



CIRCE'S RECRUITS:  
**ZACK & ACE**

MARIE HARTE

Loosely

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# Circe's Recruits: Zack and Ace

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## Chapter One

Something had definitely gone wrong. Ace Two Bears and the other four members of Circe's Recruits, the last surviving sane members of the now-defunct Project Dawn, searched in vain for the serial killer stalking the woods of Glens Falls, New York. What should have been a simple search-and-destroy mission had turned into a bloodbath. Now they had two more crazed Circes to take down. Their original target lay in a broken heap near the dozen campers the monsters had brutalized to death.

Ace sighed, a low rumble that sent the denizens of the forest scrambling for safety. The lack of moonlight didn't bother him. The scent of blood all around did. When *changed*, Ace stood a head above his normal six-two. His tougher, darker skin blended in with the night and the woods in which he walked. He could see in the dark, and his hearing and olfactory senses remained in a heightened state during a hunt.

Opening his mouth, Ace sought the scent of his prey. Nothing but the coppery taste of blood registered. He snarled under his breath and pressed onward, following his intuition that told him one of the murderers had to have passed this way. The only escape avenues open to his quarry were to the south and the east. Roane, Derrick, and Hale had taken the south. Zack and he had the east.

He stopped and listened, catching the faint noise signaling Zack's footsteps. Unbidden desire spiked at thoughts of his best friend and biggest rival. The unwelcome need frustrated him. Ace didn't like lusting after Zack English. Before Project Dawn, he'd never considered sex with a man. Unfortunately, the science that had turned his squad from military servicemen into supersoldiers had side effects. And the mating heat was nothing to sneeze at.

Trying to forget about the last time he'd experienced that all-consuming lust, Ace hurried forward. He spied broken branches and large footprints in the damp soil to his right.

*Gotcha.*

Turning, he followed the trail and froze when the scent of his violent quarry returned. He tilted his head, trying to catch a hint of sound in the still night. Nothing moved, but he could feel eyes on him. The prey had suddenly turned predator. And Ace had just become the prey.

Alert, Ace realized he'd been drawn into an ambush when two foreign, tainted scents tingled his senses. The rogue Circs had paired up. *Shit.* Against one he was fucked. Against two? The waiting dead.

He felt the attack before it landed. Aiming in that direction, Ace fired off half a dozen shots before his gun was yanked out of his hand by strong fingers with sharp nails. Claws raked his hardened skin, drawing blood. The force that landed on him knocked the breath out of him -- no small feat to take down a Circ. The dead weight crushing his chest told him he'd nailed the bastard. Thank God.

Ace struggled to shove the unmoving mass off him, aware he had another rogue to deal with. One minute the body crushing him was there; the next it was gone, lifted off him as if it weighed nothing. Before he could catch his breath, he suffered several slashes to his chest and abdomen. The remaining Circ was twice as strong as Ace, hopped up on drugs fed to him by Pearson Labs. *Satan's scientists at work.* Ace grimaced as sharp claws gouged his shoulder. Rolling to his feet, he managed to avoid a stomp to his face.

Glaring at the fucker facing him, Ace now knew what evil looked like. The demonic look of pleasure on the rogue's face was one he wouldn't forget anytime soon. Unlike himself, this hulking monstrosity topped eight feet. His shoulders were freakishly broad, and bits of his black skin had been flayed by something, giving the Circ an almost garish, undead appearance.

*What the hell was he?* Ace dodged another swing and countered by kicking his opponent in the chest hard enough that he snapped a rib bone. The rogue didn't flinch. Studying the male, Ace had no idea what to make of him.

Derrick, one of his team members, was African American. When *changed*, his skin took on a darker brown than his original shade. Ace had Native American ancestry, and when *changed*, looked more copper than brown. This creature... What the *hell* turned black? He looked burned, his face so distorted by stretched muscle and bone that he no longer resembled anything human. Those dead campers had never stood a chance.

"I'm going to suck the marrow from your bones while you watch," the rogue rumbled in a deep bass. He grinned, showing wickedly sharp fangs, longer than any teeth Ace had ever seen on a Circ. "But not until I fuck you first. Been a long time since I've had a Circ when the mating heat hits. Normally, I rape whatever's handy. But you know, it never quite satisfies."

*Oh, shit.* Ace recognized the rogue's sudden, overpowering pheromones. He felt a familiar tingle throughout his body, that fucking call to procreate the damned scientists at Pearson Labs had engendered. They'd burdened both the female and male Circs with the need so that when the mating heat struck, both genders went crazy. Because a Circ could only experience satisfaction with another of his kind, it wasn't as if Ace could find fulfillment with a human female, not when *changed*. Someone like Kelly Malloy, say, would only suit him when he wasn't in heat. He'd been stuck for the past two years fucking Zack and the rest of the team when the call to procreate hit them.



Ace hadn't experienced this lust in a month, not since he'd helped their newest female Circ bond to the others. The unnatural lust that at times accompanied his current form drew him to Zack, of all people. *His best friend*. But if he wasn't careful, he'd find himself under this piece of shit -- the freak/mutant stared at him as if he was his next meal.

"You killed innocent people. You're a fucking monster." Ace growled. "I'm here to end your life. Why don't you do us both a favor and kill yourself, asshole?" Not known for his diplomacy, Ace let his foe have the unvarnished, ugly truth.

"Now why would I kill myself before I've given you what I'm here for?" The mutant's purr grated against Ace's nerves. The rogue licked his lips with a -- God help him -- a *split tongue*. Circs were far from normal, but this rogue was beyond even that. What the *fuck* was he?

"Look, you mutant. You've been abandoned by the labs. The PPA damned well led us to you. There's nothing for you now." The PPA, Project's Protection Agency, was Pearson Labs' version of security. Ace might have been moved to pity by his enemy's circumstance had he not seen the victims this thing had left behind. Though this creature had once been human, he was now nothing more than a killing machine.

The bastard leaped forward. Ace broke the rogue's clavicle, but still he kept coming. He took Ace to the ground and grabbed one of his hands, piercing the tender flesh between Ace's thumb and forefinger with serrated teeth.

Ace jerked and swore. *That fucking hurt like a bitch*. He fought to break free with everything he had. Then he felt an alien tongue probing his wound, seriously freaking him the hell out. Two prongs of flesh sucked at his blood, and everything went black.

When Ace came to, he felt the male shoving against him with an urgency he didn't understand. He hurt, his body was slick from the blood of his injuries, and the sting of his wounds intensified as the male on top of him slid over him again and again.

“*Shit!*” He heard Zack’s voice as if through a long tunnel, and the presence on top of him vanished. The scuffled sound of fighting preceded the muffled *pop* of a silencer firing several times. “Ace, man, you okay?”

“I...no. What...?”

He couldn’t move his limbs, but he could sense pressure. He knew when Zack hefted him over a massive shoulder, steadied him with a strong hold across his hips, and raced through the woods. Ace tried to blink, but it didn’t make a difference. He couldn’t see. Flashes of light pierced the tree line as the moon broke through the clouds, but he couldn’t make out any shapes, just blurs of light and shadow.

Deeper, familiar voices sounded. They’d found the rest of the team. Zack’s panic worried him, though Ace’s senses were far more acute than the others on the team. He could smell emotions, like the tangy scent of fear, the heady smell of arousal, the intoxicating scent of pleasure.

Fear assailed him, a bitter spore coming from several directions. Not just from Zack, but from the entire team.

“What’s...happening?” he slurred. That was unlike him. He couldn’t wait for the answer. Following the darkness even deeper, he passed out.

\* \* \* \* \*

### *Cape May, New Jersey*

Kelly Malloy stared in horror as the team carried Ace past her toward the elevator leading to Doc’s underground lab. Though she normally had no part in the Circ aspect of life here on the compound, she refused to ignore an unconscious and bloodied Ace.

“What happened?”

Roane, Hale, and Derrick looked grim as they held him between them. Zack had shut down, his face a mask of stone as he forced his way to Ace's side

"Kelly," Roane, the leader of the group, said as he hedged. "Ah, you might want to steer clear --"

"Don't give me any bullshit." Angry, and knowing it stemmed from fear, she took a deep breath, fought for calm, and tried again. "Please. Tell me what happened. What can I do to help?"

"Doc's waiting for us," Hale answered. Normally the easygoing charmer, he didn't seem able to summon a smile. Kelly saw the worry in his light blue eyes. She felt her stomach drop. This wasn't good. "We ran into some trouble on this last mission. It got ugly, and Ace took the brunt of it."

"He'll be okay," Derrick repeated again and again. He lightly jostled Ace. "Wake up, jackass. You still owe me from that stupid bet you placed on the Knicks." The giant African American reminded Kelly of a stuffed bear. A grizzly on the outside, he rarely allowed people to see the softy he really was on the inside. Right now, she sensed him on the verge of panic, though he masked it well.

"I'm coming with you." Kelly wormed her way between Zack and Ace, sandwiching herself between the two men she could never stop thinking about. She touched Ace's hand, panicked at how cold he felt.

"Me too," Caitlyn Chase said as she met them by the elevator doors. "I'll take the next one down."

Kelly saw her look at Roane and could see relief on her face that her lover was all right, mingled with anxiety because Ace had been injured.

Hale and Roane maneuvered Ace into the elevator. Zack and Kelly stepped in while Derrick, unable to fit in the space, waited with Caitlyn for the next one.

As the elevator connecting the first floor to the lab dropped, Kelly couldn't stop touching Ace, needing to reaffirm that he still lived and breathed while they raced him down to Doc.

"In here." Doc held open the door to one of his lab rooms. "Put him on the exam table. Roane, remove his clothes. Kelly, I'll need your help."

"Tell me what to do."

She gathered the supplies Doc asked for as Roane and the others stripped Ace's clothes from him by *changing* their fingernails into claws. Kelly watched in both awe and fascinated horror, having never witnessed them *change* before.

Circe's Recruits, the five men who all lived here with Doc, were members of an elite fighting unit. Once members of the United States military, they'd undergone some experimental drug therapy. Or so Doc had told her. In the process, they'd become super soldiers. Each could shift into a tanned, Hulk-like person, with enhanced senses and a physically imposing body. She'd once seen Caitlyn, their newest Circ, transform her hand into a claw. That had been for show. Kelly'd never personally seen the damage it could do.

She leaned forward. Were those claw marks in Ace's ragged flesh?

His lower body seemed undamaged; she thanked God for small favors. Doc laid a white sheet over that exposed part of him and got to work.

Kelly sucked in a breath as she watched Doc furiously labor to clean and patch Ace's wounds. The stomach injuries required stitches. Doc patched the hole in his shoulder with a large bandage. The teeth marks on Ace's hand, however, commanded a more serious focus. Doc lifted Ace's palm toward the light.

"Most of these wounds are superficial. Nothing's punctured -- nothing vital, anyway -- so why is he still unconscious?" He glanced up. "Zack, tell me again how you found him."

Zack remained motionless as he stared at Ace.

"Zack," Roane barked. "Tell Doc what happened."

Zack blinked at Roane, looked back at Doc, and answered in a soft monotone. "I caught scent of the bastards too late. One of them set a trap for me in the woods. Took me a while to get through it. By then I scented Ace's blood." His raspy voice deepened. "By the time I came on the scene, one of the bastards was dead, shot twice through the head and several times through the gut. The other fucker was on top of him. He..." Zack paused, glancing at Kelly.

"Tell him," she said softly. "Doc needs to know to help Ace."

Zack cleared his throat. He was pale, probably in shock, Kelly noted with dismay. Nothing much ever bothered Zack. He looked at Ace, then returned his attention to Doc. "The rogue was on top of him, caught in what appeared to be an odd type of mating heat."

"Shit." Roane wiped a hand over his face.

"Hell, no." Hale swore.

"Penetration?" Doc asked, his voice calm.

Kelly's eyes widened as she realized what Zack had said. The mating heat, a circumstance that befell the Circs at odd times, caused them to spiral into an out-of-control lust. She didn't know much about it, only that Doc had warned her repeatedly to stay away from the team when it happened.

"No." Zack gritted his teeth and fisted his hands by his sides. Kelly couldn't look away as his nails *changed* into claws again, into inhuman weapons. She was mesmerized by this side of Zack she'd always wondered about but had never seen. His gaze remained glued to Doc's, but as if he sensed her stare, he flexed his hands, and they were once again normal.

"I pulled the rogue away before he could do anything. Ace had lost consciousness. The rogue did some damage to his stomach and shoulder, but that wound on Ace's hand concerned me. The fuck *bit* him. This rogue was anything but a normal Circ. His skin was black. Not brown, but tar black. And his tongue was split down the middle with barbs on either tip. Like a goddamned mutant *snake*." He glanced at Ace and studied his lifeless body. "I think he might have injected Ace with something."

Doc frowned. "I'll do some tests on Ace's blood, but it would help if I had --"

Zack tossed a baggie at him. To Kelly's disgust, it looked like the tongue they'd been talking about. *Holy crap*. Zack had cut a man's tongue out! She stared at the tongue, then at Zack, but he was oblivious to her shock as he continued to watch Doc.

"There it is. I made sure to keep it free from dirt as best I could." Zack wavered on his feet and blinked.

Kelly noted the blood pooling at his feet and darted to his side, just as Hale met her there. "Zack! What happened to you?"

Doc swore, which he didn't often do. "Hale, Derrick, get him into the next room and let's find out where he's bleeding."

"We've got him." Hale moved under Zack's arm. Derrick took his other arm, and they walked him slowly to the door. "What the hell, Zack?" Kelly heard Hale hiss at him. "Why didn't you tell us you'd been nailed?"

"Booby trap in the woods. Not a serious wound. I just lost a lot of blood is all." Zack tried to move out of their hold, and Derrick snapped at him.

"Dammit, stay still! You obviously tried to patch yourself up, but it didn't close." Derrick lifted Zack's shirt and tossed a blood-sodden bandage to the floor. "Now you'll get help, whether you want it or not. Stubborn bastard," Derrick mumbled as they made it to the door.

"Caitlyn, dear, help me with Zack, would you? You have a gentler touch." Doc ignored the glares Hale and Derrick shot him.

Kelly started. She hadn't heard Caitlyn arrive. Then again, she hadn't realized when Derrick had entered, either.

"It's already closing up," Caitlyn said over her shoulder as she followed the guys out of the room.

Doc considered. "Then this shouldn't take long. Roane, bring that tray into the other room. I'll run Ace's tests in the lab after I see to Zack."

Kelly stared from Ace to Zack, not sure where to go. Ace wasn't bleeding anymore, but he wasn't conscious, either. Zack looked terrible, pale and needing attention. But he had the entire team to help him, Doc included.

"Kelly?" Doc watched her, his gaze understanding.

"Will Ace be okay?" She couldn't contain her anxiety. Her voice trembled, and it was all she could do not to cry. "Will Zack be all right?"

Doc frowned. "I'm not sure. Of the two of them, I'm more concerned with Ace at the moment. I'd like you to stay with him while I see to Zack and run those tests on his blood. Ace's pulse is a little high, but his breathing seems normal." Doc shook his head. "I just don't like that he's still unconscious," he said as he started moving away. "I need to look at his blood."

In moments, only Kelly and Ace remained in the room. Wanting to help him, Kelly filled a small pail with warm, soapy water and grabbed a cloth and towel. His shoulder-length, blue-black hair was dirty. Dried blood streaked his face and body. She couldn't do much more than sit and wait with him, but at least she could see to his comfort.

She washed him gently, removing the grime from his skin with sweeping strokes. Under her touch, she imagined that he shined with health. Kelly willed him better, praying like she hadn't prayed in years. She sighed. As if thinking it would magically make it happen.

More than once as she cleaned him, she stopped to stare. Even more than his incredible biceps, pecs, and six-pack abs, his wounds intrigued her. They seemed smaller now. As she watched, they actually started to *heal*. Skin knitted around the stitches Doc had just sewn. Ace's shoulder wound pulled together until only a pink scar remained. His abs no longer looked an angry red, but instead sported large purple and blue bruises.

"Amazing." Kelly shook her head, full of wonder as she stroked the warm washcloth around his injuries. When the sheet over him tented, indicating life in that part of him she'd done her damndest not to think about, it caught her off guard.

When the others had stripped off his clothes, she'd noticed everything. In addition to his wounds, she'd caught an eyeful of the perfect male body. He had a wide chest, muscular arms that tapered to large, graceful hands, a flat stomach, and strong thighs. Between those thighs lay a long, thick cock nestled in black hair that she'd had to fight not to touch.

Flushing and feeling embarrassed to be so aroused in front of an ailing man, she didn't know what to make of his erection, other than to ascribe it to a normal physical male response to touch. She eyed the sheet. *Good God, but he was huge!*

Kelly leaned over to better study his face. A hand caught her wrist and scared a soft shriek out of her. She was helpless to resist as he brought it to that hot, pulsing part of him.

"Kelly," he slurred. "Yeah, baby, that's it."

She unconsciously squeezed him, lured by the husky note in his voice. *What am I doing?* Horrified at the thought of anyone coming in to find them like this, or worse, that she might inadvertently hurt him, she tried to take her hand away. He wouldn't let her. He wrapped his hand around hers and pumped it up and down. She stared hard at his face, trying to ascertain if he was joking, but this was no ploy. He was semiconscious and horny.

"Please," he rasped and thrashed his head on the table. "I...need..."

She couldn't help a small smile. If Ace was healthy enough to need sex, he'd surely recover. Wouldn't he?

Then what he'd said hit her, shocking her to her toes. "You said my name." She licked her lips, suddenly hungrier for Ace than she'd ever been before. Which made no sense. He was semiconscious, for God's sake. Perhaps that rogue Circ's mating heat had infected him. Was he -- could he -- be passing it on to her?



He moaned. Under his hand, she pumped him harder, wanting to give him the release he craved. Something to ease her mate in so much pain.

*Mate?* Where the hell had that thought come from?

Raspy breathing alerted her to pay strict attention to her “patient,” the man she was currently giving a handjob. *I am so going to hell for this.* She blushed, though she couldn’t stem the pleasure she felt at touching Ace. She wanted badly to hear his voice.

“Ace, are you okay?” Any thought she had about ending this right now disappeared as Ace tightened his hand around hers. Before she knew it, he gave another groan, and his abs clenched. Milky fluid shot from his cock, hitting his belly and sliding over their joined hands. To her surprise, he sure had a lot of it. The urge to lean down and taste the sweet-smelling cream drew her for a moment before common sense prevailed.

She yanked her hand away and quickly used the warm rag to clean up the mess, being careful to be gentle. *What the hell was I thinking? Licking up his cum? Sweet-smelling cream? What’s happening to me?* Kelly tucked the sheet back around Ace’s waist, relieved he no longer had an erection. If she wasn’t mistaken, the tension she’d sensed in him also seemed to have eased.

An orgasm -- for all that ails you. “I should hang out a shingle,” she murmured, feeling feverish and unlike herself. Standing, she continued to soothe Ace, running her fingers through his hair. Such soft strands, and probably the only part of him that wouldn’t ache when he woke.

Caitlyn walked in the door minutes later and stopped at her side. She was the one person who knew exactly how much Kelly cared for both Ace and Zack. “Kelly, are you okay?” Kelly nodded. Caitlyn gave her a quick hug before turning to Ace. She frowned, then leaned closer and sniffed.

"What?" Kelly asked, praying the Circ couldn't tell what she'd done. Kelly loved Caitlyn like a sister, but even sisters had their limits. She had no intention of telling her best friend she'd just jacked off an unconscious man.

"He seems better. Smells healthier." Caitlyn shrugged. "For what it's worth, Circs heal really fast. Just look at his wounds. They're already much better. Even Zack's doing well. Doc says he'll be on his feet in a day or so, after he gets some rest."

"And finds out how Ace is doing." Zack glared at Derrick and Hale, who stood sentry on either side of him just inside the doorway. They glared right back.

"You're going to pull it apart again. The skin just fused," Hale said. "You need to take it easy."

"Yes, Dad," Zack drawled. He slowly made his way to Ace's side and smiled. Kelly's heart raced, but her tension eased. She stepped aside to give him some space. "He looks much better." Like Caitlyn, Zack sniffed at Ace. He shot Kelly a sharp look but said nothing. *Thank God.*

"Zack, are you okay?" Kelly eyed him with worry.

"I'm fine. Nothing a little rest won't cure. Hey, Doc," Zack yelled. "We're good."

Doc and Roane reappeared. "More good news. I saw nothing noxious in Ace's blood. There's a small anomaly, but nothing to preclude Ace from healing." Doc leaned over Ace and touched his scars. He nodded, appearing pleased. "Good. In a few days, he should be fully healed. Even his hand looks better.

Kelly exhaled a huge sigh of relief. Ace and Zack were fine. Roane hugged Caitlyn, and Derrick and Hale peppered Doc with questions as he continued to study Ace.

"You okay, Kelly?" Zack asked quietly. She turned and stared into his light gray eyes, captivated by his nearness, his scent...

*His scent?* A headache suddenly throbbed at her temples. "I'm fine. Just tired." Alarmed that her medication was wearing off so soon, she turned too quickly and knocked into Zack.

He put his hands on her shoulders to steady her, and fire raced toward her womb. *Okay, that was never a part of my symptoms.*

“Shit. I’ve gotta go.” She ran from the room, half praying he wouldn’t follow. Half praying he would.

## Chapter Two

Ace was having the most erotic dream. Soft hands stroked him, brought him to bliss through a dark haze of pleasure. Kelly was there, her scent both soothing and arousing, while Zack's presence lingered in the background. His beast purred with satisfaction, surrounded by those he considered his.

He shifted on the bed and groaned. Opening his eyes, his enhanced vision easily pierced the darkness, and he saw that he was in his bedroom. Safe, at home. Then reality returned in a rush. He recalled the trip to New York. Remembered killing one rogue and battling another. Ace held up his injured hand. The bandage worried him. That freak had done something to him. Though Ace had suffered some fierce wounds, they weren't enough to knock him out. One touch from that monster's strange tongue and he'd blacked out.

He tried to remember what had happened next. *Oh, shit.* That fucking freak had been humping him. All that talk about rape he'd heard as he lay there half conscious wasn't just talk. If Zack hadn't gotten there when he did, who knew what might have happened? Feeling ill, Ace forced himself to sit up, fighting the ache in his midsection.

"You okay?" a gravelly voice asked. Zack's familiar scent eased his tension.

"I've been better." He paused. "Thanks. You have excellent timing."

Zack's knowing gaze told him he caught the reference to what happened in the woods. "So I've been told." He grinned.

Ace swung his legs over the side of the bed, needing to feel his strength return. He didn't like exposing his vulnerabilities and hated being hurt.

"Whoa, not so fast." Zack appeared by his side in the blink of an eye. He wore a pair of boxer briefs and nothing else, except a large bandage on the left side of his torso.

"What happened to you?" Had the rogue hurt him too?

"The woods were booby-trapped. Took a wooden stake through the side." Zack shrugged. "It was a clean cut, but it bled a lot." He scowled. "Worried the mother hens around here."

Ace couldn't help grinning. "Forced you to take it easy, eh?"

"Hale's acting like a woman. I swear, he checked on me three times yesterday, and that was in between Derrick, Roane, and Caitlyn stopping in to monitor me."

"But not Kelly?"

Zack slowly sat next to Ace on the bed. Though the large man wouldn't say it, Ace could see he was hurting. And the notion bothered the hell out of him.

Without thinking about it, Ace laid his palm over Zack's bandage. "I'm sorry."

"Thanks," Zack muttered, clearly nonplussed. Ace never touched him, at least, not voluntarily. Though they'd always been friends, having a raging beast inside him lusting after Zack had tempered Ace's comfort around the man. He didn't like it when he and Zack fucked like animals, caught in the mating heat. He liked it even less that he'd begun to care for Zack, to desire him even when not *changed*. Not that he'd ever admit it.

"Sure." Ace cleared his throat and withdrew his hand. "I know Kelly hasn't exactly chosen one of us, but she's clearly attracted. She has a big heart. I can't believe she wouldn't even stop by to see if you were okay. Or didn't she know?"

"She knew. Ace, something's different now. About Kelly."

Ace froze. "She's okay, though, right?"

"She's physically fine, I think. She's the one who sat by your side when the others were bullying me. Doc ran some tests on you while Kelly held your hand." Zack sounded matter-of-fact and not at all jealous.

Ace and Zack both had a thing for Kelly Malloy. In the three years they'd known her, they'd been drawn to her. Kelly worked for Doc, their boss. She tended to Doc's bills, the house, and the logistics needed to care for five, and now, with the addition of Caitlyn, six Circs. She planned meals, kept the place straight, and ran herd on Doc when he'd forget to eat or return phone calls. Yet for all that, Kelly had nothing to do with their *changed* state.

Ace had been more than careful not to upset Kelly by showing her his other form, the beast that lived just below the surface of his skin. He had a hard enough time dealing with Zack and the conflicting feelings he had for his buddy. Even now, he wanted to move closer, to touch Zack again and reinforce their connection. Much as he'd like to blame it on his beast, he knew that wasn't the case. *God, am I turning gay?* He shook his head. *No, because I still want Kelly with my every breath. What the fuck is wrong with me?*

"Ace, you okay?" Zack put a hand on his shoulder, and it burned.

Ace hunched over and put his head in his hands, in part to hide his sudden erection. "Yeah. I'm just having a hard time adjusting to what happened." Was he ever.

"It's okay." Zack blew out a breath, his scent falling over Ace's darker skin. Zack had a paler coloring, one that set off the bright gray of his eyes. Short black hair framed a face sculpted with masculine strength. The others called Ace a pretty boy, but he figured if he was pretty, then Zack could only be classified as handsome. Hell, Zack had to beat women off with a stick. Most women. *But not Kelly.*

Instead of reassuring Ace that Kelly was still available, the notion that she didn't want Zack disturbed him.

"Why didn't Kelly come see you?"

“Like I said, I think something’s wrong with her. Yesterday, at the lab...”

“What?”

“Ace, what do you remember about the fight you had with the rogues?”

Ace shifted, his dick pressing against his thigh. *Shit, Zack, you want me to think with you this close to me?* He subtly moved away, but Zack noticed.

Frowning, Zack stood and began to pace. “The rogues?”

“When I found them, I realized it was a trap. I shot off enough rounds to take down the first asshole. But the other one hit me hard. He had more power than I could deal with. Like he was as strong as three of us put together.”

Zack nodded. “That damned Circe booster Elliot Pearl designed.”

“When is Doc going to let us take Elliot out?” Ace asked. “We all know Pearson Labs is as strong as ever because of that dickhead. We eliminate Pearl, we crush the labs and the new monster Circs with it.”

“I’m not sure. I agree with you, but Doc’s reluctance makes me think he knows more than he’s telling us.” Zack shrugged. “Get back to yesterday. What else do you remember?”

Ace flushed. “I know that asshole was getting ready to fuck me, okay? He threatened me with it before he bit my hand. I was hurting but awake, until he sucked on those punctures he made with that weirdo tongue. He injected me with something. A kind of venom, maybe? I mean, the guy was black, and he had a forked tongue. That’s way beyond being a Circ.”

“I know. I threw him off you as soon as I entered the clearing. You had all your clothes on, so I doubt he had the time to do anything, ah, weird to you.”

“Thanks. Now, can we please stop talking about it?”

“Gladly.” Zack sighed and continued to pace, making Ace dizzy. “To get back to Kelly. She sat with you while Doc examined me. If that wasn’t bad enough, I also had to endure Caitlyn’s probing hands. And let me tell you, she’s hot as hell when *changed*, but she’s

nobody's wet dream of a doctor." Zack winced. "She fucking poked me when I was down. Evil woman."

Ace chuckled. "Baby."

"Whatever. When I went back to check on you again, I scented something the others didn't." Zack gave him a strange look.

"What? Spit it out already."

"Well, when I neared you, I smelled Kelly. Like you were covered in her scent. And I smelled cum," Zack said bluntly. "Did you jack off or something? I thought you were unconscious, but now I'm wondering."

"No shit." His dream surfaced. "I had the best dream. Kelly was touching me, stroking me. I came hard. But you were there too." Ace glared at him. "You sure you weren't in there while she was doing that to me?"

"We don't know that she was doing anything to you. When I entered, Caitlyn was there talking to her. You were laid out flat and passed out. Maybe it was a dream."

"Or maybe I came in my sleep. Who the hell knows?"

"There was something else. Kelly smelled wild. Like a Circ. She looked completely normal, and no one else seemed to notice. But when I gazed into her eyes, I swear I could feel a Circ looking back at me."

"Wishful thinking?"

"I don't know. She bolted, literally ran out the door. I haven't seen her since."

"What time is it?"

"Around four." Zack stretched and groaned, rubbing his side. "Damn. Don't tell Hale this, but I think I will take it easy. Problem is, I've got a kink in my back. I can't get to it, and it's bugging the crap out of me."

"Come here." Ace owed Zack more than he could ever repay. Zack had saved him from rape at that rogue's hands.



Zack approached, a question in his eyes. Their silvery shine sparkled in the darkness, like neon lights flaring with heat.

“Lie down.” Ace moved over so Zack could access the bed.

“You okay?” Zack didn’t move. “You never want me anywhere near you.”

Though Zack spoke quietly, with little inflection, Ace knew his distance bothered the man. He also knew that Zack had never spoken of it aloud. If Ace gave him the slightest hint, Zack would be all over him. It had taken Ace a while to figure it out, but Zack wasn’t straight, nor was he gay. The man was bisexual with a capital *B*. He’d had his fair share of women. The entire squad knew that. But they had no idea Zack liked to fuck men as well. Not as a beast, but as a man.

Ace had caught him once back when they were in the service together. He’d thought Zack and the guy were pals until they’d kissed. Sincerely freaked, he’d never been quite as close to Zack since. And Zack knew it.

“Do you want that kink eased or not?” Ace snapped.

Zack studied him for a minute before slowly lying down. He propped his head on his forearms while his feet dangled over the sides.

“No, idiot. Lay on the bed long ways. Haven’t you ever had a massage before?”

“Not by you,” Zack snapped back. “Look, we both know you don’t want to touch me. You’re just feeling weird because I saved your ass.” Zack shook his head and started to rise. “It’s no biggie, Ace. You’d have done the same for me. You don’t owe me anything.”

Ace’s nerves stretched thin. What Zack said was true, to an extent. He *did* owe Zack. Not only for this past rescue, but for so much more. Zack always had his back. He’d never once come on to Ace or made him feel less than a true friend. Though Ace always took out his aggression on Zack, he did it because he knew Zack would take it. When *changed* and the mating heat hit, they inevitably fucked. Their nature as beasts looked for compatibility. Only a Circ would do. Despite finding Caitlyn a few months ago, Ace’s beast still looked to

Zack for completion, which made him wonder what his relationship with Zack really boiled down to. Instinctively, he thought of Zack as his.

Zack stood, and Ace pulled him back to the bed. Zack landed with an *oomph*.

"Sorry." Ace tried to be gentle as he pushed Zack to lie straight, the way he'd suggested.

"What the fuck?" Zack's voice was muffled by the pillow Ace shoved under his face.

"Just relax and enjoy. I'm not coming on to you, for Christ's sake. I'm just trying to be nice. Accept it," he barked, his glare fading when he felt Zack chuckle.

"Ass." Zack sighed and settled into the bed.

Ace studied the muscles of Zack's back and shoulders. Shit, the guy was cut, like looking at a mirror image of himself. He saw the knot bothering Zack, the bunched muscle opposite his injury. "You overcompensated."

"No shit. What was I supposed to do? Leave you there?"

Zack had hurt himself by hoisting Ace over his shoulder, which made Ace even more determined to ease his pain.

He lightly probed the area, trying to release the knot of muscles. Zack groaned.

"Pussy. I haven't even touched you yet."

"Feels like it. And stop calling me a pussy. I wasn't the one who was *bitten in the hand* and had to be carried out of the forest," Zack teased.

"Funny." Ace remembered he had a bottle of lotion in their adjoining bathroom. "Be right back. Don't move." He and Zack shared the second floor and the bathroom between them. Hale and Derrick shared the floor above, while Roane commanded the downstairs, which connected to the rest of the house. Doc had spared no expense when outfitting his house to accommodate the team.

Situated on thirty-plus acres of land, the compound belonged to Doc. They had a big-ass house and a barn where they did most of their physical training, or PT, as they called it in the Marines. The latest exercise equipment, free weights, and a full-size pool provided them

an outlet for their workouts. Another oversize building housed several cars and trucks, as well as the munitions they often needed to work missions.

All in all, Doc had thought of nearly everything to provide for the team. Ace supposed he felt his own guilt about what had happened to Circe's Recruits, since he'd been a part of the initial research team that had created them.

Ace picked up the bottle and returned to Zack, thinking about how far the squad had come. Eight years ago, he'd volunteered to be a part of Project Dawn -- a secret program designed to create the world's first supersoldiers. Along with seventy-seven other Marines, sailors, soldiers, and airmen, he'd received a shot -- a virus, Doc had explained -- with a serum piggybacked on top of it. After several doses of the stuff, he and the others had *changed*. Enhanced senses, strength, intuition, and the ability to turn into a Hulk-like creature, complete with super strength and agility.

"Not too hard," Zack mumbled.

"You get what you get." Ace poured the lotion onto his hands and started out by lightly rubbing Zack's back.

The first time he'd *changed*, Ace remembered, he'd fallen in love with his new abilities. He'd formed a tighter friendship with Zack, another volunteer. A dozen of them had become close friends -- Hale, Derrick, and Roane included. For five years they'd performed for the government. Top secret missions that made the world a better place and put the criminals where they belonged: ten feet underground.

And then something changed. Men who'd once been his friends turned into monsters. Murderers and psychopaths who had the strength and cunning to destroy with ease. Two-thirds of the original Circe's Recruits turned bad. It took the remaining third to find them and put them down. Apparently, nothing and nobody else could stop them. There was no way to reverse the Circe serum. Ace and the rest of the sane volunteers had worked tirelessly

to clean up Elliot Pearl's mess -- the scientist in charge of Project Dawn -- until only five of them remained. Zack, Roane, Derrick, Hale, and himself.

The Pentagon demanded answers and someone's head on a stick. Elliot Pearl took the heat. Project Dawn was scrapped, and Doc, sick of what the end result had turned out to be, quietly left the group with the remaining Recruits. He'd promised them a place in society with a purpose. He'd defended them when the government wanted to terminate "what was left" of the program. And he'd provided them with a home and each other, friendships Ace would kill to keep.

He glanced down at the man nearly purring under his hands. Zack was no pushover, but when it came to Ace's wants, he normally didn't argue. Surprised by that observation, Ace considered his friend.

"Still hurts," Zack grumbled and flexed his delts.

Ace's loins tingled. By thinking about the squad, he'd been able to tune out what Zack felt like under his hands. Now he couldn't think about anything else. *I'm not gay. I'm not.* Maybe not for anyone else. But when it came to Zack, his body knew what it wanted.

Pushing harder over the spot on Zack's back that needed attention, Ace worked the area.

"That's good," Zack growled and turned his head, his eyes closed.

Ace stared at the spiky lashes shadowing Zack's cheek. His square jawbone, straight nose, and dimpled chin should have hinted at a stubborn man. But Zack was all about pleasure...Ace's pleasure, actually. Maybe it was time to give back for once.

Though nervous, Ace wanted to see to Zack's needs. It was more than thanking Zack for saving him. It was a chance to get closer to his best friend, someone he hadn't treated right for a very long time. Ace wasn't sure why he knew it was the right thing to do, but he didn't question his instincts. He'd ignored them for too long as it was.

“Wait one.” Ace hurried to the bedroom door and locked it. A glance over his shoulder showed him Zack hadn’t stirred. He hurried back and carefully straddled Zack’s ass.

*“What the hell?”*

“It’s easier for me to apply the right pressure if I’m over you.” Ace smoothed more lotion on his palms and rubbed deeper into the silky skin under his hands. “This doesn’t hurt, does it?” He made sure to avoid Zack’s bandaged side.

“No.” Zack’s gruff answer made Ace smile. If he didn’t know better, he’d say Zack was aroused. God knew he was.

He stared down at his tented underwear and sighed. *No, I’m not ready for all of this, not yet. Baby steps. Besides, this is for Zack, not me.*

Settling over Zack’s tight ass, Ace continued to massage his friend’s back. Zack’s breathing grew raspy. The scent of arousal filled the air. Zack moved his head down, his face into the pillow once more. Ace squirmed over Zack’s ass and heard a faint moan. No question, this was arousing both of them.

In an effort to lighten the mood, he said, “You know, I hate to say it, but I think you’re getting bigger.”

*“What?”*

“Your back. Your lats are bigger than mine. I’m going to have to work on that. You still have nothing on my guns, though.” His biceps rocked.

“Oh, right.” Zack snorted. He didn’t quite mask the flex of his ass. The bed had to be hell on his cock.

Ace smirked and scooted back.

“Thanks,” Zack said in a thick voice. “I feel much better.”

“I’m not done yet. Unless you want me to stop?”

"Hell, no. I haven't had a massage in too long. And after yesterday, I feel like a human punching bag." He quieted. "You sure you're feeling okay to do this? You took a pounding too."

"Not as bad as you. Some scratches that bled a lot, a few minor bruises. To be honest, it's my hand that hurts the most. The rest of me feels fine." He felt energized, truth be told. Being near Zack aroused his energy as well as his libido.

"Well, finish me then."

*God help me, but I intend to.* When Ace reached for Zack's briefs, Zack froze.

"What are you doing?"

"Just trying to move your clothes out of the way so I can hit skin. I'm not gonna hurt you, Zack," he scoffed. His heart raced. He'd never done this before. What if Zack said no? Worse, what if Zack saw him hard and aching and said no?

But his buddy kept his head down in the pillow. "Whatever. I'm not scared of you, cub."

*I'll give you* cub. Whereas Zack's play on his last name normally irritated him, right now, it sounded like an endearment. Still, Ace gave him the expected response. "It's Two Bears, dickhead."

"It's Cree," they both said at the same time.

Ace shook his head, grinning, and eased Zack's underwear down his legs and onto the floor.

God, his ass was tight. Images of sliding his cock between those cheeks, of sticking his dick in that dark hole, consumed him. Zack had taken him so many times before, but only when *changed*. What would it be like to be the one doing the taking? And in normal skin? Fangs pierced his gums, and his arms began to ripple.

"Man, you okay?" Zack lifted his head, and Ace forced his *change* back.

“Fine,” he answered in a hoarse voice and jumped forward to shove Zack’s head down on the bed. “Just, ah, lie down and enjoy, okay?”

“Sure.” Zack didn’t move again, for which Ace was grateful.

Ace knelt on the bed between Zack’s legs. He drew in a deep breath and placed his hands on Zack’s ass.

Zack’s entire body locked up.

“Relax.” Ace kneaded the hard muscle, unconsciously rubbing with a sensual touch. “You want it to feel good, don’t you?” he asked in a low voice.

Zack grunted and relaxed.

Ace continued to massage him, pushing his hands down to Zack’s thighs and calves. His dick was so hard, it hurt, and his underwear stuck to the wet patch growing over his shaft.

“Feel good?” he asked.

“Mmm.”

“Spread your legs wider for me.”

Zack did so immediately.

Ace ran his hands between Zack’s thighs, grazing his hard sac. Zack hissed his pleasure.

“Still feels good?”

“Oh, yeah.” Zack’s thick voice drove Ace wild, and he had to work to control the urge to fuck that ass.

Gone was any reticence about being sexual with another male. Only Zack mattered right now. *Zack’s pleasure, not mine.*

Ace stroked up and down Zack’s thighs, making sure the tips of his thumbs continued to brush Zack’s balls. Then he eased his hands between Zack’s legs, rubbing constantly against his sac and the base of his shaft.

With each push of his fingers, Zack shoved against the bed. Ace had a feeling if he slid his hand under his friend, he'd find Zack as wet as he was.

Leaving Zack's groin, he circled again to Zack's ass. Rubbing the cheeks wasn't enough. Ace wanted to see that hole. He glided closer and closer to Zack's crease, no longer pretending this was about a simple massage.

Zack was humping his bed, his arousal saturating the room. Ace pushed his ass cheeks wide and stared at his hole.

"God, what are you doing?" Zack groaned.

"Making you feel good." Ace rubbed that ass for all he was worth, sliding his thumbs closer and closer to Zack's anus. Finally having had enough, he shoved a thumb inside, marveling at the heat and tightness of that flesh.

"*Fuck.*" Zack pumped again and shuddered, moaning. The scent of cum filled the air, and Ace knew a moment of peace as Zack found release. *I gave him that.*

Before he could take care of himself, Zack rasped, "I think I need more lotion."

Ace blinked in confusion.

"On my ass. It's especially sensitive where you put your thumb," Zack emphasized and tilted his ass in the air, like waving a red flag. "More lotion would help," he said in a gritty voice.

Understanding dawned. Ace knelt and pushed his underwear down to free his cock. He gripped himself tight and began masturbating.

"I'll make sure it's warm." He grunted as he neared his climax, so ready he felt like he'd come forever.

"Warm is good."

Ace held a finger just inside Zack's ass and pulled his cheek away as he came hard, covering Zack's hole with cum. "Oh, oh yeah." He groaned as he spewed all over that ass. He



rubbed his finger in his cum and used it to push inside. Much as he wanted his cock there, seeing his finger disappear inside Zack was its own reward.

“Shit, Ace. You’re killing me.” Zack arched up, pushing Ace’s finger deeper.

As they both caught their breath, Ace realized his friend was covered in his cum with a finger -- *his finger* -- up his ass. Instead of repulsing him, the sight stimulated him. But still, something was missing.

He gently pulled his finger away. “Hold still.” Ace left and returned with a warm, soapy washcloth and a towel. After cleaning the mess on Zack’s ass, he left the bed and helped his friend to his feet. Not able to meet his eyes, Ace continued to clean Zack, removing the cum that covered Zack’s cock, balls, and belly while Zack remained still.

“Ace?”

When Ace felt fingers beneath his chin, he glanced up. To his surprise, he couldn’t read a thing on Zack’s face.

“Thanks for the massage,” Zack said softly. He caressed Ace’s cheek, then left through the bathroom door and closed it behind him.

Sated, confused, and oddly content, Ace would have flopped back onto his bed were it not for the wet spot in the middle. He stared at it for several minutes, needing to change the sheets but loath to remove Zack’s scent from his room.

It was some time before he stripped his bed.

### Chapter Three

After taking a day to recover from what had been an isolated incident, Kelly decided to ask Doc for help. The odd symptoms that had plagued her as a teenager had vanished, thanks to Doc's miracle medicine. Though she had to increase the frequency of her doses, she'd never before needed another shot so quickly.

She normally only took her meds once a month. Considering she'd received her last shot two weeks ago, something was very wrong.

Now, sitting next to Doc in his private study, she prayed he could once again find something to help her over this hurdle. *A minor obstacle*, she could hear her mother whisper. *A Malloy never quits. Get up and get moving.*

"Kelly, we've known each other for how long?" Doc asked quietly.

*Shit.* That soft voice meant trouble. "Hell, Doc. Since I was a kid."

"And in all that time, I've taken care of you. Will you trust me when I say I'm sorry?"

"Sorry for what?" Anxiety flared.

"For not telling you the full truth when this started." Doc sighed and faced away from her. Kelly clutched the arms of her chair, scared at this turn of events. "A long time ago, your

parents went through a rough spell. Your father didn't like your mother working for Pearson Labs."

She knew that. She remembered her parents arguing about it when she was younger, even after her mother had left the job.

"Shortly after you turned four, she quit. Your father moved you all far away. I hadn't heard from them in years when your mother contacted me again. You were nine, and you'd gotten sick. They had no idea what was wrong with you."

Nine? She hadn't become ill until much later.

Doc fiddled with his glasses and turned around to face her again. "I was good friends with your parents, and they needed someone they could trust. They brought you to me for some tests. Your mother had her suspicions and didn't want to take you to a civilian doctor. She knew I'd never tell Elliot what I found. To our relief, you checked out to be perfectly normal. At least, until you turned thirteen."

At thirteen, she'd gotten her first period. Not a joyous experience celebrating her entry into womanhood. Kelly's first cycle had pushed her nearly to madness. PMS to the extreme. Her joints had ached all the time. Her headaches had become migraines, sure to split her skull wide open, to say nothing of her out-of-control sensory experiences. Enhanced sight, smell, and hearing bombarded her with too much all at once.

"The injections I gave you took care of any discomfort. You graduated high school and attended college without any issues."

"And then my symptoms reappeared. The yearly injections weren't enough." Too easily, she remembered the pain.

"Upping your dose worked. But it wasn't until you surrounded yourself with Circs that you truly found some peace."

"What?"

"Think about it, Kelly. After college, you could have gone anywhere, yet you moved near me, or more specifically, near Project Dawn. You worked hard for that law firm for years but left on a moment's notice when Project Dawn broke up, and I moved north. While I'm pleased that you think of me as family, we both know you didn't leave a great job just to work for me here."

He had a point, now that she thought about it. She had done what her parents wanted and graduated college. She could have lived anywhere after school, but she chose to live on the coast of North Carolina. Near Doc. At the time, she'd reasoned that she liked living near the ocean. The secretarial job with a well-known law firm in town had been a godsend, but she would have done anything she could to stay near Doc.

"Spit it out, Doc." She loved Doc. He'd always been there for her when she needed him, like an adopted uncle. Without those shots of his, she would have lived in a lot of pain. But when Doc talked around an issue, he drove her nuts.

"Kelly, the shot you receive suppresses the Circe serum from overtaking your blood."

*"What?"*

"When you hit puberty, the serum began a quick takeover of your body. When you first took sick, I didn't think to give you any blockers because you checked out normal. But after that first incident, your mother suspected what you were; as did I. Elliot Pearl did a lot of things he should regret. Infecting your mother was just the tip of the iceberg. She never knew how he'd infected her with the virus carrying the Circe formula. And by then it didn't matter, because you carried the effects of the serum in your blood."

"You and Mom knew." Kelly was stunned.

He nodded.

"Dad?"

"She never told your father."

Kelly didn't know why she was so shocked. She knew what Doc did. Hell, she'd known him more than half her life. She'd worked for him for the past three years. Though she had little to do with his actual research and the operational aspects of his work, she knew the gist of what Circe's Recruits were, what they'd done. And nobody, certainly not her, could ignore five larger-than-life, gorgeous men bound together under one roof.

Kelly wished her mother were alive to answer the many questions she now had. But Bridget Malloy had succumbed to cancer several years ago. Doc said her father didn't know anything, so Kelly had no intention of broaching the subject to him. No, she had to deal with this on her own.

Doc stared at her, his expression patient and understanding. Then again, maybe she wasn't so "on her own." She'd always considered Doc and the others her family, but now she felt like a real member of the group, instead of the annoying younger sister on the fringes.

Kelly cleared her throat. "My being able to scent certain things, my attraction for Zack" -- *and Ace*, she almost added -- "it's because of the serum?"

"Partly. Are you attracted to the others in the same way?"

"No." *Just Ace.*

"Then I'd guess what you feel for Zack is a personal choice. I'm sure his Circ genetics make him more attractive, on a basic level. What's intriguing about this is, why now? What's stimulated the Circ within you to come to the fore?" Doc's eyes gleamed with curiosity. "I think you've finally matured. You're what, twenty-seven now?"

"In two weeks."

"A year younger than Caitlyn when she fully *changed*." He frowned.

"I thought it was the PPA's involvement that made that happen."

"Yes and no. They fed her drugs for many years, but I don't think those drugs had any effect. Personally, I wouldn't be surprised if her blood rejected the excess serum. She just

needed to let nature direct her growth. Like you." Yet he didn't look satisfied by the explanation.

Her mind whirled. "So is my being Circ the reason you never wanted me around when the guys hit their mating heat?"

"Yes." Doc's cheeks reddened, but he didn't look away. "The heat is extreme and can only be satisfied with another Circ."

"Wait a minute. Only another Circ? So the guys haven't been chasing down horny women for sex when it hits?" What the hell did *that* mean? For the longest time, the only Circs in town were the five guys.

Doc continued as if she hadn't asked the question. "They only satisfy the mating heat with another Circ. As much as you possess the genetic material, you haven't become a true Circ, not yet. I didn't want to chance you getting hurt in the event they accepted your nature, not fully formed, as it is. The men can be quite rough, so I understand."

"Right." She swallowed hard. "So, what now? Am I going to start wolfing out, or turning into whatever they turn into? The shot you gave me is wearing off. I can feel it. Yesterday, I *smelled* Ace. It's like I identified him through scent. And I've been having these weird thoughts."

Doc cocked his head. "About what?"

"Um." She didn't know exactly how to put it.

"Kelly, it's okay." Doc squeezed her hand. "What you're experiencing may be scary or uncomfortable, but it's normal for a Circ."

Normal. Great. "I have these odd notions of claiming the men. I keep hearing the word 'mates' in my mind."

"Men? Mates? You mean Zack and Ace."

She felt her face heat. "Maybe."

“Kelly, it’s been obvious for some time that both Zack and Ace care for you. When Caitlyn arrived a month ago, a female Circ, they barely spared her a glance. With you, they can’t take their eyes off you whenever you’re in the room. What’s more, it’s obvious you feel the same way. Go with what your heart, your *beast*, tells you. Listen to your instincts.”

“My beast.” Kelly had heard Caitlyn talk about that.

“In fact, you should talk to Caitlyn,” Doc said, as if reading her mind.

“I think I will. But Doc, can we not tell the guys this yet? I need time to process it all. Maybe another shot will help?”

“Okay.” He fetched the needle and injected her just as Zack walked into his office unannounced.

“Kelly?”

“Thanks, Doc.” She gave Doc a kiss on the cheek and flashed Zack a brief smile. “I’m going home for the rest of the day. I’ll see you tomorrow, Doc, okay?”

Doc nodded. “Sure thing.”

She breezed by Zack but faltered when she caught Ace’s scent all over him. Shocked at what that might mean, she darted for the doorway and lit out for her car. All the way home, she thought about what she’d been told. If the Circs only wanted another Circ for mating, then that meant before Caitlyn arrived the guys had been...doing each other? *Holy shit*.

Her face flamed at the sudden image of Zack and Ace having sex. And she’d just caught Ace’s scent all over Zack! Had the men been forced into having sex together because of their DNA, or because they liked it? She always overheard them talking about women, and Roane was head over heels for Caitlyn. It had to be the Circ thing.

Which made her wonder. Now that Caitlyn had appeared, was she doing all the guys now? *Her* guys?

Kelly’s arms rippled. Her sight wavered, going from normal to superintense. Colors seemed brighter, sharper, and her hearing improved tenfold. Then the sensation abruptly

ceased. Thank God she'd arrived home. Shaking, Kelly parked her car and entered the house. She dropped onto the couch, unable to stop trembling.

Her body was no longer her own. *I'm a Circ.* The idea still stunned her. *I can contribute to Doc and the guys in a whole new way.* Kelly paused in thought. *What, with my legs spread wide open?* She groaned, because instead of feeling embarrassed at the idea, she was strangely turned on. The thought of taking both Zack and Ace made her wet and aching in an instant.

Kelly swore and resolved to maintain control, even if it killed her. "Screw this. I'm taking a bath and going to bed." Right after she had a tall, stiff drink.

\* \* \* \* \*

Zack stared in horror at the needle in Doc's hands. "What did you do to Kelly?"

As if he needed one more distraction, with Ace nearly dying and doing a one-eighty in their relationship, such as it was. Normally consisting of verbal sallies and physical fights, now Ace was pushing him into orgasm, *willingly*. Then to walk in here and find Kelly looking like death warmed over, and sick besides, well, it wasn't a good mix.

"Easy." Doc tossed the needle onto his desk. "Close and lock the door, and come here."

Zack locked the door and took the seat Kelly had vacated.

"Kelly wants to tell you this herself. I promised to give her time --"

"Doc," he warned, his beast close to exploding at the thought of Kelly undergoing harm.

"Kelly is a Circ. She's teetering on full maturation, which is why you've never directly sensed what was in her before now." Doc gave him a thoughtful look. "Or have you?"

Zack couldn't have been more shocked. "You're kidding, right?"

"No." Doc sighed. "I've known for some time. That's why Kelly took shots every month. To suppress her need to *change*. She didn't know what the shots were for. Her



mother made me promise never to tell her, a promise I regretted giving the moment I said the words." Doc frowned. "We never wanted to hurt Kelly. And if Elliot had known about her, I can't imagine what he might have done."

Zack relaxed. "Good point."

"But Kelly's starting to reject the blockers. She's very susceptible right now. Her senses are becoming stronger. I don't have to tell you she'll need to be handled very carefully."

"I'd never hurt her." Hell, why would Doc suggest such a thing?

"I know that, not intentionally. But imagine finding a female Circ to take the edge off when the next mating heat hits. And not just any female, but the one you've been drawn to for a long time." Doc arched a brow. "Now imagine throwing a rival Circ into the mix. How do you suppose Ace might react when he finds out Kelly is one of you, available to mate? Have you two come to some accord about sharing?"

Zack swore. Though today had been an improvement in the way he and Ace normally dealt with one another, throwing Kelly into the mix would probably harm rather than help them. "We're working toward a semblance of peace." Zack knew he'd be wise to keep this from Ace, at least for the time being.

"So you see why I don't want anyone to know yet. Let the girl have some time to adjust to the idea. Another week and everyone will know just who and what she is, because the meds won't save her from this next heat."

The thought of sharing Kelly, as Roane had once shared Caitlyn, made Zack furious. "Are we, that is, do we need to perform the same kind of bonding ceremony we used with Caitlyn?" Ceremony. Hell, they'd gangbanged Caitlyn while Roane watched.

"I don't think so." Doc's calm centered him. "Roane is your leader, and from what I've gathered, Circs are a hierarchical group. Caitlyn is Roane's mate. She connected with the group as he did. He leads because he dominates, and he established that sexually. The rest of

you aren't like that. You share your duties, and you give your loyalty because it's a part of you."

"Then as my mate, Kelly would only have to show her loyalty to Roane...sexually."

Doc squirmed, as though uncomfortable with the subject. Then again, the man treated Kelly like a daughter. "I suppose. It really depends on how Kelly bonds with you and Ace."

"So you think it'll be both of us, me and Ace, she takes to?" Hope suffused him. To have to make a choice between Kelly and Ace, or worse, for Kelly to have to make a choice, would destroy him.

"I was convinced of it the first time she met all of you." Doc smiled. "The girl's headstrong, and she's selective. She's been challenging you in subtle ways for years. But without being a true Circ, she couldn't test you physically, and we both know how necessary that is for a mating to occur." Doc paused. "Zack, can I ask you a question?"

"Sure."

"What is Ace to you?"

*Everything.* "Why do you ask?"

"Because during the mating heat, you two segregate yourselves from everyone else, correct?"

"Yeah." He knew Hale often provided details so that Doc could study them. But it still made him uncomfortable. Sure he liked sex with both genders, but he didn't advertise it.

"I think you two bonded some time ago. So long as you're both secure in that, you shouldn't have any problem in mating with Kelly. But you really need to make sure there's no sense of rivalry or insecurity between you two."

"You know, that's a good point." Zack took the initiative, an idea forming that might help all of them. "I think it would be best if Ace and I took off for a little bit. Maybe sorted out our issues before the next heat comes."

"You only have a week." Doc looked worried. "Make sure you two fix your problems. If not, things may become dangerous for Kelly and you when the time comes."

"Right." Zack stood. "Uh, maybe you could keep this quiet for now. Just say we're taking time to recuperate or something. I don't want to make Ace feel weird about this. He's not as comfortable about us as I am."

"No worries." Doc turned to his computer. "I'll announce at dinner tonight that you'll both be busy recuperating elsewhere. It might be best if you left before the meal to ward off any questions."

"Done." Zack unlocked the door and left, stunned by what he'd just learned.

*Helluva day.* He'd been given the best massage of his life by the man he loved, a man who'd never before reciprocated his feelings. That Ace had touched Zack sexually meant he might finally be coming around to a real relationship with Zack. Then to learn that Kelly could fulfill that aching need that lived deep in Zack's soul? Like a dream come true -- one that had the potential to blow up in their faces if he didn't manage this right.

He needed to smooth things with Ace, and he couldn't do that here. They needed privacy, some alone time. But more, they needed to bond with Kelly prior to her *change*. When the beast took over, impulse and instinct reigned. No one would be safe, unless they all trusted each other on a basic level, before the wildness ruled them all.

Zack passed by Caitlyn, who had her arms filled with rolls of paper and paint samples. Two seconds later, he nearly knocked Roane down on his way toward the stairs.

"Easy." Roane narrowed his eyes. "You okay?"

"Yeah. Sorry, gotta go."

"You're supposed to be resting. Doc's orders."

"Right. I'm heading back to my room."

"I mean it, Zack. We could have lost you and Ace. You need to go easy," Roane ordered in a thick voice.

Zack warmed. He could feel Roane's sincerity. The look in his eyes suggested he still worried about the pair. "We'll be fine. But you might not be. I think Caitlyn's taking decorating to a whole new level. She has paint samples, and she was heading to your room."

"Shit," Roane muttered under his breath as he went back the way he'd come.

Smiling, Zack bounded up the stairs and entered his room. Neat as a pin, he had no problems locating all the clothes he would need and packed enough for a week's absence. Finished, he heard the shower running. His body tightened as he imagined Ace naked and covered in water.

Forcing away thoughts of sex, he took a deep breath and knocked on the bathroom door. No one answered. *Probably can't hear me because of the water.* Zack let himself in and stared at Ace's broad back through the glass door of the stall. His dark hair shone blue-black in the light as greedy droplets of water clung to his shoulders and lower. Down the small of his back to that muscular ass to those thick thighs he could easily imagine spread wide while he pushed between firm cheeks...

"Zack." Ace turned around, sporting a hard-on. He spoke as if nothing was amiss. "What's up?"

Wanting nothing more than to get down on his knees and take Ace's cock between his lips, Zack concentrated on looking only at Ace's eyes. The dark brown irises appeared jet-black, deep pools of emotion Ace normally kept under wraps.

"We need to get out of here for a while."

Ace frowned.

"There's a situation. Nothing serious," he said quickly before Ace could ask. "Well, yeah, it's serious, but in a good way. I can't explain here. Too many ears." Too many Circs. "Bottom line is that you and I need to come to an understanding. I'll tell you all about it once we're gone. Pack enough for a week."

Ace blinked in surprise. "We're leaving?"

“Just for a little while. Like I said, we need to handle this away from the others.”

Ace nodded and turned off the shower. Just like that. No questions, no arguments. Zack was instantly suspicious. Ace stepped out of the shower, dripping on the floor. The two men stood face-to-face. Zack wasn't surprised to see a measure of cunning reflected in Ace's black gaze.

“I'm humoring you. Now humor me.”

“What?” Zack took a cautious step back, prepared for anything. A swipe of claws, a shove, a joke at his expense.

Ace stepped forward, slowly, as if stalking prey. “Why are you backing away? Are you afraid of me?”

“Please. I can kick your scrawny ass any day of the week.” *Not a scrawny ass, a tight, hot, fuckable ass.* “I'm ready for whatever you're going to throw my way.”

Ace relaxed and smiled. “I doubt it.” Without warning, he plastered his mouth to Zack's and kissed him hard.

## Chapter Four

Ace groaned, rewarded with the kind of perfection he'd dreamed about but could never have hoped for. Zack's kiss. They'd fucked and touched when *changed*, but they'd never shared a kiss. Zack relaxed his mouth under Ace's, but he remained tense, as if waiting for an attack.

*Which I would have given him if he'd tried something like this with me before today. God, this feels so good. It can't be wrong, can it?* Ace couldn't stop thinking about what they'd done earlier. His beast purred in his breast, almost happy. Never before had he felt *that*. Satisfying the mating heat cured his cravings, but he'd never felt this welling of affection. It confused him as much as it made him seek more.

He pulled back and stared at the lust gathered on Zack's face. "You want me to leave with you."

"What? Yes. Yes, we need to go," Zack said hoarsely.

"Okay, but first I need you to do something for me."

"Sure."

It gratified him that Zack still couldn't catch his breath. "Put your hands behind you, flat on the counter. Don't move them, no matter what I do."

Zack frowned.

Ace sighed. He was as bad at seducing men as he was at seducing women. Look how he constantly fucked up with Kelly. “Look, I have some questions. I need to see if I can handle you...us.”

Understanding -- or was that hope? -- lit Zack’s gray eyes. “Just put my hands like this?” He placed his hands palm down on the laminate countertop. In doing so, he thrust his chest forward, his massive pecs impressive to anyone with a pulse.

“Good,” Ace said gruffly. “Now shut up and don’t move.”

“Typical,” Zack muttered with humor.

Ace fell to his knees, enthralled with the hard dick beneath Zack’s shorts. He pulled the material down to Zack’s sandaled feet, then ripped it off.

“What --”

“Didn’t I say to shut up?” Ace asked with menace.

Zack narrowed his gaze but quieted.

“I’m glad you’re not wearing a shirt. So I can do this.” Ace rose and set his mouth just above Zack’s groin. He licked from just below Zack’s navel to the middle of his smooth chest. Centering on the nipple to his right, he clamped his mouth around it, intrigued by the foreign taste and size of the bud. So different, sucking a man’s tit from a woman’s. Yet because it was Zack, it tasted like candy.

The scent of arousal filled the small space -- Zack’s and his meshing together.

Zack groaned as Ace licked his other nipple, biting with strong teeth. Zack arched toward him, and the tips of their cocks touched.

Reminded of what he’d set out to do before getting distracted, Ace leaned away. “Sorry.” He grinned, drugged on the power of Zack’s taste. Hell, Zack looked like he was barely hanging on. When *changed*, the dynamic between them was different. Bigger than

Ace, Zack normally showed his dominance by being on top. He did the fucking, Ace the receiving. But now, the same size, Ace had equal control, and he loved it.

Slowly dropping to his knees, he held Zack's gaze until he found what he sought. Closing his eyes, he concentrated on the scent, taste, and feel of the hard cock he took into his mouth.

Zack swore and hissed, shaking as he tried to remain still. His cock pulsed, small jets of semen filling Ace's mouth as he began stroking with his tongue. The taste of Zack's essence only made him want more. That small bit of precum didn't give Ace all he needed.

Reaching up with his hand, he cupped the firm balls hanging near his chin.

"Fuck, yes. Oh, God," Zack expelled on a breath.

Rolling the tight globes in his hand, Ace sucked harder on Zack's thick cock. He couldn't take all of it, just the head and part of the shaft. Zack was so big, so thick, that he had to work to take that much in. *That answers part of my questions. I'm not gay. No way could I imagine doing this for any other guy.*

He took a good whiff of Zack's arousal and sucked harder, wanting to swallow a load of sweet cum. As he sucked he jerked off, his hand moving quickly as he fought Zack's control.

Thankfully, it didn't take long. He came hard just as Zack panted a warning.

"Shit, Ace. I'm gonna blow. You need to pull back -- fuck!" he yelled as he shot his load. spurts of cum slid down Ace's throat and filled his mouth as Zack continued to orgasm. To Ace's shock, the milky seed tasted good -- a concept he never would have imagined as anything but disgusting. But Zack... Ace's beast cried out his need and drank every last drop. *My mate. Mine.*

At the idea he'd just accepted Zack -- a male -- as his mate, Ace released him from his mouth and quickly stood.

"Well, that answers part of my question." *I'm seriously fucked.*



Zack had a hard time recovering as he watched Ace mumble under his breath, clean up the floor, and head back into the shower. Weak-kneed, he washed his face and took a deep breath. He decided he'd be safer in his bedroom, so he sank onto his bed and tried to make sense of what had just happened. Twice now, Ace had taken him by surprise. Zack should have been ecstatic that his friend continued to push their sexual relationship. But with Kelly's news, he couldn't help worrying.

What would Ace think about her? He chafed whenever Zack talked about her, as if it were a given that Ace would own her heart in the end. Zack had no intention of taking all of Kelly's attentions. He wanted to share them with Ace. And how much better would their threesome be if Ace and he came to an accord as well?

Zack rubbed his cock with a groan and put on fresh clothes. He'd never imagined Ace's mouth would be so fucking hot. He was obviously new to sucking cock, but what he lacked in experience, he made up for with enthusiasm. Considering how much Zack desired him, he thought it amazing he'd lasted as long as he had. Not being able to touch Ace, to resist running his hands through that silky black hair or fuck that delicious mouth and instead be taken, had gone against the grain. Zack dominated Ace whenever they had sex.

He'd never thought Ace might enjoy dominating him.

Wondering what it would feel like to let go and let Ace do everything and anything to him, Zack lost track of time as he threw some things together. He jumped when Ace dropped his duffel to the floor.

"I'm ready. Let's go."

Zack grabbed his bag. They hurried out the back stairway toward the back door. He didn't want to explain where they were going or why. Ace may have taken huge steps, but Zack didn't want to put their new relationship to the test. Not yet.

They made it to Zack's Wrangler without incident. Once on the road, Ace broke the silence.

"Fill me in." Not a request. A demand.

Glad to have the Ace back that he knew and loved, Zack explained. "Okay. First, we need to cement our bond before we see Kelly again. No, wait, hold your questions until I'm finished. I know this is all new to you, and I appreciate how hard this must be."

Ace grinned, and Zack flushed.

"Not that kind of hard. Geez, what are you, twelve? I just meant...fuck it. You know what I mean. I'm not gonna take any shit from you about this, either. You're not gay. I know. I've heard it more times than I want to remember. This isn't about being gay. My beast recognizes yours on a fundamental level. Yours knows mine. We click. So forget about labels and follow your instincts, okay?"

Ace studied him, considering. "You talk a lot, you know? Like a girl."

"Fuck you." Zack scowled, though he was relieved. A joking Ace was a happy Ace.

After a minute, Ace asked, "So what's this second major item you have to tell me?"

"This is a big second. Kelly's a Circ."

*"No shit?"*

"No shit. Seems Doc's been helping her control herself for years. Poor Kelly thought she was ill. Didn't know she was Circ until today. She's ours, Ace. That's why we've been so cagey around her for so long. Our beasts recognized her, except she hadn't fully turned yet. Doc said she's past the medicinal blockers holding her back. And that means we need to be on the same page before we make her ours."

"A Circ?" Ace asked, his voice hoarse. "Oh, man."

Zack had a bad feeling about this. "Yeah, a Circ. *Our* Circ. I'm not sharing her with Derrick, Hale, or Roane." *Well, maybe Roane, if we have to.* "She's different from Caitlyn. She's ours."

"Fuck, yeah. *Ours.*"

Zack wanted to sag with relief, and Ace eyed him knowingly. “Thought I’d fight you for her, hmm? Worried I’d win?”

“No, you ass. I was worried you’d be so obsessed with proving who has the bigger dick that we wouldn’t be able to give Kelly what she needs. She’s brand new to this. You and I can’t afford mistakes or selfishness. That’s why we’re going to take the next few days and get it together.”

Ace said nothing for a moment. “What if our beasts can’t handle it? Roane’s damned possessive about Caitlyn. After she bonded with the squad, he growled at anyone who stepped too close to her. Hell, he still does.” Ace snorted. “Another thing. What if Kelly’s turned off by two guys getting it on? We could always just focus on her, mate with her, use her to bond the two of us together.”

Zack had wondered the same thing. He knew Ace would find that solution easier to handle. His heart broke at the thought, but he asked the question anyway. “Is that what you want?”

“Yes.” Ace crossed his arms over his chest and stared out the window. “No. Shit. I don’t know what I want. When I was kissing you, tasting you...” He paused, flushing. “You tasted like the sweetest thing in the world. At that moment, you could have fucked me raw, and it wouldn’t have been enough.”

*Thank God.* Ace felt it too.

“That doesn’t mean I like it, or that I don’t have a hard time accepting the fact I blew a guy.” Ace rubbed his face. “Christ, I can’t believe I said that.”

“Think of it this way.” Zack worked hard not to let his relief show. “You’re not normally attracted to men, right?”

“Hell, no. There’s just something about *you*.”

"So it must be part of your Circ nature. You've been Circ for eight years, and you're finally integrating with that beastlike side of yours. I don't see the big deal about it. So you happen to want a guy and a girl. You ask me, it's the best of both worlds."

Ace said nothing more, and Zack thought he was done talking. "Where are we going?"

"A little place I know."

Ace frowned. "You take a lot of your 'dates' there?"

Zack whistled, encouraged enough to tease. "Jealous?"

"Hell, no." Silence. "Answer the question."

"I've taken a few women there. But normally, I just go to get away. Sometimes I need space. Being in the squad is a lot like being in a pack. No time for me, just us. I like my own company. I don't always need to be part of a group, no matter what my beast says."

Before Zack could say anything more, his cell phone rang. "Answer it."

Ace fumbled and dug the phone out of the console. "Yeah? Doc? Hold on." He handed the phone to Zack.

Zack listened to what Doc had to say, handed the phone back to Ace, and turned the car around.

Ace tucked the phone away. "What's up?"

"Change in plan. Kelly needs us now. Looks like you're going to have to come to grips with *us* in the next thirty minutes."

\* \* \* \* \*

Kelly was burning up. She'd try to hang on until Doc arrived. She didn't understand what had gone wrong. Her bath had helped, and the small nap she'd taken refreshed her. Then her body turned into the enemy.

Urges pulled her, fantasies of Zack and Ace teasing her nipples into sharp points and her pussy into a slick, wet, needy place. She writhed on the bed, desire and fear tugging her

in different directions. She knew she was gearing up to *change*, but she wasn't ready. She still had no idea what she'd be like when in that altered state. Would she hurt someone? Would she hurt herself?

Her lack of control scared her more than anything. For years, she'd maintained a tight rein on her world. She could do nothing about the sickness dogging her, so she'd managed everything else that she could. Kelly kept herself in shape and ate right, took the monthly shots from Doc to maintain good health, and organized her world. It had been simple to include Doc and the others into the neat pockets of her life. She had a place where she belonged, where she made sense.

These sudden changes shocked her orderly world. She could deal with secret missions and a "mad" scientist. But to not know herself?

Heat burned through her belly into her limbs, centering in her womb. Her clit throbbed, as if aching for a firm touch. She hesitated to give herself the relief she craved. What if, in her excitement, she *changed* and couldn't *change* back?

The door banged open.

"Kelly." Zack and Ace yelled her name.

Something inside her purred in welcome. "No." Her voice was no more than a croak. "Don't come in. I'm not...me."

Zack and Ace froze in her doorway, their eyes wide with shock and sudden desire.

"Fuck me." Ace licked his lips, his gaze running down her naked body to her spread thighs.

"Kelly, honey." Zack drew in a deep breath, and his gray eyes darkened, the pupils slitted like a cat's before he blinked his eyes back to normal. "Damn."

"We're here to help," Ace added in a rough voice. He dragged his gaze back to hers. "What do you need? What are you feeling?"

"So hot." She groaned and closed her eyes, embarrassment fighting her inner urge to display herself before potential mates. "I ache. I can't stop it." Tears fell from her eyes. She'd been in love with these two for years. As many times as she'd fantasized about being with the both of them, even the Circs didn't do threesomes. She felt like a pervert and a loser, flaunting her less-than-perfect body at two men who had no doubt seen much better.

"Kelly, it's the *change*. You know that, right?" Zack asked in a thick voice. "We're going to help you."

"Go away." She tried to do the right thing against everything her instincts demanded. *Run away, before I do what I've been wanting to do forever.*

"Hell, no." Ace didn't give her a chance to say more. He bore down on her with intent. In seconds his mouth covered her clit, and he sucked hard, pushing her into a violent orgasm.

She screamed and clawed at the bed.

"Oh, yeah," he said as he continued to lick her.

"Ace, you should take it slow." Zack panted as he knelt by Kelly's side. "Baby, I don't want to scare you, but --"

Kelly didn't give him time to say any more. She reached for his head and yanked him close. Kissing him with all the fire building inside her, she still wasn't ready for what he gave her.

Zack kissed her with lips and tongue. He shoved his tongue inside her mouth and mimicked what Ace was suddenly doing with his fingers. Zack held her scalp with firm hands, growling with need as he deepened the kiss.

He broke off to trail his lips down her cheek to her ear. "God, Kelly. I've been waiting so long for you."

“*We’ve* been waiting,” Ace corrected as he came up for air. He pulled away from her, but Kelly couldn’t complain, caught up in Zack’s whispered words. She’d always thought him the gentler one of the pair, but his words caught her by surprise.

“I’m going to fuck you so hard. Going to give you the good reaming you’ve been asking for. As if some little prick like Stephen Folsom deserves you? Deserves what’s *mine*?” he seethed.

“Ah, Zack, tone it down, man.” Ace stroked her with tender fingers.

“Fuck that.” The husky rasp of something hungry echoed in his words. Kelly recognized what had always called to her. It was as much a part of Zack as his quirky sense of humor, that wild part of him she’d never seen but sensed. “*Mine*.”

Sharp teeth nicked her ear, and she gasped as her desire increased. To her mortification, she felt moisture slide down her slit. She was so incredibly wet.

“*Ours*. Don’t forget that.” Ace ripped off his clothing.

For the second time, Kelly saw his cock, that massive piece of flesh so imposing and wonderful. She didn’t have to ask for it, because suddenly, he was ramming inside her.

“Shit. *Yes!*” Ace groaned as he fucked her. “Kelly, baby. So good.”

She couldn’t speak, finally feeling the respite from her overwhelming desires. The orgasm Ace had gifted her with gave her a brief fix, but nothing like the feeling his strong shaft brought as it rubbed with exquisite thoroughness along her inner walls.

“That won’t be enough,” Zack said, pulling back to stare into her eyes. He removed his clothing in record time, treating her to her first glimpse of Zack English, naked.

“Oh my God,” she moaned. They were like twins, each as perfect as the other. So solid, so muscular. Not an ounce of fat to spare over those battle-scarred frames.

“My thoughts exactly,” Zack rumbled in tones belonging to a creature more animal than human. “Ace, fuck her harder. Give it to her. Own her.”

Ace moaned but did as Zack commanded.

“Now pull all the way out. Let me see that glistening cock, covered in her juices.” Zack stood, and Kelly, half out of her mind, boggled at his girth. So thick. She needed him. Had to have him right now. *So empty, so hungry...*

Zack fixed his gaze to hers and smiled, showing sharp teeth. “Your beast is so pretty, baby. But keep it inside you yet. We need to show you what it’s like with your mates this way, okay?”

The angry howl inside her died at the word *mates*, at his simple acceptance of a concept that still chafed her.

Ace pulled out and swiftly turned her onto her belly. He pulled her back to the edge of the bed. Zack propped her onto her hands and knees, the two of them working like a well-oiled machine. Before she could protest, Ace rammed her from behind, sliding deeply into her pussy. Zack quickly knelt on the bed, pulled down on her jaw, and pushed his cockhead past her lips.

The sweet taste of him wiped her mind clear of any thought. Unconsciously seeking what she needed, she moved her mouth over him in time with Ace’s brutal pounding. The rougher he grew, the more turned on she felt.

And then Zack started fucking her mouth, pushing so hard, so fast, she nearly gagged. She couldn’t breathe, couldn’t swallow around the fullness stretching her lips...until her mouth *grew*. She had no other explanation for how she could suddenly take all of him with ease. She snaked her tongue around that luscious cock and sucked hard, using her lips and tongue and teeth to find what she needed from the male.

His moan worked wonders. She felt a surge of cream push from her womb, sliding over Ace’s shaft to encourage his release. Clamping down on the male riding her, she wanted it all. She wanted their seed, their acceptance, their possession.

The beast inside her reveled in this taking, wanting even more. To fully *change* would be a heady feeling.



“Not yet,” Zack commanded, as if reading her mind. “You don’t *change* until we tell you to.” His voice was hard, as firm as the dick she couldn’t get enough of. “You want it? You want to swallow my cream, baby? You want Ace to jet deep inside you?”

Kelly was so close to climax she shuddered, anticipation making her light-headed. She’d never guessed Zack could be so mean, that Ace could be so incredibly hard.

She moaned her supplication.

“That’s it,” Ace said in a low growl. “Little pussy ready for me yet?” he rasped and reached around her waist, finding her clit with a long, cool nail. The contrast of danger near such tender flesh amped her desire. “Careful, or I might scratch you.” He replaced his nail with a finger. With his other hand, Ace clutched her hip. Claws dug into her skin, pinching.

The scent of blood suddenly mingled with the arousal she could almost taste.

“Ace, fuck. You shouldn’t have done that,” Zack groaned. “Swallow it, Kelly. All of it.” He cried out as he came.

The touch of his sweet cum on her tongue pushed Kelly over the edge. She clenched around Ace and blew apart, rendering his orgasm as well. Hot seed bathed her womb while she continued to drink Zack down. Not normal at all, the intensity of her climax continued.

The three of them trembled while milky cream filled Kelly’s pussy and mouth until she couldn’t take another drop.

She pulled away from Zack’s mouth, but he pushed back in and filled her mouth once more before finally stilling.

“All of it,” he ordered in a commanding voice that gave her shivers, not of fear, but of excitement. He finally pulled a semierect cock from her mouth.

Ace moaned her name and pulled out. She felt him slide his cock over her ass. To her shock and delight, hot liquid hit her back as he rocked against her and continued to come. He finally stopped and rubbed it in, and she felt like purring.

Hell, she *was* purring. The most incredible sexual experience in her entire life. With the two men she'd wanted for what felt like forever. A freakin' threesome. And she was purring like a cat -- a Circ. She sagged and collapsed on the bed.

Soft kisses touched her cheeks. Roughs hands tilted her face so she could receive more kisses on her mouth, cheeks, and forehead.

Ace leaned over her, sliding in the mess he'd made. "Kelly, honey, you okay?"

"Oh my God." She moaned, unable to help it when she rubbed her ass against that still-hard cock.

"That's good," Zack murmured and nipped her earlobe. "Because that's just round one."

## Chapter Five

Ace could barely breathe as he stared at Kelly. After another hearty round, this time where he fucked her mouth and Zack took her from behind, he didn't want to move. He lay on his side and stared at the woman he'd fallen so hard in love with. The connection to Zack had been instantaneous but still lacking something he'd never been able to identify. Now with Kelly, *everything* clicked.

Kelly lay sandwiched between them. And that didn't bother him at all. Just the thought of Hale getting anywhere near Kelly put his back up. Zack didn't. He smelled right. He felt right. And unfortunately, he tasted right.

Wishing he could be as accepting about his feelings for Zack as he was about Kelly, Ace decided to do what they'd agreed on, for Kelly's sake. He'd worry about his relationship with Zack later. Just because his beast liked fucking the male didn't mean they had to be involved in some touchy-feely "relationship." Just thinking about acting all gay around the team made Ace squeamish.

*Forget about it.* Right now, they had to focus on Kelly. He snorted. As if that was a hardship. Kelly was sheer perfection. As her sleepy blue eyes peeked at him from under that wealth of auburn hair, he fell even deeper under her spell.

"Hey," he said softly, cupping her face. Aware of Zack spooning her and stroking her soft belly, Ace's beast wanted to touch him too, to maintain contact with what was his. Possession Ace could understand, and he allowed himself to drift a hand over Zack's. *Mine*.

Zack's hand froze for a minute, and Ace held him with a tight grip. When Zack said nothing, merely received the touch, Ace grunted and let him go.

Kelly flushed. "I-I don't know what to say."

And she had yet to endure a *changed* sexual marathon. Ace stifled a grin. "Why do you have to say anything? You're Circ now, Kelly. The same rules that made you 'normal' don't apply to us."

She blinked, looking unsure. "You're okay with what we did?"

"I'm so okay, I want to do it again." He smiled. "And again."

"With Zack?"

What exactly was she asking him? He didn't want to know. "Kelly, Zack and I are a unit, a pair within our small team." He'd explain as much as he could without telling her he'd turned into a man who would have disgusted his father. Then again, nearly everything about him had revolted the old man. "My beast needs Zack around," he said gruffly. "As much as it needs you. We, the three of us, are mates."

"Like Roane and Caitlyn."

Ace nodded. "Right." Zack remained strangely silent, leaving Ace to fill in the blanks. "The *change* is hard enough on your body, but when your sexual needs start taking over..." *Wrong direction*. "See, it's better that we bond this way first, in our own skins. Hell, Kelly, I've wanted you from the moment I laid eyes on you. You're so damned sexy." He narrowed in on those full lips, his cock feeling their softness all over again.

"So why did you wait so long to make a move?"

"We -- I -- was afraid of hurting you. Sometimes when I get really excited, the beast comes out. With another woman, it wouldn't matter so much." Kelly visibly withdrew.

*Another woman. Great going, Ace.* He looked to Zack for help but couldn't see his face over Kelly's shoulder. "I'm not saying this right. Look, I haven't been a saint these last years. But other women are easy. They don't mean anything. I never got all that excited, if you want the truth. With you, though, it's different.

"God, do you have any idea how hard it is to hide a hard-on? I have one around you all the time. I dream about you. I see you when I'm jacking off in the shower."

Her mouth dropped open as she stared at him.

"When the mating heat hit, it was you I was thinking of."

Zack rolled away and off the bed. "Be right back." He disappeared from the bedroom.

Ace continued, enthralled with the wonder in Kelly's baby blues. He hadn't meant to tell her the truth, but he couldn't stop himself. "The mating heat rules everything. You think craving sex is bad now, wait until you're *changed* and in a full heat. You desire with your last breath, but you're only drawn to Cirs." He swallowed hard, hoping she couldn't see the awkwardness he felt. "I thought about you all the time. When I was in heat, it made the taking so much easier. Your face in front of mine. Your sexy smile, those killer eyes." He stared at the rest of her, and he hardened again. "Those tits, that pussy." His voice denigrated into a low growl.

"Ace," she moaned his name. "You're turning me on again. I shouldn't still want sex, not after what we did." She leaned over and kissed him, the first time she'd taken the initiative. His beast quivered with delight. "I can't help it. You're so sexy. And the thought of you and Zack together... I want you again. Right now."

Ace rolled her to her back. He shoved her thighs wide, telling himself she hadn't meant what she'd said. *Zack and him together.* He had a quick thought, of the way Zack had eventually taken over the fantasies Ace had of Kelly while they fucked, until Ace craved him as much as he craved the woman beneath him.

He pushed inside her slick folds. The feel of her sucking heat drowned out his capability for reflection, and they both moaned at the contact.

"You feel so tight around me." He began thrusting in and out, slowly. "Kelly, it's been so hard not to think about you. About us." *All of us.* "Zack and I, we've waited so long." He intentionally angled his pelvis so that he grazed her clit. Her breasts shook, taunting him with what was now his.

Ace sucked a rosy nipple into his mouth, licking and biting until she cried out his name. "Such pretty tits, Kelly. So big and suckable." He laved attention on them until he had her screaming. Staring into her face as he pounded into her, he was about to blow when she yanked him in for a kiss.

Penetrating his mouth with her tongue, she pushed in and out, reminding him of how good it felt when Zack fucked him. His beast wanted him to remember, demanded that he acknowledge *all* of his mates as he played with Kelly. He moaned and fucked her harder, faster, until she cried out and clamped around him with incredible strength.

"Kelly, yes, baby, yes." He kissed her as he came, letting her body milk him. Ace eventually relaxed into his climax, letting the ripples of pleasure leech away his fears and regrets. Damn, but it just kept getting better every time. The way it did with Zack.

Glancing over his shoulder and expecting to see his friend watching, since he clearly hadn't joined them, Ace was surprised to see the room empty. *Probably giving me some special time with Kelly. Zack always knows what I need, even when I don't,* Ace thought with warmth as he pulled Kelly close, feeling absolutely drained. *Zack's the best. No wonder I love the jerk.*

\* \* \* \* \*

Zack drove down the Garden State Parkway like the car was on fire. He didn't give two shits about cops, other drivers, or Ace at the moment. The darkness of night soothed that part of him that wanted to curl into a ball and lick his wounds. And that sadness kick-started

the anger already brewing within. A rage unlike any other filled him, and he knew if he didn't get far away, he'd hurt someone he cared about. Probably the same person who didn't care about him.

To hear Ace admit he thought about Kelly while Zack fucked him really hurt. Sure, Zack had fantasized about Kelly as well. It didn't matter who he was with at the time; so long as the person was female, she wore Kelly's face. But when he was with Ace, his focus shifted. No one could replace Ace in his heart. No matter how many times the mating heat had forced him to seek pleasure with Roane and the others; it was always Ace he came back to.

Lately, they'd both satisfied each other. Zack had foolishly believed Ace had come to accept him as more than his beast. If not, why the hell had Ace jacked him off in his bedroom? Why blow him before they'd left? Was it simply lust? Was Ace exorcising him out of his blood to make room for Kelly?

An odd jealousy formed, but for whom, Zack wasn't sure. He wanted Kelly just as much as Ace did. He cried out for her with every breath he took. But Ace had her. Ace was probably still fucking her, uncaring that Zack was gone. Because he had Kelly, Ace had no more need for Zack. She'd effectively excluded him, and she had no idea what she'd done.

Speeding toward an exit and uncaring of where it led, Zack wanted to move as far away from his heart as he could. Fuck Ace Two Bears. Zack's vision blurred, making him even angrier. He could just hear Ace taunting him. *Yeah, you're a real man now. Crying like a fucking girl. Damned pussy. You should have been born with one.* Rage and hurt mingled until Zack was blinded by it. He accelerated off the main road into a wooded area. Crashing through the barrier, the Wrangler smashed into a tree. Instinct was the only thing that saved him. He *changed* as he smashed through the windshield into a thick tree trunk.

Bone crunched, but the hard shell of his skull held firm. Trying to clear the haze in his mind, Zack stood up on shaky feet and clutched his side. He'd reopened the stitching in his wound and might have broken a rib. *Dammit.* The pain amped his temper.

Muttering under his breath, he stomped into the marsh surrounding the wreck of his car. The lateness of the hour and lack of moonlight helped camouflage him, but he really needed to avoid the roads until he *changed* back.

So much for maintaining control. Derrick was right. Women *were* trouble.

Things had been going so well with Ace. Then *she'd* come between them. Kelly, the woman he wanted as much as his next breath. Apparently, she found Ace as captivating as he did. Now he was ass out, both of his mates drawn to each other, but not to him.

Oh, Zack knew he'd made Kelly feel good. He could fuck like a stallion. But she hadn't looked at him the way she'd looked at Ace, with love in her eyes.

Furious and not sure what to do about it, Zack tried to find a way out of the mess his life had become as he headed deeper into the marsh. He was a Circ. He couldn't turn that off. Every month he had to endure the mating heat. With Ace so close, yet so distant, Zack didn't think he could handle forcing his friend to take him anymore. No matter how hard they came together when *changed*, Ace always resented it afterward. Zack had hoped Ace might change his mind, especially after their last few days together. But now, he didn't know what to think.

Brooding, he pushed onward, the mosquitoes and gnats unable to bite through his thick skin. *Thick only in the physical sense. All this emotional bullshit is annoying.*

So mired in his worries, Zack failed to note the warning silence around him until it was too late. He turned as he sensed eyes upon him. At the same instant, something solid plowed into him, taking him to the ground.

"Dammit, she's *mine*," a hoarse voice snarled as claws ripped into him.

Grunting under the assault, Zack quickly shoved the Circ from him and stood, cursing himself for his lack of attention.

Facing off against a rogue as tall as himself, Zack wondered how far gone this one might be. "What the fuck's your problem?"



"The female's scent all over you is wrong. She's mine," the Circ growled before he launched himself again.

Prepared, Zack caught him and flipped the asshole over his shoulder. The rage he'd felt about Kelly and Ace returned full force. Now this guy thought he had a claim to Kelly too?

"Stand in line, pal." Zack met him blow for blow. He slipped under the male's defenses with a long slash to his stomach followed by a kick to his solar plexus. As the Circ went down, Zack followed, continually striking the Circ's face and abdomen. He managed a swift kick to his opponent's groin as well, the haze of rage he felt further encouraging him. Moments later, a satisfying groan of pain stopped him, and he stared down in shock at what he'd done. The Circ lay in a broken heap at his feet. The dumbass had started it, but still, Zack wasn't this much of a brute. Not usually.

Feeling guilty, but wanting to make the most of this confrontation, he yanked the Circ up by his hair. "You don't seem psychotic, just out of your mind if you think Kelly's yours."

"Not all of us are crazy, English. We've been developing quite nicely with what Weston's bitch gave us."

*Caitlyn?* What did she have to do with this? Then what the rogue said hit him. *Holy shit.* Pearson Labs was producing sane Circs again. But how long until they went nuts this time?

"How long you been a Circ?"

"A few months. So what?"

That was longer than the others Pearson Labs had turned out.

"What makes you think my female is yours?" he asked, avoiding the Circ's question.

The rogue snorted. "Yours? Why? Because you own her right now? She was promised to *me*. I was designed just for her." The rogue smiled, his left fang chipped, his mouth a bloody mask of joy. "She won't be able to deny her blood, any more than she'll deny her *change*. With you and Two Bears dead, and the right male by her side, she and I will --"

The male grimaced and stopped talking as several darts hit him hard in the neck. Another planted itself in Zack's thigh, and he dived for cover. His night had gone from bad to worse. He needed desperately to get back to Doc with this news. Elliot Pearl had managed to discover a new way to tamper with the Circe serum. Who knew how badly this next batch would behave? It had taken the original Circe's Recruits five years before most of them had manifested dangerously aggressive behavior. The current rogues they encountered only took days, a few weeks at most, before they lost it. But this guy had been Circ for *months*?

A man stepped out of the shadows. Zack watched him from where he crouched in the brush as a familiar face spoke into a handheld device. "Fuck! If Pearl finds out about this, we're all dead. Find Chenko and drag his ass back to base. I want the other Circ alive. I've got this one."

Simon Dunn. The same asshole who'd almost raped Caitlyn weeks ago, and who'd threatened her yet again not soon after. Zack looked forward to this battle. Then more vehicles arrived, and with them the sound of many voices, more than he could handle at this point, alone and drugged.

Logic prevailed. Zack yanked the dart out of his side and prayed it wouldn't make him too woozy to seek shelter. He tore through the marsh, uncaring about making noise, and sought the bliss of the ocean.

Sinking under the cold waves of life, he swam as if his own depended upon it.

\* \* \* \* \*

Derrick cursed the shrill sound of his cell phone, pissed that Hale had managed, yet again, to change his ringtone into something earsplitting and just plain ugly.

"What?" He swore and glared at the blue glow of his alarm clock. Four thirty in the goddamn morning. "This had better be good."

"Yo, D. I need a ride. A quiet ride, real soon." Zack's slurred voice shook him wide awake. Zack was supposed to be chilling out with Ace and Kelly. Doc had been pretty

adamant they weren't to be bothered with anything until he gave the go-ahead. Frankly, Derrick thought it was about damned time. He didn't know what to make of this, but his instincts warned he wasn't going to like it.

"Where are you?" Derrick rolled out of bed and threw on some clothes. He stuffed his feet into sandals and made his way quietly out the back door toward the garage.

"Not sure." Zack's breathing didn't sound right. "I'm at a gas station, a Wawa, but..." He paused, and Derrick heard voices in the background. "Try Tuckahoe Road. Bring a med kit."

"I'll be there as soon as I can. Sit tight."

Derrick disconnected. After finding a medical kit and a set of towels from the utility room in the garage, he grabbed keys off the key rack, slammed into Hale's Toyota 4Runner, and took off.

Forty-five minutes later, he had Zack bundled up and lying down in the backseat.

"You look like shit." Derrick glared into the rearview mirror, but Zack seemed too weary to care. Starting the vehicle, he took pains to watch the speed limit, driving away from traffic into the darkness of the rural roads he was more familiar with. Taking a long, back way home, he drove another ten minutes before jerking the car off the road.

"Here it comes," Zack murmured.

"What the fuck is going on?" Derrick roared. "It's nearly five in the morning, and instead of shacking up with your boyfriend and your new girlfriend far away from your horny buddies, you're what, picking a fight in the swamp?"

Zack groaned. "I hate when my bones heal. Fucking hurts."

"I don't care." Derrick hated feeling worried. Ever since encountering that bloodbath in the woods a few days ago, he'd done nothing *but* worry. First for Ace, now for Zack. "Tell me exactly what happened."

"Things were...intense...at Kelly's. I needed some space." Zack swallowed. "I accidentally ran off the road somewhere off the Parkway. I don't even remember the exit I took. I busted my ribs and my stitches. Then the PPA found me."

"No shit?" Derrick saw Zack's half-assed attempt to sit up and swore again. "Don't move."

He left the vehicle and popped the rear hatch. Then he carried Zack out of the backseat and sat him in the way back, as if he weighed no more than a child. Zack said nothing. His eyes were glazed, but Derrick didn't know if it was due to his injuries or the faint scent of wrongness he smelled.

"Keep talking while I stitch you up." Zack remained silent. "Unless you'd rather Doc did it?"

"Hell." Zack exhaled on a groan and lifted his arm over his head, giving Derrick access to the gravest of his wounds. "I wasn't paying attention. A rogue Circ knocked me on my ass. Don't worry, I took care of him. The dick actually claimed Kelly belongs to *him*." *Changed* muscle rippled under Zack's skin.

"Calm down. We both know she's yours."

"Yeah, right." Zack sighed. "Anyway, he said some things that really concerned me." Zack proceeded to tell him about some weird-ass shit -- rogue Circs that weren't crazy, Caitlyn's DNA used as testing, and a Circ claiming he'd been created for Kelly.

*What the fuck?*

"Then the PPA showed up and bagged him before he could tell me more," Zack finished.

"They killed him?" A good rogue Circ was a dead rogue Circ, in Derrick's opinion. He didn't share Doc's Pollyanna attitude about saving the monsters.

"No. They shot him up with the same stuff they shot me with. I only took one dart. They plugged him with them. The damned things penetrated my beast, man. Tough stuff."

“So the PPA showed up. You’re lucky you escaped.” Derrick used the sealing tape Doc had shoved in the kits. Not all of Zack’s stitches had popped, but the wound did seep blood. He bandaged the main injury and patched up a few other cuts healing at a sluggish rate, no doubt because of the PPA tranquilizer running in Zack’s bloodstream.

“I know.” Zack seemed to be wrestling with some decision. “Look, D, I need you to fill Doc in on this crap tomorrow.” He glanced beyond Derrick into the dark. “Hell, make that later today. But I’d consider it a real favor if you’d just drop me off at Kelly’s and keep my situation under wraps for now.”

“Ah, okay.” Zack never asked for anything. “You sure you want to go back to Kelly’s? If it was pretty intense there, you can always crash in my room. I won’t tell anyone you’re there.”

“Thanks, D. But Kelly needs me right now, even if she doesn’t realize it.” Zack smiled, and Derrick knew what Ace and Kelly saw when they looked at him.

Zack English had a masculine beauty that went so much deeper than his looks. He attracted women with ease, yet it was that selflessness, that eager warmth to share what he had, that pulled others closer. Derrick didn’t like many people, and he rarely let others know what he felt. With Zack, he’d never felt the need to protect himself. Zack provided for and protected others all the time. It seemed to Derrick that maybe, it was time somebody returned the favor.

“Lie down back here. I’ll have you back at Kelly’s in no time.”

“Thanks again.” Zack lay down and closed his eyes.

Yeah, he’d take Zack back, no more questions asked. Zack needed his help, no doubt with that dumbass Cree. Derrick and the entire squad knew the two men were a pair. He’d never known Ace or Zack to be with other men sexually and chalked up the unusual attraction to Circ genes. Then again, who knew what the others did on their limited off time? But the way Ace acted around Zack, drawn yet uncomfortable, spoke volumes.

If Derrick were a betting man, he'd say adding Kelly to the mix was a complication that made *everything* difficult to deal with. Driving in comfortable silence, they made it to Kelly's in no time.

With Derrick's help, Zack eased himself out of the truck. He slapped Derrick on the shoulder. "Thanks. You're a good man."

"Good luck."

Waiting until Zack entered the house, Derrick sighed. Instead of returning back to base, he pulled over and parked down the street. He wanted to be close enough to keep an eye on the threesome, just in case the PPA decided on a return visit. Grumbling at what promised to be a shitty day without his necessary seven hours of shut-eye, he settled in with a favorite radio program. But just to be contrary, he decided not to refill the gas tank on the way home, no matter how much shit Hale gave him for it.

"That'll teach you to screw with my cell, Hale." Nothing like pissing off at least one member of the team.

## Chapter Six

Several hours later, Kelly debated the wisdom of contacting Doc when she laid eyes on Zack.

“Where the hell have you been?” Ace asked, then his eyes widened. “Shit, what happened to you?”

“Oh, Zack.” Kelly raced to his side and ran her hands over the faded bruises on Zack’s chest and belly as he stood in the middle of the kitchen. “You look terrible. How do you feel?”

Zack shrugged and tried to turn away. For the first time that she could remember, he wouldn’t meet her gaze. She exchanged a confused look with Ace. “Zack, what’s wrong?”

“Nothing. I couldn’t sleep last night and went out for a beer. Got in the middle of a fight. No biggie. I’ll heal.” He smiled, but the expression didn’t quite reach his eyes. “What’s for breakfast?”

“Eggs and bacon,” she murmured, understanding there was more he hadn’t said. Maybe he’d speak if she left him with Ace. She knew how close they were. A blush heated her cheeks as she recalled what she now knew about the mating heat. Oh, yes, Zack and Ace were *very* close. “I, um, I’ll be right back.”

She left the kitchen but lingered in the hallway.

"Come on, man. What's up?" The concern in Ace's voice warmed her.

"Nothing."

"Don't lie to me." Ace's anger was justified. Why the heck was Zack pretending his bruises weren't a big deal?

"What do you care?"

Kelly started. Why did Zack suddenly sound angry?

"You're hurt. Why wouldn't I care?" Ace quieted. "Is this about Kelly? You angry I was with her without you? Hell, I'd have waited for you, but it's just..."

*Oh, God. Please don't let them fight over me.* This was part of what she'd worried about. A physical relationship with two men she could more than handle, as evidenced by how aroused she got just thinking about them. But the emotional minefield they'd need to wade through would take all of them working together.

"It's not Kelly. She's great." His sure words did nothing to make her feel better, especially because she heard the echo of loneliness there, which made no sense.

"Then what is it?" Ace asked quietly.

"Look, I had a long night. I'm tired. Can we do this later?"

Kelly slipped around the corner back into the kitchen.

Zack looked drawn, nothing like the man who'd taken control last night, who'd made her come so hard, she'd fallen into instant, intractable lust. Add that to the love she'd never been able to deny for him, and she felt horribly worried. Anxiety made her heart ache for this wounded man.

Zack didn't wait for Ace to reply. He turned his back on his friend and walked away. When he neared her he stopped for a kiss, then moved around her down the hallway. A door closed, followed by the *snick* of a lock.



Kelly didn't know what to say. It was as if Zack had just shut them out of his life. Even as she thought it, she knew she exaggerated. Hell, he probably just needed to wind down and wanted some privacy. But she wasn't used to seeing Zack as anything but confident and flirty. Right now, he seemed so sad and tired, not at all like himself.

Ace folded her into his arms, as if sensing her need for togetherness. His embrace was her undoing.

She struggled to hold back tears. "I'm so sorry, Ace. This is my fault. I've come between you two."

"Hell, no." Ace pulled back, his face flushed. "Kelly, my relationship with Zack has nothing to do with you. I mean it does, but it's been strained since before you were ever in the picture." He sighed. "Can you make some coffee? I'm not at my best before I've had a cup."

"Sure." She kissed him on the mouth gently, but the heat was there. The kiss lingered longer than she'd intended, especially when she felt his hands inside her robe cupping her breasts.

"Fuck. I want you all the time," Ace moaned against her mouth. "Knowing what it's like is only making the need worse. Wait until we do it when *changed*." He kissed her one last time. "All your sensations are magnified." His eyes glowed. "Zack's amazing when he's normal, but when he's *changed*, it's like he's living, breathing sex."

Kelly stepped away to brew the coffee. She glanced over her shoulder, wanting to see Ace's face. "That's the first time you've ever alluded to sex with Zack. You guys never touch except to punch or push each other. At least, that's all I've ever seen."

"Yeah, well. We do. Have sex, that is." Ace looked so incredibly uncomfortable with the discussion, which made him that much more attractive. A man with muscles on top of muscles who was scared of something as simple as intimacy. It gave Kelly equal footing in a world she knew little about.

"Is that so embarrassing to admit?"

"You have no idea." Ace shook his head. "You might as well be dead if you've kissed a guy where I come from. You didn't cry in my family. Didn't show love or affection for anyone. Mom took off when I was three. Dad was an asshole," he said bluntly. "If you weren't tough, rock solid, he wanted nothing to do with you. No matter how great I was in football or how many fights I won, it was never enough."

"I'm sorry, Ace."

"Hey, it is what it is. I haven't seen the old man in years. But I can't help thinking about what he'd think about me and Zack." Ace stared at the empty mug Kelly handed him. "Being with you, on the other hand, would be okay."

"Just okay?" she teased.

The hunger in Ace's brown eyes startled her. "Hell, I might get a medal for fucking you as hard as I have."

She blushed. She couldn't help it.

"Sorry. I should have said, for *making love* with you as hard as I have. Zack's always on my ass not to curse in front of you."

She didn't mention that "ass" was also a curse word. "He's something of a gentleman, isn't he?"

"He likes to think so," Ace said with a grin that quickly faded. "Something's wrong with him. I feel it. It's more than physical. He's different now."

"I know. I sensed it too. Like he's hurting. Maybe he needs time." Even as she said it, the beast growing within roared its displeasure.

The coffee beeped, and she poured some for them both.

Ace stared. "Your eyes are *changing*. I'm not sure how much time we can give him."

Sudden need for her wounded mate consumed her.

Ace must have sensed her need, because after a moment of silence, he said, "You know, I think it's best that you see what's wrong with him." He nodded toward the hallway. "Don't worry. I'm not going anywhere."

Kelly left her coffee without taking a sip. Down the hallway, she saw a closed door and reached above the picture frame next to the door for the key. Opening the door quietly, she entered and closed it behind her. Zack lay on his back on the spare bed. His hands were behind his head as he stared at the ceiling.

"I thought you were tired," she said softly.

"I am." His low voice sent shivers down her spine. Zack was so sexy, though he never tried to be. So handsome, so full of enthusiasm...usually. Now, he looked worn. "I can't sleep."

"Can I help?" She wanted to soothe him, and without realizing exactly how she did it, she released a light perfume in the air.

Zack tensed. "No." He had to clear his throat to continue. "I'm fine."

"Liar." Kelly sat next to Zack on the bed and traced the faint bruises on his chest. He healed at a remarkable rate. "Let me see your bandage."

Zack stared up at her, his light gray eyes full of pain.

"Oh, Zack. Let me help you." She peeled back the bandage to see his wound healing. Tapping it gently back in place, she stroked his chest with a light touch and ran her hands down to his waist. "Your shorts are damp."

He blinked slowly, his gaze lingering on her mouth. "I had a swim."

"In a bar?" she asked dryly.

He didn't seem to care that he'd been caught in a lie. "Yeah."

She deliberately shoved her hand under his waistband and closed it around his steely cock. Zack hissed his pleasure.

"Zack, I don't know what's bothering you. But I want to help. I want to heal your hurts," she whispered and released him. Slowly, she inched down his shorts, loving the way they clung to his muscles. One muscle in particular jumped when she eased the fabric down and off his body. "You're so big."

He groaned. "Only around you."

*And Ace*, he didn't say. Interesting. Kelly removed her robe and knelt, straddling his knees.

"Your breasts are full, your nipples hard," Zack rasped.

"Yours are too." Kelly leaned over him, closing her eyes as her breasts nestled his cock. She reached out and tweaked his nipple. Sliding over him, careful of his stitches, she took that small bud in her mouth.

*"Christ."*

She sucked him and added teeth, the way he and Ace had done to her last night. "I missed you before. When Ace was fucking me," she added.

Whether it was the thought of Ace taking her or her language, she wasn't sure, but Zack acted like a male in the throes of his own heat. He arched against her, rubbing his cock under her belly. His arms left his head to cage her back.

"You're so soft."

"You're so hard." Kelly continued to kiss him, laving his nipples and chest, running her mouth down his body toward that rigid part of him. Gratified to see his slit filled with arousal, she lowered to taste it.

"Yes," he hissed as she took him in her mouth. He threaded his fingers through her hair and pushed more of himself inside her.

Kelly wanted to bring him pleasure, to soothe his aches and make him happy once more. But Zack refused to let it be only about him.

"Put your pussy over my mouth," he commanded, tugging at her thighs.

Helpless to refuse him, she took him deeper into her mouth and circled his body. With pleasure, she straddled his face.

He didn't tease, didn't go slow. Zack sucked her clit hard and rammed two fingers inside her.

Aroused beyond measure, she sucked harder, taking more and more of him in. She rubbed his balls and eased a finger between his cheeks, wanting to shove inside his hole, the way Ace must when they came together.

Zack moaned and sucked harder, echoing her excitement. The scent of sex filled the air, a smell her beast approved of. She wanted more, to push the male beneath her past his limits.

Kelly added the press of teeth against the sensitive skin under his cockhead just as she pressed deeper into his ass.

Zack began pistoning his hips, arching up harder and harder into her mouth as he sucked ravenously, eating her with moans while he fucked her with his fingers. He pushed deep while he tasted her, but she needed his seed.

Clamping her mouth around his shaft, she tugged, caught in her own ecstasy -- the feel of his lips, his tongue. She was so close to exploding...and then he shifted the pressure on her clit enough to slow her down before ramping the tension again.

He drew her flesh into his mouth with a groan, the rumble of his pleasure vibrating through her very womb. She sucked hard as she came, unable to stop.

Warm cum filled her mouth, spurting into the back of her throat while Zack gripped her tight. He continued to lick her, tasting all of her cream while she swallowed him up.

It was some time before they could move. He kissed her one last time and shifted her to lie on top of him.

"Zack, watch your wounds."

He grinned, the pain that had clouded his gaze nowhere to be found as he stared up at her with possession. "Thanks, baby. You make me feel good."

Purring like a cat, Zack made her think of an untamed panther. Sleek and dark and dangerous. Tamed with a bowl of cream.

"That's the Zack I know and love," she murmured, content until she realized what she'd said. "I mean, I...I'm glad you're happy now. You had me worried."

His eyes twinkled, his grin sincere. "Oh, I'm happy, Kelly. I came inside that sweet mouth of yours, and I can't stop purring. You taste so good, like honey." He licked his lips, and his gaze darkened. "I want you again. All the time." Zack's smile faded. "I think your heat's coming on strong."

"Yeah, and it's going to push ours up ahead of schedule," Ace added from the open doorway.

Kelly froze. "I, ah, how long were you standing there?" She hadn't heard the door open, and from Zack's flat expression, neither had he.

"Long enough to come in my shorts." Ace grimaced. "Watching that... Man, I want to see it all over again."

The tension in Zack told her where the problem lay -- in Ace's direction.

"You know, I really am tired." Zack kissed her shoulder and gave her a hug. "I don't mean to be insensitive, but I think a rest would help me heal faster. I have a feeling we're going to need our strength for tonight."

"Okay." She stroked his face, so in love with him.

"Thanks, Kelly. I think I can sleep now." He winked and kissed her palm, dismissing Ace as easily as if closing the door. "Wake me in a few hours, would you, Kel?"

"Sure. Get some rest." She leaned down to kiss his cheek, put on her robe, and pushed a scowling Ace out of the room.

Once outside, she had to forcibly drag Ace back down the hallway toward the kitchen.

"It's you," she said bluntly.

Ace clenched his jaw. "Yeah, I get that. What the hell's his problem? He was all about sharing, not wanting to fight. Now he wants to keep us separate?"

Kelly felt off balance. Her body kept telling her to take more of them while her heart said to slow down. They all needed to know each other better before she lost her mind to the mating heat. She'd learned more about Ace this morning than she had in the three years they'd known each other. His childhood explained a lot about his attitude.

Always the hardhead. The macho male. The one with the cocky grin and lazy stance who said he could take whatever was shoved at him. Ace's way of dealing with his insecurities was to pretend he didn't have any.

Then there was Zack. The easygoing, friendly partner. The one who took more of Ace's crap than anyone on the team. The gentle giant who stirred Kelly's need to protect, but who could turn into a dominating beast in the bedroom.

Her mates had so much depth that needed plumbing, but she had a feeling they needed to start with each other. She had her own questions that needed answering, and she needed her own space to think as well.

"Ace?"

"What's the matter?"

"I need to see Caitlyn. Some girl time would really help, you know?"

He shrugged. "Sure."

"Plus, there's a few things I need to do at the compound --"

"Hell, no. I don't want you around those horny bastards." Ace fumed.

"Ah, okay." She hadn't thought about that. Still, she could use an objective viewpoint. Caitlyn had once been where she was now. "But I don't see the harm in going over there. I love Derrick and Hale. I know they'd never do anything to harm me. And Roane's so in love with Caitlyn, he's no threat."

"Yeah, well, you might want to keep all that love to yourself," he snarled. "If the guys scent you now, they'll want to fuck you. And I won't be able to stop myself from taking them apart."

He wasn't joking. Instead of frightening her, his anger appeased her. She needed a worthy mate, one strong enough to protect and support her. Ace's aggression triggered satisfaction in her beast.

"Okay. Then I'll call her to come here."

He nodded stiffly, clenching his fingers tight.

"Relax, Ace. I can barely handle two mates. I don't need any more."

"That's right. *Mates*. Mine and Zack's." Ace stepped forward to nuzzle her cheek. "Mmm." He stepped back. "Okay. You call Caitlyn, and I'll make myself scarce. I promise. Besides, I need a shower. I wasn't kidding about coming in my shorts." His eyes flashed with heat. "That was really hot. I wonder how we can turn sixty-nine into a three-way."

He grinned and left her staring after that perfect ass, as if he knew what he did to her. Kelly groaned and fanned herself. *Oh, hell. I'm really turning into a bitch in heat. I need help.*

She picked up the phone and dialed Caitlyn.

Caitlyn arrived a few hours later.

"Thanks so much for coming. Ace doesn't want me around the compound until I can put a lid on...this."

Caitlyn smiled. "He's right. You're safer away from the others just now. Doc explained to us what's going on. Should I say congratulations?"

Kelly shrugged. "Ah, sure. Thanks, I guess."

"This is a hard thing to understand until you go through it."



“That’s an understatement.”

Caitlyn nodded and sat across from Kelly in the living room. “Let me give you what I know. The guys mean well, but even Doc doesn’t understand that being a female Circ is a lot different from being a male Circ. Women and men think differently. To men, it’s a huge plus to be bigger and stronger.”

“Frankly, I don’t see the advantage being gargantuan will get me, not when I have to run errands around people I know.”

“Yeah, that might be a problem. Scaring the mailman won’t win you any favors around town.” Caitlyn grinned.

“Please tell me this will get easier.” Kelly sighed. “I like that I’m closer to Ace and Zack, but this intense relationship is complicating things. I’m so confused right now.”

“Maybe I can help with that. As far as what to expect physically, you’re going to turn into a she-beast. When *changed*, you’ll be able to see, hear, smell, and taste like you wouldn’t believe. The enhanced senses are there when you’re normal, too. But they’re magnified to the nth degree when you’re beastly.”

“Beastly. Great. You mention your beast a lot.”

“It makes sense. You probably already understand that part of yourself I’m talking about. Oh, and before I forget, the first time you *change*, it might get a little rocky.” Caitlyn blushed.

“Rocky?”

“Since you’re not mated yet, you’ll want to screw anything not nailed down. That’s why Ace wants you to stay far away from the others. And trust me, when you’re mated, you’ll know. It’s more than just sex with the guys. It’s something hard to describe.” She paused. “Any questions?”

Kelly stared, wide-eyed. “Uh...”

“Sorry, too much? It’s a lot to take in. And you have two guys. That’s gonna be tough.”

They remained silent for a moment as Kelly absorbed what Caitlyn had said. "So what's it like? The mating heat?"

Caitlyn squirmed. "You want to screw everybody with a Circ heartbeat. I couldn't control myself around Roane at all. But at the same time, I had to challenge him. My beast wanted someone I couldn't control. He had to be the strongest, fastest, toughest -- you get the drift. It's an animal urge, Kelly. You just have to accept and go with it."

"I understand what you're saying, but I don't want everybody. I only want Zack and Ace. You told me I haven't yet mated, but my beast knows what it wants."

"What *she* wants," Caitlyn corrected. "The beast we talk about lives inside you. It's a real part of you now, not just an instinct or a feeling. I think of mine as a second level of consciousness. And your beast is never wrong. Doc thinks she's almost psychic."

Kelly considered that. "Lately, I've sensed when something's bothering the guys, or if something's wrong. And it's more than hunch. It's almost like I know things."

"Right. My intuition pretty much flares at anything to do with Roane or my safety. But there it ends. It's not like I'm psychic now, just really tuned in to what I consider necessary for survival."

Kelly nodded. She'd known something bothered Zack. And she'd felt off even after lying with Ace -- when Zack had gone. "Does your beast control you?"

"Only in the first stage of the mating heat. But Roane quickly took charge of that." Caitlyn grinned. "It's so weird now to think I was dying. Before the others found me, I'd been very ill. Doc explained I was simply gearing up for my first *change*. It was a huge relief to know I'm perfectly healthy."

"Yeah, me too." Kelly explained her circumstances. "For the longest time I thought there was something wrong with me. Doc's shots helped; of course they helped. He was stopping my development." She should have been angrier about his deception, but she couldn't fault Doc for wanting to help her and heed her mother's wishes at the same time.

“Does it feel finally like you belong?” Caitlyn asked. “I was alone for a long time. Now I’m happy, fulfilled. The Web design business is booming. Roane is mine, and I have a new family.” Caitlyn frowned. “If it weren’t for the PPA, life would be perfect.”

“I feel closer to all of you, but I admit, I’m a little worried about the PPA. I never used to worry about them, since they were a part of Doc’s life I didn’t belong to. But now I wonder if I’ll lose control of my Circ side in public. What if they find out about me? You think they might try to kidnap me like they once tried with you?” Kelly had been living with that fear since she’d learned the truth from Doc.

“I don’t know. Until you’re more secure with being a Circ, I’d suggest staying close to Doc and the guys. *Your* guys,” Caitlyn emphasized with a grin.

“Not a problem.”

Caitlyn stared at her.

“What?”

Her friend leaned closer. “So, what’s it like with Zack *and* Ace?”

“Words can’t describe it.” Kelly gave her a naughty smile.

“Wow.” Caitlyn’s eyes widened. “It’s incredible with Roane. I can’t imagine two guys with that stamina.” She turned bright red. “I mean, I can, it’s just that --”

Kelly looked over her shoulder to see what caught Caitlyn’s attention.

Ace stood in the kitchen wearing a pair of shorts and nothing else. Talk about a perfect body. He grabbed a soda from the refrigerator and paused when he felt them staring at him. “What?”

“Nothing.” Caitlyn shook her head.

Ace gave her an odd look. He winked at Kelly, saluted her with his drink, and left.

“Double wow,” Caitlyn breathed. “You have your own personal bookends.”

Kelly laughed out loud. “Bookends? I think I like that better than ‘boy toys.’”

“Yeah, well, I don’t want to talk about your sexy playthings. They remind me of my ‘boy toy,’ and I’m deliberately steering clear of Roane for a while. That idiot had the nerve to argue my designs for our bedroom.” Caitlyn scowled as she reached for her ample purse. She pulled out three bottles of nail polish. “How about we hang out and do girl stuff? Pretty Pink, Barely Blue, or Primal Purple?”

“Primal Purple.” Though she wondered if the polish would cover her beast’s nails later tonight. Kelly felt the need to *change* with every breath she took. It wouldn’t be much longer until she let it out. At the thought, her beast purred its approval. “Once you *changed*, did you finally settle into your own skin?”

Caitlyn nodded. “I was scared at first, but after you embrace that part of yourself, you’ll feel better than you ever have. You can’t deny who you are, no matter how much you might want to. And trust me, after you claim those knuckleheads who’ve been mooning over you for years, you’ll wonder what held you back so long.”

Remembering how good she’d felt sandwiched between them, Kelly smiled and focused on the polish in Caitlyn’s hand. Tonight couldn’t come soon enough.

## Chapter Seven

“Caitlyn Chase is leaving. Derrick Packard is driving her back,” Simon reported to central command.

“Good. Keep an eye on the house. I want to know the minute Malloy is vulnerable. Our Circ is standing by.” Command disconnected.

Some days it paid to be a normal human. Simon grinned, feeling superior once more. For all that those dickhead Circs strutted around Pearson Labs, there were many instances where only a human could perform.

Take this cushy assignment. He had to watch the woman’s house. Due to the house’s isolated location, Simon remained a quarter mile away near a neighboring housing development, where he could better blend in. He’d planted surveillance equipment several nights ago, keeping watch on the woman he’d once seen with Caitlyn Chase -- the one that got away.

Malloy wasn’t bad. Big breasts, a nice ass, and dark red hair he could easily imagine digging his hands into. She didn’t have that same animal magnetism Caitlyn had, but then, from what he understood, she hadn’t *changed* yet.

That was what the surveillance was for. According to Pearl, the woman neared her time. She'd turn into an animal, one who wanted nothing more than to be fucked by her own kind. Able to sniff out any rogue Circs in the area, she'd alert the assholes with her of the PPA's presence. Hence the need for a human operative. He blended in with the rest of her neighbors.

Simon sighed. So far, so good. English and Two Bears remained inside the house. Two Bears had recovered nicely, and English hadn't taken enough damage the last time he'd seen him. Not enough to seriously mess up his sexual performance, at any rate.

Simon still wanted to know how Pearl received so much information on Circe's Recruits, but the scientist remained closemouthed. No doubt he relished knowing what his original Circs were up to every second of the day. Then too, there was a rumor floating about that the PPA had a mole within its own ranks. Several subjects in the subbasement had expired sooner than anticipated, and computer files vanished, or so Simon had overheard Pearl tell McKinley in a moment of panic. Pearl suspected a traitor, as did Simon.

For that reason, Pearl kept his secrets hidden and had revised step two of the new Project Dawn's timetable. The original plan had been to seduce Kelly Malloy and manipulate her away from Circe's Recruits and Doc -- Dr. Evan Dennis. With worry of a traitor in their midst, Pearl had taken Simon under his wing and confided a few things.

Kelly Malloy was *changing* sooner than anticipated. Thanks to the rogue Circ attack in upstate New York, Ace Two Bears had been infected with a drug that, when passed to Malloy, would hasten her *change*. Apparently, Two Bears had fucked her well, because Malloy was in serious heat. The little slut had taken on Two Bears *and* English and was due to *change* any minute.

The cameras around her property would detect heat signatures and rises in pheromone levels. All Simon had to do was sit and wait, report back to his boss, and follow new orders.

Easier said than done. He frowned. It had been a week since he'd gotten laid. One thing he could say for the freaks in the basement, they craved sex. He could fuck as many of the females as he liked. So long as he kept them tied down and drugged so they wouldn't *change*, he suffered no injuries, just mind-blowing orgasms. Or at least he had, until that bitch took over the test subjects and took away his clearance for the sublevels.

Sabrina Torrence. Talk about frigid. The only woman he'd met that had the nerve to deny him. As pretty as she was, she'd more likely freeze a man's dick off than suck him dry when she opened those ripe lips of hers. Even McKinley had waited her out as she'd ripped Simon a new one. As if Simon should consider violating those things in the basement rape. They were less than human. Who cared what he did with them? Or *had done* with them.

He glared at the monitor in front of him. It showed nothing more than the heat signatures of the people inside the house. All three occupants remained in separate rooms. *No sex there, and no sex in here.* Simon knew he couldn't let Torrence get away with her superior act. She was no better than him, just another peon in Elliot Pearl's rise to greatness. Except she didn't yet know her place.

*On her damned knees.*

He knew how Pearl felt about her. He'd heard the man complain to McKinley on more than one occasion. Simon made up his mind. As soon as he finished this job, he planned to show Torrence just where she belonged in the new order at Pearson Labs. Under *him*. He hadn't worked his ass off for the last four years to submit to her like some fucking dog. Simon had plans of his own. And he'd be damned if he'd let some geek with glasses, no matter how fine her tits were, get in his way.

The equipment in the van beeped, alerting him to the rise in temperature of the individuals in the house. Pheromone levels spiked. *Finally.* Simon called in his status and sat patiently. He'd wait it out and then make his move. He had his own secrets and his own agendas, ones that didn't include Elliot Pearl, Circe's Recruits, or Sabrina Torrence.

\* \* \* \* \*

Ace stared at the bedroom door separating him from Zack, who had finally ventured into the hall bathroom for a shower. While Kelly and Caitlyn chatted, he'd wanted nothing more than to confront Zack about his bullshit attitude. But he didn't. The feelings he had for Zack were too new. He didn't want to say or do the wrong thing, like it appeared he already had. So he sat on the bed, his head in his hands, wondering where the hell it had all gone wrong.

He'd finally made his move on Zack. Both times, the man had come hard. Now nothing should have stood in their way when it came to claiming Kelly for their own. Unless Zack had changed his mind about sharing her? Ace's beast rose in anger. Had Zack pretended to agree to share her in an attempt to lower Ace's guard?

If so, Ace had foolishly compromised himself. He'd acted on the burgeoning feelings for his best friend, when he should have kept that part of himself secret. He'd never opened up to anyone before. Why had he thought now might be the time to try it?

A knock on the door shook him from his thoughts. He opened it to find Zack standing on the threshold. His hair was wet, and droplets slid down his firm, bare chest, snaking under the band of his shorts. Immediately, Ace's anger receded. The beast within purred its acceptance, wanting his mate closer. Ace forced himself to shake free of his stupid desire. He didn't read appreciation on Zack's face. The man remained expressionless.

"What?" he asked more harshly than he'd intended. Zack didn't flinch.

"Kelly's going through her *change* right now. Let's keep this calm and together, for *her*," he emphasized, as if Ace wasn't worth the trouble. "I'm not going to fight you. And you're not going to fight me," Zack said quietly, steel reinforcing his words. He shifted into his beast in seconds, ripping through his shorts with his claws when he could have easily slid them off.



*Not as in control as you'd like to be.* Ace found Zack's lack of restraint comforting. So much for the stoic warrior making demands. Zack English wanted Kelly. And if Ace wasn't mistaken, the gleam in Zack's gaze as it ran over Ace suggested he wanted Ace as well.

"She needs us. *Change*," Zack ordered in a low growl.

Ace kicked off his shorts and flowed into his second, stronger skin with ease. The feel of his muscles stretching and his bones rejoining no longer hurt. Instead, the transformation brought him closer to himself, to the heart that beat in his true breast.

He scented Kelly on the air, as well as Zack's overpowering sexual desire.

"Don't fuck around," Zack warned and pulled Ace close. Zack sniffed him and focused on the faint bite mark at the crook of his neck, the mark Zack had given him the very first time they'd felt the mating heat. "Good."

Ace didn't have to wonder about Zack's sudden acceptance. No matter how their human halves dealt with one another, Zack's beast had already staked its claim. As had Ace's.

Giving back, Ace grabbed Zack's dick and rubbed a finger over the beading tip. Bringing the fluid to his lips, he savored his mate's taste. "Mine." He nodded to the door, his nostrils flaring at Kelly's wild, alluring scent. "And ours."

Zack grunted, his eyes as dark as night. Turning on his heel, he stalked to Kelly's bedroom and shoved open the door, Ace on his heels.

What they saw stopped them in their tracks. Kelly Malloy had *changed*. Over six feet of glorious feminine Circ stared back at them with challenge in her eyes. Her blue irises gleamed against the hardened honey skin over her face. Her red hair looked almost black and had lengthened, coming to rest over the curves of her hips.

She stood naked, her body arousing both men into a full lust. Ace could smell it in the air.

Kelly cocked her head. "Come." She motioned them closer. "Give me what I need." She sniffed, and her pupils dilated. She rubbed her tight nipples, pinching them and sighing at the pleasure.

Ace wanted to tackle her to the floor and mount her. Her breasts had enlarged in perfect proportion to the rest of her frame. He had an urge to suck those nipples until she came. His cock throbbed, wanting to feel her heat all around him. A glance to his left showed Zack similarly fixated. Which posed an interesting question. Who would sink inside her first?

Zack met his look and nodded to Kelly. "Follow my lead," he murmured and stepped closer.

More willing to follow Zack when *changed*, Ace ceded to the larger male and stepped closer to Kelly. He was fully aware of the danger she presented. His beast sensed her need to control, to select what was hers by right. Just as he and Zack had come to an agreement those many years ago, now they had to allow for Kelly's need to fight for her right to take her mates.

Kelly growled when they'd come close enough. Ace licked his lips, taken with her white fangs and long nails that gleamed purple at the tips. A hint of amusement lingered, the thought that not too long ago, she'd been painting her nails. So feminine, so soft --

She ripped a claw down his belly, and he roared.

Zack stopped him with a broad hand on his chest. "Not yet."

Kelly opened her mouth to taste his scent in the air. A thin trail of blood trickled down his belly.

"Mine." She stepped closer and cautiously knelt between his feet.

Ace's cock grew harder, as stiff as iron. With Zack beside him and Kelly on her knees in front of him, he wanted nothing more than to ride his mates until he came.

Kelly pressed her mouth to the start of his injury and slid up his body to lick the blood away. The scratch had already healed, but the press of her lips against his flesh caused him to arch into her.

A soft hand gripped his balls in warning, and he stayed as still as he was able, his breath overly loud in the sudden silence.

"Mine." Kelly's tongue trailed back down his abdomen, her mouth resting above his pubic bone. She released his sac to cup him, then ran her hand over his taut shaft.

"Yes," Ace hissed, grabbing the hand Zack used to steady him.

Kelly lifted her head to study his cock. She leaned closer to the fluid beading at his slit and licked it away. "Good."

Ace groaned, unable to keep still.

Turning to Zack just a step away, Kelly lifted a hand, her claws at the ready.

"No," he growled. "You want to taste me, you take what I offer." He gripped his cock and held it out for her. "Lick it off."

Zack's dominance had a predictable effect on Ace. His balls drew tight, and he shivered, taken with the need to submit to his more powerful mate.

Kelly's eyes flashed, but she didn't disobey. She leaned close and stuck out a pretty pink tongue. With a soft stroke, she licked away the cream glistening on Zack's cock.

"That's it." Zack suddenly grabbed the back of her head and held tight, but he didn't pull her closer. "Now suck it." Kelly balked, and Ace saw Zack's hands tighten. "Obey me, mate. The way he does." Zack nodded to Ace.

Ace understood exactly what Zack wanted. He stepped behind Kelly and caught her head, holding her in place. Zack released her and ran a hand up Ace's arm to his chest. He pinched Ace's nipples, and Ace pushed Kelly's head forward.

She hissed at him as she opened her mouth over Zack's shaft.

"That's it. Good girl." Zack remained still as Kelly worked him, but his gaze remained on Ace. "She's sucking my cock," he said, as if Ace couldn't see it with his own eyes. "And after I come, she's going to suck yours."

Ace nodded, caught in the lust swirling around the room.

"That's it, Kelly. Let me mark you." Zack panted. As if he too were involved, Ace caught Kelly's rhythm and continued to push her head over Zack, but only because she allowed it. Her scent drenched the air, and Ace had a hard time not coming as he rubbed his shaft against her back.

"Swallow it," Zack roared as he spewed. Before he was even done, he pulled away, still coming. "Now him."

Kelly turned around and took Ace into her mouth. Her nails scored his thighs as she swallowed him whole. Such bliss, such heat in her mouth. Her fangs lightly grazed his shaft, and Ace knew she'd retracted them, accepting both him and Zack as she touched them.

"That's it, Kelly. So good, mate," Ace rasped as he fucked her mouth. "I'm coming hard." He couldn't wait any longer.

"Not yet." Zack forced her to back away, meeting her shouts and slashing claws with ease. "Bend over the bed, Kelly."

"Fuck you. I'm not done." Kelly's snarl gave Ace a rush. Her aggressiveness was as arousing as her scent. A female Circ in her prime, and she was his to share. She wanted *him*.

Ace willed his orgasm away, wanting to last. God, watching Zack manhandle Kelly was so incredibly hot. His beast roared its approval, infatuated with Zack's raw power, so at odds with the laid-back man he normally was.

"You're done when *I* say you're done," Zack snarled back. "Now bend over the fucking bed." He didn't give her another chance to argue as he shoved her down and spread her legs. "Ace, come take what's yours. Ram her hard. Share your seed. She needs it."

Kelly thrashed beneath them, but she lifted her ass when Ace mounted her from behind.

“Oh, yeah,” he rumbled as he slid deep inside her. “Such a hot pussy. So tight.” Ace began fucking her, thrusting in and out with deliberate roughness.

Kelly mewed and pleaded, wanting more.

Zack gave it to her. He rounded Ace and shoved his hand beneath her waist. “Feel that little clit. So hard, so moist.” He kissed her shoulder, nipping her when she turned her face away from him. “Watch me, mate. See me while Ace fucks what’s his.”

Breathless as he watched Zack kiss Kelly while he played with her, Ace started at the viselike clamping of Kelly’s channel.

His body reacted before he could think. He shot hard inside her, his climax obliterating his ability to feel anything but the drugging pleasure from Kelly’s body.

It was a moment before he realized Zack had mounted him as well.

“Lean over her,” Zack ordered, his tone gritty.

Ace didn’t have a chance to obey, because Zack forced his legs apart and slammed deep, his natural lubricant easing the way. His cock surged against Ace’s prostate, pushing Ace into another powerful orgasm as Zack continued to ride him.

Kelly moaned and contracted around him, caught in the heavy pheromones layering over the room. Sex invaded the small space, heaving bodies and the perfume of arousal drugging them all.

Zack shouted as he came, spurting inside Ace as Ace continued to come inside Kelly. The three of them were caught in an orgasmic frenzy as scents and sound magnified. And then, as the crescendo of lust faded, their individual scents merged.

Ace sucked in his breath as the sweetness of their joining became clear.

Zack pulled out, and Ace did as well. He caught Kelly in his arms and laid her tenderly on the bed.

"Mine, both of you, mine," Kelly breathed as she stared up at them in shock. Her breathing gradually calmed, and she blinked up at both of them in awe.

"Your beast is so damned pretty," was all Ace could say and think as he stared down at her. He finally felt at peace, claimed by Zack, claiming Kelly. Right in the middle, where he belonged.

He sensed Zack behind him and tilted his head to the side. While Kelly watched, Zack pierced his skin with sharp fangs, right where he'd left his last bite. Ecstasy rushed through Ace in a riot of intensity.

Then Zack left him and knelt on the bed by Kelly. She stared at him for a moment before tilting her head to the side. Zack smiled down at her before marking her the same way. His mouth covered the area where her neck and shoulder met. He sucked hard before withdrawing gently.

"Mine. All mine." Zack included Ace in his comments.

After cleaning up, the three of them lay down together, taking up Kelly's bed so that they all had to sleep on their sides to fit.

"I hope the bed holds us," Kelly murmured in a low, husky voice.

"If it doesn't, no matter." Ace nuzzled her neck. "I'll hold you, and Zack will hold the both of us." Ace nestled his groin against her ass, hugging her tight. He couldn't help toying with her breasts, so full and plump. He wanted very badly to bite her there, to make his own lingering mark. But he didn't want to overwhelm her so soon. It was enough he and Zack had finally claimed her as their own.

Zack was kissing her, and Ace couldn't help himself. He reached over her hip to take Zack's cock in his hand. Not surprised to find his friend hard and wet, Ace played with him while Zack continued to kiss Kelly.

His own body wanted more of her as well. The *change* ensured not only enhanced senses, but a sexual stamina that strengthened between mates. God knew he and Zack had

fucked like rabbits many times before. But with Kelly between them, Ace didn't think he could wait for her to catch up to them. And then he didn't have to as she reached behind her to take him in hand.

Kelly could only feel as she lay between the two men she loved. Her beast had finally found freedom, and with it, Kelly opened up to a whole new world. Sights, sounds, and scents were magnified. She could literally taste the desire in the air, the sweetness of the seed she'd swallowed that already lay buried in her womb. The essence of her mates wrapped around her as well. Whereas before they'd been three, now they were one. And she wanted more.

Zack kissed her with skill, with need, and with pleasure. His cock pressed into her belly, still stiff and needing ease. She wanted to provide him that pleasure. But more than that, she *needed* to give it to him. Rocking back, she felt Ace's desire as well. He slid between her ass cheeks, prodding at that virgin hole that needed something more.

Kelly groaned into Zack's mouth, trying to tell him with her body what she needed.

"That's it. That's good, Kel." Zack broke away, and she stared into his dark eyes. The pupils expanded so wide, his eyes looked entirely black. So inhuman. So sexy. And so hers.

"I want more," she shocked herself by growling. Before she could demand they give her what she wanted, Ace and Zack took her ability to command her body from her.

So strong, her mates. Her beast purred with affection, thrilled when Ace pulled her over him. His form was massive, his muscles solid and large against her back. Zack loomed over them, spreading their thighs as he watched. His gaze fixated on her crotch, and he played with her pussy, pushing his fingers through the darkened red hair over her mound.

Then she felt Ace shudder beneath her and realized Zack had grabbed Ace's cock.

"Sit up," Zack told her. "Ace is wet, almost wetter than you. Our dicks produce a natural oil when needed. And Ace needs this as much as you do."

Instinctively knowing what he meant, she braced herself on his chest as he lowered her onto Ace's cock. Instead of reaching for her slick channel, Ace penetrated her anus in slow increments.

She panted, thrilled and alarmed to accept him in a place she'd never taken anyone before.

"That's so fucking good," Ace growled and held her hips tight.

"And so sexy," Zack murmured, watching Ace work his way inside her.

So thick and large, Ace still had little problem sinking deep as Kelly settled over him. Her body knew what to do, and she felt a small give before he stopped, fully seated within her.

She glanced up to see Zack's cock in front of her nose. He crouched before her on the bed.

"Take it in your mouth, baby. Suck me, get me ready for that pussy again."

Kelly wanted them both inside her. As she shifted over Ace and heard him groan, she took Zack inside her mouth. He tasted right, the perfect mixture of salt and sweetness that she wanted to experience once more. As she worked him with her tongue, she let Ace guide her up and down his cock, stretching her ass and pleasuring the sensitive receptors along that once-forbidden passage.

She'd never imagined anal sex could be so good and wondered if in her normal state she'd like it as much. She discovered that her body acclimated itself to sexual variety much faster when *changed*. Already she accepted Ace with little pain, only magnified pleasure. Sucking harder on Zack, she rubbed his tightened sac and licked at the precum filling her mouth, wanting to set him off.

"Enough." Zack pulled out and moved so quickly, she had no idea what he meant to do before he did it.



He latched onto her clit and sucked with voracious need. The pulls on her tender flesh, in addition to Ace's ecstatic pumping, pushed her toward a climax she wasn't ready to feel. Not yet.

"No, wait." She tried to stop him, but Zack only growled and sucked harder. He nipped with his teeth and licked. Over and over, filling her empty pussy with his long tongue.

Kelly climaxed with a scream, not conscious of much until she felt Zack over her, pushing her against Ace's chest as he entered her pussy. He thrust with speed, and Ace whispered praises in her ear as she continued to come.

"So fucking tight." He hissed. "Zack, I feel you inside her. Rubbing against her, against my cock. Oh, shit. Yes, yes, now!"

He groaned and trembled, spilling into her as Zack thrust once more and stilled. Zack groaned her name as he came, filling her to the brim. His seed slid down her crack and onto Ace, the scent of the three of them sweeter than anything she'd ever smelled before.

Zack took a moment before withdrawing. He helped her to disengage from Ace and laid her on the bed. He left and returned with several damp washcloths, then tenderly cleaned them all, providing for his mates before he joined them in bed once more.

Kelly could barely keep her eyes open. She yawned and stretched, suddenly aware she felt smaller. She glanced at her arms and saw normal flesh once more.

"How did I...?"

"It'll become second nature," Ace said as he nuzzled her cheek with softer, human skin. "God, Kel, that was incredible. You're ours now."

*Ours.* Not mine. She liked the sound of that.

Zack chuckled on the other side of her, the bed dipping to accommodate his normal frame as well. "She's still purring. A well-fed little cat."

“Make that a tiger,” Ace murmured. “She sliced the hell out of my belly. Man, I love aggressive women.” He ran a hand over her shoulder. “You’re going to stay?” he asked Zack. His voice was casual, but Kelly heard the tension he tried to hide.

Her beast suddenly sat up and took notice.

Zack sighed, and she relaxed. “I’ll stay. For now.”

But that was enough. Kelly fell asleep with her mates surrounding her, finally where she needed to be. Surrounded by the two men she loved. She’d found peace at last.

## Chapter Eight

As they turned onto the familiar street leading to Doc and the others, Kelly felt nervous. Though she'd spent the past week with her new mates -- *not mates, boyfriends*, she told herself -- she couldn't get past the thought that everyone at the compound knew what she'd been doing with not one, but *two* men. She fiddled with the door handle in the front seat of her car, annoyed by the reminder that Zack's vehicle was out of commission.

Apparently, he'd been in an accident the night he went "barhopping." He had yet to explain what had really happened, and anytime she or Ace asked about it, he clammed up.

"She's blushing again," Ace teased, leaning forward from the backseat to kiss her cheek.

"Leave her alone." Zack's reprimand was soft, but the tension between him and Ace blazed as bright as the evening sunset.

Kelly had thought that by coming together as they had, in honest-to-God rapture, that the ill feeling between Zack and Ace would have disappeared. She'd watched Zack fuck Ace. Had been there when Ace sucked him off before giving her similar oral bliss. There were no problems when the three of them were *changed*, which, come to think of it, was the only time they were all in one place at the same time anymore.

When in their normal states, Ace and Zack took turns being intimate with her. And the lack of one of her partners during sex bothered the hell out of her. As often as they'd been together, she knew there was no way Ace and Zack had problems with *her*. On the contrary.

They bought her groceries. Sent her flowers -- not carnations, but pink roses. Gave her small gifts, thoughtful things that told her how well they knew her. Sea horse figurines to add to her collection. Soft cotton clothing in various shades of blue, not to mention a naughty silk negligee that made both of them wild in bed. They each did everything she asked when she asked, so long as it didn't involve the other. If she could ignore the tension between them, all was right with the world.

Then, inevitably, they'd have to deal with each other. Unspoken hostility seethed between them, which made matters worse. Zack avoided Ace. Ace then avoided Zack. Hell, she almost wished they'd pound each other and let out whatever festered between them.

But she didn't want them to come to harm. They were so gentle with her. Zack and Ace had no problems working with her to teach her about the *change*, to control it at will. Apart, they were wonderful teachers, patient and forgiving of mistakes. But together, the two were getting on her last nerve. The beast inside her demanded she take charge and make things right.

"I want you two to drop me off at the compound."

"Uh, Kelly? That's where we're headed." Ace glanced out the window. Caitlyn waved wildly from the front door as they approached.

"I don't think you understand. I don't want you coming in with me."

"Why the hell not?" Ace growled.

Zack said nothing. He gripped the steering wheel in silence and stopped the car.

Kelly turned in her seat so she could see both of them. "I'm tired of the way you two are acting with each other. In case it's escaped your notice, I love you both." It was the first time she'd said it out loud, and it felt good.

"Kelly." Ace smiled wide.

Zack's gaze warmed with satisfaction.

"But I can't handle you two at odds with each other. I've racked my brain to find a way to fix it, but I'm out of ideas. And don't try to tell me nothing's wrong," she barked at Ace when he started that lame excuse. "I'm not an idiot. I know you two, and I know there's a problem. Bottom line: you two are banished from the compound until you work this out. I don't care what Doc wants from you or how many missions come up in the meantime. This is more important than any of that." Dammit, she was talking about their family, their small trio.

"Kelly, I don't think you understand." Zack spoke quietly.

"No, I don't. Zack, do you love me?"

Silence filled the truck. Kelly had never meant to ask such a question in a car, for God's sake. But these two had pushed her past her limits. Even her beast had had enough.

"Yes." His simple answer thrilled her.

"You don't have to ask me," Ace added. "I've been in love with you from day one."

"And I love you too." She smiled at Ace before turning her frown on the both of them. "But I'm tired of the way you two are treating each other. You were friends long before I came into the picture. So if I'm not the problem --"

"You're not," they both assured her at the same time.

"Then you need to get your heads out of your asses and fix this. My beast is going nuts. I can't handle any more worrying. I have a bad feeling if you can't solve this problem between you, the next time you're called to handle a problem in the field, your attention

won't be at its best, either. You'll be a danger to your teammates and yourselves until you settle this."

"Kelly --" Zack began.

"No, she's right." Ace shocked her and Zack by agreeing with her. "Have a nice night with the gang. Make sure you sit next to Caitlyn or Doc. Not any of the others," Ace warned, his eyes glinting with menace. "I'll fix this, baby. Go have a good time, and we'll pick you up tomorrow."

"Tomorrow?" Zack scowled.

"Okay." Kelly kissed Ace, a reward for stepping forward to do the right thing. She glared at Zack. "Don't screw this up. You're messing with our family."

His frown softened, and he sighed. "Go have fun," he said gruffly. "We'll see you tomorrow."

They waited until she met Caitlyn by the door. Ace exited the car to move into the front seat, and they left.

"What was that about?" Caitlyn asked as she met Kelly.

An emotional tug-of-war churned inside Kelly. She'd just declared her love, had it returned, and then sent the loves of her life *away*. She burst into tears.

"Kelly! Come on, what's wrong?"

"Those two have me pulling my hair out already. I can't imagine what it'll be like when I'm pregnant."

"You're pregnant?" Caitlyn stared, shell-shocked.

"Not now." Though the way she and her mates had been going at it, anything was possible. She'd never once thought of using protection, when by rights, she'd always demanded it of her partners. What did that mean? Satisfaction dwelled deep inside her, and she knew to blame her beast for such disregard.

“Oh.” Caitlyn sounded disappointed. “I’d like to be an aunt. Not a mother, not yet. But an aunt would be nice.”

Kelly laughed and dried her eyes, her emotions vacillating with the drop of a hat. “Sorry for being so weepy. It’s just that Zack and Ace have been at odds for too long. I love them both, and it’s killing me that there’s so much tension in the house.”

“Speaking of houses...” Caitlyn wound an arm around Kelly’s shoulders. “Come on in. Doc is dying to talk to you. And I’d like you to see some of the changes we’re making.”

“Changes?” It was then Kelly noted the large commercial trash bin on the side of the house.

“Yep.” Caitlyn glanced at the bin. “We’re expanding the grounds. While I don’t mind living in the house, I think too many of us mated chicks around the others without girlfriends is going to make them crazy. We’re building a few houses on the compound. With thirty-some acres, Doc has room to spare. I can’t wait to do some real decorating! Because honestly, Roane’s room is less than a challenge.”

Kelly couldn’t help sharing in her friend’s enthusiasm, when a sudden shiver chased its way up her spine. She stopped at the doorway to the house, unnerved.

“Kelly?”

“Never mind.” She shrugged it off. “Just my imagination.” *That something’s out there isn’t friendly. As if anything could avoid detection on Doc’s property, with all the security around the place.* “Now, tell me what Diego has for dinner and about these plans to decorate. I’m all ears.”

As Zack drove them back to Kelly’s, he felt a surge of relief. It had taken a stubborn woman to do it, but she’d finally broken through Ace’s hard head. Maybe now the jackass would admit the problem. He’d been avoiding Zack for days. Why not just tell the truth?

Zack would have, but he hadn't wanted to put Kelly in the middle of their squabble. With her gone, it was best to get it out in the open. He wasn't surprised she'd felt the stress.

He couldn't sleep, didn't have much of an appetite, and felt as if something inside him was dying. Ace, from what he could tell, didn't feel the same way. He still laughed and flirted outrageously with Kelly. And he had no trouble taking her aside to fuck her brains out at every available opportunity, as if by doing so, he could escape what his beast forced him to accept when *changed*.

They arrived at the house in silence. Ace preceded Zack inside. Zack locked the door behind him and turned around...into Ace's *fist*.

The blow shocked him.

Ace took advantage of the fact and knocked him down with two more punches and a knee to the balls that had him groaning in agony. Trying to catch his breath, Zack curled into a ball, cognizant of little around him but the excruciating ache between his thighs.

Before he could catch his breath, Ace *changed* and cradled him in his arms.

"Sorry about that, but you've been asking for it for days."

Zack was going to beat the shit out of him as soon as he could breathe again.

Ace carried him into his bedroom and tossed him onto the bed. He ripped Zack's clothes off, then shoved Zack's arms and legs apart, staring down at him with hunger in his eyes. "You're acting like a shit, and I'm tired of it."

"*You're* tired of it?" Zack managed to say, lacking the strength to transform. For once, his inner beast remained quiet, shocking him as much as Ace's attack had. Thank God the pain between his legs finally faded.

"Tell me what's wrong, and I'll fix it. But no more moping around. You're acting like a goddamn girl. And don't tell Kelly I said that."

Zack only heard the accusation that he was like a woman, a statement too close to the hurtful teasing he'd imagined before crashing his car. Ace grabbed his wrists on either side of



his head and held him easily in place. Fury pulsed, but still, Zack's beast refused to emerge. He belatedly caught the scent of lust in the air, his senses not as keen in his normal state as they were when *changed*.

"Let me take care of you. Then you can ream me for assault." Ace chuckled and leaned forward, pressing his rough chest against Zack's. He effectively pinned Zack in place with his massive body.

Having never dealt with a *changed* Ace when not in the same form, Zack didn't know what to do. He couldn't budge the strength of the hands that dwarfed his, nor could he move Ace off him.

To his further shock, he watched as Ace licked a trail from his collarbone down his belly to his cock. Hard at the first touch of Ace's mouth, Zack squirmed to get closer or get loose -- he wasn't sure of which at this point. "No. Don't let your beast rule you now." He tried warning Ace. "I know how much you hate this." Which made it so unbearable for Zack to express his love with his mate time and time again, only to know how much Ace despised their sharing of physical affection.

Ace murmured something Zack couldn't understand. Then he waited, for what, Zack wasn't sure. Ace's large hand between his legs clued him in quickly. The intense pain he'd felt faded under the pleasure soon stealing his breath. Ace knew just how to touch him, and the power abundant in his huge frame made this exchange an erotically charged challenge. Zack was the one who gave the orders when it came to sex, not Ace. Yet his breath left him again as Ace took his erection deep inside his hot mouth. The light press of fangs slid over him before a thick, raspy tongue licked him from the head of his cock to his balls.

"*Fuck*." He arched into Ace's mouth, aware of the differences between their bodies. He couldn't help wanting to touch his mate, but Ace wouldn't let him.

"No. Just lay there and accept my apology." Ace grinned at him, the sight of that beastlike face wearing a smile enough to plunge Zack hopelessly deeper into love.

Ace took Zack's cock between his lips again. With a powerful tongue, he licked and sucked Zack to orgasm within moments.

Zack panted as he came hard, shuddering as Ace sucked him dry before licking and teasing his balls.

"You taste sweet," Ace murmured, his scent growing darker, spicier with need. "Now I need to finish this, don't I?" He laughed, a deep boom coming from a creature more animal than man.

He pulled Zack to the edge of the bed and nudged his thighs wide. Zack blinked to clear the haze from his mind. He saw the moisture surrounding Ace's cock, the natural lubricant over his massive shaft signifying his desire. God, he'd split in half around that thing.

Ace *changed* back and released him, and Zack didn't know what to think.

"It's not my beast that wants this," Ace said quietly as he penetrated Zack's ass. He gripped Zack's thighs as he eased through a passage long neglected. "It's the man who loves you that wants more. I need this, Zack." He panted as he pushed deeper. "I need you."

Hearing what he'd been waiting for for so many years, Zack was helpless to stop his eyes from filling as Ace seated himself inside his ass. He blinked hard but felt a drop leak regardless.

"Don't cry, babe. Then you'll be a woman for sure," Ace teased, his voice thick with desire. "God, I've been dreaming about this for so long. But you always have to be dominant, don't you?"

He pulled out, the painful friction reminding Zack how long it had been since he'd been on the receiving end of a male relationship. Ever since he'd bonded with Ace during the mating heat, he'd foregone sex with other men. And even then, he'd rarely let another take him. He lost track of the time as Ace thrust in and out of him, fucking him so tenderly, like a man in love.

“You’re so tight.” Ace smiled with satisfaction and gripped Zack’s growing erection.

“It’s been a long time,” Zack rasped, caught in a new kind of heat.

“Waiting for me?” Ace asked as he took his time slamming back inside, grazing that pleasure spot within Zack.

Moaning, Zack fought to answer. “Always waiting for you. So long...”

Hearing that, Ace stopped being gentle and fucked him hard, mixing the pain with pleasure as he jerked Zack off. Zack couldn’t hold off his orgasm as Ace continued to nudge his prostate. As he shot over Ace’s hands, Ace swore and came, jerking as he spilled inside Zack.

“Yes, yes,” he breathed, clutching Zack in a tight grip. “Give me your cum, mate. All of it.”

He milked Zack, rubbing the fluid all over Zack’s balls, shaft, and belly. A caress that restored Ace’s hard-on. “Now ride this out while I take more of what’s mine,” Ace warned, fucking him all over again.

Zack lay there and took it as he allowed his inner beast to overtake his sexual response, as Ace must have. While in his normal state, he could respond sexually like his beast, insatiable and responsive in mere minutes, but he’d only tried it once before. The woman he’d been with at the time couldn’t handle it, so he’d turned it off. But now, with Ace...

Ace ramped up and came again, getting Zack hard in the process. He withdrew, still spurting cum, and dropped to his knees. He took Zack in his mouth and licked away his seed. Soon enough, he had Zack coming yet again, purging himself of the frustrated need he had for his lover.

“Enough,” Zack pleaded, thoroughly sated yet still confused.

“It’ll never be enough,” Ace murmured. He left Zack to clean up and returned with a warm, wet towel. “Let me take care of you.”

Zack lay still, not used to this role reversal.

"What happened, Zack? What made you pull away from me?" Ace asked quietly. "I thought... I'd hoped after that massage and that time in the bathroom that you wanted me."

"I did. I do."

"Then why did you distance yourself? You've been hurting, and I sensed it. So did Kelly. It was tearing me up that you wouldn't let me in to fix things. What did I do?"

Zack leaned up on his elbows, surprised at the intensity in Ace's voice. "You really do love me, don't you?" he asked in wonder.

"Hell, yes. You're dense, you know that?" Ace ran an unsteady hand through his hair and flopped onto the bed beside him. "I know I haven't been the easiest guy to get along with. I haven't been as nice to you as I should have been for a long time. I apologize for that. But tell me how to fix things, and I will." He sought Zack's hand and held it tight.

Amazed, Zack squeezed him back. "I love you, Ace. I have for a very long time. I knew you were uncomfortable with my bisexuality. I never pushed, never wanted more than you could give. Then the mating heat changed that."

"It sure the hell did," Ace mumbled.

"Our beasts knew each other, and I could love you the way I'd wanted to. But I knew you didn't like it."

"No, on that you're wrong." Ace sighed. "I liked it too much. I was afraid it would make me gay. It sounds really stupid now, but I couldn't help thinking it then."

"Huh?"

"My dad was a homophobe, and I'm ashamed to say some of it must have rubbed off on me. I never realized it, but I've had so many problems with my feelings for you because of *him*. Man, I really hate that fucker." Ace shook his head. "I love you, Zack. At first, we were brothers-in-arms. Then we were Circe's Recruits together. You've always been my best friend, even when I didn't deserve it." Ace cleared his throat. "When the mating heat first started, it was like a nightmare for me. I had to fuck other guys, but more, I *needed* to fuck

other guys. Don't get me wrong. I like Hale, Derrick, and Roane. But I never wanted them the way I wanted you."

"Really?" Zack couldn't believe what he was hearing.

"Man, you have no idea how much I looked forward to the heat, when I'd feel you ramming that cock up my ass. It felt so good. You always made me come so hard, and your mouth..."

"Stop." Zack groaned on a laugh. "I'm too tired to get hard again."

"Yeah." Ace exhaled heavily. "I felt weird about loving the mating heat when everybody else hated it. You never said anything, but I knew you didn't mind it as much." Ace paused. "I saw you once kiss a guy."

"I know."

"And then we met Kelly, and I fell hard in love. But I still had feelings for you, and it confused the shit out of me. It took a long time, but after this last fiasco, I realized I could have died without ever experiencing us. I love you, man." Ace sounded emotional, and Zack knew just what to say.

"Now who's the girl?" he teased.

Ace rolled over on top of him and grinned, wiping away a tear. "You are, you pussy." He kissed Zack hard and hugged him tight. "God, the guys are going to ride me for this, I know it."

"No one's riding you but me," Zack said gruffly and shoved Ace over onto the bed. He turned on his side and caressed him, unable to stop touching his best friend, his lover, his mate.

They lay peacefully for a moment before Ace spoke again. "So what did I do to fuck things up? Tell me, because I honestly don't know."

Zack felt like an idiot. "Ah, well, I might have been overly sensitive. If you call me a girl again, I'm going to knee *you* in the balls."

"Sorry about that." Ace had the grace to wince.

"Yeah, well, it's okay now. Just don't do it again. It hurt like hell."

"Agreed."

"Remember last week when we first took Kelly together? You were in some postorgasmic bliss when you told her how you thought of her during the mating heat. I don't know. It just hit me wrong. I mean, whenever we went through it together, my only thought was of you. That you saw her instead of me while I was fucking you hurt."

Ace blushed. "I, uh, well, it *was* true, Zack. I just didn't tell the whole truth. The very first time we went into the mating heat, I did think of Kelly. I wished I could have been fucking a woman instead of going down on a dude. Sue me, but it's still hard for me to acknowledge to others that I'm in love with a man. And that's after years of animal sex. You'd think I'd be used to it by now."

"Oh." Disappointed but not surprised, Zack tried to ignore the mixed signals and focus on the fact that Ace loved him.

"No, hear me out." Ace took Zack's cheeks in his palms to force eye contact. "I love you, Zachary English. The very first time we fucked, I tried to think about Kelly. I admit it. But it was *you* who took me. *You* who showed me how right we could be together. We both love Kelly. I know you want her as much as I do. But this thing between us, it's real. And it's not going away."

Zack warmed, falling in love with Ace all over again. "So you're saying you love me, but you don't want me giving you a handjob in front of the guys, right?"

Horror shone in Ace's eyes. "Hell, no." He narrowed his gaze. "Asshole. I'll show you a handjob."

Zack groaned. "Not now. Give me a break before my dick falls off. I didn't know I could still harness that kind of sexual energy when not *changed*." He sucked in a breath as Ace masturbated him. "Only you and Kelly can get to me like this."

Ace smirked. "I know."

"But remember, my beast won't forget it. I'm still the dominant one in our relationship." Zack tried to sound forceful, but he knew the moan that left him hurt his authority.

"That's right, Z. Tell yourself you're in charge while you come all over my hand." Ace leaned in to nip Zack's ear as he whispered, "Do you know how good you taste? How great you feel with that fat cock rammed up my ass?"

Zack strove for control but could only promise payback.

"I'm looking forward to it, lover." Ace licked his lips. "I can't get enough of that mouth of yours. Now come over my hands and let me taste you again."

"I love you."

"Back at you, control freak. Now, come hard." Ace winked as Zack lost it. "Wait until I tell Kelly what she missed."

## Chapter Nine

"My money's on Zack," Derrick said as he put a ten on the table. "Any takers?"

"Gimme a break," Kelly muttered. Her dinner with the others had gone well toward restoring her faith in her mates. The guys stuck up for the pair, but Caitlyn spared Zack and Ace little sympathy, or privacy, as she paraded their feelings in front of the others.

"Seriously," she said. "How could the rest of you not see how much Ace and Zack complement one another? Or do the rest of you have that guy/guy problem too? Like, if you love another guy, you're automatically gay. As if there's something wrong with that."

"Caitlyn, enough." Roane's face turned bright red. Hale and Derrick avoided eye contact as well, and Kelly thought it was because they had been with each other sexually and didn't want to talk about it. Talk about some guy/guy problems.

Caitlyn laughed. "Come on, Kelly. Tell them how sexy it is watching two hot guys like Ace and Zack going at it."

"Hot guys?" Roane repeated, his voice menacing.

"Shut up, already, Caitlyn." Derrick grimaced. "Roane, seriously. You need better control over your woman. Who wears the pants in your relationship, anyway?"



"We both wear pants. Really, Derrick. In this day and age..." Caitlyn's voice grew louder as her rant continued. Poor Derrick took Caitlyn's tongue-lashing like a champ. He rolled his eyes at Hale and Kelly, but Caitlyn saw it and verbally tore him to shreds.

"A true sacrifice. His ears for our sanity," Hale murmured with a grin.

"Thank God." Kelly agreed. She loved Caitlyn and the others like family, but there was such a thing as too much sharing. The guys obviously felt the same.

"Save me from a sharp-tongued Circ," Roane said under his breath. "Okay, that's enough, you little witch."

"Little witch?" Caitlyn ceased berating Derrick and turned on her mate. Her eyes *changed* first, then her hands.

"Damn, now *that's* hot," Hale said.

Roane must have agreed, because he stood, swung Caitlyn over his shoulder, and left the table in a rush.

"Another ten says she's purring the next time we see her," Derrick challenged.

"You're on." Hale grinned. "Kelly, you want a piece of the action?"

Before she could answer, Diego called her from the study. "Kelly? Phone call."

Thinking it had to be Ace or Zack, she gratefully left the dining room and closed the study door behind her. She picked up the phone, hoping for good news. "Ace?"

"Kelly Malloy, don't speak. Listen. We have Ace Two Bears and Zack English. They're drugged but alive...for now. If you want to see them again, don't ask for help. Don't speak to anyone at all. Come alone to Morey's Pier, where we'll be waiting for you. If we see anyone following you, your lovers are dead."

The phone clicked, and Kelly stared in shock at the receiver. It had to be a trap. Not willing to react out of hand, she called her home, but no one picked up.

She needed to tell the others. Her beast roared with denial. *Take care of your own mates. Don't endanger them because you're too weak-willed to protect what's yours.*

Then again, if she told the others, they'd demand to accompany her, and Ace or Zack might die. She thought quickly. Scribbling a note to Doc, who would probably see it, at the earliest, later tonight, if he stopped by his office to work, she figured she'd have enough time to do what needed to be done.

Composing herself, she rejoined the group in the dining room. "Good news. The boys are happy again. I've gotta go. Straight home, and I'll call you when I get there," she said to forestall Hale's arguments for protection.

"Come on, Hale. Give the girl some privacy," Derrick said on her behalf. "She's got two 'hotties' waiting for her at home." He snorted with laughter.

"Thanks. I'll see you later!" She left before anyone could question her, waving at Diego as she practically ran from the house.

*Crap.* What car to take? She'd let the guys have hers. After she raced into the garage out back, she fished for a set of keys off the key rack and took Derrick's. Careful not to draw undue attention, Kelly drove his red truck down the long-ass driveway and away toward Morey's Pier in Wildwood. She'd do anything she had to for her mates.

Patting her purse that held her favorite nine mil -- courtesy of her father-- she sped toward the meeting place, intent on saving the other pieces of her heart.

She remembered to call Doc's a few minutes later to announce that she'd arrived home safely. A little white lie, but if it meant saving her men, she'd do whatever she had to. She parked as close to the boardwalk as she could. Running two blocks, she made her way up the boardwalk and onto the pier. Though not so crowded during the winter, the boardwalk still had several people milling about. And then she saw him.

Simon Dunn stared at her without smiling. "Not a word." He quickly snagged one of her arms and dragged her back down the way she'd come, off the boardwalk, and onto the street. Before she could demand to see evidence that he had Ace and Zack, a jolting pain

stung her neck. She turned to stare in surprise at the last man she'd thought to see next to a creep like Dunn.

"Stephen?"

Stephen Folsom didn't blink as his gaze roamed her face with satisfaction. With possession. He tucked the syringe he'd used back into his jacket pocket. "Hey, Kelly. Nice to see you again."

She stumbled into his arms, working hard to identify the suddenly garbled voices around her. She felt too weak to stand, no doubt thanks to whatever he'd given her.

"Easy, asshole," Dunn reprimanded.

"Touch her again, and I'll geld you where you stand." She heard a growl. Stephen, growling? Even more confusing, Stephen trying to protect her? The man who could barely work up the nerve to kiss her good night or argue with his friend who'd once tried to cop a feel? That Stephen? "You don't touch what's mine."

Then blackness overtook her, and she knew no more.

\* \* \* \* \*

The next morning, Zack woke Ace with the same kind of massage Ace had lovingly given him a few weeks earlier. Except instead of using his finger in Ace's ass, Zack fucked him slow and easy, his cock stroking with a precision that had Ace shouting his name as he came hard all over the bed.

"Now, *that's* a massage." Ace struggled to catch his breath. "I hate to suggest it, but I think it's time to see Kelly again."

"Yeah." Zack pulled out and groaned. "Do we have to get up?"

"Actually, 'we' don't. You're the one that had all the issues. I think you should go fetch our mate."

Zack glared down at him, not surprised when the lazy Circ closed his eyes and tried to go back to sleep. "That you could sleep in your own cum is a little disturbing, not to mention gross. But you even think about leaving me to take care of our mess, and I'll --"

Ace shot out of bed with a grin. "Kind of pissy, aren't you? Not a morning person, eh, English?"

"Fuck off, cub." Zack chuckled, caught by the playful gleam in his lover's eyes. Emotion hit him hard, the burgeoning love he felt for both Ace and Kelly so strong. Their future looked bright, all his dreams and hopes within reach...

The phone rang. "Yeah?" he asked as he picked it up. "Oh. Hi, Caitlyn." He frowned. "Why would you be calling here for Kelly? I thought she was staying overnight with you." Had she returned, and he and Ace been unaware? No. No matter how into one another they were, they would have caught Kelly's scent the minute she stepped through the front door.

A dark foreboding stole his earlier joy as he raced through the house. "Shit. She's not here. Tell me again what happened last night."

As Caitlyn explained what she knew from the others, Zack headed into the bathroom to find Ace. "Caitlyn, tell the team to suit up. Kelly's not here. So what you're saying is that she's been gone from eight last night until" -- he paused to check the clock on the wall -- "nine this morning. Thirteen hours. *Shit*. We'll be there in twenty."

He hung up and yanked the shower door back. "Ace, Kelly's missing."

Ace's cocky smile disappeared. "Tell me."

"Apparently, she left last night. Said we'd told her to come back after she took a phone call."

"Bullshit."

"Right. So why would she lie?"

"Good question. Let's find the answers, fast."

They cleaned up and arrived at the compound in under twenty minutes. Zack's hair was still wet, and his clothing clung to him in spots, but all he could think about was Kelly in harm's way. They found the others circled around the dining room table. No one looked happy.

"I called her father. He hasn't heard from her since last week. She's not in Maryland," Doc said before Zack could speak. "Derrick's truck was missing. Using the vehicle's tracking device, he found it this morning parked down by the pier. No sign of Kelly."

Diego cleared his throat. The short male looked far too sober for Zack's frame of mind. "I gave her the phone." He shoved his hands down the pockets of his neatly pressed shorts. A peer of Doc's, as well as Doc's good friend, Diego always wore a ready smile that beckoned others to feel his joy with life. That he wasn't brimming with optimism spoke volumes. "A man asked for her. It wasn't either of you, but with that relationship she has with that Folsom fellow, I didn't think twice to ask her about it. I left her alone to take the call."

"Folsom," Ace snapped. "We need to find him."

"If it was even him." Zack's frustration boiled over. "Fuck this. It's the PPA. I know it."

"Yeah." Derrick exhaled slowly. "What say a few of us stake out our usual suspects? If we're near the labs, we'll be that much nearer to Kelly, I'm sure."

Roane took charge. "Hale, you check out Folsom. You find him, you make him tell you what he knows. The rest of us will check with our sources around Pearson Labs. But, guys," he said, narrowing his gaze on Ace and Zack, "we don't move on the labs until I give the say-so. We don't have the manpower to rescue you two if Pearl decides he wants to get his hands on you while you play cowboy holding up the lab. We need to focus on finding Kelly and getting her back safely."

"No shit." Ace exploded into action, shoving his fist through the drywall in the kitchen.

"Right." Zack put arm around his mate and pulled him close. "Simmer down. Focus on Kelly. Think about what we need to do."

Ace growled but nodded and stepped away, trying to regain control.

"What about me? What should I do to help?" Caitlyn blinked rapidly. Zack could see the tears in her eyes. "I want to do something."

Roane kissed her. "Stay here. If by some chance Kelly calls or needs help, she'll need you available. Doc might need a hand as well. We know a lot of people out there. Somebody's bound to have seen something."

Caitlyn nodded. "Okay." She shooed them with her hands. "So go already. Find Kelly. She promised to take me shoe shopping once her men wised up."

Guilt choked Zack, though he said nothing. Kelly should have been home with them last night. Instead, she'd been without her mates because he'd had intimacy issues. *Motherfucker.*

Ace pounded him in the arm. "Not now," he hissed. "Don't you lose it. We have to find her, *together*. Don't leave me," he said. "Not again. She needs us, Zack. We both need you."

Zack nodded. Ace was right. They had no time for recriminations. He followed the group out to the garage and into the hidden vault that held their defenses. Throwing on their light armor and arming themselves, they jumped into two vehicles and sped for the northern portion of the state, where Pearson Labs thrived.

Promising himself it would be okay, Zack reached out to his frantic beast and pledged his life to finding and protecting his mate. An arm sought him from the front seat, and he glanced up to see Ace looking at him with worry.

"We'll find her." Ace tried to reassure his mate.

"We will." Zack nodded. Now wasn't the time for doubt. Only one thing mattered: finding Kelly.

"No matter what it takes," Derrick muttered from the driver's seat. "The two of you need to dig out those cell phones and make some phone calls. Between your contacts and

mine, we'll find her. And don't count Harry out. If he hasn't seen her near the labs, she ain't there."

"Homeless" Harry saw everything, for the right price. He and a few of his friends lived outside the abandoned industrial area near Pearson Labs. His network of informants was vast, and he particularly liked Derrick. They had an arrangement, of sorts. No matter how many times Derrick had tried to find Harry a place to live, food, and employment, Harry would only work for money. And he only accepted it from Derrick.

"What's with you and Harry?" Zack asked.

"It's a black thing." Derrick shrugged.

"But he's white."

"How can you tell with all that dirt on his face?" Ace asked.

"Good point," Zack conceded.

Derrick grinned. "Maybe it's because I'm black and bad and I impress him. More than you skinny-ass white boys."

"Who you calling white?" Ace asked. "My blood's darker than yours."

"Please. I'm ebony, you're --"

"Not ivory. The cub's Cree," Zack interrupted with a snort. "I agree you're bad, though." Zack grinned, despite his worries. Derrick had a way of pissing him off and making him feel lighter at the same time. "A bad dresser, bad tipper, bad with the ladies..."

"That's pushing it." Derrick huffed.

"Actually, D, Zack has a point. And you know, my mate's never wrong." Ace finally said it out loud. *My mate.*

Derrick smiled, a sincere grin that turned his stern countenance into a face of masculine beauty. "About damned time, pretty boy."

Ace frowned. "I hate it when you call me that."

"I know. Now give me the phone." Derrick took the phone and pressed a button. A few moments passed. "Yo, Harry. It's D. I have a situation, one that'll have you rolling in green if you have the answers I need. Here's the deal..."

\* \* \* \* \*

Sabrina Torrence stared down at the unconscious female Circ strapped to the gurney as she pushed it along the hallway. Bile rose in her throat as she realized what she'd done. No more pretenses. Pearl would know who'd sabotaged this latest lab work. But there'd been no hope for it.

The woman was pregnant.

The likelihood of Kelly Malloy passing on sane, rational Circ genes to her progeny was about an 89 percent surety. She'd done the math. With the blood and tissue samples Elliot had already collected, and his plans to remove the woman's embryo now, Sabrina couldn't wait. Even though Elliot knew he might risk this offspring by grabbing it at such an early state, he wanted complete control over its development. Not a rational decision for Pearson Labs' top scientist, but then, she'd had her doubts about him for some time.

She rolled the gurney faster, nodding at the colleagues she passed. No one would question her. Not with her new clearance level. The CEO had seen fit to promote her, regardless of Pearl's ambivalence. She knew Pearl respected her intelligence, but the man didn't like the way she treated him. Well, fuck him. She hated his guts. If it hadn't been for him, she wouldn't be in this mess right now.

So much for a promising career in biochemistry. Her chance at leapfrogging from the Navy to something more lucrative in a state-of-the-art scientific lab, courtesy of Project Dawn, had tanked the minute Pearl created psychotic killers.

Sabrina still agreed with the project's original intentions -- to help the military, her fellow sailors and soldiers, be less vulnerable. She'd already lost friends due to the current conflicts the military was thrust into. Why sacrifice hardworking troops when science could



do what so many peacemakers couldn't? Rid the world of evil one dreg at a time by force. A superior force. Unfortunately, an unstable, murdering, superior force.

Five of Circe's Recruits had survived, and it killed Elliot that he didn't know why. It also aggravated him to no end that Dr. Evan Dennis held the men's loyalty. That his nemesis had the means to continue research on viable test subjects, while he made do experimenting with failure, time and time again.

"Where are you going?" a low voice rumbled, shooting tremors of fear through her every pore.

Sabrina stopped as McKinley stepped out of the shadows. Just twenty more feet, and she'd have made the elevator and freedom. The giant Circ's yellow eyes gleamed with a predatory intent. She never felt safe in this environment, not with what she knew and what she'd done. But Sabrina felt positively hunted whenever she was around McKinley. She'd swear he knew all about her, except he'd never acted on her misdeeds. Yet the man was aware of everything. More psychic than any of the Circs they'd ever seen.

Even Folsom and Dunn's new partner, Colins, didn't possess McKinley's ability to blend with the shadows, and they were Pearl's new, top-of-the-line Circ generation. They'd both lasted weeks longer than any of the others and showed no signs of regression.

"Torrence?" McKinley hissed, growing impossibly larger. He towered over her, nearly brushing the ceiling as he radiated hostility.

"I'm taking the patient to the subbasement levels after more testing. Dr. Pearl wants me to harvest her embryo first." Which wouldn't explain why she'd be near the service elevators instead of the level two shafts she'd already passed.

McKinley studied her. Then he stared at the woman on the hospital bed. He leaned down to sniff her, and his gaze darkened. He straightened and stepped closer to Sabrina.

She couldn't help backing away, but his low growl stopped her in her tracks. He sniffed her, nuzzling her neck. Shocking the hell out of her, he proceeded to lick her there, the rasp of his tongue like lightning against her skin. She felt the heat spiral to her sex in an instant.

McKinley rose, staring into her dark eyes. Nose to nose, they considered one another.

*Will he kill me now or toy with me first? Oh, God, please don't let him rape me, too.*

"You took this route because the elevators are busted, right?"

It took a minute for her to understand. The level two elevators weren't working? The perfect excuse. "Yes. Right. Not working. Exactly why I was...going to go this way."

The woman beside them moaned, the sedatives beginning to wear off.

McKinley shook his head and stepped back, his hands fisted into claws. "Get your ass moving. Dr. Pearl wants results fast on this one." Yet his words didn't seem right. McKinley should have asked more questions. Even if the level two elevators were inoperable, it made no sense to use this elevator leading to the outside.

"Well then, let me get on it." Sabrina tore past him, relieved beyond measure when the doors opened right away and she hustled her patient inside. She watched McKinley as the doors closed. Bemused, she thought she saw him murmur "good luck" before she lost sight of him.

Once on the ground level, she hurried down the nearly deserted hallway toward the back lot. With the keys to a white, nondescript medical van the PPA used when working Circ cases, Sabrina loaded Kelly into the vehicle with the slowest pneumatic lift known to man. Once Kelly was inside and the gurney locked down, Sabrina flew into the van and drove away.

It took every ounce of discipline she had to make small talk with the gate guard and to drive the fifteen-mile-an-hour speed limit off the property. She nodded at Mary, one of the homeless who lived outside the grounds. A nice woman, one who used the information Sabrina gave her all too willingly.

Sabrina knew where that information went. She could only hope it did more good than it seemed to lately. Because she wouldn't be able to pass any more. Not now when she'd stolen Elliot Pearl's greatest treasure.

A dark black sedan came out of nowhere behind her. She swore when she saw Simon Dunn in the driver's seat, sitting next to another PPA agent. "Son of a bitch." She veered sharply into him when he tried to pass. Unfortunately, they both sped along an unused street between deserted warehouses. The industrial section in this part of town hadn't been used in a decade, which made it the perfect place to create monsters.

Gritting her teeth, Sabrina knew she wouldn't be able to outrun them. She needed to drive carefully, concerned about the pregnant Circ in the back. Rummaging through her pockets, she found the syringe she'd love to stick in Dunn's neck. *I'd watch while you seize to death and enjoy every minute of it, you creep.*

A high-pitched scraping sound scared her spitless as another vehicle rammed her from the other side. A red truck sandwiched her against Dunn. It was driven by a man who looked more savage than McKinley. Dark brown skin surrounded eyes that glowed like gold. Surprisingly, Sabrina could see an arresting face despite the grimace he wore. She wondered where her head was that she noticed something like that, or that she could concentrate enough to see him through a blurred window and at such distance.

Shots fired, scoring her temple and lodging in her shoulder. She slammed on the brakes.

The truck and sedan continued past her. Her head throbbed, but thankfully, the bullet hadn't done more than graze her there. Her shoulder felt on fire. Not sure who to trust with Malloy, Sabrina turned the vehicle around and raced in the opposite direction. In the rearview mirror, she saw three men exit the red truck to confront Dunn, Folsom, and Colins from the sedan.

"Maybe we'll get lucky, and they'll kill each other."

*Not going to happen.*

Her cell phone rang, scaring the shit out of her. Answering cautiously, she waited.

"You got her?" Harry asked.

"Yes." Relief made her light-headed. No, that was the bullet currently stuck in her arm, in addition to the blood loss from her forehead.

"Bring her to the warehouse with the broken fish outside."

She knew just the one. An old cannery at the entrance to the industrial park. She disconnected and drove back a quarter mile, zigzagging through the complex. Aware she was still too close to the PPA for safety, she nevertheless had to rely on Harry. His Circ friends would help. From what Sabrina gathered, they were the good guys in this fight -- or at least, a helluva lot less bad than Pearson Labs.

Parking in the darkened building with the engine running, Sabrina quickly moved into the back to check on Kelly. To her surprise, the woman had revived.

"Where am I? What did you do to me?" Kelly cried out.

"Nothing." Sabrina held up her hands. "Shh." Crouched as she was, her balance was off, and she wobbled. Her wounds were weakening her. She needed to leave, but she had to make sure Kelly Malloy was protected first.

"You're that woman from Pearson Labs. Pearl's assistant," Kelly hissed.

"In case you hadn't noticed, I'm bleeding here," Sabrina said dryly. "I'm going to unstrap you. I think your buddies are on the way. Three big Circs just stepped out of a red truck, and they didn't look happy. They're duking it out with some PPA guys right now."

Sabrina caught her head and tried to overcome the dizziness.

"You're bleeding," Kelly said.

"A master of the obvious." *You don't have time for wit, Sabrina.* "Don't attack me when I get closer," she warned. Strapped or not, this woman was a Circ. She'd only been given mild tranquilizers to knock her out, and she wasn't injured and normal, like Sabrina. "Some key

points. One, you matured faster than normal. Pearl arranged for a mutated Circ to infect one of your lovers with an aggressive virus.”

“What? When?”

“That mission in Glen Falls. A rogue Circ bit one of your team, who in turn infected you. The virus was designed to jump-start a female Circ’s biological clock. Once activated, the virus soon died. Don’t worry, only you were impacted by it. Which leads us to key point number two. You’re pregnant and extremely valuable to Dr. Pearl right now.” Sabrina moved her left arm and grimaced at the pain.

“Pregnant?” Kelly sounded shell-shocked as Sabrina released her.

“You have to leave. Go back to your Circs and make sure to stay away. Tell them.” She paused. She’d once dreamed of a better life, of being someone important. Now her “career” was nothing more than a dirty, shaming mess. Then again, all that had really ended three years ago with the crumbling destruction of Project Dawn. “Tell them Pearl isn’t running the show. He hasn’t been for a long time. He’s making a new batch of Circs.” Time was running out. She was fading fast. “He has female Circs who aren’t crazy. He’s started a breeding program. Not with you, but he’ll use you to make sure they conceive.”

Kelly reached out to help steady her, and Sabrina jerked back. A knock on the back of the van door scared her, not helping matters.

“Hurry up in there, dammit.”

She breathed a sigh of relief, recognizing Harry’s voice. “Go. Harry’s a friend. He knows your buddy, Derrick, I think.”

“Derrick. Right.” Kelly inched toward the doors, then looked back at her. “Come with me.”

“No. I’m as good as dead. You don’t need that right now. Not with a baby on the way. Now tell them what I told you. And give them this.” She handed Kelly a small disc. “It’s password protected. But the password is --”

The van shook, and bullets whined through the front windshield.

"Dammit. Get out of here!" Once the shooting stalled, Sabrina crawled back into the front seat. The minute the back doors opened and she caught sight of Harry and Kelly racing for safety, she floored the accelerator. Sabrina tore out of the warehouse and went straight, then left, away from the red truck and Simon Dunn. In minutes she had four of the PPA's company cars on her ass. With a determined grimace, she stepped harder on the accelerator, aiming for a way out of this maze.

"Doc" and his pals could find a hacker to get into her encrypted files. Maybe he could do more with them than she'd ever been able to do. Then again, she was just a woman, just a stupid *phlebotomist*, as she'd often heard Pearl refer to her.

"Yeah, well, fuck you, Elliot Pearl." She wiped a hand over her face, clearing the blood from her eyes. "Now the enemy has your secrets. And I'm not done with you yet."

Not by a long shot.

## Chapter Ten

Kelly raced with a foul-smelling man for the dark shadows in the dim warehouse. The sun outside said it was daytime, but she couldn't remember much past Simon Dunn and Stephen Folsom...drugging her? She glanced down and saw she wore a long hospital gown. Perfect. Calling on the beast within, Kelly tried to transform...to no avail. Harry swore at her to hurry up and run, pointing outside and away from the van. Surprisingly fast for a man his age, he disappeared around the corner of the building.

She hurried into the shadows, fairly certain she couldn't be seen as she watched the woman speed away. *S. Torrence*, the name tag on her white coat had said. Well, S. Torrence had apparently rescued Kelly at great cost to herself. The woman bled profusely from her forehead, and a dark patch had spread over her shoulder, whether from glass or a bullet, Kelly didn't know. She could only hope S. Torrence would be all right.

Still trying to conquer the shock to her system, Kelly processed what she knew. She was pregnant and in danger of being captured by the PPA.

*She was pregnant.*

The need to find her mates and protect her baby triggered the *change* in an instant. *Thank God.* Kelly sniffed the air and caught several scents. Decay, refuse, oil. The tang of blood, probably belonging to that Torrence woman. And Zack...

Kelly raced in the direction of her mate's scent. Once outside the building, she found a narrow street parallel to the one the van had escaped onto. No one was in this alley, so she ran as fast as she could toward Zack. Soon she heard the sound of a fight. To her relief, she scented Ace as well.

She stopped as she turned the corner of another building. Derrick's red truck sat next to a dark car. Zack and Ace fought two massive Circs while Derrick engaged Simon Dunn. All five Circs had *changed*. Simon didn't stand a chance and in seconds lay in a heap, one arm broken, his face covered in blood.

"Kelly belongs to me," one of the rogue Circs argued. "I was made specifically for her. We share the same blood."

"That *I* collected, Colins. Pearl promised her to me," a Circ that looked like Stephen said. He was twice as thick in the chest and two heads taller than the pleasant-faced man she'd dated a few times. "It was my work that found her. Mine that gave her what she needed. She'll carry my brood. *Mine*."

Ace growled and attacked Stephen, while Zack took on the other male. Derrick spotted her and immediately ran over to her.

"You okay?" he rasped.

She nodded. "You?"

"I'll be fine, as soon as your mates stop fucking around and end this." He finished in a raised voice.

Everyone froze as they saw Kelly, fully *changed*, wearing only a hospital gown that hugged her curves.



The fighting engaged in earnest. Watching Ace and Zack battle was like watching a ballet. Choreographed, graceful moves merged with power and skill to decimate their enemies.

Surprised not to see more of the PPA around them, she asked Derrick what to make of their absence.

“Roane and Hale are providing a distraction.”

In the distance, Kelly saw smoke in the air. The roar of sirens grew louder.

“We need to go,” she whispered.

Derrick nodded.

At that moment, Zack twisted the head of the Circ he fought, breaking the male’s neck. Ace knocked Stephen’s head into the ground hard enough to crack his skull. Stephen slumped to the ground, unmoving.

“About time.” Zack shook his head at Ace and dropped his adversary to the ground.

“Show-off.”

“Hurry up,” Derrick called.

They turned and rushed to Kelly’s side.

“Baby, I’m so glad you’re all right.” Zack embraced her, hugging her tightly in his arms.

*Baby is right.* Kelly squirmed out of his hold. “I missed you, too, but we need to leave, before we have company.”

Ace kissed her hard. He and Zack moved to the backseat of the truck, allowing Kelly to sit next to Derrick. They sped around a corner, just in time to avoid the horde of Pearson Labs vehicles as they reached Simon’s car.

“Not that we’re not happy to see you, but how the hell did you escape from the labs?” Ace asked.

Kelly explained waking up in the van and about S. Torrence. "I hope she's okay. She saved my life. From what she told me, Pearl is fixated on me." *Because of my baby*. She wanted to share her news with her mates, but confusion and uncertainty made her weary. She still needed time to process the news herself. There'd be time enough to tell them later.

"This S. Torrence," Derrick said. "You sure she helped you? Maybe it's all a setup."

"For what? If Pearson Labs wanted me, why let me go? Besides, the woman took a bullet for me. They shot at her while she was leaving. I don't think she faked that."

"I don't like it." Derrick sniffed in Kelly's direction. "Something's off. That blood on your gown isn't right."

"No, it's not," Zack said quietly. "But at least it's not hers."

"It's Torrence's blood. I didn't sense anything odd about her, if you don't count her working for Pearl. Then again, I was more concerned with getting the hell away from that mess than I was studying her."

"Pearl's people don't help us. The damned scientists only care about their experiments, about 'positive results.'" Derrick muttered. "Torrence is bad news. Soon as we get you back, we'll see just what the hell they did to you in that lab."

"D's right." Ace gripped her hand. "You were gone for a long time, Kelly. We were so worried about you. You sure you feel all right?"

"I feel fine." Kelly smiled, catching Zack's hand as well. She liked Ace saying "we."

After Derrick called Roane and Hale, who also headed toward the compound, they drove in companionable silence.

Two hours later, they left the Parkway a few miles from the house, and Kelly voiced what she'd wanted to know since she'd left the other night. She turned to her mates in the backseat. "Is it safe to say you two have worked things out?"

Zack grinned. Ace flushed.

“Don’t get them started.” Derrick grimaced. “If I have to look at Zack mooning over Ace’s sorry ass, I’ll puke. I could barely handle the two of them slobbering all over you. Now I have to watch them making cow eyes at each other. It’s damned embarrassing.”

“Oh?” Zack asked coolly.

“Yeah, *oh*. I swear, one of you starts giving the other chocolates and I’m outta here. It’s bad enough the women have you idiots getting them flowers.”

Zack relaxed, and Ace laughed. “Chocolates?” He looked at Zack. “Come on. You can do better than that. You want a way to my heart? A nice, long massage should do.”

Kelly’s beast purred its approval, ecstatic to see the love flowing between her mates.

Zack shifted in his seat. The scent of arousal filled the small truck.

“Shit. Cut that out,” Derrick growled. “You push me into a mating heat, and I swear, it’s Kelly I’m taking.”

“You sure?” Ace asked as he leaned closer. He surprised Kelly that he’d tease Derrick, considering his issues about loving a man.

Zack grinned from ear to ear. “Now, that’s sexy. What do you think, Kel? We going to keep him? Our own little Ace *in the hole*?”

Ace snickered at the innuendo, though his cheeks flushed.

“Kelly, just say yes and put me out of my misery,” Derrick begged. Then he snapped at Ace. “And *you*, sit the fuck back. I don’t think Kelly wants to see what I’ll do if you don’t cut that shit out.” He shifted in his seat, drawing Kelly’s attention to his arousal.

“I don’t know, Derrick. You’re a handsome man. Why wouldn’t I...?” Kelly teased.

Derrick pulled the vehicle to the side of the road, his mouth tight. “I suddenly need some exercise. I’ll meet you at home.” He took off down the road, running as if chased by demons.

Ace and Zack high-fived one another, laughing. “Way to go, Kels.” Ace kissed her hard. “I’ve never seen anyone scare D out of his truck before.”

Kelly grinned and scooted over into the driver's seat. "That's me. Hell on wheels. Now, let's go home."

Kelly grumbled as she sat up slowly, with Doc's help. She'd been poked and prodded for what felt like forever, forced to accept Doc's multitude of examinations with her mates on either side of her.

"So, Doc? Is she okay?" Ace asked, clearly worried.

"Nothing strange in her system. A few traces of that viral agent your S. Torrence mentioned, the same 'toxin' I found in Ace's blood after his battle with those rogues. The woman didn't lie about that." Doc rubbed his chin. "Other than that, Kelly seems extraordinarily healthy. So maybe we should ask her. Are you okay, Kelly? How do you feel?" He deliberately focused on her belly and raised a brow in question, as if to say, *Should you tell them, or should I?*

Kelly swallowed hard, still not sure how to feel about her pregnancy. Thrilled at the new life inside of her, she nonetheless was still getting used to being a Circ with not one, but two mates. And a baby?

"Kelly, we love you. If something's wrong, you can tell us." Zack rubbed her shoulders and kissed her cheek, his affection soothing her anxiety.

"Yeah, baby. We're your mates. Trust us. We love you," Ace added.

Her beast nudged her to do the right thing, not that Kelly needed much prodding. Accepting the baby meant accepting this new way of life for all of them. As a Circ. As a woman with two lovers. *As a family.*

"I'm pregnant," she blurted, staring from Zack to Ace.

The looks on their faces were priceless. Both men gaped at her, then at each other.

"Ah, uh, are you sure?" Ace asked.

"A baby?" Zack asked at the same time.

Together, their expressions turned to ones of wonder, and her men smiled. "A baby."

Doc grinned. "Normally, it takes eleven or more days to detect hCG in the system. But because Kelly's Circ, her hormone levels vary significantly. There's no mistake. The amount of hCG in her blood confirms it. Kelly's pregnant."

"Has to be my kid." Ace puffed up. "My stuff's pretty potent."

Zack rolled his eyes and leaned down to hug Kelly. "As if. Cub, you wish you had my strength. It's obviously mine."

"Guys," Kelly said firmly, tugging them both to face her. "If this thing between us all is going to work, the baby will be *ours*, no matter who turns out to be the biological father."

"I know." Zack sighed. "But if it is Ace's, he's going to be a bear to live with after you give birth."

"*Two* Bears." Ace snorted. "It's Cree. Get it right."

"Ass."

"Dick." Ace glanced at Kelly. "I mean, jerk."

Kelly laughed and hugged them to her. She knew life with her Circs wouldn't be easy, but it would never be dull. "You're both going to have to cut down on that swearing, for the baby's sake." She patted her flat belly. "I'm going to have to move out of my house, aren't I?"

Doc's smile faded. "I think it best. We'll beef up security on the compound. I'm not sure if Caitlyn mentioned it, but we're building a few houses on the property, so you mated pairs, or groups," he said, looking at the three of them, "can have your own space."

"Good idea," Zack and Ace said at the same time.

Doc nodded. "How about we break the news to the others?"

Kelly groaned. "Caitlyn's going to be impossible about this. She wants to be an aunt, you know."

"Yeah, well, just think how much shi -- flack -- we're going to get from the guys about baby furniture and baby clothes." Ace sighed. "They'll never look at me the same again."

"None of us will, you idiot. You're going to be a dad, not queen of the gay pride parade." Zack snorted.

Ace flushed. "I'll give you 'queen,' you son of a --"

"Men," Doc interrupted loudly, trying to hide his smile. "Let's go on upstairs, okay?"

"Yes. Let's introduce our new family to the rest of the team." Kelly held out her hands, and her mates settled her between them.

"Doc, give us a minute, would you?" Zack asked.

"Sure. But don't make me wait long. I hate holding on to good news."

Ace waved him away. Once the three of them were alone, Zack spoke. "Kelly, we were teasing. The baby is ours, no matter what."

"Yeah, ours." Ace nodded.

"I love you both, so much." Zack cleared his throat. He leaned close to kiss Kelly fully on the mouth. "My mate." He turned to Ace, who met him halfway, and kissed him. "My mate."

"Yeah." Ace sighed when he broke away. "He's so damned sexy. Maybe we could make Doc wait a few. It's been a while, Kel. And I'm feeling a powerful need to bond with you both."

"In here?" Kelly's libido roared. She narrowed her gaze, her interest piqued. "Fine."

"Okay?" Zack blinked. "Don't you want a bed, candlelight, and rose petals or something? You know, to remember this?"

Kelly slyly smiled. "You're such a romantic. But I was thinking of something better." She quickly moved to the door and locked it, then closed the blinds over the glass windows in the lab, in the event anyone entered the outside hallway. "I have a few fantasies we haven't gotten around to yet."

“Oh?” Ace asked, his dark eyes growing darker.

“Yeah.” Kelly dropped the shirt and shorts she’d put on earlier and stood before her mates, proud of her nudity and the effect it had on them. She could feel their beasts fighting to take control and take her. “I want to see my mates fucking. Then I want to play.”

Zack groaned and kissed her hard, his hands tightening over her breasts while Ace dropped his clothes.

“Anything for you, Kelly.” He winked. “Did you have anything particular in mind?”

Ace reached for Zack and pulled him away before she could answer. She watched Ace strip Zack of his clothing, then grind himself against his mate. She grew wet in an instant, heat and desire building as she watched her fantasy come to life. Hard muscles gleamed and the scent of lust and love beckoned.

“That’s just what I had in mind. Except I want to watch every messy, sexy minute of it.”

“Perfect.” Zack and Ace pulled her close and sandwiched her between them, the sensation of belonging and excitement turning her inside out. “You know, Kelly. That rogue was wrong. He wasn’t created for you...”

“We were,” Ace finished, sliding against her back. “And it’s time we showed you once more...”

\* \* \* \* \*

“What the hell? Doc said you had news for us *an hour ago*,” Derrick snarled as he paced in the living room. He stopped what he meant to say next, shocked to see Ace and Zack holding hands. *In front of everyone*. Kelly beamed like a proud parent. *Some weird shit going down here, even for Circs*. Then he caught the scent of sex in the air and shared a groan with Hale.

Roane and Caitlyn grinned like idiots.

"Everyone, I'd like to announce that Zack, Ace, and I are mates."

"Yeah, and?" Derrick felt itchy. Since his escape from the three sex fiends hogging his own damned truck, he'd had a hard time forgetting the scent of that blood on Kelly's gown. No matter what the others thought, it wasn't human. Of that he was sure. But it wasn't quite Circ either, not that he could tell. That scent intrigued him more than it should.

"And we're having a baby," Kelly added softly, grabbing his attention once more.

"Holy shit. A baby?" Hale asked.

Caitlyn squealed and hugged Kelly. Ace and Zack beamed proudly, and Derrick didn't have to ask who the father was. The way their scents joined as one, all three of them would claim this kid. The way it should be, a child protected by its parents, as well as his or her extended family. He grinned with the others as they shared heartfelt congratulations. A baby. How about that?

"Well, I for one am going to teach this kid how to deal." He hugged Ace and Zack, then kissed Kelly on the mouth with a *smack*, just to irritate her mates. Ace growled, but Zack shook his head, grinning. "First rule of thumb," Derrick proclaimed, "is to never bring flowers to a girl. And two, chocolates are the sign of a sap."

"Ass." Roane glared. He'd recently wooed Caitlyn with both flowers *and* chocolates.

"Derrick, you need help." Hale sighed. "You don't even know it's going to be a boy."

"The odds favor male Circs. But hell, I'll give you two-to-one it's a girl, just to shake things up." Derrick loved betting on a long shot.

"You're on." Roane flipped him off. "And you owe me for that sap crack."

"Leave him be, Roane." Caitlyn snuggled against her lover. "Can't you see what's happening? It's like fate is about to slap Derrick upside the head with a mate. And then we'll give him so much crap, it's not funny."



Hale laughed. "Oh, yeah. I can't wait to watch him fall all over himself over some woman. And she won't be easy. Oh, no. Hard-ass Derrick Packard will fall for some ball-busting chick. I can just see it now."

Everyone broke into laughter but Derrick, who suddenly couldn't stop thinking about S. Torrence and her role in Kelly's supposed "escape." Talk about a ball-busting chick. Any woman who would go up against Elliot Pearl had a set, or a death wish waiting to happen.

"Whatever, Hale. I think you might want to go easy on the whole mate thing, though. Because if those five keep going at it, you and I are going to be hurting for sure." And feeling the mating heat before their time. By Derrick's calculations, they still had a few more weeks to go before they ended up doing each other. Derrick doubted Roane or the boy toys would share their mates, now that they'd bonded. Besides, the thought of sex with a pregnant Kelly didn't sit well at all. As sexy as she was, Derrick couldn't see taking her in his beast form and possibly harming her child. No way in hell.

"You know what, D? You're right. What say we go grab a beer and let the newly mated celebrate?" *Have sex*, Hale might as well have said.

"Good idea." Derrick followed him out the door, waving behind at the others. "Just promise me something," he murmured as they entered his truck.

"What?"

"If I ever look at a woman the way our brothers look at their mates, shoot me, will you?"

Hale grinned. "No problem. I'm not all that eager for a mate, either, to tell you the truth. The only thing good about having one is that you no longer have a need to...you know." Hale quickly glanced out the window of the truck, as uncomfortable about the mating heat as Derrick. "Don't get me wrong. Ace and Zack fit. They're mates. But me? I just want to control my beast. I hate it controlling me."

"Amen." Derrick steered them away from the compound.

"Where are we going?" Hale asked.

Derrick didn't realize he'd started back toward Pearson Labs until he noted the signs they passed. "I was thinking."

"Shit. This can't be good."

"S. Torrence. We don't know much more than that she *supposedly* helped Kelly. I want to know what that woman did in Pearson Labs, and why she decided out of the 'goodness of her heart' to give Doc some encoded disc. About time we found some answers, instead of waiting on the fucking PPA to attack or Harry to call, you know?"

"Not bad, D. I like the way you think." Hale pounded his shoulder. "It's for the greater good, after all. And it'll keep us away from all those hormones clouding the compound. I don't know about you, but one female Circ in the house is bad enough on my sex drive. Two is going to have me perpetually horny."

Derrick frowned. "Yeah." His thoughts turned again to Kelly's "savior," his instincts telling him to find the Torrence chick quickly. If the damned woman had lost a lot of blood, she might not be around much longer to answer his questions. His beast snarled at the thought.

"And Kelly's pregnant. Don't pregnant women have a ton of hormonal changes?" Hale asked. "Mood swings, and they get all horny at certain times while they're carrying?"

"Shit. I don't think I can deal with another mating heat as ramped up as the last one Caitlyn caused. Now we have to deal with Kelly's hormones, too?" He groaned.

Hale paused. "Drive a little faster."

 THE END 

## **Marie Harte**

Marie Harte is an avid reader who loves all things paranormal and futuristic, but especially all things romance. Reading romances since she was twelve, she fell in love with the warmth of first passion and knew writing was her calling. Twenty-three years later, the Marine Corps, a foray through Information Technology, a husband and four kids, and her dream has finally come true. Marie lives in Georgia with her family and loves hearing from readers. To read more about Marie, visit [www.marieharte.com](http://www.marieharte.com) and check out her blog at <http://www.marieharte.blogspot.com>.