your words." Still holding her in place, he slid his hands down her back and over her ass.

"Damn it, stop that." How could she think when she was shivering so hard? "You said you had already made up your mind concerning a relationship with me."

She'd blurted it all out in hopes that he would stop what he was doing, but he only laughed, quietly, sexily, darkly.

He ran his hands over her ass several times, then parted her cheeks. She started to sweat. No matter what he said, no matter what *she* said, she still wanted him with every fiber of her being.

"I never said that I *didn't* want to have a relationship with you." He smacked her ass smartly when she would have protested. It stung, but damned if her nipples didn't harden.

"I said that I'd made my decision. That doesn't mean that I didn't want you. It meant only that my mind is made up. See the difference?"

"But --"

"I've known that I want you for my own from the moment I met you. I've been trying to manipulate you on the genetic level since then. The goal is to wean you off the other male's pheromones and imprint mine."

This time she didn't try to look at him. She held her position and stared at the headboard. "Can it be done?"

"I'm going to do everything in my power to make it so, and I'll do whatever I have to. Fair means or foul. Chrysanthemum Hollister, you are mine. Get used to the idea."

Ohhh-kay. Done.

She gasped when he slid his fingers along the crease of her ass and dipped a fingertip into her weeping pussy. Just that. Only a fingertip. She nearly screamed. Her body clenched and released, trying to get a deeper penetration, but he kept it light, barely there.

When she could stand it no longer, she pressed back against him. The smack to her ass cheek caused her to still.

"This is a lesson, Chrys. You mustn't rush it."

"Donovan." It came out as a gasp. A whisper.

"Yes, you want me nearly as much as I want you."

He couldn't want her as much as she wanted him. She could feel her skin rippling with need. Muscles clenched and hips arched, needing him to fill her.

Knuckle by knuckle he slid two fingers inside her. She felt him move behind her but she didn't care what he had planned. Lost in the sensation of finally having something where she needed it the most, she ignored what he did.

While he slid the fingers in and out of her in a parody of fucking, he reached around her waist and slid a rough-padded finger over her clit. Sparks flew through her body. She couldn't breathe.

"Please."

"What? This?" He pushed three fingers into her cunt and licked her ass. "This is my pussy, my ass. Say it."

"Yours."

She wiggled her ass, only because she knew he didn't want her to, and smiled secretly when he smacked it.

Yeah, she loved that he got all dominant.

If only he would quit teasing and fuck her.

A threatening growl escaped her and she gasped.

That low, male chuckle of his, sounded next to her ear. "Want me that bad, baby?"

"I want to touch you."

Donovan slipped his fingers from her body and pulled her upright. Agilely, he moved himself so he lay on his back in front of her, legs spread on either side of hers. "You may do as you wish, but no fucking, and no coming."

"Can I suck you?"

"Be my guest."

She didn't jump on him, no matter how much she wanted to. She had control and restrained herself. However, she did let her gaze run the entire length of him. There was so much of him that it took a while.

He had to be six foot six in stocking feet. That didn't mean he was rail thin like a basketball player though. Oh, no. He was built like a lumberjack. Broad shoulders, broad back, broad chest, thick muscles everywhere. Dark, thick body hair covered him from the top of his head to the tops of his feet. Why that turned her on, she didn't know. She'd never been with a furry man, but with Donovan, she wanted to rub her body all over him, just to enjoy the tickle of his hair on her skin.

"Are you going to stare at me all night, or are you going to do something?"

His words jolted her into action. Leaning forward she placed her hands on his knees. Sliding her hands up his inner thighs, as he had done to her earlier, she enjoyed the sensation of the crisp hairs over the skin and hard muscle against her palms.

Dragging her breasts up one thigh, she caught a whiff of his manhood. Strong, male, potent, wild. His scent sent wicked flutters down her abdomen to settle in and vibrate at her clit.

Lightning struck outside, and at first she didn't know if it had been inside of her. The sound of rain pelted the windows and she sighed. *Coup de grâce*. A hot, dominant man and the sound of a rainstorm. She was completely done for.

Unable to restrain herself, she took one last deep breath of his sex and ran her tongue up the vein that led from his balls to the tip of his cock. "Mm. You taste as good as you smell."

"Is that so?"

"I'm having trouble not wallowing in your scent."

"It's a werewolf thing." He ran his hand through her hair, tugging it lightly in reprimand for sitting still. "I want your scent on me, too."

That sounded like it had a *now* attached to the end, so she slowly splayed herself over his chest and rubbed her body against his. The room lit up with lightning. She could see his face and it reminded her of granite. Sculpted by a master, beautiful. His eyes glowed in the second flash and the house shook from the rumble of thunder.

Rubbing as much of his skin as she could with hers, she slithered up his body so that she could reach his face. His sexy mouth. Brushing her lips across his full ones, once, twice, she took his bottom lip between her teeth and pulled back until it popped free.

She felt his hand tighten in her hair, but he didn't take over the kiss. As a reward, she ran her tongue across his lips and dipped inside when he parted them. He tasted so good.

Everywhere. She could still taste traces of the wine he'd sipped at earlier and it melded with his own flavor to make something drugging. Needing more, she tilted her head to get the right angle and slid into his mouth to run her tongue across his.

One word pounded through her brain. Slow. She wanted to take this slow, savor, indulge. This was her time and she wanted to make it count. Knowing that his relinquishing control was only temporary, she wanted to make what time she had count.

Already, she recognized his need to be in charge, if only in sexual matters. He'd let her be herself, in charge of herself, when it came to every other aspect of her life and Lizzy's life, so giving up that power wasn't a hardship. Maybe one day she'd find out why he needed control in this. But right now, it was unimportant.

Kissing him was.

Simultaneously rubbing her chest against his, feeling her hard nipples rasping in his thick, soft chest hair, she ran one hand down his side, feeling the sleek skin. The other she buried in his silky, black hair. She was lost in a myriad of sensations and caught herself mewling into his mouth as she ran her tongue along the sides and roof of his mouth. She

inhaled and took the air from his lungs into her body. Breathing him, tasting him, feeling him. She started to shiver uncontrollably.

Pulling her head up with the hand buried in her hair, he whispered a warning against her lips. "No coming."

Chrys had to pant hard through her mouth to regain some measure of control. In, out, in, she breathed, eyes closed, head lifted, listening to the soothing rain on the house. One last hard shiver and she sighed out a cleansing breath.

"This is so not fair. The first time in my life I almost get off from just kissing a man and I'm not allowed to." Smiling, she watched his eyes flare.

"I'll not apologize. You'll only come at my doing, not your own."

Teasing, she sat up and slid a hand down his chest and abdomen, then put her hand on her own abdomen and slid it down. "Not even from touching myself?"

Faster than the lightning that struck outside, he had her wrist in his hand. Gently he pulled her hand away from her body and returned it to his abdomen. "You want to play, you play with me. Or, when I tell you that you can play with yourself. Not otherwise."

Curious, she tilted her head a little. "What would you do to me if I masturbate without your consent?"

"I'll tie you to the bed and fuck you in all your holes until you pass out."

Her eyebrows rose as she considered this. "All my holes? My ass too?"

"Most definitely your ass."

Wickedly, she swirled a finger in the line of dark hair that led down his abdomen to his groin. "And if I want you to fuck me there?"

"Then you better hope you have some lube handy."

Even better, since she'd put away her personal stash of joy toys in the drawer next to the bed. A girl should never leave home without them, and since everything she owned had been thrown into her car after the fatal phone call, they'd been there when she unpacked this afternoon.

Keeping her gaze locked with his, she took her hand off his body and put it on hers. Sliding her hand inexorably downward, she parted her folds and touched her clit. Fire raced from there throughout her body as he growled.

He moved as a blur and she was laughing as her stomach hit the bed and he was pinning her down. It was nice to know that even though he was so sexily dominant, he let her push him to do what she wanted. She could let him be as he needed to be and still have power of her own.

"Where's the lube?" His voice had a gruff edge to it as if he were barely hanging on to his control. Good.

“Top drawer of the nightstand, right hand side.” She heard the drawer open, things got shuffled around, then he stilled.

“Hmm, what’s this?”

She turned her head to see what he meant and saw that he held her favorite toy. “That’s my Jackrabbit.”

“And what does this do?” He started pressing buttons and the head of the vibrator started to rotate and the clitoral stimulator went nuts. “Never mind. I get the idea. This might come in handy.”

He laid the toy on the bed beside her head where she could see it, and returned his hand to the drawer, coming out with the lube. Setting that beside the toy, he put his hands on her shoulders and started to massage.

“Mm, that feels good.”

His strong hands pressed in all the right places, sorting out and eradicating sore, tense muscles. If he kept it up, she’d be pudding in no time.

Then he changed from kneading to stroking. His hands felt strong on her body. Powerful. Capable.

He worked his way from her shoulders to her feet, then back up. By then she was practically nerveless. She heard the cap on the lube pop open. Instantly she was wide awake and her muscles tensed slightly.

“On your knees.”

She considered that he sure liked her on her knees as she climbed into position. Luckily, she didn’t mind it.

The cold lube-coated head of her toy touched her heated opening, making her draw in air between her teeth. As he pushed it inside to the base, she let the air out slowly. The muted whirl of the shaft sounded, and she could feel the movements, so deep in her body. She moaned softly and would have pushed back into it, but he held her still. The feel of the stimulator rubbing against her clit was nice, but she wanted more.

She got it in spades. He turned the stimulator onto a low setting and when she didn’t react, to the second setting. Her body tensed and he laughed softly. “There we go.”

He began a fucking motion with the toy that rubbed her clit and vibrated it until she was panting. Cool pressure at her anus had her pushing out and he slid two fingers inside her. Twisting and stretching her hole, he didn’t stop the movements in her cunt. It was nearly too much, she almost came, but a soft warning from him had her panting her way through it.

His fingers slid out of her body and she felt the push of something larger, softer. The head of his cock popped past the tight ring of her anal muscles and he started to press in, a little at a time while she breathed heavily. When his pubic hair pressed against the cheeks of her ass, she sighed.

“So full.”

She felt stretched to the maximum with both passages filled. It stung a little, but not enough to complain.

“So tight.” He panted from above her.

“Fuck me, Donovan. Please.”

The man was a god. He managed to fuck her slowly in her ass, in and out, making her moan. Then added, in opposition, the fucking of her pussy with the toy. The vibrations on her clit, the fullness in her pussy and the thick, hard shaft up her ass had her groaning constantly. She could do nothing but take what he was giving her. And love it.

“Good girl. Very nice. You should see what I see. The little pucker of your hole stretched tight around my big cock. Damn, what a pretty sight. And it feels like heaven. I can even feel the vibration of the cock in your pussy.”

He talked all the while he was fucking her twice over. His words had her dropping to her elbows, putting her forehead on her hands.

“Ah, yeah, better. I can see the toy sliding in and out of you in this position. Right under my balls, it’s going in and out, covered in your juices.” His speed picked up. Press in and slide out slowly, over and over.

Heat climbed up her back and her eyes rolled behind closed lids. “Close. So close.”

“Me too.” He turned the stimulator up one more notch and her mind went red. The vibrations on her clit were so strong she thought she would die of pleasure. Suddenly, Donovan increased his thrusts. Hard pounding into her ass, rapid thrusts of the vibrator, the stimulator hitting just the right spot, nothing had ever felt so perfect. Then he bit her on the curve of her neck.

Her world went white. Pure white and her body exploded with a scream.

Donovan looked down at his woman as she lay unconscious. She’d screamed and then drooped under him as they climaxed simultaneously, and his heart had threatened to stop. He’d never been more scared in his life. He’d thought, for one second, that he’d killed her. Then she sighed and tried to spread her legs out behind her.

He slipped out of her, enjoying the feel of her body’s caress, and pulled the vibrator from her vagina. Helping her into a more comfortable position, he gazed down at her, thankful that he’d found her. She was so perfect.

Still holding the toy, he took it into the attached bathroom and washed it and himself. Taking a washcloth, he wet it with warm water and grabbed a towel. Returning to the bed, he gently, reverently washed their fluids off her and dried her so she would sleep comfortably. She was a treasure. Beautiful, and she didn’t seem to mind his needs. In fact, she seemed to enjoy them.

Carefully, he lifted her sleeping form and tucked her under the covers. Slipping in beside her, he pulled her tight against his chest, wrapping his arms around her so that he would feel her close as he slept. He needed to know she was near. That she couldn't leave him.

He lay in the dark, listening to the rain outside, for a long time. His mind, his heart, his -- his whole being was still. The loneliness had lessened since he'd found Chrys. And he damned sure didn't want to go back to feeling that way. Being with Chrys and Lizzy made him feel whole, like a part of a family. He'd never had that. Just Susan.

Thinking of the woman who'd essentially raised him, he frowned. He had to go back to town to talk to his agents, and especially Susan. The agents, being hunters born as he had, would most likely approve and agree with his need to transfer out of the city. They all felt crowded where they were and moving to this small town, with forest and uninhabited areas where they could run, would be a boon. He hoped.

If worse came to worst, he could leave the agents in the city and he and Susan could work here. With today's technology, they could all live in different places and still be able to conduct a profitable business.

Regardless, he wasn't going to leave Chrys and Lizzy. Every instinct inside him said they were his. Belonged to him, and him alone. Chrys wore his bite mark now, as he wore hers. She probably didn't know the significance of what she'd done, but, too late now. He was hers as much as she was his.

He smiled at the thought. He'd been smiling a lot, lately. Around her, he couldn't seem to do anything else. She made him feel happy, which was a rare and odd thing. Thinking of Susan, he smiled again. Wasn't she going to be surprised and happy for him?

As he settled into the bed, adjusting Chrys so they could sleep entwined, he stilled. Was that a noise from the baby's room?

A very quiet scuffling sound reached his ears. If it weren't for his hunter's senses, he wouldn't have heard it. He grinned. The baby must be awake. He'd just go find out what she needed and take care of her. He slid out of the bed, grabbed his pants and pulled them on as he headed for the hall.

Lizzy gave a startled shriek and he heard a murmur. Someone was in the room with Lizzy.

He tensed and turned the corner into Lizzy's room and saw a shadow going out the window. He shouted and leapt out after the fleeing person. The baby cried and he realized whoever this was, had taken Lizzy from her bed.

"Son of a bitch. I catch you I'm going to rip your fucking heart out. Put the baby down."

The person, draped in a long, flapping coat, glanced back at him and ran faster. In the rain, Donovan couldn't tell if it was a male or female, only that they were about five foot

seven or eight, average build. That's it. He ran faster and felt the skin on his arms ripple. His body was trying to change and he fought it off.

He couldn't take the time to change right now. Lizzy needed him. Why the hell would anyone take the baby out of her room and into a rainstorm in the dead of night? Who would do that?

Donovan didn't have any answers, but he'd soon get them. He was gaining on the kidnapper fast. Closer and closer he came until he reached out and nearly tripped over the baby that the person had tossed aside. Donovan skidded to a stop, grabbed Lizzy up off the wet ground and checked her for injury. In the dark, no matter how good his vision was, he couldn't see any blood, or dislocated bones.

She was crying, but seemed unharmed. "Shh, baby. We'll get you back home and dried off."

He glanced after the fleeing figure, but didn't try to go after them. The rain masked their scent and tracking later would be impossible for the same reason.

Donovan didn't like losing prey, but he had no choice. He had to take care of the baby. Lizzy was priority.

"Let's get you home." He was striding back to the house at a quick, ground eating clip, when Chrys rushed up to him.

"Lizzy's gone!"

"I have her." He showed the whimpering baby cradled in his arms and Chrys crowded up to them.

"Dare I ask what happened?"

"Someone was in the house and took her. I went after them and the fuck threw her to the ground just as I almost had them."

Chrys cried out and ran her hands over Lizzy, checking for herself that she was all right. "We should take her to the doctor to make sure she's okay."

"Let's get dry and dressed first." He ran his heated gaze over Chrys's scantily clad body. She had thrown on an old tee shirt and the rain had plastered it to her body. She looked naked.

"Okay." She turned, not even noticing their lack of dress, and led the way to the house. "Why would someone try to take Lizzy?"

"I was wondering that myself."

"Did you get a look at them? You know the sheriff is going to ask."

"No. They had on some sort of coat and the rain obscured my view." Fuck, fuck, fuck. He'd screwed up that whole situation. His one chance at maybe catching the shit head who had been causing so many problems, and he fucked it up. Big time.

“I’ll be glad to get the alarm system put in. I didn’t realize Nowhere had become such a hotbed of crime.”

She was talking only out of fear and relief, but every time she opened her mouth he flinched. He should have had the installers come immediately. He should have kept the baby closer. He should have done a lot of things differently.

“I’m sorry. It won’t happen again.”

At his apology, Chrys stopped dead in her tracks and spun to face him. “You didn’t do anything wrong. You got her back from who knows who and she’s safe. You did wonderfully.”

She stood on tiptoe and kissed him. The rain had chilled her lips and his, but only a second after she pressed hers to his, he felt on fire.

The baby let out an aggrieved cry and Chrys pulled away. “Let’s get inside.”

They’d made it back to the house. The back door stood open and rain had blown in onto the floor. “Damn. I guess I didn’t get it shut.”

At Chrys’s words, he handed Lizzy to her and with a curt warning not to go inside until he called her, went into the house alone.

Chapter Seven

The house was dark and still. He checked every room, behind every door and even looked under the beds. The house was empty.

“You can come in. It’s clear.”

“Thank goodness. Let’s get Lizzy changed so we can see if she’s hurt. If you’ll grab some towels?”

Chrys slid past him after offering him a sweet smile, and he watched her beautiful, tight ass swish by him and down the hall. The shirt clung so perfectly to her curves. He shook off the need to follow her and restart their earlier play. The baby needed to go to the doctor. First, though, they needed to dry off and get warm. The rain hadn’t been cold, but now, in the air conditioning and soaked to through, he was feeling chilled.

“Donovan.” Chrys called from Lizzy’s room.

“Coming.” He went into the hall bathroom and grabbed several large towels and took them in to Chrys.

“Thank you.” She took one and wrapped the naked baby in it. “I didn’t see any obvious injuries on Lizzy, but I still want to get her in for an examination. Poor thing. She just got out of the clinic, and here we are taking her back.” Chrys fussed getting Lizzy dried and dressed, then settled her into a car seat, ready for transportation. The baby took it well, and went right to sleep.

He’d been watching Chrys as he dried himself off. He’d wrung some of the water out of her hair, and she’d let him, but now she was shivering.

“You need to get dry.”

In response, she turned into his arms and pressed against him. “Someone tried to take her away from us.”

He pulled her close against his heated body and kissed the top of her head. "They didn't get her. No one will take her away from you."

"Us, Donovan."

"Right. Us. I'll kill anyone who tries to take her." Or you, he left unsaid.

She stayed in his arms for a few more wonderful moments, then she sighed and stepped away. "We need to dress and get to the clinic."

And he needed to call for backup.

The clinic was quiet at this hour. Three a.m. wasn't a very dangerous hour, apparently. Chrys looked around the deserted waiting area and wondered if everyone in town were sleeping peacefully in their beds, unaware that there was a baby snatcher in the area. Why was this place called a clinic anyway? It was as big as a bona fide hospital. The town leaders probably thought naming it a hospital would be pretentious. Unworthy of their small town status.

She stood and crossed the room, turned and paced back to her chair. She couldn't concentrate on any one thing, her worry over Lizzy paramount. Damned doctors anyway. Who were they to say...

Donovan strode into the room with Ross grumbling behind him.

Catching sight of her, the men came to loom over her.

Ross was frowning and ran a distracted hand through his short, blond hair. "We didn't find much of anything, Chrys. No fingerprints and only one shoe print. We can figure out what size and style shoe it is, but my guess is, it's not going to be very helpful. The rain has destroyed any trail, so that's a no go as well."

He looked so frustrated that she felt the need to sooth him and put her hand on his forearm, only to jerk it back off at Donovan's menacing growl.

"Wonderful. This again." Ross's tone had turned from frustrated to aggravated. "You guys are very territorial."

"Yes." Just the one word, and everyone in the room knew that Donovan took the touch very seriously.

Chrys tilted her head in a contemplative manner and stared at Donovan. "Ohh-kay. So, is it just men I can't touch or am I not allowed to touch anyone?"

Donovan stepped close and took her in his arms. "I can't help this, Chrys. It's who...no, what I am. Yes, it's primitive, but I warned you about that."

Putting her palm on his cheek, she smiled. "All right, I get it. It's an instinct thing. I can deal with that. Just don't go biting anyone because I accidentally touch them. Deal?"

He put his forehead on hers. "I'll try."

Placing her lips on his, she kissed him lightly. "That's all I can ask."

His arms tightened momentarily before he let her go and stepped back. "Have you heard about Lizzy yet?"

"No, they haven't told me anything. I was in there with her, but they tossed me out when she clung to me and wouldn't let them examine her. Let me tell you, I'm pretty pissed about that."

She had the right to be in there, and damn it, she wanted to be in there. "I think they think I'm abusing her."

Ross crossed the room to the door. "I'll go straighten them out. They'll let you back in."

He strode out of the waiting room and went in search of whoever he needed to talk to.

"You didn't start to change?" Donovan asked it quietly.

"No. I was angry and wanted to bite someone, but I didn't start to change. Why? Is that a potential problem?"

That would be the final straw. They'd take Lizzy from her for sure if they saw her change into a wolf.

"Maybe. Amalee gave me some vials of Pete's pheromones in varying degrees of strength. If you change, I'll be there to turn you back, with the help of these vials."

"Just keep them on you in case. I don't want anyone who has the authority to take that baby from me to see me change."

"Why don't you carry one with you?"

Her lips curled in a snarl. "I don't want anything of that man's on my person. He was disgusting and foul and I won't have it near me."

"You got it. I'll keep it on me until you no longer need it."

"Fine. You carry the gross stuff, and I'll keep this." She showed him the handkerchief he'd given her when she'd been crying. It still smelled like him and when he wasn't around, just touching it kept her from missing him.

He chuckled. "I wondered where that had gotten to."

"Well, you're not getting it back, so there."

Donovan put his arm around her waist and pulled her close. "Anything of mine that you want is yours."

Ross came back into the room and signaled them. "All straightened out. You two can go back now. I'm going to bed if nobody minds. I need my rest before the next crisis hits."

"We're hoping there won't be any more," Chrys informed him.

"Keep your fingers crossed." He waved as he left.

Donovan turned Chrys toward the door. "Let's go see how Lizzy's doing."

Chrys had no objections at all.

The baby was fine. Sleeping as if nothing had happened. She had a big bruise on her little thigh and hip where she had hit the ground, but luckily, the wet earth had cushioned the worst of it. She'd be sore and cranky probably, but nothing was broken.

As they stared down at the child, Chrys felt Donovan stiffen. She glanced up and saw the flash of fury as it overtook him. His fist clenched in anger. "I should have caught the bastard."

"Donovan, you did the only thing you could. You got her back. If you hadn't gone after them, who knows where Lizzy would be right now."

Even though she tried to let him know she was earnest, he still berated himself. "I could have ended this."

Chrys stepped into his arms. "What's done is done. I've got no complaints, but if you're going to martyr yourself, could you wait until after we get Lizzy home? I'm tired and need to get some sleep."

Unexpectedly, a smile quirked his lips. "You can change my mood in seconds, woman." He planted a quick kiss to her lips. "Fine. Let's go home."

He gathered up the baby in his strong arms, while she picked up the diaper bag they'd hastily packed.

When they reached the hallway, Chrys looked for the doctor or a nurse. She reached the nurses station and there she found the doctor writing in a file. "We'd like to take Lizzy home now, if you don't mind." Her tone suggested she didn't really care if he did or not.

"That's fine. Sorry about keeping you out, but you wouldn't believe the things we've seen."

Chrys signed the paperwork that he set on the counter. She thought it behooved her to keep her opinions to herself for the moment, but she could think them all she wanted. Passing back the papers to the doctor with a tight grin, she turned smartly and followed Donovan back to his car.

He was already putting Lizzy in her car seat. It had taken them several minutes before they left the house to figure out how to secure it in the back seat. Things had gone much faster when they found the instructions the manufacturer had printed on the bottom. Now getting her into her seat was a breeze. Lizzy didn't even wake up for the experience. In fact, she slept the entire five minute trip home.

They moved her crib into their room for the night. Until the security system installers came and did their thing, they weren't going to let the baby out of their sight.

Chrys lay on the bed, curled around Donovan, head on his chest, breathing in his scent. "I think I'm afraid to go to sleep."

"Me too," he whispered back.

"I'm really glad you're here." She kissed the nipple that was close to her mouth. "I don't know what I'd have done if you hadn't been so aware of what was happening."

"I wish I could have caught the bastard." She felt his chest rise and fall on a sigh. "I've got to go to the city tomorrow. I don't want to leave you, but I've got to get this out of the way. But, not until after the installers do their thing. I'll also leave Amalee here with you." He held up a forestalling hand. "I know you have issues with her, but she's a born werewolf and where you can't yet control your wolf side, she's had years of practice. Anyone tries to get to you or the baby and she could at least distract them while you two get to safety."

Chrys thought it over and conceded. "You have a point. I'll let her into the house, but one word out of her and we are going to tangle."

"Not unless I'm here to watch."

"Perv." She slid her tongue over his newly hardened nipple. "You just want to be around in case one of us tears the other's shirt off."

"Well, yes." His tone was incredulous, as if he couldn't believe she didn't understand the whole male psyche.

His teasing made her laugh quietly and she took a sharp nip out of his shoulder. "Just don't be gone too long. I can only promise to be good for a finite amount of time."

"You aren't going to be a bad girl just so I'll punish you, will you?" She could hear the satisfaction in his voice. He seemed to like knowing that she enjoyed his "punishments."

She pretended to think about it. "Well, I suppose I can be good this one time. But only because I don't want the good doctor to get jealous since she doesn't have herself a big strong man to keep her satisfied."

"Yes, there is that." He hugged her closer and put her head to his chest. "Go to sleep, woman. I need my rest."

Chrys snuggled into him and did as he ordered with a smile on her face.

* * * * *

The morning was hectic. Nice, but strange men crawled all over her brother's house and kept her from getting much done. Donovan stayed and watched every move the men made, offering suggestions and giving outright orders.

So it wasn't just her he tended to boss around. Chrys grinned at her observation while drinking a cup of coffee sitting at the table with Lizzy banging a spoon on the high chair tray.

She'd be glad when they all left, except for one thing. Donovan would leave as well. She was still trying to get used to the idea that he might want her for keeps. She glanced at the happy baby. That he wanted both of them for keeps.

Hell, she wasn't unlovable, why was she tripping on this so bad? She should just take what he was offering and forget the rest. Worrying that he was going to leave was just going to give her an ulcer. If he did leave, well, she'd worry about it then.

Chrys stood, put her empty coffee cup in the dishwasher, and extricated the messy baby from the high chair. "How long do we have to wait until you gain a little aim?"

The baby only offered a wide-mouthed bass kiss. "Oh, now there's an appetizing sight. Yes, I'll kiss you, but not until you're cleaned up a little."

Keeping the baby at arm's length, Chrys took her to the kitchen sink and filled it up with nice warm water. While it filled, she stripped the giggly baby down and stuck her in the water.

The baby spent more time splashing than Chrys did actually washing her. They eventually got the job done and while she dressed the wiggly worm, Donovan came into the baby's bedroom where she'd taken Lizzy to dress.

"The men have gone. I've called Amalee and she'll be here in a few minutes. Is now a good time to show you the system?"

She sent him a welcoming smile. "Sure. Want to take Lizzy?"

He didn't answer, just held out his arms. The baby squealed and lunged for him. When the grin broke across his face, she was happy that she'd offered. Donovan seemed to take any show of trust and love as a great surprise. As if he didn't expect it from anyone. She'd have to find out why that was, and fix it.

She followed him to a box mounted on the wall across from the front door. As he explained how the system worked, she paid close attention. He had her set it and turn it off several times to practice. "It's important that it be set even if you're home and expecting someone. Never turn it completely off. You can set it for you being home and for you being away so that you're always protected."

He explained that if any window or door opened while the alarm was on, a loud siren would go off and it would alert a twenty-four-hour company who would then call the police.

"Okay, so all I really have to do is hit this button?" She pushed the button and several beeps sounded to let her know the alarm was set.

"That's right. It looks like you have it down."

The doorbell rang and Chrys turned to answer it.

"Wait. First check who it is, then if it's someone you want to answer, push this button. It will temporarily turn off the alarm system."

Chrys nodded then peeked out the window. "Nope. Not going to answer it."

"Open the damned door. I'm here to do you a favor, remember?" The doctor's voice came from the other side of the door.

"Chrys..."

"All right, all right. Sheesh." Chrys pushed the button and opened the door.

The doctor entered and gave her a look. One of those "bitch" looks. Chrys gave her one right back.

It suddenly struck her that they were actually both bitches and she started to laugh.

She stifled it quickly when Donovan and Amalee stared at her. She was so not going to explain that one.

"So, where can I plug in?" Amalee held up a laptop case. "I've got work to do. I'll stay out of your hair if you do the same."

"Not a problem. You can use the den." Chrys showed Amalee where she could set up and went back to Donovan and Lizzy.

He handed her the baby after giving Lizzy a noisy kiss that she loved. "I've got to go now if I'm going to be back before dark."

"I know. Drive careful and hurry back. We'll be waiting for you."

"I'll be bringing my things here from the cabin when I return."

"Good."

Kissing her softly on the lips, he pulled back before she could deepen it. Without saying another word, he reached behind her and pushed the button for the temporary shutdown then strode out the door.

She watched it close behind him and felt instantly lost and alone. The baby moved, whacked Chrys in the face, and bluntly reminded her that, no matter what, she wasn't alone.

They spent the day doing household chores, and Chrys was still trying to find where her sister-in-law had put things. Her sister-in-law had been neat, but not very organized. Eventually, Chrys would have to fix that.

She made phone calls to find out about funerals and started that ball rolling. She even took the time to call the family lawyer and asked for advice on how to deal with the legalities. He was very helpful and they set up a date to meet and handle paperwork.

Those calls were hard on Chrys and she wished Donovan were around so she could lean on him. He had a way of making even the most awful tasks easier.

Chrys wanted to take Lizzy outside, but the threat of the kidnapper kept them inside. The day dragged because of it.

She and the baby were lying on the living room floor playing when a loud siren went off in the house. Chrys jumped up, grabbing the baby, and when Amalee rushed into the room, she almost screamed.

"Did you set off the alarm?"

The doctor didn't sound accusing, and Chrys shook her head. "I was hoping you had."

"Nope. Guess we have ourselves an intruder." Amalee didn't seem frightened, which helped calm Chrys. Amalee started stripping.

Chrys heart was jumping and her stomach rolling. Shit, she wasn't calm at all.

The baby squirmed and that's when she noticed the rippling of her skin. "Oh shit. Here we go."

“Just don’t fight it and it’ll be okay. Oh, and you may want to put the baby down.”

Chrys put the baby in the playpen she’d set up earlier, but had left unused.

Quickly, Chrys stripped out of her clothes and watched the entrances for the intruder. She didn’t fight the change as it overtook her and she felt little pain. One second of blurred vision, then she could see everything clearer, more precise. She remembered the sensation from when she’d been a wolf the first time.

Standing next to the playpen, hackles rising, she could smell a stranger getting closer. Whoever it was seemed to be systematically searching the house. Chrys’s hearing was better and she actually heard their breathing as they came down the hallway.

Growling low and mean, Chrys waited for them to come into the living room. Closer the human came. She wasn’t sure how she knew it was a human, but they didn’t have a -- the best description would be gamey -- scent like Donovan and Amalee had, so she figured it had to be human.

The baby giggled and burred merrily. Chrys let her gaze roam the room, quickly, to make sure no one else had come in. She saw the gun just as Amalee leapt into the air at the human. Growling and snapping, the small, dark wolf was all teeth and claws. The human never made it into the living room so Chrys could see them.

When the human shot back down the hall toward their entrance point, Amalee followed. Chrys wanted to run after them too, but one glance into the playpen at the helpless child, who was sitting up, poking fingers through the netting, smiling at Chrys, and she knew she couldn’t leave. Instead, she listened for anyone returning, and licked Lizzy’s fingers, causing her to giggle and wiggle the ticklish digits.

It felt like an eternity as she waited for something else to happen. She could hear her heart beating. The air conditioner kicked on and she flinched. Cursing quietly, she stared at the hall, and tried to be patient.

Soft padding came down the hallway and Amalee appeared. She gracefully moved to her clothing then changed. She stood nude, human, and actually quite lovely. Reaching for her clothes, the woman glanced at Chrys.

“The human got away.”

You didn’t go after them?

“Not in my job description. I’m here to protect the two of you, and if I go hightailing off after the human, who’s to say another won’t come in?”

You have a point. Did you perchance get a look at them?

“Nope. Tried, but the coat and bandana covering the face kind of blocked my view.”

Well, can’t expect more than you did. Thanks. This time, she didn’t begrudge kind words.

“Guess we’ll have a chance to try out one of those vials now.”

She was lovely, but a pain in Chrys's ass. *Donovan has the vials.*

"I've still got a stash."

Fine. Let's get this over with before the cops get here.

Finished dressing, Amalee disappeared down the hallway. When she returned, she had a test tube in her hand. "We'll have to go full strength on this, since Donovan has the watered down ones."

Wonderful. Chrys couldn't wait.

How come you can change back without any pheromones, and I can't?

"I'm a born wolf. I will be the pheromone dealer when I find my mate. He'll be in your shoes, so to speak, while I can change at will." The doctor stunned Chrys. She'd been all energy and bossy from the moment Chrys had met her. Now, she looked completely different as she thought of her mate. Her eyes had gone tender and Chrys wondered if she knew who he was. And if so, why wasn't she with him if she felt so soft about him?

Where is he? Damn it, she hadn't meant to ask.

The doctor smiled sadly. "Haven't found him yet, but I know he's going to be perfect."

Chrys didn't want to dash the other woman's hopes, but how often does one actually get what they want instead of what they need from the universe. Take her and Donovan. He was an alpha male with a capital "A." She liked being in charge of her own life. She would never have chosen him if they'd gone to school together or met on the street, but she was wildly, madly in love with the man. Just thinking that he might not return from the city hurt her.

Amalee pulled out the cork and a foul smell permeated the whole room. It smelled like dead skunk and she wanted to hold her breath. Chrys remembered it from the attack. His taunting words, his hot breath on her neck and shoulder, his hands tearing at her clothes, the weight of his body on hers. The fear she'd die or be raped and not knowing which would be worse. She started to shiver in reaction, wishing it were over. She closed her eyes and waited.

"Hmm."

Chrys opened her eyes and her gaze shot to the frowning doctor. *What?*

"We seem to have a teensy tiny problem."

Chrys held her breath. She really didn't want to know, but, *What?*

"It's not working."

Chapter Eight

Donovan stood in Susan's office, surrounded by his agents. It was rare that they were all available at the same time, and when he'd called, they'd come. No questions asked. Susan, of course, sat at her desk with her hands poised over the keyboard, ready to take notes.

"I want to transfer the company to Nowhere."

Complete silence met his announcement. Then Susan folded her hands and set them on her desk.

"Why?"

Staring at Susan, ignoring the other hunters, he showed her his emotions. "I've found the woman I want to be my mate."

"Donovan, you know you can't just pick a mate, they have to be compatible." Susan stood and rounded the desk.

"I've got Dr. Aimes working on bypassing that."

The woman he considered more of a mother than his birth mother stared into his eyes. What she saw there caused her to sigh softly and straighten her shoulders. "I'll come."

Three males and one female, all hunters, considered primitives and ostracized by their own people, stood and held out their right hands to him. The motion signified that he was their leader and they would give their dominant fighting hand for him if he so desired. He closed his eyes, grateful, and touched each one. They were willing to uproot and move to Nowhere as a unit. A denpack. A family.

He gazed at each agent. All over six feet tall, as dark, moody, and dominant as he, and each willing to change their life for him on a moment's notice. Faith and trust glowed in the eyes of each hunter in a rare, visible show of emotions.

Not a word was said aloud, but Donovan knew what each was thinking. He felt the same way. They would fight or die for one another. He just hoped Nowhere was ready for them.

A small plump hand rested on his arm. "Tell us about her and about this town."

The pressure in his chest lightened as he told them about the town and the surrounding forests, and about Chrys and Lizzy.

Amalee had turned the alarm completely off since they were expecting company any minute, and went back into the den to run some tests after putting Lizzy back on the floor so Chrys could watch over her.

Lizzy was in heaven. She kept getting her hands into Chrys's coat and pulling. Laughing and having the best time playing with her new toy.

Chrys let her have her fun. The baby pulling her fur didn't hurt, and as long as the baby didn't try to put Chrys's tail in her mouth, she was fine. She just hoped Lizzy didn't start to cry. Right now, there wasn't a darned thing she could do about it.

A pounding at the door had her leaping to her feet. Growling, she stared at the front door and called for Amalee.

"Police, open up!"

"I'm coming, hold on to your britches."

Amalee ambled to the door and after peeking out, wrenched it open. "About time you got here, copper. We could have been dead by now if we'd had to wait for you."

"What's going on here?" The officer wasn't one Chrys recognized. He apparently didn't like Amalee's tone, and let her know it right off.

"Well, we were in here, minding our own business and an intruder came in through a back window. We managed to scare them off before the asshole could hurt any of us."

"Who is us?" The officer crossed the threshold, looked around, and froze. He cursed and reached for his gun.

Amalee stepped between the gun and Chrys, trying to get the officer's attention.

"What's that wolf doing to that baby?"

She'd straddled Lizzy, to the child's delight, and was practically laying on her to keep her safe from the freaked out cop.

"Babysitting. Chill, all right, she's as gentle as the baby's momma. Well, her aunt, anyway."

I can leave the room if you think it would help, Chrys offered.

"It's attacking!" The officer had reacted to her growling yips as if she'd lunged at him, and again tried to point the weapon at her.

“That’d be a great idea.” Amalee had to do some fancy footwork to stay between the gun and the wolf, but she was wiry. She kept at it until Chrys had licked the baby’s face then trotted out of the room.

To stay out of the way, but still within hearing, Chrys curled up beneath the table and lay down.

She could hear Amalee describing the incident to the officer, and at the same time, managing to calm him down enough so that Chrys stopped worrying over Lizzy’s safety. Not to mention her own.

She stayed under the table as the officer wandered around the house, checking the windows and the entry point of the intruder. He kept making official sounding noises, but Chrys already knew there wasn’t much he could do. He informed Amalee that he would be making a report and there would be more drive-by’s of marked units.

Amalee thanked him and sent him on his way.

Chrys wiggled out from under the kitchen table and returned to the living room.

“Next time, you deal with the cops.”

Amalee was sitting on the couch, head back, eyes closed. Lizzy was sleeping in her swing.

Next time, maybe I’ll not be a wolf and in danger of getting shot.

“Well, there is that. I thought some of the locals knew about us.”

Chrys went to a recliner, climbed up, and curled comfortably into it. *I know the sheriff knows about us, but I think the rest of the department is still in the dark.*

“That’s probably for the best. What’s this sheriff like?” She held up a hand. “No, wait. I know exactly what he’s like. Small town sheriff. Attitude about big city folk, and werewolves to boot. Probably has a pot belly and has a mouth full of dip.”

Picturing the tall, muscular, blond sheriff, Chrys almost laughed. *Describes him to a T.* She couldn’t wait till Amalee met Ross Kendricks. That would teach her a little lesson about pigeonholing people.

“I knew it.” She groaned and stood. “I’m going to go find out why you’re still in wolf form. You going to be okay with the cub?”

I’ll be fine. If I need you, I’ll come get you.

“Works for me.”

Chrys practiced her wolfly skills while the baby slept and Amalee did whatever she was doing. Walking was becoming easier. The tail thing got her once in a while when she wasn’t expecting it. The biggest worry, now, was that she had to go to the bathroom. She was getting desperate.

Damn it. I don’t want to do this. She huffed out a disturbed breath, but called Amalee anyway.

“What’s up?”

I’ve got to go to the bathroom and, damn it, I’m not sure what to do while in this form. Hell, I can’t even open the damned door. Sheesh, this was so embarrassing. If she could have killed Pete all over again, she would, for making her have to go through this.

“No problem.” She led the way to the back door. “The good thing is that we’re female. We don’t have to do that hiking of the leg thing. That’s so crude. Just go into the tree line and squat a little. Oh, and make sure your tail is out of the way.”

With that sage advice, Chrys went out the back door and across the yard to the tree line. Once the house was out of site, she looked around for a good spot off the trail to do her business.

Less than two minutes later she was back on the trail and heading back to the house.

Amalee met her at the door.

“Well?”

I need a shower.

The doctor only laughed and closed the back door.

“Lizzy woke up while you were gone, so I put her on the floor on the blanket. You think you need a shower? I had to change the girl’s diaper. Yuck.”

Chrys inwardly grinned at the other woman’s overblown reactions to a simple diaper change. *Never dealt with babies?*

“Heck, no. I was an only child and ended up in college when I was thirteen. I studied, I went to school, and I studied. If I’d hung out with the older crowd, I might have gotten to play with the babies, but as it was, I spent a lot of time in the library and at the labs.”

Amalee’s nonchalant attitude said she wasn’t bothered by the way she grew up. Her eyes gave her away. They told a different story. Sad and lonely. That’s what they said to Chrys.

Well, Lizzy will be here for a very long time, and if you want, you can come over and play with her. I won’t make you change too many diapers.

Amalee’s eyes flashed with gratitude, but she only nodded her head. “I’ll think about it. She is kind of cute.”

With that pronouncement, the doctor turned sharply on her heel and actually marched out of the room.

Chrys sent a quizzical glance at Lizzy. *I think you’re getting to her.*

The baby laughed and clapped her hands from the blanket she was sitting on.

Wondering if Lizzy understood her, she sidled up to her and lay next to her on her stomach. A test to determine if the baby understood. Hmm.

Give me a kiss?

The baby giggled, opened her mouth wide and leaned toward Chrys. Chrys rewarded her by giving her a lick on the face. The baby loved it and started to laugh until she fell over.

Holy mackerel, you do understand. Amalee!

At her shout, the doctor came running. "What? Another attack?"

No, the baby understands me.

"Impossible."

Not. Watch. She turned back to the baby who'd struggled back onto her bottom. *Give me a kiss?*

Again, the baby opened her mouth wide to kiss her.

Chrys gave her the kiss she expected and turned to Amalee.

See?

"No fu -- No way!" She'd amended herself mid word.

You just saw it with your own two eyes.

"Yeah, but..." Amalee's eyes glazed. "The ramifications of this are stellar. Depending on whether or not it can be duplicated. Hey!" Her attention shot to Chrys. "I wonder if it's all babies or just the ones that have the gene?"

Good question. But Amalee was gone. She'd been muttering under her breath about lab tests and the den door closed behind her.

Well, that will keep her busy for the next few months, I bet. What do you think, squirt?

Lizzy's response was to shoot her a raspberry.

Chrys could add nothing to that since it was the perfect answer.

Night was falling. Chrys had been lying on the couch for a while now, watching television. Boring, but it killed the time. Amalee had fed, bathed, and put Lizzy to bed, amid several grumbles and instructions from Chrys.

The house was quiet with Amalee ensconced in the den and the baby asleep, and Chrys herself was nodding off. The door opened and Donovan strolled in, caught sight of Chrys, and froze.

"What happened?"

His deep, dark voice rolled over her and she sighed in relief. She'd missed him more than she'd thought.

We had an intruder and I changed. Afterward, Amalee tried the vile vial and it didn't work. She's working on why I didn't change back as we speak.

"Tell me about the intruder first." Donovan sat on the couch next to Chrys, putting his hand in the fur at her nape.

Chryst laid her head on his leg. *It all happened pretty quickly. The alarm went off, Amalee and I changed, then there was a gun poking out of the hallway. Amalee went after the person and I stayed to guard the baby. A cop came and wanted to shoot me, I hung out in the kitchen under the table till he left. That's about it.*

She was so not going to tell him about her foray into urination. Heck no. That was just too icky.

"Why didn't you reengage the alarm?"

Uh, yeah, that. Well, it seemed to be too much trouble to arm, disarm, arm, etcetera.

"Damn it. It can't do its job if it isn't armed. Are any of you hurt?" His hand had tightened in her fur when she had mentioned the cop, but he seemed to be controlling himself pretty well.

Nope. We came out just fine. Except that I've not been able to change back into my human form.

"Very strange. And Amalee had a vial of Pete's pheromones?"

Yup. She waved it around, stinking up the whole room. It was pretty gross.

Donovan smelled good. Nothing like that foul odor that still lingered in the room. She took a deep breath of his scent and closed her eyes.

"Quit that. I'm trying to reason this out and you're distracting me." The humor in his tone caused little bursts of happiness to erupt in her.

Just clearing my sinus cavities. You're the best thing I've smelled all day.

"You're smelling pretty good yourself." He put his nose in the nape of her neck and drew in a breath of her scent.

The rising ridge of his cock in his pants caught her attention. *Mm. Happy to see me, or do you have a banana in your pants?*

Laughter burst from him. "Damn woman. Don't make me laugh. I'm trying to work something out."

Me? She nailed him with, literally, puppy dog eyes. Of course, it wasn't fair, but heck, use them or lose them.

"Ah, honey, you turn me on so fast, I have to concentrate not to come in my pants."

His scent grew stronger with his words and a ripple of need washed through her body. *Darn it. You're getting me all excited and there isn't anything we can do about it. At least, not until I'm human again.*

"Does that mean you don't want me to turn into a wolf and we can do it doggy style?"

Her pussy lips actually twitched at his suggestion. Closing her eyes, she imagined it for just a second. They could...

"Holy shit."

“What?” Breathless, she cast her frightened gaze around the room. She didn’t see any intruders.

“Chrys. You’re back.”

Slowly, her eyes flicked back to stare at him without comprehension. Then they widened and shot down her body.

“Oh, wow. Cool.” She was human again.

Running her hands up her body, feeling the human skin, she glanced at Donovan, who sat beside her. She pushed up and stood on her knees.

Her body was raging. It ached and was so empty, needing to be filled. “Donovan.”

His attention skimmed up her body where it was watching her hands touch herself and caught her expression. He reached for the button on his pants, opened the fastenings, and tugged his hardening cock out. Idly, he stroked it as he watched her.

That was such a turn-on for her, she had to close her eyes for a moment. He made her so hot and she wanted him just as hard for her.

She ran her hands up her sides to her breasts. Taking them in her hand she squeezed them and ran a soothing palm over the slight ache it left behind. Gripping her nipples between thumb and index finger, she pinched, hard.

Donovan moved, but she growled. “Not yet. Watch.”

He relaxed back on the couch and with cock in hand, did as she demanded. Never taking his rapt gaze from her body, he slid his hand up and down his erection, distracted.

Chrys couldn’t help but lick her lips as she watched him. She’d taste him later, but for now, she was going to tease a little.

One hand skimmed down her stomach to the small thatch of hair at the apex of her thighs. Sitting back on her heels, she separated her knees, making sure Donovan had a perfect view of what she was about. Fingers slid down, brushed through her soft curls. Her second hand joined the first. Slowly, so he wouldn’t miss a thing, she parted her labial lips with one hand and slid the middle finger of her other hand along the crease, rubbing against the bundle of nerves. She gasped and arched into her hand and Donovan groaned.

“Oh, hey. You’ve changed. What...um, shit. Guess it’s time for me to go. I’ll get my things and go out the back. Call me tomorrow and we’ll discuss...” Amalee’s voice trailed off as she went back into the den, closing the door behind her.

Chrys tried to feel embarrassment, but was so freaking hot that nothing, not even another woman seeing her masturbating could dent it. Not with the heat that was flaring in Donovan’s eyes. She wasn’t even sure he’d heard Amalee at all.

“Lay back. I want to see.”

She could barely understand him, his voice was so deep and low. The way he was looking at her got the point across though.

Chrys lay on her back with her head on the arm of the couch, feet planted on the cushion beside Donovan, and spread her knees wide. When she felt comfortably situated, she licked her fingers and returned her hands to her needy pussy.

Spreading her labial lips wide and keeping her hand out of the way so Donovan would have an unobstructed view, she pressed her moistened middle finger against her clit. His face hardened, and his gaze sharpened.

“Rub it.”

Even now, he was giving her orders. And for fuck’s sake, why did it excite her so much?

As he bid, she slid her finger along her aching clit and sighed. The tingles started low in her body and spread. Watching him watch her, she massaged and pinched the bundle of nerves until her hips arched in reaction. The buildup was slow and steady and her breathing matched her rhythm.

Panting, moaning, she kept her attention fixed on Donovan. The hand on his cock slid up and down his shaft as he watched her. She could practically feel the lazy glide of the motion in her own body.

Need burst in her and she pressed her finger deep into her body. It wasn’t enough, so she inserted two.

“Not enough.” The words were ripped from her lips, breathless.

She needed more. Frantic with the need to climax, she sent Donovan a pleading look. “Please.”

Donovan shook his head. “Finish it.”

Redoubling her efforts, she pressed three fingers into her aching hole, her pinky slipping past the tight ring of her ass, and with her other hand, rubbed maniacally at her protruding clit. Arching her head back, thrusting her painfully tight breasts into the air, she reached for the goal.

Higher and higher she climbed, but she couldn’t crest the hill. She knew she wouldn’t be able to do this alone. Needing his touch so bad, sobs ripped from her body. “Shit, Donovan. Help.”

A moment later, she felt his hot hand on her thigh. “Ah, yes.”

“Come, now.” With the order, he smacked her inner thigh, right next to her pussy, sharply.

The pain pushed her over into a red-hot orgasm.

The moment she was able to hear again, his low voice calling her a “good girl,” caused her to smile. Yes, she was a very good girl. She could be better though.

With that mental pronouncement, she levered herself up and straddled Donovan's waist. Facing him, arms wrapped loosely around his neck, she slid her sopping pussy along the pulsing vein of his hard-as-a-rock cock.

"That was good for me. Was it good for you?" Teasing him got her what she wanted.

He growled low in his throat and, hands on her hips, lifted her, then impaled her on his cock.

The fullness that stretched her pussy had her sighing in his ear. "Yeah, baby, fuck me good."

Without saying a word, he lifted her until just the bulbous head remained inside her. He grinned evilly and slammed her back down. Taking up a hard, fast rhythm, he did as she asked and fucked her good. Real good.

Tightening her thighs, she rode him. Vocalizing little grunts each time her ass met his thighs, she closed her eyes and rubbed her nipples against him. She couldn't get close enough. Buttons plinked on the wooden floor when she ripped the shirt apart so she could press her aching breasts against his hairy chest. Her mouth tingled as she licked him where his shoulder met his neck, and sank her teeth into the soft spot she found.

Donovan sucked in a sharp breath then relaxed his shoulders. He moaned when her teeth drew a little bit of blood, and she tasted him on her tongue.

She lapped at the wound she'd made, sucking it -- leaving her mark on him.

He was hers, and if any woman got too close, she'd rip their face off.

The growl ripped from her, and her nails bit into his shoulders.

"Fuck." Breathless, muscles taut, Donovan arched into her. "Shit, that's it, baby. Take it. More."

Galvanized into giving him anything he asked for, she threw her head back and pounded herself on him.

The tingling started at the nape of her neck and with Donovan's hands on her hips keeping her thrusts even and hard, she fell forward, sinking her teeth into his chest, and went off like a rocket.

Her teeth tightened in his skin when he swelled inside her and grunted his climax.

His hands slid around her waist and pulled her to his chest, hugging her tightly. He kept up slow and easy thrusts into her sensitive portal, which made her shiver over and over.

"Damn, baby. That was..." He finished with a long, harsh growl.

Chrys chuckled, breathless. "Yeah, you don't have to tell me. I may come out of the clouds next week some time."

Her eyes felt gritty when she pried them open. "Crap. You're bleeding." Following the trail of blood that trickled from his chest, she lapped it up, reverently.

"Probably from several places."

Letting her gaze roam over his body, she smiled. His shirt was shredded, buttonless, and pushed off his shoulders, practically trapping his arms. His pants were on but undone. Bite marks were on his chest and at his neck, and he probably had claw marks on his back from her nails.

Yeah. She liked that. No woman seeing him would be able to miss the obvious ownership marks.

"That's a satisfied expression if I ever saw one."

Her gaze slid up his body to his eyes. "Never, never touch another woman. Ever."

His eyebrows rose. "Never? Not even accidentally?"

"No."

She couldn't blink. He had to understand. Control wasn't terribly important right now, and damn it, she needed him to agree.

Shrugging, he sighed. "I'll do my best, but I know two women I'll have to touch."

"No! Mine." The hair on her arms stood up and she felt a growl build and break free.

Lips pursed, he moved his hips. His cock was hardening again. "Two females. Lizzy and Susan. No others. I swear."

Her breath came in gasps and her skin felt tight. "Why Susan?"

Rolling his hips so he pressed deeper into her body, he groaned. "She's my mother. Unofficially. My mother."

She loosened her grip on his muscles, letting her fingernails release the pressure into his skin. "All right. Just her."

Panting, rolling her hips on his with his tight grip, he moaned. "Okay."

His fingers pressed deeply into her skin. He'd leave marks, and Chrys grinned wickedly. It's what she wanted, needed from him. Proof of his possession as she'd marked him.

Slow, he kept their movements slow and steady. Easy. The buildup was just as slow and easy, and when it hit, Chrys thought her soul would just slip away. It climbed up her spine and spun her head. Closing her eyes, she let the sensation take her away.

Chrys was nearly asleep when Donovan separated them. The slow glide of his cock as it left her body had her sucking in a deep breath.

"Bedtime."

She wondered if that was his way of saying no more play, but she let him lift her into his arms as he stood and carry her into the bedroom without argument. She just didn't have the energy.

A huge yawn escaped her and she relaxed into his arms. "I'm glad you're home."

"Home." His tone said he just realized it was true. Reverent, as if he'd never had a home before.

It made Chrys open her eyes to look at him. "Yes, home. With me and with Lizzy."

His lips tightened and he nodded tightly.

They entered the bedroom and he strode across the room to look into the crib. Lizzy was sleeping in her favorite position, on her tummy, butt in the air, and little lips pooched out as if she were sucking.

"I wonder..." Donovan whispered, not waking Lizzy. "What our cub will look like. Will they look like Lizzy and you? Red-haired, green-eyed, and light-skinned? Or dark like me?"

Chrys felt his self-loathing. It was like a physical lashing. "Donovan, I love you and everything about you." She slid her hand over his chest, feeling his heart beat. "You may be darker skinned, eyed, and haired than I am, but I find that sexy as hell."

His despondency left him as if it were never there. An eyebrow quirked and a small smirk twitched at his lips. "S that so?"

"Look, I thought you were sexy as hell the moment I saw you."

He huffed and carried her to the bed. Laying her on it gently, he stripped out of his clothes and climbed in beside her. "When you first saw me, you were turning into a wolf."

Chrys went to him when he reached for her, tucking up against him, head on his chest. "Yeah, like that mattered. Here I was, traumatized, flipping out, and here you come in all your bigness, looking so damned sexy. All I could think was that I wanted to rip your clothes off and rape you."

She could feel his laughter against her. It was silent, but it moved his whole torso. "Somehow I doubt that."

A smack to his side made him grunt, and her hand sting. "I said -- Oh, never mind. I suppose you need to be shown."

"I suppose I do."

Lying quietly for a moment, Chrys twirled her finger in the hair across his chest. "What's Susan's number?"

He hummed lightly. "Susan's number? Why?"

"She got you to trust her. I need pointers. I'm going to wring everything she knows about you, out of her, then devise a plan."

"Sounds ominous."

"It is. Be prepared to have your walls stormed."

"A siege, is it?"

She nodded, not answering aloud. She would do whatever it took. He was hers, and damned if he was going to convince himself that he was unwanted, unloved, or any of the other un's he could come up with in his man-brain.

"She'll be here tomorrow morning. You can talk to her then."

Good. Again she kept her thoughts to herself, but the sooner she started the better.

She started to drift. Tired, having had a very long day, she was more than ready to sleep.

His low rumble drifted through her senses. She heard him whisper under his breath. Just a sigh. "Not Pete's pheromones. Mine."

He sounded so hopeful, she smiled as she slipped into darkness.

I told you so.

Chapter Nine

His tone caught her attention first. Donovan was extremely pissed. He didn't yell, he didn't cuss. She knew he was upset just by the quiet rumble that vibrated the air around him.

"You didn't come yourself? Why not? The human you sent tried to shoot my mate. You're lucky I don't rip him to shreds."

Ross Kendricks's tone sounded just as aggravated. Her hearing being what it was now, she could actually hear his replies, which was pretty cool.

"Hell, Vitello, when the call came through, the closest deputy to the house got the assignment. I didn't even hear about it until you called." He sounded as if someone was going to get their ass royally chewed about it, too. "Where were you? I thought you were going to be there."

The flare of red in Donovan's eyes made Chrys cringe for the sheriff. Not the right thing to say.

"No. You're right." Ross sighed. "I should have let my people know that I was to be called. That was a failure on my part."

Donovan looked slightly mollified. His eyes returned to sexy black and his hand unclenched. "Ross, look. My mate has to stay safe. I can't lose her now that I've found her."

Love and hope blossomed in Chrys's heart. Maybe he needed her as much as she needed him.

"Curiosity here, what would happen to you if you lost her?" He spoke fast, not letting Donovan speak. "Not that anything *is* going to happen, but what if?"

"I'm a hunter. The one thing in life a hunter has to look forward to is a mate and cubs. We need it. Someone to protect, someone to keep us in the real world. Many hunters have just gone into the woods and never came back out. My agents are all hunters and I see the

strain in all of us, even the female. If I lost Chrys I'd have nothing to live for beyond revenge. I would become an unconscionable monster."

So not going to happen. Chrys clenched her fists, vowing to learn self defense, how to shoot a gun, make napalm in her damned basement, but nothing was going to happen to her if it would threaten Donovan.

Ross blew out a breath. "Okay. Gotcha. Hunter's mates have to live if I don't want my work to double." He paused. "Wait. I thought she was the killer's mate."

"There is some question about that."

His tone said the subject was closed and for Ross not to push.

"Yeah, all right." The sigh was audible through the phone lines. "Look, I'll talk to the officer and find out what happened out there. I'll call you later."

"Fine." The click of Donovan's phone closing preceded his entrance into the kitchen.

"Good morning." Chrys greeted him with a plate full of food.

He stalked right up to her, wrapped an arm around her waist, pulled her tightly to him, and kissed the breath right out of her.

Lizzy giggled and clapped her hands.

When Donovan let her go and slid into his chair, Chrys slowly opened her eyes to focus on the baby. "Yeah, he does deserve applause."

Chuckling lowly, he pulled her into his lap and kissed her neck. "Feed me, woman."

"What? Like a baby?"

"No. I'd like it to be a little neater in the delivery if you please."

Chrys laughed aloud and glanced at Lizzy. He had a point. She was a mess. "Big man got jokes."

Lizzy chortled and banged her hands on her tray.

"Good thing he's cute, huh, squirt, or we'd have to do something drastic."

"Like what?"

The baby answered for her, shooting him raspberries.

"Yeah, that." Chrys gasped out between coughs as she tried not to crack up.

They were all laughing when the doorbell rang.

Instantly, Donovan was on his feet, alert. He'd set Chrys on the chair he been sitting in and pulled a big gun from his back somewhere.

"Where can I get one of those?" Wow, her voice was calm. That surprised her. She felt anything but calm.

"Know how to use one?"

"It's on my to do list."

He winked at her, turned, and headed out of the kitchen. “When you do, let me know and I’ll get you one.”

“Cool.” She extricated Lizzy from the high chair. Tucking the messy bundle close, she moved to a nice corner where the two of them would be safe from flying bullets or whatever thought to come their way. Donovan knew what he was doing. She had to trust that.

The doorbell pealed again and thumping on the door followed. “I know you’re in there. I can smell you. Open the door.” The doctor apparently had no patience.

“Do we smell, pumpkin? I don’t think so.”

Lizzy grabbed Chrys’s nose. “Hmm, don’t know how to take that.”

Donovan had let Amalee into the house and preceded her into the kitchen. Chrys saw his sharp surveillance of the room until his attention landed on her and Lizzy. He relaxed visibly and motioned her back to the table.

She made a quick detour to the sink to grab a washcloth to clean the baby and herself.

Amalee carried a laptop case and set it on the table. Pulling out the computer, she opened it and while waiting for it to boot up, folded her hands and stared at them.

“I’ve been doing some research as to why Pete’s pheromones didn’t work last night. I noticed before I left, that you were back to human, and that got me to thinking.”

The laptop was apparently ready because she started tapping away at the keys. “Here’s what I need to know.” She glanced briefly up at Chrys. “Well, I need to know every tiny detail of the attack.”

Chrys sighed. Not again. She took a deep breath and told Amalee exactly what she heard, smelled, saw, and felt. Everything.

“Wait.” Amalee held up a hand, and stared at her. “You said you smelled something good, then something bad, then nothing?”

“That’s right. The killer was tearing at my clothes yelling that I had to smell his pheromones and I’d be his mate, and the stench made my eyes water.”

“But, you smelled a good smell first?”

“Yeah, kind of cinnamony. I remember thinking that it was a really nice smell.” Chrys wished she knew where Amalee was going with this. She kept harping on one tiny segment of the attack.

Amalee started to laugh. “Donovan, you didn’t happen to be downwind of them, did you?”

He thought, then nodded. “Maybe.”

“Okay. That might explain it.”

Chrys huffed. “Explain what?”

“Old Pete wasn’t the first to imprint you.”

Chrys shook her head. “But he bit me.”

Donovan took her hand. "The bite gives you an enzyme that mixes with your genes to make becoming a werewolf possible. Any werewolf who imprints you with pheromones first is your mate."

"Even a woman?" Chrys stared horrified.

"No." Amalee was quick to interrupt that line of thinking. "Actually yes, if you were gay. Otherwise, it's the sex that attracts you."

Chrys let out a relieved breath. "All right. So, you're saying that I smelled Donovan before I smelled Pete?"

"Yes." Donovan's eyes glowed.

"Not now, Donovan. I've got to understand this," Chrys chided him.

"It also explains why you changed. After the first time you smell the pheromones of your mate and it goes away, you are capable of changing. If the wind had kept blowing your way, you might not have changed at all."

Chrys was getting confused with Amalee's explanation.

It must have showed on her face.

Amalee tapped the table with a fingernail. "Let's put it this way. You got bit. You smelled Donovan's pheromones, then they went away and you got very scared and mad. Right?" At Chrys's nod, she continued. "Right. So, your body at that time was fully capable to change out of fear or anger. Strong emotions and the lack of a mate's scent can cause the change. The mate's pheromones will turn you back."

"But Donovan came to me right when I was changing. Why didn't I turn back right away?"

"Sex. You had to have sex the first time." Amalee pursed her lips. "Here I thought I was doing you a favor and I ended up just being a voyeur. Yuck."

Chrys mulled all this over in her mind. Bite, pheromones, no pheromones, change, sex and pheromones... All right.

"Talk about a bunch of pain in the ass rules."

"Yeah, tell us about it." Donovan chuckled. "That's just one set, too."

Groaning, Chrys laid her head on the table. "Where's a silver bullet when you need one."

Ignoring Donovan's growl, Amalee laughed. "Silver bullets don't work on us any more than they do humans. Well, no more than they do humans. Hit a vital spot and we'll die, but not from some werewolf poisoning."

"Noted."

Lizzy squirmed and Chrys sat up. "What? I wasn't squishing you."

The baby reached for Donovan. "Must be your turn."

Donovan took Lizzy and kissed her cheek. "Good. I was feeling lonely over here."

As if. Chrys turned from the pretty sight of the man and baby and narrowed her gaze on Amalee. "Okay. What you're saying is that Donovan has been my mate all along. Even though I told everyone that Pete wasn't my mate, no one would believe me and kept waving that smelly stuff around me." She felt another "I told you so" coming on, so pressed her lips together.

"That about sums it up. I have more tests to run, but I think that's about it. You wouldn't want to change now, and let Donovan stink the place up to see if you change back, would you?"

She must have seen Chrys's look because she laughed and stood. Closing her laptop, she tucked it back into its carrying case and headed for the door. "Thought not. Keep me updated if anything goes awry and I'll leave you three alone. For a while."

With the ominous warning, she marched to the alarm system, pushed a button, opened the front door, and closed it smartly behind her.

"I could really hate that woman." Chrys turned from glaring at the door to scrutinize the two sitting next to her. "I want food. I think breakfast is cold and I don't feel like cooking again."

Donovan stood. "Then let's go out to eat."

"The diner? I haven't been there since I got back. I heard about the waitress who was killed. Lee called me when it happened because I went to high school with her younger brother. It was the last time I talked to Lee." Her eyes welled up a little, but she shook it off. "I want to get her address so I can send a card or flowers or something. I know she had kids."

"Lannie feels bad about all the deaths."

"Lannie? Oh, the woman you call the alpha female. I remember meeting her. Why would she feel bad?"

"She thinks Pete might have come here hunting for her. They don't have proof yet, but pack members have been going through his house. He wanted to be the leader and if Kyle took a mate and had cubs, Pete would be out of the running."

"The poor woman. I'll have to talk to her to make sure she understands that I don't blame her for any of this. I met the man, remember? And he was genuinely crazy." All true. She didn't blame the woman for what the whacko had done to her family or herself. Although, she would like to bash in his brains a second time, just so she could enjoy the revenge this time.

With a grin, Donovan tucked Lizzy under his arm like a football, to her delight, and helped Chrys stand. "Let's get you something to eat."

They took Donovan's car to the diner. He wanted to talk to someone at the repair shop to get Chrys's car fixed as soon as possible, and since it was on the opposite end of town, driving would be best.

The occupants of the diner grew quiet as Chrys walked in. Donovan trailed behind her carrying Lizzy, and he had the uncomfortable feeling that everyone knew everything about him.

Impossible. He'd only been in town about a week or so. They couldn't know everything about him. Could they?

Chrys must have felt his hesitation just inside the door. Glancing at him curiously, she put her hand on his arm. "It's all right. They don't bite."

"I do."

She laughed as if he'd made a joke. He hadn't.

One thing he didn't like was crowds. This couldn't actually be considered a crowd, but enough people were staring at him, and watching his every move, to make it seem that way. Not that he'd made any moves since he came in.

Tugging on his hand got him moving. Chrys led the way to a table, grabbing a high chair on the way. Positioning the high chair on one side of the table, she reached for Lizzy and settled her in the chair, strapping her in.

"There." She pushed the high chair up to the table, and sat down in her own chair. "Donovan, sit down."

He sat. He wasn't happy about it, but he sat. He wished everyone would go back to their breakfasts.

And as if he'd flipped a switch, they did. Just like that. Weird.

The volume in the diner rose and he could have been invisible for all the attention the others gave him. Thank the goddess.

They had a leisurely breakfast and soon they were on the road. Instructing the repairman what needed to be done to Chrys's car took only minutes and Chrys insisted they needed to stop at the grocery store.

They were there for a considerable time and left with enough food to feed an army. As he loaded it into his car, he wondered if he should get a truck, or SUV, or mini -- Oh no, he wasn't going to go there. He might be a family man now, but there was no way he was going to get a vehicle that screamed it.

A family man. The grin broke across his face. He liked the sound of that.

"What's got you looking like the cat who stole the cream?"

He shook his head at her metaphor. "Dog with a bone would be more accurate. I was just thinking that I'm a family man."

She held up her left hand. "Hmm, how do you figure? I don't see no ring on this finger."

His heart lurched. "You don't..."

Chrys sighed and cut him off. "Yes, I do consider us a family, but we have to think of Lizzy. The courts are going to be involved with my raising of her, at least initially, and no matter how the rest of the country is, this state, being of the Southern variety, frowns on couples who are only living together raising an orphan. It has to do with stability."

He stared at her, trying to gauge the seriousness of her comment. "All right."

Turning at the light, he pulled into a parking space in front of the jewelers.

"Well, are you getting out, or do I get final say in our wedding bands?"

"Wedding bands?"

"Chrys, we're going to get married so the courts will know we're a family. They try to take Lizzy from us, it will be over my dead and decaying body." He meant it. He wasn't going to lose his family just as he acquired it.

"That's just gross. And no. You will not pick out our rings without me."

"You don't trust me?"

She smiled prettily. "With your predilection to domination, I'd worry that you would get me a slave collar."

"Hmm." He eyed her neck longingly.

Laughing, she covered her neck with her hands. "Wedding bands first. Then we'll talk about collars."

He could live with that. Either way, he'd have his brand on her so that humans would know she was taken.

What he really wanted was to get a tattoo put on her that says, Property of Donovan Vitello, but he didn't think she'd go for that. Maybe on their first anniversary he could propose it.

Stupid humans. The werewolf way was much easier. A bite, a scent, and sex. That's all it took to mark a mate for everyone to get the hint. The human way was so...involved.

Inside the jewelry store, Donovan saw a set of three rings that he thought would not only look good on Chrys, but wouldn't look like shit on his own hand.

Clearing his throat, he caught Chrys's attention. The look in his eyes must have given him away because she came right over and glanced into the case he'd been staring into.

She hummed and adjusted Lizzy on her hip. "I like that set right there. What do you think?"

Damn, what a woman. She was pointing directly at the rings he'd been scoping out. "They'll do."

He heard her soft chuckle and her whispered words to Lizzy. "Yeah, they'll do, all right. Don't let him fake you out. He loves those rings."

Of course he did, but that didn't mean he had to go all gushy over them, did he? In response, he reached over and placed a light smack to her ass, then rubbed it soothingly.

She'd yelped softly at the wordless reprimand, then leaned into him. "He loves me too, Lizzy. And we love him, don't we?"

The baby bounced several times and reached for him over her aunt's arm.

"I'll take that as a yes. How about you, sweetheart?" Chrys handed him the baby and stood on tiptoe to kiss him. "Are you sure you're ready to take on a ready-made family?"

He held the baby in one arm and wrapped his other around his woman's waist. Jerking her against him and up his body, he covered her mouth with his. Deepening the kiss, he tasted her sweetness on his tongue.

Separating their mouths, he whispered against her parted lips. "Mine." Then turned to the bouncing baby. "You too, little one," And kissed her on the cheek.

The baby loved the attention and kissed him back. Okay, open mouthed baby kisses weren't the worst thing he'd ever had on him and, he cherished every one she gave him.

Behind the counter, the clerk watched them with a small smile. "Have you decided, or are you still trying to choose?"

"We've made our selection. We'd like this set sized, please, and this ring," He pointed to a pretty silver band in the next case over. "Put on a chain."

Chrys gave him a questioning glance, but didn't say anything.

Handing the clerk his credit card, he let the woman fit him for the ring. Then had to grab for Chrys. "Hush. She wasn't holding my hand and you know it. Calm down."

The clerk walked away muttering about needing to get the women's ring sizers, and Chrys's growl lessened. "She shouldn't touch you."

"I want my ring to fit right. She's just doing her job."

He wanted to howl to let everyone know he'd found his mate. The feelings were so strong, so primitive, he had to battle them down with an iron hand.

"I want to run with you."

Chrys glanced up at him. "Run? Like exercise? Yuck."

Laughter rumbled from his chest. "Not exercise. Run as the wolf."

Her head tilted as if she were contemplating it. "We'd need a babysitter."

"We could ask the alpha pair. I know she's expecting and might like the practice."

"What is it with men thinking that women want to practice mommyhood?" She cast him a teasing glance. "Oh, all right. Give her a call and ask. I'd like to meet them anyway. Besides, I think I'd like becoming my alter ego on purpose instead of during an emergency."

"Anything you want." He mentally sighed. If anyone heard him they'd think he was completely pussy whipped and, damn it, he was. He didn't actually give a flying fuck, but if any of his agents saw him... Fuck it. *They were bound to see it. They'd just have to deal with it. They'll understand when their own mates show up.*

The woman returned with the ring sizers and held out her hand for Chrys.

Ungraciously, Chrys held out her left hand and let the woman get a good fit. As soon as the woman let her go, she snatched back her hand and surreptitiously wiped it on her jeans.

He watched his mate reacting to the woman clerk. The woman seemed to be ignoring Chrys's strange behavior and turned her attention to Lizzy. "And how are you, sugar?"

Leaning over the counter, the woman chucked Lizzy under the chin softly. The baby took one look at her and started crying. Loudly.

"What did you do to her?" Chrys practically leapt at the woman again, but Donovan caught her just in time.

Defensive, the woman sputtered and waved her hands in front of her. "I did nothing. The baby just started crying. Maybe he's holding her too tightly."

"It's all right. She must be tired. We'll be taking her home now." He turned Chrys away from the woman and toward the door. "If you could have the rings ready in two days, I'll come back for them."

"Not a problem, sir. The jeweler could have them done by tomorrow."

Her smile was saccharine and about as fake as a four-dollar bill, but it gave him enough time to get his females out of the shop. He put a fuming Chrys in the front seat and a crying Lizzy into her car seat in the back. Closing the door, he sighed. What the hell was that all about?

He climbed into the car and started it. Glancing at the two upset females, he decided when he came back to pick up the rings, he'd be alone. It might be safer.

Other than the tension filling the car, the ride home was uneventful. They unloaded the car and put away the groceries and Chrys started lunch.

He made a phone call to the leader. The alpha couple would be happy to baby sit, but Donovan said it would be contingent on Lizzy accepting them. He wouldn't leave the baby with anyone who upset her. Today's experience had been stressful enough. The tyke was still sniffing as she slept in her swing.

The banging from the kitchen told him that Chrys wouldn't leave the baby with anyone who upset Lizzy either.

Leaving the baby in the swing, he entered the kitchen and watched Chrys work. He could be unpacking the suitcases that he'd brought over from Kyle's rental house, but he didn't feel like it. He wanted to be with his mate.

His mate.

He loved the sound of that. He'd been saying it for a while, but now it was official. Chrys was his mate and nobody else's.

Rubbing his chest against the feeling that threatened to explode out of him, he sat at the table quietly, hoping none of his overpowering emotions showed on his face.

"I still want to know why that woman made Lizzy cry. She doesn't cry often, but she sure as heck was after that woman touched her."

Fighting a smile at the way she snarled *that woman*, he shrugged. "I was standing right there, and didn't see her do anything to hurt Lizzy. All she did was touch her under the chin with her finger. That's it. Lizzy looked up at the woman and started wailing."

"Well, I think she did something. She had shifty eyes."

Donovan really wanted to ask what shifty eyes looked like, and when she'd observed this phenomenon. He'd observed nothing suspicious about the woman and it was his job to notice such things.

"Kyle and Lannie said they'd be happy to baby sit, but I told them it was up to Lizzy."

Chrysta nodded, satisfied.

"We'll take her over there, check out the situation, then drive to a nice place and go running. Sound all right to you?"

"It's fine. Thank you for considering Lizzy's needs in this." She let out a long breath of air and went to him. "I'm being really crabby and you're being great about it. Thanks."

"Hey, what are mates for?"

"Oh, I don't know." In a lightning change of attitude, she smiled and sat on his lap. "I could think of a few interesting things."

So could he. He circled her small waist with his hands and turned her so she straddled him. Taking her mouth with his, he lifted his hips so he could rub his growing erection against her pussy. They were fully clothed, but he didn't care. The rasp of the two pair of pants against his hard-on had him seeing stars.

He fired up so fast when he was around her, he figured one day he'd just burn out and turn to ash.

Not that he was complaining. He'd been waiting a long time for a woman of his own and he was completely satisfied with the one he got. No other woman would have been as good for him as Chrysta. She liked -- encouraged -- his primitive, dominant side. Not once had she shied away from him, even when she'd first met him.

She was perfect.

He kept rubbing his aching cock against her pussy, enjoying the combined scent of their building excitement. When the craving hit him, he didn't fight it. He lifted her off his lap and lay her across the table on her back.

Quickly, he stripped her out of her jeans, socks, and shoes, and tossed them aside. Putting her feet on the edge of the table, he slid her toward him until her ass was against the edge.

Chrys's breathing deepened. When he glanced up her body, her eyes were closed, her mouth partially open and her body tense, ready for what he might do to her. Completely willing to let him do whatever he wanted.

Seated in the chair, he scooted closer to the table. He had a straight on view of her dampening panty crotch.

"You smell good." Pushing her knees apart, he leaned forward and lapped at the moist panties. "Taste good too."

She groaned and her hips arched.

He pressed a flat hand against her lower abdomen. "Stay still."

Her ass landed on the table with a plop. He grinned because he knew she would do her best to follow his instructions. His job was to try to break her control. She expected it.

He could tell by the small smirk on her face.

Leaving the panties on, he tugged the crotch to the side with his thumb. Using both thumbs, he separated her folds, and moaned as her scent floated up to him.

She was pink and wet, her clit protruding from its protective fold. She'd shaved her pussy this morning, and her skin was smooth and soft. Damn, she had a pretty pussy, and it was all his.

His finger crept up to her clit and circled it slowly. She sucked air through her teeth, hissing, but kept her ass on the table.

Barely touching her, he rubbed her clit in circles with the pad of his index finger. Chrys moaned and her scent grew stronger. A tiny bit of fluid leaked out of her portal.

He wanted to taste her, but restrained himself. Soon.

Without stopping the movements on her clit, he spread her thighs farther until her legs were practically touching the table. "Hands."

Immediately, her hands were holding her knees down, keeping them from closing.

"Good girl."

The way she was laid out gave him plenty of room to work without having to encumber his hands. Perfect.

One finger continued to rub slow circles over her clit, occasionally dipping into the liquids that leaked from her, but not entering her. That, he left open for his other hand. To start, he used only the tip of one finger. Rimming her portal, spreading it for entry, the fingertip went around and around.

Chrys moaned. "Donovan."

He loved the sound of his name on her lips. Especially when she screamed it. She would scream it this time.

Slipping inside her to the first knuckle on his finger, he continued the rimming and widening. As he watched her panting at his teasing, he reminded himself to get online and make a few purchases. He needed some things from a specialty shop.

He grinned wickedly, imagining her strapped down to the table, ready for whatever toy he wanted to use on her. Later tonight, he'd make some purchases.

Chryst had started to sweat, but hadn't moved. For being such a good girl, he pressed his finger in full length. The sound of her breath clogging in her throat made his cock swell even more in the tight confines of his black jeans.

Not yet, though. She wasn't ready.

Sliding two fingers inside her, he twisted them, then scissored them. Spreading her wider.

Her scent sharpened and he could take it no longer. He had to taste her.

Leaning forward in the chair, he slid a third finger into her, twisting and scissoring, and lapped at her clit. Gods, she tasted wonderful. Her personal flavor exploded on his tongue and he had to have more.

Sucking, licking, biting lightly, he tormented her clit until she squirmed uncontrollably. Mewling sounds were coming from her throat and he heard a low growling coming from his own.

Fuck. He had to get into her now.

He leapt to his feet and ripped at his jeans. Pushing them to his knees, he grabbed her by her thighs and plunged into her. When his balls rested against her ass, he froze. His cock throbbed in the tight, wet passage. He could feel the rippling of her inner walls, caressing him and he shuddered.

"I could spend the rest of my life buried to the balls inside of you, Chryst."

"Yes, yes."

Her head was thrashing side to side, and the sight of her made him ache with love and need.

Slowly, feeling the most miniscule twitch, he slid out of her until only the sensitive head of his cock remained within her. Her muscles tightened and the sensation had dark spots flashing before his eyes.

Deep, he pounded back into her. In and out, hard and fast, their skin slapped together and the table legs squeaked on the floor. Moans erupted from both of them, reaching higher each time he bottomed out in her.

He felt her inner muscles start to spasm and her back arched. A low, keening scream of his name ground out from behind her clenched teeth and he rammed into her once, twice, a third time. The fire raced down his spine to his balls, and he erupted in a shower of flames.

Slamming deep, he pressed the head of his cock against her cervix. She was going to take everything he had this time. A son, another daughter. He wanted her to get pregnant. He wanted to watch her stomach round with his cub.

“Fuck.” His cum jettisoned into her. More and more until he could feel it leaking out of her body.

Collapsing over her, barely putting his arms down in time to keep from crushing her, he lay against her, breathing deeply. Her own breaths were panting in his ear and her hard nipples rubbed against his chest where he held himself over her.

Lazily, as if she had little strength left, her arms rose from the table and wrapped around his back. Her hands slid through the sweat that covered him and she sighed heavily. “That was phenomenal.”

“It’ll only get better.”

His woman actually snorted at his pronouncement.

“Impossible.”

“A given.” He turned his head and kissed her softly. “Thank you, my mate.”

“Any time. And for your information, I hope I’m pregnant too.”

Chapter Ten

“Pardon?”

Chrys smiled at his stunned expression. “You said you wanted me to get pregnant. I heard you. You said it over and over.”

“I did?”

“Yup. And, I’m sure that if I’m pregnant now, by the time the baby’s born, we’ll be old hands at raising a baby.” And that was the honest truth. She really did want to have Donovan’s child. More than anything. She knew that Donovan needed a family to feel secure. She’d noticed little things about him that told her his youth had sucked big wampum and she intended that the rest of his life be filled with love. If it took children, which she loved, then they’d have however many it took. Well, they’d have as many as was within their means, of course. They each had enough love for at least a handful of kids.

She watched the expressions she wasn’t sure he knew he was showing, cross his face. A confused frown, a hopeful grimace, finally he settled on a happy grin. Just a small one, but he made up for it with the glow in his eyes.

Oh yeah, he wanted a baby.

Lizzy started hollering, letting them know she was awake and tired of the swing. Donovan looked down at their bodies. “I’ll get her.”

Since he had way more clothes on than she did, she thought it was a good idea.

He separated their bodies and stood, fastening his pants. The look he gave her as she lay sprawled on the table said it all. He was very proud of himself right now.

The cum leaking out of her body caught his attention and he grinned. Without saying a word, he went to the drawer containing dishtowels and brought one back to carefully clean her.

Damn it. Every move he made caused her to fall farther into love with him.

He held out his hand and helped her off the table. Kissing her hand before letting it go, he turned and went to rescue Lizzy from her swing while Chrys stared after him, dazed and bedazzled.

Lizzy took to Lannie and Kyle like a house on fire. She was flirting with them and having a great time by the time Chrys felt comfortable enough to leave.

The baby waved bye-bye as they went out the door, then went back to playing with Kyle.

"This is killing me." Chrys stood on the front porch, listening to Lizzy's giggles. "This is harder on me than it is her."

Donovan wrapped his arm around her shoulders and led her down the stairs to the car. "She'll be fine. Where would you like to go running?"

Chrys sighed. Lizzy would be fine. She knew that. And the whole purpose of this evening was to get some wolf practice in. "Okay. Drive north for five minutes. We'll head into the deep woods."

"Sounds like a good idea."

Donovan started the car and followed her directions. His hands were secure on the steering wheel, sure of his control of the car. They were such strong hands and Chrys had no idea why they were the object of her attention. He had so many other body parts to distract her from missing the baby. She slid her gaze up his arms and down his torso.

"Shit." Donovan's shout had her blinking and turning her head.

The big blue suburban clipped the rear panel of the car, only missing the passenger doors because Donovan sped up.

A scream built, but didn't break free. Chrys couldn't look away from the truck as it swerved to make another attempt. The car fishtailed, but Donovan regained control.

Stomping on the gas pedal, Donovan had the car flying down the road away from the truck. "Are you hurt?"

"What the hell was that?" Chrys had to force the words out of her tight throat. "What the hell was she doing?"

"Are you hurt?" Donovan's voice was stronger the second time he asked.

She did a quick survey of herself. "No. I'm fine."

"Did you see her?" Donovan glanced at her quickly, then returned his attention to the road.

"Yes. That woman from the jewelry store. What was she trying to do? Kill us?"

"Probably."

Everything in Chrys froze. She couldn't think, couldn't blink, couldn't breathe. "You think she tried to kill us?"

"We're going to the sheriff. He needs to know about this."

She wondered if the world had gone mad. Donovan calmly stated that they were going to the sheriff and that a pissed off jewelry store clerk was trying to kill them.

"Okay."

Chrys decided she was in shock. What the hell kind of answer is "okay?" For shit's sake, things were most definitely not okay.

To say the sheriff wasn't happy to see them was an understatement.

They described the incident in detail and were asked the inevitable question. "What did you do to piss her off?"

Lips pursed, frown on her face, Chrys settled on glaring at the sheriff.

"Not enough to have her try to turn us into road kill," Donovan supplied in his monotone voice.

Ross stood and grabbed his hat. "I'm headed to the jewelry store to get some answers. Barring that, a name and address."

Before he could say otherwise, Donovan nodded. "We're going too."

"No."

"Yes."

Chrys leaned toward Ross and whispered loudly. "If you don't let us go, we'll just follow you."

"S that so?" The sheriff hooked his thumbs in his belt. "I could have you arrested."

Donovan shifted his stance and put his arm around Chrys. "You could, but then I'd run against you next election, and win."

Ross laughed and shook his head. "I bet you would, too. Well, come on if you're coming."

They piled into Ross's heavy duty, four-by-four, steroid-driven truck. Chrys had to literally be lifted into the back seat, it was so high off the ground. "What do you chase in this thing? Giraffes?"

"Ha-ha. No. I go hunting for shiners."

Chrys paused. "They still do that? Damn, I thought that went out when the county voted in liquor."

"Nope. The die hard moonshiners are still going strong."

Chrys laughed at his unintentional pun while buckling up, and settled back into the seat.

The ride was short and they arrived just as the doors were being locked.

“Open up.” Ross rapped on the door as the man was trying to lower a privacy shade.

He tapped at his watch and mouthed that they were closed.

Ross gave him a really interesting look that in no way could be misinterpreted. “Official business. Open. Now.”

Why, Chrys wondered, do men speak in shorthand when they get pissed or excited?

The man took the hint and opened the door to them. “Can I help you? It’s after hours.”

“I need to know the name of the woman who was at the counter this morning.”

“Why? Has there been a complaint?” The man, who Chrys assumed was the owner, looked as if he might pass out on the spot. He wasn’t up to the measure, in any way, of the two big brawny men before him. Heck, she topped him by three inches, and probably outweighed him by twenty pounds. Not the best thing to think about if she wanted to keep her good attitude.

“No official complaints yet, but we need her name.” Ross suddenly got a sly edge to his tone. “We’re trying to keep this on the individual and not make it a company complaint.”

“Gladys Marsden.” The name shot out of the man so fast Chrys wondered if she’d gotten spit on her shirt.

“Thank you. You’ve been a big help. Have a nice night.”

Ross turned and escorted them back to his truck.

Donovan spoke for the first time since they left the station. “Okay. I might not win against you in an election. Not if I kept it fair, at least. You’re some politician.”

Chrys snickered behind her hand. “You wouldn’t want the job. After what you’ve been doing, Nowhere would be way too tame.”

“What exactly, do you do, Vitello?”

“He’s double-oh-seven.”

Ross glanced in the rear view. “He’s a British Spy?”

Donovan sighed. “I have a security business that does little jobs for dignitaries. Foreign and domestic.”

“A merc.”

“No. Not a mercenary. Not officially.” Donovan sent Ross an evil grin. “And I’m moving my headquarters and my people to Nowhere.”

“What? When?”

Donovan looked at his watch. “They should already be in town. If not, by tomorrow at the latest.”

“Shit. Are they anything like you?”

Straight-faced now, Donovan stared at the sheriff. “Exactly like me.”

Ross Kendricks was nobody’s fool and got the point quick. “Hunter werewolves?”

“Precisely.”

“Well, just don’t make my job harder and we’ll all get along fine.”

Pragmatic and damned sweet of the sheriff. He could have put up a stink, but it seemed he could get over the fact that werewolves were infiltrating his town. Chrys wondered if, when Donovan’s agents got here, the testosterone level in town would cause some sort of explosion.

She wouldn’t consider it. These were Donovan’s family and while she was nervous about meeting them, she was grateful that they agreed to move on a moment’s notice.

Ross called over the radio for a check on Gladys Marsden. Specifically, he wanted to know what type of vehicle she drove and her home address.

When he got the answer of a dark blue Chevy Suburban, Donovan nodded. “Right vehicle.”

They got the address and wrote it down. Ross turned his truck in that direction.

“I can’t charge her with a hit and run under the circumstances. You were the one that drove away. However, we can try to find out what the fuck she was thinking.”

Chrys watched the men’s faces harden. She wondered if they knew they were a lot alike. Both strong, dependable men, who didn’t take shit from anyone.

One dark, one fair, both damned good looking, and the epitome of men’s men. For half a millisecond she wondered what it would be like to be the meat in a man sandwich, these two being the bread.

Donovan turned and raised an eyebrow at her, inquisitively. She felt the heat rise on her skin. Embarrassment colored her face at being caught fantasizing even if it wasn’t a real wish.

All women had them, right?

Sure they did.

Lucky for her, they pulled up into the drive of the suspected whacky woman -- her own terminology. After a short, but heated argument -- which she lost two to one -- she watched the men stride up to the front door and knock.

The pressure of the sheriff’s fist to the door opened it. Not a good sign. Both men pulled guns and went into the house.

Leaving her outside, all alone. In the dark. Ignorant of what was going on. She didn’t like it one damned bit.

Chrys eyed the shotgun that was standing upright in between the front seats, but left it alone. First, she didn’t know how to get it free of its functional clamp, and second, how to shoot it. Well, she’d seen them on TV, and as long as there were bullets in it, pulling the trigger should work, right?

With her luck, there would be something important she'd need to do or it would shoot backwards instead of out the front, and she'd kill herself.

A stick. That's what she needed. A really big stick. Apparently, she wielded a mean stick. She had taken out the last bad guy with a stick.

Feeling much better about herself after her mental barrage, she glanced out of the truck, looking for a likely weapon. Nothing. One thing about this woman; she kept a neat yard. Damn it.

Donovan came to the door and waved her in.

Scrambling out of the truck, Chrys tried for a sedate walk to where Donovan stood, but ended up power walking to him. "Is she here?"

"Yes."

Very informative. "And?"

He only shook his head.

What did that mean? Damn it. If someone didn't give her some strait fucking answers soon, she was going to start cussing. Then she saw the tears in his black silk shirt. She gasped and grabbed him, touching the tears lightly. He had four scratches across his chest seeping blood. Not much, but enough that Chrys put her hands on the collar of his shirt ready to rip it off.

"No. I'm fine. She had this glove that had sharp razor-like claws on it. She caught me with it before we were able to take it away. It doesn't even sting."

She stared into his eyes, gauging his honesty. Finally, she nodded.

Chrys followed Donovan into the living room. Ross stood over the woman from the jewelry store. Arms threaded through the rails of the chair she sat on, hands cuffed behind her back.

Inexplicably, the woman was growling and barking at them.

"Is she a werewolf?"

One loud yes, and two quieter no's answered her. "Well, which is it?"

"He said I am his mate and he'd get me the baby since I can't have one of his." Gladys growled and barked at Chrys specifically.

"You killed my mate. I heard people talking and they said you killed Pete."

"Yeah, well, he bit me and tried to rape me. I think I had the right."

"No. He loved *me!*"

Chrys wondered what the hell was going on.

"What the hell is going on?" Okay, so she hadn't asked it as calmly as it had sounded in her head, but her shout brought answers.

Donovan took her arm and led her to a couch. "From what I've been able to glean from our suspect," he motioned to Gladys who had returned to growling and barking. "Pete came

to town, met and romanced her, then moved in. He told her about werewolves and mates and convinced her she was his. She thinks she's a werewolf because he bit her."

He turned a hate filled glare at the yapping woman. "And, she's the one who's been trying to take Lizzy. Pete told her that the baby was meant to be theirs and that's why they killed your family."

Chrys felt herself growing madder and madder. This woman was responsible, directly or indirectly, of the deaths of Lee, Anne, Susan, and Anthony.

"Donovan, you and Ross go outside. Now."

"Why?"

"So I can change and show her what a real werewolf looks like. I'm going to rip her to shreds."

Ross stood between her and the woman in the chair. "Chrys, you know I can't allow that. She's going to go to trial."

"Not likely. Everyone is going to say she's nuts and she'll go to a nice, comfortable institution. Not prison where Beulah will make her her bitch."

Donovan lifted her and hauled her out of the house. "Chrys. You have to calm down. I know you feel the need for revenge, but you must think about Lizzy. One case of self defense, people can live with. Two would be stretching the limit. The courts might decide to take her away from us. Could you live with that?"

No, damn it, she couldn't. "Fine. Get me the hell out of here before I forget my good nature."

He called back to Ross. "I'll let you get on with what you have to do here. I'm taking my mate for a run. I'll call you in the morning."

"Yeah, yeah. Go on. I'm going to call in the troops and we're going to have the judge write us out a search warrant and tear this place apart."

The men exchanged a look that Chrys didn't understand. Donovan nodded slightly and turned her away from the house and led her down the street and into the woods.

One thing about Nowhere, go fifty feet and you're five feet into the woods.

He gently grasped her by the shoulders and turned her toward him. "Do you want to run?"

Yes, actually, she did. Her wild side called to her, wanting her to change and howl. "What about our clothes?"

"We'll come back here to change back."

The plan worked for her, and she started to peel off her clothes.

They folded their clothing, putting them in the crook of a tree where they would stay safe until they returned later.

Donovan kissed her hard and stepped back. Breathless, she watched him change.

Man, that was hot. His turning triggered her own shift. The muscles rippled on her arms and red hair sprouted from her pores. Her fingers curled into a fist and her eyes closed, much to her dismay.

Damn, I wanted to watch. She knew she was pouting, but she'd wanted to witness her own transformation.

You'll have to watch me during the change because we are unable to see ourselves change. Everything has to go through an alteration, including our eyes. Watching is impossible. However, you could tape the change with a camcorder.

Chrys rubbed her shoulder against the huge black wolf. *I'd be using the camera for other activities of ours instead of catching the shift.*

His bark was filled with laughter. *I'm mated to a pervert.* He licked her on the nose and rubbed his face against hers. *I'm a lucky dog.*

Oh my god. You made a joke. Chrys rolled around on the ground laughing. The grass and other forest debris felt good against her body so she kept up the act for a moment longer.

Donovan watched her, tongue hanging out. *Are you ready to run?*

She leapt to her feet. She was getting good at controlling them all at the same time. *As I'll ever be.*

They ran through the forest, going deeper into the uninhabited area. Chrys enjoyed the sensation of the wind on her fur, the soft ground beneath the pads of her feet, and the taste of nature on her tongue. She could see better, smell everything, and hear even the tiniest bug.

Being a wolf is so cool, Donovan.

Yes, it is, now. It wasn't always for me. But since I met you, being who I am is...good. He licked her nose again, making her sneeze. *Thank you for bringing me happiness.*

You are such a poet at heart, Donovan. I love you so much. Learning from him, she licked at his nose.

They reached the top of a high hill and looked out over the valley that Nowhere occupied. The sun had gone down and twilight was setting in.

Donovan tipped his head up and howled. Ululating his enjoyment of life, he serenaded the town.

Looked like fun, so Chrys joined him. Oh, the joy, the freedom of howling at twilight when the stars were just starting to glitter and the quiet was thick.

Other howls joined theirs, coming from several different directions. She knew that two came from Kyle and Lannie's house, and Amalee was out there too, but there were voices she couldn't identify. They sounded sad and lonely, but glad they could join in the song.

My agents. They sing for you.

Chrys thought that was so sweet, she barked them a greeting and welcome. It was the least she could do when they added to her enjoyment of the evening.

Crowding her, Donovan rubbed his body against hers. He'd never been more proud of a person as he was with Chrys at this moment. She gave his people the same treatment as she would a family friend. Her greeting would mean a lot to them and they would show their gratitude in ways she would never expect. He wondered if she had a big freezer at the house. His family would be bringing her their fresh kills. Their way of thanking her. To his people, food was better than money and fresh meat was always the best.

He'd have to check the fuel in her brother's grill. Looked like they were going to have a barbeque. He barked a time to show at the house to the denpack and they howled their acceptance.

His old family would meet his new family. They were going to love Lizzy. Susan was likely to spoil her to madness, but they would all protect her with their lives.

Chrys howled a good night to the agents and the others and twitched her tail at him. *I want to run some more, then go get Lizzy and go home.* The way she said *home* had his cock hardening. He could smell her growing arousal and his leapt to keep pace.

Even as a wolf, she was sexy.

Hurry up. I've got plans and you're slowing me down.

Chrys took off, and he followed right on her heels. His heart was light, his life was full. Nothing like a week ago when he was alone, lonely, and considering taking off into the woods.

Now he had something to live for, to fight for, and to die for. And with the promise of a cub or four of his own to go along with the little redheaded green-eyed charmer, his life was complete.

Damn, he was so pussy whipped.

* * * * *

Ross glared at Donovan who glared right back. "You knew this was going to happen, so quit bitching. She's a psycho and the court officials will never get her to trial. She said that you and Chrys had to pay for killing Pete, which is why you'd been plagued by the vandalism. She's the one that killed those people in the clinic. And the worst of it was the whole basement was filled with big pickle jars. Each one had a head in it. The heads were from the victims of the werewolf that had been here killing people. There were lots of them. We knew he was taking the heads, but shit! We're still trying to identify most of them. They weren't locals, and I had to put out an alert searching for missing people or decapitated bodies in an attempt to do so. It's not a pretty situation out there. The creepiest thing was she kept calling them her babies."

“So, she goes to a mental institution and lives her life without paying for her crimes.” Donovan’s dark rumble was followed by several others.

Chrys had been listening to the sheriff, but had come to terms with what had happened to her family members. They had been laid to rest and now she was left to raise Lizzy to the best of her ability.

Glancing around the room, she smiled. She had always considered this room an overly large one. But with the addition of Donovan’s four hunters, all just as huge and dark as he -- the female being only inches shorter than the males -- they sure filled a room to bursting.

And they loved Donovan to distraction. Oh, they didn’t show it in any physical way, but they stood behind him, and any opposition he met was met by them. In force and deadliness.

Sending approving smiles to each one of the agents, Chrys watched as each met her glance, colored slightly, and dipped their heads.

She met Susan’s gaze and they smiled at each other. They had loved each other on sight, and after having lost her mother years ago, it was like having a new one. And Lizzy, who sat on Susan’s lap, was in heaven. Susan sat in a comfortable chair and the agents stood within arm’s reach, picking up toys as Lizzy threw them, and handing them back to her. Lizzy knew a good game when she found one, so kept the agents busy retrieving her toys.

She looked at her mate and smiled secretively. When she’d asked, he told her the other ring and necklace was for Lizzy. She was part of the package, so he thought she should have a ring of her own. Man, she loved him so much.

Donovan and Ross had been discussing Gladys Marsden for thirty minutes now and Chrys was tired of the tension. “I thought we were here to eat some of that great meat that your family brought, Donovan.”

They’d brought so much fresh meat, she had at first wondered if the store had any left for the other townspeople. Donovan had whispered in her ear that the agents had gone hunting for her last night, and were offering her their kills as their alpha female.

“I thought Lannie Sylia was the alpha.”

Donovan had nodded. “They are the alphas for the North American werewolf clan, but the agents see me as their alpha. Hunters live on the outskirts of our society and we sort of formed our own denpack. By might and right, I am the leader, and as such, that makes you alpha female.”

Chrys had accepted the gifts as they were meant to be given, and thanked each one, kissing their cheeks.

Each had colored, shocking Donovan, but offered her a small smile. That shocked Donovan even more. He’d told her in private that his agents were thought to be emotionless robots.

“Why, that’s just mean. They’re nice people and anyone who says different is going to have to deal with me.”

Donovan had kissed her so hard she couldn't breathe for a solid minute after he let her go. "You make a perfect alpha. Thank you."

"Well," was all she'd been able to manage as he stepped away from her.

They'd had a lovely meal, ate lots of fresh meat, and the sheriff had joined them. He was as quiet and stand-offish as the werewolves, and Chrys thought he might be one at heart.

Amalee showed up saying that the smell of fresh meat was going to kill her and she'd come begging. Chrys welcomed her, introducing her to the agents. She took to them so well, with her overpowering exuberance, that they didn't know what hit them before they were answering her questions on just about everything.

Chrys and Amalee were pouring drinks when the doctor posed a quiet question. "Who is the blond Adonis?"

"Who? Ross?" Since Ross was the only light-haired person in the house, she figured her guess was right. "He's the sheriff here in town."

"Yeah?" Amalee perked a little. "Well, so much for pot belly and dip chewing hick. I sure had him pegged wrong. He sure gets my juices flowing, if you know what I mean."

Chrys did since Donovan did that to her every time she even thought about him. She'd been so lucky to have his pheromones imprint on her first. So, so lucky.

"I'm going to have to go now, Chrys. Thanks for having me." Ross brushed past Amalee, stopped, sniffed the air, shook his head, and walked out the door.

"Well, that was weird." Chrys looked after the departed sheriff and wondered at his odd actions.

"Yeah. Do I smell or something?" Amalee sniffed her underarm jokingly, but the expression in her eyes didn't match her jovial tone. She looked hurt.

Chrys wrapped her arm around Amalee's shoulders and squeezed. "Men suck."

"I do if you're a good girl." Donovan's arm slid around her waist and she leaned back into him. "Why are we man bashing in here?"

"Ross said bye, sniffed the air, then split without a word or a look at Amalee. She'd just been saying he was cute. Men are so insensitive."

"Yeah, men are such jerks." Donovan laughed.

A startled howl erupted from outside, drawing everyone to the yard in a hurry.

"What the heck?"

Amalee gasped and ran toward the white wolf lying on the ground next to the sheriff's truck. "Quit fighting it, doofus. It'll hurt less."

"Doofus? Who is it?"

"Well, mate, now I know why he wouldn't even get within sniffing distance of my hunters." Donovan wrapped a loving arm around Chrys and tugged her back into the house. "It seems our esteemed human sheriff isn't so human after all."

“This is so just desserts,” the doctor continued. “You deserve this for making me feel like I need a stronger deodorant. You could have...”

The front door closed and Donovan leaned her against it. “Things are going to get interesting around here.”

“They weren’t already?”

Chrys wrapped her arms around his neck and kissed him with a happy laugh.

 THE END 

Brenda Bryce

Brenda Bryce has been married to the same wonderful man for half her life. He gave her three children during that time.

As time passed and the children grew, Brenda took up writing to give her a little “me” time. She also loves crochet and knitting and reads to the dismay of her husband, who is tired of tripping over piles of books and yarn.

She spent four years in the U.S. Army when she was young and is very proud to have served her country.

As a transplant to Southern California she has learned to love the desert and 100+ degree heat -- it is a “dry” heat, you know -- and the sunsets are worth it.