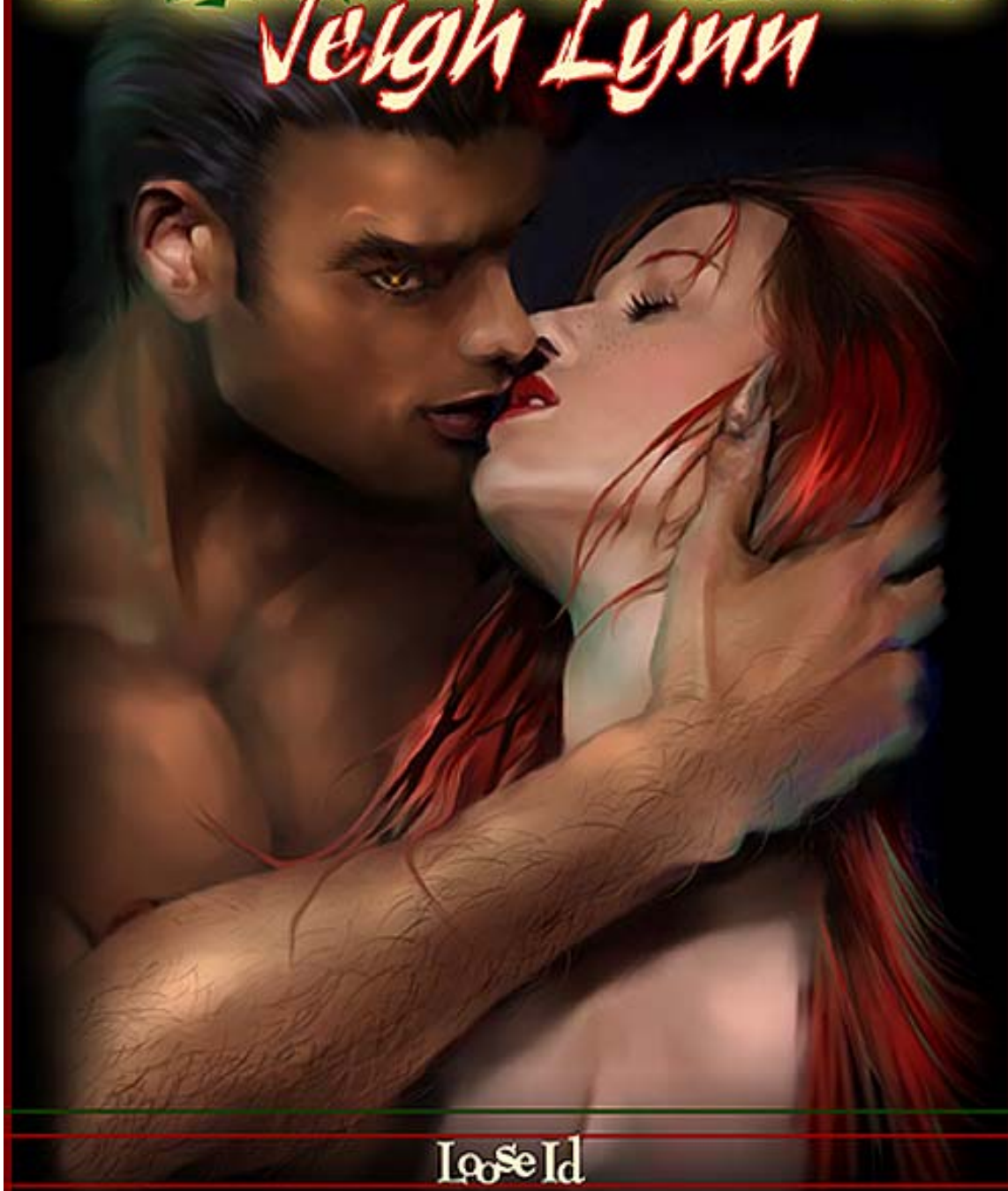


A LOVER'S MOON

Teigh Lynn



Loose Id

Praise for the writing of Jeigh Lynn

Latin Moon

I absolutely loved *Latin Moon*. Ms. Lynn has written a novel that flows so well that I found myself at the last page before I knew what happened...*Latin Moon* is so smoothly written and well formulated that I enjoyed every passage and am craving more.

-- Francesca Hayne, *Just Erotic Romance Reviews*

Jeigh Lynn's *Latin Moon* is a book that you should not miss! Alex and Jessica are unforgettable characters that you will instantly fall in love with. The physical and emotional connection between the two will amaze you.

-- Tewanda, *Fallen Angel Reviews*

What's not to love about the werewolves in *Latin Moon*? They are sexy, primal, and very alpha. Ms. Lynn won't disappoint fans of the genre with this story.

-- Patricia Green, *Romance Reviews Today*

There are many characters in this book, but each has a place in it and it's a pleasure to get to know them. Alex's loving family is a large one with brothers, sisters, cousins – and not a homely guy in the bunch! In fact, there are more hunks than you can shake a stick at and every one of them is werewolf – mate for life – sexy. More to come from this talented author, all she needs to do is hurry–please!

-- Johnna, *Euro-Reviews*

Latin Moon is now available from Loose Id.

A LOVER'S MOON

Jeigh Lynn

LooseId
www.loose-id.com

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This book is rated:



For explicit sexual content and graphic language.

A Lover's Moon

Jeigh Lynn

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Publisher's Note

A Lover's Moon is the second standalone book in the Moon series. Latin Moon, the first book, is now available from Loose Id.

Dedication

To my CP Brenda Bryce. You're next!!!

Special thanks to: Andre, just because you're you; the ladies of JBuL for critiquing and their support; to Olivia Wong and Raven McKnight for editing; and to Christine M. Griffin for not one, but two beautiful covers in this series.

Chapter One

Adrian took the keys out of Katherine's hand and unlocked the apartment door. His left arm was still wrapped around her waist, tucking her small frame under his shoulder. He hadn't been able to get more than a foot away from her all night, and he hadn't wanted to. Since the day they had met two weeks ago, they had spent all their free time together.

She and his cousin's mate, Jessica, were best friends, with similar thoughts and complementary personalities. Where Jess was outgoing and sometimes seemed to display a wild streak, Katherine was a little on the shy side. Without a doubt, Katherine was the most ladylike woman he'd ever dated. It was actually one of the things about her that had attracted him. She was beautiful and sexy as hell, but she was also very modest.

Tonight, they'd eaten dinner and forgone the movie when he'd suggested that they rent a video instead. He wanted to toss the video and make love to her, but she'd been raised by her grandparents and had some very definite ideas about relationships -- most of them a little old fashioned.

She flipped on the lights as Adrian shut the door. "Do you want something to drink?"

"No, thank you."

"Oh, okay." She stood there for several seconds. She looked lost, as if uncertain what to do next. He knew she hadn't had much experience with dating.

Adrian grinned at her nervousness, sat down on the couch, and crooked his finger at her. "Come here, Katherine."

She made her way to the couch and stood directly in front of him. He reached up and clasped her hand, his gaze taking in her little blue dress and heels. She was a tiny thing, but shapely, without the typical dancer's body; she and Jessica probably looked good dancing as a duet because they were very close to the same size and shape.

Kat's grin looked nervous as he pulled her down beside him, even though he had assured her that he'd let her set the pace in their relationship. Adrian knew she had planned to wait until she was married to have sex.

"Adrian?"

"Yes?"

"We should start the movie. Where did you put it?"

He smiled at her gently, tugging on her hand and pulling her into his lap. His fingers raked through her long, red hair, then pulled her lips down to his.

The first touch of his lips was tentative on hers; he wanted to give her time to protest. When she made no move to stop him, he deepened the light caress into a passionate embrace. His tongue caressed her bottom lip, seeking entrance. When she sighed and sank into his arms, parting her lips, he groaned.

As their tongues dueled, Adrian's hands found the zipper on the back of her dress. Easing the thin straps down her shoulders, he pulled on the dress and lowered her to the couch without losing contact with her mouth. Her arms wrapped around his neck and pulled him closer -- then she pulled back slightly with a gasp. Adrian looked down to see what had caught her attention. He didn't remember removing her dress and bra, but he must have; Katherine would not have done it herself.

She was so lovely; her beautiful breasts were as smooth as satin and much lighter than her arms and stomach, showing that she actually had a bit of a tan. That surprised him; she was so fair. He captured one pale globe in his darker hand and marveled at the contrast. Unable to help himself, Adrian dipped his head and caught a nipple between his teeth. She gasped but made no move to push him away, so he began to suckle gently.

As he switched his attention to the other breast, Kat groaned. The soft groan was all the encouragement he needed. He raised himself and started to pull her dress the rest of the way down her body. A hand on his arm stopped him; he glanced up into hesitant, regretful hazel eyes.

No, no, no, don't stop me now! He was on fire. He wanted her more than he remembered wanting anything in his life. The pain of his erection straining against his black slacks intensified at the thought of having her, but he knew he would stop if she wanted. He had too much respect for her to do otherwise. "What is it, Katherine?"

She blushed prettily and averted her eyes. "We can't do this, Adrian."

"Why not?" He asked, trying to keep the need and anticipation out of his voice.

"Because I want to wait till I'm married. It's stupid, really, and ... a long story, Adrian, but I need to wait. For myself, I need to wait."

"Okay." Adrian nodded hesitantly, but the scent of her obvious arousal was making him crazy. He was desperate to touch her some more, at least for a little while. "We can do other things without doing that." As soon as the words left his mouth, Adrian could have

slapped himself. *God, what is wrong with you?* That was pathetic -- he sounded like a teenage boy trying to talk his first girl into bed instead of a thirty-three-year-old man who had no problems getting laid.

Dropping his head to her chest, he kissed both breasts, then raised up and began to pull the dress back over her. He heard a soft, hesitant "Okay."

Adrian blinked several times, trying to decide if she'd actually said it or if it was just his wishful thinking. The shy flicker of her eyelashes before she met his gaze assured him it was real. He knew he should get up, help her dress, and apologize, but he couldn't. His body screamed at him to take her, make her his. It was instinctual and overpowering. She smiled up at him, clearly nervous, and he promised himself he'd stop before things got out of hand. He had amazing control, after all.

Laving kisses along the way, he slid the dress back down her body. When he came to the waistband of her white satin panties, he worked his fingers under it, only to be brought up short by Katherine's hand. He wouldn't be thwarted; he needed her. Her essence called to him, begging him to take what was his. He slid father down on the couch until he was mouth-level with his goal, then pulled the crotch of her panties aside.

Kat jumped; she hadn't expected that he'd continue his quest to get her lower half sans clothing. She'd been sure that once she stopped him from removing her panties, he'd slide back up and kiss her. She loved his kisses.

He kissed her, all right. His tongue slid all the way up her crease before flicking the stiff little bud at the top. She gasped at the pleasure, and all thoughts of stopping him fled. He continued to lave her, circling the tip of his tongue around her clit, then stopping every so often to dip his tongue inside her. Every time he plunged into her, tasting her essence, a soft groan left his throat. He was so focused and enraptured, he seemed oblivious to everything else.

The intimate caress was taking its toll on Kat's sanity. She'd never felt so alive, and her whole attention was centered between her thighs and what Adrian was doing. It was beyond wonderful. Pleasure began to radiate outward; her muscles were no longer under her control. Kat felt as if she were going to fly apart, and the sensation was a little frightening. Reaching down to push him away, she found her fingers clutching him closer instead. All thoughts fled her mind as a moan tore from her throat; her vision went white behind her eyelids, and her vaginal muscles erupted into pleasant contractions.

As she orgasmed, he seemed to be in a haze and fumbled with something between them. He grunted, then whispered, "I've got to fuck you. Got to be inside you, kitten ... now!"

He jerked her now-soaked panties aside. She heard the rending of fabric, but couldn't quite grasp the meaning of it. He found her wet entrance with his finger, thrusting it

forward, and then she felt the blunt tip of his cock against her. She couldn't help herself and pushed toward him. With one abrupt stroke, he was buried deeply inside her.

Kat screamed. It hurt! No one had told her it'd hurt that much. Kat tightened her arms around him and willed herself to relax as Adrian thrust into her again and again. Slowly, her body accepted his invasion, the pain subsided, and the pleasure began to mount again. Sighing, Kat let the pleasurable friction enchant her mind as well as her body. "I love you, Adrian."

Somewhere in the back of his mind Adrian heard her moan, not in pain, but in bliss. Again and again her soft sounds of pleasure reached his consciousness. Had she told him she loved him?

Slowing his pace slightly, he looked down through a fog and saw her. She lay writhing beneath him with her eyes closed and a blissful smile on her flushed face. She didn't appear to be in pain or distraught. In fact, she seemed quite content. Watching her beautiful face light up on each downward stroke was the last straw. With enough reason left to see to his kitten's needs, he reached down between their joined bodies and circled her clit with his finger. Her moan was his undoing. He surged forward, burying himself to the hilt as he poured his seed into her.

Dropping his head down beside hers, his senses slowly returned to normal. What happened? Had he hurt her?

He opened his mouth to ask, but felt his elongated canines between the couch cushion and his lip. He blinked several times. Adrian took a deep breath, trying to think. Had his eyes changed as well? Had Kat seen his teeth?

No, she couldn't have; she'd have freaked out. Or maybe she had freaked out and he hadn't known it? He couldn't remember what happened -- one moment he'd been kissing his way down her smooth, flat belly; the next thing he knew, she was writhing beneath him. What in the hell had he been thinking?

Adrian reached up to brush away the hair that had fallen in his eyes and realized that his hand had claws instead of fingers. He groaned and put his hand back down. What had happened to his tremendous control? The scent of blood tickled his nostrils. God, he'd taken her virginity, and he couldn't even remember it.

That was it. It must have been the blood. Yes, he was sure of it; after he had broken her hymen, the smell of blood had thrust him headlong into taking her. *But what had happened before that?* He'd been mindless before he ever slid into her warm, tight pussy. Adrian groaned again; he wasn't going to get his body under control thinking like that. Hell, he still had an erection that showed no signs of diminishing; not to mention his hands, eyes, and teeth were no doubt still transformed.

Taking a deep breath, Adrian pulled out of her and sat with his back to her. He had to get his body under control before she saw him.

"Did I do something wrong?"

He stiffened.

"Adrian?"

Abruptly, he stood and started toward the bathroom without looking back. "No. I'll be right back, Katherine."

Ashamed of his undisciplined body, and his inability to overcome its reactions, he washed up and tried to regain some sense of normalcy with his body. It was useless; his hands and teeth finally cooperated after several minutes, but his cock and eyes were not listening to reason.

He'd never had any problems controlling himself; in fact, he'd been proud of it. He was one of the few in his family who could resist the pull of the moon and had actually managed to hold off his change completely on the night of a full moon.

It had to have been her scent combined with the blood. He had to get away from her, at least for the night.

When he left the bathroom, Katherine was sitting on the sofa, her clothes now back in place. The sight of her made his gut clench. She was so beautiful. And so upset. He had to talk to her. Adrian sat down next to her and took her small hand. At the contact, his teeth exploded in his mouth so unexpectedly that his breath caught. He knew at once he'd never get through this without her finding out what he was. He had to leave!

His mind whirled with possible excuses. It had to be good or she'd hate him.

Work-related. Thank God for small favors; as a neurosurgeon, he had an easy excuse.

He leaned in, kissed her on the cheek, and stood, turning away from her toward the door. "Katherine, I have to leave; I forgot about a patient that I operated on this afternoon. I'll call you tomorrow, okay? Will you meet me for lunch?"

"You're leaving?"

He nodded gently as she walked him to the door. His heart twisted in his chest at the pain he was causing her, but he had to get away. "I'm sorry; I have to go."

"Okay, I'll see you tomorrow."

As soon as the door closed behind him, he heard her sink to the floor and sob.

* * * * *

Adrian pulled into the parking lot of the dance studio and saw Katherine right away. He'd called an hour ago and told her he'd take her to lunch. The conversation had been brief, with no mention of last night.

She sat on a bench outside the front door, her feet dangling because she was too short to reach the ground. The sunlight glinted off her red ponytail, giving her an ethereal aura,

making her appear childlike. She was looking down at her kicking feet and had not noticed his arrival.

His wayward cock hardened instantly, his breath hitched, and his heart pounded in his ears. Adrian groaned, took a deep breath, and willed his disobedient anatomy to behave and his heart rate to slow. His response to her was still acute, compounded by last night's folly.

Adrian parked the car and got out. He'd been awake half the night thinking about her, hoping he'd keep his discipline when in her presence. Considering what had happened, he'd felt terrible about leaving so abruptly, but he'd had no choice. If there was one thing Adriano Kyle Garrett could not tolerate or afford, it was lack of control.

When she heard his car door shut, her head jerked up. Her lips turned into a slow smile as he walked toward her. The sunglasses on his nose bobbed a fraction as he raised his eyebrows in greeting. The soft breeze carried her scent across the parking lot, teasing his nose and wreaking havoc on his senses. Adrian had never wanted anyone as much as he did Katherine. It was a *need*. The hard-won control he'd gotten back in the car was slipping. His wayward body was not listening to reason, and his stiffening cock and accelerated heart rate were only part of the problem.

He knew the instant his eyes dilated and changed and gave thanks that he was wearing sunglasses. The stinging in his gums alerted him to the presence of his canines.

No one had ever affected him like this; it was completely unacceptable. He'd fought too long and too hard to keep his animal nature in check. He'd even given up a career in football because the rough play had triggered his baser instincts. No way was he giving up on all he'd worked so hard to master. Like football, Katherine would have to go.

Kat stood and started to wrap her arms around him, but stopped when she caught sight of his face. She sat back down. He saw a tear slip out as he took a seat beside her.

She glanced up at him, unable and unwilling to hide her hurt.

His heart warred with his mind. This was the hardest thing he'd ever done. Women had always been a dime a dozen, but she was special. His heart knew he wanted to spend a lifetime with her, but his head knew he couldn't; he had not intended to give her up, but his reaction to her demanded he do so. What good was he if he couldn't control his own body? What if he inadvertently hurt her?

Taking a deep breath, he resisted the urge to touch her. Seeing the tears in her eyes would be his undoing, so he lowered his head again. He told himself it was to keep her from seeing his teeth, but he knew it was because he couldn't stand to see her pain. "Katherine, you deserve a hell of a lot better than me."

Kat hiccupped. She sat quietly for several seconds, then suddenly jumped off the bench and stepped in front of him. "Don't you dare! Don't you lie to me! Just say it and be on your way. You got what you wanted from me! Don't insult my intelligence by telling me how sorry you are, and how you're doing this for me!"

Adrian's startled gaze met her angry one. He'd never heard her raise her voice or seen any hint of the infamous "redhead temper" in her. He sighed in relief; she had no idea how she'd just made things easier for him. This he could deal with. He could stand her fury; it was much more preferable than her tears.

"Fine. It's over, Katherine. I don't want to see you anymore." With that, he stood and walked away. He got in his Navigator without looking back and knew that he'd just made the biggest mistake of his life.

Chapter Two

Three months later ...

“We’re going to have to destroy that baby, but first I want to know who the father is.”

A soft feminine voice gasped. “But, Doctor, what are you going to tell Miss Andrews? You can’t tell her that her baby and its father aren’t human! She’ll think you’re crazy. What if she doesn’t agree to an abortion?”

“We’ll tell her something is wrong with it -- *after* we find out who the father is.”

Kat stopped in the middle of putting her pants back on as the whispered words sank in. She slapped her hand over her mouth and sat down on the chair provided in the examining room. *Abortion?*

Quickly, she got back up and finished dressing; she had to get out of this office! What was the proper protocol when one discovered one’s OB/GYN was a whacko? Shouldn’t she report him to some kind of medical board or something?

Kat blinked back tears and shook her head, her auburn ponytail swaying slightly. Lovingly, and a little bit in awe, she put her hand on her still-flat stomach and smiled. She was only fourteen weeks along, but already she loved her baby, and no one was going to take it from her.

Unsure what to do, Kat plastered a smile on her face, picked up her purse, and walked out of the examining room, pretending everything was normal -- and that she hadn’t overheard the ramblings of that madman. She wouldn’t be coming back, but wasn’t going to divulge that information today. First, she had to get ahold of Alex and find out to whom she could report psycho doctors.

Kat kept her head down, trying to look inconspicuous and sneak out of the office. She got to the edge of the nurse's station, when someone cleared their throat. *Darn it!*

"Ah, Miss Andrews, I was just looking over your chart and noticed you hadn't listed the name of your baby's father."

Kat's head snapped up, and she turned slowly toward the nurse. "No, I didn't." Kat clutched her purse tighter against her chest, her heart pounding.

"We really do need that, you know. It's always best to have the father's family medical history. That way we can anticipate any problems that may arise. If you don't wish to contact him yourself, we can do that for you." She drew out a pen and picked up a pad of paper in front of her, looking rather anxious. "Now, what is his name, Miss Andrews?"

Kat took a deep breath; her palms were sweating. She did not have to answer, and she was not required by law to list a father on any information -- even the birth certificate. She really wanted to get out of this office. The longer she stayed, the more creeped out she became; these people were certifiable. She hated to lie, even to people who deserved to be lied to -- and this lie was going to make her sound horrible, make her sound just like her mother -- but she had no choice; the nurse was only going to continue to pester her.

"I don't know his name. I don't even know him. I met him in a bar. It was a one-night stand, and I've no idea how to get ahold of him." There! That left no room for argument. Jess would be proud.

The nurse shook her head. "Now, Miss Andrews, you just don't strike me as the type. I can't possibly believe you'd have a casual fling." She tapped the pen on the pad for emphasis and leveled a glare at Kat. "We really need that name."

Kat felt as if the breath was punched out of her. What the heck was she supposed to say now? She didn't say a word; she did the only thing she could think of. Spinning on her heels, she marched right out of the office. She'd reached the parking lot before she heard the office door slam open and gravel crunching behind her.

"Miss Andrews!"

She glanced over her shoulder at the nurse running after her, then frantically dug into her purse for her keys. Quickening her pace, Kat got to her car, jammed the key in the lock, and jerked the door open before the woman caught up with her. By the time she was seated inside with her door locked, the nurse was pounding on her window. "Miss Andrews, open up. We need to talk about this!"

Somehow, her trembling fingers got the ignition going. Without looking at the furious woman beating on her car window, she backed out of the parking space and put her car in gear. As she pulled onto the street, she caught a glimpse in her rearview mirror of her doctor running out of the office, shouting something.

Kat was shaken up. The first thought that entered her head was: *There is safety in numbers* ... which scared her even more. Her heart was beating so hard she could actually

hear it. The fingers clutching the steering wheel were white-knuckled, and she was trembling. She needed to get someplace and calm down; her agitated state couldn't possibly be good for the baby.

She didn't know what to do. Jess and Alex were out of town on their honeymoon, the studio she owned with Jess was closed for the summer, and her grandparents had moved to a retirement community three hours away. So much for safety in numbers.

She should call Jess; she'd know what to do. Kat reached into the passenger seat for her cell phone and remembered that she'd forgotten to charge it again. The battery was deader than a doornail. *Great! Just great!*

Kat took a deep breath and calmed her breathing. Getting even more worked up wasn't going to help things. She didn't want to be alone, but she couldn't think of any other options.

After driving around for twenty minutes thinking, she finally decided to go home. She'd call Jess and Alex and tell them what happened; they'd help her figure out what to do.

The apartment complex was nothing special, but it was home, at least for now. Alex and Jess had offered to let her rent a guestroom in their house after the baby was born, and she was seriously considering it.

Pulling into the reserved space in front of her apartment, Kat turned off the ignition. She was about to open the door when a movement to her left caught her eye. She glanced up just in time to see her doctor getting out of the passenger side of a black SUV.

Kat wasted no time. Her fight-or-flight instinct kicked in. She didn't even waste the time to panic. She turned the car back on and squealed tires backing out of her space. Shifting into drive, she floored it. The back of her little white Toyota Corolla fishtailed as she hit the access road. Throughout her panicked flight, she occasionally looked in her mirrors, trying to spot the SUV, but to her relief she'd seen nothing so far. She got on the highway and headed for the only place that came to mind -- Brent's house.

Brent was Alex's cousin and a cop. It was almost five o'clock; she hoped Brent was home. He'd help her figure out what the heck was going on and protect her, too.

Twenty minutes later, the sun was setting when she got off the highway. At the red light, she was the first in line. She looked back in her mirror again for about the fiftieth time; about ten cars behind her was the black SUV. She nearly screamed in terror. She looked both ways and, as soon as she got the chance, she stomped on the gas, running the red light and leaving the sound of several angry horns behind.

She turned onto Brent's street, praying someone would be home. She knew the house had a two-car garage; hopefully she'd bought herself enough time running that light to get her car hidden safely inside. She pulled into the driveway and noticed the porch light was on. She jumped out, leaving the door open and engine running. She sprinted to the front door, shouting as she went. "Brent! Brent!"

As her fists hit the door, it flew open. She fell right into the arms of the one man she never wanted to see again.

Kat froze. She didn't even have to look; she knew it was him. Her body always knew when he was around. What was he doing here?

She looked up into Adrian's brown eyes, shaken to the core. Suddenly seeing the father of her unborn baby brought everything crashing back to her. *Psycho doctor, black SUV!* She righted herself. On the dash back to her car, she yelled, "Open the garage door! Now! Hurry, hurry!"

Thank God Adrian didn't stop to question her. Apparently he heard the panic in her voice, because he shut the door immediately, and when she saw him again, he was standing at the back of the garage. He waited silently as she drove her car in. Before she got all the way inside, she shouted for him to shut the garage door. He pushed the button on the wall and ran to her car door. "What's going --?"

She got out of the car and turned to make sure the door was closing. She ran right past him and into the house to the picture window.

Adrian stormed in, right on her heels. "What in the --?"

"Shhhh! Turn the lights out! Quick!" Kat turned back to the window and peeked out.

The lights in the house and the porchlight blinked off, and Kat heard the footsteps come up behind her. Even without the noise, she'd have known he was there by the tingling sensation going up her spine.

Adrian took a deep breath, inhaling her scent as he peered out the window with her. His breath caught in his chest even as his body came to immediate attention and his cock hardened to full arousal. The separation hadn't helped at all -- he still lost control of his body when she was near. Sometimes just the thought of her was enough. But that wasn't the worst of it; he missed her ... terribly. *She's here; she's actually here.*

Something had scared the hell out of her. Her heart was pounding, her breathing was erratic, and she had sweat pouring off her temples.

His protective instincts kicked in. A soft, low growl escaped before he could hold it back. No one was allowed to frighten her like that. He wouldn't stand for it. *She's mine!* And she was so close. *Damn her!*

It had been too long since he'd touched her, talked to her. He's seen her last week at Alex and Jess's wedding, but she hadn't so much as looked at him then; in fact, she'd kept as far away from him as possible. Now she was standing in front of him, close enough to touch.

He reached out to stroke her soft red hair, but the sound of a car engine and her gasp of fear brought him back to reality. Katherine slid to the floor at his feet. She wrapped her arms around her knees and rocked back and forth. He glanced down at her when he heard her

sniffle, then quickly looked back out the window. Whoever had reduced her to this fear was going to pay.

Outside, a black SUV drove by very slowly. With his superior eyesight, Adrian could make out three passengers. Then a glimpse of something in one of their hands caught his attention. He narrowed his eyes and squinted. From where he stood, it was obvious that the man held a rifle. He let go of the blinds and stepped back.

“What in the hell have you gotten yourself into, Katherine?”

Chapter Three

Adrian looked down at his feet where Katherine lay sound asleep. He didn't know how long he'd stood at the window peering out into the darkness, but Katherine had long since slumped over and dozed off. She might not like him, but she apparently felt safe enough with him to fall asleep. That was promising.

He had no idea what was going on, but one thing was certain: they couldn't stay here. After seeing the gun and how many times the black SUV circled the block, Adrian had no doubts that whoever these guys she'd pissed off were, they were some serious players. If she stayed here, it would only be a matter of time before those men figured out where she was.

Crouching down beside her, he brushed a lock of hair out of her face. She looked so pale and fragile. He brushed at the tears staining her cheek, but couldn't get them off; they'd long since dried. She must have been terrified to stay here after she'd discovered he was in residence. No doubt she had come to Brent for protection. *Well, you got a surprise, didn't you, honey? You obviously weren't aware I was living here. Looks like you've had a bad day all around.*

Adrian scooped her up into his arms. She was so small, so light. He carried her over to the couch and gently placed her in the center. She snuggled down into the cushions, unaware of his presence. Unable to stop himself, he bent down and kissed her pale forehead.

God, he'd missed her! The two short weeks they'd been together had been the happiest of his life. He'd never before felt the intense sense of belonging he felt with her. It was like they were two halves of a whole, and when he'd left her, he'd left his other half behind. *Good God, you're getting sappy in your old age.* Adrian shook his head and left Katherine asleep on the couch while he went about getting a few things together.

On his way to the guestroom he'd been using, Adrian snagged the cordless phone and dialed Brent's cell number. Balancing the phone on his shoulder as he waited for an answer, he rummaged through the closet and found a duffel bag.

As he threw the bag on the bed, Brent answered. "Hernandez."

"Brent, I've got a problem, bro. I need you to run a plate for me."

"Sure, coz, what's up?"

He gave Brent the license plate number that he'd committed to memory, then pulled open his dresser drawer and pulled out several pairs of underwear, socks, and shorts.

"Katherine is here. She's in trouble. Some guys with assault rifles in a black Ford Bronco were following her."

"WHAT?!"

Adrian pulled the phone away from his ear. He should have expected that reaction. Katherine was the very embodiment of "good girl." And good girls did not get into scrapes involving men with guns.

After a few seconds, he put the phone back on his shoulder and stalked back to his closet. "You heard me; she was being followed by some goons in a Bronco with guns."

"What in the holy hell did she do?"

"I have no earthly idea. She isn't exactly forthcoming with info where I'm concerned. She barely managed to speak to me long enough to order me to open the garage door for her." As he continued to pack, Adrian told Brent everything that had happened.

"All right, Adrian, I'll check it out and get back to you. What are you going to do with Kat? I don't think she should stay there."

Adrian zipped up his bag and sat down on the edge of the bed. "I'm taking her to the cabin. I'm off work all week." He let out a sigh, then flopped back on the bed. Staring up at the ceiling, he continued. "She's not going to like it, but no way am I leaving her by herself."

"You're right, she isn't going to like it, and quite frankly I can't blame her. You ass!"

Adrian groaned. Brent, his other cousins, Alex and Dash, and his younger brother, Julian, knew what had happened between him and Katherine. *He* hadn't told them, but they all knew, thanks to Jess, he presumed. Until now, none of them had commented or mentioned their feelings about it, but he'd felt their censure where she was concerned. Still, they'd let him muddle through it. Apparently, their silence was over.

"Look, I don't want to get into this right now. I know I wasn't exactly Mr. Nice Guy where Katherine is concerned, but I had my reasons. Right now I'm more interested in protecting her than explaining our relationship to you, so lay off! You can butt in later after she's safe."

Brent sighed. "All right, but I've held my tongue long enough. You can rest assured that after we get this situation in hand, you're going to get the ass-chewing you deserve."

Adrian rolled his eyes. "Fair enough. Now run those plates and figure out what the hell is going on. Once she wakes up, I'll get some answers from her and try to make sense out of this, then give you a call."

"I'll see what I can find out." There was a long pause before Brent continued, his voice softer, gentler, "Be careful, bro."

Adrian smiled and closed his eyes. "Will do."

He was about to say goodbye when Brent spoke again. "Adrian?"

"Yeah?"

"You are going to be alone with Kat. Don't screw this up! Use this time to your advantage."

Adrian grinned. "I plan on it, coz ... I plan on it."

"Good. And Adrian?"

"What is it?"

"My backup piece is in the top drawer of my nightstand. Take it, and the ammo, too."

Before Adrian could respond, the line went dead.

Adrian sat up, turned the phone off, and tossed it into his duffel bag. He got up, grabbed his bag, turned out the lights, and shut the door, then went down the hall to the bathroom to get his electric razor and toothbrush. After throwing them in his bag, he slung it over his shoulder and walked to Brent's room. There were plenty of guns at the cabin, but he did need something for the trip out there ... just in case.

He stepped inside the master bedroom and flipped on the light before making his way to the nightstand right by the big four-poster bed. The semi-automatic handgun sat beside a box of ammo inside the top drawer. He tossed his bag on the bed and unzipped it, then grabbed the box and threw it in the bag. Picking up the gun, he made sure the safety was on, then slid the slide back just enough to ascertain if there was one in the pipe. Knowing Brent, he had been certain there would be, but he checked anyway. Packing away the gun, he zipped up the bag and hefted it over his shoulder again. Turning out the lights, he closed Brent's door behind him. Time to go get Katherine. Adrian sighed and headed toward the living room where he'd left her sleeping.

Katherine lay on her side in the middle of the couch, her knees bent and her hands resting under her head. Adrian wondered how anyone could want to hurt her. She looked so angelic and innocent. As soon as he thought it, he groaned; his entire body responded.

The thought of her innocence brought back the memory of that night. Or rather what he remembered of it. After nearly four months, he still didn't have a clear recollection of what had happened. One minute he'd been kissing her; the next, he'd been deep inside her, staring down into her big hazel eyes. How he'd gotten from point A to point B was a blur. Adrian sighed again and bent down to pick up her purse.

His time spent with her, though brief, had changed him. He no longer wanted the life of a bachelor, and he was no longer content being alone. She'd domesticated him. He wanted the white picket fence, the two-point-five kids, the dog -- all of it. The only problem was, he didn't want it with anyone but Katherine.

He'd even decided to buy a house. The sleek loft apartment downtown had lost its appeal. He'd bought a lot three spaces down from Alex's home in the hopes that he'd see Katherine from time to time since Alex was married to her best friend. He'd moved in temporarily with Brent and Julian until his new house was complete. And as fate would have it, she'd wound up here on Brent's doorstep. *It's a sign. It all adds up too perfectly to be anything else.* Here was the chance he'd been waiting for. He was going to get her back.

Deep in thought, Adrian went to the garage and put his bag and Katherine's purse in his SUV, then covered her car with a tarp. He ran back to his room and grabbed a pillow and the quilt off his bed, folding the quilt in half and laying it between the front and second row of seats. The pillow completed the makeshift pallet.

By the time Adrian got back to the living room, he'd come to a decision. He couldn't live without her anymore. It was a concern and a relief at the same time. He no longer had to suffer her absence, but he had to win back his discipline, not to mention her trust. The question was, which of those things would kill him first?

He stood over her for several seconds, drinking in the sight of her. With his mind finally at ease for the first time in months, he took the time to really look at her. She looked thinner than she had the last time he'd seen her. Tendrils of bright red hair had escaped her ponytail and partially concealed her face, which was even paler than usual, and she had bags under her eyes.

Lowering himself to his knees, Adrian reached out and brushed the hair out of her face. The small contact with her soft skin had him breathing hard. His erection hadn't completely gone away since she'd arrived, but now it hardened to painful proportions.

The living room was dark now, and he realized he could see as well as if it were mid-afternoon. His eyes had turned. He adjusted himself, trying to make himself more comfortable, and took a deep, relaxing breath. Much more of this and he was going to have to take care of himself. This was going to be a frustrating few days and the perfect time to relearn control over his body.

He leaned down, kissed her cheek, and whispered, "You aren't going to scare me away this time, Katherine. You're mine. I will master the effect you have on me, and I'm going to keep you ... forever."

Chapter Four

Kat woke slowly to the realization that she was moving. She could hear soft music and the hum of an air conditioner. Opening her eyes, she saw the glow of a dashboard and knew at once where she was. Adrian had somehow gotten her into his SUV without waking her, and they were driving somewhere ... but where?

Kat tried to ascertain their location from her spot on the floorboards, but the only thing she could tell was that it was dark out and they were somewhere with a lot of trees.

"Where are we?"

Adrian jumped at the sound of her voice. "About five miles away from my family's cabin."

"Why?" Kat rolled over onto her back and ran her hands over her face, trying to come fully awake. "Can I sit up? I do hope you made sure no one was following us."

Adrian groaned. "Yes, I made sure we weren't followed. And yes, you can sit up."

She pushed herself upright, then stretched her arms over her head. As she crawled to the passenger seat and sat down, she asked, "Why are you taking me to your family's cabin? I don't remember asking for your help. If you'll just loan me your cell phone ..."

Adrian turned his head to face her. He looked appalled. "Just who in the hell do you think is going to help you, if not me? Your grandparents? Need I remind you that Alex and Jess are in Mexico?" Kat started to speak, but he cut her off as he looked back at the road. "Don't even say it, because you damn sure do need help. Those men had guns, Katherine!" He slammed his hand down on the steering wheel. "What the fuck are you involved in?"

Kat opened her mouth to speak, then closed it again. She stared at him, horrified, her eyes wide. "Guns? Are you sure?" she asked quietly. She hadn't realized the men had been armed. They were crazier than she'd thought. She was in way over her head here. Unfortunately, it looked like she was going to have to accept his help.

Adrian let out a sigh and glanced at her again. "Assault weapons, to be exact, but, yes, they had guns."

"Wow."

"Wow? That's all you can say ... wow?"

"What do you want me to say?" What *could* she say? She certainly couldn't tell him the truth.

He sighed, obviously not happy with her. "I don't know, Katherine, I don't know. I just want you to tell me what is going on. And don't say that you have no idea. How can you not know why someone is hunting you with guns?"

How could she answer that question without lying? There was absolutely no way she was going to tell him about the baby. But she would definitely take the protection he offered. At least for now. She would not put her baby at risk because she was too proud to take help from him. "I want to shoot *you*. Did you know that?"

There was no hiding the smirk that played at his lips. "Yes, and I know why. Stop changing the subject."

Kat ran her hands down her face. "As long as you know. Do you have a gun?"

Adrian groaned, shook his head, then chuckled. "Very funny. Now, spill it."

She finally decided on a half-truth. "When I pulled in to my apartment complex, they were waiting for me. They scared me, so I ran. They followed, and that scared me even more. I ran a red light to keep them from catching me."

He sat there for several seconds, digesting the information. As he turned off the paved road onto a gravel one, he said, "Think, Katherine. There must be a reason they're after you. Maybe you saw something? A crime being committed?" He paused, concentrating on the road as he made another turn. "What about your parents?"

Kat grimaced; just the mention of her parentage had her nerves tensing. She did not want to talk about her mother. "What about my parents?"

Adrian had to have picked up on the warning tone in her voice, but he chose to ignore it. "You never talk about them. I know you aren't close to them, but could they be involved in something? Maybe these people are after you because of your parents."

She closed her eyes and leaned back in the seat, suddenly very tired. "I don't have parents."

"Everyone has parents."

She sighed and looked out the passenger window. He obviously wasn't going to drop it, and she was too worn out by the day's events to argue with him. "I don't. I have no idea who my father is, and my mother is a druggie who got knocked up."

Adrian was silent.

"I don't even know her. I wouldn't recognize her if she came up and slapped me." She had never told anyone but Jess about her mother, and she wasn't sure why she was telling Adrian now. She certainly didn't owe him an answer, but maybe she felt he had a right to know. After all, it was part of *his* baby's history and genetic makeup. Not that she ever intended to tell him about the baby.

In a way, it felt good to get it out in the open. "She left me at the hospital after she had me. The social workers contacted my grandparents, and they took me in. My grandpa says she's a drug addict. They had tried to help her, but she was in and out of rehab until they finally cut her off after he got tired of her stealing from them. When they got the call about me, they hadn't heard from her in over three years. In a sense, I think they replaced her with me." She paused. "There's a warrant out on her for abandoning me. I doubt she even knows my grandparents took custody of me. She's probably dead by now."

"I'm sorry."

Kat glanced over at him. He looked tense. She bet he hadn't been expecting the answer he'd gotten. "Don't be. And, for crying out loud, I don't need your pity. My grandparents are wonderful. They've always loved me and provided me with a stable home."

Adrian pulled up to a locked gate. Opening the door, he looked at Kat. "Slide over here and drive through when I open the gate."

Kat took off her seatbelt, got up, and slid behind the wheel. She had to sit on the edge of the seat for her feet to touch the pedals. She watched as Adrian pulled a set of keys out of his pocket and set to work on the lock. What would he do if she honked the horn? She smiled, barely containing her mirth at the thought. It really wouldn't be a very nice thing to do. Then again, he deserved all the grief she could dish out, didn't he?

The little devil on her shoulder took over. She smiled evilly and slammed her hand down on the horn.

Adrian jumped, then spun around and glared at her. A stream of angry Spanish soon followed. She smiled really big and waved to him. As soon as he turned back around to the gate, she burst out laughing.

After she pulled through the gate and Adrian locked it behind her, he opened the passenger door and got in. "Very freakin' funny, Katherine."

She didn't bother to hide her smile. "Just trying to keep you on your toes."

He frowned, then pointed toward a clump of trees. "Head toward those trees; the cabin is right past them."

"Is there indoor plumbing in the cabin?"

He raised his eyebrows at her question, then gave her a lopsided grin. "Does an outhouse count as indoor plumbing?"

Kat felt the blood drain from her face. There was no way she was staying if she had to go outside to get to the bathroom. She was not going to fight the bugs and snakes every time she needed to use the facilities. Pregnancy and below-standard plumbing just did not mix.

Adrian chuckled. When she glanced at him, he was smiling. "Relax, I was just kidding. There is indoor plumbing and electricity. Alex even has a computer and Internet access in his room. In fact, it's probably not what you're expecting." Kat drove around the trees and onto a cobblestone drive. She looked up in awe at the large structure that appeared.

He was right; it wasn't at all what she had expected. It was huge, more a lodge than a cabin, rustic yet elegant.. The only cabinlike thing about it was that it was made of logs. She couldn't wait to see the inside.

As she pulled up to the cabin, a wave of nausea hit her and her stomach grumbled. Oh, no! She'd gone too long without food. Not only was she cursed with morning sickness, but whenever her stomach was empty, she got sick, too. As she put the Lincoln Navigator in park, she gagged. She pushed the door open as fast as she could. Maybe the fresh air would help.

"Katherine? Are you okay?"

She stumbled out of the SUV, then doubled over and vomited, or attempted to. It was a little difficult, considering she had nothing in her stomach.

Chapter Five

Katherine tossed a box of Oreos into the cart and headed toward the crackers and other assorted snacks. She stopped, put one hand on her hip, a finger to her lips, and cocked her head to the side.

Adrian watched from his appointed position behind the shopping cart. He wondered if he should tell her about the old adage to never shop hungry. He glanced down at the buggy already half-full with junk food and decided it was too late.

It was no wonder that she'd gotten sick. Heck, if a case of nerves from being chased by psychos wasn't enough to make her vomit, then her choice of food was. Was this how she'd been eating the last few months? When they were dating, she'd always been so health-conscious, like him. Had their breakup affected her that much?

Adrian took a good look at her as she bent down to select a box of crackers. *Lord, she's beautiful.* Her eating habits sure hadn't changed her appearance much. She was thinner, but still as lithe as ever. Nevertheless, there was *something* different.

Her scent had changed in a subtle, indefinable way. In fact, he hadn't noticed it at first. The only way he could describe it was that it seemed sweeter. Her scent had taken on a sugary quality. Well, with the crap she was eating, he shouldn't be too surprised. Hell, she'd probably bleed syrup instead of blood.

Adrian looked at the buggy again. He wondered if she'd notice if he put back some of the sweets and replaced them with healthier snacks.

In the seat of the cart sat her purse and the open package of peanut butter crackers they'd found at the cabin. Once he'd helped her into the cabin after her bout of nerves, she'd immediately gone in search of food. She'd confessed to not having eaten since breakfast. He'd tried to tell her that that wasn't a good idea, but she insisted food would settle her stomach and calm her nerves. Oddly enough, the peanut butter crackers did seem to help.

Unfortunately, he hadn't taken into account that there'd be little to no food at the cabin. Without any idea how long it would take Brent to find out about Katherine's gun-toting stalkers, Adrian had decided to take her grocery shopping and to buy her some essential clothing.

He stared at his mate and realized it was going to be up to him to see that she ate a decent meal instead of snacks. "Katherine, are you planning on getting anything semi-eatable?"

Kat picked up the box of Ritz and the box of Saltines and studied them both, trying to decide between the two. "Did you say something, Adrian?"

The exaggerated sigh told her clearly that he had. When he didn't respond further, she turned her attention away from her tough dilemma and looked at him. "What?"

"This is not healthy." He held up a bag of cookies and pointed to them. "Are you planning on getting any *real* food?"

What was his problem? *Whatever*. Kat looked back at the boxes in her hands. Holding them up, she asked, "Which do you like better?"

He just stared at her, obviously unaffected by the tough decision facing her. Kat shrugged, tossed them both into the buggy, and continued down the aisle.

She needed to find a way to get some prenatal vitamins. Hers were on her bathroom counter in her apartment. They had over-the-counter vitamins, didn't they? Too bad she didn't have her phone; otherwise she could reach Alex and have him call her in a prescription.

Kat had turned to check out the potato chip selection when a movement caught her eye. She spun around and gaped. Adrian had her Fig Newtons in hand, presumably looking for a place to put them back. "You are not putting my cookies back, are you?"

He jerked the bag down behind his back, looking quite guilty. "Uh-uh ..."

She walked over to him and held her hand out.

He placed the cookie bag in her hand and sighed. "Katherine, we have to get some real food. We cannot live on this crap you're piling in the cart."

"Humph. Says you." Kat leaned over the buggy and tossed the cookies back in. On the seat next to her purse and crackers was Adrian's cell phone. If she could get the phone, she could call Alex. If she could call Alex, he could call in a prescription. "Okay, fine. I'm going to go get shampoo and soap and all that sort of stuff. You go get *real* food."

While Adrian stood there in shock at her easy agreement, she slid her purse over the phone and lifted both out of the seat. She turned to leave, then back again. "Adrian?"

"Huh?"

"Don't put any of my goodies back." She turned and retreated as fast as she could without looking like she was trying to escape.

As soon as she got out of earshot, she punched in Alex's number, since she knew Jess would have misplaced her phone again, and headed toward the in-store pharmacy. She got to the counter just as Jess answered the phone.

"Hello?"

"Jess, is Alex where I can talk to him? I have a problem."

"Sure, he's right here. You okay?"

"Yeah, but I need him to call in a prescription for prenatal vitamins."

"Okay, hold on a sec," she said hesitantly. Kat knew she wanted to pry, but was glad she didn't. She had to get this done as soon as possible. She didn't want Adrian to catch her.

A few seconds later Alex's deep voice came on the line. "Hello?" he asked cautiously.

"Hey, Alex."

"Hi, Kat, everything okay? Are you all right? Is the baby okay?"

Kat smiled at the concern in his voice. Over the past few months he'd become as protective as Jess. He was as excited about the baby as she and Jess were. "The baby is fine, and so am I." She mumbled under her breath, "For now, anyway."

"I heard that. What do you mean 'for now'?"

"It's a long story, Alex, but I'm changing doctors ..."

"Is there ...?" He sounded deeply concerned.

"Whoa, Alex, everything is fine, *really*. I just don't like the doctor. I promise I'll tell you all about it later, but I don't have time right now. If I give you the phone number to the pharmacy here, can you call me in a prescription for prenatal vitamins?"

"Yes, I can do that."

"Can you call it in under Jess's name?"

There was a short pause. "Why? What's going on?"

"I told you, I don't have time to tell you about it now. I'm not in any danger ... I'm with Adrian."

"What?"

"You heard me. I'm with Adrian. I'm going to y'all's family cabin."

"Kat, I'm not letting you off this phone until you tell me what's going on ... Are you safe? You wouldn't have mentioned danger unless you thought you were in danger." Kat could hear Jess in the background asking Alex what was going on. "Hold on, Jess, I'm trying to find out ... Kat? Do we need to come home?"

"NO!" Kat sighed. She'd feel a lot better with them around, but no way was she going to make them cut short their honeymoon on her account. They deserved this break. They

had not only been dealing with their own problems the past few months, but hers as well. “No, seriously, Alex, everything is fine. I’m really short on time ’cause Adrian is somewhere in the store. He thinks I’m getting shampoo and stuff. I’ll call you later and tell you what’s going on ... I promise. Just call in the prescription for me and tell Jess not to worry. Enjoy your honeymoon, and I’ll call tomorrow.”

“All right --” There were a few scuffling sounds, then Alex’s voice in the distance. “-- I wasn’t done talking.”

Jess came on the line. “Are you okay?”

Kat rolled her eyes and shook her head, even though Jess couldn’t see her. “It’s rude to snatch the phone right out of your husband’s hand.”

“Don’t kid around, Kat. Alex seems to think you’re in trouble.”

“I’m fine, Jess. I’ll call the two of you tomorrow, I swear it! Give Alex this number for me. You got a pen?”

“No, but I have sand and my finger.” Her voice became distant for second, like she’d pulled the phone away from her mouth. “Quit, Alex, you’ve already talked to her.” Then louder again, she said, “Okay, I’m ready, give it to me.”

The sound of the waves and seagulls hadn’t registered until Jess mentioned sand. Kat grinned, picturing them on the beach arguing over the phone. She took a business card from the pharmacy counter and gave Jess the number. Saying goodbye to a reluctant Jess, with Alex still trying to get the phone back, she went in search of one of the handheld baskets to gather toiletries.

After getting the essentials, she returned to the pharmacy counter and asked for the prescription under Jess’s name. After telling the pharmacist she had no insurance, she shoved the small bag containing her vitamins under the stuff she had in the basket.

“Are you ready?”

“Eep!” Kat spun around. She had been so focused on stashing her vitamins, she hadn’t heard Adrian approach. “Geez, Adrian! Do you have to sneak up on me?”

“Sorry. What are you doing at the pharmacy?”

Kat decided to play it up like it was no big deal. She held out Adrian’s phone. “Oh, I forgot my allergy medicine, so I had Alex call me in some.” He looked skeptical, so she rushed on. “I got everything we need; are you ready to go?”

He took the phone and put it back on the seat of the buggy. “I could have gotten you a ’script. You didn’t need to bug Alex.”

“Oh, it’s a new prescription; I forgot what it was called. I’d asked Alex about it when I first got it. I wanted to know if it’d make me sleepy ... anyway, he remembered the name, so he called it in for me.” *Whew! That sounded good.* She was getting better at lying.

Adrian wasn't buying her act. On the way to the checkout stand, he watched her, wondering what she was up to. She was clutching the basket to her chest. What did she have that she didn't want him to see? Who had she really called? He supposed he should at least be glad that she was smart enough to use *his* cell phone. "I'm glad you didn't use your own phone. There's no telling who these men are that are following you. They might be able to trace your whereabouts."

Kat looked stunned. If it was possible, her complexion became even paler. "I don't have my phone with me. I hadn't thought of that. What am I going to do? I don't have any more cash. I spent that on the few clothes I just bought. I can't hide forever."

"Well, they don't know you're with me, so they have no reason to trace my phone or credit cards. Who are these people, Katherine?"

She shook her head sadly and placed the basket on the conveyer belt. "I don't know, Adrian. But I'll pay you back for my half of this stuff when I'm able."

"Don't be ridiculous, Katherine." She nodded reluctantly, then took a small bag -- her "allergy medicine," he presumed -- and handed it to the cashier. Once the cashier handed it back, Kat stuffed it in her purse. *Interesting.*

When she turned and started unloading their cart, he picked up his phone. So she *had* called Alex, but was he the only one she'd called? He needed to check and see. He also wanted a look at the alleged allergy medicine, but he didn't want her to know he was on to her. She might not know who was after her, but she knew something. He clipped the phone back on his belt and helped her unload the cart. For now, he'd be happy with the small miracle that she was letting him pay for the groceries without an argument. The fact that she'd let him pay so easily, and from him, of all people ... it was more telling than anything else. *She knows something.*

Chapter Six

Adrian turned off the television set and stood, stretched his hands over his head, and glanced down at Katherine. She was sound asleep, with a bag of cookies clutched to her chest.

After they'd unloaded the groceries, she'd grabbed her box of crackers and a bag of cookies, then absconded to the couch with her goodies and turned on the television. He'd tried to interest her in a real meal, but she'd had none of it.

Now, here she lay, asleep, with a death grip on her cookies. Adrian leaned down and gently pried her fingers off the bag and set it aside. She looked so sweet and peaceful in sleep, nothing like the little tiger she'd been earlier.

He needed to find out what was going on so he could keep her safe. He went to the kitchen area, grabbed his cell phone off the counter, and dialed Brent's number.

Brent picked up on the first ring. "Hey, I was just about to call you. I've traced the plate you gave me. It's registered to a Clifford Gordon."

That name sounded vaguely familiar. "You get anything on him?"

There was a loud crunch, then several quieter crunches. "Nope, just the standard driver's license stuff, and that he's a doctor, too, but I'm still looking." *Crunch*. "How's Kat?"

"What are you doing?"

"Eating my dinner. Which, unfortunately, consists of two bags of chips. How's Kat?" *Crunch, crunch*.

"Asleep. Why don't you get something decent to eat? Geez, you and Katherine and your junk food." Adrian paused to rub the bridge of his nose. "Listen, that name sounds kind of familiar, but I can't remember where I've heard it. Make sure you do a thorough search."

Brent snorted into the phone. "Like I'd do anything else! I'm insulted." *Crunch*.

Adrian smiled. "Oh, for crying out loud, get over yourself. I wasn't insulting you. You dominant wolves and your egos."

Brent chuckled. "Well, if that isn't the pot calling the kettle black ..."

"Who, me? I don't know what you are talking about." He chuckled into the phone when he heard Brent snort again. "Look, Katherine knows more than she's telling. I'm not sure how much more, but I'm betting that Alex and Jess know as much as she does. She took my phone today to call Alex behind my back. She said it was to have him call in some allergy med, but I'm not buying it. It doesn't add up. Why would she go to the trouble to call Alex when I was right there?"

"Hmm." *Crunch, crunch, crunch.* "I don't know. That's a good question. Have you spoken with Alex?"

"Not yet, but I intend to."

"Well, hold off. Let me call him. He's not exactly thrilled with how you've handled things with Kat. He'll probably be more forthcoming with me than you."

Now it was Adrian's turn to snort. "This is serious. He wouldn't dare withhold information from me when Katherine's safety is at stake! I ought to beat the holy crap out of him already for not letting me know what's going on. In fact, I think --"

"Whoa, hold it! Chill out. Geez, you dominant wolves and your egos. Tsk, tsk, tsk."

Adrian laughed and felt the anger and fear that had been building drain away. Brent had always been good about keeping his anger in check. When they were kids, Brent had always played the peacekeeper between him and Alex. Even as a kid he'd usually done so with humor. As an adult, he usually just threatened to shoot them.

Crunch, crunch, gulp, crunch.

Adrian grinned. "Don't make me shoot you" was Brent's signature phrase. Funny ... Brent was bigger than even Alex, but he had always been the peacemaker. "All right, coz. He's all yours. I'll keep watch over Katherine. You find the bad guys. That's what you do best. And go get some real food! Don't you know that crap will kill you?"

"Yeah, yeah, yeah. I'll die happy, though. I'll call Alex and let you know what I find out. Later."

"Later." Adrian pulled the phone away from his ear, hung up, and tossed it into a nearby chair. He made sure the cabin was locked up tight before he sat down on the edge of the couch. He stared down at Katherine. Kissing her forehead, he pulled her into his arms and stood up. She was such a tiny thing, so delicate and fragile, she brought out his protective instincts. He climbed the stairs to his room, staring at her beloved face snuggled into his chest. She was going to be angry in the morning, but he didn't care. He wasn't spending another night without her in his arms.

With one hand, he pulled back the covers and laid her down. He carefully began removing her clothes. He didn't want her to be uncomfortable, or so he tried to convince

himself. After removing her top, he pulled her jeans off, folded both garments, and set them on his dresser. Walking back to the bed, he debated for several seconds on whether to remove her bra and panties. He quickly decided that those would be the *most* uncomfortable articles of clothing ... so they had to go.

His cock twitched and stiffened at the thought of her completely naked. He'd never actually seen her entirely nude. Not only had clothing just been moved out of the way of the important parts, their one encounter had been rushed. He'd only known his need to be inside her. The thought of savoring her had never crossed his mind, but it did now. His heart rate increased, and his erection grew further.

He could look at her as long as he wanted. She was asleep and would be unable to protest. He adjusted the fit of his jeans; his discomfort was quickly approaching unbearable.

Sliding a hand under her bottom, he lifted. His other hand grabbed the front of her panties and gently pulled. Stopping to reposition the hand holding her, he laid her back down. Once again, his hand slipped beneath her now bare butt. His cock hardened to its full potential, and he felt his eyes shift. He closed them and dragged her panties off the rest of the way.

Concentrating on her deep, even breathing, he tried to regain his control. For crying out loud, you'd think he'd never felt a bare ass before. Adrian groaned and opened his eyes. Big mistake. The sight of her plump, pink, clean-shaven labia was too much temptation. He leaned forward and inhaled deeply through his nose. God, she smelled so good! His tongue snaked out and slid down to her opening. Ahh, she tasted amazing, too! He probed more, drinking in her sweetness. She moaned and wiggled her hips toward him.

Adrian sat up abruptly and slapped his hands over his face. *What in the hell are you thinking? She's sound asleep, for crying out loud!* He took a few deep breaths and stared at the ceiling. He had to calm down. It was almost pathetic how excited she could make him ... even when she was asleep!

Adrian got up and shut the lights off. Walking around to his side of the bed, he undressed and folded his clothes neatly. After all, carelessly strewn laundry was one of his pet peeves. He set them on the nightstand, then paced beside the bed a few times, willing his hard-on to go away. This short leave with Katherine was going to be a challenging one, but he was up to it; he had no choice but to be.

He couldn't live without his mate any longer. The sooner he gained control over his reactions to her, the more time he would have to figure out how to explain what he was. That was a conversation he was not looking forward to. He didn't want her to find out like Jess had. If he had anything to say about it, Katherine would have the benefit of knowing what to expect before she saw him change,

Adrian looked down at his still-throbbing cock. Clearly, it wasn't going away anytime soon. He heaved a sigh and climbed into bed.

He reached down to pull the covers up over Katherine and realized that he hadn't removed her bra. Pushing her onto her side, he undid the clasp and pulled it off. Her lovely breasts bounced free from the underwires. The tightening in his groin increased. As he watched, her nipples hardened, stabbing into the air. Adrian groaned. No way could he go on like this; his balls felt like they were going to explode.

He grabbed his shirt off the nightstand, then slid down in the bed. When he was eye-level with her luscious pussy, he raised himself up on his elbow. She was so incredible. He longed to bury his face between those muscled thighs and feast on her. Reaching down, he fisted his cock. Slowly he started pumping, imagining his nose buried between those plump, slick lips. She'd tasted so good, and he couldn't wait to taste her again. Gradually his strokes gained speed. He panted and bucked his hips at the pleasure. Closing his eyes, he imagined Katherine spread before him as he devoured her.

First, he'd take her clit into his mouth and suck. When she was wild with arousal and begging him to take her, he'd slide his tongue into her sopping hole. He'd lick her and fuck her with his tongue until she came at least twice.

He squeezed his cock tighter and stroked faster. He inhaled deeply, smelling her pussy as he imagined licking it. God, it felt good!

After he was done savoring her sweet juices, he'd slide up her body and enter her in one smooth thrust. She'd cry out in pleasure and wrap her toned legs around his hips. He would slam into her over and over as she squeezed with her thighs and moaned in pleasure.

His balls tightened and drew up closer to his body. He opened his eyes and watched Katherine, staring between her slightly parted legs. Her bare labia were almost shining in the moonlight coming in through the curtains. He could almost feel her inner muscles milking his cock. He squeezed himself and pumped faster. His ass clenched tight in anticipation; his legs stiffened. A ragged groan ripped from his throat as he grabbed his shirt, catching the semen as he came.

* * * * *

Brent leaned back in his chair and propped his bare feet up on his desk. He rubbed his eyes and sighed. His gut feeling was that this ordeal with Kat was related to Jess and Rome's kidnapping the past spring -- what were the odds of two such incidents happening to his pack so closely together? He just didn't know how they were related. Aside from the events of the spring, Rhett's disappearance had been the last out-of-the-ordinary occurrence to affect the pack, and that was almost sixteen years ago. Had this group of psychos had something to do with Hellion's disappearance so long ago? Maybe the threat to his pack was bigger than he'd first surmised. Even if the past events and Kat's current trouble weren't related, he was going to have to take the group of werewolf hunters down.

He stretched his arms above his head. Pulling his feet off his desk, he reached for the phone. Time to find out if Adrian's assumption about Alex knowing more was correct. He dialed Alex's cell phone number.

"Hello?" a husky female voice asked.

"Jess? Sorry, did I wake you?"

"Um ... no. You want to talk to Alex?"

Uh-oh! By the sounds of it, he'd interrupted something. Brent grinned. *Oops.* "Jess, if you let me talk to him, I promise I'll make it quick. It's really important, or I'd just have you tell him to call me back."

"Sure, Brent, hold on a sec."

"Okay, Jess ... sorry."

Alex came on the phone a few seconds later. "Yo, what's up?"

He didn't sound like he'd been interrupted. *Hmm.* Brent shrugged. "Uh, sorry for the interruption. I just need to know what's going on with Kat."

Alex chuckled. "You didn't interrupt anything. Jess was pretending not to sleep. We were going to go to the beach, but she lay down and that was it. She insists, however, that she's not tired. So she isn't really sleeping, or so she says." He chuckled, then added a little louder than necessary. "She does a really good pretend snore, too." Then he became the serious, no-nonsense alpha he was. "What do you mean, what's up with Kat? She swore it was nothing major and was going to call us back."

"So you don't know what's going on? What Kat is keeping from Adrian?"

Alex hedged. "Uh ... why? What do you know?"

Brent smiled. So Alex did know something. "Here, let me fill you in, and then you can fill me in." Brent told him everything Adrian had told him, about the gunmen and Kat running to his house, that the black SUV was registered to a Clifford Gordon. When he finished, it got unusually quiet. He waited several seconds for Alex to say something. He didn't. "Alex, you still there?"

"Yeah, I'm here. Holy shit! I had no idea. She called me and told me she needed a script for her vitamins and that she was going to get a new doctor. Jesus Christ! If I'd had any idea why --" His voice became quieter, like he held the phone away from his mouth. "Jess, honey, get up and pack. We've got to go home. Kat's in trouble."

"No! Alex, no, stay and enjoy your honeymoon. Adrian and I can handle this. I just need to know what you know, so I can figure out what the hell is going on."

Alex sighed. "Kat's pregnant. Clifford Gordon is ... was her OB."

Whoa. Brent leaned back in his chair and ran an agitated hand through his hair. This was not good. He didn't need to ask who the baby's father was. That meant -- "They must

know the baby's a wolf. What other explanation could there be? How the hell else could they find out?"

"I don't know, but I agree; nothing else makes sense. Kat is not the type of person who gets chased by lunatics with assault rifles."

Jess shrieked in the background. "*What?!*"

Well, she was awake now, Brent mused. Alex told him to hold on; in the background, Brent could hear him trying to calm his bride.

Alex came back on the line a few seconds later. "Okay, sorry about that. You think this is related to that group of psychos?"

"Well, it's certainly suspect. My gut feeling is that, yeah, it's related. I just don't know how. What do you know about this doctor? Did you recommend him?"

"No. I'm not sure where she found him. Oh, shit!" Alex's voice got slightly quieter. "Jess, which OB did you go to? You didn't use the same one as Kat did, did you?"

What? Jess was pregnant, too? Brent pinched the bridge of his nose. Well, hell, no one told him anything anymore. He could hear Jess talking, but despite his excellent hearing, he couldn't quite make out what she said.

He heard Alex say, "Aha!" Then he was back on the phone. "Okay, Brent, here's the deal. He was Kat's doctor before she got pregnant. According to Jess, Kat had some problems as a teenager and went to him. I'm sure it never occurred to her to go elsewhere. She has no idea what we are, and Jess didn't think about it, with all that's gone on in the past few months. Oh, and don't tell Adrian about Kat being pregnant."

Relaxing just a little, Brent chastised his cousin. "Congratulations ... even though you didn't see fit to inform me of your impending fatherhood -- or Adrian's, for that matter. As for Kat, that makes more sense. I take it that Jess has a different doctor? How's she feeling?"

"Sorry." Alex sounded sheepish. "I haven't told anyone. Jess is only six weeks along. We thought we'd wait to tell everyone until after her first official appointment. So not even Kat knows; you are the first. And Jess is fine; she never went to Gordon but used her family doctor. She found an OB through Jill. As for Kat ... well, it wasn't my secret to tell."

Brent smiled. For some reason it felt good to know that he was the first to find out. It would be nice to have a new little cousin -- make that two new little cousins. Babies were nice. Too bad he'd never have any of his own. But that was a whole different issue.

He wondered once again if this group could have anything to do with Rhett's disappearance. He didn't have any hope left that she was still alive, but if he could connect her to this group, maybe he could at least find out what had happened to her. He felt tears sting his eyes at the thought of his lost mate and brushed them away. He couldn't think about that now. It would only bring on a pity party that would last for days, and he had work to do.

"All right, I'll start looking into the doctor, and I'll have Michael start looking for the connection to Lisa and her group. Maybe with this new information, we can find these bastards before they do any more harm to the pack."

"Thanks, coz. We'll be back in a couple of days ... or less. We have the hotel for two more days, so we will try to stay. Call me as soon as you find out anything or if there are any new developments."

"Will do. Try to enjoy what's left of your honeymoon. I'll take care of things here. Kat is safe for now. Adrian isn't going to let anything happen to her. He's finally realized that she's his mate."

"About damned time! He's been in denial for three months. Personally, I don't know why he'd refuse his mate."

Brent chuckled. "Me, either! What I wouldn't do to have Rhett back." He felt the tears threaten to fall again. "I'm outta here. Take care of Jess and try not to worry."

"Brent ... I'm sorry. For what it's worth, I miss her, too. Hell, she was one of us ... one of the guys. She was much easier to get along with than Dash or Adrian."

The comment helped lighten Brent's mood. They shared a laugh. It was true. His mate had been much more easygoing than Adrian or Dash -- well, except when she was mad. She'd had one hell of a temper.

"Thanks, Alex. Talk to you later."

"You're welcome. Later, coz!"

Brent hung up. He needed to talk to Kat and see if he could get any more helpful info out of her. Until then, he could at least tell Michael to start a new probe. Michael had been put to the task of searching for the group back when his son, Rome, and Jess had been found. So far, he'd had no luck.

He picked up the phone again and dialed his parents' house, where Michael had lived since he'd filed for divorce four months ago. Michael was his father's best friend. Brent smiled. Of course, Michael was more than just a friend; he was practically family. He had pretty much lived there even before he'd filed, but now his things were permanently there, too. His parents were ecstatic about Michael moving back in with them.

Michael had lived with them when Brent was a baby. In fact, Michael was like a second father to him and had been the one to watch Brent while his parents worked. Some of his fondest childhood memories included Michael. It was funny, but when Rhett, Michael's daughter, was first born, Brent had hated her. He'd been terribly jealous; he'd felt like she'd taken Michael away from him. He could remember going with his father and Michael to Michael's family ranch for weekends at a time before she was born. After Rhett's birth, Michael got married, and all of that had stopped. He hadn't missed Michael any since he had still come over every day with the hellion in tow to watch him, but he'd missed the trips to the ranch. He had enjoyed riding horses with Michael and his dad. Fate was a strange

thing. Once upon a time, he'd have been glad to be rid of Rhett. Now he wanted nothing more than to have her back.

His father's voice interrupted his introspection. "Hello?"

"Hey, Dad, is Michael there?"

"Yeah, hold on." He heard his father cover the phone and say, "It's Brent."

Michael came on the line almost immediately. He must have been right next to his father. "Hey, kiddo, what's up?"

Brent grinned. Michael had called him that ever since he could remember. "I've got some info for you."

Brent filled him in on the new situation and gave him the doctor's name. Michael was excited about what it might mean to his investigation.

After promising to come for dinner tomorrow night, he hung up and got back to work.

Brent typed Clifford Gordon's name into his computer again, but just as before, the man was clean. Not even a parking ticket. It was going to be a long night.

Chapter Seven

There was a comforting heat around her. It was really nice. Kat snuggled deeper into the warmth at her back. The arm wrapped around her waist pulled her closer. *Adrian*. She released a soft, lusty sigh. All that naked flesh at her back was intoxicating. *Is there anything better than being held by the man you love? Well, maybe one thing ...* Where she got the nerve, she had no idea, but she knew what she wanted.

Kat reached down and pulled the hand at her waist up to her breast. The hand cupped her whole breast, engulfing it in warmth. He squeezed. Ah, yeah, that was good. Her nipple tightened and stabbed outward. The caress of his palm against the stiff peak sent tingles all the way down her back. Her pussy muscles tightened. One of the effects pregnancy had had on her was a constant yearning. It seemed her pussy was always in need of attention. The increased blood flow made her labia larger and more sensitive, and she'd learned ways to ease the chronic ache and satisfy herself.

She reached under the covers and found her aching clit. She rubbed in a small circle with her fingertip, then slowly moved down and pushed into herself. Drawing her finger out, then back in, she gathered her wetness. It felt so good! Slipping her finger out of the tight opening, she ran it down her engorged lips, the slickness on her fingers making them glide easily. She continued playing with her plump folds. Her hips bucked when she touched her erect clit.

She wiggled her bottom into the hard ridge nestled against her, eliciting a groan from Adrian. Was that his cock? What would it feel like? Kat stopped caressing herself and slid her hand behind her. Boldly, she wrapped her fingers around him. It was hotter than the rest of him and much harder than she thought it would be. It felt big, too, and the skin was so soft. Hesitantly, she tightened her grip; it throbbed in her hand. His hips pushed forward, making the skin slide under her hand. It felt so strange, so different from her body. She squeezed

harder and moved her hand up, then back down, working the skin over his hardness. Was this how he pleased himself? His warm breath fanned across her neck, making her shiver.

"Ah, honey." His husky voice rasped in her ear.

He tugged on her wrist with the hand that had been playing with her breast, freeing her hand from his cock. Groaning in protest, she started to reach for him again, when she felt his hand brushing against her butt.

Hot flesh probed at her thighs and slipped between her legs, rubbing against her damp labia without entering her. His hips flattened against her backside as his hand returned to her breast. Her bottom fit nicely into the cradle of his hips, and his body was so warm against hers. His wiry pubic hair tickled as his erection glided across her pussy, gathering moisture. It felt wonderful.

Her whole pussy tingled. She bucked her hips forward, and his cock slipped backward. The exquisite friction made her yearn for more. It felt so much better than her fingers ever had. She wiggled her hips, and his cockhead skimmed across her clit, sending tiny shivers up her back. She was growing wetter with each stroke; moisture was beginning to seep from her clenched opening. Again and again she bucked her hips as he kneaded her breast. The pulling on her nipples coincided with the tugging deep in her core as her inner muscles clenched.

The tingling below was growing, an itch that had to be scratched. She couldn't get enough, and relief was close; she could sense it. As she moved faster to try and relieve the growing pressure, her stomach tightened. She was on the verge of coming when a knot formed in her throat, and a different kind of pressure asserted itself, obliterating her need to come.

She froze as Adrian tightened his grip on her hip. Alertness whacked her upside the head, and nausea hit her like a tidal wave. "Oh, my God! Let go!" She clapped a hand over her mouth and jumped out of bed, leaving Adrian groaning in her wake.

Stumbling into the bathroom, she barely made it to the toilet. Boy, morning sickness sucked!

Kat laid her head on the edge of the toilet, hoping against hope that nothing else was coming back up. *God, if you let me get through this, I promise I'll never have sex again! Just please don't let me throw up anymore.* She guessed she should be glad the baby had decided to make its presence known. If it hadn't, she might still be in bed with Adrian, doing who knew what. *I can't believe it!* How could she have thought it was a dream? She'd never dreamed that realistically. No dream could feel *that* good. She groaned.

Adrian took a deep breath and let it out. Thank God Katherine had taken off to the bathroom and that she'd had her back to him. His top canines were cutting into his bottom lip, and his vision was now monochromatic. He was going to have to hurry up and win her

trust back -- win *her* back -- because getting control of his animal nature was going to be more difficult than he'd first thought.

He took another deep breath and tried to calm himself. Losing the erection would go a long way toward restoring his normal human eyes and teeth. The problem was, he could still smell her on the sheets and on his cock. Even the knowledge that she was in the bathroom vomiting didn't help.

If he didn't know how stressed out she was, he'd be insulted. He was going to have to reassure her of her safety again. She was making herself sick with worry. At least, he hoped that was the case. He didn't want her coming down with something. He made a mental note to examine her; she could have caught a bug.

Adrian cleared his mind and tried to concentrate on the fact that Katherine was puking in the bathroom. She needed him. His eyesight went back to normal; the pressure on his bottom lip receded. He ran his tongue over his teeth and felt the normal blunt edges. Sliding to the edge of the bed, he sat up and took one more cleansing breath. His cock was still hard, but he gave up on that going away anytime soon. He left the bed and went to the bathroom to help his mate.

Katherine was on the floor, her head resting on her arm on the rim of the bowl. Her long, beautiful red hair trailed down her naked back, drawing his gaze to her naked buttocks. God, she was gorgeous. His cock twitched at the sight of all that naked flesh. He growled. Maybe her being sick was a good thing; it kept her from screaming at him about undressing her ... at least for the moment. He was pretty sure it wouldn't last, though; his little kitten had grown some claws while they were apart.

Adrian made his way to the linen closet and grabbed a washcloth. He wet it and reached for the glass on the counter, filling it with water, then knelt by her side. "Here, honey. Here's a wash rag and some water."

"Get out!" She promptly vomited again.

He pulled her hair out of the way. She batted at his hand and mumbled, "I said, get out."

"I'm not leaving, so get over it."

"Hellooo ... I'm sick here."

"I can see that."

She retched again, then moaned as she rested her head on her arm. "That is just the point. I don't want you to see me."

Adrian reached around with the washcloth and stuck it to her forehead. She grabbed it out of his hand and wiped her face. "Thank you."

"You're welcome. Take some water." He handed her the glass, still holding her hair out of her face. She rinsed her mouth, then spit the water out. She handed the glass back to him.

"Thanks. You can let go of my hair now. I think that's it. God, I hate being sick." She groaned again and lay back on the floor, putting her hands over her face. Her nipples stabbed into the air. His hands itched to pinch those hard little pebbles and roll them between his thumb and forefinger. His cock jerked. The fact that she was sick should have put a damper on his libido, but it hadn't. He swallowed. Finally his mind overruled his body, and the doctor took over. He reached out and felt her forehead with the back of his hand.

Katherine's hands moved apart, and her eyes snapped open. "What are you --" Her eyes raked down his body. When they caught sight of his erection, they widened. She sat up abruptly, then looked down at her own body. "Oh, my God! We're naked!" Her hands flew to her breasts, and she glared at him.

Adrian chuckled at her outraged expression. "I was wondering when you'd notice." He stood up and offered her his hand. Her face, neck, and chest flushed pink. She averted her gaze and took his hand. When she stood, her hand immediately shot to her forehead and her shoulders slumped. Adrian put a steadying hand to her shoulder. "Katherine, are you okay?"

"Uh-huh. Give me a minute. I stood up too fast. I'm dizzy. Will you get me a robe or something?"

Adrian sighed. He didn't want to cover all that beautiful pale skin, but at least she hadn't yelled at him. "Are you going to be okay if I leave you?" He closed the lid of the toilet and made her sit down with her hands between her knees in case she stayed dizzy. He didn't want her to fall and hurt herself.

"Uh-huh."

He hurried into the bedroom and to his closet. A navy-blue terrycloth robe was hanging on the back of the door. He grabbed it and a pair of jeans. Stepping into the jeans, he pulled them up and returned to the bathroom. Katherine sat in the same position where he'd left her. He draped the robe over her shoulders.

"Here, put your arm in." She sat up and stuck her arms in the sleeves, one at a time. Adrian came around in front of her, helping her to stand up, and tied it. It was way too big for her, but she looked cute in his robe as it hung past her calves and fingertips. He brushed the hair out of her face and leaned in, putting his cheek to her forehead. She didn't feel overly warm. Perhaps a bit, but that was more than likely due to her bout of vomiting. "You don't have a temperature, honey. This thing has you all upset. You need to relax and trust me to take care of you. There is no sense in making yourself sick over it. They can't get to you here."

Katherine's hazel eyes met his. One delicate red brow arched; then her lip twitched. It looked like she was about to grin, but she didn't. Adrian's focus stayed on her lips. He was captivated. She had such a pretty little heart-shaped mouth; her lips were a pale rose color and were a nice contrast with her ivory skin. She licked her lips. He reached up and touched her cheek, looking into her eyes. She blinked and tilted her head into his touch. He leaned

forward, holding her gaze, his lips almost touching hers. Her breath caressed his lips. Then she cleared her throat and swiftly stepped to the side.

Her gaze darted around the room, looking everywhere but at him. "I need breakfast." She swept past him and out the door.

Adrian dropped his head and heaved a sigh. *You can run, kitten, but you can't hide. I know you're as affected as I am. It's only a matter of time.* Smiling to himself, he buttoned up his pants and followed her into the kitchen.

He sat down at the table and watched her fumble with pans from under the stove, her pretty little ass outlined against the robe. A small groan escaped, and he shifted position. He ran his hands down his face, trying once again to get himself under control. "Katherine, honey? You want some help?"

"Nope. I got it. How do you want your eggs?" She rambled on, barely stopping for a breath. "Scrambled? Good, 'cause I'm making scrambled. And there's bacon in the microwave." She turned and glared at him, apparently daring him to disagree.

Adrian grinned. She was nervous. That was a good sign. It was nice to know he could still make her nervous. "Scrambled eggs and bacon will be fine."

Katherine gave a brisk nod and turned back to the stove. "Good. Don't just sit there; get up and make some toast."

He scooted his chair back, his grin widening. He wondered if she realized that she'd just contradicted herself. He decided that it wouldn't be in his best interest to point it out and went to the pantry for bread. He put some slices in the multi-slot toaster and turned around in time to see Katherine trying to roll up the sleeves of the robe. He reached for her and, pulling her in front of him, quickly rolled up one sleeve, then the other. She mumbled a thank-you but didn't move.

He tilted her chin up and stared into her eyes. "I'm sorry. I never meant to hurt you. I miss you, and I think we should start over." Katherine tried to turn away. He didn't release her chin. "No, honey, don't."

"No, *you* don't!" Katherine slapped his hand away and turned back toward the stove and proceeded to break eggs into a pan.

Adrian wasn't about to be discouraged; he wrapped his arms around her waist and dropped his chin to her shoulder. Katherine tried to shrug him off but didn't resist otherwise. She started stirring the eggs with a whisk.

"Forgive me, kitten." He pleaded softly in her ear. He heard a sniffle, and her hand went up to her eyes. *Oh, hell.* "Honey, don't cry."

"Go away, Adrian. I'm trying to cook breakfast."

"I don't want to go away, and breakfast can wait."

She sniffled again and dabbed at her other eye. "No, it can't. I'm queasy and I need to eat. Is the toast ready?"

Adrian heaved a sigh and dropped his hands from around her waist. There was no point in further upsetting her. She wasn't going to win this. Sooner or later she'd give in. The tears were a good sign. She wasn't over him ... not by a long shot. Sooner or later she'd admit how much she loved him. He knew she must still love him ... didn't she?

He smiled. The anticipation of hearing those three words again from her pretty lips was enough to make his gut clench and his still-erect cock jump.

He filled the coffeemaker with water, then got coffee out of the cabinet and started the machine. Turning to the toaster, he put the toast on a plate and popped new pieces in. He glanced back at her. Standing at the stove in his robe, she looked so domestic. He could get used to that. Maybe he could convince her to come back to him before his new house was finished. After all, she should have a part in decorating their home.

For now he'd protect her and try to calm her fears. It would go a long way in restoring her trust in him. "I called Brent. He's looking into the owner of that SUV."

"*What!?*" Katherine spun around, spatula in hand, her mouth hanging open.

Chapter Eight

Breathe, Kat. It's not a big deal ... yet. Kat took a deep breath and turned back to the stove. She'd have to call Alex and Jess again, and she supposed she could call Brent herself, but she didn't want to be the one to ask him to keep something from his cousin, especially one he was extremely close to. It would be much better to let Alex handle it ... better for her conscience, anyway.

"Something wrong?"

"Uh ... no. I was just surprised."

"Surprised? Why would that surprise you? Katherine, you were chased by men with guns!"

"No, not about that. I mean ... I was just surprised that you didn't wait for me to call him with you." Kat gave herself a mental pat on the back for her fast thinking.

His eyebrows furrowed; then he tipped his head slightly to the side. "Okay. Do you want to call him and tell him your version of the story?"

She shook her head. "You know as much as I do, Adrian."

He scoffed and mumbled, "I somehow doubt that." But he let it drop ... thank goodness.

She finished the eggs and dumped them onto his plate, then went to the microwave, took out the crisp bacon, and separated it onto both their plates. Picking up the china, she turned to the table, which he'd already set. Good, she could sit down and start eating her bacon. The sooner her stomach was full, the better she'd feel. One thing was for sure -- this baby liked its food. Kat grinned. She loved her baby. She couldn't wait until it got here and she could feed it directly.

Adrian sat at the table with a cup of coffee in his hand and watched her. "What's that smile for?"

She shrugged and set his plate in front of him. "Nothing. I was just glad that you set the table so I could start eating."

Adrian chuckled and bobbed his head toward her food. "Dig in." He pushed a cup in front of her as she sat down. "Here's your coffee. Just the way you like it ... cream and sugar."

That figures! Naturally, he'd serve her coffee just right ... when she couldn't drink it! Kat got up and went to the cabinet. Coffee and caffeine were a no-no during pregnancy, and other than her junk food, she tried to eat right for the baby. And since her junk food was in addition to healthy food, it didn't count. The baby was getting plenty of good nutrition. She opened one door, then another. "Where are the glasses?"

"Why?"

"Because I want orange juice. I don't drink coffee."

"Next cabinet over ... since when?"

Kat sighed as she pulled down a glass. She opened the refrigerator and poured some orange juice. "Since I'm trying to eat healthier."

Returning to her seat, she took a drink of juice. *Mmm, that hits the spot.* She grabbed a piece of toast and slathered jelly on it, and the toast crunched when she bit into it. She realized it was unusually quiet on the other side of the table and looked up. Adrian was gaping at her. "What?"

"Cookies, crackers, ice cream, and all that shit you bought yesterday are healthy?"

Kat groaned. Couldn't he ever let anything be? Keeping this pregnancy from him was going to take some work if he kept making observations like that. "I'm trying to cut out the caffeine."

"Honey, I hate to break it to you, but cutting out the caffeine isn't going to do much good, considering the way you've been eating lately."

Kat took another drink of orange juice and glared at him. Who the hell was he to tell her how to eat? She picked up her toast and took a big bite, pretending it was him, while still glaring at him.

"Well, it's not! Stop glaring at me." He picked up his coffee and took a sip, never breaking eye contact.

"Then don't try and tell me how to eat. What I eat is none of your business. This is the second time you've tried to tell me how to eat, and there better not be a third!"

Adrian sat his cup down and held up his hands. "Okay, okay. I'm sorry. Don't bite my head off."

Kat growled at him.

He laughed.

Doing her best to ignore him, she continued eating. It wasn't easy. He looked utterly sexy and extremely masculine as he sat there without a shirt on. He had no right to look that

good! That, on top of his commentary about her eating habits, was really pissing her off. She glared at him again.

Adrian stopped with his fork halfway to his mouth. "What now?"

"Why are you at the table with no shirt on? It's distracting."

He smiled, then put the bite of eggs in his mouth. He continued to smile at her while he chewed.

She glared harder. "What are you smiling at?"

He swallowed and smiled bigger, showing teeth. "It's distracting, huh?"

Kat groaned and went back to eating. Why had she said that? Now the idiot would think she had the hots for him or something. She did, of course, but danged if she wanted him to know it.

"Why don't we call a truce? Let's just hang out and be friends. We're stuck together until we figure out what the hell is going on, so there's no sense in us being at each other's throats. I promise I'll keep my remarks about your diet to myself, and I'll endeavor to remain clothed in your presence." He grinned, his eyes twinkling. "Unless, of course, you decide to ravish me."

Kat snorted. Fortunately, he had no idea how good that sounded.

"Seriously. Truce?"

"Okay, truce."

"Good. Then after breakfast, let's go on a hike. We can take a picnic lunch and eat by the lake. You can even take crackers and cookies. I want to show you the property. It's beautiful. You'll love it!"

Thank God the land was mostly flat. Kat didn't think she'd have survived a hilly terrain. And thankfully, Adrian was carrying everything, which consisted of a blanket and picnic basket, but still ... she was already out of breath and breathing heavily. Man, being pregnant was wreaking havoc on her normal existence. Heck, she was a dancer and usually had great stamina; she was in great shape.

Oh, who was she kidding -- she was lazy. She only danced full-out during a performance, when Jess threw a hissy fit, or when Marisa tried to show her up; but still, she had better stamina than she was displaying on this hike. Oh, well, at least she didn't have to pee yet. That was a miracle in itself. However, one of the other side effects of her pregnancy was kicking in. She was horny!

Did all pregnant women have overactive libidos, or was it something unique to her? She didn't know, but her nipples were impossibly hard, her pussy was wet and aching, and it was Adrian's fault. He'd been on her mind constantly, no matter how badly she wanted to get over him and move on with her life. Damn that man! And to make matters worse, he just *had* to trudge along in front of her in those tight jeans. Okay, they weren't all that tight, but

still, his ass looked magnificent in them. The man was going to be the death of her. Kat groaned.

It wasn't helping her situation that she wasn't wearing any panties because she'd mistakenly bought them too small the day before, and there was no way she'd wear the panties she had originally worn twice in a row, so she'd gone commando. The seam of her jean shorts was rubbing her clit with every step she took. She couldn't decide if that was a good thing or a bad thing. It felt great! But it only provided enough stimulation to put her on edge. With that and Adrian's great butt, she was in agony.

It also brought on another dilemma. Her normal-sized clothes were getting too tight. She was going to have to go to a bigger size soon. She was still too small for maternity clothes, but she was getting too big for *her* clothes. She just hoped Adrian didn't notice. Of course, the way he'd harped on her diet, he'd probably attribute her little belly to that. "How much further to the lake?"

Adrian pushed a branch out of the way and held it for her. "Not far. Why? Aren't you enjoying the scenery?"

He turned back around, and she glanced down at his butt. "Yup. Great scenery." And the woods were nice, too. It was every bit as beautiful as Adrian had claimed it would be, and he certainly seemed to take pleasure in being outside. He had been fairly quiet, only pointing out things of interest here and there, but he seemed to be enjoying himself. That surprised her. He didn't seem like the outdoorsy type. He was just too brainy ... nerdy, actually; more inclined to intellectual pursuits. He sure didn't look like a geek, though; more like a fashion model or maybe an athlete, not a neurosurgeon.

"We're here. What do you think?"

Kat looked past Adrian. They were on a cliff, overlooking a placid lake; the view was breathtaking. Kat put her hands on her knees and took in a big gulp of air. Having suddenly emerged on a cliff, she felt a little better about being winded. They *had* been climbing, albeit gradually.

Adrian laid out the blanket and set down the picnic basket before he dropped onto the blanket. He patted the ground next to him. "Have a seat. You look flushed."

She sat down next to him, then wished she hadn't. Her waistband dug into her stomach, and the treacherous seam put immense pressure on her clit. She just barely held back a groan. Lying back on the blanket, she unsnapped and unzipped her pants. She didn't really care what Adrian thought. She wasn't going to put undue pressure on her baby; nor was she going to sit around resisting the urge to rock back and forth to put friction on her throbbing clit. She heard a sudden intake of breath and glanced up.

Adrian was staring at her midsection. Kat looked down at her tummy quickly, afraid he could tell she was pregnant. Lying back like she was, her stomach was flat. There was no way he could guess.

His palm covered her abdomen. She stared at it. His hand was so dark against her pale skin. She'd always found the difference in their complexions sexy. It was no less so now. He slipped his hand inside her jeans, running his fingers across her hipbone. "I love your pale skin. It's so smooth and soft."

Kat swallowed. His hand felt so good on her. She desperately wanted to push it further down, but she didn't dare. She lay there, staring up into his eyes. The sunlight made them appear golden. He was so handsome. His hand slid down and brushed just the top of her pussy. Kat shivered and licked her lips.

He leaned down over her, his mouth inches from her own, then bent further, brushing his mouth with hers. She closed her eyes and parted her lips. She could feel his breath, warm and moist. A soft caress played across her lips; then she felt his tongue flick her. He deepened the kiss, his tongue plunging into her mouth. His fingers sank further into her shorts, brushing her clit. She moaned. It was heaven! Her stomach clenched in excitement. The pants were in the way, so she lifted her hips.

Adrian didn't hesitate; he lifted his head and slid her pants down her legs to her thighs. One long finger slipped over her aching clit, through her swollen lips, and into her wet opening. Her inner muscles tightened on the digit as she opened her eyes and gazed up at his face. His eyes were closed and his lips pursed. He almost looked like he was in pain, but Kat knew it was arousal. She pulled him back down to her and flicked her tongue across his lips. He took over, thrusting his tongue into her mouth. She sighed in bliss as he kissed her. His finger was now making wet sounds as it drove in and out of her pussy. She could feel her juices running down her crease as he fingered her. Her stomach clenched again, and a shiver ran down her spine. She was so close to orgasming. He moaned low in his throat as his tongue dueled with hers.

His lips slid off hers and down her neck. "Oh, honey, you are so wet."

Kat gasped as he slipped another finger into her. She moaned and lifted her hips into his hand, trying to take them deeper.

He started sliding down her body. "Kitten, I've got to taste you."

Oh, yes! "No! Adrian, stop!" Kat sat up. What in the world had she been thinking? Damned pregnancy hormones! They had her so horny, she'd lost her mind. She pushed Adrian away from her and quickly pulled her shorts up. Dropping her head into her hands, she mumbled an apology.

Adrian flopped back on the blanket beside her. After about ten minutes he sat up. "Are you hungry?"

"Yes."

He started unpacking their lunch as she sat silently, contemplating him. He didn't seem mad that she'd stopped him, just disappointed. She could see the outline of his erect cock through the denim of his jeans, but other than that, he acted like nothing had happened. He'd stopped as soon as she'd told him to, but it didn't change the fact that he'd taken

advantage of her vulnerability again. He'd broken her heart and left her pregnant. She couldn't afford to forget that.

They ate their meal in silence, then headed back to the cabin. Coming back was a lot easier than going, but on the return trip her bladder began to protest.

As soon as they hit the door, she took off toward the bathroom. She came back to the open area of the cabin that consisted of a den, the kitchen, and living room. She looked around and noticed Adrian was nowhere in sight, but his phone was lying on the kitchen bar. With Adrian baiting her over her diet at breakfast, and the picnic, she'd nearly forgotten that she'd promised to call Alex and Jess.

Kat went to the bar, looking around all the while for any sign of Adrian. She grabbed the phone and sank down to the floor on the other side of the bar. She dialed Alex's number, hoping that Adrian would stay gone long enough for her to talk to Alex.

"Hello?"

"Alex? It's Kat."

"Are you all right? Brent called last night and told us what was going on."

"He did?"

"Yes, he did. Are you okay? Why didn't you tell Jess or me what was going on? You said it was no big deal. When we get ba--"

Kat grinned. She'd better cut him off. Alex was long-winded when he got going ... at least when he went into lecture mode. She filled him in on what had happened at the clinic with the doctor. Then a thought occurred to her. "Alex! Does Brent know about ... you know?"

"Yes. Why?"

"Because Adrian called him to look into the situation. What if he tells Adrian what he finds out? Adrian isn't stupid; he'll figure out about the baby."

Alex sighed into the phone. "You know I think you should tell him --"

"But Alex, I --"

"I know, I know. Listen, I told Brent not to say anything. He's supposed to report back to me, and I'll tell him what to tell Adrian. In the meantime, I want you to stay there with Adrian. Jess and I will be back tomorrow evening --"

The sound of a throat clearing interrupted. *Oh, crap!*

"Gotta go! See you guys tomorrow." Kat pushed the end button as a pair of hiking boots came into her line of sight. She looked up into a pair of angry brown eyes.

Chapter Nine

“Hi. Where were you?” Kat grinned and tried to look innocent.

Adrian frowned down at her. “Why are you sneaking my phone to make calls?”

“What?” Kat reached her hand up to him. “I didn’t sneak your phone.” He grabbed her hand and gently pulled her up. “I didn’t think you’d mind me using it.” She stood and smiled at him, then turned and placed the phone on the counter, hoping Jess was wrong about lies showing on her face. Because this was a big one, and he’d caught her red-handed.

“Why were you hiding behind the bar if you weren’t trying to keep it from me?”

Think, Kat! She put every bit of outrage she could muster into her voice. “Hiding? I wasn’t hiding! I was in the kitchen when I made the call. My feet hurt from you dragging me all over the place today, so I sat down. Is there anything wrong with that?”

Kat started walking off, hoping he’d drop it if she acted offended at his accusations.

“Who were you calling?”

Kat sighed, but didn’t stop. God, he was like a dog with a bone. “Jess. I was calling to see if she was enjoying her honeymoon.”

“Then why did you hang up when you saw me?” Adrian grabbed her arm and spun her around. Surprised, Kat did the only thing she could think of ... she kissed him.

At first, he stiffened, like he knew what her ploy was, but gradually he responded, until he finally took over. His hands ran down her back to her bottom and pulled her close. His erection pressed into her belly. It felt wonderful to know she had such power over him. He rubbed himself against her.

Kat knew she should have never initiated intimacy between them, especially since she wanted to distance herself from him, but, boy, did it feel good having him pressed up against her. He smelled so good, too, and he was so strong and masculine. She wished with all her

heart that she could explore this physical connection between them, because she'd never get another chance. She would not parade men in front of her child. As far as she was concerned, she was done with men ... forever.

Adrian had broken her heart, and she'd be damned if she'd allow it to happen again. Besides, she didn't *need* a man. She could raise her child and take care of things by herself. Who needed a sex life? She'd gone twenty-three years without one. And her small taste of it had been a little disappointing. Sure, it had held promise, but it wasn't something she couldn't live without ... or, if she dared, that a vibrator or dildo couldn't take care of.

Adrian moaned and slid his lips down her neck. Kat shivered in delight. Man, oh, man, he was a master at seduction. It was amazing how quickly things were getting away from her. What would it be like to fully and completely make love with him, to explore his body? Couldn't she find out just this once? It wasn't like she could get any more pregnant than she already was, right?

His lips nestled into the hollow at the base of her throat, and his teeth nipped the skin. Kat sighed and dropped her head back, giving him better access. If they had sex, no one but the two of them would know. So shouldn't she at least explore the possibilities while she could without consequences? But maybe there *would* be consequences ... to her heart.

Adrian's head dropped to her breasts, and he sucked in an erect nipple through the fabric of her shirt. She looked down at the top of his head and felt her insides clench. *Oh, heck! Why am I fighting it?* As long as she kept her heart separate and made sure he knew it was purely physical, there was no problem. Right? "Adrian?"

"Uh?" His hands were inching under her shirt.

"No strings, okay?"

"What?" One hand covered her breast and squeezed gently. They both moaned. His other hand pushed her shirt up over her bra, then traveled around back to the hooks while he rained kisses on her chest.

"I want this. I want to have sex, but I don't want a relationship. This doesn't mean anything."

His hands stilled. He didn't move for several seconds. Finally, he inhaled, then exhaled deeply as his hands resumed fumbling with the clasp on her bra. Keeping his head to her chest, he slowly took her to the ground with him. "Okay, kitten. We'll play it your way ... for a while."

He had no intention of doing what she wanted. No way would he accept that they were finished. She was his, and she would always be his. Making love to him without any emotional connection was not going to be as easy as she thought. She was not going to be able to keep the physical and emotional love separate. If she had been able to do so, she'd have never been with him the first time. She wasn't the kind of woman who could have sex

without any deeper feelings. Hell, she had been a virgin until him, and though she'd had no intention of ever having sex without a marriage license, things had gotten out of hand. Of course, he wasn't going to point that out to her. She was playing right into his hands, both figuratively and literally.

Adrian caught one pert nipple in his mouth and realized immediately he was going to have a problem. No sooner had he taken the stiff little peak into his mouth than his canines had grown. It was broad daylight and there was no way he could keep her from seeing his other self.

He squeezed his eyes shut and continued his exploration. She threaded her fingers through his hair as he cupped her other breast in his hand. They seemed larger, firmer than before. Or maybe her breasts had always been that size. He was fuzzy on the details of their one time together, and that wasn't something he was especially proud of. He was still a little ashamed of himself, even knowing now that he had lost control *because* she was his mate.

He loved the way her nipples stabbed into his palms and how she arched her back into his caress. He sucked harder, eliciting a moan from her. He wanted to sit up and look at her, but he couldn't chance her seeing his eyes. Moving his face to her neck, he slid off her and pulled her shirt and bra off, then undid her pants and rolled her onto her stomach.

"Adrian?" She sounded worried.

He grinned and wrapped his hands around her hips. "It's okay, honey. Lift your hips up so I can get these shorts off you." He removed her pants, then sucked in a breath. Her pretty, pale little ass was in the air, and the way she was poised, her plump, moist pussy lips were peeking up at him. He took a deep breath. She was just as aroused as she had been by the lake. There had been no disguising the scent then, and there was no disguising it now.

He couldn't help himself; he lowered his head and buried his face in her cunt. She gasped and wiggled, but he stilled her movements with one hand and spread her labia open with the other. His tongue glided up her center, tasting her wetness. "Mmmm ..."

Katherine sucked in a breath. "Oh, my God!"

"Uh." Adrian lay down on his back, then pulled her toward him. "Honey, I want you to lie on top of me on your stomach ... facing my feet."

Katherine positioned herself as he had asked, her drenched pussy in his face. "Like this?"

Adrian groaned. "Oh, yes, just like that!" He grabbed her hips and pulled her to him, burying his tongue in her sopping little hole. She moaned and gasped as he plunged his tongue over and over into her. When he started sucking lightly on her clit, she bucked and tried to squirm away, but he held her still. Nothing had ever felt so wonderful. Maybe she was wrong and couldn't live without this for the rest of her life.

She could feel his erection under her cheek. Every little wiggle she made rubbed his cock and elicited a groan from him. Just knowing that he was hard made her more excited. She wanted to undress him and return the favor, but she couldn't stop him long enough to do so, and she couldn't concentrate on anything but his wicked tongue. It wasn't long before she began whimpering between pants. She needed to move. Needed his tongue to stay ... right ... there. Soon, she was mashing herself into his face.

When he inserted a finger into her tight heat while his mouth was still latched onto her clit, she thought she'd die. She could feel her pussy dripping and knew her juices had to be running down his chin. She was *so* wet. Her pussy clenched and unclenched repeatedly around his finger. "Oh, my God! Oh, my God! Ahhhh!" Katherine ground her face into his erection.

Adrian moaned and strained toward her, pressing his cock against her cheek, hard.

Her legs began to quiver. She lifted her head, trying to get more leverage. She pumped her hips against his chest and her pussy against his mouth. It felt sooo good! Her pussy tightened and spasmed, and her breath completely left her. She actually got a little tingly sensation along her spine. When her orgasm came, it was more powerful than any she'd had before. She tensed and felt a gush of fluid rush into his mouth ... and screamed his name as she came.

Oh, yeah, she tasted every bit as good as he'd known she would. The way she'd ground herself into his face was one of the sexiest things he'd ever felt. It had taken major effort on his part to keep from coming in his jeans.

Adrian slid out from beneath her, leaving her lying in a sated sprawl on her stomach. He got to his knees and undid his jeans, freeing his aching cock. He hissed out a breath through his fangs at the sudden freedom, then positioned himself between Katherine's outstretched legs and pulled her to her hands and knees. In her satisfied condition, she didn't protest, nor did she look back at him, for which he was extremely grateful because he knew his eyes were now amber. They had to be, since his eyesight had changed to his wolf view.

Even through his monochromatic vision he could see her sex glistening with her juices, and her labia was even more swollen than before. Adrian growled his appreciation of the sight.

Grabbing his cock in his fist, he leaned into her, one hand on her hip. Slowly, he nudged her slick opening. Even as wet as she was, he didn't glide right in ... she was very tight. He would have to be careful with her in this position.

"Relax, honey." Gradually, he pressed in. She was so snug around him. He squeezed his eyes closed and concentrated to keep from losing control. He was so close to coming, and he wasn't even all the way inside her yet. Had sex ever felt this good? They'd hardly started and he was so close to orgasming, it was pathetic.

Katherine relaxed, and her body loosened up more, allowing him entrance. "Oh, wow! I don't remember this feeling *that* good before."

"Me, either, kitten. Me, either." Finally Adrian was balls-deep inside of her. He took a deep breath and withdrew slowly. Inch by inch, he pushed back into her. He kept a slow tempo at first, but when Katherine didn't seem to be having any problem accepting him, he sped up. The faster he thrust, the shallower he went in. She was still very new to all this. He'd rather tear off his right arm than hurt her.

She tried to push into him, but he held her still. "Adriannnn ..." She growled.

"What? What's the matter?"

"Nothing. But if you don't do it harder, I'm going to have to hurt you."

He smiled, taken aback by her words. She was full of surprises lately. Katherine was normally a shy little thing; to hear her speak so bluntly was unexpected, but he liked it.

He thrust deeper and relaxed his hands. As soon as he released his death grip on her hips, she pushed herself back into him, hard. It was all the permission he needed, and he slammed into her, quickening his tempo, his balls slapping against her. She started panting again and met him thrust for thrust. His cock jerked, and his balls began to draw up. If she didn't hurry, he was going to come before her. He reached around and pinched her clit between his thumb and forefinger. She squealed. Making a milking motion, he manipulated her clit until her inner muscles clamped down on his cock. It was too much; he couldn't hold back any longer.

He dropped his body forward over hers and latched his teeth onto her shoulder as he spilled himself into her. As the last jets of semen left his body, her pussy spasmed, and she came too.

Katherine collapsed under him. He barely stopped himself from falling with her. Sitting back on his heels, he watched as she sighed in bliss. His come leaked out of her pink and swollen pussy. He felt his chest swell with pride and realized that he was seeing color again.

He sat there, content just to watch her. It was only seconds before her breathing evened out and deepened. She'd fallen asleep. He grinned at the contented picture she made. *You are mine now! You just think there are no strings attached, kitten.*

Adrian got up and righted his clothes. He ran his tongue across his teeth to assure himself that they'd gone back to normal, then scooped Katherine into his arms and carried her to his bed. He needed to find out who the sneaky little wench had called, but that could wait ... until after he cuddled up and took a nap with his mate.

Chapter Ten

Kat blinked several times, trying to get her eyes to work. How long had she slept? She arched her back to stretch and realized that Adrian's arm was over her waist. She smiled, thinking about the afternoon they'd shared. That had been one of the best decisions she'd made so far. She felt wonderful. It was like being recharged.

She finally managed to keep her eyelids open. It was still light outside. Kat could hear Adrian's deep, even breathing behind her. Apparently she wasn't the only one who was tired out by that bout of lovemaking -- sex. She had to think of it as just sex. Lovemaking was something that occurred when two people loved each other. She *did* love him; she probably always would. But she was not going to remain emotionally attached. This was not a relationship. It was a one -- or perhaps, several -- night stand. Kat grinned to herself. Yes, if she had anything to say about it, it would most definitely happen again. This experience, however long it continued, was going to have to last a lifetime.

Kat stretched again. She started to turn over and see if she could persuade Adrian into another round, when the baby made itself known again. Carefully, Kat slid out of bed. Adrian wasn't an idiot; he might pass off the two spells of morning sickness she'd had so far as nerves, but eventually he'd catch on. He might specialize in the brain, but he was still a doctor. She grabbed the robe she'd discarded earlier and slipped it on, then made a quiet, uneventful escape to the bathroom ... just in time.

After she was sure the sickness was over and she'd freshened up, she snuck into the kitchen and grabbed a sleeve of crackers out of the box she'd bought. She needed a shower, but something to eat was her first priority. Crackers always seemed to do the trick, so she stood at the counter, sipped some water, and gulped down several crackers in little nibbles.

She glanced out the window as she ate. It was getting dark outside. After her stomach settled and she showered, she'd need to take her prenatal vitamins. She'd forgotten to take

one the night before. She'd briefly considered taking it this morning, but previously it had made her sick when she'd taken them first thing, so she'd take one after her shower. She also needed to wash her clothes. She hadn't bought many, and wearing the same clothes over and over was not the least bit appealing. Maybe Jess or Claire had some clothes here that she could wear.

She finished off the sleeve of crackers and went in search of a washer and dryer. This place was huge. There were six rooms downstairs, including the large open area that contained the den, kitchen, and dining room, and upstairs there were at least eight rooms. She knew that, along with Adrian, Alex and Brent had rooms, as well as Alex's parents and Brent's parents. Dash and Jill and Adrian's parents probably had one, too, but Adrian hadn't mentioned it. Kat knew Jess's in-laws, Diego and Claire, had money, but, jeez, this place was definitely worth big bucks; it was bigger than their house.

While exploring, she found a clinic-type room, which made sense. They were out in the middle of nowhere, and with three doctors in the family ... hey, it was smart. She discovered a media room complete with the latest electronics and big-screen TV. Well, that wasn't surprising either. Kat shook her head and grinned. *Men and their toys*. There were two bathrooms on the bottom floor. That would have been helpful to know earlier in the day. She shook her head and kept looking. Finally, she found a laundry room.

She'd wash her clothes later. It was only her and Adrian, so she could wear his robe for the rest of the night. Kat grinned. She was sure he wouldn't mind. All sorts of wicked thoughts ran through her head. Yep, the robe would work for now.

Tiptoeing up the stairs, she made her way back to Adrian's room and grabbed her purse off the dresser, then went into the adjoining bathroom. She wondered if all the bedrooms had their own personal bathroom ... talk about *mucho dinero*.

Kat set her purse on the counter, then turned on the shower. She got out some towels and quickly went about getting clean, which had the desired effect -- she felt fresh and invigorated. She dried her hair with a towel, then brushed it out. Her teeth felt fuzzy, so she searched through the cabinets and drawers until she found an unwrapped toothbrush. She put Adrian's robe back on and headed for the door.

It was time to do some laundry. Kat reached for the doorknob and stopped. There was a little flutter in her tummy. Her hand went to her stomach, and she looked down. Could that be the baby? She felt it again. It was very faint, almost like ... like butterflies. She smiled. Didn't they say the first movements felt like butterflies?

Her smile widened, and tears sprang to her eyes. It had to be the baby. What else could it be? She held perfectly still, hoping to feel it move again. After several minutes, nothing happened. She finally decided that the baby wasn't going to cooperate and wiped the tears off her face. Her face hurt from smiling, but she couldn't help it. She wished she could tell someone. But calling Jess would be too big of a hassle, and, well, she couldn't tell Adrian, now could she?

She sighed and went back to the counter; she'd forgotten her vitamins again. She giggled as she fumbled with the lid. Her baby was already trying to take charge and be the parent. She'd totally forgotten about the pills, but the baby had reminded her. Her hand flew off the lid, catching her nail. She turned her body to the side, trying to get a better angle, not that it helped. *Stupid childproof lids!*

"Here, let me."

Kat screamed. She glanced up in the mirror to find Adrian standing at the door ... naked. The man was a work of art. "You scared the crud out of me! Don't you knock?"

Adrian shrugged and walked closer. "It's my bathroom." He reached out a hand. "Here, give me that before you end up spilling them all over the floor."

Kat clutched them to her chest. "No!"

He jerked slightly, and his eyes widened in surprise. He raised his eyebrows.

Realizing that she'd shouted, she cleared her throat. "It's okay, I've got it." Fortunately, the bottle decided to comply. The lid popped off after one more try. She tossed the pill into her mouth, put the lid back on, and threw the bottle into her purse, then grabbed the glass off the counter, filled it with water, and downed her vitamin. "See. Got it." She opened her mouth and stuck out her tongue, showing him. *Man, that was a close one.* She couldn't afford to let him see the bottle or the pills.

He blinked and shook his head. "Your allergy medication?"

"Huh?"

He bobbed his head toward her purse. "That's the 'script that Alex called in for you?"

"Oh! Yeah." Kat nodded and smiled.

Adrian quirked a brow.

She picked up her purse and walked past him. "I'll go make us some dinner. Why don't you take a shower?" Disaster averted, Kat glanced back just before she shut the door. *What a great set of buns!*

Adrian turned around and looked at the closed bathroom door. That was it? Not even a kiss after the afternoon they'd shared? He was standing in the bathroom with a boner, and she'd just toddled on out of the room like it was no big deal. No blush, no "thanks for this afternoon" ... nothing. In fact, she'd seemed pretty anxious to leave. Oh, yes, she was definitely up to something. His kitten had a lot of secrets lately.

Well, they weren't going to be secrets for long. She was his mate, and he needed to know what she was hiding so he could take care of her. He nodded to himself and opened the bathroom door. He looked around the bedroom; it was empty. Evidently, Katherine had really gone down to the kitchen, because he could smell some sort of meat cooking.

He stepped into the bedroom and looked around. He'd start with her pills, then the mysterious phone call she'd made this afternoon. She sure seemed determined not to let him help open them. Was it her pride? He knew it rankled her to accept anything from him, but that seemed a little extreme. She had, after all, accepted his help by coming to the cabin and graciously allowing him to buy food. She'd even made love to him. Nope, something just didn't add up. What was she taking? He knew Alex would never prescribe her a narcotic, so it couldn't be that. Did she have some sort of condition she wanted to keep from him?

Her purse wasn't on the dresser where it had been before. It wasn't anywhere in plain sight. Yep, that clinched it! She *was* hiding it. Adrian lifted the bed skirt and looked under the bed, then checked the closet. He opened the drawers in the dresser and in the nightstands. It wasn't in the room. She'd obviously taken it with her downstairs.

He flopped down on the edge of the bed, then lay back and rested his arms over his head. He had to give her credit. She was sneaky. She probably knew he'd look in her purse as soon as she left.

Adrian heaved a sigh and looked for his phone. *Damn!* It was downstairs, too. He needed to know who she had called earlier. It wasn't really that far of a stretch to think she'd called Jess. She and Jess were very close, after all, and they owned a business together. But what if it wasn't Jess she had called? What if it were another man? His teeth clenched together at the thought. He'd destroy any other man that laid a finger on his mate. Just like he was going to do when he found those psychos who had terrified her.

He relaxed. She didn't have another man if she'd come to him. Not only that, he'd have heard through Jess if Katherine had been seeing anyone else ... unless she was having an affair with Brent. She *had* come to Brent's house seeking shelter.

Adrian sat up, suddenly tense again. Would his cousin do that to him? No, not Brent. Brent hadn't been with a woman since Rhett had disappeared. At least, he didn't think so. If Brent had had other lovers, he'd been good at keeping them from the family, because no one knew of any. Brent had been truly surprised that Katherine had men with assault weapons chasing her. He'd also been pleased to hear that Adrian was with her. Hadn't he told him not to screw up this time? Those were hardly the actions of a man who was having a flaming affair behind one's back. Brent knew better than anyone what it was like to be without a mate; that's why he had taken Adrian's breakup with Kat so personally. No, there was no way Brent would cheat with Katherine.

He was being paranoid. She wasn't completely his yet, and he was already extremely possessive. It was his wolf nature, but he somehow doubted that Katherine would appreciate it.

Adrian relaxed and smiled to himself, then got up and strolled back into the bathroom. He turned on the shower and got down a towel. He'd have to call Alex later. He wanted to hurry up and get downstairs with his mate. Secrets or no secrets, he didn't like being away from her, and he wouldn't be away from her ... ever again. As soon as they got this mess

figured out, he was going to fly her to Vegas and marry her -- with her kicking and screaming, if necessary. Adrian chuckled at the image and got into the shower. There was still plenty of time left to replace her faith in him. Once he figured out what she was hiding, it would be even easier.

Chapter Eleven

Michael McCoy pulled his glasses off and ran his hand down his face, then pinched the bridge of his nose. Eight hours straight in front of the computer was giving him a headache. He set his glasses down on the desk and pressed the heels of his hands into his eye sockets. He hated wearing glasses, but he didn't have much choice. It was either that or not see up close. Thankfully, his far sight and his wolf vision were still perfect. Good thing, too, since he couldn't imagine how he'd wear glasses in wolf form -- he'd look like the wolf in the story of Little Red Riding Hood. He chuckled. Maybe he'd have that laser surgery to fix his farsightedness, especially if it began to affect his sight in wolf form.

He closed his eyes and leaned back in his chair, relaxing his poor, tired eyes. He'd finally found what he'd been looking for, and he almost wished he hadn't. The old saying about ignorance being bliss was true, at least to his mind.

"Uh-oh. That bad?"

Michael opened his eyes. Emilio was standing over him, looking at the computer. Sneaky bastard. Michael hadn't sensed him. *Damn*. The long stint in front of the computer must be affecting more than his eyes.

Emilio leaned forward and placed a sandwich and a glass of tea on his desk. "Thought you might need sustenance. Sarah made this up and said you were to eat it or else."

Michael grinned and closed his eyes again. "Thank you." Sarah was so nurturing, always making sure he and Emilio were taken care of. Michael made a mental note to thank her. He should probably also thank Emilio for marrying her; Emilio couldn't have found a better woman. She had been busy all day today going over files and evidence for a story she was working on. She must have taken time away from that to make him a sandwich. She obviously realized that he hadn't eaten. Well, she *was* one hell of an investigative reporter.

"You're welcome." Emilio's hands closed over his shoulders and started kneading.

Oh, that feels good. Michael turned his head and rubbed his face on the side of Emilio's forearm.

Emilio chuckled and the massage ended. His hand found its way to Michael's hair and began stroking, his fingers running through it. His other hand fondled Michael's chin and cheek. "You find anything?"

Michael leaned into the contact. *Oh, yeah, that's it. Scratch behind my ears, please.* He turned his head toward the hand brushing his cheek, trying to nudge it toward his ear. Apparently Emilio got the hint, because his fingers raked behind Michael's left ear. Michael's right leg jerked repeatedly in response and made little thudding sounds when it came in contact with the side of his desk. *Oh, yeah, baby. That feels great!* He sighed in ecstasy.

The caressing stopped. "Michael, I asked if you found anything?"

Huh? Find what? He growled and opened his eyes. Emilio's dark ones peered down at him. He sighed and sat up, grabbing his glasses and putting them on. It looked like the petting session was over. "Yeah. I did. Pull up a chair. You remember I found that computer graphics company listed as owner of the property Rome was held at? Well, I still haven't found an owner for the company, but I found this while I was snooping around the company website."

He grabbed his sandwich and took a bite as Emilio pulled another chair up to the desk and sat down. He put his sandwich back down as he chewed, then swallowed, and went to work, backtracking to the first webpage he'd found. "This site ..." Michael pointed. "... is made to look like a role-playing game. It was listed as a link on the computer graphics company's webpage. It's called the Werewolf Termination Squad."

Emilio's head snapped toward him, his dark brown eyes wide. "Are you kidding me?"

"Nope. Unfortunately, it's true. What are the odds? I hardly think it's a coincidence. Once you dig in here ..." Michael scrolled down the page and clicked a button. He pointed to the screen again. "... you'll find a list of squad leaders and their territory. See? And look at this: Lisa Mitchell. That was Jess and Kat's boss's name. I still haven't found a Clifford Gordon yet ... that's the name Brent wanted me to find stuff on. But I'm not done looking "

"Holy shit!"

Michael shook his head. "That's not all; it gets worse. Read this." He clicked to another page and pointed to the screen. Michael grabbed his sandwich and took another bite, allowing Emilio to check out the page.

Emilio leaned forward in his chair and began reading. "Cash rewards and extra points will be given for any live captive werewolves (100 points; cash value will depend on specimen), their non-werewolf mates (75 points; value to be determined), or their offspring (250 points; again, value to be determined). Sufficient testing must be done in order to completely eradicate these freaks. Remember, they have quick reflexes and extraordinary strength. As yet, we haven't been able to determine the amount of time it takes them to transform. The length seems to vary, and we do not know the reason for this at this time.

Please consider the creatures dangerous at all times. Take precautions, and use a tranquilizer gun for apprehension. Once the monster is caged, contact your district leader for appropriate tests, exams, and your reward.”

Michael studied his expression as he read. Emilio appeared just as shocked and angry as Michael had been. He turned his head and stared at Michael. “Do you think they took her?” he asked. “Do you think they took our little girl?”

Michael swallowed what was in his mouth and took a swig of tea. He shook his head. “I don’t know, I just don’t know. I think it’s a definite possibility.”

Emilio looked back at the screen, eyes moist. “She was my little girl. You’ve always been closer to Brent, and Sarah to the twins, but Rhett ... Rhett was my baby. Not that I love her more than the boys, but ...” Emilio put his elbows on the desk and dropped his head into his hands. “God, I miss her!”

Michael stared up at the ceiling for a few seconds, trying desperately not to join Emilio in tears. He hadn’t cried over his daughter in years ... hell, Emilio hadn’t either, for that matter. Michael still missed her like mad, but he had put the pain behind him and tried to remember the good things.

He took a deep, cleansing breath and looked at Emilio, running his fingers through Emilio’s soft black hair. It was getting long again. Emilio’s hair grew fast. Sarah liked it long and was always pestering him to grow it out, but he never did; he liked it short. Michael didn’t care one way or the other. Emilio had great hair no matter how he chose to wear it. Michael brushed the hair out of Emilio’s face and tilted his chin up.

Emilio immediately sat up and dried his face. He cleared his throat and blinked, trying to pretend he wasn’t crying, Michael supposed.

“We’re going to break this thing open and bring down this group of zealots any way we can, and we’re going to find out.” Michael blinked rapidly, then added, “If she’s still alive, we’ll find her.”

Emilio slugged him in the arm. “Cut that shit out. I just stopped. You want me to start up again?”

Michael grinned and shook his head. God, no, he didn’t want Emilio to start again; he’d lose it himself for sure.

“Start up what again?” Sarah asked.

Michael and Emilio both looked toward the door. Sarah came into the room, her long mahogany hair swaying in its ponytail, and leaned down to kiss both their mouths. She was every bit as beautiful as she’d been the first day they met her. She looked more like a thirty-one-year-old woman than one who had just turned fifty-one. Her big, beautiful green eyes focused on Emilio, then turned to Michael. “What are we starting up again?”

They groaned in unison, obviously thinking the same thing. If they told Sarah, she’d join in a cry, too, and then they’d get nothing accomplished.

Emilio scooted his chair back so Sarah could join them.

She sat down in Michael's lap, then leaned forward and looked into Emilio's eyes. "Honey, are you okay?" She didn't wait for him to answer before she turned her attention to Michael. "Is he okay? You two aren't arguing, are you?"

Emilio grinned and shook his head. "You mean to tell me that in the last thirty-five years, you still haven't learned to tell when we fight?"

Michael chuckled. He and Emilio had certainly had their disagreements over the years. Usually it was obvious to everyone. It was to be expected, after all: two alpha males could not live together without having a difference of opinion on occasion. They more often than not ended up in an all-out shouting match. A couple of times they'd almost come to blows. It was part of their nature; they were both dominant male wolves. Neither of them ever wanted to admit to being wrong. Fortunately, they never stayed mad long. How could they? Sarah wouldn't allow it. She'd get right in the middle and tell them they were both idiots and to sit down and shut up. She was the perfect woman, no doubt about it. There was nothing she couldn't handle. She was the calm in the storm, the voice of reason, and the light at the end of the tunnel. She knew how to keep the peace and had done so for long as he could remember. Brent had inherited that trait from her, and he used it quite frequently to calm his cousins and pack.

Michael pulled her back against his chest and kissed her neck. "We aren't fighting." He turned his chair back toward the computer and pointed. "Read."

Sarah sat quietly for several minutes, scrunching her pert little nose at one point. Her full luscious lips snarled; her delicate eyebrows drew tighter together. Then finally she relaxed, her pretty, heart-shaped face blank. She got out of Michael's lap and looked at him and Emilio.

"We are going to get these assholes! I bet the psycho sons of bitches took my baby girl away! I want in on this investigation. I'm not going to stand by and let the two of you do all the work. I have connections, too." She looked at Emilio, then shot Michael a glare.

He hadn't expected that; he'd thought for sure she would start bawling her eyes out. There was no way he was going to let Sarah endanger herself by helping investigate these crazies.

"I mean it, Michael Brent McCoy! Don't you try and keep me out of this!"

Emilio chuckled.

Michael raised his right eyebrow, then threw his hands up in the air, letting them drop again. "What? I didn't say anything."

Emilio covered his mouth, trying to pretend he was coughing, but Michael knew he was muffling his laughter.

Michael glared at him. He wasn't helping. Sarah didn't need to be involved. It was dangerous. Eventually they were going to find these assholes, and they were going to have to deal with them.

"*Yet* ... you didn't say anything *yet*. But I know you. Don't you start that macho cowboy bullshit with me. I'm not some delicate little flower."

Emilio doubled over with laughter, no longer trying to hide it. "She knows you too well ... give it up. Besides, from what that site says, she's already in danger. Obviously they know about Roman. If they know about Rome, then they know about you. And, well, if they know about you, they know about Sarah, Brent, Rand, and me, as well.

Emilio was right, of course, but Michael didn't have to like it. He scowled at Sarah.

She put her hands on her hips, looked him square in the eye, and scowled right back. Michael sighed. He knew her well enough to know that if her men and her children were involved, she was not going to stay out of it. It would be better to let her in so they could at least watch over her and protect her. Otherwise, she'd just go off on her own. Michael shook his head and smiled. "I wouldn't dream of it, darlin'." He pulled her down in his lap and kissed her. When he finally came up for air, he added. "You'd just tag along anyhow."

Sarah gave a sharp nod, then stood up, moving in front of Emilio. "You got something to say?"

Emilio grinned. "He hasn't worked a ranch in over thirty years."

Sarah shook her head at him. "No, but he still has the 'tude." She bent over and kissed him, then headed toward the door. "Actually, so do you. I'm going to finish up this story; then I'll be back." She disappeared from sight. "Eat your sandwich, Michael!"

"I never had *the* 'tude, wench!" Emilio yelled after her, then looked at Michael and grinned.

Michael smiled. *Yeah, right!* Emilio had just as much of the macho cowboy bullshit attitude, as Sarah called it, as Michael did. He just didn't cop that 'tude with Sarah. He let Michael handle Sarah; then he, in turn, tried to manage Michael.

Emilio leaned forward. "Keep looking. I'll call Brent and tell him what you've found."

As he stood up to walk away, Michael grabbed his arm. "Don't tell him what we suspect about Rhett. Not yet. It's just conjecture right now, and it would only hurt him. We could be jumping the gun. We haven't found anything over the years to indicate that she didn't just run away."

"Why in the hell would she run away? She wouldn't leave like that. She had no reason to."

Michael stood and grabbed Emilio's shoulders. "I know that. I'm just saying we have nothing to prove what happened to her." Michael kissed him and ruffled his hair. "Okay?"

Emilio kissed him back, then nodded and walked out.

* * * * *

Adrian ran the towel over his head, making water drops scatter onto the mirror. He wiped the steam and water off the silvery surface, then wrapped the towel around his waist. A call to Alex was the first thing on his agenda. He needed to get a handle on things and find out what was going on, once and for all.

After combing out his wet hair, brushing his teeth, and getting dressed, he followed the delicious smells down the stairs. Katherine was standing at the counter, cutting up vegetables.

She looked up at him as he descended, and smiled. "Enjoy your shower?"

"I did. How about you? You seem refreshed and in a good mood."

"I am. I hope you don't mind my wearing your robe. I found the laundry room, and my clothes are in the wash."

He walked up behind her, hugged her, and rested his chin on her shoulder. She was chopping what looked to be the ingredients for a salad. "I don't mind at all. You look great in my robe." He kissed her on the neck, eliciting a giggle from her. His cock went on instant alert. Nuzzling the back of her neck, he took a deep breath, inhaling her sugary-sweet smell. He decided he liked this new scent. Maybe he shouldn't discourage her diet after all. He grinned, wondering what she'd say if he told her to go ahead and eat her cookies and sweets because he liked the way they made her smell. She'd think he was nuts for sure.

He slid his hand inside the top part of the robe and cupped her breast, then pressed up against her so she could feel his erection. She inhaled deeply and relaxed into him. "Thank you for this afternoon, kitten. It was wonderful."

Katherine sighed and dropped her head back on his shoulder for a brief second, then nodded and went back to cutting. "Yes, it was." She turned her head and kissed his cheek. "Thank you."

"You're very welcome." He plucked at her nipple and bit down on her shoulder.

"Oh, Lord! If you don't stop that, we aren't going to get any supper."

Adrian chuckled, releasing her shoulder, and slid his hand out of her robe, then stepped back. "Well, since I'm starving, I guess I'd better let you go. What are you making?"

"Steak, baked potatoes, salad, and rolls. See ... I do eat real food."

He walked around the counter and grinned at her. "So I see. It's good to know." Adrian sniffed the air again audibly. "It smells delicious."

Katherine looked up from her chopping and met his gaze. She gave him a little twitch of her hips and said softly, "Wait till you see what's for dessert."

His eyes widened. There was no mistaking what she meant. He growled deep in his throat. *The little tease*. Good Lord, he wasn't sure he could handle the little vixen if she got any bolder. "I can't wait!" His cock jerked in response, and his stomach clenched in

anticipation. He felt the familiar sting in his gums that warned of his erupting canines, and decided it was time to make a hasty retreat. He snatched up the phone on the end of the counter and headed for the back door. "I have to make a few calls. I'll be right outside the back door if you need me."

Chapter Twelve

Adrian stepped out into the fresh night air and called his cousin's cell number. He had always loved the outdoors. He supposed it was the wolf in him. Did Katherine like camping? Would she enjoy staying weekends up here in the woods?

"Hello?"

"What the hell are you hiding from me?"

Alex chuckled. "We're having a great time. Thanks for asking."

He groaned. Damn Alex! "Don't mess with me. I want to know what you and Jess seem to know about my mate that I don't. She's been calling you, and I want to know why!"

"Oh, ho, ho! *Now* you admit it! Now you stake your claim since things aren't going your way. Suddenly she's your mate and I'm interfering. I see how it is." He sounded amused, which irritated Adrian even more.

"Alex." He growled.

Alex sighed. "Look, I can't tell you what all is going on with Kat. They aren't my secrets to tell. I've talked to Brent, and he's looking into this crap. Jess and I are coming back tomorrow. Just take care of Kat, and let Brent figure out what's going on. I wish I could tell you what the hell this is about, but I can't. Quite frankly, I'm a little shocked myself. I can't imagine anyone wanting to hurt Kat."

"So you do know something?"

"Yeah, I know something, but like I said, it isn't my secret."

Adrian sighed and paced. He knew he wouldn't be able to bulldoze Alex and make him tell. Alex was every bit as stubborn as he was, and his cousin didn't take his word lightly -- if he'd promised not to tell, even torture wouldn't get it out of him. "Fine, let me talk to Jess."

Alex laughed. "She'll chew you up and spit you out. I guarantee she won't let you bully her into telling you."

Adrian knew that, but he was desperate. He ran a hand through his hair and walked a little further out. He glanced back at the cabin to make sure he was still within easy yelling distance. "She's my mate, Alex. I should have recognized it earlier, but I didn't. I freaked out. What can I say? I can't control my instincts when she's around, and it bothers the hell out of me."

"Look, coz, don't beat yourself up. That's just a part of being mates, so why the hell would you want to control yourself around her? Besides, you just said it yourself -- they're instincts. You aren't supposed to be able to control them."

"I know that, but you know I have more control than most." He glanced back at the cabin and leaned against the tree.

"I hear you. I have more control than most, too, but Jess ravages the hell out of it. Don't you remember Brent as a teenager? He probably has more control than either of us, always has, but Hellion had him all out of whack. I promise it gets better. It just takes time, and it takes some adjusting. You just have to get used to it. I know how anal you are about control. That's why you dumped her in the first place, isn't it?"

Adrian grinned. He started to say he wasn't anal, but he knew that was a useless argument. Anyone who knew him well knew that he was a bit anal. "Yes. God, I hope you're right. Do you have any idea how damn hard it is to keep it from her?"

"Yes, as a matter of fact, I do. Look, just take care of Kat. Get your relationship back on track, and let Brent and me take care of the rest."

There was what sounded like a brief scuffle, and then Jess came on the phone. "Listen, if you hurt her again, I'll cut off your --" There were more clatters and clanks. In the background, Alex was saying, "Give that back," which was followed by, "Tell him I mean it, Alex!"

Adrian chuckled; he could just picture the little demon climbing over Alex to snatch the phone. Jess was the perfect alpha female. She'd even give his aunt Claire a run for her money. He loved her loyalty. She was as protective as a mother hen when it came to Katherine. Actually, she was like that with anyone she loved. She considered it her duty to protect her loved ones. That was one of the things that made her such a great mate for their pack leader.

Finally, Alex came back on the line. "Sorry about that."

Adrian was smiling so big his face hurt. "It's okay. Put her on the phone."

"Uh, you sure that's a good idea?"

"Yes, I'm positive. Put her on the phone." He could hear Alex telling her to be nice; then she came on the line.

"What?" she snapped.

"I'm sorry. I promise not to hurt Katherine again, if you will promise to leave my favorite body part intact."

"Oh, Adrian." The hostility seemed to leave her voice. "She loves you. It would crush her if you did it again. She's just now getting over you ... maybe it would be better if you just left her alone."

"She's my mate, Jess. I'm not going to leave her alone ... not ever again. But I promise you I'll never run off on her again. I was stupid, I admit it, but my lapse of judgment is over. I don't want to fight with you. I need you on my side, because, God knows, I'm going to need all the help I can get." He was quiet for several seconds, hoping what he said would sink in. "I love her, Jess." Just saying the words out loud, it felt like a weight had been lifted off his chest.

"Tell her that."

"I will."

"Good, get to it. We're coming home tomorrow. Good luck. You're going to need it."

"Thanks. Tell Alex I'll talk to him later. I have to go find Katherine."

"Adrian?"

"Yeah?"

"I'm not the only one after your balls. You might want to be careful around Kat, too."

He threw back his head and laughed. "Bye, Jess." He hung up and walked back to the cabin.

Kat hummed a little tune along with the radio she'd found on the counter. She put the potatoes in the microwave, then opened the oven door and flipped the steaks. She did a little cha cha cha, then went back to the counter, pulling plates down and continuing to sway to the music. It was probably the dancer in her, but music made just about everything better. Cooking was certainly more fun with music. Normally she hated to cook, but she was actually enjoying preparing food for her and Adrian.

Somehow cooking for him made it more exciting. What would it be like to come home from work every day, start dinner, and wait for him to come in from the hospital? Would it always be this fun?

No! No! No! Kat slapped her forehead with the heel of her hand and shook her head. She was so not going to start daydreaming about cooking and cleaning for that jerk. So they'd had a great afternoon. It was just sex! She had to keep it straight. Once this fiasco with her doctor was over, she was gone. G-O-N-E, gone! She and her baby wouldn't see Adrian again. Well, maybe occasionally, since he was Alex's cousin, but their relationship was over. No dating, no sex, no talking, nothing. Fine, she'd talk to him. He had gone out of his way to help her. She could at least be pleasant when he was around, but she would not go back to him!

Kat turned and *chasséd* to the table with the plates. She was not going to let Adrian ruin the fun she was having. Worrying could come after Alex and Jess came to get her. Then the three of them could figure out what to do with her psycho doctor. She was going to enjoy this time and treat it like a vacation ... complete with a sexual adventure. She grinned.

A leap and a drag of her foot took her back to the counter. She dipped while rocking her hips side to side, then shimmied up. She grabbed the glasses and *chainé*-turned to the table again. The song ended, and Kat hit an ending pose with one glass in the air and the other on her hip.

The sound of clapping startled her into a little hop. “Eep!” She spun around.

Adrian was leaning against the back door, clapping his hands. “Bravo.” He pushed away from the door and strode toward her. “You love to dance, don’t you?”

She turned back to the table and set the glasses down. When she turned around, he was right in front of her. She took a deep breath, and looked up at him, a little embarrassed at being caught dancing in the kitchen. “Yeah, I do. It’s my job, after all.”

He caught her chin in his hand and bent toward her. “I would love to go to competitions and performances to watch you.” His voice was low and husky. Gosh, he sounded sexy.

His chocolaty eyes zeroed in on her lips. His clean, musky scent flooded her nose. She stared at his mouth as it came closer. She wanted to kiss him so badly. She wanted those lips all over her. His mouth had felt so good on her pussy, and she wanted that again, too. She wanted him to suck on her nipples and -- His mouth touched hers. *Oh, yes! No!* She stepped back.

He looked wounded. “What?”

“Nothing, but if you start that now, our dinner will burn.” She walked toward the stove, put on a couple of oven mitts, and took the steaks out from beneath the broiler, then brought them to the table, trying her best to ignore him. She put a steak on each plate, then put the broiler pan in the sink. “I need more clothes. Does Jess or Claire have any here I could wear?”

She felt the heat of his body seconds before he pressed himself against her back and wrapped his arms around her. He nuzzled her ear. The sensation shot to her toes, up her back, and everywhere in between. It almost tickled.

She relaxed into him. His face slid down her shoulder, leaving a trail of hot breath in its wake. There was a sharp sting on her shoulder, followed by extreme warmth. Her head lolled back on his shoulder as he ground his cock against her butt. One hand slid down into her robe to flick her clit. She groaned and pressed herself into his hand. Her vaginal muscles clenched, and she could feel herself getting wet.

“Spread your legs for me, kitten.”

She slid her legs out so fast, she practically hopped.

He chuckled against her shoulder and slipped a finger into her damp heat. "Oh, honey, you're already wet for me."

Just the sound of his raspy voice made her wetter. She could actually feel a drop of moisture run down her labia.

He bit her shoulder again as his finger slid back out and across her clit, rubbing in small circles. It pushed back in, gathering more wetness, then back to rub at her sensitive bud. The spot where his teeth clamped onto her shoulder was almost painful. But it was a nice kind of pain. It distracted from the intense pleasure his hand was creating, kept her on edge.

He moved her hips side to side, rubbing his cock against her while he pumped in and out with his finger. It was all she could do to keep standing upright.

Kat pushed back against his cock. He grunted around her shoulder. Abruptly, he stilled, then stepped away from her. He moved the salad bowl off the far counter to the other one. Before she could ask what he was doing, he came back to her and lifted her in his arms. Kat gasped.

He set her on the counter he'd cleared, pushed her backward, and picked up her right foot, pulling it toward his mouth, his eyes locked with hers. His tongue snaked out and swirled around her big toe; then his hot mouth closed over it.

It tickled. Kat giggled and tried to pull her foot away, but he held fast. His eyes twinkled as he slid her toe slowly out of his mouth, then back in. Kat stopped giggling and watched him as he repeated the action. It still tickled, but it also felt really good. The amusement left his eyes, and he pulled her toe out of his mouth and kissed the arch of her foot. The robe parted when he bent her knee and placed her foot on the counter. "Lie back on your elbows, Katherine."

"What ... what are you doing?"

He gave her a wicked grin that made a shiver go up her spine as he picked up her other foot, kissed the arch, and deposited it on the bar next to her butt. "Lean back and drop your legs open."

Kat did what he asked. His hand fumbled at the knot holding the robe together. He opened it, and the air caressed her skin. He stood there for several seconds, just staring at the bare skin he'd uncovered.

"Oh, honey! You're so beautiful!" His hands went to her breasts, caressing and kneading. Kat dropped her head backward and closed her eyes. Being laid out in front of him like this, so exposed, was exciting. She'd always assumed she'd be embarrassed for a man to see her naked, but she wasn't ... not with Adrian, at least. Her nipples stabbed up into his palms, and her pussy seeped with moisture. She pulled her feet together, letting her knees drop to rest on the bar.

"Your breasts are so firm, they feel ... different. Have they always felt like this?"

Kat's head snapped up. She swallowed and met his gaze. Oh, no, he could feel the difference. She'd forgotten all about her breasts changing with her pregnancy. Her hands came up to cover her breasts. "They feel the same as they always have."

His eyebrows pulled together, but he didn't say anything. He moved her hands and palmed her breasts again. He rolled her nipples between his fingers. Kat gave quick thanks that she wasn't producing milk yet and dropped her head back and relaxed, enjoying his attention.

Adrian's hands dragged down her body, grazing her hips. Kat pulled her head up to see the lust on his face as he gazed at her exposed cunt. His hands slid further down to the insides of her legs, and then his thumbs spread open her engorged labia. Slowly, slowly, he lowered his head. "You're so pink and swollen. Do you know what an immense turn on that is, kitten?" His mouth covered her clit and he sucked lightly. "Mmmm."

Her whole body tensed. "God, it feels wonderful!" She groaned and lay her head down on the bar. Adrian released her clit and made long, slow licks from her gaping opening to her clit. Finally, his tongue stabbed inside of her, tasting her essence. It retreated and stabbed again.

She moaned. Her legs were jerking involuntarily. "Oh, yes! Adrian!"

"Mmmm."

Kat's breath caught at the vibration on her labia. She was beginning to get those telltale tingles in her spine. She arched closer to him, grinding her pussy into his face.

"Oh, honey, you're delicious. I could do this for hours." He covered her clit again.

"I ... I ... I can't. In fact, I'm ... I'm ... OH!" Her whole body tensed, and orgasm crashed through her. She clutched at his head, dragging him to her as her vagina pulsed.

His hands covered hers, easing her grip. He let go of her tight little nub and lapped audibly at her opening, humming his pleasure as he did so.

As she lay gasping for breath, her eyes wide and staring at the ceiling, he rose up and grabbed her off the bar. Kat started and batted at his hands.

"Calm down, I've got you." His voice was husky. He carried her through the kitchen to the den area and bent her over the couch.

She raised her head and tried to look back at him, but with a firm hand, he pushed her back down.

The blunt end of his cock pushed against her. Again, she tried to rise, and again he stopped her progress.

"Shh, stay still, honey. Relax and let me in." The very tip of his cock slipped inside.

They both hissed out a breath.

Kat let her weight drop onto the back of the couch and sighed in bliss. His hard cock pushed slowly in, her inner walls grasping at him. It was a tight fit, but she was very wet. She felt his testicles bump up against her clit and bucked in response. "Ahhh."

"Ahhh is right, kitten. I love being inside of you. How does that feel?"

"Like heaven."

He chuckled. The sound was low and sexy, even to his own ears. "Yes, it does. But this is going to feel even better. Grab hold of the couch."

No sooner had she tightened her grip on the couch than he pulled out and thrust back in, hard. His balls slapped against her. She groaned.

He chuckled. "That's my girl. You like that, kitten? You like my cock in you?"

Her inner walls clenched at his blunt question. He smiled at the knowledge that she liked to hear dirty talk. Who'd have ever thought it?

"Oh, God, yes, Adrian, yessss."

Adrian growled, grabbed her hip with one hand, and pushed her further into the back of the couch with the other. He began thrusting in a steady rhythm. The slapping sounds of their bodies and their heavy breathing filled the silent cabin.

The sounds of sex were making him more and more aroused. Her vaginal muscles were already starting to contract. She was close to another orgasm. Arching her back, she moved with him, pushed herself backward into his forward thrusts. That was almost his undoing.

He groaned and moved the hand on her back to her other hip. Faster and harder he pumped into her. "I need you to come for me, kitten." He reached around and pinched her clit, rolling it back and forth, trying to help her along before he came and ruined it for both of them.

Her legs locked and her pussy spasmed. She gasped for air and tensed, letting out a keening moan as she came.

That was it! He let go, a ragged groan bursting out of him. He dropped his body over hers. His lips nuzzled her neck, and he nipped and licked. Her breathing was as hard and uneven as his own.

Kat closed her eyes. God, she felt good. Her whole body felt like goo. Snuggling up in bed with him and going to sleep sounded like a good plan. His arms tightened around her waist in a hug. She grinned.

"I love you."

Kat's eyes snapped open. She stood up abruptly, his sated cock sliding from her body. She spun around, her eyes wide. He looked shocked, but not as shocked as she felt. Her eyes narrowed and her mouth tightened. She couldn't have heard him right. At least, he'd better hope she hadn't heard him right. "What did you say?!"

Chapter Thirteen

Brent pulled into Dr. Clifford Gordon's parking lot at ten minutes to five. He immediately located the doctor's black SUV. Unfortunately, his computer search had turned up very little. He could only hope Michael's revealed more, but right now, hopefully, he would turn up something by following the doc. You could find out a lot about someone by following them.

He sat in the parking lot, watching the SUV. He had a vague idea what the doctor looked like from his driver's license photo, but since he also had his license plate number, it was a good bet that whoever got into the SUV was his suspect.

A few people, presumably other office staff, came out of the building, went to their vehicles, and left. Several minutes passed as Brent watched the parking lot become a little less crowded. He hoped the doctor wasn't one of the last ones to leave. Not that that would deter him. He'd just have to move his car to a less conspicuous spot so that the man wouldn't know he was being watched.

Finally, twenty minutes and a few less cars later, a man approached the SUV. Brent turned on the ignition and waited. The man had a remote and keys in one hand and a cell phone in the other. He pointed his remote at the vehicle, and a honk immediately followed. He opened the door and slid in.

Brent watched as the doctor started his SUV and brought his cell phone to his ear. *Great!* The less attention the man paid to what he was doing, the less likely he was to realize he was being tailed. Of course, Brent didn't plan on getting caught, but the distraction was an added bonus.

A stop at a drycleaner, a gas station, and the post office had Brent wondering if Gordon was on to him. The man didn't appear to be, but the frequent stops could be a way to throw

him off. Then again, maybe not; maybe this was Gordon's routine. It would take a few more times following him to figure that out.

A few miles away from the post office, Gordon turned into a diner parking lot.
Dammit! Now he's going to eat!

Two men who had been sitting on the hood of a brown car made their way across the lot and quickly got into the SUV. *Now we're getting somewhere.* It was definitely suspicious that the doctor was picking up people in a parking lot. He considered it a good sign that they were up to something. He jotted down the license plate of the brown car and followed the SUV as it pulled back into traffic. *Hot damn! I picked a good day to follow his psycho ass.*

Being careful to follow at least two cars back, Brent continued to tail them. They weren't speeding and didn't appear to be aware that they were being followed.

The SUV turned, heading in the direction of Kat's apartment complex. *No way! I couldn't possibly be this lucky!* Brent barely contained his excitement. What was the likelihood that he'd follow Gordon on the one day he decided to go check on Kat? The doctor took another turn, and Brent hit the steering wheel with his fist, "Yes!" It certainly looked like they were headed to Kat's apartment.

The SUV turned into the complex and parked in Kat's spot. Brent parked a few spaces down from them. The three men got out and climbed the stairs to Kat's apartment. At the door, Gordon knocked. After a few minutes, he stepped back and let one of the other men in front of him and moved to conceal the other man's actions. They looked around, their eyes never once falling on Brent.

Brent shook his head. They sure didn't know what a thorough search was.

Pretty soon, the door popped open, and the three men went inside. Brent shook his head again and sighed. He could go up there and arrest them for B&E, but he really wanted to know more about them. He somehow doubted that they would admit to their participation in a radical group of werewolf hunters during questioning. He certainly didn't want to think about what his sergeant would say when he asked them about werewolves. Brent chuckled at the thought.

While waiting for the men to resurface, he picked up his cell phone and dialed his parents' house.

"Ello?"

Brent chuckled. "Michael?"

"Yo, what's up, kiddo? You still comin' by tonight so I can show you what I found?"

"Yeah, I'll be there. Listen. I need you to run a plate for me. I plan to do it myself when I get back to the office, but I thought I'd let you get a head start."

"Hold on, I'm not in the study." Michael's voice was distant, like he had pulled the phone away from his ear. "Emilio! Paper and pen, now!"

Brent smiled. That wasn't going to go over well.

"Okay, Brent, hold on. Your father is getting me something to write with."

He heard his dad's gruff voice; it sounded like he asked if he "looked like a maid." It got quiet for a few seconds; then his father's voice got closer again. He was grumbling about "being Michael's personal servant."

"All right, I'm ready -- Oh, shut up, you were closer to the study than I was. Besides, you look like a Mexican houseboy to me -- Okay, give me the number, kiddo. OW! What'd you hit me for?"

Brent heard scuffling sounds and imagined the two of them wrestling. "Hey! Michael?" He sighed, then laughed softly. They always did that. By the way they played, one would think the two of them were a couple of pups instead of adult wolves.

Finally, Michael came back on the phone, laughing. "Okay, I'm back. Sorry about that. What's the number?"

Brent gave him the number and a brief description of the two new men, never taking his eyes off Kat's apartment.

"Ok, got it, kiddo. Where are you?"

"I've just tailed Gordon and two goons to Kat's apartment. They're inside her apartment now."

There was complete silence on the other end of the line.

"Michael?"

"I'm here. Now? Right now? They broke into her apartment? Are you going to arrest them?"

Brent looked at his watch. They'd been in there ten minutes so far. "Yes, they broke in. And no, I'm not going to arrest them. I'm going to follow them. I'll come back here after I see where they go. What are you doing?"

"Nothing, why?"

"Can you and Dad come over here after they leave, and make sure the apartment is secure? You'll need gloves in case we decide to file a report later."

"Yeah, I guess so. You want us to poke around?"

"Nope. Wouldn't do any good. You wouldn't know if they took anything; we'll need Kat for that." The three men emerged from the apartment. It didn't appear that they were carrying anything out. Of course, they could be concealing something small inside their clothes. Brent slid further down in his seat. "Ok, they're leaving. I'm going to follow them. Get over here and make sure the door is locked."

"Be careful, son."

Brent started the car as the three men got into theirs. "Will do. See you tonight." He disconnected, then tossed the phone into the seat next to him.

He followed the doctor back to the diner, where he let the two men out. Brent watched the men go to the brown car they'd been lounging on before and get in. *Shit! Who to follow?*

The doctor would be easy to find again. Brent had a name, home address, and work address. On the other hand, he had no idea who the other two were, but it was obvious that they were somehow involved.

Brent pulled out into traffic, carefully staying a few cars back from them. He followed them into a residential area a few miles away. Not a great neighborhood, but certainly not the worst, either. And the street was busy enough to allow him to stay parked and watch, assuming they pulled into one of the drives. They did ... into the drive of one of the nicer houses on the block. The yard was well maintained, and the house had a fresh coat of paint even if it was an older home. Brent parked on the street behind a silver car a few houses down. The men went inside, never checking their surroundings. They seemed too careless for professionals; then again, maybe they were just cocky. More like stupid, considering their extracurricular activities.

Brent wrote down the address, then sat back to watch. He called Michael again to make sure Kat's apartment was locked up and learned from Michael that it was trashed. He'd figured as much. He assumed they'd been searching for Kat ever since she'd left. It made sense that they'd look for evidence of her whereabouts. He gave Michael the new address to research and hung up.

It started to get dark, and there was little activity at the house. A pizza man came and went. A few lights came on in various rooms. Other than that, it was pretty quiet.

Brent decided to call it a night. He started the car and pulled out. He had to go by the office and run those plates and the address. Then he'd go to his parents' house for dinner and see what Michael had found.

* * * * *

Adrian picked at his food. It was great, but somehow Katherine's temper and her abrupt exit to go to bed had killed his appetite. She had not taken well to his declaration of love. She had told him in no uncertain terms that not only did she not believe him, but that she didn't want his love. Had he ever doubted that she possessed a redhead's temper? He supposed he couldn't really blame her. Hell, it was a wonder that she hadn't run from him as soon as she saw him at the door of Brent's house.

Their breakup had been pretty crappy. Instead of looking at the situation logically and trying to discover why he couldn't control himself, he'd flipped out and gotten rid of the cause for his loss of control. He'd desperately tried to save himself by leaving her, and in doing so he might have destroyed any chance for happiness he had. *So much for the genius IQ!*

Getting Katherine back was going to take more patience than he'd first thought, but he wasn't going to give up. She'd come around, eventually, if he were persistent. Surely playing knight in shining armor to her damsel in distress would go a long way toward gaining her trust. He'd just back off a little and give her some space ... but not too much space. He didn't want to rush her, but he didn't want her getting the idea that he'd just leave her be, either.

Adrian pushed his plate away and got up from the table. He just couldn't eat knowing that Katherine had gone to bed mad and on an empty stomach. He put the food in airtight containers and stuck them in the fridge. Maybe she would get up in the night and eat something.

He needed to see about getting her some more clothes. He didn't think his aunt Claire or Jess had any here, but it was worth checking into.

There wasn't much, but he hadn't expected there to be. The women in his family didn't come out to the cabin nearly as often as the men. After a thorough search, he came up with a pair of socks and a cell phone that belonged to Jess. Alex would be so thrilled to learn she'd left her phone at the cabin. He also found a summer dress in his uncle Diego and aunt Claire's room, and a pair of jeans and a top that belonged to Jill. Claire and Jill were both taller than Katherine, but the clothes would do in a pinch. He hadn't found any undergarments. He smiled at the thought, then heaved a sigh. Katherine would have a fit. He'd better call Brent and see about having him bring some clothes out.

He went back downstairs and found his phone, then dialed Brent's line.

Brent answered on the second ring. "I was just about to call you."

"Yeah? Why?"

"Kat's apartment was broken into."

"*What?*"

"I said that Kat's --"

"I heard you! Jesus Christ!" Adrian flopped down on the couch. "Was anything stolen?"

"Not that I can tell, just ransacked."

"What the hell has she gotten herself into?"

"Trouble?"

Adrian groaned. "Don't be a smart ass. This is serious."

"I know it is. Listen, Michael has found a few things. I'm positive this has to do with you, not Kat."

Adrian sat up straight, his eyes widening. "Me? How do you figure?"

"We think it's also related to Jess and Rome's abduction. We're looking for a link between these guys following Kat and the group that Jess's boss belonged to ... I think they know she's your mate."

Adrian took a deep breath and tried to relax. The fact that he'd inadvertently caused a threat to Katherine was not what he wanted to hear. He was already feeling guilty for the way he'd left her. Now he had to deal with the fact that he'd abandoned her to deal with psychopaths by herself.

"Adrian? You still there?"

"Yeah, I'm here."

"You all right?"

Adrian got up and paced the den. "Yes. Tell me what Michael found."

"Not much ... yet. But he's still working on it. He found a website for the group." Brent grunted. "Get this ... they call themselves the Werewolf Termination Squad. Michael and Dad named them TWiTS for short. They offer a reward for the capture of any werewolf, werewolf mate, or offspring."

Adrian flopped back down on the couch again. "Shit!"

"Tell me about it."

"What are we going to do?"

"Find these fuckers and eliminate them."

Chapter Fourteen

After ensuring that Brent would bring Kat some clothes, Adrian hung up the phone and went to bed. The next morning, he woke with fangs and an erection. Thankfully, Katherine was still sound asleep. He got up and fixed breakfast. He was pretty sure Katherine would be starving when she woke.

He put on some coffee and started on the sausages. Then he remembered Katherine's ridiculous diet and got out the orange juice for her. Silly or not, if she wanted orange juice instead of coffee, he'd make sure that she had it. He really liked the idea of pampering his mate, and he figured that making her breakfast in bed was sure to win him some brownie points. After last night's revelations from Brent, he'd changed his mind about wooing her slowly. Time was a luxury he could no longer afford to give her. He was going to have to gain her trust and her love soon. Not only did he have to protect her, but it was only a matter of time before she discovered *why* she was in danger. He'd have to make every appearance of not rushing her, even though, in actuality, he was.

Before he'd finished cooking, he heard her upstairs. She'd gotten out of bed and hurried to the bathroom. It sounded like ... was she sick again?

He started up the stairs. Halfway up, the toilet flushed. He stopped, trying to decide whether to continue. He glanced down at the kitchen and realized he'd left the eggs on the burner. *Shit!* The squeak of the shower knobs turning helped make his decision. Adrian jogged back down the stairs with one last glance at his bedroom. He must have been mistaken about her being sick.

Katherine came downstairs just as he finished setting the food on the table. Her hair was still wet, and she was wearing one of his shirts. It came almost to her knees, and she looked adorable. She stifled a big yawn behind her hand and took a seat at the table. "Thank you for making breakfast, Adrian."

Adrian took the seat across from her. "You're welcome. Are you okay? I thought I heard you get sick again."

Katherine's head snapped up, a look of surprise on her face. "Nope. I'm fine." She smiled, then started cutting her eggs with her fork.

Interesting. Was she surprised that he could hear that well? Or was it something else? "You're sure?"

She took a bite of eggs and nodded her head vigorously.

"Ok. Well if you start feeling bad, let me know; the cabin has a clinic of sorts. Alex, Jill, and I keep it pretty well supplied, in case of emergencies."

Kat took a swig of orange juice. "That's pretty smart, actually; this place is pretty far away from civilization." She immediately went back to eating. Either she was really hungry, or she was still pissed at him from last night. Probably both.

"Katherine, I'm sorry I upset you, but I'm not taking it back. I lo--"

She slammed her fork down and held her hand out. "Don't say it! I mean it, Adrian. I'm already sleeping with you. It's not necessary to finesse me into bed, okay?"

"Finesse you into ..." He breathed in slowly and exhaled. "Okay, okay, look ... Just eat, and we'll talk about this later, a serious talk. For now, let's call a truce ... again."

Katherine stared at him for several seconds. "All right, truce ... again." Finally, she picked up her fork and resumed eating.

Adrian smiled. "Good. I have a surprise for you."

Katherine's head shot up. "A surprise?" Her eyebrows furrowed together.

He chuckled. She looked like she couldn't decide whether to be surprised that he had a surprise for her, or suspicious of his motives. "Finish eating. I'll tell you all about it after you eat."

Kat looked in the mirror at her reflection. *Not too bad.* The dress was a little long, but other than that, it fit. The pretty, pale blue color looked good with her coloring. Thankfully, she'd washed her clothes the night before, so she had a bra and panties to wear with it. She'd have to wear her tennis shoes, but she was in the woods, so who cared. Besides it wasn't like she hadn't worn sneakers with a dress before. Adrian, the fashion plate, would probably have a stroke.

Adrian. What was she going to do about him? Was he serious? Did he really love her? Did it even matter if he did? She wasn't so sure she could forgive him. What was to keep him from running off again? The baby?

She ran her hands down the front of the dress, smoothing it over her tummy. She really was starting to get a definite pooch. She sighed and turned sideways to study herself in

the mirror. He wouldn't be able to tell. It just looked like she was getting a belly. She rolled her eyes and heaved a sigh. Yeah, he'd start nagging about her eating habits again.

She was going to have to tell him. Logically, all along she'd known that she would have to, but she'd been trying to deny it. Staying here with him had made him seem less of the inconsiderate, unfeeling ass that she'd thought him. He'd want to know. And as badly as she hated to admit it ... he'd probably make a great father. He'd certainly taken care of her the past couple of days. She'd have been up a creek without a paddle if he hadn't jumped to her rescue.

Telling him was not going to be easy. Kat laughed; she couldn't even get the nerve up to tell her grandparents.

If he really did love her ... No, she didn't trust him, not with her heart, anyway. There was no way she was going to marry someone just because she was pregnant! Subjecting herself to a loveless marriage would be one thing, subjecting an innocent baby to it quite another. Not that he'd offered marriage anyway. But what if he did? Didn't the baby deserve to have two parents? Kat closed her eyes, took a deep breath, then opened them again. *What a mess I've gotten myself into.*

She pulled her hair up into a ponytail and went downstairs to find Adrian.

He sat at the bottom of the steps, tying his shoes. As usual, there wasn't a hair out of place. The man looked like a model for a sporting goods store instead of a man about to take a hike in the woods. Kat grinned. It was really kind of amusing.

Adrian looked up from his shoe. "What are you smiling at?" He winked and stood up.

She shook her head. "Nothing. Where are we going?"

He held out his hand. When she didn't take it, he quirked an eyebrow at her.

"Fine." She put her hand in his and let him lead her out the back door. "I asked where we were going."

"It's a surprise."

Kat groaned. "I hate surprises!"

Adrian chuckled and tugged her along.

They walked through the woods in silence. It was cloudy, but that kept it from being so hot. And it kept her from having to squint from the lack of sunglasses.

Kat once again marveled at the surrounding beauty and was thankful that this trip wasn't uphill. In fact, they'd gone the opposite direction from last time.

A small clearing came into view past the line of trees. There was also a pond. "Wow!" It was roughly the size of four swimming pools and rather private, completely surrounded by trees as it was.

Adrian turned around, looking at her. "You like it?"

"Yes, it's lovely! No wonder you Hernandez men come up here so often."

Adrian chuckled and let go of her hand. "I'm not a Hernandez; I'm a Garrett."

Kat smiled and shook her head. "Close enough, your mother was Rita Hernandez, before she became Mrs. Kyle Garrett, was she not?"

He grinned and nodded. "Yes, she was. And if you want the truth, I'm closer to the Hernandez side of the family, anyway. The only other Garrett I know is now a Hernandez. The rest died before I was born, or before I was old enough to remember them, anyway."

"Huh?"

"My aunt Sarah. She's married to my uncle Emilio, but she's also my dad's first cousin. Her parents died when she was young, and my paternal grandparents took her in, so she and my dad were raised together."

"Geez, talk about confusing. Isn't Michael McCoy some kind of kin, too?"

Adrian sat down and untied his shoe. "Nah, Michael is just a close family friend. My mom's dad worked as a foreman on the McCoy ranch. Michael grew up with my mom and uncles." He set his shoe aside and tucked the laces into the shoe, then pulled off his sock. "My dad lived in the same town. He went to school with my uncle Diego. He and my uncle have been best friends since fifth grade. That's how he met my mom." He shook his sock out, rolled it up, stuffed it into his shoe, then started removing the other shoe.

"What are you doing?"

Adrian paused from rolling up his second sock. "I'm going swimming. That's the surprise ... we are going to go swimming."

Kat's eyes widened as she watched him stuff the sock in his other shoe. "In case you haven't noticed, we don't have bathing suits."

The smile he gave her was utterly wicked. "I know." He waggled his eyebrows as he stood up, then unbuttoned his jeans and stepped out of them. Shaking them out, he folded them neatly and placed them on top of his shoes. "Well don't just stand there; get undressed."

"You mean swim naked?"

Adrian pulled his shirt over his head, folded it, and placed it with his jeans. He stood in his boxers and stared at her. "Yes, I mean swim naked. Haven't you ever gone skinny dipping?" He shook his head, then took off his boxers. Like his other articles of clothing, he folded them neatly and set them aside.

Kat gaped at him. God, he had a great body! He was heavily muscled, which appeared to be the standard build in his family, except for his brother. Julian was more slim, like a gymnast, and took after their father. Personally, she preferred bulky.

"Well, come on!"

Kat's eyes immediately dropped. *Oh, my!* He was erect! And it was a thing of beauty. His cock was a bit darker than the rest of him, and it had a reddish tint. It wasn't overly huge, but it was certainly above average ... or at least she assumed so. She hadn't really seen

any others up close and personal, but compared with the pictures she and Jess traded back and forth via e-mail, he was definitely a bit above average. *Wow!* Her inner muscles spasmed, and almost immediately she felt herself dampening. *Damn hormones!* What would he taste like?

Adrian's chuckle brought her head up. "I'm glad you like what you see. Come on."

He turned and waded into the water. Kat watched as his powerfully built backside quickly disappeared. She shook her head to clear it from her hormone-induced lust. Heck, who was she kidding? The sight of Adrian naked would induce lust with or without pregnancy hormones.

She took a deep breath and willed her heart to stop beating her to death. She looked down at his clothes. Suddenly what he'd done dawned on her, and she busted out laughing.

"What?" Adrian grouched from the water.

"You! You are so anal!"

"I am not! You're just trying to change the subject. You're all shy about going skinny dipping with me."

Well, yeah, maybe a little. She doubted he'd notice the baby, but there was always a slim chance. She couldn't imagine having to tell him now. "Oh, yes, you are ... I can't believe you folded your clothes so neatly just to take a swim. I bet you even fold them to put them in the dirty clothes hamper."

"Just get in the damn water!"

Kat grinned. "You do, don't you?"

His sexy mouth dropped open, proving her right. She giggled.

"You probably drive the hospital staff nuts! I bet you're absolutely meticulous about how your scrubs and lab coats look. I bet you even iron and starch them."

He glared at her.

"Oh, my God! You do!"

He snorted. "Just get your ass in the damned water!"

Kat couldn't help herself -- she laughed, then pulled the dress over her head.

"Don't throw that down, either. Fold it!"

She laughed harder. She tossed the dress onto his clothes, then quickly followed it with her shoes, socks, bra, and panties.

Quickly, she ran into the water. As soon as she was waist high, she dove under. When she surfaced, Adrian was right in front of her. He wrapped his arms around her, pulling her close. He felt so good up against her. Kat couldn't resist; she ground her tummy against his manhood. She was turning into quite the little sex addict. She grinned against his chest, then looked up into his smiling face.

"Now, was that really so bad? Was it necessary to make fun of me first?"

Kat giggled. "You've got to admit, you are way out there when it comes to certain things, clothes being just one of them. Besides it distracted you from leering at me."

Adrian pulled back and looked down at her breast. "No, it didn't."

Kat basked in his hot gaze. She stood there letting him look. Feeling her nipples peak under his scrutiny.

He gasped. "Katherine. I think we need to have that talk now, before we get too distracted."

"Umm ..."

She pressed more firmly against his cock and moved slightly side to side. "What talk?"

Adrian groaned, then stepped back. He grabbed her chin and held it, making her look at him. "About last night."

"Ugh!"

"I know you don't want to, but I'm going to talk, and you are going to listen. I'm not taking it back. I love you. I'm sorry I was such a shithead to you. I never should have broken things off, and certainly not in the way that I did. I was running scared, and that's all there was to it. No man ever wants to admit that his bachelorhood is over --"

Kat opened her mouth to tell him to give her a break, but he put his finger to her lips, shushing her.

"No, listen. Whether you believe it or not, I love you, and on some level I knew you were it for me. I was just trying desperately not to admit it. But I'm not denying it now. We belong together, Katherine. You know we do. Marry me?"

Her stomach dropped. She suddenly felt ill. What the heck was she supposed to say to that? Did she dare hope he was telling the truth? Did she dare put her heart in his hands again? He'd left her after one of the most profound nights of her life. The night she'd waited for for years.

She felt the tears sting her eyes. She tried to look away from him, but he wouldn't allow it. His brown eyes pinned her, begging her not to deny him.

He reached up and caught a tear running down her cheek. "Say something, kitten."

She shook her head breaking free from his hold. "I don't know, Adrian ... I mean, geez ... That's a lot to spring on a person. I haven't seen you in three months -- well, except at Jess and Alex's wedding -- and now you want to just pick up where we left off?" She looked down at the water. "Not even that, you want to go way beyond where we left off."

He pulled her to him as a rumble of thunder sounded in the distance. They both looked up at the sky. Adrian's gaze settled back on her. "Will you at least think about it?"

The thunder came again, this time a little louder.

"Yeah, I'll think about it. We better get back to the cabin. It's about to rain."

Just as the words left her lips, it started pouring. Kat screeched and swam for the shore. Adrian followed, laughing the whole way.

Chapter Fifteen

Adrian stepped into the shower just as Katherine dipped her head under the water. She finished rinsing her hair, then opened her eyes and jumped. "Ack!"

He reached out a hand to steady her. "Sorry, didn't mean to scare you. Mind if I share your shower?"

She chuckled. "Well, I guess not, since you're already in here. But next time warn me. You almost gave me a heart attack."

He gave her his best seductive grin. "Well, by all means, Miss Andrews, allow me to make it up to you." He grabbed the mesh sponge and the shower gel off the shower caddy. He added gel to the sponge, then put the bottle back. Working up a lather, he leaned forward and kissed her cheek. Gently, he turned her around and began to soap her delicate back, paying special attention to the shallow little dip at the base of her spine right above her pretty, heart-shaped butt.

Soaping her perfect little ass was almost more than he could take. He used the sponge, then followed with his bare hand, feeling her taut cheeks. He grasped her flesh and squeezed before running his hand to the other side and repeating the process. Her behind was so firm and muscled. Oh, yes, there were definite perks to his mate being a dancer.

He trailed a finger down her crease and back up, teasing, trying to make her wonder about his intent, seeing what he could get away with. He pressed in and repeated the process, running his finger across her anus. He expected her to squirm away or protest; she didn't. She sighed, seemingly in bliss, and dropped her head forward. Would she protest if he pushed his finger in? Probably. Later, he promised himself. She was far more open and sensual than he had ever thought she'd be, but there were still many, many more things to explore first. No way was he going to push his luck just yet.

He smiled to himself, gave her bottom one last squeeze, and ran the sponge up over her shoulders, then down her arms. He stepped closer, his erection sliding across her wet butt. His cock jerked as it came to rest against the small of her back. His chest cradled her slim shoulders. Her skin was so smooth and creamy white, such a contrast with his dark tan. He closed his eyes and reveled in the feel of her soft flesh against his hardness. His cock flexed and his stomach tightened against her.

She hummed her appreciation and leaned back as his hands slid down her front, soaping her breasts and belly. He peered over her shoulder and watched the suds slid down her full breasts, past her hard nipples. He groaned his approval. "Kitten, you are so beautiful." Wrapping his spongeless hand around her waist, he snuggled her closer. He nuzzled her neck and ran the sponge between her thighs, teasing her feminine folds. "How could I have been so stupid? I could have spent the last three months like this ... with you. I love you so much, Katherine."

She whimpered and turned her head, looking at him. Her eyes sparkled with unshed tears, and she gave him a hesitant grin. Her tongue slipped out, wetting her lips. At that moment her lips were the center of his world. Slowly she moved her head closer to his. His vision blurred slightly, the precursor to their changing. Squeezing them shut, he captured her lips in one swift move. His tongue darted out, tenderly caressing the inside of her mouth. Her tongue stroked across his, returning the sweet contact. His gums began to sting. *Damn! Not now!*

He couldn't allow her to feel them. He slid his mouth down her neck, kissing and nibbling as he went. "Ugh!" He'd forgotten about the soap. He spit out the soap, gaining a chuckle from Katherine. Well, that had cooled his ardor some. He still had fangs and wolf eyes, but at least he'd gained back an ounce of control.

Adrian maneuvered her under the spray of water, washing off the suds. When she was free of the soap, he dipped his head again. He brushed his lips across hers lightly, careful not to let her feel his canines, then continued on his original path down her neck. He nipped her shoulder with his front teeth, and she trembled. Slowly he turned her to face him and trailed kisses across her chest. He took one pebbled bud into his mouth. Her large nipples were made for suckling. He pulled back and let go her nipple with a soft popping sound. He gazed up at her through the steam, carefully keeping his eyelids low over his eyes.

Hers were shut. Her long sable eyelashes rested against her cheeks, her delicate features relaxed. The feathering of freckles across her nose was a contrast with her pale, pale skin. She looked angelic and utterly blissful. How had he gone without her for so long?

Finally, when he felt it would be more comfortable to drop to his knees, he did so and nuzzled her belly with his face. Adrian kissed her slightly rounded tummy with a frown. The slight swell was charming, but had she been eating so badly because of him? The thought that she'd be depressed over him was both flattering and bothersome. He didn't like to think he'd caused his beloved so much stress with his self-centeredness. He was going to have to

make sure she ate more healthfully. A little weight would do her a world of good, but he wanted to be certain it was put on by the right kinds of food, not the junk she'd become so fond of. He kissed her abdomen and slid lower, anxious for the taste of her. She always tasted so good ... better than any dessert. Would he ever get enough of her sweet essence?

Katherine's hands clutched his head closer. He smiled against her. Who'd have ever thought his shy little kitten would be so demanding? Using his thumbs, he spread her labia wide, intently studying her lovely flesh. She was so red and plump, so engorged. It was sexy as hell. He leaned in and swiped his tongue across her erect clit and was rewarded with a gasp, then a heartfelt groan. If possible, his cock got harder; it was already leaking precome. Unbelievably, he was on the verge of orgasm just from pleasuring her.

Between her inner and outer labia, his tongue traced a path up one side and down the other. She was salty-sweet and moist. He stabbed his tongue inside of her, gathering more flavor. "Mmmm ..."

"Oh, yes! That feels so good. Will you teach me to pleasure you this way?"

Adrian groaned. His balls tightened, drawing further against his body at the thought. "Oh, God, yes, honey! Later, you can count on it." *I can't wait!* Would she be able to take in all of him? A picture of her lips wrapped around the head of his cock had him dropping a hand to fist his erection.

He used the other to thrust two fingers up into her hot center. She was so wet, and it had nothing to do with the water from the shower. Her juices were thick and warm, coating his fingers in a luscious fragrance.

Timing his fingers to the hand pumping his cock, he sucked her clit into his mouth and applied light suction. Katherine spread her legs wider and pressed herself onto his fingers. He could feel the irregular contractions of her vaginal walls and knew she was getting close. His hand squeezed his cock tighter as he drew back and watched her.

Her eyes were still closed, as he knew they would be ... which was good, considering his own eyes undoubtedly resembled a canine's. She had her bottom lip caught between her teeth. Every so often she would make a sweet little *mmm* sound in the back of her throat. He stroked his cock faster.

Her eyelids started to flutter, and he quickly closed his own. He leaned in to lick her again as he continued to pleasure them both. He heard a soft gasp above him.

"Move back a little so I can see you," she drawled in a husky, sexy whisper.

That was all it took -- his balls squeezed tight, and his cock jerked as he shot a stream of semen over his hand and her shin. He groaned, lips still latched to her clit.

He wasn't sure if it was the sight of his own climax or the vibration of his groan, but she gasped again and contracted tightly around his fingers, jerking her hips frantically. "Ahhhh! Yes! Yes! Yes!"

He sat back on his heels, releasing his now sated cock, and brought the fingers he'd used to satisfy Kat to his mouth. "Mmmm."

She let out a sigh, released his head, and sagged against the wall.

Adrian couldn't ever remember feeling as spontaneous, as wild with a lover as he was with her. He'd never believed his uncles when they'd told him how feral he'd be with his mate, until now. If he hadn't had such iron-clad control over his instincts normally, he'd probably have had her screaming in fear with his animalistic behavior. As it was, he was having a hard time not shifting.

He sucked his fingers clean and took a deep breath, inhaling her intoxicating scent, which always wreaked havoc on his senses. The tips of his fingers began to itch. *Shit!* So much for all his discipline helping him resist the majority of his wolf instincts. His hands were about to shift. *Well, at least I've managed to keep from throwing her down and biting her on the back of the neck ... this time.* Clenching his hands into fists, he wrapped his arms around her waist, resting his head on her stomach.

She ran her hand over his head, lightly caressing his hair. "That was the sexiest thing I've ever seen in my life. I never thought a man doing that to himself would be so beautiful."

He smiled against her. What a kooky little thing she was turning out to be. "Honey, don't take this the wrong way, but you're weird." His fingernails stopped itching, and slowly his lower teeth began to recede.

She snorted.

Chuckling, he turned his head and kissed her tummy. "I love you."

"Do you really?" She asked seriously.

He snuggled the side of his head further into her belly and let out a breath. His upper set of canines were shrinking, as well. "Yes, I do. I want you to marry me. You might as well give in, you know. I'm not going to leave you alone until you do."

She sighed above him, still playing with his hair, but when she spoke, he could hear the smile in her voice. "You know, they have a name for that; it's called stalking, and it's illegal."

"That's okay; I'm in good with the law." He grinned up at her and wagged his eyebrows.

She chuckled and shook her head at him, smoothing her fingers down the side of his face. He leaned into her caress. It felt so good.

"Ah, so you're going to drag Brent down with you, eh?"

"You bet! Anything to get my way." He kissed her stomach once more, then rested his head against her again. A soft swishing sound caught his attention. Was that her heart? No, it was way too fast to be her heart. Katherine was talking, but he tuned her out. There was something about that sound. Something important. It sounded vaguely familiar. It wasn't a

heartbeat ... wait, it *was* a heartbeat! But not Katherine's; it was much, much too fast. In fact, he could hear her heartbeat, too.

"Oh, my God!" The pieces finally clicked into place. Her slightly rounded belly, her vomiting, the pills, the refusal to drink caffeine. The always engorged labia. Her breasts! They weren't normally like that. Those were the mammary glands he'd felt.

He pulled back away from her and flopped down onto the shower floor. Stared up at her. "You're pregnant."

Katherine paled. She was so white, he jumped up, fearing she might faint. He steadied her, making sure she wasn't going to fall.

"Let go!" She jerked out of his reach. "I ... I ..." She shook her head, then opened the shower door and got out.

Adrian turned off the shower, trying to decide what he was feeling. He was excited, hurt, and ... mad. She'd been going to keep it from him. "You weren't going to tell me." He stepped out of the shower and stared at her. She was drying off. "Answer me, damn it!"

She wouldn't look at him.

He brushed his hands over his soaked hair, slinging water down his back and onto the bathroom floor. He reached out and grabbed her arm as she continued to dry her hair. "Katherine? Why didn't you tell me?"

She frowned at him. "Why the hell do you think I didn't tell you?" She threw the towel down and stormed out of the bathroom, not giving him a chance to reply.

Oh, no! How had he found out? Katherine pulled on her panties and grabbed her bra. She hurried her dressing, knowing she'd feel a little more secure about the confrontation to come if she had clothes on. It had never even occurred to her to deny his accusation. It had become harder and harder to think of him as the jerk who had dumped her after taking her virginity. Would he ever believe that she'd been going to tell him? He'd seemed so hurt. She'd been right in thinking he'd want to know. How in the world was she going to soothe his pride and yet keep her dignity? No way was she going to roll over and beg forgiveness. She had a sneaking suspicion that if he saw evidence of the meek little thing she used to be, he'd plow right over her, just like he had before.

Just as she finished pulling on the last of her clothes, he came storming into the room, a towel around his waist. He'd obviously taken the time to dry off before he came after her.

He jabbed a finger in her direction as he crossed the room toward her. "You, young lady, have some serious explaining to do!"

That did it! All traces of sympathy and remorse were gone, at least for the moment. No way was he going to bully her! "Don't you dare take that tone with me, Adriano Garrett! How dare you talk to me like I'm a child! Have you forgotten all about your part in this situation?"

His nostrils flared and his eyes narrowed.

"Two wrongs don't make it right, Katherine Michelle Andrews!"

Kat couldn't help herself -- she grinned. Not only because he'd used her middle name, but because she remembered a similar conversation she'd had with Alex, wherein Jess had very seriously pointed out to her new husband that "Two wrongs may not make a right, but three rights make a left."

Alex hadn't thought it was very funny, so she kind of doubted Adrian would, either. She was definitely losing it if she could find any humor in this. This was so *not* funny! Stupid pregnancy hormones as well as her stupid libido were now eating at her brain! Her mind was fried. What other explanation could there be?

"What the hell do you think is so damned funny about all this?!"

Kat stared at him, trying to decide on hysterical tears or hysterical laughter. How did she manage to get herself into these situations? She hated confrontations. She had been wrong to not tell him, she knew it, but, dang it, she'd always been the one to compromise and make concessions. He was just so aggressive; he'd take over her and her baby's lives if she gave in now.

She had to make him realize that she'd kept the secret out of self-defense, not out of spite. Okay, maybe a little spite had been involved, but mostly it had been from self-defense and uncertainty. After all, he had broken up with her, casting her out of his life like a used tissue! Her and his baby, even though neither of them had known about the baby at the time. How could she have been certain, then, that he'd even want a baby with a woman he'd discarded? She'd suspected he might want the baby, but she certainly hadn't *known* he would. Heck, it still felt like he was keeping something from her. Could she trust him? She wanted to, but trust had to work both ways.

Just this once, she wanted someone to care enough about her that they took the blame. She wanted him to care. Didn't he know how much she loved him? *Great! So much for keeping things separate!* Who the heck was she kidding? She'd never stopped loving him.

This whole thing was making her tired. Her brain hurt from thinking so much. Kat blinked back tears, crawled into the middle of the bed, and lay down, her back to him. "Go away, Adrian. I'm done with this conversation. When you're ready to talk to me instead of shouting at me, I'll talk to you. But right now, I'm tired, and I'm going to sleep."

He stayed there for several minutes. She guessed he finally decided it wouldn't do him any good to continue, because he got dressed and headed out the door. Before he closed it, he said softly. "You are marrying me, so I suggest you get used to the idea."

Chapter Sixteen

Brent pulled into the cabin's driveway and parked behind Adrian's SUV. He wondered how Adrian and Kat were getting along. Hopefully, his idiot cousin had managed to get back in his mate's good graces.

He hated to interrupt, but he needed to see if Kat recognized the man his search had turned up. When he'd run the brown car he'd tailed, he found it registered to a Herman Cobb.

Brent hadn't been all that surprised to find that Cobb had a record. All his crimes were petty misdemeanor charges, so he'd never done any hard time. Brent was willing to bet the man had just never been caught at anything more serious ... not that he hadn't actually done it. Fortunately, Cobb turned out to be one of the men who'd accompanied Gordon. Unfortunately, the other man remained a mystery.

The residence that Cobb and his cohort had gone to was owned by an advertising agency. Michael was looking into the agency, as well as still investigating the company listed as owner on the property that Rome and Jess had been held at a few months ago. They still hadn't found a connection to TWiTS, other than a fictitious website made by the same computer graphics company, but Brent was more certain than ever that this had to be the same group. Now he just had to prove it and find those lunatics! It would be a great lead if Kat could recognize the photo of Cobb.

He got out with the file folder in hand. The cabin door swung open before he reached it.

Kat peeked out the door and smiled. "Brent!"

He stepped onto the porch and hugged her. "Hey, Kat! How are you?"

"I'm good. What's that?"

A growl came from the kitchen area. Brent looked up with a smile, wrapping his arm around Kat's shoulder as he shut the door and led her to the kitchen, where Adrian stood scowling at them. "I have a picture for you to look at."

"Oh, okay. Have you eaten breakfast?"

"No, actually I --"

"He isn't going to live long enough to eat breakfast if he doesn't get his arm off your shoulder." Adrian gave him a slight grin, but Brent realized the threat was there all the same. He thought about goading him, but decided that he'd cut him some slack. He doubted seriously that Kat had cut him any. He let go of Kat and tossed the file folder onto the end of the bar.

Kat gasped and put her hands on her hips. She turned back to Brent. "You'll have to forgive him; he's in a mood. I'm afraid we are having a bit of a disagreement. Can I get you something to drink?"

Brent leaned on the bar, crossed his arms across his chest, and raised an eyebrow at Adrian, who stood at the counter dumping eggs out of a pan onto a plate. "No, thank you, Kat. I had a cup of coffee on the way over."

Kat busied herself setting another place at the table, and Adrian went back to the stove.

Brent grinned. He was pretty sure he'd hit the nail on the head; Kat wasn't giving an inch. Adrian did not look too happy.

His cousin took a pan of biscuits out of the oven and set them on the table. He looked at Brent. "What brings you all the way out here?"

"What? You aren't happy to see me?"

Adrian rolled his eyes.

Brent chuckled, then crossed to the table and took a seat. "I have some photos I want Kat to look at. I need to know if she recognizes a man I've recently come across."

Kat sat down to his left. "Oh? What man?"

He scooted his chair back and got the folder off the counter. He flipped it open and set the mug shot in front of her. "This man. Have you ever seen him before?"

She crinkled up her brow and cocked her head. She was acting very cute. Brent had a hard time not laughing at her. She was obviously thinking very hard and trying to recall. "I don't think so. Am I supposed to know this man?"

Adrian came up behind her, looking over her shoulder. He hesitantly placed a hand on her shoulder, then rested it more firmly. Brent supposed he'd been waiting for her to object, but she hadn't. Yikes, were things going that badly for them?

"This is the man who was in the passenger seat of that black SUV ... the one holding the assault rifle." Adrian nodded briskly. "Yup, I'm almost positive. It's the nose. The guy had

a big nose, just like this man.” He let go of Kat’s shoulder and pointed to another picture, then sat down across from Brent.

Kat looked up at Adrian, then Brent. “The guys chasing me? This was one of the guys? Who is he?”

Brent shrugged, not sure how much he could say without giving her secret away. “Don’t know exactly. His name is Herman Cobb.”

She looked puzzled. “But how did you find him?”

He cleared his throat and glanced toward Adrian, hoping she’d understand what he was telling her.

Apparently, she did. She gave Adrian a quick glance, then turned back to face him with a faint smile. “It’s okay, he knows. I haven’t told him the whole story, but he knows about the baby. So go ahead and tell me how you found this guy and what else you’ve found out.”

“*What?!*” Adrian stood up from the table with a loud screech of his chair, followed by it clattering to the ground. “Are you telling me Brent knew you were pregnant before I did?”

Kat let out an exaggerated sigh. It was all Brent could do to keep from laughing at her expression.

Adrian threw his hands up and paced the kitchen. “Un-freaking-believable! Alex and Jess know, too, don’t they?” He glared at Kat, then looked to Brent for confirmation.

Brent nodded.

Adrian walked back to his chair, righted it, and flopped down. He grabbed a biscuit and stuffed it into his mouth. His shoulders drooped in defeat, but the look on his face was slightly amused.

Brent couldn’t hold it in any longer. He busted out laughing.

Adrian shook his head at Brent and took a swig of coffee, washing down his biscuit. “Go ahead and laugh. I deserve it.” He looked at Kat. “Did everyone know but me?” He sounded aggrieved. “Doesn’t matter; the more people who know, the more pressure for you to marry me.”

Kat glared at him. “Don’t start!”

Adrian held up his hands in surrender. “Fine!” Then he turned to Brent. “Since you seem to know more about this situation than I do ... Why don’t you enlighten me?”

Brent glanced at Kat. She nodded her approval. He picked up the plate of eggs and proceeded to fill his plate. “Ok, but how about we eat while we talk?”

They all began reaching at once, filling their plates.

“Absolutely! I get morning sickness when my stomach is empty.”

Both men watched as Kat dug into her food with enthusiasm. They shared a grin as she hummed her delight.

Brent told Adrian all that he'd learned from Alex, and explained to Kat what Michael had turned up from the website's werewolf role-playing site. He left out anything that would lead her to think they believed the werewolf story. He was certain that Adrian hadn't told her about that yet. She just thought they were dealing with a group of psychopaths ... which they were. There was a bit of tension between Kat and Adrian, but it was disappearing with every minute that passed. Adrian seemed to redirect his focus from not knowing about the baby to protecting his mate and unborn child. By the end of the meal, they all seemed to be on the same page ... well, as much as they could be without Kat knowing they were actually wolves.

"They broke into my apartment? Oh, my God! Did they steal anything?"

Brent shook his head. "Not that I can tell."

She dropped her head into her hands, then looked up at him. "Did you arrest them?"

"Not yet. I need more evidence against them."

"More evidence? Why? They broke into my apartment!"

Brent sighed. It would be so much easier if she knew what they were. "Because we want to catch them and make it stick. We don't want them running around hurting innocent people. B&E would be a slap on the wrist; they'd be out before you know it, and then we wouldn't know who all is involved."

Kat shook her head. "I don't get it. I mean, they seem to be some kind of cult, but instead of religion they seem to be fixated on make-believe creatures. Can't you put them into an institution or something?"

Brent and Adrian shared a meaningful glance.

Adrian finally spoke. "Honey, we don't have any proof. They haven't hurt anyone."

Kat scoffed and shot out of the chair. "Hello?! They were going to hurt our baby!"

Adrian grabbed her hand and scooted his chair back, pulling her into his lap and wrapping his arms around her. "But they didn't. Besides, Brent *is* the police, a detective. This is what he does. He's supposed to investigate these kinds of things and look for evidence against them! Right, Brent?" He raised a brow, a silent "Go ahead -- come up with an answer to that one."

"Uh, yeah! Yeah, right. They have to break the law first, Kat."

Kat looked at him like he'd lost his mind. "Isn't threatening a person breaking the law? I know breaking and entering is!"

Well, she had a point there. Brent cleared his throat. "Well, they didn't actually threaten you, did they?"

That seemed to calm her down a little. "Well, not to my face, but they threatened me all the same. *And* they broke into my apartment!"

Brent stood, preparing to leave. "I know, Kat. And trust me, I'll nail them, but we have to bide our time. There's all sorts of red tape involved. We don't want these loonies running around hurting people."

Much to his relief, she finally nodded her head and conceded. "You're right. Just catch them before they harm some other woman's baby."

He grinned and winked at Adrian. "I will. You just stay here with Adrian and take care of yourself. I've got your apartment locked up and under surveillance."

Adrian stood up, taking Kat with him. He set her back down on his chair. "I'll be back; I'm going to walk Brent out."

She nodded, although it was apparent she was deep in thought. Thinking about her apartment, no doubt. "Okay. Bye, Brent. Thank you."

"You're welcome, Kat. Thank you for breakfast. I'll be in touch."

Again she nodded.

"And Kat?"

She glanced up at him. "Yeah?"

"You might consider marrying him as a way of torturing him for the rest of his life. That would be a pretty good revenge."

She laughed and shook her head. "Don't you start in on me, too! Get out of here and go catch those nut jobs!"

Adrian closed the cabin door and followed his cousin to his car. "Do you really have someone watching her apartment?"

"Yeah, I do. A couple of pack members are there in case they come back. You know, if you'd just tell her about us, it'd be a lot easier."

Adrian groaned. "She'd probably take a page out of your book and shoot first, ask questions later. Hell, I have to get her to trust me first."

Brent nodded. "Any ideas how they knew the baby was a wolf?"

He shook his head. "Not a clue. Alex?"

"Nope. He was as surprised as us."

"I didn't think we showed signs until puberty."

Brent shrugged and got into his car. "Me, either. But obviously we're wrong. I think I'm going to do a little B&E of my own and see if I can get her records from Gordon's office. Maybe the tests will be in there. Meanwhile, see if you can find out what sorts of tests they ran on her." He shut his car door and rolled down his window.

Adrian leaned his arm on the roof and rested his head against his arm, looking in the window at Brent. "Yeah, I'll do that ... along with the million other things I've got to do." He straightened up and ticked a list off his fingers. "One, get Katherine to trust me. Two, get her

to agree to marry me. Three, tell her about our family. Four, find out who these men are and destroy them before they get to my family --”

“Nope, that’s my job.” Brent put his sunglasses on and started the car. “All you have to do is get your relationship in order and take care of your mate.” With those parting words, he put the car in reverse and left.

Chapter Seventeen

At the sound of the front door clicking shut, Kat looked up from clearing the table. Adrian walked in with ruffled hair. He looked a bit frazzled. She wondered if he was going to start in on her again about the baby and her not telling him.

"Katherine, we need to talk."

Kat grinned as she put the last of the dishes from breakfast in the sink. "Gee, you sure do say that a lot."

Adrian walked up beside her and opened the dishwasher. "Well, if you'd quit screwing with my head, I'd quit saying it."

Kat chuckled and handed him a plate. "At least you've stopped yelling."

"Well, yelling at you doesn't seem to do any good. Believe me, if it did, I'd still be doing it." He put the plate in the dishwasher and reached for the one she'd just rinsed. "Whatever happened to the meek little thing that hung on my every word and went out of her way to make me happy?"

"You. You happened to her." Kat sighed and stopped rinsing dishes. "Look, Adrian, you hurt me ... really badly. Heck, maybe I overreacted, but I really loved you. I thought we honestly had something together. Now, looking back, I feel pretty stupid. I mean ... no one falls in love that fast. It should have been obvious that I was just a fling for you. But it wasn't -- I thought you felt the same way I did." She shook her head and blinked back a tear. Her hands trembled slightly as she resumed rinsing the dishes. She was through hiding; if he wanted to talk, then she'd talk. She'd just lay everything out, and he could do with it what he wanted.

"I decided a long time ago that I didn't want to be like my mother. It's always been a fear of mine. But you know what? I'm not like her. I loved you, and whether you loved me or not, it doesn't matter anymore. I told myself I wouldn't have sex without love, and I

didn't. I don't even regret the baby. I'm not going to dump my kid off on my grandparents, and I'm not going to run away from what I've done. I guess what I'm trying to say is, I've had a hard time coming to terms with things. But I realized something important: I'm not my mother. I'm not selfish and self-centered like her. And it's not your fault, either. It's mine. I made my own decisions, and even though they turned out to be wrong, my reasoning was sound, if a little misguided."

She took a deep breath and passed him the next plate. The sink was becoming blurry. She continued to rinse, not daring to take a peek at him. She felt him still as stone next to her and knew he was looking at her. If she looked at him, she'd start bawling. It had taken a lot for her to admit what she had. Man, her mood swings were off the scale. "What I'm trying to say is, I'm not sorry. And I won't try and keep the baby from you."

She felt him move, but she didn't try to see where. Suddenly, two arms wrapped around her waist. It was way too much; the tears started falling in earnest. She could no longer see the dish in her hand.

Adrian reached up and took the bowl out of her hand and placed it in the sink. He pulled her close to his chest and kissed her cheek. "You are nothing like your mother, Katherine. She was a drug addict; you said so yourself --"

"Yeah, but some guy was her downfall. Some man got her into --"

"Shh! You aren't like her. You are strong-willed and level-headed. I can't see you ever being someone's doormat."

Kat turned her head with a loud snuffle. "You basically said I was a doormat before."

He chuckled against her neck. "No, I didn't. You were shy and unsure. There's a big difference. I doubt seriously you would have remained compliant for much longer." He turned her to face him. He looked into her eyes and gave her a reassuring grin. He wiped the tears from her face. "I understand why you didn't tell me about the baby. But you're wrong. I did love you. No, I *do* love you. I'll quit pressuring you to marry me, but I want you to give it some serious thought. And don't try to use the excuse that I'd be marrying you for the baby, because it's not true. I asked before I knew about the baby. Let's just take things a day at a time. Deal?"

Kat nodded through her tears. "I can do that. One day at a time."

He kissed her forehead and pulled her into his arms. He put his hand on the back of her neck, snuggling her face into his chest. Kat yawned and hugged him back. It felt so good to be held by him. She sniffled and tightened her arms around him. Maybe things would work out after all. He seemed sincere about the marriage proposal. She felt something harden against her belly and grinned. Well, he certainly wanted her; that much she knew. Her eyes drifted shut on another yawn.

His chuckle made her start. She stepped back and looked up at him.

“Go lie down, honey.” He kissed her nose. “You’re about to fall asleep in my arms. It’s been a long morning for you. You and the baby go rest, and I’ll finish cleaning the kitchen.”

She didn’t argue. She was tired. Her brain could only take so many revelations in one morning. She thanked Adrian and headed up the stairs for a nap. Things would look much better and be more clear after a few Z’s.

Adrian stepped out of the shower and grabbed the towel off the rack. In the middle of drying off, he heard the sound of ... laughter? No, it was applause. No, it was more like someone singing. Then there was the sound of heavy machinery, followed by a dog bark. He smiled to himself. Katherine must be channel surfing on the TV in his room. He wondered how long she’d been awake. It couldn’t be long; she’d been sound asleep when he’d gotten in the shower.

He hoped her mood would be conducive to talking. He still needed to find out how her doctor had learned about their baby being a werewolf, but her emotions were unpredictable lately. She went from snarling lioness to indifferent house cat to lovable kitten. He grinned at the imagery. *His* kitten.

Wrapping his towel around his waist, he opened the door. The cloud of steam followed him into the bedroom. Katherine looked up from her place on the bed. She grinned and went back to flipping channels.

“How was your nap, kitten?”

“Good.”

Adrian smiled and went to the dresser where the TV sat. He pulled open the top drawer, looking for some boxer shorts. His towel slid from his hips as he closed the drawer.

“Wow, what’s that? I don’t remember seeing it before.”

Adrian looked around; her gaze seemed to rest on his butt. What was she looking at? He glanced down his own back as far as he could see. He didn’t see anything. “What is it? You’ve seen my butt before.”

“Don’t be silly. A birthmark, I guess. There ...” She pointed. “Right above your tailbone, there’s a dark patch of skin. It’s kind of shaped like a ...” She cocked her head to the side. “Like a coyote or a wolf howling at the moon.”

Adrian grinned. Considering its resemblance to a wolf, he’d gotten teased about his birthmark all his life. He faced her, leaning back on the dresser. He couldn’t help but grin even wider when her gaze drifted below his waist. As usual, his cock responded to her interest. “That *is* a birthmark. It’s called a Mongolian spot.”

“Huh?”

“Well, it has nothing to do with Mongolians, of course, but people of Asian and Latin descent are well-known to have these types of grayish-blue or brown birthmarks. Basically, the dark-skinned races, like Latinos, Native Americans, Asians, and some of us who are of

mixed races, often have them as children, but usually they gradually go away. When I was younger it was a bluish-purple color and looked like a bruise. It's faded as I've gotten older."

Katherine swallowed audibly, and her eyes shot back up to his, but not before he smelled the instant arousal her gaze had triggered. Good, she was affected just as much as he was.

His grin widened.

Her eyebrows shot up, and she cocked her head. "Geez, aren't you a fountain of information."

"I considered becoming a geneticist before I decided to become a neurosurgeon."

Katherine let out an inelegant snort. "Have you ever done anything that didn't require a genius IQ?"

He pushed off the dresser and walked toward her, smiling the whole way. Her eyes immediately dropped to his erection, and her tongue snaked out to moisten her lips.

He took in a deep breath and stopped in front of the bed. Good God, she was sexy! He crooked his finger at her. She started inching toward the edge of the bed.

"Actually, yes. Would you believe I was a running back in college? I had a full scholarship for all four years of college. A damned good running back, as a matter of fact. I had NFL scouts all over me."

She stopped in midscoot. Her eyes widened, and her mouth dropped open. "What? Really?"

"Yes, really." He motioned her closer again. "I decided football wasn't for me, so I went into medicine." When she reached the edge of the bed, she threw her legs over it, sitting in front of him. Her eyes once again zeroed in on his cock. He used his forefinger to lift her head up, but her gaze stayed glued to his groin.

She licked her lips and swallowed. Finally her gaze drifted up to his. "Why didn't you go into the NFL?"

Adrian swallowed hard. His gums were itching like crazy. He groaned, knowing that if he told her the truth, she'd tease him, but he wasn't about to mislead her any more than necessary. "I hated losing control. Taking a hit or tackling seemed to ..." He shrugged. "I don't know, make me ... mad? Animalistic."

She chuckled. "Yes, and we all know how anal you are about your control. You're a control freak."

He scoffed. "I am not a control freak! And I'm not --"

Katherine raised her eyebrow, daring him to deny it.

He sighed. "Okay, fine! I'm a little anal retentive, but I'm *not* a control freak." Before she could say another word, he reached down, grabbed the hem of her shirt, and whisked it over her head.

She gasped and moved her hands as if to cover herself.

Adrian shook his head and held her hands out to the side. "God, you're lovely."

Kat swallowed. The lust in his eyes was evident; they were practically glowing. His body was mesmerizing. He made her run hot and cold. When she didn't want to strangle him, she wanted to love him. What would he do if she touched him?

Her eyes trailed down his strong chin, down his defined chest to his muscled abs. There was hardly any hair on his body. He had a small trail of it that started below his navel and led down to the small patch above his cock. She decided then and there that he should have been a geneticist -- who better to research genes than a person with a perfect set of them? She grinned. Yeah, ok, so that didn't play into it, but still ...

Kat's attention focused a little lower, on his erection. It was thick and smooth, aside from the veins. The head was large, with a glistening drop of moisture on the tip. Her vaginal muscles clenched and her nipples hardened. She reached out and wrapped her fingers around him and was rewarded with a hiss. She squeezed tentatively. The blood pumping through the veins pulsated against her palm. He moaned, and her stomach tightened. The wetness from her pussy increased. She could actually feel it slowly running down. She glanced up briefly to find his eyes closed and his head thrown back.

A drop of semen slid down the head. She watched it trickle toward her hand. What would it taste like? She bent her head and flicked her tongue out right before the drop reached her hand. It was salty, but not bad-tasting. "Hmm." The feel of his skin against her tongue was stimulating. He was so soft and warm, almost hot. She ran her tongue up the shaft and around the head.

Adrian tensed. He seemed very still, like his muscles were locked into place. He obviously liked what she was doing. Her courage grew with his obvious approval. She licked her lips and slid her mouth over the end, just past the head.

"Yessss ..."

Kat smiled around him. She pulled back, then slowly inched forward, taking more of him in. She repeated this several times. At his growing excitement, she began testing her grip on him, tightening her fist as she slid back, then loosening it when she went forward. He seemed to like it, if his groans and the twitch of his hips were any indication. She certainly was enjoying this. It felt ... empowering. Her nipples hardened even more at the soft breeze her motions were stirring.

His hands went to her hair and guided her movements. "Ah, honey, I think you have a knack for this. You don't need teaching."

Kat chuckled.

He groaned. She was going to be the death of him -- there were no two ways about it. Just the thought of her lips wrapped around his cock had been enough to make him lose his mind; the reality was almost sensory overload. As usual, he knew his eyes had shifted, and his teeth had stabbed into his lips as soon as that hot, moist tongue of hers had slid up his shaft; his hands hadn't been far behind in shifting. He'd tangled his hands in her hair to keep her from accidentally seeing his claws. He'd hit an all-time low as far as his control went ... but damned if he cared at the moment.

She was getting bolder and bolder with each stroke. One hand had traveled down to play with his testicles. The other hand continued to squeeze his shaft in rhythm with her strokes. She might never have done this before, but she sure did improvise well. What she lacked in skill, she made up for in sheer enthusiasm.

He was so close to coming, it was almost painful holding it back. His fingers tightened in her hair. Her experimental touches were as big a turn-on as they were refreshing. Never would he have guessed an inexperienced lover would be to his liking. He was used to sophisticated, experienced women. Never again! They didn't hold a candle to his mate.

He had the sudden urge to growl and shout, "Mine!" He wanted to mark her as his. That thought alone was enough to push him over the edge. His ass clenched, his stomach tightened, and before he even realized what he meant to do, he pulled away from her and fisted his cock in his hand. When his voice came out, it sounded rusty and hoarse, more of a growl.

"Keep your eyes closed." He pumped his cock once and erupted. His eyes shot open, and he looked down at her. Semen splashed her chin, neck, and chest. He moaned a low, satisfied sound. The sight of her pale, pretty face turned up, her eyes closed, chin and neck covered in his seed, only added fuel to the fire. He ejaculated more, covering her pert breasts. *Mine!* He'd marked her as his. Marked his territory, his property.

The backs of his hands tickled. He looked down. The hair was growing ... rapidly. *Shit!* The primal act had caused more of his control to slip. He was very near to shifting completely, almost at the point of no return. He had to get hold of himself. He looked back at Katherine covered in his semen. *No!* "Be right back." He took off in a near run to the bathroom.

The bathroom mirror reflected gold eyes back at him. He reached for the sink and turned on the taps, seeing that not only did he have claws, but his fingers were beginning to fuse together. Quickly, he opened up the cold water as high as it would go, then cupped his hands under the water and splashed it onto his face. Taking deep, even breaths, he willed his mind to focus. His heart rate finally slowed down, and his breathing leveled out. He opened his eyes and checked his hands. They were still claws, but they had ceased to fuse, and the hair was receding. Soon they'd be the normal, steady hands of one of the country's top surgeons.

Again he cupped his hands under the faucet and splashed his face, then stood there with his eyes closed, feeling his fingernails shrink back to normal. He opened his mouth and took another really deep breath.

There was a swift intake of air, followed immediately by the smell of fear.

His eyes snapped open and looked into the mirror. Over his shoulder, Katherine stood at the door, pale as death, her eyes widened in horror.

Chapter Eighteen

Her heart hammered, threatening to race right out of her chest. She needed to run, to get away, but she couldn't move. She felt like she was in a trance. Her feet just wouldn't respond.

She couldn't have seen what she thought she'd seen ... what she *did* see! It had been real -- there was no way he could have faked it. His teeth ... his eyes ... they weren't human!

"Katherine? Honey?" Adrian approached her cautiously, reaching out slowly, like one would to a frightened animal.

He looked normal. His eyes were his eyes, and his teeth ... they were his normal teeth, too -- but she knew what she had seen. She swallowed hard and trembled at his approach.

His voice was soft, almost a whisper. "Oh, honey, don't. Don't be frightened. Let's discuss this. I promise you're safe. I could never hurt you, Katherine." He took her hand and gently pulled her toward the sink. "We're going to wash you off, okay? That's all, sweetheart ... come on." He stopped at the sink, let go of her hand, and busied himself wetting a rag. He moved very slowly and calmly.

Kat stood perfectly still as he washed her chin, neck, and chest. She was still in shock. Was he going to kill her? Was he like a Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde? Was he okay as a human, but turned into a deranged monster that went into a killing rage? What would make him change into that beast? She barely felt the cool, damp cloth on her skin as he cleaned off the remains of their lovemaking.

Before she realized it, he had her back in the bedroom. He was getting dressed as she stood by the bed. She glanced down at the rumpled covers. She'd made love to a ... a ... what the heck was he? Not once, but several times.

He came back to her fully dressed and pulled her T-shirt over her head. He put her hands through the armholes like he was dressing a child. "Katherine, honey, come sit down and let's talk. You must have some questions ..."

Child? Her child was his child. And he wasn't human. She put her hand on her stomach. *Oh, my God!* The doctor! This was why the doctor wanted to abort her baby. Was her baby going to be like him?

"Kitten, you're white as a sheet. Your heart rate is way too high. You need to calm down; it's not good for the baby or you for your heart to beat that fast for an extended period." He bent down into her line of vision.

Kat's eyes caught his. All of a sudden, the dreamlike fog cleared. She was in love with a man that wasn't human, and pregnant with his baby, who probably wasn't human, either. Kat did the only thing she could think of -- she threw back her head and screamed at the top of her lungs.

Adrian blinked. What the hell had just happened? She'd been so calm and quiet, despite her elevated heart rate and the scent of fear; then she'd turned into a screaming banshee. He reached out a hand slowly to touch her, hoping to calm her.

She slapped his hand down and took off in a dead run.

"Oh, shit!" He listened as her feet pounded down the steps, and prayed she wouldn't trip. He was going to have to go after her, but he dreaded chasing her and scaring her even more. *This sucks!*

He listened carefully, tracking her through the house. It sounded like she was digging through the kitchen drawers. Why? Was she looking for his keys? His car keys were up here, thank God, so he didn't have to worry about her going too far! But she was going to hurt herself or the baby if she didn't calm down. Suddenly another thought occurred to him -- what if she was getting a knife? "Shit!"

He stepped out of the room and found her immediately. She was standing in the middle of the kitchen with the biggest butcher knife in the place in her hand. She waved it up at him. "Just stay where you are. Don't come any closer."

Great! What now? He had to get her to talk to him. He couldn't afford to have her scared of him and running into the arms of the bad guys.

He sighed and sat down on the top landing. Turning to the side, he lay down and looked at her through the stair railing, propping his head on his hand and trying to look harmless. Her shoulders dropped just a bit. Good, she'd relaxed some.

She took a deep breath and backed herself against the far wall, side-stepping until she had a clear path to both the front and back doors. Then she stopped and her gaze narrowed. "What are you?" she whispered.

"A werewolf."

She clutched her chest, then, apparently realizing she'd dropped her defensive stance, jumped back to attention, knife held out threateningly. "There are no such things as werewolves."

"Apparently there are. All the men in my family are werewolves."

"What?! All of them?" Her brown eyes widened noticeably. She was either shocked, or she didn't believe him.

"Well, not my dad. My dad's human."

"Are you saying that Alex and Brent are werewolves?"

He nodded. "Yup. So are Dash, Diego, Emilio, and my little brother, Julian." He watched her mouth drop open. He could smell her fear, but the conversation was helping. Her stance was gradually relaxing with every little bit of information he imparted.

Her eyes narrowed at him, and she shook her head. "No! Alex and Diego aren't werewolves."

"Yes, honey, they are. What do you want to know, Katherine? If I'd wanted to hurt you, I'd have done so already. I'm ten times stronger and faster than a normal man. My hearing is better, as is my sense of smell. I could track you by scent alone."

She shook her head and stood up a little straighter. "No! It's not possible. How did you do that? How did you make your eyes and teeth do that?"

He sighed and sat up. She shook the knife a little. Reminding him she had it, he supposed. He held out a hand. "Calm down. I'm just sitting up. I'm going to stay up here until you tell me I can come down, okay?"

She nodded, but didn't loosen up her posture any.

"Okay, I'm going to talk and you listen. When I'm done, you can ask questions, okay?"

Again she nodded.

"All right. I was born a werewolf, as were my cousins." She started to protest, but he held up a hand, forestalling her. "Let me finish. And, yes, that includes Alex. It's a genetic trait that runs on my mom's side of the family. My mom is not a wolf, but she carries the gene. Marisa probably carries the gene, as well."

Her eyes widened in horror again, and she vehemently shook her head. He smelled the tears in her eyes before he saw them.

Adrian's stomach knotted. God, this was hard! "Honey, listen to me. We are not monsters. We don't hurt people. It's not like in the movies where they go around eating villagers and mutilating livestock. You have nothing to fear from me ... from any of us. Ask me anything you want, sweetheart." He ached to take her in his arms and comfort her, but he knew she'd never allow it; not yet, at least. He sat still, trying not to give in to his impulse to go down the stairs and get her.

"What about the baby?" She dabbed at the tears on her face, shoulders slumped. Slowly she lowered the knife.

He closed his eyes against the pain. What if she rejected him? What if she no longer wanted the baby? He hadn't considered that before. He swallowed the lump in his throat. Remaining composed and calm seemed to be working so far. He'd just talk to her until she accepted it. "What about the baby, honey?"

"Is it a ... a ... a werewolf?" she asked hesitantly. Thankfully, he could detect no repulsion in her voice, just disbelief and uncertainty. She slid down the wall and sat, her knees bent, with the knife still in her hand but resting on the floor. He considered that a very good sign.

He breathed a little easier and relaxed a bit himself. "More than likely, the baby is a boy. And, yes, it's also probably a wolf. I'm not sure how your doctor found out, but if the baby is showing signs of being a wolf, then it's a boy. Females don't show any characteristics at all. It's sort of like color blindness; the mother passes it to the child but doesn't have it herself. Males don't show any physical signs until they reach puberty, but there are ways to determine at birth -- and apparently before birth -- if they are a wolf."

She put the knife down beside her and ran her hands over her face. She sniffled a few times -- trying to stop crying, he guessed. "My baby isn't going to be a monster?"

Adrian's stomach knotted tighter. "No, kitten. The baby isn't going to be a monster. Do you think I'm a monster? That I'd hurt someone? I've dedicated my life to helping people. The only way I'd ever hurt anyone is to protect you ... and our baby. We don't go around attacking people, Katherine."

She dropped her gaze to her stomach, then ran her hands around it in a circular motion.

His heart squeezed in his chest. She still wanted the baby; there was no denying that. The look in her eyes said it all. She might be scared and unsure, but she wanted their baby. He breathed a sigh of relief.

"How are we going to protect the baby from these ... these ..."

"Murderers?"

She glanced up at him and nodded her head. "I've felt him move, Adrian."

His eyes teared up, making it hard to see her. He stood up, intending to go to her.

He heard the clatter of the knife as she picked it back up, and he stopped midstep. He looked at her, standing perfectly still.

She stared back at him, watching him for several seconds, before she finally took a deep breath and let it out in a fragmented sigh. "I'm scared."

He nodded. "I know. I'm not going to hurt you; nothing has changed. I'm still the same person. You just didn't know about my ... uh, heritage."

"Yes, but if you were going to kill me, you wouldn't tell me you were going to."

"Why wouldn't I?"

"Because you wouldn't want me to know."

Adrian grinned at her logic. "Why? If I were going to kill you, would I really care what you thought? Do you honestly think I'd kill my mate and my unborn pup? Do you know anything about wolves?"

She put the knife down again. "I guess you're right. If you were going to kill me, you wouldn't go through all the trouble to reassure me. Assuming you're in your right mind." She shrugged. "And you appear to be sane."

He nodded at her, encouraging that train of thought. "I have an idea. Stay right there." He turned back toward his room. When he reached the door, she stopped him.

"Wait! Where are you going?"

He held up his finger. "Just a second. I'm going to get my phone." He retrieved his cell phone and came back to the landing. He sat down on the top step and dialed Alex's number. He glanced down at Katherine as the phone began to ring. She was sitting quietly, watching him like a hawk.

"Hello?" Alex's deep voice responded.

"Alex? I need you to put Jess on the phone."

"Why, what's wrong?"

Adrian let out a small sigh at Alex's suspicious tone. "Katherine needs to talk to her. She knows, Alex, and she's scared. Put Jess on the phone."

Alex didn't say another word. Adrian could hear him talking to Jess in the background. Jess came on the line a few seconds later. "Kat?"

"No, hold on, Jess. I'm going to get her the phone. Just give me a minute, and bear with me." He glanced down at Katherine. She was still studying him intently. He pulled the phone away from his ear and held it by his side. "Honey, I'm going to have to walk down the steps to give you the phone. I don't want to throw it at you."

She shook her head and pointed at the couch. "Throw it onto the couch."

Adrian sighed again, but did what she asked. He tossed the phone onto the cushions, then sat back down on the top step.

Katherine clenched the knife in her hand and stood. She made her way to the couch cautiously, watching him the whole way. Once she had the phone in her hand, she hurried back to the far wall and sat down again. Her eyes locked with his as she brought the phone to her ear.

"Jess?"

Chapter Nineteen

“Wow.” After an hour-and-a-half conversation, Kat ended the call and glanced at Adrian. Jess had promised to answer any other questions Kat had as soon as Jess got there, but she’d answered enough to make Kat feel safe. Jess and Alex were on their way to the cabin at that very moment. “I’m the last one to hear anything!”

“I know the feeling,” he mumbled, then yawned and sat up from where he lay on the landing. He stretched his hands over his head, pulling his shirt tight across his broad chest. Kat swallowed. He might not be human, but she was. She’d just gotten over the shock of a lifetime, and already her hormones were doing a little jig. Geez, would he always have this effect on her?

He interrupted her thoughts. “I tried to tell you. You just didn’t want to listen to me.”

What? Oh, the werewolf thing. “Do you think you could have told me sooner? Like when we were dating, maybe?”

He shrugged. “Nah, you wouldn’t have believed it. You know, it all makes sense now. You were in heat -- er, ovulating. That’s why my control snapped. It’s no wonder I took you. I mean, you *are* my mate.”

“Sure, blame it on me and my cycle, you jerk!”

His forehead wrinkled. “I just can’t believe I didn’t realize it. What kind of idiot doesn’t recognize his own mate?”

“You?”

He glared at her.

She placed the phone by the discarded butcher knife. She was still confused and vaguely disbelieving, but she was no longer so frightened. If what Jess said was true -- and she had no reason not to believe her best friend after seeing what she’d seen -- everything was going to be fine. She was Adrian’s mate, and not exactly certain what all that entailed,

but from what Jess had said, they were destined to be together, and there would never be another for Adrian. In fact, according to Jess, Adrian had no choice but to love her; it was in his genetic makeup.

Kat couldn't decide if that was a good thing or not. Sure, she loved him, but it would be nice to know that he'd chosen her rather than been stuck with her. It was all so confusing. She stood and began to pace, trying to reason things through.

"Ok, so the baby is probably a boy if they realized that he -- and you -- are ..." She stopped and lifted a skeptical brow at Adrian. "... werewolves."

Adrian chuckled and got up, then walked downstairs. "What I want to know is how they found out about the baby. What kind of tests did they do on you? As far as we know, there isn't any way to find out until after the baby is born."

She shrugged. "Just the standard tests, I suppose -- blood and urine."

Adrian walked in front of her to block her pacing. He held out a hand and raised his eyebrows.

She took it. Relief played over his features, and he pulled her into his arms, squeezing her tightly. "I love you, Katherine. I'm so sorry I caused you such grief. I didn't mean to scare you. Will you forgive me?"

A tickle in her stomach made her gasp. The baby was moving again. She smiled, and tears sprang to her eyes.

"What? What's wrong, honey?" Adrian held her at arm's length, studying her intently.

"The baby is moving. I can feel him."

Adrian's eyes widened in wonder, and his hand shot to her stomach, trying to feel its movements. After several seconds of groping her belly, he frowned. "I can't feel him." His bottom lip actually pouted out just a bit.

Kat laughed. "Of course not! He's too small."

Adrian grinned and pulled her into his arms again. "Please don't make me beg. I will if you want me to, but I won't like it."

Kat looked up at him. "Beg for what?"

"You."

"Me?"

"Yes, you. Marry me, Katherine."

Kat took a deep breath. She wanted to. She loved him. She couldn't deny it anymore, couldn't lie to herself any longer. Slowly, she nodded. "Yes, but --"

Adrian squeezed harder, making her squeak. "Oh, sorry, honey!"

-- I want to take things slow."

He pulled back and frowned. "How slow?"

She shrugged.

"Three months. You have until you're six months pregnant; then I'm done being nice. In three months, you will march your pretty little ass down the aisle willingly or at gunpoint. I don't care which." He nodded once, kissed her on the head, and pushed her head back against his chest.

Kat smiled. "Gunpoint?"

"Yeah, Brent owes me."

Kat shook her head against his chest and grinned. "Give it up! Brent likes me; he wouldn't shoot me."

He chuckled and kissed the top of her head. "I love you, kitten."

"I love you, too, Adrian. I've tried not to, but, God help me, I do." She sighed and squeezed him tighter. She felt the tears gather in her eyes again. *Damn hormones!*

He pushed her back so he could look her in the eye. He was smiling, clearly happy at her declaration. He wiped the tears from her eyes with his thumbs and lowered his head.

The phone rang and the front door opened. Alex stepped in. "We're here!"

Damn it! Jess and Alex had horrible timing!

Adrian groaned and put his forehead against hers. "You get the phone; I'll help Alex bring stuff inside." He straightened and walked toward the door, where Alex had luggage and bags hanging all over him.

The phone rang again, and Jess swept into the cabin behind Alex. "Lucy! I'm home!"

Where the heck was the phone? It wasn't Adrian's cell phone. It sounded like a regular phone. Did the cabin have a regular phone? Kat looked up at Jess. "Great! Glad you made it, Ricky. Where the heck is the phone?"

Jess pointed at the end table by the couch. There was nothing on it but a lamp. The phone rang again. She looked down, and on the bottom shelf of the end table sat a black phone. She threw her hands up and let them fall.

"Figures! There was a freakin' phone here the whole time, and I was jumping through hoops and running through fire trying to sneak Adrian's phone."

She grabbed the receiver, tuning out the laughs and hellos behind her. "Hello?"

There was no answer.

"Hello?"

Jess shrieked behind her, "Oh, my God! That's great!!!"

She covered her ear, trying to block Jess out. "Hello?" There was a click, then a dial tone. Kat hung up the phone and stood up, facing the noisy trio in front of the door. All this time she'd been here, no one had called, and now, suddenly, there was a crank call. The hair on the back of her arms stood straight up. She placed a hand over her stomach absently.

Jess came up to her, the smile on her face fading with each step. "Kat, what's wrong?"

The men got quiet. Alex dropped the luggage at his feet and stepped forward with Adrian.

"There was no one there. I mean, there was, but they hung up."

Adrian stepped behind her and grabbed the phone. He pushed some buttons and put the receiver to his ear. After a few minutes he shook his head and hung up the phone.

"What?" Alex wanted to know.

Adrian wrapped his arms around Kat and placed his hands on her belly. She wondered if he'd done it consciously. "When I did call return, there was a busy signal."

Jess looked at Alex, then back at them. "Well, do you suppose it was a wrong number or something?"

Kat shook her head. "I don't know. Maybe I'm being paranoid, but that registered pretty high on my creepy-feeling meter. Were you guys followed?"

Alex shook his head. "I don't know how we could have been; we left from the airport. We didn't go home. Who all was listed as your emergency contacts on the paperwork at the OB's?"

"Just you and Jess. But would they really go through the trouble of looking into your whereabouts and finding airline listings for both of you just to get to me?"

Jess shrugged. "I don't see why not; they kidnapped me and Rome. In this day and age, you can find out anything, with a little patience. Heck, they've probably researched all of us thoroughly."

Adrian hugged her and spoke above her head. "All they'd have to do is look into Alex's properties. His name is listed on the deed to this place. It was signed over to him when he took over as pack alpha. I'm listed as co-owner. If they traced Alex here, then they now have my name, as well. Of course, they've probably had our names and the rest of our family's since they took Jess and Rome. Besides, Jess is right -- you can find out most anything nowadays, if you know where to look. Even unlisted numbers."

Kat stiffened. "What?! Do you mean Lisa took Jess because of Alex being a werewolf?" Man that still sounded funny spoken aloud.

Alex growled, but nodded.

"What the hell is going on?! Didn't anyone think this might be important info for me to have? In case all of you haven't noticed, I am carrying a baby that is half ... werewolf! Jesus! I'm always kept in the dark, and I'm tired of this crap!" She pushed out of Adrian's arms and began to pace.

"Honey?"

Kat turned and froze Adrian with a glare just as he reached for her. "Don't you 'honey' me! You might not have known I was pregnant until just recently, but you knew there were psychos out there who might want to harm me because I'd dated you!"

"No, I didn't! I thought we took care of the psychos when we rescued Jess! I'd have never left you alone if I'd known you'd be a target."

Kat sighed. She pointed to the front door. "Alex, shut the door!" She pointed to Jess. "Sit! You have some explaining to do!"

Jess gave her an overexaggerated grimace and sat down.

"Honey --"

Kat glanced back at Adrian, then pointed to the loveseat in front of the couch. "Sit!"

Alex chuckled on the way back from shutting the door. "Next, she'll be telling you to roll over and beg and ..." Kat glared at him. He snapped his mouth shut and quickly took a seat next to his wife.

"Now. What the hell all is going on?"

Adrian sighed and looked at Alex. Alex shrugged and looked at Adrian. Finally, Adrian spoke. "There is an organization that's trying to take out any and all wolves. We thought we got rid of the immediate threat when we took Lisa and her group down. We knew the organization was bigger than just Lisa and her cronies, but we had no idea it was as big as we now know it to be. Everything Brent told us is true. But now you know they aren't just crazy ... there is such a thing as werewolves."

Alex stood and slowly walked back and forth. He took over Adrian's explanation. "I've had people looking into this since we got Jess and Rome back. I knew there was a slight risk to the pack and members of my family until we located the rest of this group. I didn't think there was a risk to you, Kat, because you and Adrian were no longer together. I wasn't aware they could test to find out the baby was a wolf. If I'd known that, I'd have sent you to someone I knew. I should have sent you to a different doctor anyway, but you insisted that you'd used him before and that he was a good doctor. Hell, we still don't know how they found out about the baby. What kind of tests did they do?"

"I don't know; they took urine and blood. Nothing seemed unusual or out of place."

He nodded, sat back down next to Jess, and turned to Adrian. "We need to find out what lab work they did. Is there some sort of chemical present in both fluids? How can they tell? We need someone researching this. You want the job? Or shall I give it to Dash and Jill?"

"Brent's going to see if he can take a look at the records from Gordon's office. At the very least, Kat's file should be there, and we can see what the workup was." Adrian grabbed Kat's hand as she started to sit down, and pulled her into his lap. "Give it to Dash and Jill; at least Dash deals with pregnant canines. And Jill's been dying to experiment on werewolves for years. Dash complains all the time about her trying to make him into a science experiment. Without looking it up, I have no earthly idea what the usual composition is in the workup of a normal pregnant woman. My specialty is at the other end of the body. You

want to know normal brainwaves or something like that, I'm your guy. But I don't know nothin' 'bout birthin' no babies."

Kat chuckled and felt Adrian smile against her shoulder.

Alex grinned, "Nothin'?"

"Okay, I know a little; the bare minimum. And thank you, but I'd just as soon not know any more than I already do." Adrian kissed her cheek. "No offense, honey, but delivering babies is messy."

Alex nodded his agreement.

Kat grinned. "And digging around in people's brains isn't?"

She felt him shake his head. "It's just not the same. My patients are out of it. They aren't yelling and complaining and cussing the male species. And I don't have to deal with squalling babies, who more often than not pay you back for pulling them out by peeing on you."

Alex gave a mock shudder and nodded at Adrian's assessment with enthusiasm.

Jess elbowed him in the ribs. "I hate to break it to you, but you better get used to the idea, because you are going to be in there with me the entire time. Screaming, squalling baby, and all!"

Alex flinched. "Maybe this would be a good time to tell you about my rule. I don't deal with preggos. Ever! If they come into the ER, I make Jill or one of the interns accompany them up to Labor and Delivery. No way in hell would I chance getting stuck in the elevator with them. In fact, if I get into an elevator and a pregnant woman gets in, I get out!"

Kat and Jess sat staring at Alex with identical looks of shock on their faces.

Adrian concurred. "That's a good rule, coz! Mind if I borrow it?"

Jess reached out and whacked Alex upside the head. "I've just abolished your rule. You have exactly eight months to get used to the idea of being involved in childbirth."

"What?" Kat raised an eyebrow at Jess. "Are you pregnant?"

Jess nodded and smiled.

Kat pushed out of Adrian's lap and met her best friend between the couch and loveseat. They hugged and started making plans, until Adrian interrupted them.

"What are we going to do about the call? It's starting to get dark."

Kat let go of Jess and spun to face him. The hair on her arms stood up again. *Dang!* How could she have forgotten about that?

Alex got off the couch, rubbing the side of his head, gave Jess a glare, and headed up the stairs. "Call Brent! He was supposed to meet us here."

Adrian stood. "Where are you going?"

"To get the shotgun for Jess and Kat. You and I are going to shift and check out the grounds."

Adrian nodded and pulled his shirt over his head.

Kat's gaze caressed his bare shoulders, down his chest, across his rippled abs, to the trail of hair leading into his waistband. Then what Alex had said registered. Her head snapped around to Jess. "Shift?"

Jess nodded, her eyes trained over Kat's shoulder. "It makes more sense. Their sense of smell will be much better. They'll be able to tell if anyone has been snooping around here lately."

Kat heard a thud and turned to see Adrian pulling off his shoes. His shirt was already folded neatly on the arm of the loveseat. He pulled off the other shoe and started on his socks. Kat blinked. Was he just going to undress in the living room in front of everyone? She looked back at Jess, who was still watching Adrian with a grin tugging at her lips.

Kat's mouth dropped open, and she jumped in front of Adrian. Before she could say anything, Alex came back downstairs with the shotgun. He handed it to Jess, then looked over his shoulder at Adrian, who now had his socks neatly rolled and stuffed into his shoes.

Alex looked back at Jess, who was smirking at Kat. "Ahem!"

"Yes?" Jess asked sweetly.

"Do you mind?" Alex asked with a grin.

Jess shook her head. "Actually, no, not at all. I mean, if Adrian wants to strip in front of me, who am I to tell him not to?"

Alex shook his head and chuckled. "Who, indeed." He reached over his head and pulled the back of his shirt up and over his head.

Kat glanced behind her at Adrian. He was standing in a pair of boxers, folding his pants and grinning at her. A shoe flew by from Alex's direction, followed by a sock, then another shoe. Kat glanced over in time to see Alex drop his jeans and step out of them. Her mouth dropped open. What was wrong with them? She could not believe the two of them were stripping in the middle of the living room. Jeez! Kat glanced at Jess, who just stood there, watching Alex undress, with a grin on her face and a shotgun in her arms.

Alex reached down and pulled his underwear off. Kat gasped and felt the heat rush to her face. Jess chuckled.

Kat saw Alex start to turn, so she whipped her head back around to Adrian and nearly screamed. Standing where Adrian had been seconds ago was a big black wolf. Her hands flew to her chest. Two dainty arms wrapped around her from behind.

"Shh. It's okay, Kat. Breathe. He won't hurt you." Jess stroked her arms and whispered to her as the wolf -- Adrian -- made his way slowly to her.

He stopped right in front of her. He didn't look scary. He looked like a pet or something. Cautiously, she reached out a hand. Jess let go of her and stepped back. Kat looked over her shoulder.

Jess nodded. "Go ahead. I can't be that close to him. Alex just changed, too. They don't like other men around their mates; I don't want to start a fight. But go ahead; he won't hurt you, I swear."

She started as another big black wolf walked up next to Jess. Jess dropped her hand to his head and nodded her encouragement to Kat. Jess absently petted Alex's wolf head like it was no big deal.

Something warm and moist raked across her knuckles, bringing her attention back to Adrian. She looked down to see him lick her hand again. She lifted her shaking hand and slowly and cautiously placed it on his head. He rubbed against her, making her pet him. She chuckled. Her other hand found its way to his head, too, and pretty soon she was kneeling in front of him. His tongue lapped at her face, and she laughed. It was really him, Adrian, her love. She wrapped her arms around his neck and buried her face in his fur. He was so soft. His tail began to wag, and she laughed harder. The next thing she knew, she was on her back, with him standing over her, licking her face. She laughed and tried to squirm away. Suddenly, a thought popped into her head. "My, what a big tongue you have ..." She laughed even harder and heard Jess chuckle with her.

Jess's smiling face came into view over Adrian's shoulder. "I hate to break up this lovely playful show of affection, Little Red Riding Hood and Big Bad Wolf, but Alex is already on the way out the doggy door."

Chapter Twenty

Kat's gaze followed Adrian out the doggy door that was built into the back door. "Whoa! That's really weird. I don't know if I'll ever get used to that." She hadn't even noticed that there was a doggy door. First the phone, then the doggy door; she wondered what else she'd missed. Apparently, she'd had her head in the clouds since she'd gotten there.

"Yeah, it takes some getting used to, but I've always wanted a dog."

She turned and stared at Jess wide-eyed, then burst into laughter. Soon Jess was laughing with her. "I can't believe we're laughing about this. It isn't funny! It's ... it's ... well, it's just plain weird." Kat slanted Jess a mischievous grin. "Does this mean our children are going to chew up our shoes and pee on the floor?"

Jess laughed even harder. "Do me a favor -- don't ask Adrian that question. He has no tolerance for the dog jokes. I threw a stick a few weeks back at a family gathering and yelled 'fetch!' I thought he was going to take my head off."

Kat flopped down on the couch, cackling at Jess's antics. "No way! You didn't!"

Jess lay down on the couch opposite her, nodding vigorously. "Oh, yes, I did. The really funny thing about it was that they weren't in wolf form and Dash actually started to go get it before Adrian yelled at him."

Kat decided that if she didn't laugh, she'd cry. Her life was just getting weirder and weirder.

During their laughter, they'd missed the door opening and closing until a voice asked, "What's so funny?"

Kat screamed and ran for her butcher knife, still on the floor. Jess rolled off the couch and came up with the shotgun in hand and had it leveled at the intruder's chest in mere seconds.

Brent's hands shot up in the air and he stopped walking. "Whoa! Jess, it's me, don't shoot! Sorry I scared you." Both women breathed sighs of relief. Jess lowered the gun and clutched her chest.

Kat walked slowing back to the loveseat and set her knife on the table. She took a few even breaths, trying to will her heart to slow down. "Jesus, Brent!"

"Sorry, I thought you guys were expecting me."

Jess explained. "We were, but we got a crank call on the cabin phone, and we're a little edgy. The guys went to check it out."

He nodded and unbuttoned the tab holding his gun in his shoulder holster. "What kind of crank call?" He turned around and walked back to the cabin's front door. He locked it, started turning the lights down low, and moved the curtains to look out the front window to the left of the door.

Kat leaned back in the loveseat and relaxed. "Someone called, then hung up on me. I said hello, and then there was nothing for several seconds. Then I said hello again, and I heard a click. When Adrian did a call return, the phone was busy. Was it you, by any chance? We haven't checked it since that. Do you think we should do another call return?"

Brent shook his head as he walked over to the phone and picked it up. "No, it wasn't me." He pushed some buttons and put the receiver to his ear. Almost instantly, he shook his head. He hung up the phone and stood. "Still busy."

Kat sat there studying him. It was so strange to know that he was a werewolf. She'd never look at any of the Hernandez men the same again.

Brent caught her gaze. "What?"

Kat shrugged. "Just trying to imagine you as a wolf."

His grin lit up his whole face and made his green eyes sparkle. "I'm a damn good-looking wolf, if I do say so myself. Even more handsome than both Alex and Adrian combined." He winked. "When did you find out?"

"Today. About two hours ago."

Brent nodded and stepped toward her. He reached out his hand. "Good, then you know why we have to stop these maniacs. Come on, I have something I want you to see."

Kat took his hand, and he pulled her to her feet. He kissed her forehead, then stepped back. Kat smiled. He was such a sweet man; she couldn't believe he wasn't married ... or mated, as they preferred to call it.

He tugged her along behind him toward the stairs. "Jess, bring the shotgun, turn the lights off, and come on."

Jess caught up to them on the stairs. "Don't you love him? His sense of humor is so much better than Adrian's, and he's nowhere near as goofy as Dash."

Brent chuckled. "You can stop sucking up. I'll protect you with my life ... I swear."

Kat giggled. Jess was right; he always did have a nice way about him that put a person at ease.

When they reached Alex and Jess's room, Brent opened the door and went inside. He let go of Kat's hand and went directly to the computer. "I want you both to see what Michael has found. The other day, I followed the OB. Kat, you already know this." He looked at Jess and continued. "He picked up two men and went to Kat's apartment. When they left, I followed those two men to a house about five miles away." He carefully pulled the curtains closed, then sat down in the chair and turned the computer on. He looked back at them. "Pull up a seat."

Patiently, he waited for the computer to boot up. "The property deed was owned by a small advertising agency. So I got Michael looking into the company. He found a connection to the one listed on the deed of the place where you and Rome were held, Jess." Jess placed the shotgun on the bed and pulled the only other chair in the room over to the desk. She sat on the edge, then patted the empty space next to her. Kat perched herself next to Jess.

Brent's fingers flew over the keys as he spoke. "It took some digging, but both companies are owned by the same man. This man." He pointed to the screen. On the screen were three men. One of them was Kat's doctor, or former doctor. Kat had never seen the other two.

"Oh, my God!" Jess's hand flew to her mouth.

"What?" Brent and Kat asked in unison.

"That's the man Alex and I saw Lisa with that morning at the diner." She looked at Kat. "Remember, I told you about that? She was acting weird, and she never did introduce us to the man or even acknowledge him." She looked over at Brent. "Alex said he smelled like fear. And I remember he was really fidgety. Who is he?"

The sound of a car door interrupted.

All three of them jumped to their feet.

Jess grabbed the shotgun.

Brent pulled his gun out of his holster. "Kat, do you know how to use this?" He held up his gun.

She nodded, and he handed it to her and went to the closet. A few seconds later, he emerged with a rifle.

Kat scooted past Jess and went to the window to peek out, trying not to open the curtains any more than necessary. There were two men. They'd just stepped out of a dark blue truck. Both had black hair. Both were fit ... and handsome. "Damn! If those are the bad guys, I wouldn't mind being a bad girl," Kat whispered.

Jess stepped over next to her and carefully peeked out. She relaxed her grip on the shotgun. "It's Emilio and Michael."

Brent relaxed, too. "What are they doing here?"

Jess shrugged.

Kat looked at her, then back out the window. "There were so many people at the wedding ... which one is which? Whose dad is Emilio?"

Brent stepped out the bedroom door and started down the stairs. "My dad."

He greeted the two older men at the door as Kat and Jess were coming down the stairs. Kat touched Jess's arm. "Jess? Haven't Adrian and Alex been gone a long time?"

Jess shrugged. "It's a big property; it will take them a while to go all around the perimeter. Hi, Emilio! Hi, Michael!"

"Hi, Jess," they answered in unison. "Looks like you're prepared for visitors," one of them said, sweeping a hand toward the darkened lights.

Kat took the time to study the newcomers in the moonlight filtering through the curtains. Yes, one of them definitely resembled Brent. He was the bigger of the two. He had the Hernandez build, tall and very broad. His black hair was a little on the long side and was just starting to gray at the temples. He was very tan and very fit. He had to be at least fifty to be Brent's father, but he didn't look a day over forty. The man was every bit as sexy as his older brother, Jess's father-in-law, Diego. And Kat had always had a huge crush on Diego. She had met Brent's mother briefly at Jess's wedding, and although she hadn't talked to her much, she decided she admired the woman's taste.

The other man was leaner and a few inches shorter, but still very fit. He had more of a swimmer's build. His hair was jet black and cropped short like Adrian's, his skin was slightly lighter than that of his friend, and his eyes were a piercing gray instead of brown. He was one of the most beautiful men Kat had ever seen. How he still managed to look masculine was a mystery, but he oozed raw sex appeal. In fact, he was so beautiful, he'd have been intimidating if it weren't for his smile, which clearly proclaimed how friendly he was. Judging by what little she could see of his personality, the man obviously had no idea how utterly gorgeous he was.

As Kat reached the main level, Emilio said, "There's a black SUV parked down the road. We were checking on Kat's apartment to make sure no one else had broken in, and saw them there. We waited and followed them here, then had to stay back and wait to pull into the drive until they got out, so they wouldn't know they were being followed. There are five of them, all headed toward the woods behind the cabin, and they have guns. We need to get out of here." He motioned with his hand. "Come on, let's go." He started for the door.

Michael stood still and looked around the cabin as Emilio walked past him. "Where are Alex and Adrian?"

Kat and Jess gasped. Kat's gaze flew to Jess's. She got a sick feeling in the pit of her stomach, and it wasn't morning sickness.

Brent muttered to himself. "Ah, shit!"

Chapter Twenty-One

Kat waited, standing beside the back window, looking out. Brent, Emilio, and Michael had left in search of Adrian and Alex ten minutes earlier. They carried an arsenal they'd retrieved from Alex's and Brent's bedrooms. She'd been shocked but vastly relieved by the amount of weapons Brent had gathered for them to use. He'd pulled out another shotgun, four more handguns, and two assault rifles. She'd asked if Adrian was the only one in the family who didn't own a gun. Brent had quickly informed her that Adrian owned several and that they were all locked away in the gun safe in his closet upstairs; then he'd given them all their choice of weapons. She and Jess had ended up with a shotgun, two semi-automatic pistols and a rifle. Brent, his father, and Michael had taken the rest. She'd jokingly asked if the ATF knew about them, and Brent had very seriously answered that, no, they did not.

Kat couldn't stand it anymore. She glanced across the cabin at Jess, who stood by the front window, shotgun in hand and pistol tucked into the back of her jeans. Kat smiled and whispered, "Hey, Annie Oakley, I'm worried. I think we should go look for them."

Jess turned with a grin. "Yeah, I was thinking the same thing. Let's lock this place up and go. I can't sit here much longer. My mind is conjuring up all sorts of horrible things. I'll feel much better when I see Alex. Even if he does chew my ass out for coming after him."

Kat nodded. Yeah, Alex would definitely give them hell when he saw them. Adrian would, too, for that matter.

It was dark, but the moon was bright enough that they could see. Which was good, because a flashlight would've drawn attention. They bent low as they stepped out the back door with guns in hand. Like Jess, she'd stuffed the pistol down the back of her pants. She felt a little silly, but she had to admit that she felt more secure having the weapons. These people were not anyone she wanted to play around with. Not only did they want her man; they wanted her unborn child. As far as she was concerned, they'd take both over her dead

body. Well, assuming they hadn't already taken Adrian. She shivered, then quickly diverted her thoughts. She didn't even want to go there. *Adrian is fine*. "Jess? You think they're okay?"

"I hope so, Kat."

"Me, too. What are we going to do if we run into these loonies?"

"Shoot first, and ask questions later." Jess held back a branch, allowing Kat to pass by.

"Good thing my grandfather used to take us quail hunting with him ... I guess."

"Yeah, I was thinking the same thing."

Kat grinned at the thought of her grandfather; he'd have had a fit if he knew they were traipsing about the woods at night looking for bad guys. Kat sighed. Well, actually they were looking for the good guys. She thought she knew where she was, but she wasn't positive. It looked like the same trail Adrian had taken her on to go to the lake. "Hey, Jess, do you know where we're going?"

Jess stopped in front of her and looked back. "I think this is the way to the lake. I figured we'd just walk around a bit and see if we find anything."

Great! Not like she had any other bright ideas, but it still seemed kind of foolhardy. She couldn't even count the number of times Jess had gotten them in trouble over the years. Maybe she should lead and make Jess follow for a change? It probably wouldn't matter; they'd still be no better off.

Jess abruptly stopped in front of her and held out her hand. She turned with her finger to her lips and jerked her head to the side. "Do you hear that?" she whispered.

Kat cocked her head to the side, too, and closed her eyes. A little way in front of them, leaves and branches creaked like someone was walking on them. It was getting louder ... closer. Kat gave a quick prayer that it was one of their men, or wolves, or whatever the case might be.

A few seconds later, a pair of glowing green eyes came into view. They were animal eyes, but they were way too high to be an animal. Good Lord, what had they gotten themselves into this time? Kat held her breath and raised her rifle. She was barely aware of Jess bringing the shotgun up to her own shoulder. Suddenly, the silhouette of a rifle came into view. Whatever or whoever was coming toward them had a gun -- a big gun.

Brent's whispered voice reached them before he did. "It's me, don't shoot." He stepped into the small clearing they were in, shaking his head. "Jessica, I swear you remind me so much of Rhett, it's frightening. I'd tell her to stay put, too, and no more than five minutes later she'd be right behind me, following in my footsteps."

Jess went up on tiptoe and kissed his cheek. "Man, I'm glad to see you! And thank you. From everything Alex has told me about Hellion, that's a big compliment."

Brent groaned. "No, it isn't, you pain in the ass!"

Kat stared at his face. His eyes were so strange -- they reflected the light, just like that of a ... wolf. Only they were green like a cat's, not amber like a wolf's. "Your eyes ... they look like cat eyes."

Brent's looked at her and grinned. "Yeah, they are a little bizarre. They're this same color in wolf form, too. It's a little strange, since the rest of the pack has brown eyes like Alex and Adrian. Well, all except Michael and the twins -- they have blue eyes like Alaskan Huskies. Listen, we found Alex and Adrian ..."

For some reason, Kat didn't like the sound of that. She looked at Jess.

Jess's eyes widened; she obviously didn't like the sound of it, either. "Spit it out, Brent."

Brent sighed. "It's probably easier to show you. Be really quiet. Not a sound. You aren't going to like what you see, but don't make a peep." He turned around, then motioned at them. About ten feet away, he stopped and lay down, signaling for them to do the same. The grass was tall, coming well over their heads as they crawled. All sorts of snakes and bugs and critters could hide in it easily. Kat shuddered at the thought. It was probably best not to think about it.

She made her way next to Brent's right side. Jess flanked him on the left. Through the trees, they army-crawled to a ridge overlooking the pond. On the edge of it stood five men with rifles. They were standing in a group, discussing something. One of the men was her doctor. The four others she'd never seen before. Kat heard a swift intake of air. She glanced to her left, trying to see Jess, and discovered what had elicited her gasp.

On the beach, side by side, lay two large black wolves. They were completely still; she wasn't even sure if they were breathing. Her hand flew to her mouth, and tears sprang to her eyes. She hadn't seen Alex very long in wolf form, but she recognized Adrian.

Brent looked at them both warily, then motioned them once more to follow him. He retreated from the concealing grass, crawling back the way they'd come. They got to where they could stand up without being seen, and walked toward the concealment of the trees.

"Sons of bitches!" Jess hissed furiously.

Kat blotted the tears out of her eyes. The sense of loss was overwhelming. Tears poured down her face, and she was having a hard time not sobbing aloud. Part of her didn't care if they heard her and killed her, too. But almost immediately, she came to her senses. She might have lost Adrian, but there was no way she was going to lose their baby.

She looked at Jess and realized that Jess was shaking. Jess looked ... pissed? Kat was a little surprised that she wasn't crying. Kat ached with her whole being at the loss, of not just Adrian, but of Alex, too.

Brent reached up and wiped at her cheeks. He pulled her into his chest with his free arm. "Shh. It's okay, Kat. They aren't dead."

She looked up at him in a blur of tears. "How do you know?" She lay her head back against his chest, taking comfort in his embrace. He wasn't Adrian, but he'd do for now.

It was Jess who answered. "They're still in wolf form. If they die in wolf form, they shift back to human. So, since they're still in wolf form, they're alive."

Brent nodded, bumping his chin on Kat's head. "Jess is right. But I also know they aren't dead, because my dad saw the tranquilizer darts before they were pulled out."

Kat let out a ragged breath. She felt like she could breathe again. Suddenly, not only did Jess's fury make sense, but it spread to her, as well. She was ready to go kick some ass!

Brent must have sensed it. She could hear the grin in his voice when he spoke. "There we go! That's my girls! Let's go get 'em."

Kat pulled away from him, looking at him and Jess. "Yes, let's go." She started walking back toward the cliff.

A hand grabbed her by the arm, halting her progress. "Hold on, tiger. We can't just go racing in there without a plan."

Five minutes later, she and Jess lay on opposite sides of the cliff, waiting for a signal. Brent had given Jess his rifle and taken her shotgun, then went to find his father and Michael. He told them to conceal themselves in the grass and wait for a signal ... only he hadn't said what signal. He'd also neglected to mention what it was they were supposed to do once they got the signal.

Oh, well. She and Jess had discussed it. They had rifles, they were good shots, and if nothing else, they were pretty sure that from their hiding spot they could take out the five crazies. They didn't want to kill anyone, but they'd both be damned if they'd let anything happen to their men, either.

Kat vowed to strangle Adrian when they got out of there. Her heart was going ninety miles an hour, she was lying on her stomach in high grass and weeds, with God only knew what kind of critters, she had to pee, and she was hungry ... and scared. She was absolutely terrified that something was going to happen to Adrian before they could rescue him.

She stared down the sight of her rifle, waiting for the signal, trying not to cry, when she saw a movement in the trees below. She squinted and could make out three forms. The group of men below them didn't seem to notice. They kept talking. Thank God!

She watched as Brent, Michael, and Emilio spread out. They went in and out of view through the cover of trees, surrounding the group of men on three sides. She could barely make them out. She doubted the men on the ground could have seen them even if they'd been looking.

Glancing over at Jess, she saw Jess watching them, as well.

She looked back through the sights of her rifle and saw Michael step out of the tree line and grab her doctor so fast he didn't know what had hit him. He gasped when Michael pointed a pistol at his temple. Dr. Gordon dropped his gun and held his hands in the air. His men turned to him and trained their rifles on Michael.

Emilio stepped out with the shotgun. "Drop your weapons, or we start shooting. You're completely surrounded. You might shoot one of us, but I guarantee we will take the rest of you out."

One of the men dropped his rifle and held his hands up. Brent stepped out of the trees and clocked the man in the back of the head with his pistol. Another of the men swung around to Brent, aiming his rifle at him. Kat didn't think; she aimed at his hand and squeezed the trigger. The man screamed, blood flew from his hand, and he dropped his rifle.

Emilio stole the opportunity to grab the man nearest him. The man dropped his weapon and held his hands up in surrender.

A shot exploded from Jess's direction, and the last man dropped his rifle, falling to the ground and screaming in agony, clutching his bloody knee. "Yes!" came Jess's triumphant yell.

Brent chuckled, presumably at Jess's outcry, and quickly gathered up the discarded weapons. "Well done, ladies! You can come out."

Jess popped up and immediately began scrambling down the cliff. Kat followed her at only a slightly more leisurely pace, not wanting to risk a fall and endanger her baby.

Jess reached the bottom seconds before Kat. She dropped her rifle and threw herself on top of Alex's still form. He whimpered, but Jess didn't budge. She started kissing his snout, his head, his shoulder, anything she could reach. As Kat reached Adrian's side, Jess began to spit out hair.

Kat smiled and sat down next to Adrian. She pushed aside her rifle and reached out to caress his face. His eyes snapped open and stared at her for a few seconds, then closed again. Thank God! He *was* alive. Kat leaned forward and hugged him, burying her face in his fur. After several minutes, she sat up. Her sight was blurry as she petted him. Everything was going to be okay. They were going to get married and have their baby, and everything would be fine. If he even thought about leaving again, she'd hunt him down and drag him back by his tail. She chuckled and reached out, grabbing his tail and letting it slip through her fingers.

She bent and kissed his nose, whispering, "I love you, Adrian."

He whimpered, then began to snore.

Chapter Twenty-Two

Adrian sat up, groaned, and immediately lay back down. Good God, it felt like someone had hit him in the head with a hammer. He groaned again and threw his hand over his forehead, trying to calm the throbbing.

He heard a soft chuckle next to him. He took a deep breath, inhaling his mate's sweet scent, and smiled. He already knew he was back at the cabin. There was no mistaking the scent of himself and Katherine on the cool sheets beneath him. The last thing he remembered was Alex's yelp and a stinging in his right hip.

His eyes shot open, and he started to rise. "Alex!"

Katherine smiled and gently pushed him back down. God, he loved her. "Alex is fine. He's in his room with Jess."

"What happened?"

"Jess, Brent, Michael, Emilio, and I saved your asses; that's what happened. And if you ever scare me like that again, I'll kill you myself! I thought for sure you were dead when I saw you lying there, you big idiot." Tears glimmered in her eyes. She took a deep breath and threw herself onto his chest.

He wrapped his arms around her, and two things occurred to him: she was really upset at the thought of something happening to him, and she was as naked as he was. His body instantly took notice, his cock filling with blood and twitching against her. He grinned and ran his palms down her naked back, grabbing her buttocks. He kissed her shoulder. "Shh, I'm fine, sweetheart. I'm not going anywhere. Ever again, I promise."

She nodded against his chest, then looked up. She sniffed and wiped her eyes. You better not. I already decided that if you did, I'd hunt you down and drag you back by your tail."

He blinked, then grinned. "Is that so?"

She nodded and sniffed some more, then ground her pelvis into his growing erection. The little vixen!

“Does this mean you’re okay with my wolf side?”

She nodded again and reached up to caress his hair. “I guess I don’t have any choice but to be okay with it, now do I? Apparently, not only is my husband going to be a werewolf, but my son is, too.”

Adrian liked the sound of that. His smile widened, exposing teeth that he knew had already returned to wolf form. He kissed her and pressed her against his hard cock.

“You make a beautiful wolf. And besides ... I’ve always wanted a pet.”

He growled, nipped her on the chin, and rolled her under him in one smooth movement. “Why, you disrespectful little ...”

She reached between their bodies and grabbed his cock, guiding him into her.

He hissed and closed his eyes as her warmth enclosed him. She was so snug and warm. They fit so perfectly together.

Kat bucked her hips upward, trying to get him to move. She’d been dying for him since he shifted back to human form in his sleep. She’d taken one look at that gorgeously naked body, and her libido had stood up and shouted hallelujah and done a happy dance.

He pushed up on his hands, staring into her eyes.

She noticed that his eyes had shifted to amber. It was incredibly sexy. For some strange reason, she liked the reminder of what he was. She touched his cheek.

He gritted his teeth together, showing his extended canines.

A shiver went through Kat. Her pussy clutched at him. He felt so big inside her. She wanted -- no, needed -- him to move. “Please move. I want you so badly.”

The strain on his face vanished, and he looked intently into her eyes again, then pistoned his hips back and forth. He groaned deeply in his throat and lowered himself to his elbows.

The smooth slide of his cock into her wet core was heaven. Every time he pushed in, the curls above his sex brushed her clit. It felt wonderful. Just when she thought it couldn’t get any better, he dipped his head and took her nipple into his mouth, sucking hard.

Kat gasped at the pulling sensation that sped through the very core of her. She wrapped her fingers in his hair, holding him there. His soft sucking sounds inflamed her.

He pulled back with a pop. “Oh, yes! I love your breasts.” He latched onto the other nipple and gave it the same treatment. Abruptly, he rolled over, taking her with him. Kat gasped.

He grabbed her legs, pulled them up next to his sides, and pushed her chest up. “Ride me, Katherine.”

She stared down into his amber eyes for a few minutes, then shifted experimentally. Oh, that felt good! She lifted up on her knees, then plunged back down, and they both gasped. She tried that for a few minutes, then shifted forward and back. *Ahhh*. Her head fell back and her eyes closed. She quickened her pace, feeling her breasts bouncing as she moved.

Adrian moaned. "Yes, honey, like that ... faster."

She opened her eyes and stared down at him. He was watching her every move, but his gaze was primarily glued to her breasts. He reached up and pinched her nipple, making her squeal. She was shocked to discover that not only did it hurt, but it also felt good.

"Oooh, do it to the other one."

He did, tweaking the other nipple. Sensation shot to her pussy. She rode him faster. She was very close to exploding.

Adrian watched his mate reach her orgasm. She flung her head back and let out a low, keening cry. Her pussy muscles convulsed around his engorged cock. He tried desperately to hold off, to prolong their pleasure, but it was no use. She took him right over the edge with her. His belly tensed and his balls tightened. He growled as his climax took him, and poured himself into her.

She collapsed forward onto his chest, burying her face in his neck as the last tremors shook him.

He lay there for several seconds, listening to Katherine's labored breathing. They were sweating, but he was content to lie with her draped over him. He smiled. She was limp and not moving ... truly sated.

He stretched his arms above his head and waited for Katherine to sit up.

Finally, she took a deep breath and pushed herself up to straddle his waist. She wiggled a bit, but his cock stayed firmly inside her sweet body. He grinned, and she grinned back.

"So what happened to the men that caught Alex and me?"

Kat's face went white, and she shuddered. "I don't want to know. Brent stayed with them while Emilio and Michael carried you and Alex back here. After they brought you both upstairs to your rooms, they went back downstairs. I heard them undressing. When I heard the doggy door swing shut, I went to the window and saw them running back toward Brent in wolf forms. A few minutes before you woke, I heard the dog door again. Then I heard Jess say something about them dripping blood on the floor." She shuddered again. "Then Emilio apologized to Jess, and Brent said that it was all taken care of and those men wouldn't be bothering the pack again."

Adrian reached up and caressed the frown lines on her forehead, smoothing them. "I'm sorry, honey."

Kat shook her head. "It's okay. I'm glad they won't be bothering your family anymore. I just don't want to think about ... well, never mind. I just can't imagine that they tasted very good. The three of them are probably going to come down with food poisoning."

Adrian chuckled and pulled her down for a kiss.

She sighed against his lips and mumbled, "... the better to kiss you with, my dear."

Epilogue

Adrian stood staring out the hospital window at the moon. It was a beautiful moon ... and it was beginning to call to him. He'd have to go soon, even though he didn't want to. He heaved a sigh, tempted to fight off the change and stay at the hospital.

Alex should be back any moment to get him. He had taken Jess to get something to eat. She was going to come take Adrian's place, but he didn't want to go. He looked down at the sleeping newborn in his arms, then at his wife asleep on the bed. If she woke up and found him here, there'd be hell to pay. When she'd learned why he'd left her, she'd made him promise to revel in his wolf side and to go with the flow ... no more fighting his instincts. Little by little, he was learning to be less of a control freak, as she would say.

But it was hard. Especially now, knowing that someone had discovered something none of them had known and had tried to use it to harm his mate and cub. After Brent had broken into Gordon's office and stolen Kat's records, they'd discovered that there was a trace enzyme in the mother's urine that detected the baby's heritage. After that, Adrian had gone on a search for a new doctor. He'd managed to find an OB who was married to a pack member's uncle. From now on, all pack members and their families would use only doctors vouched for by other pack members. He, Alex, Dash, and Jill were also doing research, running tests on their pack to discover just how much could be detected through blood work and other body fluids. What could have happened to them all, especially Kat, was a scary thought; they didn't want anything like it to ever to happen again.

The door creaked open, and he caught Alex's scent, followed by Jess's.

"You ready? We need to hurry and get to my parents' house."

Adrian nodded and looked down at his son. "Well, Brandon, looks like you're on your own. Take care of your mom and Jess." He kissed the sleeping baby on the head and walked toward the clear bassinet the hospital provided.

“Don’t you dare put that baby in there. Give him here.” Jess waddled in and sat in the chair next to Katherine’s bed and held her arms out.

Adrian smiled and handed over his sleeping son. He bent and kissed Jess on the forehead. “You sure you can handle this, preggo?”

Jess ignored him and began baby-talking to Brandon.

Alex crossed the room and headed toward his wife. “She has a gun in her purse. They’ll be fine. I talked to Uncle Emilio earlier; he and your mom are planning on taking over for Jess in a couple of hours. They should be here when we get back in the morning.”

Adrian nodded and watched as Alex leaned over to Jess’s shoulder and caressed the baby’s cheek. Alex smiled, then kissed Jess on the top of the head. Adrian grinned and turned toward his own wife. She just got more and more beautiful. He couldn’t imagine ever living without her. When he thought of the mess he’d caused with his damned ego, he got sick to his stomach. What if he’d lost her for good? He sat down on the edge of her bed and clasped her hand in his, tears misting his eyes.

Hers fluttered open. She smiled when she caught sight of him. “What are you still doing here?”

“I’m leaving. I was just waiting on Alex and Jess to get back. How do you feel?”

“Tired. Where’s our baby?”

Adrian moved aside and pointed over his shoulder.

Kat grinned up at him and nodded. Then her eyes shifted higher. “Oh, how pretty! Look at the moon. What do you call it when it looks like that?”

He bent down and kissed her on the lips. His eyes filled with tears of joy “A lover’s moon, my love. A lover’s moon.”

 THE END 

Jeigh Lynn

Jeigh Lynn lives with, her real life hero, her husband and their two rowdy sons. She is an ex-dance instructor and dancer of over twenty-five years. She lays claim to several National and Regional Dance Competition trophies, including Showstoppers, Stars of Tomorrow and Star Power. She was also featured twice on a variety show for the BBC. Currently, Jeigh is a stay at home mom and a writer, not to mention an avid reader of Romance and Mystery. When she's not fetching Kool-Aid and swapping out video games, she can usually be found enjoying the decadence of chocolate, in between her workouts and writing. Her hobbies include, gardening, practicing her marksmanship, art, typing email to her critique partners and, of course, reading.

Visit Jeigh on the Web at www.jeighlynn.com.

* * * * *

Read on for a tantalizing glimpse of

Dark Knights 1: Eternity of Darkness

by Ann Jacobs, writing as Shana Nichols

Available Now from Loose Id

Dark Knights 1: Eternity of Darkness

Julie couldn't help shuddering. Not so much at the sight of Stefan sipping blood from a mug, or even by the fact he'd just told her he'd lived for over four centuries, but at a woman on the dance floor who'd just sunk her teeth -- fangs -- into the neck of her partner. The look on the man's face hinted not at agony, but more like ecstasy. He looked almost as though he were experiencing a sexual climax right there on the floor. When he lowered his hands and cupped his partner's buttocks, Julie squirmed.

The woman's skirt swirled about his pale fingers, the burgundy chiffon dark -- bloodlike -- against his slacks. Soft, sensual, it moved with the breeze from their motion, kissing his dark gray suit pants, then retreating. They swayed to the escalating rhythm of muted drums and mellow woodwinds that spoke of smoke-filled rooms, a time live with action...untold forbidden pleasures.

I'm not a voyeur. I'm not. Yet Julie couldn't take her gaze away from the couple. She imagined the man dragging his partner to the floor, spreading her legs, returning her love-bite with many of his own. Not just on the pale column of her throat but on her nipples. Her belly. The insides of her quivering thighs.

Julie trembled with fear -- and yearning, too. What was it about this scene -- highly erotic yet anything but pornographic -- that made her yearn to drag Stefan onto the dance floor? To beg him to take her? She met his gaze, saw the raw hunger in his expression.

"That's the sort of a mating dance that made vampires enjoy. The males are unable to have conventional sex," Stefan explained, as though he'd read her mind.

Damn. She'd forgotten he was an telepath. He probably *was* reading her every thought. She couldn't help thinking how he'd taken her last night. "I remember now. You said you were -- "

"A born vampire." He smiled, his fangs a flash of white made brighter by the colored lights. "Born vampires can mate as humans do. Occasionally we even produce a baby vampire to proliferate our clans.

"And yes, it would heighten your orgasm if I did to you what she's doing to him, at the moment I began to spill my seed. But I wouldn't. Couldn't. I'd risk turning you...or even killing you if I couldn't control my bloodlust."

"Turning me?"

"Making you like them. Consigning you to an eternity of darkness."

Julie sipped her wine, savoring the rich, slightly fruity flavor of the fine vintage. Questions tumbled around in her mind, needing to be set free, explored.

The otherworldly lovers' searing passion encompassed Julie like a soft, sensual cloak of fire, red, orange and electric blue. Erotic echoes of the mellow music caressed her ears, her

soul. Her nipples tingled, and she grew damp between her legs. The dry, fruity essence of the fine red wine heated her throat, curled lovingly in her belly. What was happening to her? She didn't get swept away by colors -- by passion.

The masters who'd tried to unleash her inhibitions, encourage her to express her feelings unabashedly in her art had given up, certain she lacked the emotional depth necessary for greatness.

Here in a den of vampires, though, the haze of convention that dulled her emotions fled. She felt raw terror, not for her life but for her very being. Fear that was deep and real yet eclipsed by an insatiable desire to become part of the milieu, to immerse herself completely in her vampire lover. Excitement crackled all around her, and when she reached over and took Stefan's hand she experienced a jolt of carnal need, yet something more. A forever kind of feeling, a need for him to take her to that plane of ecstasy she sensed lay just beyond her grasp. "Dance with me," she whispered, every cell in her body aching for...

A taste of the rich, red fluid from his lips. Confirmation he was indeed of another time, another place, another world where he might take her, keep her cocooned in his desire so her own might flourish. A place where he would keep her safe from harm. Safe from the monster that was Louis Reynard.

"You don't know what you're asking of me." Setting down his mug, Stefan rose as though resigned to honor her plea, as tall, commanding a presence among his own kind as he was among Julie's. He held her chair, then took her hand. A familiar song from Chicago 's gangster era blared through the speakers, its heavy percussion and wailing woodwinds beating out a rhythm that brought to mind crowded dance halls, gun-toting molls, and hot, sweaty sex. When they stepped onto the hardwood dance floor, the strobe lights reflected brilliant shards of red and gold off his raven hair, forming a macabre halo that encompassed him and her in a kaleidoscope of sensation.

When he pulled her into the circle of his embrace, Julie knew. She wanted him. But did she want to say goodbye to her mortal existence, live for centuries by his side in a shadow world instead of decades as a mortal in the only world she knew? Watch generations of her friends and loved ones age and die? Could she bear living for centuries with her father no longer there to give advice and love?

You'd have centuries with Stefan. Forever in the safe haven of his embrace. Forever seeing all the shapes and colors in vivid hues, experiencing all the sensual, sexual pleasures of belonging to your vampire lover... Seduced by this place, the music, the seething sexuality he wrapped around her even as they swayed together fully clothed, Julie had her answer. She might regret it later, but she couldn't resist. It felt right. So right...

"I want it all. Bite me, Stefan. Transport me to a plane beyond any where I've ever been. Invade my heart and body and mind and make them yours."

He growled, a deep, anguished rumble that seemed to have come straight from his soul, but he grasped her hips, drew her close enough to feel the strength of his erection. Closer.

The heat of his big hands molding the curve of her buttocks, the gentle motion of his breath on her hair, the brush of his chest against her nipples as he led her in the dance all stoked her desire to a fever pitch.

Then he took her mouth, wiped away any doubt that it was blood he'd drunk from that chilled stein. The slightly metallic taste, was unmistakable, like the taste of her own blood when she'd sucked away the pain from a minor paper cut. Arousing, though, not revolting as she'd thought it might be. Hungry, she traced the seam of his lips with her tongue, blatantly inviting him to plunge inside. His groan of acquiescence tickled her lips, and she opened them to his tongue's insistent, rhythmic invasion.

God, but she wanted it all. Wanted it right here and now. Wanted him to raise her skirt, rip away her flimsy panties and impale her on his huge, rigid sex. She laid her head back, bared her throat as she'd seen the vampires do. "Bite me, now."

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What people are saying about

Dark Knights 1: Eternity of Darkness

Eternity of Darkness is a wonderful new start to the Dark Knights series. Ms. Nichols shows the dangers and obstacles that need to be overcome when mortal and vampire hearts entwine... I would not hesitate to recommend this book, and I am looking forward to the next in the series.

-- Jaynie Ritchie, *Just Erotic Romance Reviews*

Shana Nichols has written one of the most intriguing vampire stories that I've read in a while. She dispels all the myths associated with vampire and their habits... *Dark Knights 1: Eternity of Darkness* is a highly recommended read. Make sure that you have plenty of ice water and an extra spot on your keeper shelf.

-- Claudia McRay, *Romance Junkies*

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