



U N T A M E D   H E A R T S

*Wolfen  
Choice*

JAMIE HILL & JUDE MASON

Wolfen Choice  
*by Jamie Hill, Jude Mason*

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Wolfen Choice

ISBN # 978-1-907010-17-0

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Cover Art by April Martinez ©Copyright April 2009

Edited by Janice Bennett

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Published in 2009 by Total-E-Bound Publishing 1 The Corner, Faldingworth Road, Spridlington, Market Rasen, Lincolnshire, LN8 2DE, UK.

**Warning:** This book contains sexually explicit content which is only suitable for mature readers. This story has been rated *Total-e-burning*.

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## **Untamed Hearts**

WOLFEN CHOICE

Jamie Hill and Jude Mason

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## **Dedication**

To our loyal readers, here's hoping you feel like Cole—young at heart, carefree, and always, the chosen one.

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## Chapter One

Cole sat with his back to the cliff face, naked as the day he was born. The rough stone scratched his back, the rubble under him dug into his bum. He focused on a distant point where flames had licked at the treetops, leaving nothing but blackened fingers reaching into the sky.

The fire had recently passed over the valley, leaving the territory of the wolf tribe a mixture of ashes and partially burnt foliage. If Gar hadn't been away from home, if the wind had turned the other way, Cole was sure life would have gone on as usual. Many of the small family packs had fought the flames, while others had fled. But without Gar, the pall of death now loomed over the entire tribe.

Cole's immediate thoughts were of his find and the meaning behind it. The talisman. The brilliant red stone in the shape of a wolf's head, set in the centre of the gold filigree, rested in his palm. He wanted to throw it as far as his strength would allow. Instead, he tossed it into the air and snatched it back then lifted it so the sun shone through the gem, sending brilliant shards of colour across the dull, burned soil.

"What's the matter?" Zane, his friend and companion, leaned down and, reaching out, tried to snatch the stone from his grasp.

Cole pulled the amulet close, unwilling to allow it to leave his hand. Cursing under his breath, he wondered why. He'd have given anything if he'd never seen the damn thing—never



found their tribal leader, Gar, and his mate's scorched corpses. Charred flesh and bone had been all that remained. The smell was something he'd never forget, he was sure of it.

The shock and grief were still hard to bear. The ramifications of what this meant to their tribe were enormous. Cole sighed. No one would ever be able to replace Gar. Yet someone would have to try.

Shaking off his black mood, he dropped the amulet onto the pile of clothing he'd shed and grabbed hold of Zane's wrist. He pulled the tan-fleshed, white-haired man around and draped him across his knees. "Nothing besides the obvious," he said, answering Zane's question. "Oh, and I'm horny." It seemed inappropriate, but Cole needed something to distract him from the horrible events that had taken place.

Zane's response was predictable, as had been Cole's own comment. "Yeah, so what else is new? Ever since I met you, your cock's been at no less than half-hard."

"Nothing wrong with that, or so you've been telling me for the past couple of weeks. No one else complains about me being hard all the time."

Zane wriggled, dragging his thighs and genitals over Cole's erection. "Like I'm complaining!" He squirmed a little more and chuckled when Cole groaned.

"Fuck, you know how to get to me." Cole slid his hand over Zane's lower back then along his arse. The man's squirming took on a more determined thrust, driving his shaft hard into Cole's thigh.

"I understand how you're feeling. This whole situation is overwhelming, and you'd rather not think about it for a while

longer. But you're driving me crazy!" Zane drove his hips forward again. "Either spank me or fuck me, please!"

Grinning, Cole continued his teasing caress, sliding his palm over the firm cheeks of the man's bum and down his thighs. He nudged them apart and slipped a hand between those sturdy columns of muscle and bone, cupping the warm, round sac. "Spank you? Have you misbehaved? Do you need a spanking?" Cole was intrigued. He'd never spanked anyone before.

"For fuck's sake, just do me, would you?" Zane snarled, his temper obviously getting the better of him.

Cole loved trying new things and wasn't about to let Zane off so easily. He pressed his free arm across the man's back, holding him in place, while continuing to toy with the hefty ball sac and the crack of his arse.

Zane's writhing grew more desperate when Cole pushed a finger against the tight rosebud nestled between his cheeks. He groaned when it popped inside.

"So, fucking or spanking?" Cole twisted his digit around the tight passage. His own cock shifted, pulsing under the weight of his new lover.

"Whatever you want. Fuck, spank, I don't care," Zane growled. "Just don't leave me hanging."

"And you said *I* was always horny. What about you and this monster you have dangling between your legs?" Popping his finger free, Cole pushed his hand between them and grabbed Zane's impressive hard-on.

"Yes," the man hissed and pumped his hips.

"Yes, you want to fuck, or yes, you want a spanking?" Cole asked, insistent. "Make a choice or you get neither."

"Fuck then, fuck me," Zane replied quickly. He raised his arse, perhaps hoping Cole would relent and slip a finger back into his tight hole.

"I think I want to spank you, first." Cole released the hard shaft and laid his palm on the nearest cheek. He waited until he sensed the time was right, then raised his hand, preparing for the first blow.

Peering over his shoulder, Zane must have seen what he was doing, because suddenly, his bum cheeks clenched tight. "Then spank me," he said with a hint of mischief in his voice.

"Turn around, don't look." Cole expected an argument but got none. The beautiful, white-haired man simply turned his face away and put both his hands on the ground. Cole lowered his arm, again stroking the taut, tanned bottom, exploring the crease and the inside of the muscular thighs. The firm, round balls shifted, the sac grew tight and wrinkled under his touch. "I've never spanked anyone before, but it excites me to think about it."

"Just do something." Zane's voice was hoarse. He lifted his arse again.

"Spread your feet apart." Cole pushed against the smooth, inner thighs trapping his hand. A moment later, he had room to explore and tease, but instead he pulled away. The view was spectacular—two lush mounds of skin, divided by the dark cleft between and the soft pucker of a tight anus.

"Cole, you're driving me crazy." Zane shifted, pushing his cock forward.

"Yeah, I know. Fun, isn't it?"

There was a long pause, and several more shiftings of the man's feet, before he replied in a soft voice, "Yes, you bugger."

Chuckling, yet feeling hornier than he had in weeks, Cole brought his hand down with as much force as he could from such a short distance. The cheek he struck wobbled deliciously, and the howl that came from Zane was music to his ears. The blow turned into a caress, his hand moving around the buttock, examining the sudden heat.

It wasn't enough. Cole wanted more and raised his hand again. He waited for Zane to relax then spanked him on the other side.

"Youch!" Zane twisted and tried to roll onto the ground, but Cole held him.

Their cocks dragged across each other, both hard and both dripping pre-cum. Cole shuddered and ran his hand over the reddened flesh, admiring the blossoming handprints adorning each.

"You really do have an amazing arse, you know. It reddens nicely." He ran his hand over the upturned cheeks and again between them. Zane's sudden shiver told him he was doing the right thing, circling and tormenting the tight, crinkled hole. He pushed in, past the outer ring of muscle. "I love the feel of your hole gripping me." He gently eased it in and out, pushing it a little deeper with each inward thrust. When his palm rested flat over Zane's arse, he stopped and wiggled his inserted digit, probing for the hard nut of his prostate.

"Ay!" cried Zane. He pushed back into Cole's hand. "Your cock would feel good in there, too, you know. Much better than just your finger."

"Maybe." Cole pretended to ponder, while continuing to massage the small organ. Zane's cock throbbed every time Cole jammed his fingers against the man's prostate, and Cole was sure a climax wasn't far behind. "But if I moved you around so I could fuck you, I wouldn't get to watch this quite so easily."

"But you'd feel it, and I know I can make it good for you."

"I know that, too. We've fucked already, remember?"

"Yes," Zane hissed. Sweat glistened along his flesh, filling the hollow of his spine. "How could I forget? You're amazing when we fuck."

"Ah, and I adore when you talk dirty." Cole withdrew his single digit and worked two into the gripping hole. "Tell me how much you liked it. Tell me what you want me to do, now."

"I loved the feeling of your big cock piercing my hole. The softness of the crown popping inside was amazing. When you pushed the shaft in, I thought I'd lose consciousness. It just felt so good."

Cole spread his fingers, stretching the membrane, preparing the man for another such treat. "What about the spanking? Did you like me spanking you, first?"

"Yes, yes, I like the heat on my arse."

"You've done this before?"

"Damn, Cole. Fuck me. Please." Zane's hips trembled, the muscles in his arse clutching at Cole's fingers.

"Horny bugger, aren't you?" Cole pushed a third finger into the hungry hole and worked all three in and out.

"Fuck yeah, you know I am."

"Tell me how you want it." He was enjoying the dialogue too much to let it stop. His cock felt like it was on fire. Each gentle thrusting of his fingers brought an unmistakable squirming of his lover's hips, which dragged their cocks against each other in a wonderfully erotic way. Pre-cum anointed them both and made the stimulation that much better. The smell of arousal hung heavy in the air.

"Let me lean over that log, the one right next to us. I'll spread my legs good and wide. You'll have no trouble getting into me."

"What if I want something else?" He smiled, knowing he was frustrating the poor man nearly beyond endurance.

"What? Tell me what you want." Zane twisted his upper body around so he could look up at Cole. "Whatever you like. I'll do it." His eyes were wide, his nostrils flared and his face and shoulders were flushed bright red.

Pulling his fingers from the warm dampness of the hole, Cole said, "Go drape yourself over the log."

He watched appreciatively as the tall, well-built man tumbled off his lap. With his handsome, pre-cum-lubricated cock flailing between his legs, he rushed to arrange himself over the fallen tree. Cole sat and admired the view for a few seconds before climbing to his feet and following. When he was less than a body length from the luscious arse, he dropped to his knees and approached him at a slow crawl. The smell of the man dragged a moan from deep inside Cole.

Finally, near enough, he leaned forward, flicking his tongue along the backside of Zane's thigh, and smiled at the shuddering reaction.

"Keep still," he commanded.

"I'll try. You're making me crazy."

Cole leaned in again and slid his tongue from the back of Zane's knee to the crease joining leg to bum. He ran the tip along the delicate tuck of skin and then into the warm groove. Targeting the man's hole, he lapped at the tight swirl of tissue, pushing his tongue barely within. Zane's pungent taste forced a groan of pleasure from deep inside Cole.

"Oh fuck, oh fuck!"

Zane's soft litany was music to Cole, urging him to delve even deeper into the man's anus.

He reached up and cupped the dangling ball sac. He tugged gently on the precious orbs until he heard a deep intake of breath. Pulling away, he whispered huskily, "Yeah, I like you crazy. Don't move."

"Right. Not moving." Zane shuffled his feet, perhaps trying to position himself more comfortably, more likely attempting to wedge his toes under the log.

Cole trailed a line of kisses from one taut, muscular buttock to the other, bypassing his lover's anus. He gathered saliva in his mouth and, on the return trip, spat it onto the waiting hole.

Rising to his feet, Cole gave his cock several caressing strokes. He was hot and wanted nothing more than to drive his aching shaft deep into the man's arse. He knew he couldn't, the pain would be unbearable. He stepped forward,

crouched and took his cock firmly in hand. Positioning himself just so, he nudged the sensitive head against the pucker. He shuddered, the sensation causing him to doubt his ability to control the animal lust rising inside him.

"Do it." Zane pushed his arse back, attempting to trap Cole's weeping cock head. "Fuck me, I'm ready. More than ready."

"I said, hold still." Cole strained for control. Without warning, he raised his free hand and brought it down twice, once per cheek, as hard as he could. To his credit, Zane kept still, but the yelp of surprise made Cole smile even wider. While the man beneath him was still gasping from the swats, Cole wedged his cock head at the opening again and pushed.

He slipped in easily, the sudden heat and grip of the man's arse a sensation he'd never tire of. He eased forward, stopping only when his shaft was half-buried. Breathing deeply, he released the hold he had on his cock and moved both hands to Zane's hips. Gripping firmly, he swayed Zane's body from side to side, enjoying the way his cock head pressed against the different parts of Cole's arse. Slowly he sank in deeper, feeling the stretch of anal membrane around his shaft, the heat enveloping more of him the further he went. Blissful release was close. His balls churned with the desire to spend, and soon. He fought it off, wanting desperately to pleasure his new lover, first.

"Don't tease me any more. Fuck me. I need it." Zane pressed back against him. Arse met groin with a resounding slap of flesh.



Tightening his grip, Cole held him firmly in place until he was sure he could go on without shooting too soon. He began the slow, easy dance of fuck, driving in and out, each thrust a little faster, a little firmer. Every few strokes, he ground his pelvis into Zane's behind and growled his pleasure. When his heart raced, he let go of his control and slammed into his lover's tight buttocks.

"Yes, yes," Zane hissed repeatedly, encouraging him to greater speed.

Cole reached around the man's belly and took hold of his lover's cock. The stiff shaft filled his hand. He pumped it, and pre-cum coated his fingers in only a few strokes. It pulsed and thickened, and he knew the inevitable climax was mere moments away.

His own came like a blast of fireworks, exploding into the tight confines of his partner's arse as his body tensed, and his hips shot forward. He lost sight and hearing. All that mattered was the driving of his hips, the squeezing of his shaft, and Zane's sticky cum shooting in stream after stream through his fingers.

He throbbed and gasped until there was nothing left then he collapsed over Zane's back. Sweat-slicked and hot, it was like lying on a bed of smooth, warm stone.

"Thank you," Zane sighed. "But you better get off me, or I'm going to fall over."

Chuckling, Cole replied, "I was just wondering how I was going to manage that without collapsing, myself."

Pulling back, he eased himself out of the tight hole then dropped to the grass in a trembling heap. Zane joined him, arms and legs winding around his.

"That was amazing." The white-tressed man turned his face upwards and pressed his lips to Cole's.

When he broke the kiss a few moments later, Cole looked into the man's brilliant blue eyes. He wanted to sink into them and lose himself. "Yes, that was truly amazing. We're good together." He stopped there, unwilling to offer more than the occasional, afternoon fuck session. There were so many others he hadn't tried, so many men and women he wanted to test and explore. But those eyes, those lips, affected him like no one else's had. The man made him feel as if he could do anything.

"The talisman, what are you going to do about that?" Zane asked as he sat up. His face showed his concern.

Cole knew the pack couldn't be without a leader for long. Not now. Not after the fire. The entire tribe needed strong guidance. Yet, he wasn't ready to settle down, let alone take on that kind of responsibility. Hell, he didn't have a life-mate, so the talisman couldn't belong to him.

"I don't know. It can only belong to someone who has the good of the pack in his heart, and a life-mate who will also do all he or she can for the tribe. That's not me. I'm too young." He pushed himself away from the beautiful, white-haired man and got to his feet. He went to where his clothing lay in a pile. Bending over, he retrieved the brilliant red-stoned talisman. Looking at it, he mused, "It's beautiful. But not for me. I'm not ready, not yet."

"Maybe the amulet knows something you don't." Zane retrieved his own pile of clothing shed earlier and began to dress.

Cole watched him, eyes fixed on the man's arse. Zane hopped on one long, well-muscled leg and stuffed his foot into the leather pants. A moment later, he pushed the other one in and then his bum was covered, concealed from view. Still Cole watched him, admiring the lean body, the beautifully shaped shoulders and arms. He loved how the man's silky, white hair swung across his lower back. He found himself wondering if he could coax Zane into another session.

"Are you going to stare at me all afternoon?"

Cole looked up and smiled into his lover's face. "I was just wondering if I could convince you to take those clothes off again. You make me horny."

"Horny?" Zane gaped. "But ... but you just came. You're insatiable."

Winking, Cole replied, "Yeah, I know, and you love me for it."

Cocking his head, the amazing man said, "Maybe that's part of the reason."

Shrugging Zane's remark off, Cole returned his attention to the amulet. "We should get back to the pack. They'll wonder where we are. We've got to tell them about Gar and his lover. Damn!"

Zane approached him and, after laying both hands on his shoulders, said, "Yes, we do. And then we have to explain how the talisman has chosen you."

"But it can't. I'm not fit to be the next guardian. I've got too many wild oats to sow yet and I have no mate. It can't be me."

"Then let me hold it." Zane lowered one hand and held it open.

Cole looked at the outstretched palm. He glanced down at the delicate, gold filigree and the red stone at its centre then tucked it in close to his chest, protectively. "Maybe later," he whispered. *Maybe not.*

\* \* \* \*

They were still a good half-day's journey away from their pack. The trip might have gone more quickly had they shifted into wolves, but Cole wanted to gather things along the way the pack could use, and that was easier when he was in human form.

They'd stopped to help a small bear clan bury one of their dead. After wrapping the body, they'd watched the clan members lift it into a tree so the old man could begin his journey to join the Great Spirit. The bears had ancient customs, very much like their own.

*We have to do the same. The pack must pull itself together and take care of our dead.* With their leader gone, it might fall apart. He thought guiltily about the bodies of Gar and Ruby that he'd discovered and left behind. Charred and burned as they were, he truly thought their spirits had already gone wherever they were going. There was nothing he or Zane could have done for them. But he knew something was

needed to mark the passing of such important members of the tribe.

Trudging forward, he glanced sideways at his travelling companion. Zane had only been with the pack a few months. Details about his prior life and pack were sketchy. Cole gathered something about an unfortunate run-in with hunters from the nearby city of Newburgen. Zane had done what he could to help his brothers, but the others had succumbed to their injuries. He alone had survived. He didn't like to talk about it, so Cole hadn't pressed.

The white-haired warrior had apparently told Gar everything, and their leader had welcomed him into his family pack without hesitation. Cole had been curious at the time, but more interested in the man himself. Tall, with muscles bulging in all the right places, he was the most gorgeous creature Cole had ever laid eyes on. If his own sexual orientation had been in doubt before, it wasn't any longer with the arrival of handsome, sexy Zane. He definitely liked men as much as, or possibly even more than, he did women.

Gar had been tribal leader long before Cole was a pup. He was probably Cole's uncle or some more distant relative related by blood, but he'd never been the mentor type. Growing up, Cole had learned much more from Kaleb and Ulric, two mated males in his pack. Their relationship was a source of awe and inspiration for him. Inherently sexual, playful and loyal, while also enjoying the occasional inclusion into their bed of a female they both admired and agreed upon, those wolves had what Cole wanted. *Someday.*

His closeness with Kaleb had irritated Gar, who'd had plans to mate Cole with his female offspring, Tala. No matter how pretty the raven-haired she-wolf was, though, she did nothing for Cole. He knew he was nowhere near settling down, but when he did, it wouldn't be with her.

He kicked a rock as he marched forward.

"You're quiet." Zane fell into step with him.

"Ever fucked a female?" Cole found the same rock on the path and kicked it again.

Zane coughed. "Where the devil did that come from?"

"Just thinking."

"Well then, sure I have. It's actually quite pleasurable. They're deliciously soft and tender. I simply prefer the smell and ruggedness of a male." He glanced at Cole. "How about you? You ever been with a female?"

"Yeah, of course." He had, but all the encounters had been as a wolf, and there'd been nothing tender about any of them. Pure, animal fucking was an appropriate description—quick and satisfying, a means to an end for both himself and his female partners.

Before Zane came along, none of his sexual encounters had held much meaning. They felt damn good, though, so he arranged fuck sessions as often as he could. He'd told himself that was all he needed. The females had all been satisfied, he was sure of that.

Yet watching Kaleb and Ulric interact, whether as wolves or men, fascinated him. The caring tenderness they showed each other never failed to amaze and arouse him. Their mating was truly lovemaking, whether they were in a

secluded spot in the forest or sprawled atop the pile of thick furs in their den.

Cole suspected they knew he observed them at every opportunity. Kaleb always stuck up for him and had gone several go-rounds with Gar about the younger man and his sexuality. Allowing him to watch seemed to be Kaleb's way of teaching Cole—gently guiding him in the ways of love.

"Have a specific female in mind?" Zane's comment broke the silence.

"No! Fuck no!" Cole leaned towards him and pressed their mouths together. His tongue traced the seam of Zane's lips, and he groaned when they parted, allowing him access.

Everything Cole had been carrying fell to the ground as he grasped Zane and pulled his body close.

"Damn," Zane managed to mutter. He dropped his armload of scavenged items and deepened the kiss then pulled back regretfully. "We'll never make it back at this rate, but who cares? I can be out of these pants in a flash if you'd like to give me a better idea of what you're thinking about."

The offer was tempting. It wouldn't take long to bend the tall man over and ream his arse again, thoroughly and completely. The very idea made Cole's cock twitch. But they had a job to do, and they'd dawdled enough that day. Their pack needed them. They had to get back.

Another thought niggled at Cole. He craved more than a quick, mindless fuck. Waiting until they were home and could take their time, enjoy each other languorously, sounded very nice. He knew Zane would like it better, and for some reason, that seemed important. He kissed Zane once more. "Much as

I'd enjoy that, we should get going. We need to travel with the daylight. But don't tire yourself out too much. When we get back, you're all mine."

Zane scooped up the items he'd been carrying and scooted ahead on the path, glancing back teasingly. "Maybe. We'll see."

Grabbing the various bits of metal, cloth and leather he'd thought might be useful back at the den, Cole did a double step to catch up, grinning. "Sounds like someone's asking for trouble."

"Me, trouble?" Zane peered over his shoulder and blinked innocently. "If you feel that way, you might have to spank me again."

"Fuck." Cole shook his head to clear the lustful images. He was hard in an instant just thinking about it. Obviously, he and Zane had barely begun to explore the possibilities in their relationship.

The path ended, and they were forced to wade through knee-deep, blackened grass. Cole frowned. It was hard to get excited about the future when the present was so damned dim.

"The going would be easier if we shifted." Zane swiped at a tall weed using his free arm like a machete.

"I, uh, wouldn't be able to carry this stuff." Cole held up the scraps in his hands.

"That would be a vital loss to the pack." Zane's eyebrows waggled as he smiled at Cole.

Uncomfortable with hiding his true reason, Cole smiled half-heartedly. If they morphed into wolves they could only



carry packs, or whatever could go around their necks. They had no knapsacks with them, and he wasn't prepared to place the talisman around his neck—yet. A worry nagged at the back of his mind. *Once the amulet goes on, how can I be sure it'll come off?* With another quick glance at his lover, he walked on.

\* \* \* \*

They stopped for a meal of jerky and berries a short distance from home. Zane dipped his face into the nearby stream and gulped water.

Watching the tall man stretch and move, Cole had to tamp down the stirrings of his ever-ready cock. They were almost at their den. Once they'd talked to the rest of the pack and filled them in with news of their grisly discovery, the rest of the evening would be theirs, or so he hoped.

"Water's nice and cool. Join me for a drink—or a dip?" Zane's eyes seared into Cole's, the lust mirroring his own.

"We're almost home. The pack is waiting for us."

"All the more reason to fuck me now. They're going to be upset and full of questions. We'll be up half the night explaining, comforting."

Cole scowled. "I don't see why. They're not our responsibility." Even as he said it, he knew it wasn't true. He hated to admit it, though.

"Of course they are. They're our family." Zane sauntered over and stood in front of him. "Have you forgotten the amulet you carry in your pocket? If nothing else, that makes them our responsibility."

"My, aren't you the conscientious one?" Cole cupped Zane's groin. "Maybe I do need to turn you over my knee and paddle you for being such a know-it-all."

"Never said I knew it all. I do know the difference between right and wrong." He thrust his hips forward and gazed into Cole's eyes. "And I know I'd like more of that. Spank me first, if you like, but then I expect to be fucked properly."

"Cheeky bastard." Cole squeezed the hardening shaft in his hand. Zane was right. The pack would need more from him than dropping the bombshell and running. He shook his head to clear the stupidity. This responsibility thing would either make him stronger or fucking kill him.

A rustle in the brush next to them caught Cole's attention. He glanced over and examined the scraggly bushes. "Did you hear something?"

Zane's gaze followed his. "Probably a rabbit. Quit trying to change the subject. I swear, you like teasing me, more than anyone I've ever known. I'll put up with your agonising taunts for just so long, then they may backfire on you. You might find your arse over a log with me taking matters into my own hands."

"That a threat?" Cole grinned and made eye contact. The idea of being taken by the strong man was hot. He could get into some of that action.

Another movement in the bushes made Cole freeze. He kept his face straight ahead and peered out of the corner of his eyes, speaking quietly. "That was no rabbit."

"No, it wasn't." Zane spoke just as low, while turning slowly to face the brush. "Neither is that."

Wolfen Choice  
*by Jamie Hill, Jude Mason*

A dark-headed child stood watching them, her long, brown hair dishevelled and her eyes full of fear.

"What the fuck?" Cole muttered then gaped as the child turned and sprinted off.

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## Chapter Two

Cole loped after the child and heard Zane at his heel. Their small quarry had an advantage, being lower to the ground. Most of the foliage had burned off the bushes, leaving gaps below but prickly shards higher up, at the perfect level to scratch their arms and faces.

"Ouch!" Zane muttered when the branch Cole let loose swatted him.

"Shit. Sorry." He paused. "Did you see which way she went?"

"No, all I saw was a thorny limb flying at me." Zane rubbed his cheek.

"She was just here." Cole glanced around and spotted the little one, frozen against a tree trunk. "There!" He dropped what he'd been carrying and dove towards the child, but someone sprang between them, blocking his path.

"Leave her alone!" The voice was female, but the tone was all mother wolf.

Cole stumbled to a halt. Zane stopped short next to him and would have fallen if he hadn't grabbed Cole's arm for support.

Awestruck, Cole looked at the growling figure, her arms poised to defend herself and the youngster she protected. She was nowhere near his height, but the mass of long, unruly red hair made her appear so. Her face was dirty and her clothes, if they could be called that, mere rags that clung to her abundant curves.

Cole held up his hands in a gesture of surrender. "I wasn't trying to harm the child. She startled us, and we only wanted to find out who she is and what she's doing out here alone. We're trying to help."

When the child disappeared into the brush, she lowered her hands slightly and studied the men. Cole thought she almost sniffed at them.

"Who are you?" she asked. "Townpeople from Newburgen? It's unwise to come so far into the woods without weapons. Never know who you might run into." A low rumble sounded in the back of her throat.

Cole glanced at Zane, and they smiled at each other. He looked back at the female, admiring her attempt at bravado. "We're not from Newburgen. We're members of a pack that lives nearby. And as for weapons, we can acquire them quickly enough, if needed."

She stared at them questioningly.

Zane spoke quietly. "What do you think, Cole? Is she wolfen?"

Cole kept his eyes on her. "It would appear so."

The female took a deep, shuddering breath, a look of surprise on her filthy face.

Very slowly, Cole pulled the crystal-clear red amulet from his pocket. He held it up. The gold filigree forming the wolf's head shone brilliantly.

She gasped. "The talisman. Then you're—"

"Members of the wolf tribe. We're returning to our den after scouting out damage from the fire. The forest has taken quite a hit."

"You're not the tribe leader. I've never seen him, but I heard he was old and wise." She tugged self-consciously at the scraps of fabric, which barely covered her ample breasts and hips.

"Yes. He was." Cole nodded. "Gar was our tribal and pack leader. He and his mate, Ruby, died in the fire. The amulet has not yet chosen a new holder."

She stared at the dangling talisman, which to Cole's amazement glowed ever so faintly.

Zane smiled. "Personally, I believe it has."

Cole gave him a grim look and turned back to the female. "No, it hasn't."

She raised her eyebrows. "I'd tend to agree with your friend." Setting her shoulders proudly, she continued, "I'm Shira, also of the wolf tribe. The fire decimated my pack. We've been out here for days, trying to decide what to do and where to go."

"At least you're not alone." Cole gazed at her evenly.

Her eyes narrowed, then she seemed to give in. He couldn't tell if she trusted them, but she seemed tired of carrying the burden by herself. "No, I'm not alone. Another female of my pack escaped with me. And we have two pups."

Cole smiled. "The little dark-eyed creature we were chasing. She's fast."

Shira nodded. "We've had to be. It's been frightening, on our own. We've had nothing but water and a few roots—" She bit back whatever else she was going to say. A pink flush raced across her chest and face. "She's shy."

*So proud!* The two females had survived the inferno, managing to rescue their two pups, yet this one seemed hesitant to appear needy. Cole liked her spirit already. He reached into his pocket and felt around. Removing a cloth, he gently uncovered several pieces of jerky. "I wonder if she could be coaxed out with a little something to eat? It's not much, but we're only a short distance from our den. It might hold you until then."

"I've got more." Zane held out another pouch. "In case anyone else would like some."

Shira studied the dried meat intently. "The pups could use a meal."

"There's a clearing with several tree stumps just over there." Cole motioned to the side. "Why don't you call them to join us?"

Two scruffy children and an equally unkempt female appeared from out of the brush, eyeing them nervously.

"Good." Cole smiled warmly at them. "Let's go sit for a spell and have a bite to eat." He turned towards the clearing and shoved the amulet back in his pocket.

Zane followed, the others close behind.

Cole sat on a stump and held out the jerky. "My name is Cole. This is Zane. We live in a den not far from here."

The two females sat a little distance from him. Hesitantly, they both reached for the jerky and passed some to the pups. They all chewed vigorously as they kept their focus on the men. "This is Meghan." Shira nodded towards her yellow-haired companion. She glanced at the pups as she ate. "Skip and Hani."

"Hello, Skip. Hello, Hani." Cole acknowledged each of the youngsters who watched him cautiously. "Meghan."

The female didn't speak, just nodded and ate as quickly as she could. They were obviously half-starved and in shock.

"This has been a trying time for you." Zane watched them, kind concern on his face. "The fire was frightening for us all. You've lost so much."

The female pup sat, wide-eyed and chewing determinedly for a few moments, before she spoke hesitantly. "It was all around us, the fire. It was horrible. People were yelling and running all over. Shira got burned getting us out of our den."

"Hani." Shira looked at her sternly.

The child closed her mouth and went back to chewing her piece of dried meat.

"Are you injured?" Cole asked quickly. The foursome was so dirty, it was hard to tell. With the river so close, they'd surely had the opportunity to bathe since the blaze had died out. Unless they were badly burned. *Or scared beyond belief.*

"Minor wounds." She brushed him off.

Something about the female captivated him. She was beautiful—shapely in all the right places, with full breasts and curvy hips—but it was more than that. Her feisty demeanour, even in the face of catastrophe, was engaging. "As I mentioned, our den is a short distance from here. We have medical supplies, clean clothing..." he watched Shira devour the last of her jerky and lick her fingers, "and food. Plenty for all."

"We're fine." Meghan's voice echoed Shira's defiance.

"The rest of your pack?" Zane asked gently.



"Everyone is gone," Skip murmured in a quiet, distant voice, as if he couldn't quite believe it.

Cole exchanged glances with Zane. *Then they're not exactly fine.* Two females with two young pups were easy pickings in the wild, no matter how spunky they were. Cole chose his words carefully. The last thing he wanted to do was offend. "Obviously, you are fine. The fact you rescued your pups and managed to save yourselves is a great testament to your fortitude. Perhaps you could use some safe shelter for the night. Take a meal, clean up, rest. We extend our pack's hospitality to you."

The females gazed at each other nervously, and Shira asked, "The others in your pack would not object?"

Zane sighed. "We're saddled with the great misfortune of returning to our pack with the bad news about Gar and Ruby."

"Bitter medicine to swallow, indeed." Shira gazed at them thoughtfully. "Perhaps we shouldn't intrude."

"I think the distraction would do everyone a world of good." Cole smiled at her over the heads of the pups. "Our females love to mother cute, little pups. Yive and Tala will be all over these two."

"We're their family!" Meghan exclaimed, anxiety registering in her eyes.

"Of course, you are. No one will try to take them from you." Zane held up his hands. "Yive has two thriving pups of her own. Cole simply meant that you're welcome in our pack, and that you and the pups would fit right in. Whatever we have to offer, we do so willingly."

Shira gazed from Cole to Zane before bowing her head.  
"We accept your kindness."

"No!" Meghan drew her aside, and they whispered harshly to one another. Cole observed the pups sitting in silence, consuming the rest of their meal, until the she-wolves returned to the circle of stumps.

"We'll consent to your thoughtfulness—for the night." Shira nodded. "Thank you."

Cole smiled. In the small clan of Meghan, Shira and the two pups, the red-haired she-wolf was obviously dominant. *I wouldn't want to cross her.* Thoughts of other things he *would* want to do to her and with her floated through his mind, but Cole tamped them down, quickly glancing away.

*Damnation!* Just when he'd about decided that Zane was the one he wanted to explore fully, and intended to do so at every opportunity, a new wrinkle appeared in the fabric. His eyes darted to Shira's round breasts, and he found himself wondering how the soft weight of them would feel in the palms of his hands. Cole shook his head to clear it.

The sun was fading quickly. Despite their bravado, his newfound charges were depending on him and Zane to see them to the safety of the pack's den. For the second time that day, the tug of responsibility niggled at him. It was an unfamiliar emotion, and one with which he wasn't quite sure how to deal.

Cole patted his thighs and stood. "We'd best get moving or we'll lose the light. With the pack in such turmoil, I'd rather approach when they can see us." He gathered the items he'd scavenged.

Zane got to his feet, and the two women trudged beside them. The cubs bounded from their perches on the log. Filthy they might be, but the two youngsters seemed in fine shape. The women had done well by them.

He watched the small group closely and, after only a moment or so, realised Shira favoured her left side. She was injured, burned most likely, but too proud to ask for help. He'd keep an eye on her. Stubborn was one thing, but he wouldn't allow her to go unattended if she needed meds.

"Zane, would you bring up the rear?" he asked and pointed his chin towards Shira. "Make sure the pups don't wander, if you can."

As if he could read Cole's mind, Zane eyed the redheaded female and gave a sharp nod. "You bet. Just don't go too fast. These two look as if they're about done in."

"We're fine," Shira said in a tight voice.

"Yes, you're fine, but you're exhausted. Anyone would be after what you've been through." Cole stood in front of her, refusing to back down.

Her lips started out tight, a pale line of determination, but they softened as he watched. Her chin quivered, and, for a moment, he was afraid she was going to break. He quickly said, "We'll get you all to the den then we'll worry about what comes next."

She looked up at him, her eyes sparkling with unshed tears. "Thank you," she whispered then lowered her gaze.

Cole turned and checked his surroundings. It definitely wouldn't do for them to get lost. The terrain appeared so different with the forest burnt in so many areas. It took a

moment, but he spotted the familiar range of hills and headed just slightly to the left.

He kept his pace a little slower than he was used to, hoping to give the females an easy time on this leg of the journey. Behind him, he heard a soft moan every so often and wondered how badly Shira was burned.

The charred area gave way to greener patches of brush and trees, only to revert to blackened swaths of dead vegetation. Cole clambered over fallen logs and turned to help the women cross. The pups scampered ahead, but Zane called them back after they'd gone a few dozen paces.

"But we want to see what's up there," Skip, the more adventurous of the pair, whined as he trudged back to the group.

Cole paused to watch the youngsters return to their places in the line.

"You'll see soon enough," Meghan admonished from behind Shira. She, too, was showing signs of distress, staggering over the blackened branches strewn across their path.

"Very soon," Cole said, and wondered at how protective he suddenly felt for the four waifs.

Shira glanced up at him but quickly looked away when he gazed down at her. *Such a gorgeous creature*, he thought, and looked over her to where Zane stood at the end of the line.

The tall, white-haired man winked at him and smiled.

Cole turned and resumed their trek. His thoughts raced, going from the known excitement of his lust for Zane to the unknown cravings he harboured for Shira. They had him

confused and exasperated. Her figure, scarcely concealed by her ragged, filthy clothing, seemed branded into his mind. Her breasts, with their plump, tanned flesh, nuzzled against each other every time she moved. The smooth curve of her waist into her hip seemed made for his hand, and he longed to place one there. Her legs were long enough to bring her up to his collarbone if she stood very tall. Her brilliant, blue eyes captivated him whenever their gazes met.

He stumbled over a root, and a rush of sudden heat warmed his face. "Damn," he cursed softly, dragging his attention back to their trek home. The crotch of his pants was too tight, and he reached down to re-arrange himself. His erection pressed against his hand, and he gave it a surreptitious squeeze.

*Am I lusting after Shira or Zane?*

The small group emerged from a dense swath of forest onto a wide patch of relatively green grass. A creek meandered from somewhere in the foothills, and across it was the slope of the mountains and the pack's winter den where they'd sought refuge. The half dozen pale grey mounds of ash in front of it stood as a testament to the fire's damage.

"There's home." Cole wasn't sure how he felt about arriving, but it was too late to turn back. One of the pack pups had spotted them and whooped their arrival.

"There goes our chance at a quiet entrance," Zane said.

Cole's stomach twisted. He knew he'd have to break the news about Gar and his mate in a very short time. The talisman grew warm, heating his thigh through the pocket of his pants.

A few minutes later, the pack was all around them, welcoming them home, examining their finds and reaching out to touch the newcomers. Dib and Effie, the two pups belonging to the pack, found Skip and Hani. After an initial uneasiness, accompanied by much sniffing and posturing, the four pups scampered off, yipping and pouncing on each other in some type of chasing game. Shira and Meghan huddled together while the pack questioned Cole and Zane about what they had seen and done.

Cole tried to hang back, but Tala, Gar's chunky, dark-haired daughter, confronted him. "What did you find? Did you see any sign of my father or Ruby?" Crossing her plump arms, she glared up at him.

From the other side of the crowd, Zane replied, "Tala, we have guests who need attention."

The female turned and glared at Zane. "I want to know if you found my father. Is that such a difficult question?"

On one of the outside tables, Cole deposited the odds and ends he'd collected then placed a hand on her shoulder. Those around him fell back, as if giving him room to break the news. His heart went out to her. She wasn't his type, but she was a pack member and, for some strange reason, it seemed important that he tell her gently. "Let me get our guests settled, then we'll all talk. Will you help me, Tala?"

She looked up into his eyes, her own softening under the impact of his. "Yes, of course I will. What happened to them?"

"They've lost everything to the fire. Their pack was destroyed. There's just the four of them left."

"Oh my god." Her hand went to her face, and she glanced at the two women still clinging to each other off to one side. "I'm so sorry. Are they hurt? They must be starving. Have they been on their own all this time?"

"Shira, the red-head, she's been burned. Won't tell me how bad, though. She's been favouring her left side."

She turned from him and went towards Shira and Meghan, her arms outstretched in welcome. "You poor dears, you must be exhausted," she said when she got closer.

Shira moved away and pulled Meghan with her. Straightening up, she pushed her shoulders back and, in a strong voice, replied, "We're fine. We just need a little rest and some food for the pups."

Cole looked at her and felt a rush of pride and caring that surprised him. She was so strong, so vibrant, yet he knew she was half-starved and in a great deal of pain.

Tala lowered her hands. "Please, won't you let us help you? We've all lost so much to the fire."

Shira sagged a little then, her shoulders drooped and her stern-faced demeanour softened. She looked first at Cole then back to Tala and replied, "Thank you. Yes. We've lost much."

"Come with me, you'll want to bathe and then eat, both of you." She ushered the two women away, taking them towards the mouth of the den.

Cole was sure they'd be tended to. Tala had a great motherly instinct.

He was about to join Zane when Kaleb came through the group towards him. His mentor, who was barely ten years

older than he was, looked old and tired, the pressure of the last week had obviously taken a toll. Tall and well built, the man's dark hair hung to the middle of his back in a rat's nest of soot and dirt from whatever cleanup work he'd undertaken.

Kaleb took him by the shoulders and hugged him close.  
"Welcome home, Cole. How is it out there?"

Extricating himself from the hug, Cole replied, "Not good. Can we go into the den? We've been walking for hours." Any hope he'd had of getting away with Zane for a little quiet time seemed farfetched then. But he knew they'd never leave him alone until he told the news.

"Surely. Why don't you go inside and take a load off, while I go clean up a little? I've been scavenging in the burned-out huts, trying to find anything that's still of use."

"Did you find much?" Zane's voice came from behind him, and Cole turned to give his new lover a quick smile.

"Not really. The fire destroyed whatever it touched. Some dried meat we'd taken from here when we left in the spring and a few hides. That's about it. It's a good thing the caves here held a lot of supplies."

"We're better off than some." Cole reminded them of the four newcomers.

"True." Kaleb turned and headed for the stream. "I'll be back in a few. Go get something to eat. You must be famished. We'll talk when I return."

"Thanks, Kaleb." Cole grabbed Zane's arm and dragged him along as he headed for the den's entrance. The others followed, some talking softly while others seemed content to simply head for the security of the cave.



The few trees they passed were still standing, but had been scorched at the base. The grass was gone, the shrubs, little more than skeletal sticks pointing at the sky. Even the rocks and boulders littering the area were blackened or cracked from the heat of the fire.

Leaning against him, Zane whispered, "I want you."

Cole looked at the handsome man and smiled. "You have such a way with words."

"Yeah, I know. It's a talent."

"You've got other talents. One or two that absolutely drive me wild."

Zane's smile widened, and he slid a hand down over Cole's arse. Cupping it, he whispered, "I know, and I want to drive you wild again."

Sighing, Cole replied, "That's going to have to wait. I was crazy when I thought I could just tell them about Gar and Ruby then leave. I have a feeling it's going to take a while."

The amulet grew warm against his thigh. It was almost as if the blood red stone was sending him some kind of message. He pushed his hand into his pocket and wrapped his fingers around the talisman. The heat pulsed and sent comforting warmth up his arm.

He let the stone go and drew out his hand as they made their way into the den. Going from the early evening sunlight to the dimness of the cave, he slowed his pace for a moment until his eyes adjusted. The smell of the pack was rich when he inhaled deeply.

The others wandered into their separate dens, small alcoves that circled the central chamber, leaving him and

Zane to themselves. The fire pit in the middle of the room was unlit, but ready. By some unspoken signal, they went and stood by the rough wooden benches surrounding it.

Cole turned to face Zane and pulled him close. "I'm hoping this won't take all night, but I'm not counting on it. You can hang out in my den if you want. I'll come to you as soon as I can."

Zane pressed his lips to Cole's throat. Cole found the kiss comforting, yet it carried such a yearning heat, it took his breath.

When Zane pulled away, his voice was husky with passion. "I'll stay. I'd rather be with you here than waiting alone for you to come to me." He kissed Cole again then, with his lips still against his throat, he murmured, "At least I'll be able to see you. I want to be here for you, even if I do plan to tease you unmercifully later."

Chuckling, Cole said, "Oh, yeah? Just what do you think you're going to do?"

"Haven't decided yet, but I'm sure something will come to mind."

Cole reached around the man and clasped his arse. Squeezing the firm globes tight, he pulled Zane closer. "You'll get that spanking if you're not careful."

"Promises, promises."

A noise behind him dragged Cole's attention reluctantly away from his lover. The man was quickly becoming more than a quick fuck. Cole wanted something else, as well. He wanted to give him pleasure. He wanted to make him happy.

Giving his head a shake, he cleared the thoughts of lust away. Kaleb and his mate Ulric strode into the chamber from outside. Both males were large and well-muscled, though Kaleb was taller, and his dark hair hung to the middle of his back when he left it free, as it was now. Ulric, whose hair was lighter and hung in tight waves to his shoulders, had a small scar on his face that blazed red when he was angry.

"Have you gotten something to eat?" Kaleb asked, heading for the kitchen area at the rear of the cave.

Cole stepped away from Zane, but not too far. He felt incredibly protective suddenly. "No, not yet. We have news that we need to share with the pack. Food can wait."

Kaleb stopped and turned back to face him. "I see. Shall we get everyone out here?"

The others must have heard, because slowly they came out of their dens to lean against the rough stone walls. None came too close to Cole. Each of the family units, cousins for the most part, stayed together. It was as if they needed the reassurance. Zane was the only completely unrelated member.

Cole looked around, judging that all were present who needed to be. Even the two women, Shira and Meghan, peered from the kitchen alcove.

"We found Gar and Ruby," Cole said in a voice he was sure would carry to them all. He turned and looked at Zane, then back at Kaleb, his teacher and friend. "They're dead. The fire got them."

"No!" The anguished cry came from the kitchen.

Cole turned, just in time to see Tala launch herself at him. "No, it can't be. He can't be dead!" she screeched while flailing her fists against Cole's chest.

He grabbed her shoulders, holding her back until she stopped striking him. When her face softened and tears poured down her cheeks, he pulled her into his arms. Stroking her back, he whispered, "I'm so sorry, Tala, but he's gone. Ruby and your father are in a better place, now. They were together, and I'm sure that's how they would have wanted to go."

She sniffled into his chest for a few moments then murmured, "Where are their bodies?"

"About half a day's walk from here. It won't be possible to bring them back, I'm sorry. I thought a couple of us could return with shroud material and take care of them there." The thought formed in his mind at that moment and spilled out. It sounded much better than what he'd actually done, leaving the bodies where they were to be picked over by scavengers.

"Kaleb and I can do that." Ulric stepped forward. "We'll leave at first light tomorrow."

"I want to be there." Tala pushed away from Cole and wiped her eyes.

"I don't think that's wise. It wasn't an easy trip. I'm so sorry, Tala." Cole shook his head.

"It's my decision, not yours." She squinted up at him. "The talisman—did my father die wearing it? Did you find it?"

Uncomfortable, Cole shuffled his feet and looked at Tala. "Your father's body—I'm not sure you should—" He gazed to Kaleb for help.

"Cole's right, of course." Kaleb nodded, moving to Tala's side. "I agree with him about this. You don't want to remember your father this way. Let Ulric and me give him and Ruby the proper treatment. You know we'll show the utmost respect."

The look on Tala's face indicated she didn't want to go along with their decision, but perhaps felt she had no choice. "I'll leave it to you, Kaleb."

He squeezed her shoulders and planted a light kiss on her temple. "Have you seen to our guests, Tala? They appeared to be greatly in need of food and rest."

She glanced into the kitchen, where Shira and Meghan waited. "I'll do that now." Looking around for Yive, mother of the pack's two pups, she spotted her and said, "Would you gather the young ones? We'll feed them, too, and see about baths."

"Yes." Yive nodded and went to find the cubs.

Tala returned to the other women, and Cole saw them setting out trays of food on the table. His stomach rumbled.

Kaleb turned his back to the women. "You found the amulet, didn't you?"

Feeling guilty, Cole looked at him.

Kaleb smiled and nodded solemnly. "It glowed in your hands. I sense that."

"I don't want the blasted thing!" Cole muttered harshly. "I'm not ready for such responsibility, and even if I was, I don't have a mate! Everyone knows the talisman holder must be mated for life."

"Trust the wisdom of the talisman. If it chose you, then perhaps you're not as unsettled as you think."

Cole scowled. "Are you suggesting the talisman knows something I don't?"

"It usually does, my friend. I saw the looks your white-haired warrior sent your way. He's quite enamoured with you. I also saw how you looked at him."

"Uh, maybe." Unwilling to commit to anything, Cole answered vaguely. But in his heart, he felt an immense deal of pleasure, knowing Zane so obviously cared for him.

Kaleb chuckled. "On the other hand, I saw the way you watched over the wounded, red-headed she-wolf. She's quite a specimen, isn't she?"

"I, uh..." Cole was more confused than ever, and he groaned when the amulet again grew warm against his leg, right through his trousers. "I don't know what the fuck to do."

"Relax." Kaleb nudged his arm. "All will be revealed in time, I'm sure. Right now, you need food and rest. Go sit with the visitors and take your meal."

"Thank you, Kaleb." Cole exhaled when the older man walked away. His mentor seemed so wise, seemed to understand so many things Cole couldn't even begin to fathom. Attempting to figure it all out at the moment felt overwhelming. He turned and looked around, finally locating Zane. "Shall we grab a bite to eat?"

"Certainly." Zane smiled and allowed Cole to take the lead as they went to join the others.

"I hope you're being well-tended." Cole chose a seat at the table next to Shira, who was polishing off a serving of venison and berries.

"Your pack is very welcoming." She nodded. "Thank you."

He watched her wince as she squirmed in her seat. "Good. I do hope you'll allow Yive to treat your burns. Our healing powders will have you better in no time."

Her eyes clouded. "I might have to. We lost all our medicines to the fire."

Cole could see she was in great discomfort. He leaned in to reassure her and caught a whiff of she-wolf—her feminine scent tickled his nose with its heady, musky aroma. He paused, tamping down the feeling of his cock hardening.

"Please do. You'll be ... fine."

She gazed at him with a curious expression on her face. "I will. Thank you."

Deep in thought, he ate slowly and was relieved when the females and pups left the cave to bathe. It was much easier to function when *she* wasn't around. He finished his meal slowly, pushed the plate away from the edge of the table then looked at Zane.

The man's knee rubbed his. "Have you had enough, Cole? I thought we might want to visit the stream before turning in for the night."

"The others are down there," Cole objected. He envisioned Shira standing below the cool trickling water of the cascade, her round, brown nipples erect against firm, white breasts. His cock pulsed merely imagining her naked in the water. If he were actually to see her ... He inhaled.

"They're coming back already. Look." Zane nodded towards the cave entrance. Four females, each carrying an exhausted but clean pup, traipsed through the den. "They washed up quickly. Those pups have had it. I bet they'll sleep well into tomorrow."

"Yes, I imagine they will." Cole watched them pass, making brief eye contact with Shira. The clean gown she wore was barely long enough to cover her bum and clung to her curves in a most exciting way. A sleeping Hani covered her upper half. Her legs under the fabric caught his eye. He stared at the tantalising 'V' between them as she approached him and the sway of her full hips when she passed and walked on.

Shira glanced back at him over her shoulder then looked away.

Cole swallowed.

"What do you say?" Zane leaned close, speaking into his ear. "A dip in the fresh water sound good?"

"Yes." Cole stood, gathering his bearings. "It sounds very good." Walking out, he couldn't help looking back towards the alcove where the women would sleep. Shira had laid Hani down and was preparing to settle herself in for the night. Her breasts swung back and forth as she climbed onto the pile of fur bedding set up for her.

Cole was mesmerised. The thought of burying his face between those fleshy mounds was all-encompassing, and he couldn't look away.

"Would you prefer that?" Zane murmured.

Cole turned to face Zane. "What?"



Wolfen Choice  
*by Jamie Hill, Jude Mason*

Zane smiled. "If you're too tired to bathe, I could give you a back rub in your den right now. If you'd prefer that."

"No, let's get out of here." Cole grabbed Zane's arm and led him down to the river.

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## Chapter Three

Cole turned his face upwards into the stream of water. Cool and refreshing, it helped clear his head now that Shira was out of sight. He'd never experienced such a thing and, at that moment, he needed to put it from his mind. He stepped back, shook his head and inhaled deeply.

Zane dropped to his knees before him and grasped both buttocks in his hands. "I've wanted to do this all day." He nuzzled Cole's erection and the heavy ball sac that hung beneath. "Come to me, you gorgeous beast."

"Whatever you say." Cole thrust his groin forward, allowing his cock to disappear down Zane's throat. "Oh, yeah."

Zane didn't speak again, just devoured Cole with an intensity that took Cole's breath. Hands gripped Cole's arse firmly, keeping their bodies close. Sucking and swallowing, Zane brought Cole to the point of insatiable need.

Cole's balls churned and drew up. His lover's mouth felt exquisite, but he had something more in mind for their coupling. "Wait." He pressed Zane back.

"Mmm, so close. Let me taste you. I want your cum flowing down my throat."

"Not yet." Cole dragged Zane to his feet. "My turn to play. Lean against the rocks."

Zane did as instructed. Facing Cole, he propped his elbows on the ledge behind him for support.

Cole kissed his way down the tanned, muscular body, listening for any and all reaction from the man. He stopped to

lick each flat nipple before dipping lower, enthralled by the soft sighs and gasps of pleasure he caused. He nuzzled the smooth abdomen and moved lower yet to bury his face in the nest of light, curly hair. "Oh, yes. My turn to enjoy."

Zane's erection stood out from his body, full and thick, a drop of pre-cum glistening on the slit. Cole wasted no time before flicking it off with his tongue. The standing man groaned, and Cole smiled.

"See the torture I endured?" Like a hungry pup, he licked and teased the cock to produce another creamy pearl then laved his tongue over it smoothly.

"No more teasing!" Zane thrust his hips forward. "Take it all."

"If that's what you want." Eagerly, Cole covered the shaft with his mouth and moved slowly to swallow every inch. His face again nestled in the mat of pubic hair, he groaned. Nuzzling his nose there, he inhaled the musky scent of him.

Zane pulled back and murmured huskily, "Oh, yes. Yes!"

Cole held his lover's thighs, encouraging him with gentle pressure to fuck his face for as long as he liked. He adored the desperate plunging of a rampant cock into his mouth. The soft pressing of the firm, round balls rubbing against his chin made him hungry for more. The urge to fuck was strong, the act of receiving it, whether in the arse or in the mouth, was even stronger.

He relaxed his throat muscles and enjoyed the full, pulsing shaft that filled his mouth. When Zane's ball sac tightened, Cole felt it against his lower lip and knew the man's climax

was near. He steadied himself for the onslaught of creamy, warm fluid.

"Fuck!" Zane cried out, his body convulsing as he emptied down Cole's willing throat.

Cole held him tight, swallowing frantically and taking all his lover had to offer before finally withdrawing. "Mmm, you do taste good. Sorry I denied you the same pleasure. But I've got other plans for my nice, hard cock."

"Please." Zane spread his legs and lifted one knee to his chest.

Zane's dark rosebud appeared before Cole, who leaned in to nuzzle it. He licked around the puckered opening then forced his tongue past the tight, outer ring. He pressed in as deeply as possible before pulling out. "Now, that tastes good. I'd love to stay longer, but my erection might burst if I continue to deny it."

"We wouldn't want that." Zane eyed him lustily.

Cole glanced around quickly. "Over there," he motioned to a smooth, moss-covered, flat rock. "On your back."

Zane scrambled to oblige.

Kneeling over him, Cole spread the strong thighs and kneaded the flesh. He pressed the man's legs upwards, his knees to his chest, again exposing the desired target. "Nice." He slid one hand smoothly over the soft, fleshy arse before raising his arm and sharply slapping one cheek.

Zane grunted.

Smiling, Cole caressed the reddened flesh. He'd caught his lover off-guard, and that made it even more fun. He saw Zane's cock twitch and thicken, there was no doubt he

enjoyed it, too. Without speaking, he quickly spanked the other cheek then landed a third slap directly in the middle over the rose-coloured anus.

"Please," Zane mumbled, almost incoherently.

"Please what, my handsome one?"

Zane looked him in the eye. His lust, so recently slaked, had risen again and turned to carnal desperation. "Please fuck me."

Cole grinned with pleasure. Spreading the man's thighs even wider, he shifted between them. He stroked his own shaft firmly, squeezing pre-cum out for lubrication. He nudged the tip of his cock against Zane's hole and rubbed it around then, with a finger, he worked in the slickness.

"More." Zane bucked his hips.

"It's coming, greedy boy. Let me stretch you properly, first." Cole added a second finger and worked it around, tugging carefully. He took his time, gently stretching his lover's hole, while he toyed with the plump ball sac and rapidly rising cock. Each groan was like music to his ears, every squirming push towards his hand, the dance he craved seeing. When three fingers slid in and out easily, he returned his cock into place. "There we go. I won't bother to ask if you're ready for this. Your bum is burning with red heat, and your cock is thick again. You're ready. More than ready." He pressed the tip in, gritting his teeth at the delicious pressure around him.

"Yes, ready." Zane reached for Cole's arms as if searching desperately for something to hang onto.

Cole's shaft penetrated the tight hole, inch-by-inch and, once fully seated, both men groaned. Such an exquisite feeling, his cock enveloped in velvety tightness. Cole hated to move.

"More!" Zane muttered, raising his groin.

"You're in such a rush." Cole leaned down and kissed him, his tongue searching Zane's mouth unhurriedly. When he had to take a breath, he backed away and whispered, "I want it slow. Let's make it last all night."

Zane gritted his teeth. "I want it hard and fast, my teasing lover. When you spank me like that, I instantly grow hard. All I want is to be fucked. The devil with making it last all night. We can do other things in your bed back at the den. Right now, *I need you to fuck me!*"

Cole chuckled and pulled his cock out until the outer ring held just the tip. He slammed it back in, jolting both their systems and driving a gasp from his lover.

Zane's eyes rolled back in his head.

Summoning all his strength, Cole pummelled the taut body below his until they were both sweating. His climax loomed, another few strokes and he'd let loose. "Soon," he whispered.

Zane grabbed his own shaft and pumped it back and forth between their stomachs. His movements became strained, his strokes desperate, and when he tensed, Cole knew he was there.

"Now!" Zane moaned and exploded. Ribbons of creamy seed splattered both their chests.

Cole gave in to the sensations and let his own climax free. Shuddering, his body on fire from the intensity of it all, he

exploded. A gut-wrenching sob reached his ears, just as his first spasm struck, sending a geyser of cum deep into his lover's arse. He held himself in deep, digging his toes into the gravel at the bottom of the river to remain embedded in the hot, silken glove. He thrust again, sending a second hot gush of cum deep into Zane's rectum and causing him to clench. He clung to Zane and rode it out then collapsed over him, panting as if he'd run a race.

"That was perfect," Zane finally whispered.

Burying his face in the man's neck, Cole inhaled deeply of his rich, masculine scent. The more time they spent together, the more he felt their connection growing. That hadn't been comfortable for him at first. He'd always preferred the casual, no-strings approach to sex. But suddenly, being here, wrapped between Zane's muscular thighs and held in his arms, felt right and good. "Perfect," he agreed.

Zane ran a hand down his back and cupped Cole's arse. "Don't move. You feel too good right there."

Cole ground himself against Zane. It did feel good. In fact, he couldn't imagine anything better.

Unbidden, the image of Shira's naked breasts popped into his head. He envisioned sucking the full, ripe tits, felt himself driving his cock deep into her slick pussy. Her eyes would stare at him and, if he dared look back, he'd be drawn into the deep, blue pools of emotion.

He shook his head guiltily, stopping only when Zane reached for him and drew him into a kiss.

\* \* \* \*

Later, while the rest of the pack slept, a confused Cole sat alone in the pack's main chamber, gazing into the fire. Zane lay deeply asleep on Cole's furs, the picture of peace. For a while, he'd lain, watching him, wondering at his feelings for the beautiful white-haired man and where the woman came into things. Finally, he had to leave or risk waking Zane with his tossing and turning. Pulling on his trousers, he'd wandered into the big chamber.

Feeding the embers with some of the dried wood piled just outside, he sat looking into the flame. The tryst at the river had been amazing. Zane excited him like none other had, and he wondered if perhaps he'd found his true mate. The man made him feel special in so many ways. *Do I deserve such a thing?*

As soon as he recalled how their lovemaking had ended, he also envisioned Shira. Red curls blowing in the wind, her lovely curves a feast for the senses, and even though he'd never laid eyes on her more intimate parts, he couldn't help but wonder if her pubes were as auburn as the hair on her head. His stomach lurched. The front of his trousers felt tight against the growing erection inside.

He wondered who the father of the pups was. Thinking of her with another male cooled his ardour somewhat and confused him even more. He craved Zane, as he'd never craved another. Yet he couldn't seem to shake thoughts of the glorious redhead from his mind.

Frustrated and angry with himself, he climbed to his feet and paced around the fire pit, kicking at small bits of wood that had escaped the flame. The talisman heated a patch on



his thigh right through his pants, reminding him of yet one more dilemma with which he had to deal, and soon. He reached into his pocket, drew out the golden filigree and gazed at the blood red stone cradled inside. He wanted to fling it away. He wanted to be free and uncaring, but he knew, deep down, that part of his life was over. He just had to admit it.

"Cole." A soft voice startled him.

He thrust the talisman back into its nesting place. Spinning towards the sound, he couldn't help but smile. It was Shira, dressed in a clean night shift, her breasts straining against the top, her hips pulling the middle section tight across her tummy, and the hem just barely covering her pubes. Below, she was barefoot. In the firelight, she was gorgeous.

His guilt returned, but he pushed it aside. "Yes, what is it? Are you all right?" he asked in a rush.

She took a few steps closer and raised her hand. "Everything's fine. I couldn't sleep. I saw you and just wanted to thank you for insisting we come." She stopped a mere pace away, close enough for him to see the twinkle in her beautiful, blue eyes.

"Come and sit with me by the fire," he held out a hand to her. When she took it, a tingle ran up his arm.

She must have felt something, too, for she glanced down then up into his eyes, her mouth a round 'O' of surprise. Blinking, she closed her mouth and shivered. "I'd like that."

He guided her to the place he'd just vacated and held her hand until she was seated, her back to the bench. Joining her, he was afraid to sit too close, afraid the feelings he'd been

fighting would overcome him. He sat with his knees wide and his ankles crossed. Leaning forward, he poked a stick into the flames.

"Are the pups settled all right?" he asked hesitantly. He wanted to be direct, to ask about their father, but didn't want to push her. She'd had too much happen to her over the last few days, and he didn't want to add to her burden of grief.

"They're fine," she whispered then sighed. "Pups adjust fast to just about anything. They needed food, but when that need was satisfied, their little world was good." She gazed at the far wall, her eyes becoming unfocused, as if she saw a much different vista.

Cole watched her, ached to comfort her, but was unsure how she'd take it. So many issues he didn't know about. *How can I approach her? How can I ask her to stay?*

He blinked at his thoughts. Guilt tore at him. Zane—he was growing to love the man. What was happening to him?

He shifted and realised his cock was again erect, the tip pressing against the waistband of his trousers. Placing the palm of his hand against the bulge, he tried to will the stiffness away, with no luck. It throbbed. Stifling a groan, he knew he was in trouble when he turned and saw her smiling at him. Her gaze went from his eyes to where his hand rested on his crotch.

"You seem to be in difficulty. Would you like me to leave?" She winked and made as if to rise.

"No." He reached out and took her by the arm, urging her to remain seated. The last thing he wanted was for her to leave. He was totally captivated by her. "Damn."

Shira settled back down, her hand brushing the outside of his thigh. Another jolt of tingling pleasure travelled from there, upwards. His cock twitched.

"Are you all right?" she asked, her eyes twinkling with laughter.

He looked at her, opened his mouth to say something brilliant, but all that came out was a rush of air accompanying a soft grunt. He was speechless, dumb with frustration. Closing his mouth, he took a deep breath and strained to calm himself. He tried again, with better results. "I'm fine. I don't want to upset you, but I..."

"Upset me? What's wrong?" She cocked her head and looked at him, obviously mystified. "Why would you upset me?"

"Nothing, I promise. It's just that you've been through so much. You've lost your pack, your mate..." He let that go for a moment, hoping she'd jump in and say something. She didn't, so he went on. "Only you and Meghan and the pups survived. That's got to weigh heavily on you."

Her eyes darkened, and he knew she was remembering the horror of those events. "Yes, it was awful. The pups saw it all. The poor babes."

"Yes, but you saved them. Your pups, I mean." There, he'd said it, and now he waited.

She was in no hurry to relieve his discomfort or was simply so lost in her thoughts his words didn't connect for a moment. Finally, she shuddered, her eyes took on a more animated look, and she replied, "We saved each other. I think if it hadn't been for the pups, Meghan and I would have gone

back into the flames. Our families ... everyone we loved, our homes, are all gone." A tear trickled its way down her cheek.

He wiped it away with the tip of his finger. "You haven't lost it all. The pups, your friend ... or sister. Meghan."

"Meghan isn't my sister. She was our pack leader's chosen. Those are her pups."

Cole's heart skipped a beat. He wanted to whoop his pleasure, but fought down the urge. Still, he needed to know if she had been mated to someone. Was she in mourning?

Feeling as if there were no easy way, he simply blurted it out. "And you? Did you lose a mate? Pups?"

When he saw her eyes brimming with tears, he pulled her into his arms. He'd said too much. Pushed her too hard. He wanted to kick himself for being such a fool.

Her body shook as she cried for her dead. Tears she probably should have shed days ago trickled down his chest. He held her and stroked her and was about as uncomfortable as a male could be, but he willingly shared her sorrow as best as he could. Her hair smelled of cedar and fresh air, and he pressed his face into the soft abundance of it. Sliding his hand over her back, he felt her cringe when he touched the left side. The burns she'd been unwilling to admit to, he assumed, and moved his hand away.

"Now, now, it's all right. You're here, now, and the pups will be fine. So will you, if you stay with us. You'll fit in, I know you will. And redheads are special." He mumbled nonsense, just words to calm her and ease the pain she endured. He felt her breasts pressing against his chest, the nipples like small pebbles dragging across his skin as she

moved. He inhaled deeply and felt light-headed. Her scent made it hard to concentrate. She was driving him wild, and he wanted to touch her intimately, take her, but he dared not. Not yet.

His erection was back full force, and he fervently hoped she wouldn't notice. He twisted to the side, pulling her across his lap. Her arms draped around his neck, and again he inhaled the sexy smell of her. Woman scent, wolf bitch, and he wanted her desperately.

He kissed her hair, lightly, timidly, unsure of her desire for him yet unable to control the need to comfort her. Carefully, he slipped a hand around to her belly, moved it upwards until it bumped into the under-curve of her breast. There it stayed, gently touching the soft yet firm mound, giving him about as much pleasure as he could stand, and hopefully her as well. He caught the new smell, her arousal, a moment later, and smiled into her hair.

Shira's sobs eased, slowly fading until she simply sat cradled in his arms, hers still wrapped around him. Her lips were pressed to his neck. He felt them there, soft, luscious, wet.

"I'm glad you're here," he whispered into her hair. He felt breathless. His heart was beating so fast, it must have made quite a racket in her head.

"I'm glad we came, too." Her lips brushed his chest, tickled him in a way that made him shiver and want more. "I was so afraid we'd die out there." She sobbed again, but only one time.

"We'd have found you. If not that day, then when we went to bury our tribal leader and his mate." He flashed on the remains of Gar and Ruby. How sad it was that they'd gone, but how right that they'd been together when it happened.

"But it was you who found us, and you who convinced me to come here."

"Yes, it was. I'm glad it was."

"I don't have a mate, Cole. I was never attracted to the males of our pack." She pulled her face from his chest and tilted her head back. Their eyes met and locked. "The sex was always good, but I never stayed with anyone."

"Well, perhaps you'll find someone here."

Blinking away her tears, she looked up at him and tried on a smile. "Maybe I will."

He leaned towards her and kissed her, gently, tentatively. Her lips were soft and wet, and when he ran his tongue along the seam joining top lip to bottom, they parted, allowing him entrance. He ran his tongue across her teeth, savoured the sleepy taste of her mouth and was breathless in moments.

Pulling back, Cole looked into her eyes, trying to spot any hesitancy or fear and finding none. He wanted her, desperately, and from the hungry look on her face, she felt the same about him. With his hands still on her, he twisted her around until she lay across his lap, his erection stabbing into her back. He hoped he wasn't hurting her, dragging himself across the painful burn that was still healing. The med powder was good, but it seemed the injury had been more serious than he'd thought.

She twisted a little but settled back down, her arm once more going around his neck. "Come here and kiss me." Her voice was harsh with desire.

"Hey, we're rushing an awful lot, here. Are you sure you wouldn't rather wait for—"

She didn't let him finish but simply pulled his mouth down to hers. Her breath on his cheek came an instant before her lips touched his. Her tongue flashed out, slid across then thrust between them and sank eagerly inside. As she stroked the sides of his tongue with hers, they were soon lost in the steamy world of sex and pleasure. The gentle sucking progressed to more aggressive nipping and chewing. His hands wandered over her, tugging at the top of her shift, opening it to allow his fingers to stray inside.

Blood pounded in his veins, and his body ached with the need to move, to thrust into her. He knew his wolfen self was very close to the surface.

She turned to face him, her knees straddling his thighs. She straightened up, thrusting her chest out, and moved her hands to the hem of the shift. With her eyes locked on his, she slowly pulled the nightdress up, baring the tiny auburn thatch of pubic hair he'd wondered about only minutes before. The roundness of her hips drew him closer, and, as she pulled the shift higher, he slid his hands over her hot flesh.

She teased him then, sliding her nakedness against him but refusing to reveal her tits. He desperately wanted to worship them with his teeth and lips. The taut flesh of her belly slid across his chest, and she lifted the hem a hand span

higher, showing him just the under-curve of each luscious mound.

His mouth watered, and he couldn't control the grunt of pleasure he felt as her body moved against him. His cock strained against his trousers, aching to be free. "You're gorgeous. Let me love you," he crooned, his blood boiling with need.

"And you are driving me crazy," she whimpered and finally whipped her shift off. Tossing it across the bench, she arched her body away from him, displaying her beauty.

"So lovely, so soft. You fire me, woman." His voice was a throaty growl. He slipped one hand over her arse and up her back, pulling it away when he saw her cringed. *The burn, damn!* More carefully, he caressed her spine and the soft curves of her back and shoulders. "Let me pleasure you. Please, let me."

Shira cupped his face in her small hands and lifted his chin so he had to look her in the eyes. "You can take what you want."

"Yes, I can. But I only want what's given freely." He sat forward and, taking her weight in his hands, he lowered her to the floor. "Would you like a pelt? I can get one from my room."

"No, just you. Just you." Her words came in soft pants, and she couldn't seem to make her body be still. Her hips moved, and her legs flexed.

Smiling, he looked around for something on which to lay her. Spotting an old pelt the pups used for playing on, he jumped up and fetched it. He tossed it on the floor beside her



and watched her shift onto it. Then he took his time pulling off his trousers. What was good for the gander was good for the goose, or in this case, the bitch wolf. After unfastening them, he eased his thumbs into the waistband and wriggled them down over his hips. He twisted around and looked at her over his shoulder, smiling when he saw her eyes were glued to his backside.

"Ah, you like a man's arse," he teased, drawing his hands around and running them over the smooth muscles of his bum.

"Yes, I like a man's body. All of it." She sat up and held out a hand for him, but he quickly stepped out of her reach.

"Good." He slid his trousers off. When his erection sprang free, he couldn't control a sigh of pleasure.

"I want to see you." Shira again reached for him.

"You will. Patience, my girl." He turned and pushed his trousers down further, bending forward, covering himself as he forced each side over the foot. When he rose and tossed the pants aside, he allowed her to see him naked for the first time.

"You're beautiful, Cole."

He chuckled and knelt before her. "'Beautiful' isn't exactly a masculine thing to call a male."

"But you are." She slid a hand over his chest, took a nipple between her finger and thumb and squeezed the hard, little nubbin until he groaned. Her other hand moved lower, gripping his erection firmly at the base. "And this is beautiful, too."

His cock pulsed, and he gritted his teeth to keep from thrusting into her hand. Control, he strained for it, thought of a dozen things to keep from driving forward. Sweat trickled down his back and from under his arms. He shuddered. When she tightened her fist, he gasped, "Keep it up and you'll make me shoot."

She looked up at him, feigned innocence on her flushed face. "Me? How could I make you do anything you don't want to do?"

"Womanly wiles, your hand, maybe your mouth, I can think of a dozen ways." He pulled back, drawing his cock from her grasp. "I actually have something in mind."

He gazed at the two luscious mounds of flesh before lowering his mouth to the perfect brown nipple of the first. It tightened under his lips, hardening into a firm nub. He grazed it with his teeth and sucked it deeply into his mouth.

Shira moaned and arched her back, offering him more.

A low growl rumbled in the back of his throat as he suckled her, kneading the flesh with his hand. When that nipple was cone-shaped, he switched sides, rolling the first between his thumb and forefinger.

He lavished the same treatment on her second lovely tit, licking and sucking until he thought his cock might burst without ever being touched. He'd never experienced such pleasure with a female before, and adored basking in the fleshy differences between her body and Zane's.

*Zane.* The thought hit him like a ton of bricks. How could he be there with Shira when, just hours earlier, he'd been in

Zane's arms? Zane had pleased him like no one ever had. Yet, here he was, seeking out another person to fuck.

*Not just fuck.* Shira beckoned him, instinctively it seemed, from somewhere on another level. He couldn't explain it any more than he could stop it. He had to have her, yearned to explore her in every possible way.

He squeezed both breasts, the soft flesh bulging out between his fingers in small mounds, then reluctantly left them to move on. He traced a line of kisses down her stomach until he reached the V-shaped apex of her legs. Pushing them apart, he settled onto his stomach between her thighs and leaned forward to examine her femininity much closer.

The scent of her arousal was strong, and he breathed it in deeply, hungrily. Carefully parting the sparse covering of shiny, red hair, he pulled her fleshy, outer lips apart. Unable simply to look for a moment longer, he dipped in his tongue and dragged it across one smooth, wet fold.

Shira gasped, and her hips twitched.

He grinned at her reaction and dived in again, wanting to make her really squirm. He spread her more fully and exposed the pink button nestled between her nether lips. With the tip of his tongue, Cole flicked her clitoris and enjoyed the taste of her musky essence. It nearly drove him wild, and he buried his face in her pussy, seeking more.

"Oh, yes!" Her thighs twitched under his hands, the rest of her body tensing as he delved deeper.

When he inserted his tongue into her velvety, slick channel, her muscles contracted around him. He thrust in,

again and again, thinking about nothing more than tasting as much of her as possible and driving her to new heights of pleasure. When he was at the deepest point, tongue fully extended and chin pressed against her body, she cried out with an earthy, guttural moan. Rocking with orgasm, her hips rose so fast, if he hadn't been holding on tight, she'd have dislodged him for sure. Clutching her body to his face, he kept up his pace, hoping to prolong the pleasure. *The first of many at my hand, he thought with satisfaction, or rather, my mouth.*

Shira quivered for long moments before reaching down and running a hand through his hair. "Beautiful," she murmured.

He covered her pussy and inner thighs with tiny kisses then worked his way up her body. His cock was painfully rigid, and he knew from his limited experience that sex with a well-lubricated female didn't require as much preparation as he was used to. Reaching between them, he grasped his shaft and guided it home.

Shira's arms slid around his neck, her fingers playing over his shoulders and back with a light touch. She adjusted her hips, allowing him to sink in fully, and wrapped her legs tightly around his arse.

They gazed into each other's eyes as Cole began a series of slow thrusts, designed to drive them both insane. He leaned forward and kissed her hungrily, their tongues batting back and forth.

It felt so different, being in the arms of a shapely female. Her body was pliant and soft against his, not muscular and

solid like the males he was so used to mounting. The females he'd mated with as a wolf were an entirely different matter. In animal form, whether he was with a male or female, fucking was pure, carnal, physical activity. He loved it, no doubt about that, but it was something so entirely dissimilar, the two acts could barely be compared.

With his chest pressed against Shira's flattened breasts and his cock embedded as deeply inside her as possible, Cole ground his hips into hers. Shira clung to his neck, and her body quivered in that special way he was learning signified her orgasm.

"Yes!" she growled in his ear.

Cole clutched her back and groaned his release, sending loads of warm cum shooting deep inside her. The intensity of each shuddering release took his breath. Shira groped for his face, her lips finding his for a deep, hungry kiss that brought it back. He gasped for air and kissed her, until it seemed they were breathing for each other.

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## Chapter Four

When Cole stopped shuddering, and his breathing returned to something approaching normal, he grasped Shira's arse and pulled her firmly against him. He flipped them over so she was on top, yet he remained planted deep inside her.

"Neat trick." She sat up just enough to allow her breasts to bob in his face.

He nipped playfully at each tit then settled back, his hands resting comfortably on her thighs. "I wanted to get you off your back. I don't know why you're being so stoic. I know you must have a hell of a burn there."

"It's getting better." She squirmed, just talking about it.

"If it's not better by tomorrow, I'll apply more of the medicinal powders. It shouldn't take that long to heal."

Shira leaned down again and kissed him tenderly on his lips. "Thank you. So ... tonight you loved me tenderly, as a man cherishes a woman. Tomorrow we might shift to wolves, and I'll let you chase me down to the river and mount me like the beasts we both are." Her eyes twinkled. "Doesn't that sound like fun?"

Cole laid a palm against her face. "It does. Not that anything could beat the fun we've had here, tonight." He bucked his hips, jostling her.

She smiled. "Thank you, Cole. Thank you for making me feel alive again." She pushed on his abdomen, allowing his cock to slip from her pussy. Standing up, she reached for her night shift and glanced to the side of the den for a moment

before looking at him one last time. "Good night. See you tomorrow."

"Don't go!" He wove his fingers behind his head.

She gazed to the side once again then back at him. She blew him a kiss before returning to the alcove she shared with the other females and pups.

Cole watched her go, inhaling deeply then slowly letting the air out. He was just getting started. His cock was half-erect again. He could have gone on all night.

A noise made him jump, and he looked in the direction he'd seen her gaze, towards his sleeping alcove. Zane stood in the doorway, but before they made eye contact, the blond man backed away.

"Zane!" Cole leapt to his feet. He made sure the fire was contained then grabbed his clothes before hurrying into the small alcove he called home.

To his surprise, Zane appeared to be asleep on the bed of furs, exactly where Cole had left him.

Cole knelt next to him and, leaning forward, spoke softly into his ear. "Are you awake?"

The white-haired man didn't stir.

"Zane." Cole couldn't believe he really was asleep. Or perhaps all he'd seen was a vision of Zane, borne of guilt. How could he have just lain with Shira only hours after being with Zane? How could he be so damn confused?

Cole flopped onto his side of the bed and stared at the gorgeous, kind-hearted man sleeping there. He'd made a mistake. He'd always been inclined to take a male lover, and he fully expected to choose a male mate. Zane trusted him

and had opened his heart to him. Cole had betrayed that and had stomped Zane's heart into the ground. He was a dog, a filthy, mangy creature who didn't deserve the trust of such a good man. Rolling over, he threw his arms over his head and sought sleep. A sleep, that when it finally came, was filled with haunting visions of both Zane and Shira calling to him.

\* \* \* \*

Waking before Zane in the darkness of pre-dawn, Cole slipped quietly from the bed. He couldn't face him yet. He dressed in a simple loincloth, not intending to remain in human form for long, and left the alcove.

When he stepped into the central room of the den, memories flooded his senses of being with Shira the night before. He didn't want to face her, either. For some damn reason, he wasn't his normal self around the sexy she-wolf. *More like putty in her hands*, he thought wryly. Confused and not particularly proud of himself, he grabbed a strip of jerky and headed out the front entrance of the cave.

Ulric was there, lacing his boots in preparation for travel. "Morning, Cole."

"Ulric," he acknowledged. "It's still dark. You two setting off already?"

"As soon as Kaleb returns. He's gathering supplies and a special shroud cloth."

"That'll be good. I gave Kaleb detailed instructions about where to find the bodies." He moved around Ulric, preparing to set out on a small journey himself.



"Cole." Ulric grabbed his arm. "Kaleb told me you have the talisman."

"I do." He'd hidden it in his sleeping alcove, still unwilling to put it around his neck.

Ulric's smile was strained and not particularly friendly. "He seems to think you're a good choice to be our new tribal leader. I'm not convinced I agree with him."

"Oh?" *I'm not convinced of it, either.* He wouldn't admit that to Ulric, though. His mentor's mate had always treated him kindly, but the grip Ulric had on Cole's arm felt anything but easy-going or friendly.

"Tala, as Gar's sole surviving offspring, thinks the amulet might belong to her. She wonders why no one has seen it but you. I question that as well."

Cole raised his eyebrows. "Indeed? You'd like to see Tala leading the tribe?"

Ulric chuckled. "Not hardly. Tala is a fine female, I suppose, although I've never had much use for bitches. No, I believe there are others in the pack better suited to the task."

"You, I presume?"

The older man smiled again. "Me or Kaleb. Our hearts beat as one. Either of us has the maturity and wisdom required to fulfil the duties of a tribal leader."

"Which I don't." Cole's ire grew as he talked to Ulric. Kaleb hadn't indicated he felt that way the previous night. He'd almost encouraged Cole to accept the amulet. Perhaps the mated males' hearts beat as one, but apparently, they were of separate minds.

"If you did, would Kaleb and I be retracing your steps to take care of Gar and Ruby's remains? You should have handled that when you found them."

Guilt pierced Cole to the quick, but he faced Ulric stubbornly. "Zane and I had many responsibilities on our journey. Our leader was dead. And since we didn't have shrouds with us, I thought it best to leave them for others to see to while I brought the talisman back to the clan."

Ulric's eyes flashed. "You're not the tribe's leader yet, young one with the smart mouth. I'll let this go for now out of respect for Kaleb. He feels some crazy loyalty to you. But it's not over. Nothing's been decided until the amulet's been presented to the pack, so we can see for our own eyes. Remember that."

"Yes, sir. And, may I remind you, it will be the talisman that chooses, not you or Tala or anyone else." Cole glared at him for a moment before he pulled his arm free and, turning on his heel, stormed off. For a moment, he thought he should return to his den and get the amulet. It might not be prudent to let it out of his hands. Glancing back, he spotted Shira at the entrance to the cave, watching him.

In his current mood, he still wasn't prepared to face her or, worse yet, Zane. Cole hurried off into the brush where he could be alone and dropped to his hands and knees.

Shifting from man to wolf took mere minutes, but the stabbing pain never failed to surprise him, and the following pleasure always excited him. He arched his back, the muscles along his spine shifted, and the torment turned to sweet bliss.

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by Jamie Hill, Jude Mason

His bones condensed, thickened, while his arms extended, and his fingers cramped, morphing into small pads.

Cole shuddered as his spine realigned itself. He groaned with both pleasure and torment as his nose elongated and ears drew up on top of his head. Claws formed where nail beds once lay. Fur sprouted from skin, a thick, sleek, grey-brown pelt. His cock and balls flattened against his body, while a tail emerged and grew above his arse.

He stretched, revelling in his reborn shape. He loved the purely animalistic feel that being a wolf gave him, and he fought back the urge to howl. *Much too close to the den for that.* Shaking himself, he took off, loping at a sprinter's pace through the forest and massive, black-tinged trees.

It felt wonderful to move, to breathe and to be at peace with nature and his surroundings. If he were a true wolf, and not a changeling, he wouldn't have to worry about his feelings. Trust, betrayal, lust and longing were part of the human world. Wolves simply existed. Took action when necessary and did what needed to be done without discussing every fucking thing to the smallest detail.

There was a social hierarchy, and each pack was ruled by the breeding pair. Gar and Ruby had been prolific, producing many offspring in their time. Yet, Tala was their only surviving heir, the others having fallen ill and died or been killed by accident over the years. As age crept up on the leader and his mate, by consent, Yive and Theron became the breeding pair. But Theron, although strong of body, was weak of spirit, and the first wolf to challenge him aggressively would likely chase him off. Cole had never been interested in

dominance or any of the responsibilities that came with it, until very recently. Suddenly, for some unknown reason, he thought about it all the time.

Gar might have stepped aside as breeding pack leader, but he continued to carry the talisman, and ruled the tribe with wisdom and kindness. He'd told Cole the story of their ancestors, how the amulet had saved the changelings from constant bloodshed and turmoil. How the tribes had been formed from the multitude of family clans and packs of each of the three changeling nations.

In those years, and the hundreds previous, the changeling tribes had been at war within themselves. Tearing each other apart, each small family group had seemed to need more territory and game. Their numbers rose and fell at alarming rates. Not only wolf packs were affected, but the cougars and bears, as well. Then Cato, of the cougar clan, had discovered the secret of the amulets. He kept one for the cougars, placed a second where the bears would find it, then left a third for the wolves.

Xeno, the first wolf to hold the brilliant red talisman, had been a strong, hulking creature, possibly more powerful in legend than he had been in life. His mate and one breeding partner, Mesa, bore him many offspring during their lives together. Hunting one day, Xeno had discovered the amulet of ornate gold filigree encasing the sparkling red stone. Upon further inspection, he'd seen the delicate gold was twisted into the shape of a wolf's head.

The gem had warmed Xeno's palm and planted some unusual thoughts in his head. A plan had formed that could

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set in motion a way to end the conflict—a way to live in peace for all the clans and all three of the tribes. Each of three stones had been given to the race indicated by the delicate threads of gold. Among those races, or tribes, only one could hold the talisman. That one must have a life-mate who would stand with him through everything. He must also have the good of all the family clans of his breed in his heart. Only those the amulet deemed worthy could hold the charm, and only those who were mated for life could keep it for long.

Xeno had accepted the duty proudly, restoring peace and honour to the wolfen packs. Mesa, his strong, wise mate, had aided him, and the tribes soon found peace. There had been harmony for many generations since, with the talismans going to new owners when the old passed on.

Now, Cole had possession of the wolfen tribe's powerful, red stone, and the worry of what to do with it.

He raced through the woods, trying to outrun his thoughts and problems. Deep in his heart, he knew it wouldn't work, but it felt blissfully good to try.

The wind ruffled the fur along his back, the rocks dug into the soft areas between his pads. To his left, he watched a rabbit scurry into the underbrush and, for an instant, he thought of racing after it. *Fresh meat*, he thought, and his mouth filled with saliva. Running free, responsibilities of any kind the farthest thing from his thoughts, he rejoiced in the play of his muscles moving easily as he distanced himself from the pack.

He turned and headed for the deep forest. The further he ran, the less he saw of the fire's damage, until finally he came

to a stream that was pristine and bordered by waves of emerald green herbage. He threw himself to his back in the grass, rolling around like a pup. The gentle whisperings of the stream called to him, reminding him of his thirst. The run had dried his mouth, and he eagerly lapped up the clear liquid while watching small fish dart away.

After he drank his fill, he went to the nearest tree and lifted his leg, sending a stream of piss to its base. Marking his territory was something Gar had taught him to do years ago. Done, he turned his back and kicked up dirt, spraying the tree with the moist loam.

Gar, the great wolf who'd led the tribe for longer than Cole had been alive. How could anyone step into his role? How could *Cole*?

Thrusting the thought away, he sauntered along the bank of the stream. He'd been there before, months ago, with a young man from a nearby pack who'd bumped into him while they were both hunting. The game trail had quickly led to a much more pleasurable afternoon and evening of blissful male-on-male sex. They'd fucked as men, then they'd transformed and rutted as the beasts they both were, howling their pleasure. Hours later, when the moon had vanished behind the distant mountain range, they'd parted company and returned to their respective packs. Cole wondered idly if the raven-haired stud ever thought of him.

His focus returning to the present, he found himself daydreaming of Zane, his flaxen-haired lover. He'd never felt so in-tune with someone before. It centred him, made him feel as if he truly belonged to something important.

He reached a small, grassy ledge overlooking the stream and lay down, pondering the turn of events in his life. Thinking of Zane made his blood race and his heart sing. He adored the man, but hadn't until that very moment realised how valuable Zane was. Learning about the man was more important than anything else at the moment. Pleasuring Zane, making sure he was cared for and happy, made Cole happy.

It was a strange feeling, and one he wanted more of.

He laid his chin on his paws and let his thoughts wander. Their last coupling had been amazing. The feel of the massive cock filling his mouth, the pulse of it as Zane's excitement soared, had his heart racing.

But just as he thought his mind was made up, the image of Shira popped into his head. Her soft femaleness sent a new flood of excitement straight to his groin. His cock thickened enough for the tip to peek out of its soft sheath and rub against the grass. His balls shifted. The mating had been incredible, her climax had made his heart soar. She, too, needed caring for, and it was a great pleasure for him to do so.

Confused, he climbed to his feet and paced back and forth, finally returning to the stream's edge. How could he care for them both?

The amulet came to mind, and he immediately wanted to feel it around his neck. *Insane*, he told himself. How would he ever benefit the tribe if he couldn't even settle his personal problems? The tribe needed someone much stronger than he was. Someone much wiser.

Maybe Ulric was right. Maybe he wasn't the right man-wolf to hold the talisman.

He was about to run when he spotted movement from the brush where he'd entered the clearing. He turned, facing whatever was approaching.

A moment later, a gorgeous, white wolf stepped from the woods. *Zane*.

Cole's heart skipped a beat, and his cock emerged another finger's width. Light headed, he took a step towards the magnificent beast, his tail wagging. He stopped and just looked at his lover, admiring the stance and the beast he was. Sleek fur lay flat along his sides, his chest was deep, his shoulders wide, and even through the snow-white pelt, Cole could see his haunch ripple with muscles.

Zane approached him, his head down, his arse high and his tail to one side. It was the look in the wolf's eyes that really took Cole's breath. Blue fire came to mind, and heat that could sear.

Cole took another step forward then inhaled, taking his mate's scent. Zane came the last few steps to him and gently, tenderly, licked his snout. *'My love.'*

Zane's thoughts were clear and made Cole shudder with pleasure. Cole eased along Zane's side, rubbing his own, sleek fur against that of his lover. He sniffed Zane's pelt and the base of the long, hefty tail sprouting from his backside.

Cole thought of the night before and cringed. Had Zane seen? Had it been a dream, his presence?



Zane yipped and tucked his rear end down, his tail between his legs. He scooted away. Another yip, and he pranced around Cole, nipping at him as he circled.

Cole stepped back, shocked, but quickly realised the wolf was playing. He leaped at Zane, shoulder down, head to the side, and managed to bowl him over. Rolling in the grass, the white beast barked before springing to his feet and racing for the woods. Cole went after him, all thoughts of his trouble fading as the two of them darted from one hiding spot to another, sniffing each other out then leaping off on another chase.

The morning passed that way, each of them taking a turn as the prey then becoming the predator when they were found. Zane, with his brilliant, white coat, was at a disadvantage but didn't seem to mind when Cole easily found him time after time.

Finally, winded and gasping for air, Cole turned and headed back to the stream. *'Come, my love, it's time to end our play.'*

Zane came out from under a half-rotted stump and trotted after him. Once they were at the streamside, Cole walked right into the water and leaned forward for a drink. The water was beautifully cold, and after a moment, he lowered himself to lie in a shallow pool. He shuddered when his belly touched down.

Zane stood beside him, his muzzle at water level and his pink tongue lapping up the refreshing liquid. Bits of grass clung to his fur, a smudge of dirt marred the silken, white

expanse of his side, but he was the most amazing looking animal Cole could remember seeing.

His cock pulsed, yet he ignored it.

*'We need to talk.'*

Without raising his head, Zane replied, *'Yes, we do.'*

*'Shift.'*

Cole pulled himself to his feet and shook the water from his coat. He waited for Zane to finish drinking then ushered him to the shore. Side by side, they morphed.

A grunt of pain reached his ears just as his own guttural sob emerged from somewhere deep inside him. The realignment of his back and the stretching of his larger bones always signalled the beginning of the change. He saw stars for an instant, then the last trace of agony passed, followed by the sweet bliss of his musculature moving from one phase to another. His paws stretched, the claws sinking into the flesh, the nails flattening to become those of his human self. Hair receded into his skin, even his flesh altered, itched, like a legion of tiny fingers caressing him.

Turning his head, he watched Zane's spectacular coat vanish and the man's beautifully tanned flesh emerge. His gaze went from the broad shoulders and chest to his sides then further down. He watched his belly expand and contract with his breathing. And of course, that led to the hip and thigh then round to the curve of his arse.

Cole's excitement returned, and it took a great deal of effort to shift his gaze away. He needed to ask about last night. He needed to know what Zane thought of Shira. And

most of all, he wanted to talk about the talisman, what it meant to him, to them both.

Strange, to finally think of himself as coupled—part of a mated pair.

"Are you all right?" Zane asked, his voice still rough from the change. "You look deep in thought."

Cole looked at him, adored the way his long, silken locks shimmered in the sun and slid across the beautifully tanned flesh when the wind caught it. His heart beat faster when he thought of actually being with this man for the rest of his life. How could he be so lucky? He knew he didn't deserve such an amazing mate.

"Yes, I'm okay." He rolled onto his side and held out an arm. The grass felt wonderfully cool against his back. "Come here, I want to tell you something."

Zane dropped into Cole's arms, resting his head against his shoulder. "And I have a confession to make."

"You do?" Thoughts of the lust-filled tryst he'd had with Shira last night came to mind. *I have my own confession to make.* He took a deep breath and said, "What have you to confess, my love?"

"You call me *love*, but maybe you won't when you hear what I have to say."

Cole shifted so he could look at Zane. "Tell me."

Zane closed his eyes, and for a moment, Cole wasn't sure he'd actually say whatever it was he needed to say.

When he opened them and looked into Cole's, he began. "It's about last night."

Cole's stomach did a flip-flop. It really had been Zane and not a guilt-derived vision standing at the entrance to the alcove. "Tell me, please."

"I saw you and Shira. I watched you fuck her, make love to her."

Cole felt as if he'd been kicked in the belly. What to say, how to go on? And more importantly, how could he make Zane understand he'd come to realise how much he loved him? "And?"

"And..." Zane let it fade.

If ever Cole had thought of eyes as being the windows to the soul, this was it. Pain, fear, longing and something more showed. He leaned forward and pressed his lips to the man's forehead. "And? Tell me, please."

"I'm afraid I'm going to lose you."

Cole lay back, waiting for him to go on. But the man didn't. Silence hung over them for long moments. Finally, realising Zane wasn't going to say anything else, Cole said, "Zane, my precious man-beast, you will never lose me." He decided to test the waters, toss his feelings out there and see what happened. "I love you."

Zane's eyes sparkled. "I love you, too, Cole. But when I saw you and Shira together, I thought..."

"You thought I wanted a mate who could give me young," Cole finished for the man. A shudder shook his arm, and he wanted to reach out and hold the man but didn't dare move. Not yet.

"Yes, I was so upset. That's why I left. And when you came to bed, I couldn't face you. I was afraid you'd ask me to leave."

When Cole rose up again and looked down at Zane, he saw tears in the man's eyes. "I was confused last night." He leaned forward and pressed his lips to Zane's. Gently, he slipped his tongue inside, tasting the salty sweetness of his lover's mouth. His cock pulsed and thickened, but again, he ignored it for the time being. Pulling his mouth away, he felt as if his heart was about to burst. Zane loved him. "I'm still confused about some things, but how I feel about you is not one of them. I love you, with all my heart. I've never felt like this before."

Zane opened his mouth as if to speak, but Cole pressed a finger to his lips. "No, let me finish what I have to say. It might make things clearer for us both."

Nodding, Zane lay back against his arm and simply looked up into Cole's eyes.

"I want to be sure you've got that. I love you. Nothing will change that. Okay?"

Zane nodded but didn't try to speak.

"Good. About Shira." He took a deep breath and hoped he could explain his feelings for her so Zane didn't feel threatened. Hell, he hoped he could explain how he felt so he understood it himself. "This is going to be much more difficult."

"I've never cared for a female before. To me, they've always just been there. Pack females were all right, and I know Gar wanted me to pair with Tala, but I just couldn't go

there. I'm attracted to men much more than females. Fucking while they were in wolf form was amusing, easy, no ties, just animal fun. But when I saw Shira, something happened."

Zane tensed but didn't move or speak.

Cole felt it was safe to go on. "She's different, stronger, independent, she was quite adamant about being just fine even though it was pretty evident she needed help. I bet she would have been all right if we hadn't discovered them. Somehow, she'd have found them shelter and enough food to survive on.

"She touched me. Like no female ever has before. I can't explain it very well, but I have strong feelings for her, too. Very strong." He stopped then and let that sink in. Both for himself and for Zane.

In a very soft voice, Zane asked, "Can I please say something now?"

"Sure, knock yourself out. I just don't want to hear anything about you leaving or having doubts about how I feel." Cole reached up with his free hand and pushed a strand of hair off Zane's face.

"Wouldn't dream of it." Zane smiled and pursed his lips, blowing a kiss. "When I saw you and Shira last night, it wasn't just fear that kept me from leaving the cave."

Cole lifted an eyebrow. "No? Then what?"

"She's incredibly attractive, for a female."

"Yes, she is. Curves in all the right places. Nice wide hips, perfect for giving birth."

Chuckling, Zane went on. "That's not exactly what I meant, but that, too." He looked away, gazing towards the

stream. "She's more than a good breeder, she's sexy as hell. When I saw you together, it turned me on tremendously. I very nearly joined you."

Cole's mouth dropped open. He'd never dreamed Zane was attracted to her.

Zane continued, "I'd actually wondered what it would be like to share a female. You and I and Shira. But I thought you didn't like them—females. I mean, I knew you'd fucked them in wolf form, but, well ... I just didn't know you'd want a female in human form. I guess I figured you'd decided to take a breeding mate, and I was out."

Cole managed to get his mouth closed but not to speak for several moments. *How could we both have been so wrong?* "And I can't believe I thought I'd lost you. I saw you, just for a second, standing at the door. I was afraid you'd think I favoured her. I left this morning because I wasn't ready to face you."

Zane snuggled in closer. "We're in pretty pathetic shape, aren't we?"

"Yeah."

They lay quietly for a few moments, each lost in their own private thoughts. Cole was overjoyed at how Zane felt. He pulled Zane around so they were facing each other. Leaning closer, their lips and noses touching, he whispered, "No matter what else happens, I love you. Remember that, always."

A smile brightened Zane's handsome face. He lifted his head just enough to kiss the tip of Cole's nose.

"I can't believe we both fell for her." Cole chuckled.

Zane smiled and replied in a mock stern voice, "Why not, we both have excellent taste."

It took a second for what he'd said to sink in, then Cole roared with laughter. Zane joined him, and a moment later, they were rolling around their small patch of grass, hugging and tickling each other.

"Hey, what about the talisman?" Cole rolled them both close to the stream and turned to face the running water. Lying on his belly, he reached out and flicked at the water with his thumb and index finger.

"Where is it?" Zane slid his hand over Cole's back, making him shiver with pleasure.

"It's safe among my belongings in the den. I couldn't bear to bring it."

"I know this is your decision, but..."

"What?" Cole asked and looked at him.

Returning his gaze, Zane replied, "The talisman may have already made that choice. It grew warm in your hand. Not in mine, and I'll wager it won't in anyone else's. You need to present it to the clan."

"I know, and I'm truly beginning to believe it belongs to me. I hate the thought of not being free anymore, but perhaps it's time."

"Only 'perhaps'?" Zane asked, obviously wanting Cole to make a firm choice.

Cole squirmed. His life had been good, he balked at letting those freedoms go. But when he thought about it, they were already gone. He loved Zane, and in some strange way he was sure he loved Shira, too.



"Bugger. You just don't let up, do you?" He poked Zane's side and smiled when he heard a sharp grunt.

"Nope, never. I'm not the giving up kind."

"Good, don't ever change."

"Don't plan to. So, only 'perhaps'?" he repeated, his smile broadening.

"No. More than 'perhaps'. The talisman is mine unless it indicates it should go to someone else."

"Finally!" Zane cried.

"Oh, fuck off." Cole laughed and pulled the man close. The warmth of his flesh sent a thrill of pleasure through him. "We need to return and face the pack."

"Yes, and we need to find out what Shira thinks of us."

"True, and of those things, I'm not sure which is going to be the most harrowing."

Zane shifted closer to him. "But first, there's something else we need to do." He pressed his lips to Cole's, and both men sighed.

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## Chapter Five

Pulling his mouth away, Cole fought to keep from smiling and said in a stern voice, "So, you were spying on me last night. Sneaking around, checking up on who I'm with and what I'm doing."

Zane's face flushed with desire. "Well, uh, I guess I was. I'm sorry, Cole."

"And you think 'sorry' is enough?"

"Probably not. I have a feeling you've got something in mind." Zane leaned forward and kissed him.

Cole thoroughly enjoyed the sensation of their lips sliding together. He fell into the kiss, revelling in the softness of Zane's mouth, the slick wetness of his tongue sliding across his. The world around them seemed to vanish. When he pulled away, it took a moment for him to gather his thoughts. With his heart pounding as if he'd run ten miles, he said, "You think a kiss will lessen your punishment?"

Zane blinked and, for a moment, looked confused. Then he smiled and replied, "I guess I'm pretty transparent, huh?"

"Yes, pretty much."

"Punishment, you said. What kind of punishment could you possibly have in mind?" Zane wriggled his bum.

Cole glanced down at Zane's midsection. An erection pointed up at him. "And that's not going to help you, either." Cole chuckled and pushed himself up onto his feet. Looking around, he spotted a boulder covered with moss. Grabbing

Zane by the hand, he pulled the man up and strode over to the rock. "Hands on the boulder, face the stream."

Zane almost fell over his feet in his rush to get into the desired position, while Cole bit his tongue to keep from laughing out loud. With his hands firmly planted on the top of the waist-high boulder, Zane peered back over his shoulder, as if for approval. Cole stepped up closer and placed his hand on the small of his lover's back. Sliding his palm over the firm, warm buttock closest to him, he growled with pleasure. "Not quite right," he said, pushing his foot between Zane's and kicking them apart.

"Hey," the blond man said, stumbling. Only his grip on the rock kept him from falling. He apparently got the message and spread his feet wide apart, offering Cole an amazing view of his bottom as well as access to anything else he wanted.

"Better. Now, arch your back. Show me that beautiful arse."

While Zane obliged, thrusting his bum high into the air, Cole ran a hand over the man's body. Smooth, warm, the well-tanned flesh a joy to explore—he thought of how he'd have all the time in the world to learn what gave Zane the most pleasure. His other hand went to his own crotch, and he hefted the erection jutting from his groin. Sliding his fingers around the shaft, he tugged at his cock and felt it stiffen to its fullest. The mat of pubic hair at the base tickled his hand as he stroked himself.

He watched his beautiful, fair-haired lover arch his back and push his arse even higher. The way Zane had spread his legs allowed his balls to dangle in full view. Cole slid his hand

along the crease of Zane's arse, touching the crinkle nestled so sweetly there. A groan encouraged him to press a finger in then twirl it around.

"Tell me what you want," he urged his lover while toying with the man's anus.

"I've been bad. I spied on you. I deserve to be spanked. Please, Cole, my love, spank me."

"But, is a spanking really punishment, or is it something you enjoy?" Cole's finger delved a little deeper into the man's tight arse, while his other hand slid up and down his own shaft. Excitement soared as he waited for the reply.

"I love it when you spank me," Zane confessed, but quickly added, "but I also want it to hurt. The pain feels amazing. It burns and tingles. When you fuck me afterwards, it's like fucking tenfold."

Cole grabbed the base of Zane's cock and squeezed it tight. The explanation was nearly too much for him to hear, taking him so close to coming, he had to fight to control the urge. Just envisioning what was about to happen was driving him nuts.

"So, you misbehave and then you want me to give you pleasure?"

"Yes ... uh, no. I mean..." Zane stammered. Apparently, he hadn't thought that far ahead.

"And now you're not even sure what you're asking." Cole found he loved this teasing torment more than he'd thought he would. From Zane's squirming, and the way his erection throbbed in Cole's hand, the man was enjoying it at least as much.

"I want to feel you spank me. I want you to show me that you can control me, punish me when I need it," he murmured.

"Ah, I see." Cole slid his finger into Zane's arse to the hilt. He held it there, wiggling it slightly. The feel of the membrane tight around his digit made him tremble. Taking his time, he slowly withdrew and eased in a second finger alongside the first. "I'll have to think about this. Perhaps you should tell me how much you like it when I fuck you. I know you enjoy talking."

"Yes, oh fuck," the man gasped and shifted his feet even wider apart. "I love how your shaft spreads me wide. It fills me completely. You know just when to speed up, when to stop, when to tease me. I love to feel your cock throb when you come. I can't get enough of it."

"And do you like to suck me off?" Cole asked. He spread the fingers he'd buried in the man's luscious arse, stretching him carefully.

"Yes, yes. Oh, it's so good." Sweat glistened on Zane's back as he chanted his litany of desire.

Another finger slid easily into his lover's clutching hole, and Cole eased all three in and out at a delightfully slow pace. He twisted his wrist and searched for the hard, nutlike prostate gland buried halfway along the man's rectal channel. The slightly different texture told him he'd found it, as did Zane's sudden gasp of sheer bliss when he stroked it and pressed his fingers against it.

His own cock dripped with pre-cum, and he knew he'd need to move the pace along or he'd wind up shooting before

he actually got into the warmth of the man's bum. Before that, he had a small chore he wanted to complete.

Releasing Zane's shaft, he ran his palm over the taut rear before him then raised his arm. With his fingers still buried in his lover's arse, he brought his free hand down on the nearest cheek. The man's bum clenched, gripping his digits tight. He lifted his hand again and, as soon as the arse muscles lost their tension, he brought it down hard on the other cheek.

"Ow!" howled Zane, but he didn't move away. The only other reaction was the tightening of his anal muscles.

"You think you can handle a real spanking?" Cole asked, but before the man could reply, he let him have it again as hard as he could, once on each nicely warmed buttock.

A sharp inhalation, followed by a shuddering gasp, and then a gruff, "Yes, sir," was Zane's reply.

"Good." Cole pulled his fingers free and took a step to the side. "Hold still."

"I'll try," Zane whispered. He shifted his feet, preparing himself for what he knew was about to happen.

"Ask me to spank you."

"Damn, you're killing me."

A quick, sharp slap brought another yelp, but also a quick reply, "Please, Cole, spank my arse."

"Again, properly," Cole demanded and raised his hand. He loved how Zane made him feel. He couldn't completely understand why his lover got off on being spanked, but he was more than willing to play along. Another thing they'd explore, he was sure.

"Please, Cole. I've been bad, would you spank me?"

"Yes," Cole replied and brought his hand down, right in the middle of Zane's right buttock. He didn't stop, simply raised his arm and swung again, slapping equally as hard on the left, then again on the right. He alternated between them, adding the occasional swat right between his arse cheeks. After only a few sharp slaps, he noticed the flesh feeling warmer. After a few more, he admired the pleasing shade of bright red.

"Such a sweet arse, so tight and hot," he said and stopped spanking the man to run his palm over the heated cheeks. Handprints showed, blazoned in crimson warmth, the fingertips reaching for hips or thighs.

Cole's cock throbbed, and he ached to replace his fingers with it in the tight entrance and fuck the daylights out of both himself and his lover. Holding off was the most insanely difficult thing he could imagine.

"Please," came Zane's plea, so softly spoken, Cole wasn't sure he'd even heard him.

Moving tighter against his lover's widespread legs, Cole eased his fingers from his anus. "Please, what?" he asked, his own voice deep and husky.

"My cock aches. Touch it again, please." Zane shifted his feet, but otherwise remained as he'd been positioned.

Cole smiled and slid his hand over the well-tanned arse and down along the crease. When he came to the tight pucker, he leaned forward and spat. He rubbed the clear liquid into the man's hole, but didn't linger for more than a few delicious moments. He grasped the dangling ball sac and held him steady while he reached underneath. Zane was

hard, and the shaft throbbed when he tightened his fingers around the base.

"Yesss," Zane hissed, and Cole felt him shudder.

"Be still," he growled, sounding much sterner than he felt. He slowly eased his hand forward, drawing the snug flesh of Zane's cock towards the head. He didn't touch the smooth dome. Instead, he pulled his hand back to the man's balls. Cole masturbated him, a few quick strokes alternating with tantalizingly lazy, slow ones, and tried to read his lover's body. When Zane groaned, he stopped and simply held the throbbing shaft for a few moments before continuing with his ministrations. When he was near to bursting himself, he released the cock and balls and eased himself into the man's tight passage.

"Fuck!" He sighed and sank in to the balls. He held himself there, buried to the hilt, his pulse racing, his breath coming in sharp gasps. The pleasure was intense, the need to move almost more than he could stand.

He wanted to drive Zane crazy with lust, though, so he somehow managed to hold off, until he heard a low-pitched, whimpering sound. He pulled back then thrust forward again, slamming his hips into the man's rosy red behind and smiled when the whimper repeated.

"Tell me what you want."

"Fuck me. Damn. Fuck me. Hard." The words blasted out rapid-fire.

Cole raised his hand and brought it down with a resounding slap on Zane's right butt cheek. The left got the same treatment an instant later, then he began to thrust in



earnest. Grabbing Zane's hips, he slammed into him with force, only to be answered with cries of pleasure from the fair-haired man.

He felt his balls shift and rise up closer to his body. His head swam as a climax neared. Zane's cries of need and passion were music to his ears. When Zane's arse clenched tight, Cole reached around and again stroked the man's cock. It throbbed in his hand. Like a wild animal bent on escape, it jerked. Pre-cum coated his fingers, smoothing the stroke.

"Now! Oh fuck, now, Cole." Zane pushed his arse back and his muscles tensed. His cock throbbed.

In his mind, Cole imagined a long stream of white cream flying into the air and landing with a splat against the rock.

Cole went wild then, ramming into him while pumping his lover's cock in a rhythm he hoped would send Zane into orbit. He couldn't hold out a moment longer and shoved himself in deep once more. He held himself there, as his world seemed to explode. He roared his bliss and lost sight of everything around him. The forest was gone, the stream faded into nothing. All he knew and cared about was Zane and the pleasure they shared. He shuddered and sent another shot of cum deep into his lover's tight, warm arse.

The gasping and shuddering went on for several minutes. When Cole could catch his breath, he realised his heart was beating like a drum. He gave Zane's cock a final caress before releasing it, then collapsed across his sweat-covered back.

"Thank you," he gasped. He kissed Zane's shoulder and wrapped his arms around the man's body. "I love you."

Zane reached back and stroked Cole's side. "I love you, too. That was amazing."

Chuckling weakly, Cole kissed him again. "Yeah, it was, wasn't it?"

"I think you have to move now. I'm going to collapse."

Cole eased himself out of Zane's bottom but didn't let him go. Helping him to stand up straight, he turned the man so they faced each other. "I want more of that. More of you."

Zane's eyes lit up, and he smiled. "As much and as often as you like."

Cole reached around and gave his bum a gentle slap and chuckled at the grimace.

"Okay, maybe we'll wait a little bit on the next spanking."

"What about something to eat?" Cole looked around, checking for game trails. "I don't know about you, but I'm starving." He spotted a small parting in the brush and footprints.

"I hunt better as a wolf." Zane pulled free of Cole's arms and dropped to his knees.

Cole joined him, and together they shifted. The pain had barely begun before it vanished, changing to the pleasure of becoming the beast. His sense of smell intensified, and his eyesight sharpened, even though the colours faded into a more black-and-white world. He could hear the heartbeat of his lover a few paces away and was overjoyed.

Together they raced for the game path and sniffed. The rich scent of rabbit hung in the air, and Cole's mouth filled with saliva. The trail was fresh, and the rabbit warren was full

of plump, wild meat that filled the bellies of the two ravenous beasts.

After their meal, they returned to the stream, and both hunkered forward for a drink of the clear, icy-cold water. The rich taste of blood was quickly washed away, and any spatters of red vanished into the rushing water as they lapped. Thirst quenched, Cole leapt at Zane, and together they raced into the woods.

They spent a good part of the afternoon chasing after each other as they explored the burned out areas. Where there had once been wildlife in abundance, there was now little more than a blackened desert. But, in other places, game flourished, as did the green of the forest. They would pass along the news of where hunting would prove successful and where they'd need to let the greenery return before harvesting could take place.

After another meal of rabbit, they trotted along the slope of a hill. Cole sniffed at Zane's arse and became aroused again. His cock pulsed and emerged from its soft sheath, the tip dripping with pre-cum. He growled low in his throat and nudged his lover's buttock.

*'Horny beast,'* came Zane's eager response to his obvious signal.

*'Yes, horny for you.'*

Zane crouched down with his front end and peered back over his shoulder, his pink tongue flicking across his muzzle. Raising his bottom, he presented Cole with a view of his white, furry arse and the puckered hole just below his tail.

The sex was fast and bestial, with Cole mounting him and entering the dark hole in one lusty shove. Zane pushed back, his anal muscles clenching around Cole's cock, rhythmically tightening then loosening. Cole bit the back of the white wolf's neck, holding to the scruff as he fucked him with abandon. Both males howled as they erupted into a glorious orgasm together.

Later, while they lay by the streamside again, Cole's thoughts returned to the talisman and how his life was changing. When he gazed into Zane's ice blue eyes, he realised how happy he was.

*'Time to return to the pack,'* he sent to his lover

*'Yes, I'm sure everyone is wondering where you are.'*

*'And I need to talk to Shira. She's ... '*

*'She's special. I understand that, now.'* Zane leaned forward and slid his muzzle along Cole's neck. *'I love you.'*

*'I love you. Don't ever forget that.'* He rose and headed towards the den.

*'Not a chance.'* Zane sent as he trailed behind.

\* \* \* \*

Cole approached the den and paused. He turned and looked at his lover, nuzzling the furry neck he loved to nip. Zane's fur felt warm and sensual. *Damn!* Never before had Cole felt so horny after making love all afternoon. Zane did that to him. Thoughts of Shira excited him as well. The very idea of seeing her again caused his cock to thicken and stretch.

*'Morph?'* Zane's thought wafted over him.

*'If we must.'* Cole pulled away from his lover and crouched, preparing to return to two-legged form. His bones shifted and elongated, heat and pressure soaring through him. Already aroused, his last coherent thought was that he'd shift into a man with a raging hard-on, and he was right.

When the pain-tinged pleasure subsided, he stood with a fully erect cock next to Zane.

Zane stretched, apparently acclimating to his human stature. He glanced at Cole and grinned. "Look at you. Insatiable."

"That's the fucking truth." Cole stroked his shaft lazily. "I could bend you over right here and easily put it to you again."

Leaning close, Zane blew warm breath on his ear. "Or we could go in and talk to Shira. If everything goes as we hope, we could be sharing her pleasures tonight."

"Yes." Cole nodded, thrusting into his fist one last time. "That sounds good, too."

"Come on." Zane chuckled. He grabbed Cole's hand away from his pulsing erection and tugged him towards the den.

The evening meal appeared to be just over. Several females cleaned eating utensils while the males put away supplies, battening down the exterior of the den for the night. Theron stoked the campfire, while Yive and Meghan attempted to round up the pups and herd them to the river for bathing.

Cole and Zane stepped into the open, catching Shira's attention as she cleaned off tables. She wore a plain garment that barely concealed her curves, which didn't help Cole's

erection. There was nothing he could do about it, standing in his full, naked glory before her.

She gazed at them hesitantly, eyes darting from one to the other of them, at their masculinity then away again quickly. She finally spoke when they got closer. "Supper is over. I could fix you something—"

"We've eaten." Cole smiled at her.

She reached up and brushed his face with her thumb. "You caught something, I assume. You've been gone since early morning."

Cole glanced at Zane quickly, then back at her. "We had much to discuss. We'd like to talk to you, if you can spare us some time."

She shrugged. "I've got nothing but time. Your pack has been most kind, but..." Gazing to where the other females and pups gathered and would soon be heading for the river, she murmured, "The others fill their hours with maternal duties. I'm not of this pack, so I'm at a loss for what to do. It's easier for Meghan with the pups."

"Come on." Cole took her arm and led her to the edge of the forest. There were several sawed-off tree stumps there, and he sat on one of them, indicating she and Zane should sit on others.

They followed his lead and looked at him expectantly.

Cole started with an easy topic. "We hoped you and Meghan would feel comfortable with our pack. I know the others would like both you two and the cubs to live with us. It's too quiet without Gar and Ruby. Yive's last litter wasn't healthy, and only the two pups survived."

Zane nodded. "Skip and Hani add a breath of new life to the pack. It's much livelier with four young ones running around."

"Were they of a small litter, too?" Cole inquired. Wolfen litters usually ran between five and ten pups.

Shira nodded. "Some didn't make it. These two were the strongest of the batch." She looked around the woods and inhaled. "I believe Meghan would be happy here. She and her brood fit in well."

"What about you?" Cole asked tentatively.

She gazed into his eyes. "What about me? Last night—" Shira seemed suddenly to remember Zane and broke off her thought with a glance in his direction.

"Go ahead," Cole encouraged. "Zane knows what happened last night. He understands—"

Her eyes blazed, and she slapped her thighs. "How could he, when I don't even understand myself?" She aimed her fury at Cole. "I *thought* we discovered something special with each other. I *assumed* we'd pursue it further today, as we discussed. Then you took off before sunrise and stayed gone all blasted day, with *him*." She tossed a bitter glance in Zane's direction.

"I know, and I'm sorry." Cole folded his arms across his chest. "What happened last night confused the blazes out of me, Shira. I've never had much doubt about my sexuality before. I've always preferred males."

"You've been with females before," she insisted. "You've had to. There's no way you could have made me feel..." She clasped her own arms, looking towards the sky.

Cole saw a shudder pass through her body. He longed to reach out and touch her, but knew that wasn't fair, given the conditions he intended to place on her. He'd made his choice—Zane would be his life-mate. If Shira could live with that, and agreed to join them, he knew they could form a remarkable triad. If she couldn't—wouldn't—consent, then somehow he'd have to find a way to live without her. "Tell me, Shira. How did I make you feel?"

She stared into his eyes. "Like the most cherished, loved female on the planet."

Cole smiled. "Good. That's what I'd hoped for."

She jumped to her feet. "Was it just an act, then? A pretence to get me to spread my legs?"

"Of course not! I was attracted to you, and everything I felt was very real. I wished that to be true for you, as well."

"I've already told you how it was. But you can't imagine how I felt when I woke this morning, and you were both gone."

*Here's where the conversation gets tricky.* Cole stood and paced in front of her, his erection bobbing as he walked. "I purposely left alone, hoping to avoid both of you. I shifted and ran as far as I could to get away. I needed time to think."

She nodded towards Zane. "He was gone, too."

Cole glanced at him. "He followed me. I'm glad he did. Zane and I needed to talk. We had to figure out our relationship." He turned and faced Shira again. "Before you came along, he and I were casual lovers. It was a semi-regular thing, and it was fucking fantastic, but I was unwilling to commit past one day at a time."



Putting her hands on her hips, she frowned. "So, what? I chased you into his arms?"

"No, it's not like that." Cole sighed. *I'm doing a horrible job of explaining.* "The fire, losing Gar and Ruby ... it's been a tempestuous few days. I had some decisions to make. I didn't feel ready before. Today, I do."

"And?" She planted her feet firmly.

Had she been in wolfen form, Cole could envision the hair standing on the back of her neck. *She's a feisty one! I love that about her.* "Shira, I have to be honest with you. I love Zane. My life wouldn't be complete without him as my mate. And he is that, my life-mate."

"Blasted fickle males!" she muttered angrily, stomping about in a circle. She ripped her dress off and tossed it aside.

For a moment, Cole thought she wanted to show him what he'd be missing out on. Her lovely breasts swung heavily as she crouched, and he realised she was preparing to shift.

"Shira, wait! There's more. That's why Zane and I needed to speak with you."

Her voice dripped with sarcasm. "To break the news. Yes, I understand. Thank you for being so upfront. At least I know where I stand." She tossed her head back, and the change began.

Cole watched in amazement as she morphed from the tall, beautiful redhead to a medium-sized she-wolf with a shiny, red pelt. "Damn." He stroked his fully erect cock. "That was hot."

Zane rolled his eyes and stepped next to Cole. "We handled that well." To Shira, he called, "Please don't go. Cole

needs to explain his feelings, and he can't seem to do it without getting tongue-tied."

She bared her teeth then turned on her heel and raced into the forest.

"Fuck!" Cole swore, releasing his shaft and once again focusing on the situation at hand.

"Couldn't you just say it?" Zane teased, glancing at him sideways. "The words aren't so hard. *'Shira, I want you, too. We both want you. We want to make love to you right now, all night long.'* That might have done it."

"Fuck yeah, it's easy to say when she's not here! Try saying that, when you're looking into her eyes."

"I could have done it, but it wasn't my place. We'll have to work on this timidity of yours. If you're going to be the leader of the tribe, you'll need to be more forceful. Your words are law, speak them with conviction."

Cole stomped his feet. "I'm not timid! I have no problem speaking my mind. The problem—"

Zane faced him, grinning. "The problem is, when you look into her baby blue eyes, you get all mushy on the inside. And then she flashes those sexy tits, and your cock jumps to attention faster than a rabbit can disappear into a hollow."

"I do *not* get mushy! Shit." Cole looked down, realising Zane spoke the truth. *What kind of leader will I make, falling all over myself at the sight of a woman?*

"Look." Zane placed his hands on Cole's chest and pressed him back against a nearby tree. "It's only because the whole thing is so new. Remember how we used to act? We danced around each other before we were able to admit how we felt

and could get down to the serious business of fucking." He placed a kiss on Cole's lips.

"True," Cole murmured then opened his mouth, allowing Zane's tongue entry.

Zane reached for Cole's erection and squeezed it. "Now, things are much easier between us. We know what we want and go for it. You'll get that way with Shira, soon enough. Hopefully, I will, too." His mouth pressed against Cole's as his hand stroked, and he added, "I wouldn't mind getting my hands on those luscious tits. Or tasting what she has to offer between her legs."

"She's a beauty," Cole agreed, picturing her in his mind as Zane worked his shaft. He remembered Shira spreading her legs for him, and how he'd crawled between them. The taste of her sweet nectar was truly magnificent, and the idea of sharing it with Zane sent him over the edge. He gasped and shuddered as streams of creamy, white spunk were coaxed from his cock.

"Oh yeah, oh yeah." Zane murmured repeatedly, their lips still touching. "I love that the thought of the three of us together gets you off that quickly. We're in for some good times, my love."

Cole shook his head, trying to clear it. Zane definitely had the touch. He thought for a moment about reciprocating, but as horny as the two of them were, that might lead to several more hours of play. It sounded nice, but the time wasn't right. *I need to find Shira.*

He gazed into his lover's eyes. "Come with me, help me find her. I need you there."

"Yes, you do," Zane agreed, grinning. He smeared the sticky spunk on their bodies so it would dry and licked his hand. "Mmm."

A rustling in the brush got their attention, and the pup Dib appeared. "They're back!" he called excitedly. "Cole! Kaleb is back!"

"Already?" Cole glanced at Zane. "They made the trip in one day."

"Must have gone straight there and back, stopping just long enough for the burial."

"Unless they couldn't find the bodies." Cole followed Dib through the brush, Zane on his heel.

Inside the cave, Kaleb and Ulric stood by the fire, talking with the other pack members. "Ah, there you are." Kaleb smiled at him.

"Did everything go as planned?" Cole asked.

"Yes." Kaleb nodded. "I was just telling the others, the bodies were exactly where you said they'd be. We took care of them respectfully and spoke a few ceremonial words. Gar and Ruby are in a better place, and I know they're pleased."

Cole watched Kaleb, noting how his mentor spoke clearly and calmly. His voice was firm but soothing to the worried females, especially Tala, Gar's offspring. *Kaleb would make a better tribal leader than I ever could.*

Zane glanced from Kaleb to Ulric. "You made good time."

"It wasn't that long of a trip." Ulric crossed his arms.

"When you don't play around half the day."

Cole tried to hold his temper, but Ulric had rubbed him the wrong way that morning and continued in the same vein. "Are

you suggesting Zane and I didn't take our trip seriously? I told you we were scouting out the area. We helped a small bear clan tend to their dead and collected items we thought the pack could use."

"Yes, we heard all that." Ulric wiped his hands nervously on the legs of his leather pants. "What we don't understand is why you didn't take care of Gar and Ruby. You keep saying you helped the bears—"

"Ulric, it's done." Kaleb cradled his mate by the back of the neck. "We don't need to speak of them anymore, unless it's to discuss happy memories."

"We need to talk about the talisman," Ulric spouted, and frowned.

"Not tonight." Continuing to speak in an even tone, Kaleb squeezed his shoulders. "We've had a long day. Discussion of the amulet will need to take place, but not now."

"What about the talisman?" Tala stepped forward. "Cole said he never found it."

Ulric snarled. "Then Cole lied."

Zane spoke up. "He never said that. He didn't say anything about the talisman. He didn't want to concern Tala with that when she'd just found out about her father's death." He glared at Ulric. "He was being *tactful*."

"There's no time for tact, now," Ulric snapped back. "We've waited long enough. The wolfen tribe needs a leader. Someone with wisdom and knowledge. Not a man-pup who's biggest concern is racking up the largest number of conquests possible in a day."

"You're being unkind," Yive murmured.

"No, he's being a horse's arse." Zane strode around the fire. "You have the misguided notion the talisman would be better suited to your neck. I contend that no one so judgemental and opinionated should even be in consideration for the role of leader."

"The talisman was my father's," Tala said loudly. "And now it should be mine. Let me hold it, and you'll all see."

"That's absurd!" Ulric muttered, and bickering ensued.

Cole stood back and watched. For some reason, he didn't feel angry anymore. A sense of calmness spread like a blanket over him. The amulet would ultimately disclose itself and make the choice.

Kaleb watched him with an amused smile on his face. Cole gazed at him, trying unsuccessfully to read his mentor's thoughts. He looked back at the pack members, all of them red-faced and flinging angry words at each other.

He turned and went into his sleeping chamber, quickly donning a loincloth and grabbing one for Zane. He retrieved the talisman from the nook in which he'd hidden it. Carrying it carefully in his hand, he returned to the others.

"I have the talisman," he announced, tossing the second loincloth to Zane.

Arguments ceased.

"I want it!" Tala cried.

"Give it to me," Ulric demanded.

Cole dangled the brilliant stone by its leather cord so everyone could see it. "I'm not sure it's mine to give away."

"Cole is right." Kaleb stepped forward. "No one picks the talisman. It's the other way around. The amulet chooses its

owner, you all know that." He smiled at Cole. "Hold the gem in your hand, my son."

Shifting it to his palm, Cole held it so all could see. The opalescent stone glowed, casting warm heat in his hand.

Yive and Theron gasped and took a step back. Murmurs of awe came from the pups and some other pack members.

"Yes!" Zane rushed to Cole's side. "The amulet glows for Cole. It did nothing in my hand."

"Show them." Cole passed the stone into his lover's palm.

Zane held it in the same manner, palm up, but the stone remained dark and cool.

"Let me try!" Tala shoved forward, her hand outstretched.

Zane glanced at Cole, and he nodded.

She nearly snatched the leather thong from Zane, but once it was in Tala's possession, the stone appeared unchanged. She squeezed it as if that might bring it to life, but nothing happened.

"Yes." Kaleb nodded. "I should have thought of this before." He took the amulet from Tala and passed it around. Even the pups had the opportunity to hold it, but the stone didn't change.

Kaleb faced his mate, the last person in line to hold the gem. "Ulric, my love. Take the talisman. Understand what it is saying to you."

Shaking, Ulric reached for the leather thong and grasped the stone. He stared so intensely at it, Cole thought the thing might explode from the weight of his gaze. Nothing happened, and Ulric swore, squeezing the talisman. "No!" He dropped to his knees.

Kaleb reached for his mate. "Calm yourself, heart of my heart. This wasn't meant to be. I think we both knew that."

Zane stepped forward. "Give the talisman back to Cole. He is the rightful holder."

Ulric looked up, his face bright red and tear-streaked. "He doesn't deserve it! He hasn't earned it. The boy has no life experience and doesn't even have a mate, for Hades' sake!"

"He deserves it." The female voice came from behind Cole, and all heads turned to see who spoke.

Shira stood there in her simple garment, one hand resting against the stone wall. She glanced around the group and stopped, focusing on Cole. "He's got more wisdom and maturity than you know. And he has a fine mate in Zane. But none of that really matters. The talisman chose him, didn't it?"

Easing the amulet from Ulric's hand, Kaleb passed it to Cole. When he accepted it, the stone warmed, again glowing a deep, brilliant red.

Kaleb smiled. "Shall I place it around your neck, my leader?"

Cole glanced from him, to Zane then to Shira. "Not yet." He clutched the amulet. "There's something I need to do before I can fully accept the responsibility." He strode towards Shira and motioned to Zane. "Come with me."

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## Chapter Six

"We need to talk." Cole clasped Shira by the arm.

"That's not necessary." She shook her head.

"Of course, it is. I badly fumbled our last conversation. This time, I'm going to get it right." Maintaining his grip on her, he led Shira back into the forest with Zane following. He went farther this time, to a secluded, grassy clearing that was bathed in the light of the setting sun.

"What are we doing?" Shira glanced around.

"Sit." Cole led her to a tree stump and forced her down. He knelt in front of her. "I don't want to take the chance of messing this up again, so I'm just going to say it. I want you, Shira. I have since the moment we met. Our night together only confirmed that fact."

She gazed at him with a shocked expression. "I don't understand. You said you loved Zane."

He took her hand. "I do love Zane, deeper than I ever thought I could love anyone. But what I feel for you can't be denied. Strong, passionate, intense feelings. I can't let them go. We need more time together, of course, but I think..." he paused.

"Go on, just say it," Zane murmured from beside him.

Cole's words spilled out in a rush. "I think I might love you, too."

Shira's face softened. "Oh, Cole. I can't believe you're saying this. I just spent the past hour cursing you in my mind. I guess I jumped to all the wrong conclusions."

"There's a lot of that going around." Zane smiled. "Cole and I had much to talk about today. If we're going to be a triad, we'll all need to be able to speak openly with each other."

She glanced up at him. "A triad? Is that what you're proposing?"

"Yes." Cole squeezed her hand. "When I told Zane we'd been together, he admitted he'd seen us. And wanted to join us. He found our mating very hot."

"Is that so?" Shira pulled her hand away and stood. She walked in front of Zane, and they circled each other. She sniffed at him, as she'd done when they'd first met.

Zane, with an amused smile on his face, allowed her to check him out.

"I've never been part of a triad," she finally said.

Zane raised his eyebrows. "I believe you'll find it very pleasurable." He glanced at her nearly exposed tits. "I know I will."

"Seems like there would be lots of room for jealousy," she countered, still pacing.

"We'd simply have to try hard not to let that happen. Communication is the key."

Shira stopped and cupped her crotch. "I will be Cole's breeding partner. Only his cock will touch me here."

Zane grinned. "There are plenty of other places for my cock to play, if you're interested. The choice, beautiful she-wolf, is yours."

"The choice is Cole's," she insisted. "If Cole is my mate, I bow to his wishes."

Cole stepped next to her. "I've made my choice. I want to make love to you, Shira. Zane and I want to make love to you. We'll do whatever we can to make you happy."

She stared into his eyes, touching her stomach lightly. "I want pups."

He grasped her hips. "I'll give you all the pups you can handle. Our broods will be healthy and strong."

Shira looked at the ground then gazed up at him. "Will we ever have time to be alone together, just you and me?"

"If you desire it. Just as I might want some time alone with Zane. And Zane—who knows what he's going to want or need. But we'll be equal partners, each having a say in the relationship."

"I'm still not sure how it might work," she murmured. "But I'd like to try."

"Woo hoo!" Cole swung her into his arms. "That's what I prayed you'd say. Just try. Time will tell if we've made the right choice."

"I think so, too." She nodded then shimmied from his grasp and faced Zane. She reached out and tugged at his loincloth. "I want a more thorough inspection of you."

He smiled. "I walk around naked half the time. You've seen me."

"Not like this." She wrapped her fingers around his shaft and brought it to erection. "Not where I could examine you fully. Taste you. Explore every inch of you."

Eyeing her levelly, he thrust into her hand. "I intend to do the same."

"Then let's get started." Shira dropped to her knees, drawing Zane's cock into her mouth.

"All right, then." He inhaled as she sucked firmly. His legs wobbled, and he reached out, looking for balance.

"Lean against me, my beautiful man." Cole approached him from behind, drawing the long, white hair aside and kissing his neck.

"Always." Zane turned his face sideways, and they kissed, tongues delving deep.

Cole swallowed Zane's groans as Shira devoured the man. He felt the shudders of his lover's body as she worked him over aggressively. He could tell by Zane's ragged breathing that his orgasm was imminent. "That's it," he coaxed. "Spill it. Let her taste what you have to offer. Later, I'm going to want to taste you."

Zane grinned and moaned. "Close. So close."

"Let me breathe for you." Cole attached his mouth to his lover's and held on tight. He felt when Zane released. His man shook and shimmied, tried desperately to remain standing. Cole held him tight, vowing never to let him fall.

Shira's groans of approval were equally arousing. Cole watched her coax the last drops of cum from Zane's shaft then sit back on her haunches. "You have a pleasing cock," she announced.

Zane and Cole burst into laughter. "Well, thanks."

Cole wasn't sure he'd ever seen the man's face flushed so brightly pink. He smiled. "I think you have a very pleasing cock, too. I guess I just never told you."

"No, you haven't. But thanks. So, is it my turn to choose what will please me?"

"Absolutely." Cole stepped back, already knowing what his stud was after.

Zane dropped to his knees in front of Shira. "You, lying on your back, with my face between your legs. That's what I've been fantasising about."

She couldn't scramble away quickly enough. Shira lifted her arms and tore her dress off, tossing it aside.

"Oh, yeah." Zane eased her onto the soft grass and held his body mere inches above hers. He played over her skin, never quite touching it with his lips, as he moved from her face to her breasts.

Shira groaned, his torment obviously arousing her. She thrust her chest forward, offering a breast to his mouth.

"Beautiful," Zane murmured, before grazing the nipple with his teeth.

"More," she groaned.

He covered the brown nubbin with his mouth, sucking the bud Cole knew was so tasty.

Unable to resist, Cole dropped to her other side and drew that nipple into his mouth. She tasted of sweat and woman, a delicious mix.

Zane grinned at him over their shared feast and maintained the suction on her tit. His hands roamed over her flat stomach, while Cole's hands roamed over Zane.

Shira's hips bucked up and down. "More, please!"

"Such a greedy girl." Zane squeezed the flesh of the tit he worshipped. "I could suckle here all day, if I didn't know what awaited me."

"Moving on, then?" Cole tweaked Zane's flat nipple as his mouth pressed against Shira's fleshy mound.

"I suppose. Care to join me?"

"I'll be right behind you."

Zane grinned. "I love it when you're behind me." He slipped between Shira's thighs and pushed them apart, examining her intimately. "So lovely. When I saw Cole's face here, so many emotions went through me. First, I wanted to be Cole. Then, I wanted to be next to him, enjoying you as a pair."

"Show me." Shira jiggled her legs open and closed.

Cole peered over Zane's shoulder as his fair-haired lover spread the pink pussy lips. Zane flicked his tongue over her clitoris, and they both watched her jump.

"That's so fucking hot," Cole murmured, running his hands over Zane's muscular back.

"Slip in here and join me," Zane offered. "I'll share with you, and steal some musky flavoured kisses at the same time."

"That sounds intriguing, to be sure." Cole moved behind Zane. "But I have something else in mind. Don't worry about me." He spread Zane's arse cheeks and admired the puckered hole between them. "Ah, yes." Cole drove forward, spearing the anus with his tongue.

"Sweet mercy!" Zane gasped. "You'll have me hard again in no time."

Cole wedged his nose between his buttocks and grinned. "I intend to keep you hard, my gorgeous stud. You never know when I, or this luscious female, might need attention." His words were intended to tease, but the very idea made Cole's cock harden and weep. He smeared the tip of his shaft on one finger and inserted it into Zane's tight channel.

His handsome lover groaned, his words breathy. "At your service, my leader. Anytime, day or night. And as for this tasty morsel..." He dived into Shira's pussy face first, lapping her juices with ardour.

"Yes!" Shira cried out. "Take me! Take me now."

Cole leaned up to watch her climax. He licked his lips as Zane speared the moist pussy with three fingers. The simulated fuck apparently drove her over the edge, and she moaned and panted as her body quivered.

Zane flicked her clit until the shudders subsided then slowly laved her folds with long, wet strokes.

Cole grasped his cock. He was rock hard and near bursting. "I can't bear to watch this anymore."

"Don't just watch." Zane rolled off to the side, moving over Shira's leg. He clasped one hand around Cole's shaft and guided it to the fully lubricated pussy. "She wants to be taken. Do it! Take her now, and let me savour it."

"Fuck!" The most pleasant sensations were running through Cole's body. To feel Zane's hands on him, then Shira's, was intense and more wonderful than he could have imagined. He sank into her pussy, his cock claiming the territory it desired.

"Oh, yeah." Zane began stroking himself. "Fuck her. Grind it out. I really want to watch you come."

Shira looked at him. "You said it yourself—don't just watch." She gazed up at Cole. "Remember the neat trick from before?"

Cole grinned. He absolutely remembered. "Of course. Do you want that?"

"Please." She clung to his shoulders as Cole gripped her arse and flipped them over.

Shira sat astride him, his cock firmly planted inside her. She straightened, tossing her hair over one shoulder. "Zane." She gazed at him. "Come, join us. Fuck me at the same time our lover does."

Zane's eyes lit up. "Have you ever..."

"No." Shira ran a hand over her smooth arse. "You can be my first."

Zane straddled Cole's legs, sitting close behind her. "You'll be tight. It might be uncomfortable."

She smiled over her shoulder at him. "I'm sure you can handle tight. And as for comfort, well, I tried to get Cole to fuck me like an animal today, but he disappeared. Perhaps you can be the one to do it."

Cole saw Zane's mouth twitch, as if it were watering. He grinned up at him. "Go ahead, lover. Shira wants it a little rough. Think you can handle that?"

"Oh, I think so." Zane moved behind her, but the last expression Cole saw looked as if the man had died and gone to heaven.



Cole held still, not wanting to resume thrusting and risk coming too soon. He'd give Zane a chance to catch up. "She'll need to be stretched and lubricated," he reminded him.

"I've got it," Zane replied. "I'm dripping lubrication. And the stretching will be my pleasure. How does that feel, Shira? That's one finger."

"Oh, yes." A look of blissful disbelief crossed her face.

"I think she likes it, my love." Cole reached up and tweaked one of her deep brown nipples.

"Then let's try two."

Cole wished he could see Zane penetrating Shira's virgin arse. Next time, he'd be where he could watch and stroke himself. But now, her pussy felt warm and wet, wrapped around his shaft like a glove. He couldn't be stuck in a better spot.

"Ah, nice and pliant." Zane groaned from behind. "Three fingers, my sexy she-wolf. Your outer ring has relented. Soon, my cock will slide right in."

"If you keep talking, I'm going to shoot right now." Cole closed his eyes, trying to hold back his orgasm.

Shira rose up and down on him teasingly.

"Stop! Stop!" He shook his head. *Close. So fucking close.*

"It feels so good, Zane," she murmured. "Please, take me now. Fuck me with your beautiful cock. See if you can feel Cole's shaft rubbing against you."

"Shit." Zane repositioned himself.

Cole could feel every move he made. The tip of his bulky rod slipped into her arse an inch, and Zane pressed for more.

"So tight," Zane muttered through gritted teeth.

"Yes, fuck me!" Shira commanded as her body accepted the intruder.

Cole felt the long shaft through her thin membrane wall and couldn't hold back any longer. He resumed his thrusts, as hard as he was able to with two bodies above him. The weight and pressure made it that much more intense.

"Oh, fuck!" Zane called. "I'm not going to last long."

"Come with me." Cole felt his balls lift. His climax was right there. One more nudge, and he'd fly over the edge.

Shira wailed, and his eyes flew open. For a moment, he worried they were hurting her, but the expression on her face indicated anything but pain. She panted and gasped, her pelvic muscles contracting around his shaft.

Cole erupted. His seed shot out in spurts, again and again. It was all he could do to remain conscious. When he finally opened his eyes, he saw those of both his lovers closed. Zane's arms were wrapped around Shira's torso tightly, a hand cupping one of her full breasts.

He mustered the energy to speak. "That was incredible."

Zane kissed Shira's neck, and she turned her head to accept another directly on the mouth. They kissed for long moments, and Cole's heart soared. He no longer had doubts. This was right, he felt it. Zane and Shira were his chosen mates. They would love passionately, make an abundance of pups and gently rule the wolfen tribe with their mixture of hearts, minds and souls.

"Be still while I pull out," Zane told Shira. "Your body has contracted around mine. This might hurt a bit."

"Then never pull out." Shira reached for his face and another kiss.

Cole snickered. "I might need the use of my legs again sometime."

"Tough." Zane grinned at him then clutched Shira's hips. He backed away carefully.

She groaned, then pressed Cole's abdomen to release his staff. Rolling to his side, she nuzzled into the crook of his arm. "By the gods," she murmured.

"Incredible," Cole repeated.

Shira glanced up at Zane, who rested on his haunches. "Come lie with us, my new lover. I need a few moments, but I haven't had my fill of you, yet."

Zane smiled, moving towards them.

"Wait." Cole glanced at him. "Do something for me?"

"Anything, you gorgeous hunk."

Cole motioned to the side. "Under my loincloth. Could you bring it to me?"

Zane stood and walked to where they'd shed their clothing. He raised Cole's loincloth and they all spotted the talisman. His eyes lit up. "Are you sure?"

"I'm sure. If you two are willing to undertake this journey with me."

Zane picked up the amulet and returned to them. "There's no question how I feel. I'd love nothing more than to stand by your side." He grinned. "Or behind you, or bent in front of you—wherever you'll allow me to stand."

Cole chuckled. "All of the above, anytime you like. But seriously, this is a huge responsibility. I can't do it alone."

Zane knelt and both men looked at Shira.

She smiled. "I don't think you'll be doing anything alone for quite some time." She stroked Cole's cheek. "I, too, accept your offer and the obligations that come with it. Happily."

Cole sat up, bringing her with him. He looked at Zane. "Would you do the honours?"

Zane offered one end of the talisman's leather thong to Shira. "Shall we do it together?"

She nodded and took the strap. Together they tied it around Cole's neck, and each left one hand on his shoulder.

The sparkling, red stone glowed brighter than Cole had ever seen it.

"Look at that!" Shira marvelled.

"This was truly meant to be." Zane's eyes twinkled.

Cole reached for both his mates and drew them into an embrace. "But then, we knew that, didn't we?"

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## Epilogue

Cole glanced out over the green fields of the wolfen territory. It had been an abundant spring with plentiful rain, and evidence of the fire was getting harder to find. "The land looks good," he remarked, pleased.

"The wildlife is returning, as well." Kaleb grasped a handful of bulrush roots. "When I was out hunting this morning, I saw several families of rabbits and deer in the new growth. I was in such a good mood, I couldn't bear to pursue any of them. So we'll have roots and berries one more night." He shrugged.

Laughing, Cole shook his head. "You old softie. I'll send Ulric with you tomorrow. He won't mind hunting prey for a good meal."

"You're right." Kaleb chuckled. "He keeps me in line. So, what have you got there?" He peered around Cole, trying to see what he held behind his back.

"Nothing." Cole stepped sideways so Kaleb couldn't see.

"What is it?" Kaleb wrestled him jovially.

Cole gave in, showing a handful of wildflowers.

"Aw, those are sweet." Kaleb nudged him.

"Shut up." Cole muttered, feeling the heat of a flush rise to his face.

"You have to admit, a male mate doesn't require as much special treatment. Between you and Zane, with his treks to find Shira's favourite berries, she keeps you two hopping."

"We only do what we wish to do," Cole insisted.

"I'm sure." Kaleb continued to tease. "It's your wish to spend long hours rubbing her back and feet."

"It is." He rolled his eyes and turned back towards the den. "She's earned it. The pups will birth any day now, and by the size of her belly, there'll be a bunch of them."

Kaleb grabbed the scruff of Cole's neck as they walked home. "And my boy will be a father. Honestly, I never thought I'd see the day. Especially when you met Zane. I figured he'd be the one you settled down with."

"Zane and I are very happy." Cole shrugged off his grasp. "Shira completes us, and makes us happier. It's the perfect arrangement."

"For you, I believe it is. I'm proud of you, Cole."

"Thanks, Kaleb. Your support means everything in the world to me."

"You'll always have it."

They stopped when they reached the edge of the compound. Zane approached from another direction, a bowl full of ripe, red berries in his hand.

"You're so whipped." Kaleb shook his head, grinning.

"Ignore him." Cole slid his arm around his mate's waist. "He's jealous that Shira's reached the horny part of pregnancy." He glanced back at Kaleb and winked. "She says multiple orgasms each day will make the delivery easier. We're lucky there are two of us. One man might lose a tongue trying to keep up with that she-wolf."

"We do what we must." Kaleb nodded wisely, heading off to his own alcove.

"Shall we go check on her?" Cole turned back to Zane.

"In just a minute." He pulled Cole's face to his for a slow, deep kiss. "I'll never get enough of you. After we've seen to Shira's needs, I want you to fuck me. It's been too long."

"It hasn't been a full day!" Cole protested laughingly.

"That's far too long. Trust me."

The talisman glowed dimly around Cole's neck, a feeling he'd grown used to over time. It had varying degrees of heat, signalling different things to take note of, and validating Cole's thoughts and emotions. When it indicated happiness, pure and complete satisfaction, the heat level was at its most pleasurable. And that one never went away.

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## **About the Authors**

Jamie Hill was born and raised in the Midwest, where she continues to live with her husband and two sons. She juggles her spare time to include writing every day, freelance editing, reading as she finds time, tinkering on the computer, listening to country music, as many naps as possible, and watching movies (especially scary movies) with her family.

Email: [jamiehill1981@yahoo.com](mailto:jamiehill1981@yahoo.com)

Jude's imagination frequently leads her astray, and she eagerly follows while trying to keep out of trouble, or at least, not get caught. For those of you who know her, you'll know that's not always easy. A picture, a smell, an unexpected glimpse of flesh, or a load of soil in the back of a pick-up, are all fodder for her writing. Her male characters run the gamut from the dominant male ruling his women with an iron fist, to a simpering purple-clad boy-toy whose only desire is to please. As diverse and as richly depicted, her women find themselves in a myriad of exotic and erotic situations.

Email: [mason.jude@gmail.com](mailto:mason.jude@gmail.com)

Jamie Hill and Jude Mason love to hear from readers. You can find their contact information, website and author biography at [www.total-e-bound.com](http://www.total-e-bound.com).

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Second Time Around

Carnal Collision

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Unexpected Love: Having It All

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Secret Santa

My Secret Valentine: Secret Rendezvous

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