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**TASTY  
TREATS**

**Volume 3**

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# **TASTY TREATS ANTHOLOGY**

*Volume 3*

**Stormy Glenn  
Tymber Dalton  
Blaze Ballantine  
Jenny Penn**

**MENAGE AMOUR**



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**MAN TO MAN**

***Wolf Creek Pack***

**Stormy Glenn**

# **DEDICATION**

To My Man, thanks for everything. The flowers were wonderful.

# MAN TO MAN

*Wolf Creek Pack*

**STORMY GLENN**

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## Chapter 1

“So, how long are we staying?” Donovan Morgan asked as he turned to look at his brother, Chase.

“As long as they need us. Quilliam told us to stay until it was over,” Chase replied as he drove their truck through the quiet streets heading for the home of Daniel Nash, alpha of the Wolf Creek Pack.

“And just how long is that supposed to take?” Donovan asked, hearing his brother’s deep sigh at his question. He knew he was being irritable, but he felt irritable. He didn’t want to be babysitting some little human.

“Until it’s done, Donovan.”

Donovan just rolled his eyes and ran his hand through his collar length light brown hair. He really didn’t want to be here, but his alpha, Quilliam Reece, had ordered him and Chase to come down and assist the Wolf Creek Pack. He could think of a hundred places he’d rather be, but an order was an order.

“This is it? This is where the alpha of the Wolf Creek Pack lives?” Donovan watched with curiosity as they pulled into the driveway of a large white farmhouse. It had seen better days but looked to be kept up. It was about as far removed from his very modern log cabin as could be.

“Guess so,” Chase replied as he turned the ignition off on the truck and pulled the keys free. “We might as well go in.”



Donovan nodded, opening his door and climbing out. As he turned to shut the door, he hesitated, feeling the hairs on the back of his neck stand up. Someone was watching him from inside the house.

He shut the door and turned just in time to see the front curtains fall back into place. *Hmm, that was telling. Apparently, they had been expected.* Stepping in behind Chase, he followed him to the front door, waiting while Chase knocked.

It took just a few moments for the door to open and an older woman to appear. "Hello, you must be Chase and Donovan. Your alpha called and told us you were coming. I'm Maryann Nash, mate of Daniel Nash. Please, come in," she said as she held the door open and gestured for them to come into the house.

Donovan smiled as he walked past her, following his brother into the house. He was a little surprised at how welcoming the inside felt. The worn outside belied the homey comfort inside the old farmhouse. It was actually very nice.

"Can I get you boys anything?" Maryann asked, bringing his attention back to her.

"No, thank you," Donovan and Chase both replied at the same time. He watched Maryann nod her head, rubbing her hands together.

"Well, please, sit down. My husband is at our son, Joseph's house right now, but our other son, James, will be here in a few moments to take you to him."

Donovan nodded and went to sit down on the couch next to Chase, resting his elbows on his knees and clasping his hands together as he waited. Maryann seemed a little nervous and he wondered if she was afraid of them.

"Mrs. Nash, is everything okay?" he heard Chase ask, thankful that he didn't have to.

"Please, call me Maryann. And I'm just upset over this whole business with Nate. He's such a sweet boy and he doesn't deserve to be hunted down like a piece of lost property."

“Nate?” Donovan asked in curiosity. Reece hadn’t told them why they were coming down to help except to say that they were going to help guard someone. They had no idea what they were actually walking into.

“My son’s mate, Nate Summers.”

“Nate is your son’s—mate?” Donovan asked, surprised that Maryann was talking so casually about her son’s mate when he was another man. From what he could see, it didn’t bother her at all. His mother, on the other hand, would flip.

After Chase and their brother Devlin had come out to the family a few years ago, it had been made very clear to Donovan that he was not allowed to be gay. He was responsible for producing cubs and carrying on the family name. Being gay was not an option.

“Yes, Nate is Joseph’s mate. Is that a problem?” Maryann asked sitting up straighter and staring intently over at Donovan.

“No, ma’am. A mate is a mate, not matter what,” Donovan replied, surprised that he really meant it. He had been searching for his mate for so long, he wouldn’t care if she had purple polka dots.

“Good, because I won’t have that boy looked down on because of who he loves. He has brought more happiness to my son in the small amount of time he has been here than I have ever seen. Joseph means everything to that boy and, I suspect, Nate means everything to my son.”

“That’s as it should be, ma’am.”

“I swear, if you call me ma’am one more time instead of Maryann I’m going to sic my husband on you,” Maryann laughed.

“Yes, ma’am—I mean, Maryann,” Donovan chuckled.

Maryann nodded, sending Donovan a small smile. “Are you sure I can’t get you boys something to drink? Something to eat maybe?”

“No, thank you, Maryann. We stopped on the way through town and grabbed something to eat. Our alpha didn’t exactly explain the situation to us fully so we didn’t know when we might get another chance,” Chase explained.

“Well, I don’t think I would be stepping on anyone’s toes if I told you that you’re here to keep Nate safe. Someone is after him and we need strong boys like you two to make sure that this madman never gets his hands on him. There’s no telling what would happen to him then.”

Donovan turned his head slowly to see how Chase was taking that bit of news. Situations like this were somewhat of a sore subject with both of them, which is probably why their alpha sent them.

He turned back to Maryann and smiled. “We understand, Maryann, and don’t you worry, we’ll do everything in our power to keep Nate safe.”

Maryann reached over and patted Donovan’s hand. “I know you will. I’m just so—oh, that must be my son, James, now,” she said as they all heard the front door open and close.

“Mom?”

Donovan froze as the hairs on the back of his neck stood up at the deep raspy voice coming from the other room. His cock had gone so hard, he was afraid it was going to break through his jeans.

*Who the hell was it coming through the door and why was he having such an intense reaction?* He had never experienced anything like this in his life, not from any girl he had ever dated or any girl he had ever slept with. *So, why this voice?*

Donovan watched as pair of long legs encased in tight blue jeans came into his line of sight. He lifted his head slowly, moving up past the thick muscular thighs. His eyes paused at the tight bulge that said the other man was having nearly the same reaction as he was before moving on up past the flat stomach and nicely chiseled chest to a square jaw.

But it was the man’s smoky, gray eyes that held Donovan spellbound. One look and Donovan knew he was hooked. Hell, he was obsessed. He was looking into the eyes of his future, his mate—and he was a man.

*How fucked up was that?* Fate had mated him to another man. Donovan had meant it when he said that he had no problem with Maryann's son being mated to another man, but him? That was another story.

He'd never even been with a man. He wouldn't know the first thing to do with one if he did have him in bed. He had only been with women. Guess that was about to change. Now that he had found his mate, anyone else was off limits.

"Oh, James, you made it. Any word?" Maryann asked as she quickly got to her feet and went over to hug her son.

Donovan got to his feet also, having been taught manners by his mother. However, he couldn't keep his eyes off of the man in Maryann's arms. For some reason he couldn't fathom, he wanted it to be his arms the man was in. *How weird was that?*

"This is my son, James," Maryann said as she introduced them. "This is Chase and Donovan Morgan from the Shasta Pack. Their alpha sent them down here to help us keep Nate safe."

"I'm Chase." Donovan watched Chase reach out and shake James's hand, quickly suppressing the possessive growl building in his throat. It wouldn't do to show his hand before he had a chance to talk to the man.

When James turned his gaze to Donovan, he felt a hundred butterflies take flight in his stomach. This was his mate. He was about to touch his mate for the very first time. He could barely keep his hand from trembling as he held it out.

"I'm Donovan. Donovan Morgan," he said, hoping that his voice sounded steady to the others in the room. He knew from the slight widening of James's eyes that he had heard the deep drop in his voice.

"James. James Nash, but you can call me Jim," he said just as he took Donovan's hand.

Donovan's hand did start to tremble the moment Jim's warm skin touched his. Did he feel the bond that was instantly forming between them? Was he as confused by it as Donovan was?

“Jim,” Donovan replied, nodding his head. He held his hand a moment longer, looking deep into Jim’s smoky gray eyes before reluctantly releasing it. He didn’t want to let him go, but he knew he had to. He could see Chase was beginning to look at him strangely out of the corner of his eye.

“Can I use your bathroom?” Donovan asked, tearing his eyes away from Jim to look over at Maryann.

“I’ll show you where it is,” Jim said quickly, stepping out of his mother’s arms to lead the way.

Donovan followed behind him, his eyes dropping to the rounded ass walking in front of him. *Damn!* If he was going to have to be mated to a man at least it was a man with a nice ass. He had always had a thing for tight asses and the one in front of him seemed to be very tight.

When Jim opened a door and walked in, Donovan was surprised until he realized that it was a study and not the bathroom. He followed him in, shutting the door behind him, watching as Jim walked over to a small wooden cabinet and quickly poured two small drinks. He grabbed them, turning to hand one to Donovan before drinking his down.

Setting the glass back down on the counter he stared at Donovan intently for several moments before shaking his head, an amused chuckle broke through his lips. “While I prefer men, I’m not out of the closet,” he said.

“I’m not gay,” Donovan replied, quickly drinking down the brown liquid in his glass.

“Well, it looks like that is about to change for both of us,” Jim laughed nervously.

Donovan set his glass down beside Jim’s before turning to look at him. As he looked down at him, he realized that Jim was a few inches shorter than his six foot four. The top of his coal black head barely came up to his nose.

“You feel it, too?” Donovan murmured.

Jim tilted his head back to look up into Donovan's hazel eyes. "We could pretend this never happened and just go our separate ways, find mates of our own choosing. No one has to know but us."

"Is that what you want?" Donovan asked hesitantly. The mere thought of never seeing Jim again made Donovan's insides rebel. They were mates. There would never be another one for either of them.

Donovan wished that he could read the emotions flashing in Jim's eyes as he stared up at him. He wished that he knew what he was thinking right then. His eyes were so expressive, but Donovan didn't know how to read them. He only hoped that Jim would give him a chance to learn.

Finally, Jim shook his head. "No, I guess not," he said quietly as he lowered his eyes and turned away. He stepped back over to the wooden cabinet and poured them both another small glass of whiskey, handing one to Donovan.

He held up his glass for a toast. "To the death of the straight man."

Donovan chuckled, raising his glass to clink it against Jim's before taking a sip. He watched Jim over the edge of his glass. He took a sip, then leaned back against the edge of the cabinet countertop, crossing his arms over his chest.

"So, any idea on how we do this?"

Donovan shook his head. "Nope. Never been with a man before. You?"

Jim shook his head. "No, I've never been with a man. Like I said, I'm not out...to anyone. I don't really have a clue as to what I was doing. This—" Jim said, shrugging his shoulders before taking another sip of his drink.

"Would your brother be offended if we asked him?" Donovan had no idea where that thought had come from, but once he put it into words, it made perfect sense to him. He was pretty sure that they

could get the basics down. Sex was still sex, no matter which sex you were with. It was just the dynamics that were slightly different, right?

“Joe? He’d probably laugh his ass off. We’d be better off talking to Nate. At least he’s likely to give us the straight story without laughing, but why do you want to talk to them about it? Don’t you think we can figure this out on our own?”

“It’s not that, Jim. I just don’t want to do anything that might hurt either of us or make us uncomfortable. I don’t know anything about being with a man and it’s not like you’re built like a woman,” Donovan replied.

“Do you think that’s going to be a big problem? Me not looking like a woman, I mean?”

Donovan could hear the uncertainty in Jim’s voice. He took a quick step towards him and grabbed his hand, placing it over the hard bulge in his pants. His eyes nearly crossed at the exquisite feel of his mate’s hand on his cock. *Damn, that felt good.*

“No, I don’t think its going to be a problem. I’ve been hard since I heard your voice,” Donovan growled softly. He closed his eyes and groaned when Jim squeezed his hand around his cock.

“Fuck, you’re huge!” Jim whispered in awe as he tried to palm Donovan’s entire length.

“It’s all yours now, baby. You’d better get used to it,” Donovan replied as he opened his eyes to look down at Jim again.

“Are we really going to do this, Donovan?” Jim whispered. “Seriously?”

“All I know is that I can’t stop thinking about you, what you might look like without your clothes on, spread out on my bed. I want to smell you, to taste you, to touch you. I want to know everything about you. What you like and dislike. What your interests are. What makes you feel good.”

Donovan watched as Jim’s mouth fell open in surprise and his beautiful gray eyes took on a bright twinkle. Donovan smiled at Jim. “I’ve never felt this way about anyone in my life. And, truthfully, it

scares the hell out of me. But I'd rather try being with you, a man, than be without my mate."

"Donovan, I—I don't know if I'm ready for this," Jim whispered. "I've hidden who I was my entire life. I don't think even my brother knows that I'm—that I prefer men."

Donovan stared down at Jim's distressed face for a moment before nodding his head and taking a step back from him, putting some room between him and temptation. "I understand, Jim," he said before turning on his heel and walking toward the door.

"Wait, Donovan, please."

Donovan paused as he reached for the door handle, his hands going flat against the door as he leaned his head forward and rested it on the cool wood. He took several deep breaths trying to calm his nerves.

"I didn't mean that the way it sounded. I just—can we just get to know each other a little first? I didn't even know you thirty minutes ago and as much as I understand that we're mates, I need some time to get used to this whole thing. I resigned myself to having a woman for a mate, not—not you."

Donovan turned to look back at Jim as a thought suddenly occurred to him. "Is it me or because I'm a man?"

"It's the same thing, isn't it?" Jim asked in confusion.

No, it wasn't, but Donovan instantly knew that he wasn't going to get any type of heartfelt declaration out of Jim. He felt stupid now that he had bared his feelings to Jim. Apparently, it hadn't been a two way street. He just wasn't sure if this was the way Jim normally behaved or if it was because he was a man. Either way, Donovan lost.

"Fine, Jim, if that's what you want. I'll be here until this thing with Nate is over," he said as he turned back toward the door.

"And then?" Jim asked.

Donovan turned to look back at Jim. "And then I go home."



## Chapter 2

Jim watched Donovan walk out of the room, more confused than he could ever remember being in his life. His mate was a man. A damn sexy man, but a man nonetheless. How was he supposed to deal with that?

His brother being gay never bothered him. Maybe because he always knew he was, too. He just didn't think he had the nerve to live as openly as Joe did, but whatever. It was Joe's life. He could do what he wanted with it. And Nate seemed to make him damn happy. So, who was Jim to argue about it?

Him being gay was another story. Jim had never dated a man, let alone kissed one. He had wanted to, but after Joe had come out as gay, Jim had seen what he went through with their friends and family. He never wanted to go through that.

So, he had pretended all of his life he was straight, even dating women on occasion. Jim knew how to elicit a sexual response from a woman, and he knew what he liked, but would it be the same when it was two men together?

Hell, who was he kidding? He was so out of his depth right now, he might as well be on the moon. He wasn't going to be the only one confused by all of this, though. His parents already had one gay son. They were going to shit purple kittens when they found out about Donovan.

Taking a deep breath to calm himself, and to get rid of the raging hard-on pressing against his zipper, Jim started for the door. No matter how confused or horny he was right now, he still had a job to do.

Just as he reached the door, however, it swung open. Jim looked up in surprise to see Donovan standing there, a fierce look on his face. “Donovan, what—”

Jim’s words were muffled when Donovan took a step forward, shutting the door behind him before reaching for Jim, his arms going around his waist to pull him closer as his lips descended over his.

Jim was frozen, unmoving for a moment, shocked at actually kissing another man intimately before the erotic feeling of Donovan’s lips on his overwhelmed him. He grabbed onto Donovan, wrapping his arms around his neck. *Oh god, this was why he was gay!*

His lips parted and he allowed Donovan entrance, groaning as their tongues met for the first time. He tasted sweet, just like Jim thought that a mate should taste. Jim’s body trembled a little as he realized what he was thinking. Donovan was a man and at the moment, Jim didn’t care. He could go on kissing Donovan for hours.

He felt Donovan urge him backwards, guiding him until the desk came up behind him. But Donovan didn’t stop until Jim was lying back on the desk, his larger body covering his. Jim looked up at Donovan in bewilderment as he lifted his head.

He was shocked to see that Donovan’s deep hazel eyes had turned a dark coppery brown. They were smoldering with desire as Donovan gazed down at him. Donovan’s lips were red and swollen, slightly parted. His chest rose and fell with his rapid breathing. He looked delicious.

Jim wanted more. He wanted everything Donovan had to give, and then some. His mate looked down at him with desire in his eyes and he wanted more, much, much more.

“Donovan,” Jim whispered as he pulled Donovan’s lips back down to his, attacking his mouth the moment their lips met. Jim’s cock hardened even more as he heard Donovan groan. Oh god, he could hear that sound for the rest of his life and never get tired of it.

Jim was so immersed in kissing Donovan that he jumped, startled when he felt Donovan’s hands grab his ass through his jeans. He

opened his eyes when Donovan quickly lifted his head to look down at him in query. Jim grinned, parting his legs to let Donovan's body settled against his hard erection before pulling his head back down.

When Donovan's hand moved around to cup his cock through his jeans, Jim thought he was going to come right there and then. He never felt so alive in his life, so close to the edge of an orgasm. He just knew that if Donovan would touch him a little more, kiss him a little harder, he would come.

Reaching down with his hand, he pushed Donovan's out of the way and quickly unbuttoned his jeans and pulled the zipper down, thankful that he hadn't had any clean boxers that morning when Donovan's hand immediately encircled his cock and began stroking him.

Jim tore his lips away from Donovan's, looking up at him in desperation as he panted heavily. "D—Donovan, need more," he pleaded in a husky voice, his hand brushing against the hard ridge of Donovan's pants.

Dark, copper eyes stared down at Jim for just a moment before Donovan reached down and unbuttoned his jeans, grabbing both of their cocks in his large hand. Jim's eyes nearly rolled back in his head when Donovan started stroking them together. The feel of his hot skin against his made Jim's breath hitch in his throat.

He reached upward and pushed Donovan's shirt up to his neck, his fingers going to his nipples to pull and twist them. He could hear Donovan's small moan at his action, feel it in the quickening of his strokes, the way his lips latched onto the skin on his neck.

As Donovan's teeth raked across the soft skin between his neck and shoulder, Jim knew that he wanted Donovan to bite down, to sink his long canines in and claim him as his mate. But, he knew if Donovan did that, there would be no going back for either of them.

Once Donovan claimed him, they would be mates forever. There would be no one else for either of them. Still, he couldn't remember

ever wanting anything so much in his life. Just the thought that his mate was that close to claiming him...

Jim opened his mouth to beg Donovan to take him, to claim him, but all that came out was a long groan as his cock exploded, shooting spurt after spurt of pearly white cream all over Donovan's hand and their stomachs.

As the air left his lungs, Jim heard Donovan cry out above him, his creamy release mixing with Jim's as he came, burying his face in his neck as his chest heaved. Jim rubbed Donovan's back until he finally lifted his head to look down at him.

His face showed his wonderment at what had just happened between them, then slowly faded away to be replaced by a stone cold mask of nothing. Jim suddenly felt very vulnerable. Donovan looked like he could not have cared less about what had just happened between them, something that Jim felt had been life altering.

He suddenly wished he was anywhere other than where he was, laying on a desk with jeans undone, his spent cock hanging out, and cum smeared all over his stomach. Especially since the man that had just shook his world was standing up and fixing his jeans, looking down at him like he could not have cared less who he was.

Jim quickly stood up and shoved his cock back into his jeans and zipped them up. He reached over and grabbed a couple of napkins and wiped of his stomach and tossed them in the trash before turning back to face Donovan.

But Donovan was already walking away toward the door. Jim reached a hand toward him, wanting to call him back, but quickly lowered it when he remembered the look of disinterest on Donovan's face.

He felt something break in his chest when Donovan reached the door and turned to look back at him, his eyes raking coldly over Jim's body. "I think this proves that sex isn't going to be a problem between us. Remember that when you decide if you're going to keep me or not."

Jim was devastated as Donovan turned and left the room without another word. This had all been about proving a point? Donovan hadn't been overcome by being with his mate, claiming his mate. He had just been trying to prove a point?

Jim didn't know if he ever felt more used before in his life. Was this how things were going to be between them? Jim didn't even know if this was just Donovan's way of proving something or if he was normally like that. If he was, Jim wasn't sure he wanted to be mated, no matter how sexy the man was.

Tucking his shirt back into his pants, Jim headed for the door. He still had a job to do and not even his thoughts about Donovan were going to keep him from it. His brother needed his help and at least there, he knew what was expected of him.

Walking into the living room, he gazed around the room. His mother was talking quietly with Chase. Donovan stood looking out the front window. Jim took a deep breath, hoping he didn't smell of sex, and cleared his throat.

"Are you all ready to go? Dad is expecting us over at Joe's house," Jim asked as he walked toward the front door. He could hear Chase and Donovan saying goodbye to his mom as he walked outside and headed for his truck.

Jim climbed in and started the truck, hoping Donovan would ride with his brother instead of him. He didn't know if he was ready to talk to Donovan right now, not the way he was feeling. It would be much better if they each had some space to think.

Even so, as Donovan climbed into the car with his brother, Jim felt disappointed. He shook his head and headed for his brother's house. He was losing his mind. That was it. Donovan was driving him crazy.

\* \* \* \*

“So, what’s the story with Jim?” Chase asked as they followed behind him.

“I don’t want to talk about it,” Donovan replied stoically as he stared out the window.

“I saw how you looked at him, Donny. I’ve never seen you look at anyone that way, certainly not another man. So, what’s up?” Chase asked.

Donovan turned his head to look over at him. “He’s my mate.”

“Fuck!” Chase swore under his breath, shaking his head. “You sure know how to screw things up, don’t you? You were supposed to be the one to save the family name. Mom’s going to shit bricks when she finds out about this. You know that, don’t you?”

Donovan nodded. “Yeah, I kind of figured.”

“Well,” Chase replied, smirking, “If you were going to choose a guy for a mate, you didn’t pick a bad looking one. Jim’s hot, bro!”

Donovan tried to smile past the possessive growl building in the back of his throat at Chase’s words. He knew his brother was gay. He had known for years. He did not like him making comments about his mate, however.

“Course, I prefer my guys to be a little smaller. Someone I can cuddle in my arms. Jim’s too masculine for me, but if you like him...” Chase laughed. “You do like him, right?”

“Oh yeah, that doesn’t seem to be our problem.”

“Then what is? Why are you riding with me instead of up there with your mate?”

“Because I’m not gay and Jim lives in the closet. Until a few minutes ago, I’d never even kissed another man,” Donovan explained, feeling his cock suddenly harden as he remembered the kiss and the other stuff he had experienced with Jim.

“And now that you have? What do you feel now?”

“Horny!”

“And what are you going to do about it?” Chase asked as they pulled to a stop behind Jim’s truck.

"I haven't got a clue," Donovan replied as he climbed out and followed Jim toward the house and up the steps, waiting while he knocked. He couldn't seem to keep his eyes from trailing down to the tight ass encased in faded jeans. *Damn!* That man had a perfect ass.

"Hey, Dad, this is Chase and Donovan Morgan from the Shasta pack. Their alpha said we could have them as long as we needed them," Jim said as he gave his father a slight hug.

"Chase, Donovan, thank you for coming. We can really use your assistance," Daniel said as he shook both of their hands. "I'm Daniel Nash, alpha of the Wolf Creek Pack. This is my son, Joe, our pack enforcer and the local sheriff. The man sleeping in his lap is his mate, Nate."

"He's the reason we are here?" Chase asked.

"Yes. If you want to come sit down, I'm sure we can fill you in."

Donovan sat down across from Joe. He smiled at the sleeping man in Joe's arms, but his attention was on the man that went to stand behind him. He tried to ignore the sweet scent that Jim was giving off when Joe began speaking.

"We need to keep our voices down. Nate just fell asleep and he needs all of the rest he can get," Joe said, gesturing to the man in his arms.

"What can you tell us?" Chase asked quietly.

"There's a man—Nate calls him the Teacher. We don't know his real name yet. He has spent the better part of the last twenty years making Nate's life hell. He finally escaped the Teacher two years ago, but he's been on the run ever since. The Teacher has his hands in a lot of cookie jars and has a very long reach. No place has been safe for Nate for very long."

"Why does this guy have such a hard on for your mate?" Donovan asked.

He was surprised when the little man opened his eyes and sat up, looking over at him. "Cause I'm just that damn cute," Nate said.

Donovan watched with amusement as Joe nuzzled his hair. “Hey, baby, did you have a nice nap?” Joe asked.

“Not really, but I suppose I needed it. So, who are the mountains masquerading as men?” Nate asked, nodding his head towards him and Chase.

Chase leaned forward holding out his hand. “Chase Morgan. My brother Donovan and I were sent down here by our alpha to give you a little added protection.”

Nate grabbed the hand that Joe held out before leaning forward and shaking Chase’s hand, then Donovan’s. Donovan felt him pause briefly, staring at him before releasing his hand. Did he know about Jim? Could he tell that it was everything Donovan could do not to reach back and touch Jim?

“I guess you want to know about the Teacher?” Nate asked as he released Donovan’s hand and sat back in Joe’s arms.

“I think we need to know as much as you’re comfortable telling us. The more that we know, the better we will be able to protect you,” Donovan replied as he sat back in his seat.

“I’ll try to give you the short version then,” Nate replied before taking a deep breath. “The Teacher was made my guardian after my mother died. He uses people like me to make him money, lots of money. I’m one of his top—I get him the most money. That’s why he wants me back so bad.”

“You’re a prostitute?” Chase asked, his voice laced with horror.

“Not exactly. I have certain abilities. The Teacher sells my services to the highest bidder—government agencies, businessmen, drug dealers, you name it and he sells our services to them. That’s how he’s gained so much power.”

“Services? Abilities? Mind filling us in on what in the hell you’re talking about?” Donovan asked quietly, totally confused at this point. *Was he a prostitute?*

“For one, I’m a human lie detector. I can tell if someone is lying just by touching them. Two, I can read people’s emotions. For



example, I know exactly what you are feeling right now and for whom,” Nate replied.

Donovan watched Nate’s eye raise up to the gorgeous man standing behind him. He could feel his face heat up when he realized that Nate could sense his desire for Jim. Did he know that they were mates, too?

“That’s got to make things interesting, but I can see why the Teacher might want to get you back. So, I guess our job here is to keep him from accomplishing that?” Chase asked a moment later, serious once again.

“Well, I would really appreciate it. Just the thought of that—that man getting his hands on my baby makes me see red,” Joe stated.

“So, from what I understand from my alpha, the Teacher has been seen in town, correct?” Donovan asked.

Joe and Nate both nodded. “Yeah, Joe and I were out eating when I spotted him through the window.”

“Are you sure it was him?” Donovan asked, again, his voice very quiet.

“Oh yes, I’m positive it was the Teacher. There’s no mistaking that man. He’s been in my life for nearly twenty years. I could spot him in a crowd just by the way he walks. Besides, I’ve been expecting him.”

“You’ve been expecting him?” Chase asked in surprise.

“He’s been looking for me ever since I escaped two years ago. I knew that if I stayed in one place for too long he’d find me. Joe convinced me to stick around this time.”

“But how did he find you?”

“There are others like me. The Teacher has a whole group of us. Some have used their abilities to keep him away from me. Some have not. I assume that is how he found me. But mostly I think it’s because I stayed in one place for more than a few days.”

Chase sat forward in his chair, his hands knotting together. “There are more of you? Where are they and why haven’t we heard about this before now?”

“The Teacher moves us around a lot, so I’m not real sure where they are right now. And I suppose the reasons you haven’t heard about us is the same reasons not many people know about you. Sometimes, it’s better to keep things hidden.”

Chase nodded in understanding. “I can understand that. But I’m curious, what about these others like you? Is the Teacher holding them hostage as well?”

“Most of them, yes. But there are a few of them that like the life that the Teacher provides for them. We call them the Teacher’s pets. They like the money and power that they get from doing exactly what he says. The rest though, their lives are pretty much hell.”

Donovan watched tears form in Nate’s eyes right before he bent his head. Joe’s arms immediately went around him, comforting him. He wondered if it could be that way between him and Jim. If they were mated, would he be able to hold Jim whenever he wanted? Would Jim allow it?

“I had always hoped to go back for them, the ones that don’t want to be there. I just don’t know how. I don’t know where they are and I’m certainly not strong enough to get them away from the Teacher and his army of guards,” Nate said a moment later, raising his head back up.

“Is there any way to get them a message?” Donovan asked curiously.

“No—well—maybe. But I couldn’t guarantee it would get to them or that the others wouldn’t get the message or even intercept it,” Nate replied.

“How? How can you get a message to them?”

“Okay, this is going to sound funny but I’d have to—meditate. Some of the students have telepathy. If they were receiving at the

same time I was sending, they might get the message, especially if they were close by.”

“How close?” Donovan asked.

Nate shrugged. “I’m not sure exactly. Justin has been known to read someone as far away as five hundred miles. So, within a few hundred miles at least. The closer the better.”

“Justin?”

“Justin Reid. He’s my best friend. He’s a telepath. Justin can read someone’s thoughts. The Teacher uses him mostly for business meeting and mergers. He also takes Justin with him when he’s discussing a deal with someone to make sure that they’re being truthful with him and not hiding anything. Justin has been keeping me safe for awhile now.”

“Safe? How?”

Nate smiled. “He sends me messages every once in awhile telling me when to leave a certain area or to avoid certain people.”

“If he can do this, why didn’t he warn you about the Teacher this time?” Joe asked.

“He may not have known. The Teacher doesn’t exactly share all of his plans with us. Justin also might be away on another job or too far away to reach me. Worse case scenario, the Teacher found that he was helping me and has stopped him.”

“Would he—hurt Justin?” Joe asked hesitantly.

“I don’t know. I don’t think so. He never physically hurt us, but he did isolate us. That may not seem too terrible to you, but when the only contact you have is with the other students, you come to appreciate them, a lot.”

“Okay, say you could contact your friend, could you get him to tell you where he and the others are?” Chase asked, looking very serious.

“Yeah, why?”

“What the Teacher is doing is wrong, Nate. I don’t care what abilities you and your friends have. It’s wrong to hold people against their will and make them do things they don’t want to do.”

“You know, don’t you?” Nate murmured quietly a moment later.

“Know what?” Chase said hesitantly, looking quickly over at Donovan.

“You know what it’s like to be held against your will.”

Silence filled the room. Donovan leaned forward, patting Chase on the back before looking over at Nate. He briefly felt Jim’s hand squeeze him on the shoulder, giving him encouragement.

“We don’t know personally what it feels like, but we nearly lost our little brother that way. Someone found out that he was a shifter and kidnapped him. They wanted to study him and learn how the shifting worked. By the time we found him, he had been so abused and tortured that he was never the same again.”

“Is he—is he alive?” Nate whispered.

Donovan nodded. “I’m not sure you can call it living, but he’s breathing, if that’s what you mean. He won’t have anything to do with people he doesn’t know and he rarely leaves his room. It’s like he can’t connect with anyone outside of the immediate family.”

“Oh my God, that’s terrible. How could someone do that? Don’t they understand that you are human just like they are? Everyone has differences. It doesn’t make it okay to treat someone like a science experiment,” Nate said, his voice filled with disgust and horror.

“Not everyone believes the way you do, baby. Some people believe that they have a right to treat people how they want for their own self-interests. Others believe that people who are different don’t have the same rights as they do. Either way, they’re both wrong.”

“I couldn’t agree more, Joe,” Chase said. “I think it’s important that we save not only Nate from the Teacher, but the others as well. The ones that want to stay with him have that right, but the others...” Chase just shook his head.

Joe nodded. “Okay, so what do you have in mind?”

“The first thing we need to do is have Nate contact his friend. We need to know where the Teacher is holding all of them. In the meantime, I’ll contact a few of my friends and assemble a strike force to go in and get them out.”

“You can do that?” Nate asked, astonished.

“I can, yes. I know several people, some pack and some not, that would be very willing to help us. All I have to do is call them. It may take a few hours for them all to get here, but if I call them, they’ll come,” Chase replied.

“You can get people together that fast?”

“It’s just a matter of knowing who to call. One of my friends has his own plane. He’ll fly around and pick everyone up and deliver them here. He doesn’t do any of the fighting, mind you, but he’ll transport them.”

“What do you need me to do?” Nate asked quickly.

“Get a hold of your friend and find out where the Teacher is keeping him and the others. We’ll take care of the rest,” Chase said as he stood to his feet and looked at Joe. “Is there someplace quiet around here? I need to make some phone calls.”

Joe nodded and pointed to his office. “You can use my office. It’s right over there.” He watched as Chase nodded and walked into the office, shutting the door behind him before turning to look back down at Nate.

“What do you need to meditate, baby?” Joe asked.

“A quiet spot with no interruptions,” Nate replied.

“Will our bedroom work for you?”

Nate nodded. “Yeah, it should work okay.”

“Then why don’t you go upstairs and do whatever it is you do to get in contact with your friend. The rest of us will start preparing things down here. If we have a lot of people coming, we’re gonna need food.”

“I think your mother might be able to help with that, Joseph. I’ll head over to the house and pick her up, grab some groceries and meet

you all back here. Jim? You want to stay here or go with me?" Daniel asked as he stood to his feet.

"I think I'll stick around here, Dad, if you don't mind," Jim said, his eyes on Donovan, who stared back just as intently.

"Yeah, okay. Then I'll see you all in a little bit." Daniel was shaking his head as walked out of the house.

"Okay, on that note, I'm going to go upstairs and meditate. I'll let you know if I'm able to contact Justin. Just remember that I need lots of quiet and no interruptions," Nate said as he stood to his feet. He leaned over and kissed Joe quickly before heading upstairs.

"He's quite the man, isn't he?" Donovan asked as he watched Nate go. He seemed to need Joe as much as Joe needed him. He wondered if it would be that way if he and Jim were mated. Would they hate to be separated even by just a few feet? Donovan was pretty sure they would. They weren't even mated fully yet and he couldn't keep his eyes off of him.

"He's the best. I've never met anyone like him. He has more compassion and care in him than anyone I've ever met." His eyes turned to Donovan's. "I'll do whatever I have to do to keep him safe."

Donovan nodded. "Understandable. He's your mate. We protect what is ours," he said, looking straight into Jim's smoky gray eyes, hoping Jim saw the promise in his eyes. The slight nod of Jim's head made a warm glow flow through Donovan. Maybe they did have a chance together.

### **Chapter 3**

“Hey, Nate, can I talk to you for a moment before you meditate?” Jim asked as he followed Nate up the stairs.

“Yeah, sure, Jim, what’s up?” Nate asked as he walked into the bedroom to sit down on the side of the bed.

Jim pushed his hands into his pockets and looked down at his feet as he tried to gather his thoughts. He couldn’t believe he was actually here asking Nate how to have sex with his mate. His mate—that was still a scary thought.

“Jim?” Nate asked when he didn’t immediately answer. “What is it?”

Jim raised his head to look at Nate. He could feel his face reddening. “You know that guy downstairs?”

“Donovan, you mean?” Nate asked with a smirk.

“Yeah. He’s—well, he’s—”

“Totally hot?” Nate chuckled.

“Better not let my brother hear you say that.”

Nate rolled his eyes. “Please. I may be mated, but I’m not dead. Donovan is gorgeous,” he said as he stood to his feet. “You could do worse, you know.”

“He’s my mate, Nate,” Jim explained.

“I know.”

“You know? That’s it? That’s all you’re going to say? You know?” Jim exclaimed.

Nate turned to look at him, a grin on his face. “What would you like me to say? Congratulations? Way to go? Have you seen him naked yet?” Nate laughed.

Jim sat down heavily on the side of the bed, dropping his head into his hands. “You’re not helping, Nate.”

“What do you want me to say, Jim?” Nate asked as he knelt down in front of him.

Jim lifted his head to stare down at Nate. “He’s a guy, Nate.”

“I kind of noticed that, Jim. So what? You are, too.”

“That’s just it. We’re both guys. I’ve never—I mean, before—my parents are going to shit!” Jim groaned.

“Let me ask you something, Jim. Do you think any less of Joe because he loves me or because I love him? Because we’re two men?”

“No, of course not, but it’s not the same thing, Nate. It’s—” Jim began.

“It *is* the same thing, Jim. Being mated is a wonderful thing. And if you are as lucky as I am, then your mate will make you the happiest person on earth. I’ve only known Joe for a few weeks but I couldn’t ever imagine being with anyone else or not having him in my life.”

Jim stared down at Nate, suddenly understanding that his brother Joe had hit the jackpot with Nate. Over the last few weeks he had seen how happy Nate made Joe. He never realized that Nate felt the same way.

“Do you think—is it possible for two men to be together who have never—well, you know,” Joe said, shrugging his shoulders.

Nate laughed, getting to his feet so that he could sit beside Jim on the bed. “Well, I think it’s easier if at least one of you know what you’re doing, but it doesn’t always happen that way. Until Joe, I’d never been with anyone. Didn’t stop us.”

“Donovan wanted to talk to you about that. He wanted to make sure that he didn’t do anything that might hurt or make us uncomfortable,” Joe said, chuckling a little. “This whole thing makes me uncomfortable.”

“Enough to give him up?” Nate asked quietly.



“Would I be here embarrassing myself like this if I had decided to give him up?”

“No.” Nate laughed. “I guess not. So, what do you want to know?”

“It’s the whole sex thing.”

“Got you a little confused, has it?”

“You have no idea.” Jim laughed. “I mean, I’ve imagined things in my head, but I have no practical experience.”

“Okay, I think it’s safe to say that you’re both attracted to each other, right?”

“If you mean do I want to touch him constantly and can’t stop thinking about what he looks like naked?” Jim nodded his head. “Then, yeah, we’re attracted to each other.”

“Well, I’m pretty sure that the mechanics are pretty much the same as they would be with a woman. There are just a few variations. You’ll want to use plenty of this,” Nate said as he reached into the nightstand and pulled out a bottle of lube, handing it to Jim.

“Lube?”

“A gay man’s best friend.” Nate laughed before turning serious again. “I’m sure in your experience you’ve had anal sex with a woman, right?”

“Sure, why?” Jim asked in confusion.

“Did you like it?”

Jim could feel his face heat up again as he nodded. Yeah, he had liked it. In fact, he preferred it. It also seemed to be the easiest way he could get off when having sex with a woman. He just hadn’t found a woman that liked it as much as he did.

“When you’re with a woman, you don’t just stick your dick in her do you? You make sure she’s ready, right?”

“Of course! It would hurt if I—Oh!”

Nate patted Jim on the leg. “You’ll get it. Men and women have pretty much the same erogenous zones, I think. Nipples are nipples. A kiss on the lips is a kiss on the lips. Get my drift? The actual

intercourse is a little different but not that much. When you go down on Donovan, you're not going to find a vagina. You're going to find a dick. Just do to him what feels good to you and you can't go wrong."

"You make it sounds so easy."

"It is easy once you get past the fact that he's a man. That's going to be your biggest hurdle. But the nice thing about being mated to a man? You don't always have to be gentle."

"What do you mean?" Jim asked in curiosity.

"Sometimes Joe can be very gentle and loving. Other times, he just tosses me over the side of the bed and fucks me. We don't have to worry about him hurting me during those times. I think woman prefer gentle to rough. Course, having never been with a woman, I could be wrong."

"Not by much. It depends on the woman, I think," Jim replied.

"So, what are you going to do?" Nate asked after a moment.

Jim looked down at the bottle of lube in his hand, turning it over as he thought about what he was going to do. "I don't know if I'm ready to be with a man, but I can't give him up. He's my mate. I'm never going to have another one and I guess I'm hoping to have what you and Joe have."

Nate smiled over at him when he looked up. "As long as you remember that you have been granted a very special gift and never take Donovan for granted, I don't see why you can't. Finding you're mate is the easy part. Learning to love the one you've been given is not so easy."

"You don't love Joe?"

"Of course I do. I love him very much, but things aren't always perfect. Look at the shit I've brought into his life. It's horrible. And him being a sheriff? He could be taken from me every time he goes to work. It's not perfect, but I wouldn't trade it for anything. When I'm with him, time stops. He's it, all I think about, all I want, but it's not always easy."

"I guess I see what you mean," Jim replied, trying to think what life would be like if he had never met Donovan. And now that he had found him, what would life be like if he let Donovan go? None of it looked good.

"Uh, where can I get a bottle of this stuff?" Jim asked as he held up the bottle of lube.

"You can have that one. It's new and we have more." Nate laughed. "Joe always makes sure we have plenty on hand. I swear we need to buy stock in the damn company. We'd make millions."

Jim stood to his feet and headed for the door, turning back to look at Nate. "Thanks, Nate, for talking to me. If I have more questions, would you—"

Nate laughed. "You can ask me anything you want, Jim."

Jim nodded, opening the door. "I'm glad Joe found you, Nate."

"Me, too."

Closing the door behind him, Jim shoved the bottle of lube in his pocket and headed downstairs. He needed to locate his mate and find out if he was still interested in being mated to another man.

Walking into the living room, he found Donovan talking with Chase and Joe. He waited a moment then cleared his throat. "Donovan? Can I speak with you for a moment?"

Donovan, already looking in his direction, nodded his head. Before anyone could see the blush filling his face, Jim turned and went back up the stairs. He could hear Donovan behind him as he went to the guestroom on the far side of the house from Nate.

Jim walked into the middle of the room, turning to face Donovan as he followed him in. "Please, shut the door," he said. He watched Donovan shut the door, then turn back to him, a dark brown eyebrow raised in query.

As Donovan stared at him, Jim suddenly couldn't think of anything to say. His mouth felt dry, his palms sweaty. Rubbing them on his pants, he felt the bottle of lube in his pocket. Pulling it out, he handed it to Donovan.

“What’s this?”

“My answer,” Jim said with quiet emphasis.

“To what?”

“Whether I’m going to keep you or not,” Jim muttered hastily. He suddenly felt like the world’s biggest fool as Donovan looked at him, astonishment written all over his face. Maybe this wasn’t such a good idea. Maybe Donovan hadn’t been thinking along the same lines.

“You seem to have given this some thought,” Donovan finally said.

Jim nodded his head as he watched Donovan’s thumb rub over the small bottle of lube. “I’m not sure I’ve really been thinking about anything else,” he said in a voice that seemed to come from a long way off.

Jim felt like his nerves were being stretched to the breaking point as he watched Donovan start to pace back and forth. Every few steps he would stop and look over at Jim, his eyebrows drawn together as if he were in deep thought.

Finally, Donovan stopped pacing to stand in front of Jim. “Do I get a say in this?”

Jim’s mouth dropped open in shock and surprise siphoned the blood from his face. “Yes, of course you do.” Jim dropped his eyes down to the floor and pushed his hands into his jean pockets. “I just wanted you to know how I felt.”

“Duly noted.”

Jim lifted his eyes to stare Donovan for a moment. Disconcerted at the indifferent look in his eyes, Jim crossed his arms and pointedly looked away from Donovan’s piercing gaze. “I’ll just let you get back to what you were doing then.”

He started to step past Donovan to leave when a strong grip on his arm stopped him. Jim looked over to see Donovan’s hand on his arm, stopping him from leaving. His eyes flickered up briefly as he wondered what other humiliation he was about to endure.

Jim hesitated to say anything, torn by conflicting emotions. He wanted to turn into Donovan's arms and kiss him again. He wanted to explore all of the sexual fantasies swirling around in his head.

He wanted to run for the door and escape the closed expression on Donovan's face, to take back the last few hours and pretend that they never happened. He wanted to be blissfully ignorant of the fact that he couldn't live in the closet anymore because his mate was a man.

He was suddenly anxious to escape from Donovan's disturbing presence, from the feelings of longing he created. To his dismay, his voice broke slightly when he spoke. "Was there something else you wanted, Donovan?"

"I'm not—I'm not very good at this, Jim," Donovan said, his voice thick and unsteady.

Jim's mind was congested with doubts and fears. He looked away hastily, then moved restlessly. Perhaps it was simply his own uneasiness, but Jim suddenly wondered if Donovan was being totally truthful with him.

"Good at what?" He said the words tentatively as if testing the idea. He took a step back in confusion when Donovan let out a bitter little laugh.

"Besides the whole *I'm waiting for my mate* thing, there's a reason I don't have a girlfriend right now, Jim," Donovan said as he released Jim's arm only to stroke his hand through his light brown hair.

His voice was deceptively calm as he continued. "I don't do relationships, Jim. It's too messy. And I basically suck at them."

When Jim spoke, his voice was tender, almost a murmur. "And you think I'm any better? I've been avoiding getting involved with a woman all of my adult life. And that has nothing to do with waiting for my mate."

"The whole living in the closet thing?" Donovan asked as he sat down on the side of the bed and looked up at Jim.

Jim nodded, feeling his face heat up. "I watched what Joe went through when he came out, how people changed toward him, and I never wanted to go through that. So, I chose not to."

Donovan burst out laughing. "That came around to bite you in the ass, didn't it?"

Jim didn't know how to reply to Donovan's words without hurting his feelings or sounding like a complete goober, so he didn't say anything. He just nodded his head in agreement.

"If you've decided to accept me," Donovan said as he looked down at the bottle of lube in his hand, "how do you plan on avoiding that? I'm pretty sure people are going to figure it out, Jim, because I refuse to live in the closet with you."

"How about my place then? Will you live there with me?" Jim asked cautiously. He could feel Donovan's eyes on him, watching him, measuring him.

"So, I'm just supposed to give up my place and my position in my pack to move here and live with you?" Donovan asked. "Why don't you move to my pack?"

Jim closed his eyes and took a deep breath, letting it out slowly as he tried to reign in his anger. He opened his eyes and looked at Donovan, hoping he had beat down his anger enough to not sound like he was attacking Donovan. "Okay, then we'll live with your pack."

"You're serious." Donovan sounded astonished. Jim couldn't figure out why.

"Why are you so surprised?" Jim asked in confusion.

Donovan's hands slammed into the mattress beside him. "Jim, you're talking about giving up your life here, your friends, your family, even your job just to move to my pack and live with me. Why would you do that?"

"Because you're my mate?" Jim asked, bewildered.

"Jim, I'm a man."

Jim tilted his head to one side as he gazed at Donovan, a slight smirk on his face. "That was kind of hard to miss."

"If we live together, if we claim each other, you're going to have to admit that you're gay. I refuse to pretend we're just roommates or friends. I'll want to live with you in every way, to be able to touch you whenever I want to. I won't make sure that no one is around before I kiss you."

"And?" Jim asked.

"Jim!" Donovan exclaimed. "You've been living in the closet your entire life. Are you truly willing to come out just because we've met?"

"Donovan, who are you trying to convince? Me or yourself?" Jim asked. His ironic tone concealed the emotions he felt.

Jim watched Donovan start to say something, then close his mouth. He opened it again, but no sound came out. Finally, Donovan stared at Jim, baffled. "I don't know."

Puzzled, and a little more than nervous, Jim stepped forward to stand between Donovan's spread legs, his hands settling on Donovan's shoulders as he looked down at him.

"What don't you know, Donovan?" Jim whispered.

"What if you change your mind, Jim? What if you decide I'm not worth it?" Donovan said, sounding very nervous. "You already see me being a man clumped together with me as a person. How do I know you won't decide at some point to cut your losses and run?"

"I think the same could be said about you. You could decide being gay isn't something you want either. I, at least, have always known that I was gay, even if I never did anything about it. Until you met me, I imagine the thought never crossed your mind."

Jim's eyebrow nearly shot to his forehead when Donovan's face turned red. "Donovan?"

"It's true that I've never been with a man but that doesn't mean I haven't thought about it. I don't know if that makes me gay or what," Donovan mumbled.

“Okay, let’s take sex out of the equation. If we—” Jim started.

“Are you out of your fucking mind?” Donovan exclaimed. His hands came up to clutch at Jim’s waist as if he were afraid to let Jim go. “If you didn’t want us to have sex, why the bottle of lube?”

“No, no! I mean let’s take the whole gay, not gay thing out of it,” Jim said quickly. He chuckled. “I think it’s safe to say we’re both attracted to each other and neither of us have an ounce of experience with other men.”

“Okay...and that means what? That neither of us knows what in the hell we’re doing? I think we already know that,” Donovan said sarcastically.

Jim laughed. “Okay, yeah, there is that. It also means we’re on equal footing here. I’ve never done this before and neither have you. And I’m not talking about just the sex thing either. Neither one of us has ever had a serious relationship, a mate, or anyone we considered committing to.”

“Where are you going with all of this, Jim?”

“Are you willing to take a chance on me? Knowing that I’m afraid to come out of the closet, but I’m willing to try? Knowing that I’ve never been with a man? Knowing that I’d really prefer that you moved here and lived with me? That I don’t want to leave Wolf Creek? Are you willing to put that all aside and be my mate?” Jim asked as fear and dread knotted inside of him.

“Yes,” Donovan answered without hesitation.

“Then hand me the damn lube!”



## Chapter 4

Donovan's hand shook as he handed Jim the bottle of lube. He couldn't believe he was actually doing this. He was actually going to commit to Jim, another man. His mate. He chewed on his lower lip and stole a look at Jim.

His heart started beating faster at the look of uncertainty on Jim's face. Not because it made him nervous, but because it told him that Jim was as afraid as he was. Somehow, it made Donovan feel more confident.

"Why don't we start off with something small?" he asked as he gave Jim a small smile.

"Like what?"

"You could kiss me," Donovan replied. His whole being seemed to be filled with waiting as he watched Jim's reaction. His heart began to beat faster as a slow sensuous grin crossed Jim's lips.

"I could do that." Jim chuckled. "I seem to remember that you're a great kisser."

Donovan felt like he had died and gone to heaven the moment Jim's lips pressed against his. He tasted just as good as Donovan remembered, maybe even better now that he knew Jim was agreeing to be his mate.

Shivers of desire raced through Donovan at the touch of Jim's tongue against his. His hands slipped up Jim's waist to his chest, pulling him closer until their bodies touched. Donovan's body tingled at the contact.

"Shirt, Jim," Donovan whispered against Jim's lips as his fingers went to the buttons of Jim's shirt. His fingers shook as he tried to

unbutton each button without ripping them off when that was all he really wanted to do.

“Fuck the shirt,” Jim growled as he grabbed the edges of his shirt and pulled, buttons flying everywhere. “You can buy me another one.”

Donovan’s lips twisted into a smirk as his eyes traveled down the finer-then-fuck muscled chest and tight abdomen to Jim’s jeans, eagerly noting the large bulge trying to break through Jim’s zipper.

“How much do your pants cost?”

“I’ll make you a deal,” Jim said as he stepped back from Donovan, his hands going to the button of his jeans. “I’ll lose the jeans if you do, too.”

Donovan was all too eager to comply. He quickly got to his feet and pulled his shirt over his head, dropping it on the floor before reaching for his jeans. As he did, his eyes came up to land on the most perfectly formed male body in the universe.

Jim was glorious! Every damn inch of him, from the top of the collar length black hair that seemed to curl lightly around Jim’s chiseled face down to the hard chest and abdomen. Donovan’s tongue stuck to the roof of his mouth when he looked lower and spied the thick cock jutting out from Jim’s small spattering of dark hair. *Oh damn!*

“Donovan?”

Donovan’s eyes flew up to meet Jim’s uncertain ones, his face burning red at being caught staring. “If I refuse to replace your shirt and jeans, will you have to go naked?” Donovan asked.

Jim looked a little puzzled, shaking his head. “No, I have more clothes at home.”

“That would be very unfortunate,” Donovan said as his eyes went back to Jim’s delectable body. “It’s a damn shame to cover up something that sexy.”

“You think I’m sexy?”

Donovan could hear the hesitation in Jim's voice. He sent him a reassuring smile. "No, I think you're lethal. I also think once we get settled into which ever house we decide on, clothing will be optional and highly frowned upon."

Donovan nearly choked on his tongue as Jim reached down to caress his cock, stroking it a few times. His eyes were glued to the slow motion of Jim's hand. He didn't want to pull his attention away from him, but he needed to get out of jeans and get Jim into the bed.

"Like what you see then?"

"You have no idea," Donovan replied.

His eyes never left Jim's body as he quickly unbuttoned his jeans and pushed them down his legs before kicking them away. As he stood to his full height, letting Jim get a look at his naked form for the first time, Donovan wondered if Jim would feel the same way about him.

"Fuck!" Jim whispered. The hand on his dick stopped as Jim's mouth fell open. Donovan heard the stunned amazement in Jim's voice and hoped that it was a good thing.

"I'm a dead man," Jim said as he dropped his cock from his hand and reached out for Donovan's body.

"Wha—" Donovan started to ask in confusion, and just a little apprehension.

"If I wasn't a gay man before, I'd certainly be one now," Jim groaned.

Donovan was shocked when Jim looked up at him. His face was filled with just a little wonder and a whole lot of desire.

"How in the hell have you stayed single? Are all of the women in your pack blind?" Jim asked in astonishment.

Donovan chuckled. "No, I was just never really interested. So, now that we've gotten past the nerve-racking show and tell part of things, how about we move to the hands on bit? Cause I'd really like to get my hands on your bits."

Jim held his hands out to his sides. "Consider me yours."

"I do," Donovan said. He stepped forward and clasped Jim's body tightly to his, his arms wrapping around Jim's midriff, his hands exploring the hollows of Jim's back. Donovan couldn't contain his small moan as their bodies touched.

"It feels right, doesn't it?" Jim asked, voicing Donovan's thoughts.

Donovan reached up and cupped the side of Jim's face to tilt it back, looking down into his deep gray eyes. "Yeah, Jim, it does," Donovan whispered before he lowered his mouth to Jim's.

His lips were hard and searching as he explored the recesses of Jim's mouth, his tongue warring with Jim's as they both fought to get closer, to feel more, to give into the overwhelming need that they both had.

Donovan turned their bodies and gently eased Jim down onto the bed, following him down to settle between Jim's legs. His breath moved harshly in his chest as he leaned down to lick at Jim's nipple, his tongue teasing one taut dark nipple.

He could hear Jim's soft moan, feel Jim's hands clench in his hair. He moved to the other nipple, giving it the same attention. As he roused Jim's passion, his own grew stronger. The pleasure filling him radiated outward as he began to press his aching cock against Jim's.

Donovan's mouth made a path down Jim's ribs to his stomach. His tongue dipping in and licking around Jim's bellybutton. If the soft whimpers coming from Jim's throat hadn't been an indication of his arousal, the hard cock that sprang up before Donovan as he moved lower, would have shouted it.

Donovan's eyes darted up briefly to Jim's face as he tried to decide where to go from here. The soft glow on Jim's face, the lower lip caught between his teeth, the half-lidded gray eyes all combined to give Donovan his answer.

Hoping he didn't make a fool of himself with his inexperience, Donovan lowered his lips to the head of Jim's cock, licking up the

small droplets of pre-cum he found there. Donovan was mildly surprised at the flavor.

He had been prepared for it to be bitter, even repugnant. It wasn't. Jim tasted sweet and tangy, better even than Donovan had been prepared for. He wanted more. He needed more. Leaning down, Donovan licked around the head several times before moving down Jim's thick length.

Moving back to the top, Donovan opened his mouth and swallowed as much of Jim's cock as he could before gagging slightly. He moved back a little, taking just a little of Jim's cock into his mouth at a time until he felt comfortable. Then he slowly began to move his mouth up and down Jim's hard flesh.

His hands explored the hard lines of Jim's waist, his hips, as he moved. Feeling a movement next to his head, Donovan turned his head to see Jim plant his feet into the mattress beside him before he starting lifting up his hips, pushing himself into Donovan's mouth.

"Don—Donovan, please," Jim pleaded as he pulled at Donovan's hair. "I can't—I'm gonna—"

Donovan reached up and grabbed Jim's hands and held them down to the mattress. He began to move his mouth quicker, licking and sucking at Jim's cock as he heard Jim's whimpers become one long continuous groan.

One sudden thrust of Jim's hips and he exploded into Donovan's mouth. Donovan swallowed as much as he could as he continued to suck at Jim's cock. The scent of his mate's release overwhelmed Donovan.

He needed to be inside of Jim, and now, deep inside of him. With one last lick at Jim's spent cock, Donovan raised his head and searched around for the lube. A smile wove its way across his face when a hand holding the bottle of lube suddenly appeared in front of him.

Donovan grabbed the lube as he scooted up to his knees between Jim's legs. He popped the lid open and poured some out on his

fingers, rubbing them together to warm the cold liquid up even as he dropped the bottle onto the mattress.

His eyes widened as he looked down at Jim and found him with his legs pulled up to his chest as he bared himself to Donovan. He looked up at Jim, an eyebrow raised.

"I assume you know how to do this part?" Jim asked as he chuckled.

"I think I can figure it out." Donovan moved his hand down to spread the lube on his fingers around Jim's sensitive little hole. He stopped instantly, his eyes going up to Jim's face as he heard a soft moan.

"Don't stop. Feels good," Jim whispered back.

"You'll tell me if I hurt you?" Donovan asked cautiously.

The moment Jim nodded, Donovan returned his attention to the treasure waiting for him. Concerned, he grabbed the bottle of lube and squirted more onto his fingers. As he started to push his finger into Jim, Donovan felt a shiver pass through his body.

In a few minutes, that tight little hole would be wrapped around his cock. Donovan didn't know if he could wait that long. His balls had already drawn up tight against his body and he felt so close to a climax that he had to grip his cock at the base to keep from exploding.

Donovan quickly pressed a second finger in and started moving them both around, stretching Jim. His eyes occasionally flickered up to Jim's face, surprised at the look of intense desire he found there. Was Jim really enjoying this? Would he?

"Jim," Donovan whispered, "tell me what you're feeling. Do you like this?" Donovan moved his fingers more, adding another one when Jim seemed to be stretched enough. He was stunned to see Jim's cock standing at full mast again.

"Does it feel good?" Donovan asked as he moved his fingers faster.

"Oh fuck, Donava—right there. There!" Jim shouted as his head began to thrash about on the pillow.

“There?” Donovan asked as he moved his fingers around again.

“Yes!”

Donovan quickly noted where his fingers had been before pulling them free. He poured some more lube on his hands then dropped the bottle onto the bed and spreading the liquid on his aching cock.

One hand on Jim’s thigh, Donovan used the other to grab his cock and place it against Jim’s tight entrance. As he began to push into Jim, Donovan’s eyes moved up to meet his, the reality of the moment sinking into him.

For just a moment, time stopped as they shared an intense awareness of each other, of what they were about to do. There was an invisible web building between them, the mating bond. Donovan could feel it, could feel Jim, down to the depths of his soul.

Donovan’s breath was shallow, his senses drugged by Jim’s scent of arousal and contentment as he sank the last inch into Jim’s tight grasp. Donovan was powerless to resist the invitation in Jim’s eyes to claim him.

“Mine,” Donovan said possessively as he began to move, thrusting himself slowly into Jim’s welcoming body. Donovan was completely unprepared for the intensity of the emotions swamping him.

He suddenly knew this was where he was meant to be and he never wanted to leave. There was no longer any question about accepting Jim. It was now a fact of life, one that only excited Donovan as he foresaw many more nights spent in Jim’s arms. Jim was his mate.

“Donovan,” Jim whispered softly.

Donovan looked up at Jim, growling low in his throat as he saw Jim look pointedly at him, then tilt his head to one side, baring his throat submissively to him. Donovan doubted Jim had a submissive bone in his body, but right now it was exactly what he needed, what he craved.

Donovan leaned down over Jim's body. He licked at Jim's lips, kissing him quickly before moving down to lick at the salty skin beneath Jim's ear. He could feel the rapid thud of Jim's heartbeat beneath his tongue, the flow of his life's blood.

"My mate," Donovan whispered against Jim's hot skin before sinking his canines deep into that soft flesh. Immediately, Donovan was overwhelmed by the intense taste flowing into his mouth.

Jim's tight grip on Donovan's arms mirrored the tight grip his body had on Donovan's cock. A tingling in Donovan's spine heralded his imminent release. But, Donovan wanted Jim with him when he came.

Pulling his teeth from Jim's neck, he licked the small trail of blood there, then turned his head, baring his own neck to Jim's questing mouth. A long drawn out groan broke from Donovan's lips as Jim claimed him, biting into his neck.

Donovan's hips moved faster, harder. He grabbed Jim's hips, sliding his hand down to grip Jim's ass and pull him closer to him, tilting Jim's body as he tried to find *that* spot again. When Jim's head suddenly reared back and he yelled out, Donovan knew he was there.

His heart pounded with an erratic rhythm as he thrust into Jim. Reclaiming Jim's lips, Donovan crushed Jim to him. His tongue invaded Jim's mouth even as his cock conquered Jim's body.

Electricity seemed to arc through Donovan as he surrendered completely to his mate, filling him with his essence. His senses on fire, Donovan distantly acknowledged the cry from beneath him, the feeling of hot liquid across his abdomen as Jim climaxed.

As he let his head fall down to rest against Jim's neck, Jim's hands wrapping around him, Donovan let all of his doubts and fears drain away. Jim was his, his mate, his love, his everything.

Whatever problems they had paled in comparison to the hysteria of delight rising inside of him. Nothing was worth giving this deep feeling of satisfaction, of knowing that there was someone that belonged to just him.



“*You okay, baby?*” Jim asked through their mating bond.

Joy bubbled in his laugh as Donovan lifted his head to gaze down at his mate. “*No, and I may never be okay again, thank god!*”

Jim’s eyes twinkled as he grinned back up at Donovan. “*You should have felt things from my end.*”

“*Oh? Are you saying that you enjoyed yourself?*”

“I’m saying that we definitely need to decide where we’re going to live because now that you belong to me, I refuse to do without this again,” Jim replied out loud.

“Does that mean you’re just after me for my body?” Donovan asked, half joking.

“Hell yes, and everything else that goes along with having a mate.” Jim laughed. “That includes you still having to buy me a new shirt. And next time, I get to be on top.”

Donovan pushed himself up onto his arms and rolled to his side, groaning quietly as he pulled from Jim’s body. He settled himself back, leaning on his elbows. “Like riding, do you?”

Jim, in the middle of sitting up, turned swiftly to look back at Donovan, a worried little frown on his face. “Donovan, you don’t—you’re going to—”

“Relax, baby, I was only funning with you. I know this is a give and take relationship. I fully expect you’ll fuck me just as much as I fuck you,” Donovan quickly said as he sat up to pat Jim on the back. “Besides, you seemed to enjoy it. I’m hoping I will, too.”

Jim laughed. “Well...”

“Come on, let’s get cleaned up. I’m sure everyone is beginning to wonder where we are by now,” Donovan said as he scooted to the edge of the bed and stood up. He reached back and grabbed Jim’s hand and pulled him up into his arms. “But, first, I want another kiss.”

## Chapter 5

Jim laughed as Donovan came back into the room, a simple blue cotton shirt in his hands. "I thought the plan was for you to buy me another shirt, not get me one of yours."

"Are you saying you don't to wear my shirt?"

"No," Jim said as he shook his head, then took the shirt. He pulled it over his head and down his chest, smoothing the material with his hands as he looked down at it. "I look good wearing your stuff."

"You look better wearing me," Donovan replied, letting out a small chuckle.

Even after the very satisfactory bout of sex they had just had, Jim could still feel his face heat up with embarrassment. He turned even redder as Donovan laughed and reached over to brush his hand down Jim's cheek.

"You're so cute."

Jim rolled his eyes. "Say that within anyone else's ears and you'll find out just how cute I can be," he threatened.

"Promise?"

"You have a humorous streak in you, Donovan Morgan," Jim said sternly as he turned and walked towards the door. "We're going to have to do something about that."

"You don't like humor?"

Jim smiled. He could hear the confusion in Donovan's voice. When he reached the door, Jim stopped to look over his shoulder at Donovan, flashing him a smile as he batted his eyelashes at him.

“I love humor, but payback can be a real bitch. Say I’m cute in front anyone else and you just might wake up with pink toenails.”

Jim turned away from Donovan’s astonished face and opened the door. As he walked through it, he could swear he heard Donovan mumble under his voice.

“I like pink.”

Jim was still chuckling a moment later when they reached the downstairs. He could hear voices coming from the kitchen and went in that direction, Donovan close on his heels.

“Jim?” Joe said as he turned to look at Jim the moment they walked into the kitchen. “I’m going to take Nate to the circle. I want you to go get Dad while Ben informs the rest of the pack. I want everyone to meet us at the circle. It’s time for this pack to step up and protect one of their own.”

“Okay, Joe, but are you sure you want us to leave? Don’t you need us here to protect Nate, too?” Jim asked.

“I do, but I think it would be a little better use of your time getting the rest of the pack together. You can all meet us down circle. Besides, Donovan will be here to help me keep Nate safe. I just don’t want to have him here at the house. This is sure to be the first place that Roger brings the Teacher.”

Jim nodded. “Yeah, I guess you’re right. Okay, Ben, you’re with me,” Jim replied as he walked out of the kitchen. He was almost to the door when he heard Donovan in his head.

“*Wait up a minute, baby,*” Donovan said through their bond.

“Why don’t you go ahead and get into the car, Ben? I’ll be just a moment,” Jim said as he gestured toward his truck before turning back to see Donovan jogging up to him. “What’s up?” he asked when Donovan reached him.

“You forgot something,” Donovan replied.

“What?” Jim asked in confusion.

“This,” Donovan said as he wrapped his arms around Jim’s shoulders and drew him into them, lowering his lips to explore Jim’s

mouth. His kiss was slow, thoughtful, and full of promise. And Jim ate it up.

He groaned in disappointment when Donovan pulled his lips away. He actually whimpered. He felt Donovan's hand gently caress the side of his face.

"I still think you're cute," Donovan whispered. "Now go, and keep your sexy ass out of trouble. I have plans for it later."

Jim jumped when Donovan swatted him on the ass. As Donovan turned and walked away, Jim stood there, dazed. *Damn, that man sure could kiss!* Jim was still dazed, a silly grin on his face. He turned and walked to his truck.

He cast one last look in Donovan's direction, feeling his face burn as Donovan blew him a kiss, before backing his truck out of the driveway and heading toward his father's place. He looked over at Ben, surprised at the grin on his face. He was pretty sure he had never seen Ben smile in the entire time he had known him.

"What's so funny?"

"You," Ben replied, his humor clear in his voice. "I didn't know you were gay."

"Yeah, well, don't go spreading it around. I'm sure everyone is going to know soon enough. I'd rather get this thing with Nate over with first," Jim replied.

"He your mate?"

Jim nodded. "Yes, why?"

Ben just shook his head. "Just wondering. You two seem to be rather chummy."

"You will be too when you meet your mate. There's just no avoiding it. Once you meet her or him, it's over for you. You might as well just give in and go with it. You'll live longer," Jim said.

"No, there's no mate out there for me," Ben said.

Jim looked over at him in concern. "There's a mate out there for all of us, Ben."

“Not for me,” Ben replied. Jim could hear a wistful tone in his voice. “Who would want to be saddled with me?”

“Ben—”

“I will never subject a mate to what I am, Jim. There’s no one that deserves that.”

“Ben, you’re not a bad guy. Any man, er, woman, would be—” Jim stammered, not sure of Ben’s sexual likes.

“Man,” Ben quietly supplied.

“Okay, man than. Any man would be proud to have you as a mate. You’re not a bad looking guy and you’re certainly strong enough,” Jim said as he looked over at his six foot nine friend. Ben was huge, easily strong enough to protect nearly any mate he might have.

“I’m also a pack soldier. That means I do the fighting for our pack. What man would want to be saddled with that? Not only could I die at any moment, but fighting is my life. And I have the scars to prove it,” Ben said.

Jim shook his head. “Doesn’t matter. When you meet your mate, you’ll learn to make concessions, to compromise. Trust my words, Ben, you won’t have a choice. A mate is a mate and you’ll be damn grateful when you find yours. I am.”

\* \* \* \*

Donovan hung up his phone and dropped it in his pocket. He crossed his arms over his chest as his mind wandered to his new mate. Jim was something. Donovan was amazed at how quickly he was beginning to care for the man.

It just didn’t seem possible. A few hours and the whole course of his life had changed and, as much as he didn’t know what the future held, he knew that Jim would be a part of it. That knowledge sent a small thrill through Donovan’s body as he envisioned all of the nights they had ahead of them.

He looked up when he heard people walking toward him to see Joe and Nate. “Ready?” Joe asked as soon as they reached the truck.

“Yeah. I left a message on Chase’s voicemail. He’s probably going into the warehouse right now so he wouldn’t be answering his phone. He’ll call me back as soon as it’s safe to do so,” Donovan replied.

He saw Joe nod his head as he turned and climbed into the passenger seat. He watched Joe climb in the driver seat, Nate in the back. He was a little confused that he was sitting up front when Nate was Joe’s mate.

“Uh, Joe? Shouldn’t Nate be sitting up here with you?”

“Normally, that would be true, however, I want to know what your intentions are toward my brother. For that, I want to be able to see your face. Besides, it’s easier for Nate to know if you’re telling the truth if he doesn’t have to swing around in his seat.”

Donovan suddenly remembered Nate saying that he could tell if someone was lying or not, right about the time that Nate’s hand landed on his shoulder. Donovan just rolled his eyes as he looked over at Joe.

“So, what do you want to know?”

“What are your intentions toward my brother? You do know he’s not gay, right? If you have plans on seducing him, don’t,” Joe said as he drove the truck down the road.

Well, shit! If Donovan said anything, he’d be letting Jim’s secret out. While they had agreed to be together, they had never discussed how they were going to be together. There just hadn’t been time.

“Look, Joe, I understand where you’re coming from, really I do, but I can’t discuss this with you without Jim’s permission. This is between Jim and me, but I do want you to know I am serious about Jim. I’m sorry,” Donovan replied, wishing he was anywhere but where he was.

“Fair enough,” Joe replied, confusing Donovan even more.

Donovan was just about to ask Joe what he meant when Joe glanced into the backseat, his face going white when he heard Nate cry out. Donovan swung around to see Nate, eyes glazed over, staring off into space.

“Nate? Baby? What’s wrong?” Joe asked anxiously.

“Taylor just told me that him, Roger, the Teacher, and two armed guards are waiting for us at the circle. He’s told them that’s where we would be because he’s trying to keep the Teacher busy while Chase and the other guys go in for Justin.”

“Why does he need to keep the Teacher busy?” Donovan asked, turning to look back at Nate again.

“I guess Justin is in touch with him, telling him that Chase is already at the warehouse. One of the guards called the Teacher and told them that they were being attacked. He was ready to turn back when Taylor told him where we’d be. He says he’s sorry, but it was the only thing he could think of to keep the Teacher busy.”

“No, no, it was a good plan. At least if we know they’re waiting for us we won’t be surprised or ambushed,” Joe replied.

“You still want to go?” Nate asked.

“We have to, baby. Like Taylor said, we need to give Chase time to get the others out. Besides, the pack should be here any minute,” Joe said as he pulled the truck to a stop and turned it off.

Nate didn’t look so sure, but he nodded to Joe anyway. “Okay, if you say so. I think you’ve lost your ever-loving mind, but...”

Donovan could hear Nate chuckle as he climbed from the truck. He walked to the front of the truck and waited for Nate and Joe to join him. As Joe pulled Nate into his arms and gave him a kiss, Donovan hoped that he and Jim would be the same way. He stood off to the side a bit, trying to give them privacy.

As they walked onto the edge of the circle a moment later, Donovan carefully placed himself on the opposite side of Nate from Joe. They came to a stop when they reached a large clearing that Donovan assumed was the ritual circle.

Donovan carefully eyed the five men he could see facing him from several feet away. He carefully sniffed the air. Four of the men were human and one was shifter. Two of the men stood in front, two larger armed men off to the side. The fourth man stood behind them all.

“Hello, Nathan, I’ve been looking for you for a long time,” one of the men up front said. Donovan assumed from the expensive suit he was wearing and the air of confidence he had that this was the Teacher.

“Why don’t you come over here where you belong and we’ll just go? I wouldn’t want to see anyone else get hurt,” the Teacher said.

“No, you don’t own me and you can’t tell me what to do,” Nate replied sternly, his confidence rising with each word out of his mouth.

“Nathan, I don’t like repeating myself. Get your ass over here before someone gets hurt,” the Teacher said, his voice rising in anger as he pointed to a spot on the ground right next to him.

“No,” Nate repeated.

“Just remember that you brought this on yourself, Nathan. If you had just done what I had told you to do, none of this would have happened.”

Before Donovan could react to the threat he felt coming, the Teacher pulled a gun, raised his arm, and fired. Donovan felt a searing pain shoot through his body as he grabbed his chest, his shirt turning red with blood as he fell to the ground.

He heard Nate cry out, then the sounds of a fight. The growls he heard told him that Joe had shifted and was even now fighting for their lives. Donovan tried to sit up, but pain shot through him again.

Donovan felt an acute sense of loss as he realized he might never see Jim again. Terrible regrets assailed him as the pain in his chest intensified. He might never get the chance to experience what Jim had earlier. Never get to know the man he was mated to. He might lose Jim before he even got to know him.



Just as Donovan's vision began to dim, he was conscious of a low, tortured cry. Then hands were touching him, pressing down on his bleeding wound. Donovan lifted his eyelids to see Jim kneeling over him, tears trailing down his pale face.

"You die on me, Donovan Morgan, and I swear to god I will commit suicide just to chase you through hell," Jim sobbed through gritted teeth as he pulled his shirt over his head and pressed it to Donovan's injury.

Donovan chuckled, then moaned as pain swamped him. "Rather have you chase me through the bedroom," he whispered.

"God, Donovan, how can you joke at a time like this? You have a fucking hole in your chest," Jim cried out.

"I like pink." Donovan grinned up at his mate right before he passed out.

\* \* \* \*

Jim felt his heart stop in his chest as Donovan's eyes closed and he passed out. Sheer, dark fright swept through him until he realized that Donovan had only passed out. Even now Donovan's werewolf genetics were healing his wound. In a few days, he should be as good as new. Knowing that still didn't stop Jim from worrying.

The sound of a gun going off as they had arrived hadn't frightened Jim nearly as much as the anguish he had felt the moment he had realized that Donovan had been shot. He had felt it even before he had seen Donovan lying on the ground.

Fear, stark and vivid, had enveloped Jim's entire being until he had seen Donovan move as he ran toward him. He had fallen to his knees beside Donovan, instantly putting pressure on the bullet hole in his chest.

He knew that a bullet wound shouldn't be fatal to a shifter, but the very sight of Donovan's chest covered in blood made him ignorant of anything except the fact that his mate was injured and bleeding.

“James?”

Jim looked up to see his mother hovering over him and Donovan. Her face was a mixture of concern and confusion. “He’s my mate, Mom.” Was there anything else to say?

Jim felt his mom stare at him for a moment as she absorbed his words. He had never envisioned coming out of the closet quite like this, but right now, with his mate’s blood covering his hands, he didn’t care.

“Okay, James, let’s see about patching your mate up,” Maryann said as she knelt down beside Jim and helped him stop the blood flowing from Donovan’s chest.

Jim smiled over at his mom at her accepting nature. He knew he shouldn’t have expected any other response from her. Maryann Nash had only ever wanted one thing from her children, their happiness. If he could get his mate patched up, that was exactly what he planned on giving her.

“Is he going to be okay?”

Jim glanced over his shoulder to see Nate standing behind him, a worried frown on his face. Joe stood right behind Nate.

“I think so,” Jim said as he looked back down at his mate. He watched his mother administer help to his mate, thankful when the blood coming from Donovan’s wound slowly trailed away.

Once he felt like he could breathe again without his heart pounding out of his chest, Jim looked back at Nate and Joe. “What happened to the Teacher?”

The slight blush that covered his brother’s face surprised Jim, as did that giggle that came from Nate.

“Joe went all furry on his ass. Killed the Teacher and his goons. We never have to deal with them again.”

“And your friend, Taylor?” Jim asked.

Nate smirked. “Chase took him back to Joe’s place.”

“Whose place?” Joe growled, pulling Nate back against his body.

Jim chuckled when Nate rolled his eyes. He had no doubt whatsoever that Nate wasn't the least bit intimidated by Joe's growling.

"Our place," Nate replied.

Just to stop Joe from going on about Nate not calling their house, well, *their house*, Jim interrupted. "Hey, do you mind if we get my mate back to the house? I'd like to get him into bed."

Nate laughed. "I'll just bet you would."

## Chapter 6

“Hey, babe, where are you?” Jim called out as he set the grocery bag in his hands down on the kitchen counter. He reached into the bag and started emptying the contents.

“What’s in the bag?”

Jim felt Donovan’s arms wrap around his waist, a chin resting on his shoulder as Donovan hugged him from behind. “Our dinner, dessert, and a few other things.”

“Dessert? I like dessert. What did you have in mind?” Donovan chuckled.

“Well, I pretty much have us covered for the next twenty four hours, which is the amount of time we’re supposed to be alone with no interruptions,” Jim replied.

“So, what’s in the bag?”

Jim grabbed a bottle of wine and set it on the counter. “Wine to go with dinner, fresh garlic, cheese bread, and a complete Italian dinner. Sorry, it’s frozen. Unlike Nate, I’m not much of a cook.”

“That’s what microwaves are for, baby. Now, what else is in that bag?” Donovan asked as he patted Jim on the ass.

“Ahhh, stuff for a bubble bath for relaxing after dinner and a toothbrush for you since you lost yours, waffles for our breakfast. And those can be cooked in the toaster, thank god. Last, but not least, chocolate syrup.”

Jim snickered at Donovan’s confused look. He watched as Donovan reached over to look in the bag, then at him. “Where’s the ice cream? You can’t have chocolate syrup without ice cream,” Donovan said.

“You can if you don’t plan on pouring chocolate syrup over ice cream,” Jim laughed.

“If you’re not going to pour the chocolate syrup over ice cream, what are you—oh!”

“Now you’re catching on,” Jim said as he watched Donovan’s hazel eyes turn deep copper brown. “Want to skip dinner and go straight to dessert?” he asked, waving the bottle chocolate syrup at Donovan.

Donovan grabbed the bottle out of Jim’s hands so fast, Jim couldn’t help laughing at his eager enthusiasm. A moment later he let out a yelp as Donovan grabbed him and dragged him up the stairs. *Guess Donovan liked their dinner plans.*

\* \* \* \*

Donovan let out a loud groan an hour later as Jim pounded his thick cock deep into his ass. Jim had said it felt good, but Donovan had no idea that it felt this good until he had tried it for the first time. He thought he was going to lose his mind as pleasure overwhelmed him.

“God, Jim, fuck me harder,” Donovan demanded as he felt a small tingle go up his spine. He started stroking the cock in his hand even faster as Jim’s thrusts increased in speed. “I’m so fucking close.”

“Then come for me, baby,” Jim panted. “I’m right behind you.”

“I’d rather you went with me,” Donovan yelled as he came, white pearly seed spurting up from his cock to splatter all over his abdomen and hand. He tightened his muscles down as much as he could, hearing Jim cry out above him just before he felt warm liquid fill him.

Donovan grunted as Jim collapsed down onto his chest. “Damn, you’re heavy,” he chuckled as he wrapped his arms around Jim’s chest.

“Want me to move?” Jim mumbled against Donovan’s chest.

“No, I like you right where you are.”

“Hmmm,” Jim mumbled.

Donovan felt Jim plant a couple of kisses along his collarbone. He returned the gesture by kissing Jim’s head, rubbing his hands up and down Jim’s back. “Feel better?”

“Not yet,” Jim chuckled as he folded his hands over Donovan’s chest, resting his chin on his hands. He chuckled lightly and licked a spot of chocolate off of Donovan’s chest. “Give me forty or fifty years together and I’ll let you know.”

“I’m okay, Jim. I’ve been okay for over a month now. Stop worrying,” Donovan admonished.

Jim grunted, pulling free of Donovan’s body so he could roll off onto the mattress. “You have your hands covered in your mate’s blood and see how fast you get over it,” Jim growled as he flung his arm over his eyes.

Donovan rolled to his side and pulled Jim’s arm down from his face so he could look into his beautiful gray eyes. “I’m okay, James, I swear,” Donovan said as he reached up to cup Jim’s face in his hands. “Never better.”

“Donovan—” Jim began only to stop speaking as Donovan laid a finger against his lips.

“The bullet passed right through me and my werewolf DNA healed me right up. There are no lasting effects. I’m not even sore anymore. At least, my chest isn’t,” Donovan chuckled.

In the weeks since he had been shot, he and Jim had spent a lot of time in bed fucking each other until they could barely walk. They had also done a lot of talking between sexual marathons.

With the Teacher and his goons dead and Chase rescuing all of Nate’s friends, there hadn’t been much need for them to do more than get to know each other.

They still hadn’t decided where they were going to live or which one of them was going to join the other’s pack. For now, they were just taking things day by day. And that was just fine with Donovan. He liked the slower pace with his mate by his side.

Donovan thought Jim was getting used to being by his side, too. He was no longer embarrassed when someone caught them kissing or holding hands. The unconditional acceptance of Jim's family had gone a long ways toward Jim being comfortable being in a gay relationship.

Donovan would never be able to thank them for that. Especially after his own mother had disowned him the moment she heard Donovan had switched sides and would not be producing any cubs to carry on the family name. Donovan hadn't been surprised. The love and acceptance of Jim's family had gone a long ways toward getting him over his mother's easy dismissal.

Donovan grinned down at his mate as he moved his body over his, straddling his hips and holding his hands back against the mattress. He rubbed himself down the long length of Jim's cock, feeling the slight twinge as it started to come back to life.

"My chest isn't sore anymore, but my ass is. If I didn't know I was going to be on the receiving end of this big thing, I'd be jealous of the fact that your dick is bigger than mine."

Donovan was delighted when Jim's face turned red. It was just the response he had been hoping for to lighten the mood. Jim was extremely embarrassed about how large he was, and he was very large. The first time Jim had pushed his cock into his ass, Donovan didn't think it was going to fit. Thank god he was wrong.

"Damn, you are so cute," Donovan chuckled.

"What did I tell you about calling me cute?" Jim growled as he glared up at Donovan.

"You keep promising and I keep telling you that I like pink. I'm still waiting, Jim."

Donovan didn't think it was possible, but Jim's face turned even redder. "Man to man?" Jim whispered, "I like pink, too."

**THE END**

**WWW.STORMYGLENN.COM**



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Stormy Glenn believes the only thing sexier than a man in cowboy boots is two, or three, men in cowboy boots. She also believes in love at first sight, soul mates, true love, and happy endings.

When she's not being a mother to her six teenagers or cleaning up after her two 70-pound lap puppies, you can usually find her cuddled in bed with a book in her hand or her laptop, creating the next sexy character for her stories.

Stormy welcomes comments from readers. You can find her web site at [www.stormyglenn.com](http://www.stormyglenn.com)

# **BOILING POINT**

**Tymber Dalton**

## **DEDICATION**

To my husband, for humoring me and not rolling his eyes when I ask things like, “Would a fire dragon roasting sausages at the table be funny?” And to Steph, my partner in crime, who totally eggs me on when I pose wild “what ifs” and insists I’m not crazy...at least, not in the bad way.

# BOILING POINT

TYMBER DALTON

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## Chapter 1

*Where winter and summer face off through the field  
And fire and ice join powers and yield  
One soul to bind them, to bring forth their truth  
Pure, perfect love, from a heart so aloof.  
—Old Slavic prophecy, first stanza*

“Lina!” Edgar’s shrill scream rolled down the hallway.

Lina cringed. Damn it, not even five minutes into her workday and he was pitching a tantrum already. She pushed back from her desk and walked to his office.

“What is it?”

He’d torn his desk apart. Papers on the floor, file drawers open—he’d only been in there fifteen minutes. How the hell did he wreak that carnage in such a short amount of time?

He looked desperate. “I can’t find it!”

“Find what, Edgar?”

“Bella’s birthday card. I can’t find it!”

She rolled her eyes and took a deep breath to force back her biting reply. She walked over to his drafting table and picked up the pink envelope. “This one?”

He looked up, startled, a huge grin breaking out across his face.

He sighed, relieved. “Oh, baby! You are the greatest! Did I ever tell you that?” He rushed over to her and hugged her, planted a kiss on her cheek before snatching the card out of her hand and racing out the door.

Leaving a huge mess behind.

Lina crossed her arms over her chest and surveyed the disaster. If it wasn’t for her, Edgar would be awash in a sea of paperwork and eraser rubbings.

She sighed.

“Oh...man.” Paula’s voice from the doorway made Lina turn. “What the hell happened here, girlfriend?” Paula looked elegant, her ebony skin and almond eyes set off by tasteful makeup and designer clothes that perfectly fit her exquisitely chiseled frame. Lina always felt frumpy, underdressed and fat next to her friend, even though that was no fault of Paula’s.

“Hurricane Edgar. What else?” She leaned over to pick up a file from the floor.

Paula walked in and helped her straighten up the office. “When you gonna give up on him, honey?” Paula softly asked.

Pavlina—Lina to her friends and coworkers—Zaria knew there wasn’t a snowball’s chance in hell of her boss and friend of ten years ever looking at her “that way.” Not with her pale skin, freckles, and five-six, size sixteen frame. “It’s not like I’ve got any other guys in my life. Edgar needs me.”

Paula tapped a perfectly painted fingernail on a folder. “You’ve got that right. You hold this place together. But don’t you ever get tired of playing second fiddle to Edgar’s slut of the hour?”

Lina shrugged and brushed back a loose strand of hair. This morning her long, naturally red locks had decided to be especially unruly, frizzing in the muggy Florida July heat. She’d given up trying to style it and simply pulled it back with a ponytail holder. “He needs me,” she lamely repeated.

“Honey, what do *you* need? You’re thirty years old. When’s the

last time you went on a date?”

“I’ve been on dates.”

“Pity parties with Zack while sucking up gallons of Chunky Monkey and Cherry Garcia on his couch and crying over *Sleepless in Seattle* is *not* a date. You have a better chance of getting laid with Zack than you would Edgar.”

Lina rolled her eyes. “You know damn well Zack’s gay.”

“Uh, duh! That’s my point!”

Thirty minutes later, Paula and Lina had the mess cleaned up. Until the next time Edgar blew through, at least. Paula leveled her gaze at her friend. “You know what your horrorscope said this morning?”

“That’s horoscope.”

“Not the way yours reads. It said, ‘Time for a change. Your way isn’t working, so face the facts. Bosses who like bony bimbos won’t change their stripes and aren’t worth your heart anyway. Go find a guy on Craigslist and get your freak on.’”

Lina snorted. “It didn’t say that.”

“No, it said you’d meet someone who would change your life. Time to let Hurricane Edgar spin his wheels on his own, honey.”

\* \* \* \*

Callaway and Associates employed over thirty people, including architects, designers, and support staff. They’d come a long way from the days when it was just Edgar and Lina in a small garage office in his old house in north Carrollwood. Now they took up over half of an entire floor in a downtown Tampa office high-rise.

Her office overlooked the St. Pete Times Forum where the Lightning played hockey. Edgar had given Lina her pick of offices when they first moved in. She fondly remembered that day, just the two of them, when he’d surprised her after taking her to lunch. So what if she’d gotten her hopes up that his special surprise was

confessing his feelings? He'd taken her hand and led her to the elevator. When they walked into the empty space, he had hugged her.

"This wouldn't have been possible without you, sweetie. Whatever you want, it's yours. That's why you get first dibs, any office, and I mean that."

She'd forced a smile and swallowed her disappointment. "Thanks, Edgar."

She couldn't complain about him as a boss or even as a friend. He was damn good to her, generous, never forgetting their history or failing to recognize and reward her accomplishments. The shortcomings in their relationship were on her shoulders, not his. Paula was right. He would never see her as anything but a friend. Even when they were in college, he treated her almost like a little sister.

Lina gathered everyone in the conference room for the morning planning session. She tried to focus on the meeting. Edgar rarely made them anymore. She suspected the only reason he'd shown up at all was because of the lost birthday card. Normally, he didn't come in until after ten. She'd been surprised to see him breeze through the door that early.

Paula went over the daily list of appointments. "The only one I'm concerned about is Edgar's two o'clock, Janek Alexandr. Edgar's having lunch over on Harbor Island with some Rotary buddies at twelve-thirty. What do you want to do?"

Lina silently swore. That meant they probably wouldn't see him until four. "Okay, I'll take him. What's he want?"

"House."

"Oh, good. That's easy. I can deal with that." Even though she was the general manager, she'd spent enough time with Edgar that she could intelligently speak about less complex structures. If it was an office or commercial building, she'd have to slough it off to someone else.

When the meeting adjourned, Lina returned to her office and

tackled the most pressing items on her to-do list. On a Friday, she'd normally try to get out of the office early, meaning three o'clock instead of her usual eight. But with a client to deal with, that wouldn't happen.

At noon Paula stopped by her door. "You going to get something to eat?" Usually Lina went out to lunch with her best friend, Zack.

"No, I called the Silver Ring Cafe. They're delivering a Cuban."

Paula grinned. "Oooh, a hunky straight and single one, I hope?"

Lina groaned at the bad joke. "Sandwich."

"Oh. Well, I knew that was too much to hope for with you. See you later."

Lina shook her head. Paula could afford to joke like that. She never had a problem snagging a guy. Not with her model body and Mensa brain.

*At least I've got the brain.*

Lina had given up trying to diet herself into a single-digit clothing size two years out of college. She exercised regularly, swimming, walking and light weights. Unfortunately, her father's sturdy Slavic genes stubbornly refused all attempts to become svelte. She was healthy and couldn't be called obese, but she would always be a "big girl," broad across the beam.

Breeder hips, her old Grandmother Danika had once joked.

*Stupid old bat.* Apparently in the "old country," they liked 'em roomy.

She sat back and scrubbed her hands over her face. She'd forgone makeup today after the hair fiasco. She started to chew one of her nails before catching herself. At least her hands didn't look horrible. She had long, graceful fingers that tapered from her thin wrists and elegant arms.

What a twisted sense of humor Mother Nature had. Lina had long since quit counting the times she'd been asked if she played piano.

At a quarter till two, Lina took a few minutes to freshen up, attempted another battle of the braids, and gave up when it was



obvious nothing short of a gallon of hair gel would force her unruly locks into submission today. Back to the ponytail. She applied a little powder, blush, eye shadow, and tinted lip gloss.

Good enough. If she had to look fancy, meaning Zack was dragging her somewhere nice, she would put on mascara and foundation for him.

If Mr. Alexandr didn't like how she looked he could pucker up and kiss her fat ass. Her day had started off-kilter to begin with after Edgar's blast of disorder, and she had yet to regain her footing.

Promptly at two o'clock, Lina's intercom buzzed. "Ms. Zaria, your two o'clock is here."

"I'll be right out." Her gaze swept around her office, found it tidy, presentable. She walked to the reception area to greet Mr. Alexandr.

## Chapter 2

*Fragile soul of wounded fate,  
Who despairs of love, without a mate.  
To her the winds of change shall blow  
Elemental love, like fresh-fal'n snow.  
—Old Slavic prophecy, second stanza*

“You are the laziest fucking man on the face of the planet.”

Rick looked up as his brother walked into the kitchen. “What?”

Jan shook his head. “That. Why don’t you cook them?”

Rick grinned. “I am. What the hell do you think I’m doing?” He had a frozen sausage link skewered on a fork.

“I meant like a normal person.”

Rick focused on the sausage and brought it close to his mouth. He breathed on it. After a few seconds, grease dripped onto the plate in front of him as the sausage quickly cooked. Twenty seconds later, it was done. He tentatively tasted it, then popped it into his mouth. “Why sood I do dat? Dat’s borwing. Dis is easy.”

Jan looked disgusted. “Don’t talk with your mouth full.”

Rick grinned, chewed, and swallowed. “Deal with it. You’re the one who insisted on moving in together.”

“Um, sort of have to.”

Rick leaned back. “Frankly, I think the prophecy is a bunch of bullshit.” He shook open the *Tampa Tribune*. “Two hundred and twenty-six years old we are, brother, and no evil badasses in sight. I think we’re safe.” He glared at Jan. “You, however, have put a major crimp in my lifestyle. The literal wet blanket.”

“Oh, excuse me. I didn’t know living like a filthy pig was a lifestyle. I thought it was a personality deficit.”

“Fuck you.”

“Bite me,” Jan shot back.

The brothers glared at each other for a moment before laughing. Rick rolled his amber eyes. “We’re going to end up killing each other at this rate. You realize that, right?”

Jan ran a hand through his blond hair. “Yeah. Look, let’s give it a couple of years. It’ll get the Elders off our asses. Once nothing happens we can go our separate ways again, okay?”

Rick turned the page. “Deal.” The twins looked nothing alike. Jan’s blue eyes, wavy blond hair and pale complexion stood in stark contrast to Rick’s straight black hair, smoky amber eyes and tan skin. “And quit turning the fucking thermostat down. You had it like a meat locker in here.”

“It’s too hot.”

“Hey, I got outvoted on moving here to Florida. I’d be happy opening the windows. It’s freaking stuffy in here.” Rick gave up on the paper. “The new house gets dual-zoned A/C, agreed?”

“Agreed.” Jan poured a cup of coffee. “Jeez, a week and we’re at each other’s throats already.”

“Brings back memories of the good old days, doesn’t it?” Rick stabbed another sausage link and roasted it with his breath. Mostly to deliberately torque Jan. Yes, it would be easy to nuke all of them at once, but it was much more fun to yank Jan’s chain.

Jan smiled. “Yeah, I have to admit it does.” He sat at the table. After a few minutes, he finally said, “I missed having you around.”

Rick snorted. “Yeah, right.”

“No, I did. Seriously. No bullshit.”

Rick blushed and looked at his plate. “Well, yeah, I guess I sort of missed you, too.” He cleared his throat. “Okay, Hallmark moment’s over. What time’s the appointment?”

Jan smiled. His hot-headed brother wasn’t so much on the mushy

emotions. “Two. Callaway and Associates. Highly recommended.”

“Tile floors.”

“Yeah, with you and me, I’d say that’s a must.”

Rick nodded. He started to say something when his cell phone rang in the other room. “Crap.” He went to answer it.

Jan looked at Rick’s full and steaming coffee cup. He reached over and wrapped his hand around the mug. He held it for a moment, then sat back before his brother returned and sat at the table.

“Speak of the Devil, that was Uncle Andel wanting to see how we were doing.” Rick picked up his coffee, sipped it, then glared at Jan. “You’re a fucking dick.”

Jan smiled as he stood. “I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“This was hot. I just poured it a couple of minutes ago.”

“Maybe you can nuke it while you cook your sausage.” He left the kitchen before Rick could angrily reply.

“Goddamn ice dragons anyway,” Rick muttered. He held the mug to his mouth and breathed. After a moment, his coffee was hot again.

\* \* \* \*

Jan closed his eyes as the cool water flowed over him. Florida hadn’t been his first choice of locations, but the Elders’ Seer insisted on it. Why, they couldn’t tell them, because they didn’t know. Rick had wanted to move out west, and his logic was good. Hot summers and cold winters, they could both be happy at least half the year.

At least Florida had humidity. While Rick hated that, he loved the heat. The humidity and proximity to water satisfied Jan. The property they’d bought, thirty acres north of Tampa with its own private lake, had a little something for both of them.

Jan loved his twin even if he wanted to kill him half the time. They were always close, even when living apart. Still, forced togetherness for two opposing Elementals—especially when one was an ice dragon and the other a fire dragon—was never a recipe for

harmony.

Jan stepped out of the shower twenty minutes later feeling refreshed. He had plenty of time to make the appointment, but he wanted to be ready. He dressed in khaki slacks and an Oxford shirt with loafers.

He'd done his research. Edgar Callaway was the best man for the job. Rick and Jan had very specific requirements for their new house, requirements that would probably be seen as odd under most circumstances. With two brothers as drastically different as they were, they needed a designer who could get the job done.

Truth be told, Jan wasn't sure he believed the prophecy either. Okay, so neither brother had found a mate, although Rick made sure to get himself laid on a regular basis. That didn't mean anything. The world was a big freaking place.

*And* they were supposed to share a woman? *Puhleese*. They could barely share a kitchen.

Jan spent the morning in his home office, gathering his paperwork and design notes, as well as the site plans and surveys he'd take with him to Callaway's office. He was supposed to go out with Grace that evening, a cutie from the post office. Rick wasn't the only one allowed to get a piece of ass now and then. It'd been too damn long for him, over a year.

He found the office building in downtown Tampa and timed his arrival perfectly. The receptionist took his name and paged someone. Jan studied the waiting room walls, pictures of projects Callaway and Associates had built. Elegant, beautiful, as well as functional and sturdy enough to withstand the rigors of Florida's hurricane codes.

"Mr. Alexandr?"

The woman's voice, low and melodic, startled him. He turned, his eyes widening in surprise. "Yes. Hello."

She was beautiful! Flame red hair like a sunrise, green eyes, creamy skin.

When she offered her hand he fought the urge to kiss it. He

slipped his fingers around hers and felt the strength in her grip.

“My name’s Lina. I’m Mr. Callaway’s assistant. He’s been unavoidably detained. I’ll be assisting you today, if that’s all right.”

He dumbly nodded. *Sweet Goddess, hell yes, it was all right!*

He realized he still held her hand and released her. “That’s...yes, that’s fine. Thank you.”

“Are you all right, sir?” Her eyes narrowed, studying him.

He quickly nodded again. “Yes. I’m fine. You can call me Jan.”

“Okay, Jan. If you’ll follow me, we can go to my office.” She turned, and he studied her ass as she led the way. She wore navy blue slacks that weren’t tight, but they didn’t hide her voluptuous curves, either.

Was she single? He mentally smacked himself. He was supposed to go out with Grace in a few hours. Grace’s toothpick frame was a total turn-off compared to this beauty. She had to be taken, a woman as sweet looking as her, didn’t she?

He dumbly followed her into an office and sat as she closed the door behind him. When she was seated behind her desk, he started to ask her if she was single when he spotted the nameplate on her desk.

\* \* \* \*

Lina studied Jan Alexandr. Okay, this guy was a cutie even if he acted like he was a few brain cells short of an IQ topping his shoe size. He had to be at least six-four, wider through his shoulders than she was in her ass. His grip had felt firm and comfortably cool.

“What did you say your name was?” he asked.

She sat back in her chair. “My full name’s Pavlina Zaria, but everyone calls me Lina.” He looked a little stunned. “Are you all right? Would you like me to get you some water or something?”

He shook his head. “No, thank you. I’m fine. Pavlina, that’s beautiful.”

She snorted in disgust. “My father’s genes and apparently

unintentional sense of humor. It means—”

“I know what it means. It means small. I still say it’s beautiful. I think it suits you.”

She felt the blush creep into her cheeks. “How did you know what it means?”

Jan smiled. “My family hails from eastern Europe.”

“Well, as you can see, I’m anything but small.”

“I think you’re beautiful.”

She blushed more deeply. “I think we’re straying from the subject, Mr. Alexandr.”

Jan heard the edge in her voice. He’d pushed her too hard. “Zaria is also a beautiful name.”

“Did you bring sketches of what you have in mind for your house?”

He met her gaze and finally nodded. “Yes. I brought them.” He hoped she couldn’t see how his hands trembled as he opened his portfolio. He handed the papers over and realized it was impossible for him to keep his eyes off her face as she looked everything over.

*Zaria. Son of a bitch.*

It was *her*.

Lina looked up and frowned. Jan Alexandr still looked like something was bothering him. “Are you sure you’re all right?” Jesus, she hoped he didn’t keel over in her office. That would really suck. Although she wouldn’t mind doing a little mouth-to-mouth on him.

Of course, she was sure *he* would mind.

“I’m fine. As you can see, my brother and I have some very specific requirements.”

She nodded. “That’s no problem. This looks like a large property.”

“We like our privacy.”

“What do you do?”

“I’m a writer. Novels. My brother is taking a sabbatical for a little while. He’s a travel writer.”

“Oh, that’s interesting.” She felt his eyes never leave her. Did he find her so grotesque that he couldn’t stop staring?

She was about to ask another question when Edgar tapped on her door and opened it. “Hey, Lina! I made it back after all.”

She felt both relieved and irritated. Relief that Jan Alexandr wouldn’t be staring at her anymore.

Irritation that she couldn’t stare at him. He was a handsome hunk of man.

“Mr. Alexandr, this is Edgar Callaway.” Edgar strode over and shook hands. Was that irritation she spotted on their client’s face?

“Nice to meet you,” Alexandr said.

“I’ll take over from here, Lina. I know you wanted to get out early.”

“Thanks, Edgar.” Another quirk. Edgar always tried to be considerate. She quickly gathered up the paperwork and handed it to Edgar.

Jan Alexandr’s mind raced, desperate to stay with Lina. *Shit!* He tried to make an excuse, anything that wouldn’t sound totally bullshit, to stay there with her. “If you’re busy, Mr. Callaway, I don’t mind dealing with Ms. Zaria.”

“My girl’s been running herself ragged this week. She’s earned an early afternoon.” He indicated the door. “Why don’t we go to my office?”

Jan felt a wave of irritation at Callaway’s term of endearment for Lina. He reluctantly stood, and turned to Lina. “It was a pleasure meeting you.” He extended his hand across the desk. After a brief hesitation, she shook with him.

Lina noticed again that his skin felt cool. Not clammy or damp, like a dead fish, but like the kind of guy you wanted sitting next to you on a hot day. “Thank you, Mr. Alexandr.”

“Jan,” he insisted.

“Jan.”

Alexandr closed the door behind him. Lina let out a huge sigh of



relief at his departure. He had gorgeous ice blue eyes. No doubt he also had a skinny, big-boobed cutie who hung off his arm despite lacking a wedding ring. Gorgeous guys had gals, as many as they wanted or needed.

He certainly wouldn't want someone like her. Unless he was one of those evil fucks who liked to screw with a fat chick's head for shits and giggles.

She shuddered. With her luck, that was probably it. Wouldn't be the first time it had happened to her.

She quickly packed her stuff and skedaddled.

\* \* \* \*

Jan barely heard two words Callaway—"Call me Edgar"—said to him. He couldn't stand it. After five minutes he finally broke in. "Tell me more about Lina Zaria." *What a perfect name!* The morning Goddess.

Edgar frowned. "I'm sorry?"

Jan leaned forward. "Lina Zaria. Is she single? Dating?" He knew he sounded eager and was beyond caring. She was gorgeous, perfect, even Rick...

The stunning thought hit him. Even Rick would agree with him.

"I'm sorry, but I'm not comfortable discussing my employees' personal lives."

Jan tried to think fast and salvage the situation. "Of course. I'm sorry." He managed to make it through the meeting, and they agreed to another consultation in a week.

*Goddamn it, a whole week?*

He sat in his car and tried to clear his mind. Rick would love her.

No, that was stupid. The prophecy was just an old poem, a bunch of bullshit mumbo jumbo. The rational side of his brain tried to argue that point.

Then the other side of his brain chimed in that most people in the

world thought dragons and shape-shifters were a myth, too.

Stunned, he drove home.

\* \* \* \*

Lina stopped by Publix after she left work. She'd already packed her weekend bag and brought it with her so she could head straight to Zack's after work. Zack had texted his grocery list to her BlackBerry. She scrolled down the screen as she pushed her cart through the aisles.

*Fetzer Gewürztraminer... box of Eggo chocolate chip waffles... frozen lasagna...*

She grabbed the bottle of wine first. It was her favorite. Leave it to Zack to ask specifically for that, even though he preferred a good Pinot Grigio.

*three garlic cloves... cheese garlic bread... chocolate syrup... bubble bath... toothbrush...*

She called him. "Toothbrush?"

"Yeah."

"Why?"

"I dropped mine in the toilet. I'm not using it again."

She laughed. Poor Zack. "You're really having a crappy week, aren't you, babe?"

"Fucking sucks. Where's our food?"

"I'm almost done. Did you want milk or dark chocolate syrup? And why do you want bubble bath? You're not supposed to get that leg wet." He was stuck with a thigh-high cast on his left leg for the next six to eight weeks, the result of an unfortunate tumble over a toy dog outside his condo building the day before. In the same fall he'd sprained his right wrist, requiring it to be splinted for several days.

"Dark, if they have it. That yutz, Moskowitz? I realized his hot tub is right below my damn balcony. We're going to dump the bubble bath in there tonight, make him pay for my broken leg. His goddamn

dust mop isn't on a leash and trips me, sends me to the fucking hospital, and he bitches that I almost stepped on the little furball? Fuck him."

Lina laughed. "All right. I'll be there shortly. Anything else?"

"No. I'll see you when you get here, shortcake. You packed for the weekend?"

"Of course. I'm not driving back and forth to Brandon five times a day to walk you to the bathroom, honey."

Okay, so she had Zack. He could get a date anytime he wanted, but he was choosey. His mother not so secretly hinted and hoped the two of them would get together and give her grandchildren. Lina and Zack didn't have the heart to break her heart. His mom knew he was gay, she simply chose to willfully ignore that little factoid and kept hoping he'd change his mind. Lina was happy to help him keep his mother's fantasy alive a while longer.

They'd been closer than best friends since they were kids. She was the first one he'd come out to when they were fifteen. In college, the two of them had made a pact that if they were still single at thirty-five, they'd throw in the towel and settle down with each other.

At least they enjoyed watching the same kind of porn.

"You realize you're going to have to come home with me Sunday night, right?" she asked. He was supposed to stay off his feet for at least a week according to the doctor. Edgar had already told her she could take the days off and work from home without dipping into her vacation time if she wanted. It was easier to bring Zack home than to tote all her work stuff to his condo. And it wasn't like he was a stranger to sleeping at her place. They spent every weekend and quite a few weeknights together, alternating where they stayed.

"Yeah, I know. I really do appreciate this, Lina."

"I know. See you soon." Thirty minutes later she pulled into her usual parking spot in front of his building. She let herself in with her key and dumped the groceries on the counter. "Where are you?"

"I made it to the bedroom," he called out.

She walked back there. “How did you get here?”

“It’s as far as I could flop after the toothbrush-in-the-toilet incident.” His face looked pinched with pain as he tried to sit up, his sweet brown eyes nearly the same color as his hair.

Lina helped him limp out to the sofa. “When did your mom leave?” She’d babysat him after they’d brought him home from the hospital.

“A little after three. Her cruise leaves at midnight.”

Lina made sure he was comfortable and found the remote for him. She was about to go put the groceries away when Zack grabbed her hand. “Hey. Where’s my sugar?”

She smiled and leaned in, kissed him on the cheek. “Better?”

“Yeah. Too bad I’m gay. You’d make a great wife.”

She blushed. “Yeah, well, remember your promise.”

He tuned the TV to MSNBC. “Honey, at this rate, no guy lives up to you. I just might marry you yet, if I’m lucky enough. I’m simply biding my time.”

Lina busied herself preparing dinner. She’d also bought salad fixings. While the lasagna was in the microwave, Lina toasted the garlic bread and made them each a bowl of salad.

She carefully settled herself on the couch next to Zack, trying to not jostle him too much.

“What’s wrong, babe?” he asked.

“What?”

“You look a little distracted.” He gasped. “You didn’t meet a guy who’s gonna steal you away from me, did you?”

She rolled her eyes and laughed. “Not hardly.”

He gently nudged her. “C’mon.”

This was the spooky little special thing she had with him. They could always read each other’s moods. “I had a weird day capped off with a weird client.” She related the day’s events.

“Paula’s right, babe. Edgar’s a moron.”

“You’re jealous.”

“Damn straight.” He paused and laughed. “Yeah, uh, you know what I mean, kiddo.”

Just her luck. Zack was the kind of guy she could never have if he was straight. But they even slept together several nights a week—literally, not figuratively—when they stayed at each other’s place. *Just* sleep. Although they’d fooled around a little in high school before he came out.

Hell, at least she had a vibrator. She could pretend.

“So tell me about Mr. Alexandr,” he prodded.

She shrugged. “Weird vibe.”

“Serial killer weird, leaves his socks on for sex weird, or dressed like a stuffed animal for sex weird?”

She nearly snorted wine out her nose. When she recovered, she said, “I don’t know.” She studied the dregs of salad dressing in her bowl. “Probably disgusted by the fat chick weird,” she mumbled.

“Hey!” he angrily said. “No! I thought we had a rule about that.” He grunted in pain as he set his bowl on the coffee table, grabbed hers, and stacked it inside his. Then he pulled her into his lap as far as he comfortably could and stroked her cheek. “Babe, you’re beautiful. Really.”

“How would you know?” she sobbed. “You’re gay!”

“Uh, yeah, but I’m not blind or stupid, chica.” He laced his fingers through hers and kissed her hand. “You ever look at some of those painters from a couple hundred years ago? They digged girls who wouldn’t break in half if you gave them a hug. You’re not fat.”

“I’m not skinny.”

“Yeah, and if you were skinny, you’d be making yourself sick with the anorexia or some shit like you nearly did in high school.” He glared at her. “Remember that?”

She nodded. How many nights had she spent crying on Zack’s shoulder over her weight struggles?

“You’ve been the same exact weight for how long now?”

“Four years.”

“And you don’t have to kill yourself anymore, do you?”

She pouted. “No.”

“Honey, it’s not like you’re buying dresses from Omar the Tentmaker, okay? You’re healthy. And you’re beautiful, whether you believe me or not. When do you finally let yourself be happy?”

The microwave buzzer sounded, saving her from answering. She sat up, grabbed their bowls, and returned to the kitchen to dish out the rest of their food.

### Chapter 3

*Deep in the heart love knows the way  
though her mind and will may balk and stray.  
Elementals speak words old, deep and true,  
which shall bring her home to you.  
—Old Slavic prophecy, third stanza*

Jan raced home. Halfway there he remembered his date with Grace. He called her. “I’m sorry, I can’t make it tonight. I’ve had a family emergency come up.” He barely waited for her reply before he hung up on her. Well, if he couldn’t come up with a plan to talk Pavlina Zaria into seeing him, it’s not like he was a stranger to blue balls.

Rick looked up from the table when Jan walked in. While Rick sat in the same chair he’d occupied when Jan left, Jan knew from his brother’s change of clothes and the fact that the lawn was mowed that Rick hadn’t idly sat around.

“What’s wrong with you?” Rick asked

Jan sat. “I think I found her.”

“Found who? And don’t you have a date tonight?”

“I cancelled it. Wait until—”

“No! Aw, fuck no. I’ve got a girl coming over tonight!”

“Listen to me!” He told Rick about Lina.

Rick shook his head. “Fuck me. You’re an asshole, you know that? So she’s cute. So what? If you like her so much, go do her.”

“You don’t understand! I mean, that’s Fate, right? Her name, everything!”

“She’s most likely not the only person on the face of the planet with the last name of Zaria, dude.”

“You have to go back there with me next time and meet her.”

“Uh, yeah. I can see that going well. ‘Hey lady, me and my brother are dragons, and by the way, we think you fulfill this bullshit prophecy we’re supposed to be a part of.’” He snorted in disgust and a small plume of steam emerged from his nostrils. “I don’t think so. No thanks.”

Jan angrily stood. “If you met her, you’d understand.”

“You make a stalker look normal, you know that?”

Jan glared.

Rick finally rolled his eyes. “When’s the next appointment?”

\* \* \* \*

Lina had a good weekend with Zack. By the time Sunday evening rolled around and she got him moved to her place, she was in a much better mood. She’d quit thinking about Jan Alexandr and his killer ice-blue eyes. She conducted the Monday morning meeting as a conference call, with Zack attempting to get her to laugh by making faces at her from the couch while he watched SpongeBob.

Paula volunteered to bring a few files home to her that evening, so Lina was surprised to find Edgar standing on her front porch when she answered the door a little after seven.

“Hey, didn’t expect to see you.”

He kissed her on the cheek as he walked in and handed her the files. “No reason to make Paula drive all the way out here.” He crossed the living room and shook Zack’s good hand. “How are you doing?”

“Not playing soccer anytime soon.” Zack was, at least, being polite to Edgar. The two men usually didn’t get along all that well. Lina knew the only reason they tolerated each other was because of her.



“Yeah, I bet.” Edgar sat on the other end of the couch. “Lina, I need to talk to you about something.”

Lina’s heart caught in her throat. “Yeah?” He looked reluctant to talk in front of Zack. “Did you want to go out back onto the lanai?”

He shook his head. “No. Zack should probably hear this too.”

*Oh my God, oh my God, ohmyGod!* Her heart raced, eagerly anticipating what he had to say, hoping her prayers were finally answered.

Edgar looked at her. “The other day, something happened that bothered me. I think I should tell you about it.”

*Oh my—fuck.* “What?”

“Jan Alexandr, the client you were dealing with? He asked me if you were seeing anyone.”

*OhmyGod!* “He did?” Disappointment quickly blended with another strange sort of hopeful anticipation.

Edgar nodded. “Yeah.”

“What did you tell him?”

“I told him I wasn’t comfortable discussing my employees’ personal lives.” Zack now intently watched Edgar.

*Shit.* “Oh.” She had a chance to let that sink in. “Why did it bother you? And why did you want Zack to know?”

“I don’t know why it bothered me. I wanted Zack to know so he could keep an eye on you.” He shrugged. “If you want, I’ll drop Alexandr in a heartbeat. Did he make any passes at you?”

God bless him, Edgar did care about her in his own way, even if she would end up as Zack’s fag-hag wife in five years. “No. He was—”

“Hang on, kiddo,” Zack interrupted. “You told me he was a little on the flirty side.”

“Well, flirty can be anything.”

“You were a little wigged out Friday afternoon.”

Edgar frowned. “That settles it. I don’t need the business so bad that I’m willing to risk your safety over a client.”

“Whoa!” She stood. “Edgar, I appreciate the concern, really, but I think that’s a huge overreaction. This guy’s a writer. We don’t know what kind of connections he’s got. You drop him like that, it could be bad for business. I’m okay with it for now.” She shrugged. “Honestly? I got the impression maybe he wasn’t comfortable with me.”

Zack snorted. “Oh, jeez. Here we go again, Ed.”

At least the two men had this much in common. They never failed to gang up on her to boost her ego when her spirits were down.

“Considering he seemed interested in dating you, I don’t think that’s a problem.” Edgar checked his watch. “I’ve got to run, sorry I can’t stay. I’m taking Bella to a movie, need to go pick her up.” He shook hands with Zack again, hugged Lina, and kissed her on the cheek. “Don’t worry about working from home. Seriously, it’s okay.” He pointed at Zack. “Take care of my girl.”

Zack cocked the fingers of his left hand at Edgar like he was shooting a gun. “You mean *my* girl, but yeah, no worries there.”

\* \* \* \*

By Friday morning, Zack was going stir-crazy. Lina was about ready to kill him. “You think you could survive a trip downtown?” He could hobble around on his crutches without too many problems, but he still wasn’t completely steady.

“Hell yeah. I’ll take my laptop and work on your office couch. You’ve got cable there. I won’t miss my cartoons.”

She smiled. “Okay, let’s go to work.” She gathered her things, loaded Zack’s gear, then carefully loaded him in her Accord. She called ahead, and Edgar met them in the parking garage to help them upstairs. Once Zack was settled in her office, she caught up with Paula, got her and Zack coffee, and returned to her desk.

“Edgar’s not so bad, I guess,” Zack snarked. “You know what’s weird? I realized the other night after he left, he doesn’t look a day

older than when we were in college.”

Lina shrugged. She hadn’t really thought about it. “I guess you’re right.” She soon lost herself in her daily tasks.

\* \* \* \*

Jan repeated the words over and over in his mind. He’d spent three damn days trying to find the old book in one of the hundreds of boxes stashed in the garage. They were renting the house until their new house was built, and he hadn’t felt like unpacking anything.

“You know what you have to say, right?” he asked Rick.

Rick nodded. “And if you’re wrong, we look like a couple of morons.”

“I’m not wrong. I know I’m not.”

“I hope you’re right.” Rick had also memorized the ancient words. The words in the old language that the prophecy claimed would somehow convince her of who and what they were. And who and what she was.

Theirs.

Jan tried not to pace while they waited. Edgar Callaway walked out and greeted them with what looked like a forced smile.

*Shit.* “This is my brother, Jarek.”

“Call me Rick,” he said, extending his hand.

Edgar shook. “Let’s go to my office.” He turned and led the way.

Jan and Rick followed Edgar. When they passed Lina’s office, Jan nudged Rick and tipped his head toward the closed door.

Jan forced himself to walk past and not stop and knock.

During the meeting, Jan couldn’t concentrate. Rick shot him a disgusted look and took over. An hour later, Jan was dying to go talk to Lina.

While Callaway was talking with Rick, Jan slipped his phone off his belt and dropped it to the floor by his chair. When they finished, they followed Edgar down the hall.

Her door was still closed.

“Oh! You know what?” Jan said, “I think I dropped my phone. Do you mind if I go back and look?”

Callaway nodded. “Go right ahead.”

Rick shot him another disgusted look. “*Please, that’s the best you could do?*” Rick silently snarked.

Jan shrugged, walked back to the office and retrieved his phone. When he returned to the hall, Callaway and Rick had walked past Lina’s door. Jan took a deep breath and knocked.

\* \* \* \*

Zack and Lina looked up from where they were sitting on her sofa and looking at his laptop. “Come in,” Lina said.

Lina’s heart raced when Jan Alexandr stuck his head into her office. “Hi, I just wanted to say...” His eyes fell on Zack. “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to interrupt.”

Was that a frown on his face?

It was definitely a frown on Zack’s face.

“Zack, this is Jan Alexandr.” Lina hoped she wasn’t blushing. Alexandr looked just as handsome as he had the other day. She hated that her body seemed to respond to this man, her pulse racing, skin flushing as his eyes met hers.

Zack nodded. Alexandr stepped in and across the room, cautiously shook Zack’s hand. “Pleased to meet you.” He seemed to weigh his words. “I wanted to say I’m sorry if I came off wrong the other day. Would you allow me to make it up to you with lunch?”

“Lunch?”

Another man appeared in the doorway. *Jeezus pleezus, another hunk!* As tall and broad-shouldered as Alexandr, only with black hair and warm amber eyes.

“Jan?” the other cutie said.

Edgar also appeared in the doorway. He wore an odd look on his

face.

“Ms. Zaria, this is my brother, Jarek,” Jan Alexandr said.

The amber-eyed angel stepped forward, his eyes on her, intently studying her. She felt another warm flush race through her body under his heated gaze.

“Please, call me Rick. Nice to meet you. My brother spoke very highly of you.”

Lina shook hands with Rick Alexandr and immediately noticed how warm his grip felt compared to his brother. “Pleased to meet you.”

Edgar started to say something when Rick spoke. “Could we interest you in lunch, Ms. Zaria?”

“Lunch?” She looked at Zack, who was, she noticed, still studying the brothers. “I was just going to order us some sandwiches. Zack’s not very mobile.”

“We’d be happy to help him get around,” Jan offered.

“Lina,” Zack interrupted, “I don’t mind eating in alone.”

“I’m not leaving you here by yourself.”

Edgar again started to say something, but Rick spoke over him. “We’d love for both of you to join us for lunch. Seriously.”

She felt impaled by Rick Alexandr’s eyes. They were gorgeous! Even though she had a feeling maybe this was a bad idea for a reason she couldn’t fathom, she nodded. “Okay. Only if Zack comes with us. I’m not leaving him alone.”

Zack rolled his eyes as he shut down his laptop. “Hold on a minute. Let me get everything gathered up. I’m guessing we’re going home after lunch?”

She looked at Edgar, who’d apparently given up trying to talk. “You don’t mind if I take off early, do you? I know you said you were heading out with Bella to Key West tonight.”

He still looked odd. She couldn’t put her finger on it. “Of course I don’t mind. You’ve damn well earned an afternoon off.” He smiled, but it looked forced. “I’ll see you on Monday.” He shook hands with

the brothers, then waved to Zack. “Hope you’re feeling better soon.”

“Thanks.”

Edgar left. Lina gathered her things and helped Zack finish packing. The brothers helped Lina and Zack down to her car and agreed to follow them to the Columbia Restaurant over in Ybor.

Safely ensconced alone in Lina’s car, Zack turned on her. “You didn’t say he was gorgeous!”

“I said he was handsome.”

“If you don’t do him, I’m willing to chase him.”

She started the car. “Not on that leg you’re not.”

He smiled and settled back in his seat. “You’ve got a serious problem though, sweetie.”

“What?”

“Both of those brothers want you. You know I hate bullshit clichés, but they looked at you like they were broke and starving and you’re a free all-you-can-eat Mongolian barbecue.”

\* \* \* \*

Lina didn’t want to contemplate Zack’s astute observation. It was bad enough she felt like she was walking funny. Her panties had to be damp from her body’s traitorous reaction to the double-yummy Alexandr brothers. When they were all seated in a large corner booth with Zack’s leg propped up, Lina on his far side, the waitress took their drink order. Jan immediately declared he was paying for everything.

When the four of them were alone again, Jan looked at Zack. “How did you hurt yourself?”

Zack gave the quick version of the dust-mop dog story. Rick smiled in amusement. “Bubble bath? I like you.”

Zack smirked, an expression Lina recognized as his “maybe he’s not so bad” look. “Good thing I couldn’t get around, or I’d have done something else.”

By the time they'd finished their meal, the brothers had learned all about Lina and Zack, courtesy of Zack. Lina felt too discombobulated to carry on her end of the conversation. Like her brain had fogged over. Usually she was never at a loss for words. Something about the brothers' intense eyes on her took away her capacity to speak like an adult.

Toward the end of their meal, Zack pushed his plate away and stared at the brothers. "Let's cut the bullshit. You guys want Lina."

Lina gasped, mortified.

The Alexandr brothers both sat back and looked shocked.

Zack laughed and sipped his iced tea. "Come on, quit wasting time. We could all grow old and die waiting for you two to grow a set of balls and speak up."

Lina wanted to strangle Zack.

Jan regained his voice first. "Is that a problem?"

"Dude, she's single, and she's an adult. Why would it be a problem?" He set down his glass of tea and leaned forward, dropping his voice. "But if you two want to come in and play with her heart, that *is* a problem, and you'll have to go through me first. Believe me, despite what you see, I'm *not* someone you want to fuck with where she's concerned."

Lina noticed Zack's voice deepened, a different tone she'd never heard before. She stared at him in shock.

Rick Alexandr's eyes narrowed. "You're full of surprises, aren't you?" he asked in a low voice.

"Fuckin' A, buddy."

Lina's mouth gaped. Zack touched her chin. "Gonna catch flies, sweetie."

Her jaw snapped shut.

Zack studied the other two men. "*Pama caska treznavalinsk appareo.*" He took another sip of tea.

"Holy fuck!" Jan whispered.

Lina stared.

Rick shook his head. "You got *that* right. You sure as hell aren't what you appear."

"What the hell is going on?" Lina finally managed through clenched teeth.

Zack squeezed her hand and smiled. "I've got some explaining to do, babe." He looked at the men again. "Well?"

Jan nodded. He reached across the table for her hand. Before he could touch her, Zack grabbed his arm.

*"Trama dominae pasnatea?"*

Jan nodded again. "With our lives. We swear it."

"What the *hell* is going on?" Lina asked again.

Zack ignored her, his gaze never leaving Jan's face. "Say it again, with feeling this time. In the old language." His eyes bored into Jan's. "Otherwise, you don't get any closer to her than you are right now, I don't give a rat's ass what you are."

Jan immediately replied, *"Pama dominae pasnatea."*

Zack looked at Rick. Rick repeated, *"Pama dominae pasnatea."*

"You three better tell me what the fuck is going on right now!"

Zack released Jan's arm and took Lina's hand, stroking it. He kissed her cheek. "I'm not going to be able to keep that promise to you after all, babe," he sadly said.

"You're not making any sense!"

He brushed a stray hair from her temple. "You've met the men who are taking you away from me."

"What?"

Zack's gaze didn't drift from her face. "Go ahead, boys. Say it. Let's get it over with."

Apparently still battling their own surprise, Jan spoke first. He recited a long, lyrical passage in a language Lina didn't understand. She suddenly felt as if she'd been mentally broadsided by a baseball bat. A floodgate exploded in her mind. Overwhelming images and visions she couldn't begin to explain flowed through her consciousness. Partway through Jan Alexandr's monologue, Lina



realized she could understand the strange language.

“...and forever, with our lives, we swear to you we will.”

She felt like she was going to fall over. Zack scooted closer—thank goodness for the booth—and slipped his arm around her to steady her.

He looked at Rick. “Your turn, buddy.”

Rick nodded. Now she could understand everything even though she was aware he wasn’t speaking English.

“Forever in our hearts, eternity in our soul, our one and true we shall cherish and love and defend. Everything we have and are, is yours. But this we swear, our love will never waiver, and we will protect you forever and forever, with our lives, we swear to you we will.”

The air rushed out of her chest as she swooned against Zack. The Alexandr brothers started to stand, but Zack’s growling tone stayed them. “No. Leave her alone for a minute.” He tenderly brushed a stray hair away from her forehead as he cuddled her close to him.

She worried the entire restaurant had to be watching, but no one was.

“What’s going on?” she whispered.

Zack pressed a kiss to her temple. “These guys’ll follow us back to your place so we can talk in private.” He looked at them. “You have a few things you need to show her, too.”

The other two men silently nodded.

When Zack was confident she wouldn’t faint, he shifted position with a pained grunt. “Damn human form. I’m telling you, it’s a real bitch sometimes, boys.” He grinned. “I guess this means we’ve got some interesting times ahead of us.”

\* \* \* \*

Jan knew Rick wanted to drag Zack outside and beat the shit out of him until he gave them answers. Lina stayed mostly silent, looking

at Zack, then at them, then studying her plate. Jan desperately wanted to talk to her, to hold her.

Yes, and fuck her.

The prophecy was right all along. Unfortunately, that also meant a bad nasty around the corner. He suspected their problem wasn't Zack, although he obviously wasn't truly a human.

The men spent the wait for the check talking about any and everything except the metaphorical flaming pile of crap in the middle of the table. Apparently still in shock, Lina remained silent.

Jan couldn't hold back his deeper questions. "What are you?"

Zack smiled. "Come on, fire face—" He stopped, then looked at Rick. "No, that's not right, is it? He's fire. You're water."

"Ice," Jan said, his voice sounding strained.

Zack grinned. "Cool. Bet that'll lead to some interesting times."

"You didn't answer my question."

Zack rolled his eyes. "You lizard boys are a little dense, aren't you? Elementals aren't the only ones with prophecies to fulfill. I'm a Watcher. *Her* Watcher. You should know that if you paid attention in Prophecy 101."

Lina regained her voice. "What did you call them? What did you call yourself? What the hell is going on?"

Zack patted her hand. "Shortcake, we'll get the rest caught up at your house. I don't want to fry your brain."

The waitress returned with Jan's credit card. Twenty minutes later, Lina was driving Zack back to her house, while Jan and Rick followed close behind.

She felt too shocked to speak, unable to process what had happened.

"You okay, babe?"

She shook her head. "Do I look like I'm okay?" she whispered.

"No. You look like you just went through the world's worst mind fuck."

"I'm glad you can joke about this! What the fuck is going on?"

“There’s my girl. Welcome back, feisty.” He patted her thigh. “Let’s just say that there’s a lot to explain. I think those two brutes need to give you a demonstration first.” He grinned. “Baby, your life just got pretty wild and wooly.”

Then his expression turned sad. “No more overnights for us, though.” He looked out the window and remained quiet for the rest of the ride.

## Chapter 4

*When together brothers bind firmly to their one so dear  
Evil they shall vanquish that quickly draws near  
Two ages and twenty close shall be the day,  
When elements harnessed force Dark Gods to pay.  
—Old Slavic prophecy, fourth stanza*

Lina didn't speak again on the drive home. She lived in Odessa, in an older home comfortably nestled on five tree-shaded acres on Lake Keystone. The insurance settlement from her parents' death over ten years earlier had more than paid for it. It was quiet and secluded.

The Alexandr brothers helped Zack out of Lina's car. He made it inside on his crutches before collapsing onto her sofa with a pained grunt. Lina stood, staring at the brothers. Her nerves were shot, she felt like she was crawling out of her own skin, and maybe she'd just lost her mind.

Not to mention the two hot men were simultaneously playing hell with her ability to concentrate and unintentionally making her feel fat and ugly just by their very presence in her living room.

"Will one of you please tell me what the hell is going on?"

Zack settled back on the sofa and held out his hand. "Come here, sweetie," he softly said.

She reluctantly went to Zack and cuddled next to him.

"We've got a lot to talk about." He looked at the other two men. "Take a seat, boys. Let's get this over with."

The men sat in chairs on the other side of the coffee table.

"I'll go first," Zack offered. "You boys have a prophecy. You're

not the only one. I'm one of the Watchers. I'm sure the Elders of your *flagyer* told you what I am."

The Alexandr brothers looked shocked.

"Oh yes, I know what that means and what you are," Zack continued. "Your prophecy, our prophecy. How the hell do you think we kept your One safe all these years? Lina wasn't the first. Wouldn't have been the last if she hadn't met you two. The cycle would have continued until two Elemental brothers, twins, and the Goddess were united."

Lina spoke up. "Whoa. They're twins?"

Zack laughed. "Babe, now I *know* your brain is fried. Yes, they're twins. Not identical, obviously. Elemental shifters. Ice and fire." Zack arched an eyebrow. "But you're dual Elementals, aren't you?"

The other two men silently nodded.

"That's what I thought. If Rick is fire, that means he's also air."

Rick nodded.

"Which means if Jan is ice, meaning water, he's also earth."

Jan nodded.

"That is *really* cool," Zack said.

"What are you talking about?" she shrieked.

He pressed a kiss to her temple. "Shh. Just watch." To Jan he said, "I think your demo would be safer indoors. Kitchen's through that doorway. Glasses are in the drainer. Go bring some water in and show her."

Jan silently stood and walked into the kitchen. They heard glasses rattle, the tap running, and he returned with a full glass of water.

Zack reached for it, offered it to Lina. "Normal glass of water, babe. Right?"

She nodded.

"No, put your finger in it. Check it."

She did.

He handed it back to Jan. "I'm guessing you can freeze it?"

Jan held one hand lower than the other. He started pouring the

water into his free hand. Lina sat up to tell him to stop when the water froze even as he poured it. In seconds, he held a flowing chunk of ice in one hand, and an empty glass in the other.

Her eyes widened. “What?” she gasped.

“That was sooo cool, dude,” Zack said with a grin. “You could hire yourself out for birthday parties.” He nodded at Rick. “Can you poof that away without setting fire to the place?”

Rick reached for the large icicle and held it between his hands. In just a few seconds, it had disappeared in a cloud of steam.

Lina’s mouth gaped. Whatever these two men were, besides gorgeous hunks, they were far from ordinary.

She stared at Zack, then Jan, then Rick. The men remained quiet while she tried to digest what she’d just witnessed.

After several long minutes she softly said, “Zack, I don’t feel so good.” He reached for her as the world went black.

\* \* \* \*

She awoke with the three men staring down at her. From the angle of Zack’s face, she suspected her head was in his lap.

“You’re okay, honey,” he said. “You finally fainted. I’m surprised it took this long.”

“What’s going on? Why do I feel like this? Why do I feel like there’s suddenly all this new crap in my brain? Memories of stuff, like I lived it?”

He took a deep breath. “It’s going to take a long time to explain it all, but they are memories. I come from a long line of Watchers. I’ve protected you throughout your lives over the centuries. My job was to keep you safe until you met these two brutes in one life or another. They’ve lived several lives, too, over the eons, although they don’t remember theirs like I do, and like you do now.”

She carefully sat up. “I don’t understand.”

“I know. It’s okay. You don’t need to understand right now. You

just need to trust us and believe.” He glanced at the brothers before speaking again. “They’ve got a prophecy, their *flagyer* does.”

“What does that mean? You said it before.” God, these two men were gorgeous. And right now...

She realized that was concern on their faces. Concern for her.

She shivered.

“It’s the name of their...family unit.” Zack stroked her cheek. “It won’t do any good to tell you what they are. You won’t believe me. They need to show you.” He took her hand and gently nudged her to her feet. “Let’s all go outside. If you boys could help me out here.”

They got Zack outside and comfortably seated on the lanai in a lounge chair. “You’d better sit, honey,” he suggested. “I don’t want you cracking your head open if you faint again from the shock.”

Lina studied him for a long moment. Her friend, the man she had honestly thought she’d be spending the rest of her life with, seemed changed, nearly a stranger. This was the man she thought she knew better than herself. She pulled a chair next to his lounge, and Zack laced his fingers through hers.

“Okay, boys,” he said. “Give us a really big shew.”

Lina couldn’t help but nervously snicker at the familiar imitation. Zack always cracked her up.

Rick and Jan exchanged glances and started unbuttoning their shirts. Lina’s heart fluttered, racing as they shrugged them off, exposing their yummy torsos.

When Zack started humming *bow-chicka-wow-wow* music under his breath, Lina yanked on his hand to make him stop.

*Wow!* They were firm and broad-shouldered, not muscle-bound, but definitely in shape. Jan’s chest was lightly dusted with pale curls, while Rick’s tanned skin set off his fine dark hair. A quick mental image of being helplessly sandwiched between those firm chests set off another flurry of need between her thighs.

She fought back her flush of embarrassment.

“How many forms do you have?” Zack asked.

Lina was surprised to see the other two men redden, as if they were now embarrassed. “Several,” Jan said. “Depends on the circumstances.”

“Do you fly?”

Lina turned, startled. “What? What are you talking about?”

Zack squeezed her hand. “You’ll see. Well?”

Rick nodded. “Yeah. We rarely take that form for obvious reasons.”

“That’s why you bought that huge-ass place, a little privacy.”

“A lot of privacy,” Jan agreed.

“How big?”

“Thirty acres,” Rick said.

Zack rolled his eyes. “No, *duh*. How big do *you* guys get? Can you do the winged form for her here?”

“No,” Rick said. “Too big, and too much risk.”

Lina gave up trying to ask questions and simply stared. Both men were now working on their slacks. She gulped when she realized they had gone commando, and they seemed totally comfortable stripping in front of her and Zack.

*Holy crap!* She’d only been with one guy before, and that guy hadn’t been even a fraction as well-endowed as these two hunks. Zack, she knew from miscellaneous contact and their little bit of teenage fooling around, was generously endowed and had been her benchmark before this.

These two men, however...

*Yum.*

Zack grinned. “Ooooh, baby. You are a lucky, lucky lady.” He sighed. “I don’t suppose either of you boys...”

The Alexandr men shook their heads.

Zack sighed again. “Yeah, I didn’t think so. I’m never that lucky. Okay, do your stuff. Show her what you are so you guys can get busy. We’ve got a prophecy to fulfill, you know. Well, a couple, actually, if you count yours and mine.”



Rick and Jan exchanged a glance. Lina thought something was wrong with her eyes because it looked like the two men blurred, changed, and grew in size. On her lanai, next to her pool, now stood two four-legged...well, dragons, truth be told. Both around seven feet tall. The one standing in the space formerly occupied by Jan Alexandr was covered with iridescent scales that shifted and shimmered color from emerald green to pale sky blue in the dappled sunlight. He had a long, graceful neck and finely shaped head, and his eyes were the same icy blue of the man.

The other dragon's scales were a rich, opalescent reddish orange, changing hue from the color of a deep red sunset to the light, pale orange of a candle flame. His neck was stockier, shorter, capped off with a boxy head bearing Rick's amber eyes.

Lina's breath escaped her in an explosive blast as she cringed against Zack.

"It's okay, babe," he reassured her. "Go on, they won't hurt you." He snickered. "Well, you're going to end up bowlegged after a few days, I bet—"

She turned and slapped him, hard, on the shoulder. "That's not funny!"

"Yeah, it is, baby doll. You're not getting it. You're fated to be together. These are your men."

"What?"

He kissed her hand and squeezed. "Listen to me. These guys are your future. Your mates. The reason they look like they could eat you up is because they want to. In the metaphorical sense of the word, not the literal one. They love you."

She stared at them.

They both nodded.

"They're...dragons."

"Yep."

The two dragons remained silent, watching her.

"Can they talk when they're like this?"

"I don't know. Ask them."

It seemed like the blue dragon's eyes impaled her soul. Lina felt herself stand, as if she wasn't in control of her body. On leaden feet she walked over to him, warily watching him. He lowered his head so she could pet him.

Hands trembling, she cautiously reached out and ran a finger along his scales.

The blue dragon's body vibrated as a low chuffing sound escaped him.

Lina jerked her hand back, but the dragon didn't move.

Zack laughed. "Honey, I think he was purring."

Lina and the blue dragon glared at Zack. The orange dragon looked amused but didn't move or make a sound.

She reached out again, this time laying her palm against his neck. Now she realized while graceful, it was also well muscled. His body felt cool, much as Jan Alexandr's handshake had.

He closed his eyes, his body once again vibrating. This time she didn't jerk away. Instead, she carefully ran her hand down his neck, along his back where a thick ridge of armored scales began.

"You can ride him in more ways than one, sugar," Zack quipped.

"That's enough!" she shot over her shoulder at him. A few more of his one-liners and she was going to strangle him. Or go crazy.

Or lose her mind and scream.

The ridge along the dragon's back tapered into a three-foot tail.

Lina turned to study the other dragon. Conscious thought eluded her. She suspected maybe that was for the best. If she tried to think about it too hard, she might faint again.

A whirlwind of images and foreign memories spun through her mind, other dragons, like these, feelings and thoughts and...

*Oh yeah, baby, desire.* How could she *not* desire these two guys? Well, okay, not like this, but...*day-amn*.

The red dragon dipped his head. When she touched his neck, she felt the heat radiating from him, much as she had from Rick Alexandr.

He also closed his eyes and purred at her touch.

After a few minutes, she stepped away from them, turned and promptly fainted again.

\* \* \* \*

“You’ve got to quit doing that, baby,” Zack snarked. “You’re gonna hurt yourself.”

She was lying on the lounge. This time, Zack was in the chair, his leg propped up on the end of the lounge. Rick and Jan Alexander had whatevered back to human form.

Still naked.

She gulped.

“Are you okay?” Jan asked.

Now enough sense had returned for her to realize they were holding her hands. Jan on her left, Rick on her right. Warm and cool.

“No,” she whispered.

“Lucky for you, Jan realized you were going down and shifted in time to catch you,” Zack said. He motioned for Rick to hand him his crutches. “I’m going inside to lie down on the sofa for a while. I think the three of you need to hash some shit out.” He carefully stood. Then he hobbled into the living room and closed the sliding glass doors behind him.

Lina sat up, but when the world seemed to spin around her, she closed her eyes and grabbed her head. “I don’t understand any of this.”

She sensed Jan walk around the lounge. When she dared open her eyes, both men were kneeling before her, longingly staring up at her. Lovingly.

“We’re meant to be with you,” Rick said. He rested his warm hand on her knee. “We’re yours.”

“My what?”

Jan wryly smiled. “Yours. Your men.”

Just when she thought nothing else could shock her any more than what she'd already experienced and witnessed, they managed to top themselves. She pushed Rick's hand away as a wave of rage washed through her. "You can quit fucking with me anytime," she spat. Her gaze narrowed in anger. "Fuck with the fat chick's head, yeah, I get it now. I don't know what you assholes slipped into my drink or how you got Zack to go along with this crazy scheme—"

She couldn't continue. Jan grabbed her, his hand roughly cupping the back of her head, his lips grinding against hers.

Lina fought him at first, for a moment. Until his tongue traced and breached the seam of her lips and something inside her broke free. She grabbed him, kissing him back, feeling desire and power coursing through her, disabling her rational thought. There was something sexy about how coolly powerful his lips and tongue felt in contrast to how warm she felt.

Vaguely aware of Rick moving to sit on her other side, she eagerly kissed Jan, with both her arms wrapped around him.

Rick pressed his lips to the back of her neck. "We're going to show you how beautiful we think you are, Pavlina," he whispered. Something large and firm and very warm rubbed against her hip. She realized it was his rigid cock.

She shivered, breaking her kiss with Jan as she gasped for breath.

Rick turned her to face him and kissed her, hard. Where his brother was cool, he was hot. Her mouth felt cold against his scorching lips and tongue as he explored her, teasing, tasting. Jan's mouth did something delicious to her earlobe, making her moan.

Rick stood and scooped her into his arms as if she weighed nothing. "Where's your bedroom?" he hoarsely asked.

She pointed through the sliding glass doors leading into the dining room. "Last door on the right, at the end of the hall."

Jan led the way, holding the door open for them. Lina kept her eyes closed and her arms wrapped around Rick's warm neck, her face pressed against his firm shoulder. He smelled vaguely like

sandalwood. The men quickly strode down the hall to her room.

She heard the bedroom door shut behind them. Rick gently placed her on the bed.

Lina dared crack her eyes open. Both men stood looking down at her. Both very erect.

Heart pounding, she nervously licked her lips. "What now?" The squeaky voice escaping her lips didn't sound like her. She suspected she had a damn good idea what they wanted to do, but was she ready to do it?

The men climbed into bed with her, one on each side, and laced their fingers through hers.

"What do you want to do?" Jan asked. He tenderly brushed a strand of hair from her forehead. "I know what we want to do."

"Really?" she gasped, not daring to hope.

Rick laughed. He brought her hand to his mouth and slowly sucked each of her fingers between his lips, his tongue erotically warm against her flesh as he sensuously laved each digit. "Really."

Rational thought tried to break through and take over. Tried to tell her, *Hey, this is a really bad idea.*

She shoved it aside. There were already way too many strange, new thoughts floating around in there. For a little while, at least, she would damn well take the path of least resistance.

Giving herself to these men was a wide-open, well-paved trail compared to the alternatives of making sense of what had happened to her over the past few hours.

Jan rested his hand over her navel. "You're beautiful, but there's just one problem."

Lina frowned, her heart chilling. "Oh, let me guess, this is where you tell me I need to lose weight?"

The brothers looked at each other and laughed. Jan leaned in and kissed her, short-circuiting her anger. "No. I was going to tell you that you need to lose these clothes. They're not letting us see enough of your beautiful body."

She felt her face flush. She was probably beet red by this point.

Jan's fingers carefully worked on her lowest blouse button until it popped free. He nuzzled the base of her throat as Rick kissed her. "We want to make love to you, baby," Jan murmured against her flesh.

She closed her eyes and tried not to hyperventilate at the thought of having both of these hunks. "I'm not...you know...real experienced."

"Even better," Rick softly said. "You're a virgin?"

"No," she squeaked. "Close enough, though."

Jan sat up and lowered his mouth over the small, pale patch of flesh now exposed by her open button. "Mmm. Lucky us." He traced random circles across her flesh as he released the second button, revealing more tantalizing real estate. "We want you all to ourselves."

Her fingers slipped through Jan's hair, weaving tightly there as she hoped he didn't stop the delicious things he was doing with his tongue.

"Shit," Rick muttered. "I didn't bring any rubbers."

"I'm on the Pill. I get migraines." She had a horrible thought. "Unless you guys think you need them."

Jan laughed but didn't lift his head from her belly. Now three buttons had fallen victim to his persistent fingers. "Not because of us, baby. Stuff like that's not a worry for us. If you're on the Pill, that's all we need."

At his words, reality tried to slip past her brain again. *Just met them. Don't know them.* But it felt like she'd known them all her life. Lives. Countless lives. Had she?

Getting laid by two hunks versus contemplating if she'd just had a psychotic break and imagined the whole dragon thing? *Hmm. No-brainer.* She shoved conscious thought back into its cage and locked it. She wanted to go with this, see what happened, and deal with the rest later.

After she'd gotten laid.

A soft moan escaped her as Rick kissed her again, his tongue tasting, teeth nibbling, his mouth hot and moist and damn good. She knew she was drenched between her legs.

Another button acquiesced under Jan's slow, teasing onslaught. Now the bottom of her bra peeked through. "Relax," he softly encouraged. The feel of his cool breath against her skin sent a pleasant wave of gooseflesh racing over her.

"Easy for you to say!"

She moaned again, this time in disappointment as Rick untangled himself from her and climbed out of bed. A moment later, she heard his voice from the other side of the room. "Hey, Jan. I've got an idea."

"What?"

"You should see her bathroom. Huge ass tub."

"Yeah?" He sat up. "Let's get you relaxed, little one."

That made her open her eyes. "Don't call me that!"

He pulled her into a sitting position. "Why not?" Her heart skipped a beat as his face hardened. "You are beautiful. I can't believe we get to spend the rest of our lives with you."

"You could have anyone you want."

"We want *you*," Rick called from the bathroom doorway. She heard water running and realized he'd started filling the huge, deep sunken tub. She rarely used it by herself. Even she felt small in it.

Alone.

She'd thought about having it taken out and renovating the bathroom when she bought the house, but Zack had talked her out of it. Sometimes the two of them took long bubble baths in it together when he stayed over, but that's all the use it'd gotten.

Before she could protest, Jan scooped her up and carried her into the bathroom. *Sheesh, these guys are strong!*

She held on to his neck. When he looked into her eyes, she didn't ever want to look away. This blue-eyed angel wanted her. In the bathroom Rick pressed close, his fingers trailing up her bared skin

where her shirt fell open. She shifted her gaze to him. His amber eyes burned into hers.

Jan carefully set her onto her feet. Rick stepped behind her and nuzzled the back of her neck with his lips while Jan opened another button. Two more and her shirt would be totally open. Rick slipped his hands around her waist. She closed her eyes again.

“No,” Jan said. “I want you to look at me.”

Lina forced her eyes open.

“I want you to see what you do to us, Pavlina.”

Okay, so the way he said her name sounded pretty. Both brothers had the slightest trace of an accent, not really noticeable unless you listened for it.

His eyes never wavered from hers as he worked on the next button. Rick’s hands gently settled over her navel, pulling her against him.

Her knees weakened.

Last button, and it was all she could do to keep her eyes open. Jan’s hands pushed the fabric down her shoulders. Then he released the front hook on her bra. She shivered as he gently pulled the fabric apart.

“You’re beautiful.”

Her nipples hardened as the air brushed them. Jan bent his head to her right breast and wrapped his lips around her nipple, flicking it with his tongue.

Her soft cry of pleasure brought a chuckle from Rick. “She liked that. Do it again.”

Jan moved to her other breast, his cool, moist mouth sending a ball of heat straight to her core as he teased her. She wrapped her fingers in his hair and threw her head back against Rick’s shoulder.

“You like that, baby?” Rick asked.

“Yes!”

“Wait’ll I have my turn. We’re not turning you loose until we know for sure you completely understand you belong to us, and we



belong to you.”

Jan worked his way lower. If it wasn't for Rick's arms around her, she'd collapse. Jan unhooked her belt, then opened her slacks. When he pushed her slacks and panties down, she fully felt the heat from Rick's body wash through her. Then she realized his stiff cock throbbed against her hip.

Jan looked up at her. “You're ours. Do you understand?”

Lina nodded. She was beyond the point of coherent speech and would let them do whatever they wanted to her as long as they didn't stop.

Jan helped her step out of her slacks. Then he pushed her legs apart, exposing her to his gaze. When he slipped his hand between her legs, Lina lost control of her body. Rick held her, obviously not struggling to keep her vertical, not even shifting his weight as he supported her. They were strong!

She gasped as Jan's thick finger parted her folds.

His low, appreciative sigh when he found her wet sent yet another wave of passion through her. Her clit throbbed, but he barely brushed against it as he teased her.

“Our cocks are going to go in...here.” He pushed one finger inside her and slowly pumped.

“Oh!”

His palm pressed against her mound, flattening the short nest of curls between her legs. “I love seeing proof that your hair color is totally natural, babe, but I think we're going to shave you smooth and bare down here. We don't want anything hiding you from us.”

She reached up and behind her and hooked an arm around Rick's neck. Betrayed by her body, she felt her hips rocking against Jan's hand, trying to get traction against her clit.

Rick nipped her earlobe. “I think we're getting through to her.”

“I know we are. She's beautifully wet.” He removed his hand, making her moan. Both men laughed. “Sweetie,” Jan said, “you will get as much of us as you can handle, believe me.”

Rick maneuvered her over to the shower. A moment later, he was leaning against the wall with her securely nestled in his arms, her back against his chest. Jan had rummaged through her cabinets and grabbed a fresh disposable razor from a package under her sink.

He pushed her legs apart again. "Hold very still, sweetheart."

She couldn't help but watch as he quickly applied shaving gel and made fast work of her curls. When he finished, he carefully ran his fingers along her smooth mound, drawing another moan from her. Then he used the handheld showerhead to rinse her, playfully aiming the water at her clit but not long enough to get her off. She whimpered, trying to wiggle into the spray.

Both men laughed. "Not yet," Rick teased. He kissed her as he scooped her up again and they moved from the shower to the tub. Jan and Rick switched positions. Rick knelt in front of her in the water and kissed her, his fingers slipping between her legs.

Jan's cock pressed into her lower back as he cradled her against his chest. She wanted one or the other of them inside her, and soon. When Rick pushed two fingers into her, she bucked her hips against him as Jan reached around and gently tweaked her nipples.

"Yes!"

Rick stilled his hand. "No. I want to feel you come with my cock inside you, baby."

She whimpered.

Her legs rested outside Jan's. When he spread his legs wider, she had no choice but to open herself. Rick withdrew his hand, despite her protests, and caressed her cheek.

"Do you want it, sweetheart?" he softly asked.

She nodded.

"Ask me for it."

She forced her eyes open again. "Please fuck me!"

A sultry smile lit his face. "Those are the words I've been dying to hear." He lined up the thick, rounded head of his cock with her passage. Jan leaned back, pulling her with him, lengthening her body

and giving Rick even better access.

“Gorgeous!” Rick gasped. He pressed forward, slowly, carefully. Lina gasped as he filled and stretched her, his heated, hard shaft claiming her.

When she rocked her hips, trying to take him in faster, he reached down and grabbed her hips. “No, baby. Take it slow.” He leaned in and kissed her again. Every nerve in her body felt on fire, alive.

His slow progress continued as he fully sheathed himself inside her. With her now-bare mound, she could easily feel his body rubbing her.

She moaned again.

His eyes dropped closed. “Oh, fuck, baby. You’re so tight!”

“Don’t take all afternoon,” Jan growled. “I’m dying here.”

She shivered, heat and soothing coolness sandwiching her, the contrast driving her closer to release.

“Don’t rush me,” Rick hoarsely replied. Without withdrawing, he ground his hips against hers, rubbing her clit with his pubic bone. “How’s that feel?”

“Uh-huh!”

Jan laughed. “She likes it.”

“Wrap your arms around me, baby,” Rick ordered.

She did.

He found a motion that drew a sharp gasp of pleasure from her. “You like that?” he asked through clenched teeth.

“Yes!”

He repeated the motion, his body sliding over her clit just enough to push her closer to release. Jan spread his legs wider, opening her further, and that sent her over the edge. She cried out as her climax started, sobbing at the pleasure rolling through her. Her muscles milked Rick’s cock, bringing him along with her.

“Fuck, yes, baby!” Rick slammed into her, his fingers clamped on her hips as he pounded his cock into her depths.

She held on while Jan murmured in her ear and then Rick came

with a final cry. The liquid heat of his seed pumped into her, claiming her, branding her. He fell still with his forehead touching hers as he tried to catch his breath.

Lina cried. Sobbed. The men held her, softly talking to her, reassuring her. Rick slid his hands down her legs, pulled them around his waist, and took her from Jan. He turned and leaned against the edge of the tub, still inside her, holding her.

Jan pressed against her back and kissed her shoulders. He traced the gentle bumps of her vertebrae with his tongue. "Talk to us, sweetheart. Are you okay?"

She nodded but didn't speak.

After fifteen minutes she quieted, her head still nestled against Rick's shoulder. "Why do you want me?" she whispered.

Jan kissed the back of her neck. "Because we love you. We were fated to meet and love you."

"So, you *have* to love me?"

"No," Rick insisted. "We *want* to love you."

Jan stroked her back. His hands slid down her flesh to her hips as he nudged her off his brother and closer to him. She felt a pang of disappointment as the connection was broken with Rick, but Jan's comfortably cool body enveloped her.

He pressed his hand between her shoulders and coaxed her to relax against Rick. Then his hand skimmed down her back, over her rounded bottom, between her legs.

She moaned.

"That's it," he said. "Enjoy it. You'll get as much as you want, anytime you want it, sweetie."

Lina wiggled her hips, and both men laughed.

"I think she's finally loosening up a little," Rick teased.

Jan's cock was as large and thick as his brother's. When he pressed forward, she shivered with pleasure as he impaled her. "You're going to let me feel you come now, aren't you?" he asked her.

She wasn't so sure about that. In fact, the first one had surprised the hell out of her. She'd climaxed with Rick's cock inside her a hell of a lot harder than she ever had with a vibrator. "I want to."

He bottomed out inside her slick channel and held still. "I hope you want to." He reached around her, found her clit and started rubbing it. "God, you feel so fucking hot, baby!"

Rick's hands slipped to her breasts, cupping them, his thumbs rubbing her peaked nipples and adding to the sensations raging through her. "I thought she felt wonderfully cool."

"You would, toaster breath."

"Guys, you're killing the mood." She didn't have time to consider the freakiness of the conversation. She was too busy trying to come again.

"Sorry," the men apologized together.

Jan did a sexy bump and grind against her backside. "Just wait until we get you back in bed and I get to lick that sweet pussy of yours."

His body might have felt cooler than his brother's, but his deep, hoarse voice sounded hot and ready. His talented fingers plucked her clit, teasing it, quickly pulling her toward another release. She braced herself on Rick's thighs, feeling the short, coarse hair slipping under her palms in the water.

Rick lightly pinched her nipples, rolling them. "Don't be bashful, baby. Let's hear you yell that beautiful head off again."

Jan curled his body around her as he played with her clit. "I can't wait to feel your mouth on my cock."

Rick moaned. "Holy Christ, I'm hard again."

Lina closed her eyes and focused on the sensations assaulting her from every direction. The mixed, musky scent of the two hunks. The feel of Rick's fingers on her nipples. The wonderful, filling sensation of Jan's cock inside her.

Jan rested his chin on her shoulder, his lips by her ear. "Or maybe I'll lick your pussy while you're sucking his cock. Would you like

that?”

She whimpered and shifted her hips against him, trying to thrust. The sudden image of being possessed on both ends by these two men made her pleasantly shiver.

“Answer him,” Rick persisted. “Tell us what you’d like.”

“Yes!”

Jan’s fingers teased her swollen clit. “Come on, sweetheart. Give it to me. Don’t torture me like this.”

His playful tone finished her. All the strength left her body as her climax ripped her apart. She cried out and fell against Rick.

“That’s it!” Jan let go of her clit and fucked her with long, deep, powerful strokes. Overwhelmed by the physical and emotional feelings flooding through her, Lina sobbed as Rick held her. She felt Jan’s cock throb as he came, the sensation of his juices flooding her, marking her as his brother had.

Theirs.

She closed her eyes as the world went black.

\* \* \* \*

Lina awoke in bed, both men hovering over her.

“Are you okay?” Jan asked. His smooth brow looked furrowed with worry.

She tried to sit up. The men grabbed her arms, steadying her as she wobbled. “Yeah, I’m okay. What happened?”

Rick caressed her cheek. “You fainted on us again, baby. Are you sure you’re okay?”

“I thought that was just bullshit.”

The men exchanged a frown. Jan spoke. “I thought we’d convinced you we want you.”

She smiled. “No. About really good sex making a girl pass out.”

Rick rolled his eyes and laughed, long and hard. “She got us.”

Jan leaned in and kissed her. “Not just really good. *The* best.

Ever.”

She felt her face grow red again, but this time in a good way. “Really?”

“Really. The best.” His eyes traveled her face. “And we get you all to ourselves for the rest of our lives.”

“How long is that?”

Rick grinned. “A long time.” He leaned in and kissed her.

She looked at him, then at Jan. A niggling buzz-kill thought from reality-land tried to intrude. “I can’t believe I just jumped into bed with you two.”

“It’s the prophecy.”

“What the hell is that? You keep talking about it.” Another thought. “And what the hell is Zack?”

“Let’s handle one thing at a time,” Jan said. “We’ve got a prophecy. Apparently, so does Zack. Part of our prophecy is we find the woman who will join us.”

Her mind reeled. “How many other women have you shared?” Maybe she didn’t want to know that.

“None,” Rick assured her. “We meant it when we said you’re ours, and we’re yours. No one else.”

More phantom memories coursed through her brain, threatening to send her spinning into unconsciousness again. “What did you say to me? Back at the restaurant?”

Jan raised her hand to his lips and kissed it. “The old oath. As soon as you responded to me, we knew you were the one. If you hadn’t responded, it would have meant we were wrong about you.”

She studied the two men for a long moment, their earnest eyes, their...*sigh*...handsome faces.

Their large cocks and talented fingers.

Okay, that was enough reality for a few minutes. “Someone said something about licking me?”

Jan grinned and gently pushed her back to the bed. “I sure did, sweetie.” He dove between her legs and pushed her thighs apart with

his palms, then used his thumbs to gently part her lips and expose the swollen pink nub he sought. "This is what I wanted."

He dipped his head and gently swiped his tongue along her clit.

Lina's eyes rolled back in her head. "Oh, Jesus!" she breathed.

Rick cradled her in his arms. "You like that?" he asked.

"Yeah!"

Rick kissed her forehead. "So, how many guys have you been with before?" he playfully asked.

"One." She squirmed as Jan's tongue probed her core. "Not counting Zack."

Jan's mouth suddenly disappeared. Both men sat up. "What?"

Were they glaring?

"What's wrong?" she gasped.

Rick's eyes darkened. "What do you mean, not counting Zack?"

"I mean, we didn't do *that*." Her pleasant buzz from their passion slipped away as she sensed the men's sudden tension. "We just messed around a little when we were kids."

As one, the men leaped off the bed and raced for the bedroom door.

*Uh-oh.* This couldn't be good.

She scrambled out of bed and snagged her bathrobe from the bedpost as she ran after them. "Wait!"

Zack sat on the couch, his laptop in his lap and headphones on, iPod no doubt cranked loud. He looked up with a smile, then a frown, as the two naked Alexandr brothers stalked across the living room toward him.

He pulled the headphones off. "What's wrong?"

Rick jabbed a finger at him. "What the fuck did you do to her?"

"What?"

"If you're her Watcher, you're supposed to protect her!"

"Have you two lost your freaking minds?"

Lina, still trying to belt her robe, pushed between the two brothers and turned to face them. "I already told you, we didn't...we never had



intercourse, okay? We were teenagers. We fooled around a little.”

Zack cautiously eyed the two men. “Ah. I see. A little jealous, boys?”

Jan glared at him. “Answer us!”

“She just did,” Zack said. “You’ve got no room to take a ’tude with me, asshole. She’s *my* girl, and she’ll *always* be my girl. I’m sharing her with you, not the other way around.”

Lina turned, shocked. “What? You’re gay!”

“Yeah, well, sort of.” He moved his laptop and pulled her down to the couch. “You don’t get rid of me just because Frick and Frack here have staked a claim to you.”

He smiled, but it looked sad. “I still love you. I’m always going to love you. I just don’t get a happy-ever-after this time with you like they will.”

Zack glared at the brothers. “Deal with it. I’ve loved her for countless centuries. You don’t know shit about her. You’re going to make me your new best goddamned friend when I’m the only one with the ability to talk her off the ledge as her powers kick in this time around.”

Zack’s words and angry tone shocked Lina into silence. He stroked her cheek. “The truth is, I’m not exactly gay. The reason I could promise you we’d get married when we turned thirty-five is that the prophecy says you’d find these guys before then, if at all. We’ve always gotten married.”

“You’re talking reincarnation?”

“You’re starting to catch on, kiddo.”

If she searched the new batch of memories in her mind, she could see it, her past lives with him.

Happy lives.

“What about your mom?”

“What about her? We’re an old line. Older than these guys. If the prophecy isn’t fulfilled in one life, we keep doing it all over again until it happens. Looks like it’s happened.”

She frowned. "You let me sleep with Bill Chattham back in college. You encouraged me to go out with him!"

Zack smirked. "Yeah, well, it didn't seem fair to deny you that. I knew it wouldn't last with him, thought at least maybe it'd make me look better in the long run."

She shoved him, hard. "You played me?"

He caught her hands. "No! Never. It was fucking murder waiting for you to call me that night so I knew you were okay, fighting the urge to kill the bastard. Listening to you talk about him."

Jan looked like he relaxed a little. "He's bi."

"Give that man a prize. Yes. The Watcher doesn't... Let's not dick around. The Watcher can't fuck the Goddess until she's thirty-five, dig? After that, it's obvious the prophecy's not happening in that lifetime, and he claims her. My lucky streak finally ran out."

Deep sadness filled her heart as more old memories bubbled to the surface. They'd had...

"Children," she whispered, tears slipping down her face.

Zack smiled and gently brushed her cheeks dry with his thumbs. "Yeah, sugar. Nearly every time. But the Watcher can only have eyes for his Goddess, so I guess I'll need to take up a hobby now."

"You've been out before. With guys."

"You went out with Bill Chattham. Did it mean anything to you?"

She shook her head.

"Same here, sugar. Not when it wasn't with the one I loved."

She sobbed and fell into his arms. He held her, trying to soothe her.

Rick angrily stepped forward to pull her away from Zack, but Jan grabbed his arm and shook his head. He forcibly spun Rick around and pushed him down the hall toward the bedroom. Jan softly closed the bedroom door behind them.

Rick turned on him. "Why are we letting her cry on his shoulder?" he growled. "Why are we even letting him touch her?"

Jan sat on the bed. "How would you feel if the woman you've

loved literally forever walked off into the arms of two other guys who she just met, and you knew you'd be spending the rest of your life watching her love them and not you? If you were the one who handed her over? Personally, I think he's taking this rather well. I can't say I'd be as magnanimous as he's being. He's right. He's sharing her with us, not the other way around."

Rick closed his eyes. "Shit." He sat next to Jan.

"Yeah. I think the least we can do is give him some time alone with her."

"Yeah." Rick was quiet for several minutes. "I never really believed the reincarnation stuff before. He said we lived before, but we don't remember our past lives. Why do they?"

Jan shrugged. "I don't know. He said she didn't before all of this. Maybe we should ask him at a more appropriate time. Like when we're not standing there naked and trying to boink the woman he loves."

"Yeah. True."

## Chapter 5

*Betrayal deep, wounds slow to heal  
Trust and devotion the Dark Gods will steal.  
Bonds forged with love shall light the dawn  
and when one soul falls, all shall go on.  
—Old Slavic prophecy, fifth stanza*

Thirty minutes later, the men quietly exited the bedroom. They couldn't see the couch from the hallway. Walking out the back door, they made their way onto the lanai and dressed.

They didn't want to intrude.

They waited another twenty minutes. When they walked into the kitchen, Zack softly called to them. From the kitchen doorway they saw Lina cradled in his lap.

Neither man said anything about Zack's red, puffy eyes. "She's asleep," he whispered. "I think we've hit critical meltdown for a little while."

Rick stepped forward. "We're sorry—"

"I don't need your pity and bullshit apologies, dude," Zack said, cutting him off. "I knew the gig when I signed on." He stared down into her sleeping face. "I just hoped we'd have some more time." He sighed. "All these years. You know what's funny? Some things don't change. She's always terrified of spiders. She hates getting up early in the morning." He stroked her cheek. "She's always beautiful."

The men retook their seats. "Thank you," Jan said.

"For what?"

"For taking care of her."

Zack's eyes never left her face. "She always dies first. I've never lived more than a day or so, if I'm lucky. Our last life, I was lying there in bed with her after she passed and just praying for it to happen quick. I heard one of our sons say I was dying of a broken heart. He was sort of right. She had cervical cancer. She was only fifty-eight. I felt myself dying with her the whole six months from when we received the diagnosis until she went."

"You never died first?" Rick asked.

"No. I'm tied to the Goddess." He sighed again. "Maybe this time Fate will be kind and take me first."

The men quietly sat for a few minutes. Jan had a thought. "What happens if you die first?"

"I already said—"

"Listen to me. If you die, will she die?"

He shrugged. "I don't know. I never thought about it before."

"Do we *really* need to think about this today?" Rick asked.

"No," Jan said. "I guess not." He was quiet for a moment. "Does she have any other family?"

Zack sadly shook his head. "Nope. Just me." He stroked her hair. "Her mom and dad were killed in a car wreck our freshman year of college. Hit-and-run accident one night. They never caught the other driver."

She was still asleep nearly an hour later. "Instead of us staring at each other," Zack softly snarked, "why don't you two run to the store and pick up something for dinner? There's a Publix just down the road. She's got a gas grill. Get some steaks. She likes hers rare. Get salad fixings, make sure to get Portobello mushrooms, grape tomatoes, and carrots."

He glanced at her sleeping face. "She loves those on a salad. And pick her up a six-pack of Bud Light Lime. She's going to need something to take the edge off. If we give her wine tonight on top of everything else, it'll knock her out."

The brothers quietly filed out.

\* \* \* \*

The phone rang a little after they'd left. Carefully stretching, Zack was able to reach it. It was Edgar.

"I'm getting ready to leave the office. Does Lina need me to bring her anything, files or something? And uh, how was lunch?"

"Oh, it was fine." Zack laced his fingers through Lina's and fought the urge to lean over and steal a kiss. She wasn't his anymore. Not like that. Never again.

Edgar sounded more strained than usual. "Is Lina there?"

"She's taking a nap. Had a little too much to eat. Full-tummy coma. You know how she gets."

"Oh."

"When are you leaving?" Zack asked.

"What?"

"Key West. You and Bella are going to Key West, aren't you?"

"Oh, yeah. In a bit."

"Well, I'll tell her you called. Do you need her to call you back?"

"No. Tell her I'll see her Monday." Edgar hung up and looked down the deserted road. From the shady place he'd parked, he could see her driveway, had watched the Alexandr brothers drive off a few minutes earlier.

Had followed them back to her house from the Columbia hours before and waited.

*How to handle this?* He didn't want to risk fucking things up. Perhaps he should wait until they were together again. Better to do that than move too soon. His entire life was spent getting to this point. It would be foolish not to prepare.

He smiled as he started his car and drove off.

\* \* \* \*

Lina awoke a little after Zack hung up with Edgar. She felt disoriented and tried to sit up, but Zack kept his palm on her tummy. “Stay there, sweetie. You don’t need to get up yet.”

“Where are they?” Part of her was afraid what his answer would be, that it had all been a dream.

“Publix. They’ll be back shortly.”

Her eyes widened, then filled with tears as she laughed until she cried.

Zack smiled and brushed the hair back from her face. “You’re feeling a little whacked-out right now, aren’t you?”

She sniffled. “Yeah.” Whacked-out didn’t begin to describe it. Surreal with a pinch of psychotic, perhaps that came close. Apparently her mind had processed some of the afternoon’s experiences while she was unconscious.

“They are coming back, sweetie. I promise.”

“I love you,” she whispered.

He smiled. “I know, babe. I love you, too. I always will.”

“It doesn’t seem fair.”

He shrugged. “Life’s not fair. Destiny sucks. That’s the breaks. Don’t feel guilty because you’ve got two hunks panting after you.”

“Three.”

He arched an eyebrow at her. “Really? You think I’m hunky?”

“I always have.”

“I’m flattered.” He kissed her hand. “You know I’m always going to be here for you, right? You don’t get rid of me that easy.” He glanced at the time. “Go get some clothes on. They’ll be back soon. We can talk over dinner.”

She grabbed a quick shower and had changed into shorts and a T-shirt by the time the men returned. She was standing in the kitchen and offered up a nervous smile when they walked in, loaded with groceries. The men immediately put down the bags and surrounded her.

“Are you all right?” Jan asked as he hugged her from behind.

“Yeah. I’m okay. I guess I needed a nap. A little too much to process at once.”

Rick pressed in close and kissed her. “It’s okay. We understand.”

“It’s just that this doesn’t seem real.”

“No arguments there,” Jan said. “We can’t believe how lucky we are.”

\* \* \* \*

Dinner was good. Lina eventually loosened up with a beer in her. Jan and Rick grilled the steaks while she prepared the side dishes. Her earlier encounter with the brothers almost seemed like a dream.

Zack hobbled into the kitchen on his crutches and rested his chin on her shoulder. “They are cute.”

She stared out the kitchen window to the lanai, where Jan and Rick were tending the steaks. “Yeah.” She didn’t know what else to say. “When does this weird whacked-out dream come to an end?” she finally asked.

“It’s just starting, sweetie.” He poured a glass of water and washed down a couple of Tylenol.

“If you’re...whatever you are, how come you got hurt?”

“I’m still mostly human. I have a feeling with the three of you getting your freak on, though, things will be changing.”

“What are you supposed to do now that I’m with them?”

“I’m still your Watcher. Shit’s going to happen. You’ll start taking on a lot of their powers, coming into your own powers. My job is to protect you and help you not wipe out the world in the process.”

She shivered. “You really think I’d be dangerous?” she nervously asked.

“Babe, seriously? I’ve seen you PMSing. They could have sent you over to Iraq, taken away your Starbucks and chocolate, and the war would have been over in a week. I *sooo* don’t want to be on your bad side once you’re juiced up on dragon juju.”



After dinner they gathered in the living room. Jan and Rick nervously exchanged a glance. As always, Zack's snark came to the rescue. "I'm assuming you boys are spending the night?"

"If it's okay with Lina," Jan said.

Lina had settled at Zack's side on the couch. "Tell me about the prophecies."

Zack spoke. "Well, these two were predicted to meet you. They're opposing Elementals, primarily. You unite their powers, balance them, make them even more powerful. Which is a good thing because there's really bad shit coming down the pipe."

"What?"

Zack shrugged. "Don't know. That's the problem." He looked at Jan. "I'm assuming you guys don't know either?"

Jan shook his head. "No. Our prophecy said two hundred and twenty years. We're six years over that already."

"No shit? I would have said you weren't a day over one-eighty."

"Zack, please!" Lina said.

"Sorry babe." He squeezed her hand and prompted her to stand. It was already seven-thirty. "I suggest you three go to bed and have some fun."

"What about you?"

He laughed. "What about me? I'm going to sit here and watch *House* reruns, work on my next blog post, and chill out before I hit the hay."

She didn't respond. Normally he would sleep in her bed with her. She'd never bought a guest bed. Never had reason for one because...

Zack always slept with her, or she slept with him.

He forced a smile he knew wasn't fooling her. "I'm okay, sweetie. I've got pillows and a blanket. I'll be fine out here tonight." He stroked her cheek. "This is how it's supposed to be," he reassured her. "Come give me my sugar, then go. I'll see you in the morning."

She leaned in and kissed him on the cheek. She fought the sad pang in her heart as she caressed his face and he gently nuzzled her

hand before shooving her out of the living room.

With her initial meltdown out of the way, Lina wanted to start sorting things out. She sat, dressed, in the middle of her bed and stared at the brothers.

“Can we back up a few steps?” she asked.

The men nodded and sat on the end of the bed, facing her.

“Tell me about the prophecy.”

Rick and Jan exchanged a glance. Jan recited the prophecy for her.

“What does it mean?”

The men shrugged. “We don’t know,” Rick said. “To be honest, a week ago we thought it was total bullshit.”

“Obviously Zack never thought it was bullshit,” she quietly said.

Both men reddened. “Yeah,” Jan softly agreed. “Obviously.”

Part of her felt guilty that the man she’d spent her life—lives—loving was sitting out in the living room while she was in here with two men who’d somehow completely stolen her heart in a matter of hours.

Part of her wanted to finish what they’d started earlier.

And part of her wished she’d never gone into work that morning. Not if it meant hurting Zack.

“Do I start doing *that* now?”

“What?” Rick asked.

“Shifting.”

“We don’t know,” Jan said. “We don’t know what your latent powers are, how they will be mixed with ours, any of that.”

“Do I have to quit my job?”

The men frowned. “No. Why would you have to?” Rick asked.

“I didn’t know if you’d suddenly tell me I had to stay home or something.” She set her jaw. “And I’m telling you right now, I won’t quit being friends with Zack.”

“I doubt he’d let you anyway,” Jan said.

“You two can’t go getting all territorial over him either.”

Rick reddened again. “We won’t. We’re sorry about earlier.”

She lay on her back and stared at the ceiling. "What do we do now?"

"Do you mean literally or figuratively?" Rick teased.

"Where do we go from here?"

The men stretched out next to her and held her hands. "Wherever you want," Jan assured her. "You tell us. You can move in with us, we can move in with you, we could build you the house of your dreams, whatever you want. Anything you want."

"Can we finish what we started earlier?" It was either that or think. She didn't want to think. Thinking hurt, because it meant thinking about Zack and how he had to be hurting.

Rick grinned. "We thought you'd never ask."

Jan slid her shorts and panties down her hips while Rick parted her from her T-shirt. Jan settled between her legs again. "Okay, I think I was about...here," he said, then circled her clit with his tongue.

"Mmm hmm!"

Rick kissed her while Jan slowly flicked her nub back into its former swollen state. She wiggled her hips, encouraging Jan to go further. He teased her with two fingers. "Like that?"

"Yes!"

Slick muscles grabbed at him as he stroked his fingers inside her. "You're so wet, baby."

Rick's moist, hot mouth closed over one breast. He gently bit at her nipple, drawing more hungry cries from her. It was easy for Lina to shove conscious thought aside when these two men melted her body like this. Before long, she was rocking her hips against Jan's hand and mouth.

He spread her legs wider and lifted his head to look up her body. Positively gorgeous, with her eyes closed, head thrown back, lower lip clamped under her teeth, her body flushed with passion. When he withdrew his hand, a disappointed moan escaped her lips.

Jan licked her sweet taste off his fingers. "Don't worry, it's not

over yet.” He settled over her mound again, his hands wrapped around her thighs, his tongue buried deep in her sex. He was dying to fuck her again, but for now he wanted to let her lie back and enjoy the pleasure without having to lift a finger.

Rick released her breast with a wet pop. “We’re going to make you come hard, sweetheart.” He latched on to her other nipple and gave it a similar treatment.

Lina whimpered and fisted her hand in Rick’s hair. She felt her climax approaching and shivered between the contrasting heat and coolness of the brothers’ bodies pressed against hers, even through their clothes. A ball of hot electricity shot from her clit all the way up her spine, engulfing her body. Her back arched as Jan held on and continued lavng and sucking her clit, refusing to let go.

Rick’s mouth over hers muffled her cries. She devoured him, her tongue dueling with his as Jan relentlessly kept her climaxing.

\* \* \* \*

On the TV, Dr. House was insulting one of the doctors on his team at a fairly loud volume. Zack couldn’t hear it, however, because of Aerosmith blasting in his ears at a deafness-inducing level. He focused on his laptop, trying to work on his next blog entry.

Trying being the operative word.

Fortunately he’d been able to keep working from home, his web design and consulting business able to operate without him in the office. In another few days he could go home.

A blessing and a curse.

Home alone, to a bed he knew he’d no longer share with her. While she could curl up here with the brothers in a bed he’d never share with her again either.

He tried to ignore the painful blossom in his heart. Jan’s earlier question, what would happen if he died first, was one he tried not to revisit. He didn’t know. If he thought he could off himself and she’d

safely go on, he'd do it in a heartbeat. Very tempting, beyond belief.

Except he knew it would hurt her to lose him.

He closed his eyes against the prickle of tears. He shouldn't complain. All those years and lives they had together, he'd never forget them. He always knew this day would come.

Forcing his eyes back to the laptop, he reread the same three paragraphs he'd been focused on for the past thirty minutes. Nothing had changed there. At first he didn't look up when he felt the brush of air against his cheek. Then he realized it was warm, not cool. Like the front door had been opened.

He looked up into the barrel of the gun in Edgar's hand.

Edgar grinned, that sight more than the gun chilling Zack's soul.

Edgar placed a finger to his lips. Zack slowly, carefully reached up and slid his headphones off. "Hi, Ed. What's up?"

"Where is she? Has she mated with them yet?"

Zack's brain whirled. Well, no wonder they'd hated each other all these years. "What's going on?"

"Don't be stupid, Watcher, and I'll let you live. You and I both know you've got no loyalty to the Elementals. It's her you need."

Zack held still. "What are you talking about?"

Edgar pressed the muzzle of the gun against Zack's forehead. "I have to take them out after she's mated with them but before her own powers take over. Their powers will pass to her. Then I can claim her and absorb their powers from her. And then you can have her. I won't kill her, I promise. All I want is the Elementals' powers. After I mate with her and take their powers, I'm done with her."

This was new information. For the most fleeting of seconds, Zack was tempted to let Edgar go in there and blow the brothers away. Except that he knew it would rip Lina apart emotionally. She loved them. She was fated to love them, not him.

And there was no fucking way he'd let this slimeball's dick anywhere near his Goddess.

He had to buy time. "That's a tempting offer." Zack breathed a

slight sigh as the pressure of the muzzle against his flesh relented. "Talk to me, Ed. Tell me more. I'm listening."

Edgar grinned again, apparently falling for it. "I've been tracking the two of you for centuries. I had a feeling this life would be it. That's why I moved in and stayed close this time around. I wanted to make sure I was there."

A horrible thought struck Zack. "You killed her parents, didn't you?"

He shrugged. "I had to. Nothing personal. Needed to make sure she was glued to your side, didn't I? Makes her easier to find."

Zack hoped he hid his ever-growing anger from Edgar. It had nearly killed her losing them both. Lina had sunk into a deep depression for weeks, nearly dropped out of school. Zack had moved her in with him to take care of her while she'd recovered.

"Look," Edgar continued, wrongly assuming Zack was on board with his plan, "you can have her. I just need the one time with her to get the powers. Then she's all yours."

"You won't hurt her?"

"Of course not!" Edgar looked shocked that Zack could even think such a thing. "I really like her, seriously. I see why you're in love with her. She's a little chunky for my tastes, but I can close my eyes and think of Hooters to get the job done."

Zack swallowed his rage. "What are you? Why are you doing this?"

"It's nothing personal, buddy. It's an old family grudge, you might say. Goddamn Baba Yaga and her fucking meddling anyway. The dragon Elementals were given the powers taken away from my family line when one of my ancestors pissed her off."

"You're a dragon shifter?" How had that escaped his notice?

"Fuck no. I'm a cockatrice."

"Killer halitosis, huh?" He held his breath.

Edgar grinned. "Yeah, I wish. That's a myth."

Okay, this was definitely left field. "I thought you guys didn't

exist.”

Edgar snorted, then lowered his voice. “Yeah, neither do dragons or Goddesses or Watchers or reincarnation. Or shape-shifters or...shall I continue?”

“Right. Gotcha.” He studied Edgar, trying to buy time. “How can I be sure you won’t hurt her?”

“She has to stay alive or I’d lose my powers. State of Florida doesn’t recognize supernatural power matings as legitimate weddings, buddy. She’s all yours. Live long and prosper.”

Zack had no way of warning the three of them. With the TV volume turned up loud, they would no doubt be too distracted to hear anything. And he wasn’t exactly in a position to fight.

“Don’t kill them in front of her. It’ll kill her. Literally.”

Edgar frowned. “Really? No shit?”

“Would I lie about something like that?” *Fuck yes, I would.* Maybe it would buy him an extra few minutes and give the boys a chance to escape.

Edgar finally lowered the gun. “No, you wouldn’t. Your entire mission is to protect the Goddess. Damn it. That changes things.” He turned, pacing. Zack quickly moved his laptop and iPod to the coffee table, freeing himself. “Any ideas?” Edgar asked.

“Yeah. I’ll pretend like I’ve fallen. You can go hustle the boys outside.” Maybe they could shift and take Edgar if they had some fighting room. “You can’t do it in the house, seriously. She can’t be close enough to hear them die.”

“You’re right. I didn’t think about that. Good plan.”

*What a fucking moron.* Zack stood and hobbled across the living room while Edgar ducked into the kitchen. They couldn’t see the couch from the bedroom doorway. Zack needed a line of sight. Hopefully the brothers could pick up his thoughts.

He carefully sat on the floor, then picked up his crutches and dropped them on the tile. “Motherfucking son of a bitch!”

\* \* \* \*

Lina sat up, startled. “What was that?”

Rick groaned. He’d been ready to shuck his pants again and fuck her. She pushed him off her and grabbed her robe before racing out the bedroom door. Zack lay on the living room floor. “Oh, Zack! Are you okay?”

“Not really.”

Zack looked up and saw the brothers, still dressed, crowded in the bedroom doorway. He mentally screamed at them. “*Run, right now! Out the back door!*”

Jan frowned, but Rick looked clueless. Zack tried again.

“*Edgar’s here, and he’s whacked out, and he has a gun. He wants to kill the two of you. Run! Out the back door, now! Go shift! I don’t have time to explain, but he’s one of us!*”

Jan’s eyes widened as he clearly heard Zack that time. He grabbed Rick’s arm and pulled him toward the back door.

Lina was trying to help him sit up, fussing over him. He sensed Edgar had been too stupid to go outside, and was instead circling around from behind them to sneak down the hallway. Zack knew what would probably happen, but he leaned in close when he hooked his arm around Lina’s neck.

“Babe,” he whispered. “Go, *right* now, and lock yourself in the guest bath.” He pressed his cell into her hand. “No matter what you hear, do *not* come out until me or one of the brothers comes for you. If Edgar knocks, call 911. Never forget how much I love you.”

He pressed a kiss to her cheek.

“What?”

“Edgar’s got a gun, and he’s gone off the deep end. I don’t have time to explain. Go!” He shoved her toward the other side of the living room.

She ran.

Edgar started for the hallway. Zack rolled over, grabbed one of his



crutches, and swung it at Edgar's legs.

Edgar turned and fired.

## Chapter 6

*Victory comes with no small cost,  
and p'haps in the end all shall be lost.  
When love forges strength, a bond so vast,  
To Baba Yaga their fates are cast.  
—Old Slavic prophecy, sixth stanza*

Jan heard the shot but didn't have time to contemplate it. All he knew was he could still feel Lina in his soul, so she was okay. They ran toward the lake in the deepening gloom. Jan ripped his clothes off, already engaging the shift into his largest form.

"What the fuck's going on?" Rick asked, also quickly stripping.

"No time," Jan silently replied. "*But I think Lina just lost her Watcher.*"

"*Fuck!*" Rick started shifting. By the time Edgar raced out the back door, he was facing two twelve-foot-tall winged dragons.

Edgar pulled up short. "Shit! I should have known that was too fucking easy." He fired, but Jan deflected the bullet with an ice ball made of water he'd drawn from the lake. He could hold Edgar off all night from this vantage. Or at least until Edgar ran out of ammo.

Rick howled with rage and unleashed a blast of fire. Edgar dropped the gun and threw up his arm. Jan expected to see charbroiled Edgar, but instead an eight-foot cockatrice stood there, shaking off the sooty remains of his clothes.

"You shouldn't have done that, buddy," Edgar squawked. He launched himself at Rick, but Jan threw another barrage of ice balls at him.

\* \* \* \*

Lina screamed when she heard the shot. Then there was nothing but the sound of the TV. Despite what Zack told her, she cracked the bathroom door open. She heard sounds of a fight outside in the backyard.

Zack lay on the tile floor, in a puddle of blood.

“No!” She ran across the room and knelt beside him, cradled his head in her lap. He opened his eyes and smiled at her, put his hand over hers when she tried to dial 911.

“No, babe,” he croaked. “Won’t do no good anyway. He gut-shot me. I can’t feel my legs.”

Lina sobbed. “Zack, shut up. We’ll get an ambulance.”

“No.” He wouldn’t let go of her hand. “Just sit here with me. Tell me you love me. And then you can let me go.”

“Don’t be stupid. You’re going to be fine.”

“No, I won’t. Time to let me go first.” He coughed, then groaned.

“I love you, Zack. I love you so much.”

He kissed her hand. “I love you, too.”

“I won’t let you go. You can’t leave me. I love you.”

“The boys will hopefully kick Edgar’s ass. He told me when he snuck in that his plan was to kill them, fuck you to claim their powers, then give you to me. Apparently I had a damn good reason to hate him all these years.”

“You’re *not* dying on me!”

Zack ignored her protests, wanting her to know the full story. “I stalled him when he came in and pulled the gun on me. I had to come up with a way to get the boys outside and get Edgar away from you. Give them a running head start.”

More crashes and angry bellows from outside. It looked like a tree had caught fire.

“Lina, babe, listen to me.” His voice sounded weak. “It’s okay.

It's time. I guess this was the prophecy after all, waiting for Edgar to try to get his revenge. On the off chance he wins the fight, don't let him fuck you. You'll get the boys' powers if they die, and if Edgar fucks you before you get strong, he'll claim your powers. Apparently he's thought this out pretty well over the years."

"You're not dying!" she screamed.

He closed his eyes. "Give me some sugar, sweetie. Then you need to run and go hide until the dust clears. Promise?" He tugged on her hand. She leaned over and kissed him on the mouth, lovingly, tracing his lips with her tongue.

He smiled as she sat up. "That's what I'm talking about. Love you, babe. Now go." He released her hand after giving it a final squeeze.

She carefully got up and gently lowered his head to the floor. "I love you too, Zack. Always." Rage blossomed inside her. Revenge. She *would* have her revenge.

She ran for the back door.

\* \* \* \*

Even though the cockatrice was smaller than the two of them, it worked to his advantage. Edgar twisted and turned, dodging the dragons' attacks, slinging rocks and trees at them and trying to get the upper hand.

Finally, enraged, Edgar headed for the house again. He sensed the dragons wouldn't dare unleash around their precious Goddess. It would cause them to be cautious, give him the advantage.

He tore through the pool cage screen and pulled up short when Lina ran out the back door. She looked...

Pissed.

*Really* pissed.

He started to shift back to grab her when she snagged the aluminum pool brush from its holder. With an enraged howl, Lina

lunged at him, handle first.

When the handle pierced through his abdomen, he'd already half shifted. Unable to complete a shift in either direction, he screamed as he grabbed the handle and tried to wrench it from her grip.

Using her momentum, she forced him into the pool. From somewhere deep inside her, rage and supernatural power coursed through her veins like liquid electricity. She followed him into the pool, jamming the pool brush through the concrete at the bottom.

Edgar thrashed, fought. Lina held her breath and maintained her grip on the pool brush, beyond thought and reason. She registered the splash in the water next to her and watched Jan swim over to her. He laid his hands over hers, then forced her to let go of the brush while he maintained his grip. Edgar's keening wails sounded loud even underwater.

Gasping for air, Lina broke the surface. She was going to duck back under when Rick grabbed her arm and hauled her out of the pool. She fought him, snarling until he kissed her. Whatever rage she'd been caught in snapped. She collapsed into his arms.

"Zack!" she gasped.

Rick helped her back into the house. She dropped to her knees next to Zack, checking for a pulse.

Nothing.

"No!"

On the lanai, Jan climbed out of the pool, then quickly turned and muttered a low incantation. After a moment, the pool turned into a huge block of ice. He shook the water off his body and raced inside to join them.

"How is he?"

Rick shook his head.

Lina screamed, over and over, sobbing for Zack. Rick closed his eyes, but Jan had other ideas. "You carry him. I'll take her." He pulled Lina into his arms despite her thrashing against him as she tried to stay with Zack.

“What?”

“Think about the prophecy. We’re not done yet, brother.”

Rick’s eyes widened, but he grabbed Zack, grunting a little under the man’s bulk.

The brothers raced outside. Rick clutched Zack with one arm, Jan held Lina with one, and the two shifters joined hands.

“You think she’s still pissed off at me for setting fire to her fence that time?” Rick snarked.

“Yeah,” Jan said. “Let’s hope she doesn’t hold it against Zack.”

The men shifted.

Lina was vaguely aware of the world melting around them. Her stomach lurched. The smell of burning cypress trees was replaced by cool, deep pine forest. She opened her eyes and found they were standing in a forest clearing outside a cottage. Here it wasn’t almost night, it was mid-afternoon. The brothers returned to human form.

An old crone standing in the front yard, inside the picket fence, walked to the gate to greet them. “Wondered how long it’d take you to get here. Where’s the Dark One?” The crone’s black eyes looked cold, calculating. She spoke with some sort of old, rolling accent. After a moment, Lina realized the crone wasn’t even speaking English, but somehow, she could understand her words.

“He’s frozen in her pool,” Jan said. “Not sure how you want to deal with him.”

“I shall handle it.” The crone studied all of them.

Lina felt herself slipping toward emotional shock as she stared at her friend’s body still cradled in Rick’s arms. *Zack*. How would she ever live without Zack? She shivered in her wet bathrobe as a breeze blew through the clearing.

“Do you two love her?” the crone asked.

The brothers nodded.

“Enough to let her go?”

The men hesitated, but looked at each other, then Lina.

Rick spoke. “Whatever will make her happy. We’re willing to

sacrifice our own lives if necessary, Baba.”

The crone looked at Jan. He nodded. “Yeah. Whatever it takes. We’ll trade ourselves for his life.”

Lina broke her silence. “What are you talking about?”

“Your men are willing to release all claims to you to make you happy. To give you back your Watcher. To trade their lives for your Watcher. What are you willing to relinquish?”

“What?” Maybe the events of the past few minutes had finished frying her brain. “What are you talking about?”

“I can save your Watcher. What are you willing to sacrifice in return?”

Hope bloomed. “Save him?”

“Think fast, child. Time draws short.”

“Anything.”

“Your life? You’d stay behind here, with me?”

Lina nodded. “Save him! Please!”

“You would give up all, including these two men, and this other man you love, all of them, for eternity?”

Lina cried but nodded as she stroked Zack’s forehead. “Please. Just let them go on and be happy. Please.”

“Do you know who I am, child?”

Lina shook her head.

“I’m Baba Yaga. But of course that means little to you right now. I am known as a cruel taskmaster. Fickle, evil, harsh. You sure you care to sign away your future to a bitch like me?”

“Can I say good-bye to him? To them?”

“Of course.”

Lina kissed Zack one more time, then Rick and Jan. “Okay,” she whispered.

Baba Yaga stepped through the gate. “Put him down,” she ordered Rick. Now Lina realized it wasn’t a picket fence, but one made of bleached bones periodically topped by skulls. Supernatural flames danced and flickered inside the skulls.

Rick gently laid Zack on the ground. The crone straddled Zack's body and closed her eyes, muttered low under her breath. Then Zack jerked, his eyes popping open. He gasped for breath.

Lina cried out and started forward when hands grabbed her arms. Two robed, hooded men—she assumed they were men—had appeared and held her back, led her through the gate inside the fence.

After a moment, Baba Yaga climbed to her feet. Zack lay there, staring up at them.

"What happened? Am I dead? That fucking asshole shot me. He's a cockatrice."

Lina sobbed with relief, falling to her knees. The robed men stood nearby but let her go. "Thank you!" Lina cried. "You saved him. Thank you!"

Jan and Rick helped him stand. "No, you're not dead," Jan softly said.

Zack looked around, confused. "Are we where I think we are?"

"Yeah," Rick said.

Zack looked at the crone. "That would make you..."

Baba Yaga nodded. "Yes. Been a long time since last we met, Zachary."

Zack closed his eyes and swore. He looked at Lina, his tears falling. "Sweetie, no. I can't let you do this."

"It is done," Baba Yaga said. "It was her wish."

"She didn't understand!"

"Yes, I did understand. I'd rather the three of you live and be happy than me be alive with you dead. I can't live without you, Zack."

Baba Yaga smiled. "Such powerful, true, pure love for you. She truly is the Goddess. I knew you'd be a good Watcher for her. I've enjoyed observing you take care of her all these ages."

"Please!" Zack begged. "Let me take her place. I'll stay, fulfill her debt."

"Hmm." Baba Yaga shifted from crone to a beautiful middle-aged



woman. But her eyes still looked hard and cold. "Tempting." She circled Zack, touched a finger to his cast. It split with a ripping sound and fell away. "You no longer need that either, Watcher."

She completed her circle of him. "You would be nice in my bed every night." She grinned. "Although I'm sure you wouldn't enjoy it."

Zack smirked. "And you'd make sure of that, I bet."

"Of course."

Baba Yaga considered them for a long moment, then walked through the gate. She turned to Lina and transformed back into the crone. "All right. I tell you what I'll do. This prophecy is nearly complete. There are others for these two to fulfill. They must go on. However, your Watcher, he would be a fair trade."

She pointed at the cottage. "You walk through that door, and I guarantee these three men will go on to find happiness. True happiness for their lives. But if you walk through that door, it means you walk into whatever cruel torture I can possibly think of for you to endure forever. And believe me, it will be a very cruel torture. The cruelest."

Lina nodded.

"No!" Zack begged. "Please, let me take her place!"

Baba Yaga held up her hand. "Or. This one is willing. Such a good Watcher he is, such love. I knew when I placed him with you that he would fulfill his prophecy. Twice now he willingly volunteers to sacrifice himself for his Goddess. I will let him stay here, but I won't torture him like I will you if you stay. I can promise you he won't object to what I have in mind, although he will miss you. And you can go be with your men. Those two will be happy."

Lina stared at the stone cottage. It looked dark and primitive. Foul-smelling smoke drifted from the chimney.

Lina turned to face the three men. Baba Yaga stepped closer. "Choose quickly," she dangerously muttered. "My patience wanes."

Lina took a deep breath. "If I stay with you, you guarantee, you *swear* they will be happy? All three of them?"

“Absolutely, child.”

As Zack loudly protested behind her, Lina quickly strode to the door, opened it, and walked through.

Baba Yaga turned to the men. “Choice chosen. Good-bye.”

Jan could barely choke out the words through his crushing grief. “What do we do now?”

“For starters, I suggest you find your clothes. You men are yummy, but you draw attention to yourselves. I shall take care of the Dark One. Now go. Scram.”

She disappeared in a fog of foul grey smog.

The three men looked at each other and cried.

\* \* \* \*

Lina drew in a sharp breath as the door closed behind her. She was standing in her living room, as it had been not...shit...minutes ago? Hours? Only there was no puddle of Zack’s blood on the floor, her pool cage was intact, her backyard wasn’t on fire, and her pool didn’t look like a hockey rink with Edgar impaled and frozen like a bug in an ice cube at the bottom.

Lina was still dressed in her bathrobe, but it was now dry again.

Her heart shattered. Cruel. She’d been warned. This was devious cruelty of the harshest measure. To torment her with what she could no longer have.

Lina sank to her knees in the foyer and sobbed. Even Zack’s laptop sat on the coffee table. Dr. House announced another improbable, last-minute, out-of-his-ass diagnosis on the TV.

Baba Yaga appeared, this time as the middle-aged woman and dressed in a chic designer pantsuit. “Why are you on your knees?” She leaned against the wall.

Lina shook her head and wiped her eyes, carefully stood. “You’re good. *Real* good. I thought I could handle anything. Forced labor, torture, pain, Herculean tasks. I was actually looking forward to that.

It would have kept my mind off the boys. I didn't imagine you'd sink this low."

"I warned you I am cruel."

The sliders to the lanai opened. The three men walked in. Jan and Rick had already pulled on their pants and carried their shirts. Lina's heart jumped, soared, and she raced over to them.

Then she realized they couldn't see or hear her.

"No, child, they can't see you." Baba Yaga grinned. "Cruel? Yes. Very."

Jan and Rick were buttoning their shirts. They both looked sad. Distraught. They didn't speak.

Zack collapsed on the sofa, his head in his hands. Lina ran over to him, but it was like he had an invisible force field around him. She couldn't touch him. He looked like his heart had been run over by a truck.

"You said they'd be happy!" Lina screamed. "You promised! I swore to do what you wanted."

Baba Yaga shrugged. "Who says they won't be?" she said mildly. "I warned you I would torture *you*."

"Then they're happy?"

"Do they look happy?"

Lina screamed, enraged. She wheeled around and turned on the other woman. "You fucking bitch! We had a deal!"

Baba Yaga smiled again, cold and calculating. "Are you threatening *me*, Zaria?"

\* \* \* \*

Zack sat up and looked around. "Did you hear that?"

Jan and Rick paused. "No. What?" Rick asked.

Zack shook his head. "Never mind. I thought I heard...never mind."

"So when does the happiness kick in?" Rick snarked. "Right now,

I feel like shit.”

“Join the club,” Jan agreed. He sat on the couch next to Zack.

“Well, at least the old bat took care of the clean-up operation. Saves us the hassle,” Rick observed. He walked into the kitchen and retrieved a beer from the fridge, then returned to the living room. “Where do we go from here?” he quietly asked.

Jan took a deep breath. For the first time in his life, he had no answer.

\* \* \* \*

Lina stalked toward Baba Yaga, her anger bubbling deep inside her. “You promised they’d be happy.”

“I never promised when, Goddess.”

“Don’t fucking call me that!”

“Would you rather me call you Zaria? That’s what you are. Goddess of Sunrise. Protector of Warriors. And you’ve squandered your powers over a man. Over *three* men. How pitiful.”

Closer to the surface, Lina’s blood literally boiled. “Stop!”

Baba Yaga’s eyes narrowed. “What’s going on inside you, little one? What do you feel?”

“I feel like I’m going to pound your ass for lying to me, you goddamn bitch!”

Lina lunged at the woman, who deftly dodged her.

“You feel angry at me?” the woman asked, still in a cool tone of voice.

Lina snarled, felt heat coursing through her. “I’m going to fucking kill you—” Her words cut off in a visceral growl that seemed to start somewhere around her ankles before rolling out of her. Her vision went red, literally red, and she felt her body shift and change in ways she couldn’t comprehend.

Baba Yaga grinned. “Excellent. You do that. Or try, at least.” She held up a hand and made an odd gesture. Lina drew in a sharp breath

as everything inside her suddenly shifted back to normal.

“What just fucking happened?”

“A little test, Zaria.” Baba Yaga stepped forward, her eyes glowing red. She held out an open palm. Lina’s eyes widened as she realized a glowing ball of flame was taking shape inside Baba Yaga’s palm. “And this is another.” The other woman pitched the flame like a baseball.

Lina squeaked in fear and protectively threw up her arms. The ball of flame disappeared in a cloud of steam against the sudden shield of ice in front of her.

Shocked, Lina stared through the icy wall at Baba Yaga’s triumphant face.

“Excellent!” Baba Yaga made another gesture, and the icy wall disappeared. She stood in front of Lina. “You did mate well with them, even if not completely.” She produced a large, ornate, thick scroll tube and handed it to Lina. “Prophecy complete. Here you go.”

Lina hesitantly took the tube. “What is this?”

“New prophecies. Enjoy!” She stepped back. Lina had a feeling the woman was about to disappear.

“Wait! What the hell am I supposed to do with this?”

“Read it. Your men will help you figure it out.” She smiled.

“My...my men?”

“Of course. You’re the Goddess.”

“But...what about...”

“I promised they’d be happy, did I not?”

Lina nodded.

“I promised to torture *you*, did I not?”

Lina nodded.

Baba Yaga shifted back into the crone. “There are many kinds of torture. Some of them crueller than others.” She grinned, but it was hard and cold. “I had to make sure you were worthy, that they were worthy of you. They are. And I needed to make sure your powers were truly awakening. Your men will help you through the changes

and trials ahead of you. Especially once you finally complete the connection with your two mates.”

*What the fuck did that mean?* Lina’s brain spun as she clutched the scroll tube to her. “But what about Zack?”

“I promised them all happiness. *I* decide how and when.” She disappeared into a foul, grey, smoggy cloud.

Lina felt the world spin around her.

\* \* \* \*

The men stood, looking around. “Okay, you did hear that, right?” Zack asked.

Rick nodded. “Yeah.”

A blast of air swirled through the room. All the men closed their eyes against it. When it stopped seconds later, they saw Lina, looking confused and standing in the middle of the living room.

Lina looked around. The men seemed to be staring at her. When they walked over to her, she didn’t dare hope. “Guys?”

Zack whooped with joy and threw his arms around her. “You’re back!” He crushed her against him, hugging her, the scroll tube painfully digging into her gut. “Oh, Goddess, baby, you’re back!”

Jan and Rick waited their turn to hug and kiss her. Jan noticed the tube first. “What’s that?”

“She...she said it’s new prophecies.”

Zack took it from her. “Aw, fuck. Should have known that was coming. Why did she let you go?”

“She said it was a test. To make sure I was worthy. And something happened.”

Jan frowned. “What?”

“She was provoking me. Something happened. I changed or something. And then she lobbed a fireball at me, and I stopped it.”

Zack grinned. “Awesome!” He hugged her tightly again, burying his face in her hair. “Oh, baby doll, that’s great!”

“But what about you?”

He laughed. “What about me?” He handed the scroll tube off to Jan and Rick to figure out how to open it.

“She promised me you’d find happiness.”

He playfully rolled his eyes at her and grabbed her hands. “Honey, this is what we’ve been waiting for all these lives. This moment. The Goddess Zaria awoken. Awakened. Risen. Whatever.” He kissed her hands. “If you’re worried about me being lonely, don’t. We’re going to be too busy playing with your new powers for me to even have time to worry about that.”

Jan and Rick had opened the tube. There were a bunch of parchment scrolls nested inside. “Um, yeah. I’d say,” Rick quipped. “Between that and these, we’re going to have a full schedule. I need to call Uncle Andel and give him an update.”

*Torture.* Yes, she had two hunky, delicious studs who only had eyes for her.

She rested her head on Zack’s shoulder and closed her eyes as she inhaled his familiar scent.

Then she had Zack. And lifetimes of memories of loving him and being with him. And she knew she could never have him again.

*That goddamned bitch.* That was truly torture of the cruelest kind.

## Epilogue

Lina looked up as Paula knocked on her office door. “Yeah?”

“You want me to interrupt his royal highness?”

Lina grinned. “He’s lost track of time, hasn’t he?”

“Yep.”

“Yeah, tell him we need to get going. I’ll get my computer shut down.”

“Will do, boss.”

Paula walked down the hall to Zack’s office. Eight months later, Lina was in charge of the company. Edgar, in his infinitely shortsighted and overconfident wisdom, had set up everything naming Lina executor and sole recipient of the corporation and his assets in the event of his demise. She’d had no idea until the lawyer told her two weeks after Edgar’s “disappearance.” She’d been able to step right in.

*Stupid fuck.*

He’d obviously expected his plan to work and she would have been his, tied to him and keeping his powers strong.

Two months after Edgar’s “disappearance,” some alligator hunters in an airboat located Edgar—in his car—three miles south of Alligator Alley in the middle of the Everglades.

Authorities were still scratching their heads on how the car managed to get there.

Worked to Lina’s advantage, at least. She “hired” Zack to come in and help out, to take over her former position while she concentrated on growing the business.

She was packing her things when Rick knocked on the doorway.



“Ready to go?”

“Almost. We need Zack.”

“And here I am.” Zack stuck his head into the doorway. “Hey, Smoky. Where’s Frosty the Snowman?”

Rick grinned at the familiar jab. The three men had formed a deep, solid friendship, much to Lina’s relief. A week after all “the events,” as they euphemistically referred to what happened, one of Rick and Jan’s cousins had arrived to help decipher the prophecies on the scrolls. Kael was also a dragon shifter, but not an Elemental.

He was also pretty damn hot. And definitely gay.

Lina kept her mouth shut and watched Zack fall in love.

*Fucking torture.*

She knew she couldn’t complain considering who she shared her bed with every night. But she realized she would always carry a deep pain inside her heart that no amount of loving from her two men would ever heal. It was worth it to watch how Zack smiled when Kael walked into the room, how his eyes lit up.

How much he was in love.

The new house was ready for move-in. They’d changed the original plans, adding a new master bedroom suite for themselves and a whole new private wing for Zack and Kael. Tonight they were all spending their first night there. After grilling steaks and having a nice dinner, Zack and Kael disappeared to their private wing.

Jan walked up behind her as she watched the two men go.

“You okay, sweetie?” he asked. He brushed his lips against the nape of her neck as he slipped his arms around her waist.

“Yeah.”

Rick’s temper and mood was as hot as his body, quick and bold. Jan was her calmer, more thoughtful man.

“It’s okay that you still love him.” She’d confessed only to Jan what had happened and her suspicions about the true nature of her “torture.” She knew he’d understand. She didn’t want to risk hurting Zack or Rick’s feelings.

“Yeah.”

“Can you say something besides yeah?”

“Yeah.”

He snorted in amusement. “What?”

“How about we leave the dishes for morning and the three of us go upstairs?”

Jan scooped her into his arms and whistled out the back door for Rick. “Goddess declares dishes can wait until morning.”

“Hot damn!” Rick finished shutting down the grill and ran back into the house.

The two men swept her upstairs. Within seconds, they all landed with a bounce in the middle of their large bed. She’d ended up on top of Rick, with Jan kneeling behind her. One thing she’d quickly grown accustomed to was the two men lusting after her. It wasn’t hard to put her self-consciousness aside about her less than perfect figure when these two hunky men spent so much time running their hands over her in a most appreciative way.

She was a lucky, lucky lady. And she damn well knew it.

Jan slipped his hands under her T-shirt and pulled it off over her head while Rick worked on her shorts. Jan nipped her shoulder. “I’ve been wanting my cock inside you all night long.”

“Join the club,” Rick hoarsely said as he slipped his hand inside her shorts. “I’ve been fucking hard all day long. Who gets to go first?”

Their first night in the new house, she wanted to do something special she hadn’t had the nerve to ask for before. “How about both of you?” she nervously suggested.

The men froze. “What?” they asked together.

She closed her eyes. They had introduced her to the pleasures of anal sex, but she hadn’t been brave enough to ask for this before. “How about both of you, together?”

Rick touched her chin. “You sure?”

She nodded. “Yeah. Something special because tonight is

special.”

Rick nudged her off of him and quickly stripped, then helped her remove her shorts. Jan also got naked. “You say stop if it doesn’t feel good, okay?”

She nervously nodded.

Lina straddled Rick again, teasing his stiff cock for a moment by rubbing her slit along his thick, veined length. He grabbed her hips and thrust, sinking deep inside her with a satisfied grunt. “That’s what I wanted, baby. Don’t tease me.”

She smiled. He loved to take charge like that.

Jan had stepped out of bed for a moment and returned with a bottle of lube. “I love looking at your ass when he’s fucking you, baby,” he moaned. He caressed her smooth, rounded globes.

Rick thrust hard. “You’re gorgeous. You’ve got such a beautiful body.” He skimmed his hands up her sides and cupped her breasts. He played with her nipples, pinching them, making her gasp as bolts of need shot through her core.

“Hold her open for me,” Jan said.

Rick released her breasts, causing her to moan with disappointment. He slipped his hands down to her ass. With his fingers splayed across her cheeks, he gently held her open, exposing the vulnerable puckered ring of muscle to his brother.

Jan’s sharp intake of breath stirred another ember of desire within her. “Gorgeous!” He drizzled lube down her cleft and slowly worked a cool finger inside her.

She gasped. The feeling was amazing. Wiggling her hips and taking Rick’s thick cock a little deeper inside her, she encouraged Jan to continue.

He worked another into her, then a third, slowly stroking and making her moan with need. “Please do it!” she begged.

While she’d taken both men before, it had always been with one inside her while she went down on the other, never like this. As Jan withdrew his fingers and replaced them with his pulsing cock, she

shivered.

“You okay?” Jan asked.

“Yes!”

He pressed forward. She sucked in a breath and carefully blew it out as she wiggled her hips again. His thick, hard shaft slowly penetrated, tightly sheathed in her ass.

He stopped. “Oh, fuck, you’re so tight like this! I need a minute or I’m gonna blow.”

Rick held still beneath her, his thumb finding her clit. “I can feel you sliding inside her. Jesus, that’s great!”

Lina had traveled into a realm of passion beyond speech. The men had learned how to draw every ounce of pleasure from her body, making her explode with screaming release she never dreamed possible before. Rick teased her, bringing her close but not far enough to push her over the edge.

On purpose, she knew. The two of them stretched her, filling her with pleasure and just a pinch of pain to add a little bite to the exquisite enjoyment.

Jan finally continued his progress until his shaft was completely and tightly fisted by her ass. “If I move, I’m gonna come.”

Rick pushed her up into his brother’s arms. “You play with her up there. I’ll take care of things down here.” He continued teasing her sensitive nub while Jan cupped her breasts and tweaked her nipples. The incredible contrast of heat and cool only served to drive her harder and faster toward the edge.

Deep within her core, passion unhinged, like an over-wound spring snapping under tension, the recoil shooting her over the top, and she screamed as her body shuddered. Her muscles grabbed their thick cocks, milking them.

“There she blows,” Rick joked. He grabbed her waist and thrust as Jan grabbed her thighs and frantically pounded into her from behind. Lina collapsed on Rick’s chest, her body limp from the explosions still robbing her of strength. She thought it was over when Rick’s

cock glided along her already sensitive clit and a second wave shot through her.

She closed her eyes and hung on.

When Rick, then Jan came, she felt them both inside her, Rick's liquid heat and Jan's soothing coolness—and that's when her world imploded.

Bright images, clear and vivid, assaulted her, random scenes she couldn't make sense of. Like sticking her finger in a light socket, her back arched as another crushing avalanche of pleasure and passion seared her nerve endings. She could only cry out as she gave in, what felt like waves of icy heat running up and down her body. She knew she didn't imagine the steam rising from their bodies as all three were gripped by a last shuddering climax.

Just when she thought she couldn't take it anymore, she blacked out.

\* \* \* \*

Lina looked up to see Jan and Rick staring down at her, worry on their faces.

"Are you okay, baby?" Rick asked.

She nodded. "Wow!"

Jan laughed and shook his head. "You scare the crap out of us, and all you can say is wow?"

"Fucking wow?"

Rick looked up at the ceiling and blew out a relieved breath. "Holy shit. You scared us, girl! Your eyes rolled back in your head and you sort of looked like you died on us."

She remembered. But it wasn't death.

"I think something happened."

"No shit!" Jan exclaimed. "You passed out."

"No. I mean something else." The residual waves still washed through her. "Wait. Where's the original prophecy?"

Both men frowned. “What?”

“The original prophecy. Where is it?”

“Okay, not the weirdest segue, but whatever.” Jan got out of bed and grabbed the three-ring binder with the printouts. They’d translated and printed all the prophecies, including the original ones from Zack and the brothers, as part of their research.

She looked at it and pointed to the fourth stanza. “‘When *together* brothers bind firmly.’ That’s what it says.”

Jan looked at the line. “Yeah, so?”

She shivered, then felt sweat break out across her brow. Whatever happened had triggered something inside her. “Baba Yaga said we hadn’t mated completely, and we still had to finally complete the connection.” She shivered again, followed by another hot flash. “I think we just did.”

The brothers exchanged a look. “Fire and ice,” Rick snarked. “You must have hit your boiling point. How do you feel?”

She nodded. “I feel...weird. But good weird.”

Jan leaned in and kissed her. “Let’s get some sleep. We can deal with this in the morning.”

She nodded and snuggled tightly between her men. They said their “I love yous” and “good nights,” and she closed her eyes.

Lina started drifting to sleep as she heard Jan and Rick’s slow, steady breathing on either side of her. Before she realized it, her mind was racing downstairs, as if she was running. Startled, she opened her eyes and found herself still in bed.

She closed her eyes. Again, she found her mind heading downstairs.

Eyes open. Bedroom, her body serving as the filling in a hunk sandwich.

Eyes closed. Out of body.

She kept her eyes closed and worked on controlling this scary new talent. She managed to slow her progress, then found she could direct it.

To the far wing.

Zack's bedroom door was closed. She felt only a moment's guilt before passing through the heavy paneled oak. Zack was tightly spooned against Kael's back, wrapped around his lover in sleep, Kael holding on to Zack's arms. Kael looked peaceful.

Zack looked happy. Truly happy.

*Torture of the cruelest kind.* She missed the nights when she was the one safely nestled where Kael now lay. But Baba Yaga had kept her promise. Her men were happy, all three of them. Lina also knew that now, with this new facet to her powers, it meant more of the prophecies would kick in and life would get pretty complex.

She knew she couldn't touch Zack like this. She leaned in anyway and pressed a disembodied kiss to his lips.

"I love you, Zack," she whispered in his ear.

His eyes didn't open as he softly mumbled, "I love you too, my sweet Goddess."

# THE END

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# Prophecy

*Where winter and summer face off through the field  
And fire and ice join powers and yield  
One soul to bind them, to bring forth their truth  
Pure, perfect love, from a heart so aloof.*

*Fragile soul of wounded fate,  
Who despairs of love, without a mate.  
To her the winds of change shall blow  
Elemental love, like fresh-fal'n snow.*

*Deep in the heart love knows the way  
though her mind and will may balk and stray.  
Elementals speak words old, deep and true,  
which shall bring her home to you.*

*When together brothers bind firmly to their one so dear  
Evil they shall vanquish that quickly draws near  
Two ages and twenty close shall be the day,  
When elements harnessed force Dark Gods to pay.*

*Betrayal deep, wounds slow to heal  
Trust and devotion the Dark Gods will steal.  
Bonds forged with love shall light the dawn  
and when one falls, all shall go on.*

*Victory comes with no small cost,  
and p'haps in the end all shall be lost.  
When love forges strength, a bond so vast,  
To Baba Yaga their fates are cast.*

—Old Slavic Prophecy.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tymber Dalton lives in southwest Florida with her husband (aka “The World’s Best Husband™”) and son. She loves her family, writing, coffee, dark chocolate, music, a good book, hockey, and her dogs (even when they try to drink her coffee and steal her chocolate).

When she’s not dodging hurricanes or writing, she can be found doing line edits or reading or thinking up something else to write. She’s a bestselling writer published in several genres under two pen names and loves to hear from readers. Please feel free to drop by her website to keep abreast of the latest news, views, snarkage, and releases.

You can also check out some of her other bestsellers, such as “Trouble Comes in Threes,” “Love Slave for Two,” and “Love at First Bight,” also available on the BookStrand website.

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# **SWAN SONG**

**Blaze Ballantine**

# **DEDICATION**

For Devin, thanks for everything.

# SWAN SONG

**BLAZE BALLANTINE**

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## Chapter 1

Things on the island of Gypsy Cay are never what they seem. You pick up some gorgeous hunk of maleness in an island bar, think you've got yourself an honest-to-goodness bronze skinned Hawaiian surfer, and you wake up in the morning with a half-human version of Jaws. All those things they tell you in the tourist brochures are true. Gypsy Cay is not safe for humans, but if you've got a healthy sex drive, and a lot of nerve to deal with the unknown, it's...well, I digress. Let me tell you how I ended up living in the islands.

I grew up in the rural mid-west, blissfully unaware of just how dangerous the world could be, and then my dad lost his job and we had to move to the city. Chicago. Life wasn't the same after that. Worse, our move to the city coincided with the Mobius Barrier breaking. When the veil between alternate planes tore, the paranormal community crashed headlong into mainstream society with the sort of casualties you'd expect.

What had once been the stuff of nightmares now roamed our city streets. Some people could take it, and some couldn't. Vigilante groups formed to shoot any paranormal creature on sight, and the otherworldly community fought back. A bloodbath took place in the streets.

It didn't take long for legislature to enact a solution to give the paranormal community its own territory. Let them handle their own problems. But above all else, ban them from commingling with the

humans. Trouble being, the paranormals couldn't live together easily either. There were too many species, too many ancient blood feuds, and too many incompatible cultures.

It seemed an insurmountable problem until someone suggested giving the paranormal community the archipelago of Gypsy Cay. There were nearly two hundred islands in the chain and each species could have its own turf. The paranormal community welcomed the banishment.

However, like all prohibited things, the human world couldn't resist just a tiny taste of the forbidden fruit. Slowly, a steady stream of thrill seekers found their way to the islands and the paranormal community opened its arms to the tourist trade.

In order to minimize the chaos of lawsuits and crimes that would soon follow, humankind set up an enforcement agency to deal with problems if they came to human shores. Much like INTERPOL, the agency was an international cooperation. Basically the deal went like this, if humans wanted to visit Gypsy Cay, they could do so, but whatever happened on the islands stayed in Gypsy Cay. Unless the paranormal community set foot on human territory, they were exempt from human laws and customs. In other words, let the tourist beware.

I joined the PCU, Paranormal Crime Unit, less than a year after I graduated from Ohio State. Mom and Dad had retired and moved back to the old home place and I felt caught between two worlds myself. I didn't seem to belong anywhere. I could sympathize with the paranormals that found themselves displaced and lost between worlds. It isn't easy to lose your comfort zone.

One thing I've learned about the paranormal community is that they aren't all bad, but those that are vicious need to be put down. Eliminated. Evil is evil and sometimes there's just no cure for it. I've never seen a violent otherworldly that could be redeemed.

It was Friday night, late. My team had taken out a hostile were-jackal straight out of your darkest nightmare. Have you ever seen the jackals that guard Egyptian tombs? Not only do they look creepy,

they *are* creepy. Let one loose on the streets of Manhattan and see what happens. It's not pretty. The city would be cleaning up for a while. The undertakers would be experiencing a profit.

Caton Lee, my teammate, ran his fingers through his perpetually spiked and disheveled hair. "Got any plans for the weekend, Beauty?"

Only Caton could get by with calling me Beauty. It was a nickname my dad has used since my birth. Caton got that privilege because he'd saved my parents from a werewolf attack when they still lived in Chicago. It's how we met, and the reason I got into the PCU. He'd been a welcome guest at our home on many holidays since then, and now he served as my best friend, mentor, and occasional lover. We both saw other people once in a while, but with our work schedules there wasn't anyone serious enough to consider staying faithful to. When the lonesome nights hit, we often kept each other company.

It would be hard to lose him. I was honest enough to admit that to myself. With his looks, he wouldn't stay single forever. He had a sculptured face with high chiseled cheekbones, a firm sensual mouth and large almond-shaped eyes with lashes so dark and thick they should be illegal.

"Going to chill this weekend," I said, watching the last of the stragglers leave the building. "I'm stopping by the grocery store for a bottle of wine and a frozen Italian dinner, you know, those kinds of meals in a bag?"

Caton looked at me with distaste. Being somewhat of a gourmet cook, he couldn't stand meals in a bag. "Yuck."

I laughed, expecting his reaction. "Don't worry," I soothed him. "I'm going to buy some garlic to mix in, and a nice loaf of cheese bread to bake. That will make it taste more like homemade."

Caton raised one eyebrow to let me know he didn't think adding a little garlic would make it taste homemade. "Garlic, huh? At least I know you don't have any hot dates with a vampire this weekend."

"The only hot date I have is my favorite television show. I'm

going to watch all the episodes I've missed."

Caton nodded, shrugging into his leather jacket. "Have a good one."

"You too." I pulled out my keys to lock up behind us. "Oh, and Caton, don't call this weekend. I'm shutting off my phone and not answering the pager. If there's a crisis, someone else can handle it. We've been on six straight weekends. It's time for a break."

"I sort of hoped for a little action this weekend, Beauty," Caton answered with a wink, smiling enough to show his dimples.

Damn!

I can't resist dimples.

I looked around the office. We were alone. I licked my lips suggestively and raised an eyebrow.

"How about a quickie?"

"*In here?*" Caton asked, looking around at the security cameras mounted in every corner of the room.

"*Chicken!*" I taunted him.

"Yeah, right."

"It's okay if you don't want the best sex of your life," I goaded him. "I'm serious, don't call me this weekend. This is your chance, it's now or never."

He gave a low groan of frustration.

"What the hell's got into you, Beauty? Not enough excitement today?"

I looked up at the cameras with a shrug. "I just thought it would be a turn-on to have sex in the office without getting caught."

"Yeah, it would. The not getting caught part is easy. It's the video that worries me," Caton said, taking another look at the cameras. "I can see the PCU sex scandal all over the six o'clock news, with details to follow at eleven."

"You're right," I said. "Bad idea. Chalk it up to a stressful day and the need for release." I picked up my purse, watching him out of the corner of my eye.

“Don’t be in such a hurry. I didn’t say it was impossible.”

I hid a secret grin. Too easy.

He studied me for a minute before taking it a step further. “You willing to take the full chance?”

“Ohhh, it’s a challenge now, is it?”

“You’re damn right. I say we do it where there are no cameras.”

“That would be the bathroom or the showers,” I answered, but Caton shook his head.

“I’m thinking McFarland’s office.”

James McFarland, Director of Operations. To get any higher, you have to go to the White House.

“Now that *is* a death wish for our careers,” I protested. “I thought we’d pop in a supply closet, temporarily block the camera, and be gone before the guards could check it out.”

“Now who’s the chicken?”

“But you know McFarland’s liable to walk through those doors any second. He works 24/7.”

“Hey! You’re the one that wanted the thrill, Beauty. I’d settle for a long leisurely fuck in your bed.”

Against my better judgment, I looked over at the door to McFarland’s office. He had a sofa in there and a private bathroom. Caton had made this a challenge. I was betting the door to the director’s office would be locked and we couldn’t get in anyway, so I decided to call his bluff. “Sure, I’m game if you are.”

Caton gave me a smirk. “C’mon.”

Putting his hand around my wrist he half dragged me to the door like he thought I might bolt and run. I smiled at his tactic, still confident we couldn’t get inside the sacred territory of the director’s lair, but when the door swung inward I thought about faking a heart attack.

Caton laughed. “You didn’t think it would open, did you?”

I stiffened my shoulders so he couldn’t see my nervousness. “Sure, I knew it would open,” I lied, telling myself I’d started this and



the disaster that was bound to follow would be all my fault.

Caton made an elaborate charade of checking his watch for the camera while heading for the appointment book the director kept on his otherwise spotless desk. Oh his way, Caton managed to clip the door with his foot, sending it into a slow close that hid most of the office from prying surveillance cameras.

“One hot babe, one spotless desk, one horny dude.” Caton said, pulling his coat off and tossing it across the director’s chair.

“Two ruined careers,” I muttered to myself, stroking the dark polished wood as I looked around the office.

“Are you going to be too nervous to enjoy this?” Caton asked, pulling the Ohio State hoodie he wore over his head and tossing it on top of his coat.

I gave a sigh of defeat. “Okay, you win. I’ll admit...I’m too nervous to enjoy a good fuck on the director’s desk.” I glared at him. “Does that make you happy?”

“Yeah, especially since I know he’s in Singapore for a week.”

Caton laughed at my string of curses, easily avoiding the punch I threw at him. He captured both of my hands, swept my feet out from under me and had me leaning face down over the desk before I could blink an eye. How in the hell did he always manage to do that? I could take anyone on the force but him. He was always faster than me and could seemingly read my mind as to what I’d do next.

“What a view,” he sighed, trailing his fingertips over my upturned ass. I heard the whisper of his zipper as he held me down with one hand in the center of my back while he yanked his jeans down with the other.

I felt both of his hands smooth over my hips, pulling my short skirt up to waist level above the lacy red thong I wore. I normally don’t dress in provocative clothes just to go home for a solitary weekend, but these were the only clean clothes I had left in my locker. A red silk t-shirt, short black skirt and a change of underwear. Date clothes I kept on standby just in case I got lucky and had to meet

someone after work. Yeah, like that would ever happen.

The vent of the overhead air conditioning blew cool air over my bare ass heightening the sensuous feeling of Caton's warm hands caressing my skin. He used his thumbs to spread my ass cheeks as he kneaded the flesh, lowering his fingers each time until with every stroke he rubbed across my clit. He used a certain amount of force that bordered on being painful, yet elicited an eager jerk of response each time he skimmed across the sensitive nub.

I arched up to meet his hands and felt him lean over me, dropping his mouth to my moistening pussy. Caton Lee knows how to make a woman die with pleasure. When he fastens his mouth over your pussy you will never be the same again.

His teeth clamped over the sensitive peak of my clit and he trapped me so that his tongue could rub unimpeded back and forth until I was panting, ready to spasm with an orgasm. An orgasm he kept just out of reach by releasing the pressure on my clit when I got close to the breaking point.

I was squirming now, pushing back into his face with an urgency that left me whimpering for more. He buried his face into my pussy, curling the end of his tongue to taste my moisture like catching a raindrop from the sky. Sucking gently, he pulled me into an orgasm that nearly turned me wrong side out.

As I lay gulping in air, he shifted my legs further apart, slipped his hands under my stomach, and raised my hips a little higher so he could penetrate me deeply. I felt his hard cock straining at the entrance to my drenched pussy and he shoved, sheathing himself fully, drawing a groan of appreciation from me as his swollen penis forced its way into my body.

"You feel so fucking good," he whispered, stroking me with hard jabs that slid me across the top of the polished desk. His hands tightened on each side of my hips so he could hold me steady, allowing himself deeper entrance. "I feel your cunt muscles squeezing me with every thrust," he groaned, pulling me back across the desk

until I could feel his pubic hair grinding into my skin. “Awww, damn, Beauty, that sends me over the edge.”

He started a series of short fast strokes that nearly rubbed my clit raw, sending me crashing headlong into another hard climax that squeezed him like an iron fist. He gasped, sucking in air through his clenched teeth, hardening even more inside of me as his cock tried to stretch my inner muscles to a more comfortable level for him.

With each of his movements I clutched tighter around him, milking his cock with the ancient skill a woman’s body possesses to free her mate of his load. My inner muscles worked him relentlessly and he surrendered with a long drawn out groan that sent me spiraling into my third orgasm of the evening.

“This is it, Beauty,” he said in a desperate voice that sent chills dancing down my spine. “I fucking love the way you bring me to my knees.”

I felt him pumping hot semen into me with every thrust of his hips. He emptied himself, and then dropped down across my back to tease me with light kisses on my neck while he caught his breath.

“That was short and sweet,” he murmured. “Think you can walk?”

I laughed. “I’ll manage.”

He straightened up, gently pulling me up from the desk to place a long kiss on my lips before we cleaned up in the executive bathroom.

“I enjoyed that,” Caton told me with a wink as we walked across the parking lot. “You know they’re going to talk about us again since we both stayed behind.”

Stopping at my car I reached out to give him a hug. “Let ‘em talk. I’ll see you Monday.”

“Take care.” He shut the door to my Mustang and watched me till I drove out of the dark parking lot and into the flow of traffic.

I traveled down State Street until I reached the little strip mall on Mulberry Lane. The mall had a grocery store, and I needed to pick up enough supplies to get me through the weekend. I didn’t want to have to go back out. I tried to remember everything I had at home. I knew

there was some ice cream in the freezer. Maybe I'd splurge and pick up a bottle of chocolate syrup. Hell, maybe I'd really splurge and make myself a banana split. And while at it, since my goal was to relax, I'd buy a bottle of bubble bath too.

I'd like to think my excuse for not picking up on the danger was my exhaustion and the afterglow of a satisfactory sexual performance, but in reality my mind had shifted gears and now dwelled on frozen waffles, and those annoying little extras everyone needs from time to time, like toothbrushes, deodorant, and shampoo. At any rate, I walked blissfully past death just like any civilian would. Clueless. Completely unaware I'd crossed paths with a killer that was about to unleash hell in less than ten minutes.

I strolled leisurely up and down the aisles, adding a bit more to my grocery cart than I'd intended. I'd just finished paying the cashier when it happened. A bright arc of blood splashed over the low pharmaceutical shelves, splattering on the cashier holding out my change. Startled, she looked down at herself and began screaming, shoving her hands out like she wanted to push the blood away.

Around me, pandemonium broke loose. Customers ran their carts into one another, and raced for the doors, pushing through the glass when the electronic eye didn't open them quickly enough. I heard screams from the parking lot and a quick glance showed at least two pair of legs on the ground just outside the doors. I could only imagine what it must have been like being pushed through the glass.

Back through the store, shelves crashed loudly as they turned over. The unmistakable howls and snarls of an angry were-creature vibrated through the building. Much like an earthquake, the sound shook metal cans on the racks that still stood upright. .

*Why do they always sound like a bad King Kong movie?* I drew out the pistol I kept holstered under my leather jacket.

"Call 911," I snapped at the cashier that stood motionless in terror. "And get out of the building."

I started moving cautiously toward the back of the store. Looked

like I wasn't going to have a weekend off after all. Slipping down the aisle of the frozen food section, I held my gun in front of me as I sidestepped with my back to the doors of the freezer compartments. I felt the cold through my leather jacket. I could tell from the pitch of the snarls that at least two different species fought their way to the back of the store.

I needed backup, but I'd left my cell phone in my purse back at the checkout counter. There'd be cops here soon. I just hoped they made it before I was too dead to care.

At the end of the aisle I smelled the raw scent of blood and the earthier aroma of animal musk. Despite my training, fear shot into my bloodstream with a kick of adrenaline that left me shaking and breathless. I remembered Caton telling me it was normal to be afraid. Healthy to be afraid. Being brave proved your courage, taking that first step out there to face a monster when your heart was in your throat and your mind told you to run. From the sound of it I would be facing several monsters. I stepped out.

And got slammed by something before I could get a shot off.

It was a male javelina, a pig-like creature with wicked tusks, beady black eyes and a bad attitude. Ask any hunter what it's like to be cornered by a wild boar and they will tell you it's terrifying. Imagine being under one on a hard tile floor where it's impossible to get traction.

I was being shoved by two hundred pounds of brute strength, crushed under cloven hooves as he tried to head butt me into a pancake. I could see enough human left in him to know he'd be short in stature, with a stocky build, a pug nose, eyes too close together to be attractive, and unruly coarse hair. I remembered passing him as I came into the store earlier. I'd written him off as a gang-banger. How could I have missed something so obvious?

That oversight would probably cost me my life, along with a lot of other innocent people.

Without being able to use my weapon, I'd be dead shortly. He

wasn't giving me a chance to pull my gun up to fire. I was too busy holding him away from my throat. With a butt from his snout, the gun vanished, skittering somewhere under one of the shelves. Impossible for me to reach now as I struggled for my life.

His strength was incredible. I couldn't hold him, not even with the martial arts maneuvers that Caton had taught me. I felt my arms give, and then the sharp pain of his tusk as it entered the skin of my neck. I gasped and it came out a liquid gurgle.

*I'm sorry, Mom and Dad.*

My death would destroy them. I grieved for them more than for myself. I knew it would come to this one day. You didn't play with the monsters and not get eaten alive eventually. Out of the corner of my eye I thought I saw a blur of movement. The hard clamping pressure released me. I suddenly felt free, drifting on the impression of my body floating through space. Dying wasn't so bad after all, I decided.

## Chapter 2

I woke up with a hell of a sore throat and a dark god of a man standing over me. He had sun-kissed skin and black wings tipped in white that flared out from his back when he leaned over. I blinked my eyes at the beautiful apparition. Being raised in the Bible Belt didn't prepare me for several kinds of Heaven, or for that matter, any different god. Maybe he was an angel.

*Wait!*

Unless this wasn't Heaven...it did feel kinda hot now that I thought about it, and he did have black wings. *Oh my God, I'd landed straight in hell*, fulfilling my mother's worse nightmare.

"How do you feel?" he asked.

Okay, I guess I wasn't dead. Surely a deity wouldn't ask how I felt. I mean, if he were some sort of divine being he'd know that, wouldn't he? I looked around the room trying to figure out my location. Then I recognized the room. *My house. My bed.* The rising panic bubbled inside me subsided just a little.

How did I get here?

And who was this winged male standing over me, looking like my best fantasy creation yet? I didn't remember having any of the wine I'd bought at the grocery store so I couldn't be pleasantly drunk. Then it hit me like a bad headache. I remembered the attack and the pig tearing at my neck.

I fluttered my eyes trying to speak, but no sound came from my injured throat. I put a tentative hand up to feel for the amount of damage the javelina had inflicted. In the blink of an eye the winged one's muscled arm shot out, jerking my hand away before I could

connect with the ruined skin.

“Don’t touch,” he warned. “You were attacked by a javelina. He’s dead. You’re healing.”

“Healing?” I managed to squeak. He had used the term for wounded paranormals. They could heal normally fatal wounds with amazing swiftness. I knew from experience that it took a certain amount of dedication and persistence to kill an otherworldly creature.

“You nearly bled out,” he explained. “We had to give you blood.”

“You’ll be turning into a swan before you know it,” a mocking female voice said from behind him. “Unless, of course, you remain the ugly duckling.”

“No!” I tried to sit up. If I was in my room and not at a hospital, if I had begun healing without a transfusion, that could only mean one thing. The paranormal standing over me had shared his lifesaving blood without my permission.

Did she say a swan?

*Great!* I’d soon be turning into a freaking bird.

“That’s enough, Ileana,” the man warned, while gently pushing me back against the pillows. “You were dying. I had seconds to save you. Having your throat torn out made it a little hard for me to ask if you wanted saving.”

“Mirror,” I said with difficulty. “Get me a mirror.”

The lovely fair skinned woman laughed at my request. Obviously she enjoyed my discomfort. I couldn’t understand her anger with me until she moved closer to the male in an undeniably territorial gesture. A move designed to let me know he was taken. Suddenly I understood her animosity. She was jealous.

Oblivious to her efforts, the male reached over to pick up the long handled mirror I had sitting on the antique dresser next to my bed. Without a word, he turned the glass toward me and placed the handle in my trembling hands. I flinched at the reflection I saw staring back at me in the glass. My green eyes looked enormous in the paleness of my face, and my strawberry blond hair looked dull and lifeless as it



fanned out across the pillow, carefully arranged so it wouldn't get into the gash at my neck. I stifled a sob. He wasn't kidding. My neck had been nearly shredded, but already showed signs of knitting back together. The injured skin had turned into an angry palette of purple bruises and scarlet cuts. It changed as I stared in the mirror, mesmerized that such a thing could be happening to me.

I watched one of the smaller cuts fade to a pale thin line and I lay the mirror down on the bed beside me. I didn't want to see anymore.

It was ungracious of me not to thank him, but I had trouble uttering the words.

He sat down with his hip on the edge of the bed, moving with such liquid grace he gave the illusion he melted into the position. No wonder the woman fought to protect her territory. He was tall and lean with long muscles and flowing agility under a tawny skin that glowed with perfection.

"Thank you," I managed to choke out at last.

"You're welcome, but I didn't have much choice."

"You could have left me to die."

"Couldn't do that. Innocents don't deserve to die."

I laughed at that and it hurt my injured throat. It had been a long while since anyone called me an innocent. "I'm on the Paranormal Crime Unit, and you're breaking the law by being on human territory."

"So arrest me."

I thought I saw a flicker of amusement spark in those dark eyes of his and play around the corners of his full-lipped mouth. I could vaguely see his were-animal in the hard angular planes of his face and the glossy, straight hair hanging across his shoulders like a black waterfall. Dressed in something other than jeans and a t-shirt I knew he would look like I envisioned a modern Aztec warrior might look. I knew without asking he would be a rare black swan.

"How did you get us out of Whitman's without being arrested?"

He hesitated, obviously trying to decide what to tell me. Then I

watched him relax, giving his head a little shake as if to say what did it matter.

“I’m what you’d call a cop in your world. We have another name for it, but it doesn’t matter. I trailed Rolerrak off the island. He’s a killer in our society. I couldn’t imagine what he’d do in the human realm. He crossed over from his tribe’s land to cut a trail of death through all the species, until he didn’t have anywhere left to run. That’s when he headed for the human territories. The council voted to let him go. Let the humans take care of their own problems. I couldn’t let that happen. When I explained the situation to the cops that showed up they granted me a twenty-four hour stay on the mainland.”

I nodded, understanding where he was coming from. I’d be dead if he hadn’t been there at Whitman’s grocery store, and so would a lot of other people. No wonder the authorities gave him a pass. “What should I call you?”

“Ke’lan. I’m from the Swan Territories.”

“And I’m E’tan,” said a voice from the doorway.

I shifted on the pillows to look around Ke’lan. Wow! Double eye candy. The man standing in the doorway seemed to be a twin to Ke’lan, except for the fact of being a mirror opposite in coloring. E’tan had the pale skin of a Nordic god and nearly white blond hair that feathered around his face and broad shoulders. His pale wings were tipped in black, but his eyes were exact replicas of Ke’lan’s.

“Who’s that?” I wondered how I could be thinking such thoughts when I’d just had my throat ripped out and should have been lying on a slab in the downtown morgue.

“My twin. My partner. He brought your groceries in.”

I stared at them in amazement. “You stopped to get my groceries?”

They both nodded, and I started to laugh. Could my day possibly get any more bizarre?

To answer that question...yes, of course it could.

I looked at the female hovering close to Ke’lan. “And you are?”

“Ileana.” Her liquid dark eyes glittered with hostility. “Partner to Ke’lan and E’tan.”

It was time to set her straight.

“Why don’t you just chill, Ileana? I’m not going to invade your space.”

“You already have,” she said frostily. “You have no idea what you’ve done. You’ve ruined everything.”

“Enough!” Ke’lan ordered. “Leave us, Ileana. This is not your concern.”

“It is my——”

She got no further before E’tan took her arm and not so gently escorted her to the door. She looked back over her shoulder at me with tears glistening in her eyes. “You’re going to be sorry.”

\* \* \* \*

Ileana didn’t return and I had an idea I wouldn’t be seeing her again in the near future. Since the guys didn’t mention her, I didn’t ask for details as I prepared the food I’d picked out earlier. It seemed healing gave me a voracious appetite. Now that my neck had nearly mended, I felt starved.

The three of us sat at my kitchen table eating linguini that came from a bag, drinking wine, and discussing my future with the swan clan. Yes, I would turn into a were-swan. It was inevitable. Ke’lan had given me a lot of blood, and even then it had been touch and go for a while. In fact, my prognosis had been so bad that E’tan added a measure of his blood to make sure I would survive. I still wasn’t sure how I felt about shifting, but I knew I felt glad to be alive. I’d deal with the change when it happened.

“So why didn’t you guys leave when you knew I’d recover? Why take the chance of me arresting you? Not to mention dealing with the little issue of Ileana’s feelings on the matter.”

The two males looked at one another wordlessly communicating.

"There are complications," E'than said quietly, his dark eyes looking troubled.

He had features similar to Ke'lan though not identical. He had the same angular bone structure, but with a bit more softness to his face, although it couldn't really be deemed feminine. But it was close. He reminded me of a video game villain, softly attractive feminine features hiding the steel underneath.

I put my fork down and took a healthy sip of wine. I had a feeling I'd need it. Maybe a glassful. Maybe two. "Just tell me."

Ke'lan looked away, suddenly interested in something outside. E'than decided he had to pour himself another glass of wine. And I waited for the shoe to drop.

"Guys, what could be worse than me turning into a bird?"

They remained silent.

"If one of you doesn't answer me right now, I'm going to shoot you," I threatened.

"You're our mate."

I'm not sure which one said it. Neither one of them would look at me. I had trouble translating what I heard with what it could mean in human terms.

"Define mate."

Ke'lan looked into my eyes and again I saw a flash of humor. "Sex. Wild uninhibited sex."

My stomach fluttered and I had the ridiculous urge to giggle nervously. Maybe because his statement came too close to the fantasy I'd been having about the guys.

Ke'lan stood up from his chair, moving with a grace that was nearly heartbreaking in its perfection. I watched him kneel in front of me, his hands reaching out to take both of mine within his.

"From this moment on I will protect you with my life. I will see to your happiness and your well-being. I will provide a home for you."

E'than stood up, joining Ke'lan on the floor. He reached up to brush the wayward strands of hair from my face. Lingered for a

moment, he sifted the red strands through his pale fingers. "It feels like silk," he whispered, then cupped my face in his hand. "I too pledge to provide for you, to see to your comfort and to protect you with my life."

Tears stung my eyes till the two men before me became nothing more than colorful blurs. "Don't," I managed to choke out. "Don't say these things. We're strangers. You don't know me. How do you know we can be mates?"

"You will accept this," Ke'lan said quietly, but with conviction. "We'll teach you how to become our mate. In our society you have already become ours. To save a life is to be responsible for that life, to care for it, and cherish it as you would your own. Swans mate for life. You will learn to love us."

*Love? Did he really say that?*

I scrubbed the tears from my eyes impatiently. "What makes you think you can teach me to love you?" I asked defiantly. "Love just happens. You can't force it."

"I have no intention of forcing it. I intend to earn it," he said, pulling my face to his for a kiss that stole the breath from my soul.

I stared from him to E'than. "How can I be a mate to both of you?"

The two of them exchanged looks. "Surely, you don't need an explanation," E'than said. "It seems obvious enough..."

"You mean a ménage?" My voice sounded high-pitched to my own ears. "Come on, guys, do you really expect me to fall for this? What kind of kinky sex are you hoping for?"

They both stared at me like I'd lost it. Maybe I had.

"There is no discussion," Ke'lan said. "Accept it or not, you are now mate to both of us. We'll return to Gypsy Cay as soon as your healing is completed."

"No wonder Ileana was pissed," I said.

E'than gave an unsympathetic shrug of his broad shoulders. "She will learn to accept it, just as you will."

## Chapter 3

I felt something wild rising within me. Like a small ripple in a pond that grew larger as it moved in outward circles. It felt as if something brushed the inside of my veins, soft as gossamer wings, but powerful. Energy rose in me, propelling me forward to a goal I couldn't yet fathom. Could I be turning already? In a few hours? I wasn't ready. A bubble of panic rose inside my chest and I jumped from my chair, pacing the room, hugging myself with trepidation.

Ke'lan was instantly at my side. "What's wrong?"

I shook my head. "I feel restless. Scared. Something's going on..."

He gathered me into his arms. "Shhh. It's okay. What you're feeling is normal after intense healing."

He dropped his face to my neck, dropping soft kisses where only hours ago fangs had ripped into my skin.

"I can't do this, I ..."

E'than stepped up behind me, his strong hands kneading my shoulders. "It's like an adrenaline rush. You'll feel it when you change, during sex, when you're threatened. Your senses will all become heightened. You must learn to adapt."

"She needs water," Ke'lan said, looking over my shoulder at his brother.

"A swimming pool?"

Ke'lan nodded. "That will do."

I was breathing so hard I'd begun to hyperventilate. Black spots danced before my eyes and I could feel my knees giving out. I thought my heart would explode it was beating so fast. Thankfully, I

sank into darkness, letting go of the fear.

When I woke I had the feeling of cool water flowing around me, calming me as I settled into the gentle ripples that soothed my body and spirit. The sensation felt so exquisite it was nearly sexual. I felt free and powerful, strangely alive to all the stimuli around me.

Overhead, a pale full moon shone weakly through snow flurries and the bare branches of winter trees. Naked, in a swimming pool, in the middle of an icy night, I should be freezing, but I felt comfortable. It was the beginning of the change. I saw myself through altered eyes, watching the first wisps of white-colored down cover my body before I felt the two brothers swim to either side of me, protecting me with their presence.

Together they looked beautiful, both trapped somewhere between elegant swans and hard edged men. They retained a nearly human form, but the wings they had kept carefully under control inside the apartment were now let loose to flex at will in the cold night air. Small ice crystals trapped on their wings glistened under the moonlight like sparkling diamonds. Ke'lan and E'than. Twins. One dark and one fair. They looked like a pair of angels instead of swans.

The human left in me couldn't help but look down to see if they were anatomically correct. *Oh yeah!* From both brothers, two perfectly formed penises stood proudly, impervious to cold water. No shrinkage there. I couldn't help myself. I reached out to touch them, marveling at the way they seemed to be chiseled from marble. And they felt just as cold as marble in the icy water.

My fingers glided over them, enjoying the feel of the bulb of each smooth head. I traced the pulse in the vein running the length of the underside, trailing my fingertips down to the hard male balls that I cupped in my hands. What a delicious feeling. It wasn't awkward at all. I felt a certain wonder in holding them in both hands, watching their faces as I explored them. So far, they hadn't responded to my touch. They'd offered nothing more than a soft intake of breath, or a glazed expression of pleasure fleeting across their faces. Neither had

reached out for me. They took their time, letting me get used to the idea they were both mine to do with as I pleased. To be pleased by both as I wished.

Despite the cold water, I kept growing hotter. A decidedly warm rush of liquid pooled between my legs, as I imagined the mechanics of loving both of them at once. Could it be done in the pool? Heated flesh cooled by the icy water? What would they feel like inside my body? Would it be one at a time? Or both invading me simultaneously? Just the thought made me sigh with anticipation, squeezing my fingers a little tighter around their erections. My hands pumped them in short playful strokes that broke their resolve to let me lead us into whatever would take place.

Ke'lan's hands touched me first, his dusky skin looking dark as his fingers settled over my pale breasts. He kneaded me gently then tweaked my hard nipples with his powerful fingers, causing me to arch toward them, offering myself.

They didn't ignore the invitation. Both E'than and Ke'lan lowered their heads to my nipples, their mouths settling around the chilly nubs that ached delightfully with the sudden temperature change of warm tongues and playful teeth. I wrapped my hands around their necks drawing them closer, encouraging them to suck harder. They didn't disappoint me. I felt my toes curl and a shaft of heat nearly split me in two.

I had always enjoyed sex, but suddenly I filled with an urgency I couldn't explain. It was as strong as an addiction. The need for these men. I wanted to feel them inside me, to taste them, to experience all they had to give.

"You're a changeling now," E'than whispered in my ear, his hands running down my body, melding to the curves and valleys. "Everything will be heightened. What you once found pleasurable will now be almost painfully enjoyable. You'll get used to it."

"I already am," I whispered. "This is incredible. I feel...free."

"Let us show you real freedom," Ke'lan whispered, diving under



the water.

When his mouth fastened on me, I nearly lost control and went under. E'than steadied me by clamping his mouth over mine and holding me aloft. Under the surface, Ke'lan raised my legs to slip them over his shoulders while he buried his face deeper into my pussy. At the angle I rode on his shoulders I sort of floated on my back, feeling every ripple of the cold water, every feathery touch of E'than's wings on my damp skin.

E'than held my shoulders, treading water behind me, leaning over my head to kiss me upside down, or to fasten his mouth over my nipples and suck hard enough to cause a jolt of heat to spear my pussy. Ke'lan inserted his tongue into my body and gave me a tongue fucking that had me gasping and bucking against him like a wild stallion instead of a changeling swan.

I could feel the silky strands of his hair wrapping around my thighs and abdomen as he worked at me with his mouth. His hands grasped my hips trying to hold me steady, but I was having too much fun. I couldn't keep from rolling in the water, feeling the cold liquid caress my sensitive skin as his hot mouth burned me from the inside out.

And then he withdrew.

No!

"Come back," I begged in whispered pleas. "Come back."

His head broke the surface and he looked at E'than who gave an imperceptible nod, pulling me back toward the side of the pool. With his strong arms, he lifted me and Ke'lan positioned himself in front of me, lifting my legs around his hips this time while I leaned back into E'than's wide chest.

He had no problem entering me. My legs spread wide on both sides of his hips, my pussy already wet with need, and he definitely knew the way. Maneuvering one hand between us he took himself in his fist, guiding his cock into the outer folds of my entrance. Despite the cold water, he stayed hard as stone and eager to get inside. I felt

him straining against my entrance holding back just enough to prolong the anticipation for both of us.

E'than's hand tightened on my shoulders and Ke'lan shoved, pushing himself into me until he sheathed the large head of his cock all the way at the base of my pussy. I dropped my head back in ecstasy feeling it hit E'than's shoulder. E'than's hands tightened on me as my hips bumped back into his erection, forced backward by Ke'lan's firm thrust into my body.

Impaled by Ke'lan, I couldn't move from E'than's advance. I felt his hardness pressing into me. Once again the brothers exchanged looks and Ke'lan shifted me on his body, holding my hips higher, pulling them apart as he positioned me just right for E'than's easier access.

Lowering his face to kiss me, Ke'lan put his mouth firmly over mine and E'than placed soft kisses on the back of my neck and shoulders. I felt the quickening of his breathing, the tenseness in his body and I knew what would happen next.

"Trust me," E'than whispered, nudging the head of his penis between my hips. I felt him pushing at my back entrance, taking his time, allowing me to get used to the pressure.

Inside me, Ke'lan held steady, not moving until his brother could join us. I could feel his tension humming through his body like a live wire. He wanted to move. Needed to move. I felt myself going quietly insane with the feel of him motionless inside me.

It was my fault E'than didn't get the gentle entry he'd planned on to allow me time to adjust to him. He stayed poised at the entrance of my ass, his large head slowly opening my tightness when I began clamping my muscles around Ke'lan's large cock. I couldn't help it. It was an involuntary thing, but it must have felt good enough to break Ke'lan's control.

He groaned deep in his chest, trying to ease away from the massaging of my interior muscles. He strove for a bit of control, trying to wait so that he and E'than could claim me as their mate at

the same time.

It didn't work out that way.

I gushed around him, my body surrendering to the need. My pussy muscles began a rolling series of tightening and releasing that sent Ke'lan into a loss of control that slammed me back against E'than. Ke'lan thrust into me with a wildness that would have been frightening had I not been the one to trigger it.

E'than was forced into my body by Ke'lan's hard thrust and I became impaled between them, hovering on the climax of my life. E'than filled my ass in a throbbing mix of pleasure pain that threatened my sanity. I tried instinctively to pull away from him, only to bump into Ke'lan who shoved me right back against E'than. I felt like a ping-pong ball trapped between two paddles.

They started to move together, finding a rhythm that allowed both of them to bury themselves. One thrust fully in, as the other pulled out, and they had me sandwiched between them, drowning on a wave of pure bliss that had me close to fainting.

I felt myself spiraling out of control and I pushed back against E'than, forcing him deeper. I dropped my head back on his chest, just under his chin and pulled Ke'lan to me with desperate hands.

"Make me come," I ordered them. "Make me come, or I'm going to die. Right here. Right now."

It was enough. They plunged together and my release swept through me with a wildness that I'd never known in human form. The fire of their climaxes burned through my veins as hot as any wildfire that ever raged out of control. And at that moment I knew I'd lost my touch with humanity. I would go to Gypsy Cay when the time came. The change had taken place and I couldn't go back.

Caton was the furthest thing from my mind until I heard soft hand clapping from the side of the pool. I looked up to see him watching me, his dark eyes veiled by tinted glasses. His breath left clouds of condensation in the air and I realized I didn't feel in the least bit cold. Just one more shred of evidence I'd crossed the barrier into foreign

territory.

“Congratulations, Beauty,” Caton said with bitterness. “You just turned into one of the monsters. I’ll give the director your resignation on Monday. You’ve got 24 hours to leave the mainland and I’ll be back to make sure you do.”

“Caton, wait...” I pleaded, reaching my arms out to him. I wanted him to understand. I didn’t want our friendship to end this way.

He gave a disgusted shake of his head, hunching his shoulders against the cold as he turned on his heel and walked away from me without taking a backward glance.

“Let me go,” I said to the twins, straining to pull out of their grasp.

Ke’lan hissed with a low sound that chilled me despite the two bodies protecting me from the night. It was a sound of warning that froze me into complete stillness.

“He doesn’t want you any longer,” E’tan told me gently. “You’re one of us now, Beauty. The humans will never accept you again. It’s time we leave. Time for you to come home.”

## Chapter 4

Close your eyes and imagine a fantasyland of lakes, waterfalls, tropical foliage and undeveloped beauty. That's what greeted me on Gypsy Cay. Swan Territories were not on the big island. Instead, they sat at the foot of the archipelago, but we checked in at the main island first, stopping for a drink at a popular blues bar called Syren Song.

Ke'lan and E'than took time to fill out a police report for their superiors then gave me a quick overall of the community and what it would be like living under paranormal laws and regulations.

We took a small shuttle to the island of Ornitha. The territory had a quality in the air I'd never experienced on the mainland shores, not even in Key West. It smelled as if the air was scented with flowers and spiked with energy. A sort of static excitement danced over me, just breathing in the salt spray as our water taxi sped toward the outreaching island.

When we pulled into the lagoon I stared in wonder at the variety of beautiful were-birds that strolled casually around the docks, working, playing, living life like their human counterparts in any ocean-side community. Except these citizens looked more colorful and exotic. I couldn't help staring at them and listening to the wonderful mix of languages as they spoke to one another in their native tongues. I wondered if they would think me an outsider. I hoped not. I desperately wanted to fit in somewhere.

The twins had said little since we left the big island and I hoped they didn't regret their decision to bring me along. I'd heard about a community of outcasts on Gypsy Cay. Humans that had been turned, but for whatever reason weren't accepted into the overall paranormal

community. Or those that couldn't accept they had been turned and didn't want to live with the paranormals, but remained banned from human society. I didn't want to be sent there.

I must have showed some of my concern. Ke'lan reached for my hand, giving it a light squeeze. "It will be okay, Beauty. We're almost home."

E'than motioned us over to a small three-wheeled vehicle that looked like a golf cart and had my luggage stowed on top. Colorful streamers whipped from the posts that held the roof on. I looked up at Ke'lan, unable to stop the smile on my face. "Well, they won't miss our arrival in that."

Ke'lan barely gave it a glance. He watched the docks with a cop's eye. Something worried him. "Yeah, well, tourists like the bright colors," he explained.

"Don't you own a vehicle?"

"Don't need one," he said tersely, putting me in the front seat with E'than while he jumped into the backseat. I noticed he kept glancing behind us like he watched for something to follow.

"So what's bothering you two?" I asked, looking from E'than's hard-set jaw to Ke'lan's watchful eyes. "I'm a cop, remember?"

E'than blew out a hard breath, glancing over at me worriedly. "Rolerrak's tribe has a death threat out for the three of us."

"You could have told me that," I admonished him gently. "Another set of eyes might make the difference, you know?"

"And the human council has decided to prosecute us for violating the treaty," Ke'lan added. "They may send a bounty hunter to take us back for trial."

I whipped my head around to look at him. "No way! They gave you a 24 hour pass."

Ke'lan shrugged, glancing over his shoulder again. "They rescinded it. And it wasn't put in writing."

Tears blurred my vision. I had a suspicion Caton had something to do with the council's decision. I'd have to find a way to convince him

I was still the same person inside. That without the twin's intervention I'd be dead, along with a lot of other people. The death toll in the grocery store incident had been high enough anyway. Without Ke'lan and E'than's involvement, I'd hate to think of what might have happened on the streets. It would have been another Manhattan Incident.

"I'll talk to Caton and get this straightened out," I assured them. "I've got some connections in the legislature. I'll try to get them to see reason. You two saved a lot of lives."

Neither of them answered me. They knew how the human population looked upon paranormal entities. Justice was seldom served.

I tried to relax and enjoy the first glimpse of my new home. Despite all the bad news, I couldn't help but feel a sort of wonder at the ethereal beauty of the island. Highly forested rocky peaks rose above deep valleys filled with lakes and tropical flowers. The lakes were aquamarine blue and clear as glass, fed by gentle waterfalls tumbling playfully over moss and fern covered boulders. It looked like paradise in its rawest form.

I had no concept of how far we traveled from the lagoon when E'than turned down a single vehicle lane and striking natural wood homes began to appear. The architect for this community must have been at one with nature, because the dwellings all melded into the vegetation as if they had grown there instead of being constructed.

"This is our community," E'than explained in a husky, soft voice that sent shivers down my spine. "Every dwelling has a pond, a lake, or access to water. You will be living here, Beauty. With us, together, as mates."

I reached out to touch both of them, overwhelmed by the surrounding beauty. "I love it," I whispered, watching them both relax marginally as we pulled into the drive of an exquisite little two story cabin that had a wraparound porch and red tropical flowers growing riotously in nearly every space of ground that could hold a bloom.

“Did you guys plant the flowers?” I was enthralled by the careless splendor of the artistically unkempt yard.

“No. Damn wild flowers. We’ll get those cleaned up for you,” Ke’lan promised, hopping out of the back of the cart.

“Touch the flowers and I’ll pluck your feathers,” I warned. “I love them. They stay right where they are. Got it?”

He stared at me for a brief moment. “*Pluck my feathers?*”

E’tan burst out laughing, hefting my luggage from the top of the cart like it weighed nothing. “You get the yard duty,” he said to Ke’lan. “I like my feathers.”



## Chapter 5

Life on Gypsy Cay settled into a comfortable routine. I talked to my parents regularly, reassuring them they could come for a visit after the threat of the javelinas had been dealt with. I kept up negotiations with the human powers in an effort to lift the warrant for Ke'lan and E'than. It shouldn't have been a hard decision considering their acts of bravery, but nothing runs smoothly, or quickly, on the mainland when it comes to dealing with the paranormal community. So we waited.

I had a cup of hot coffee cooling in my hand as I stood at the kitchen window. I looked out over the deck at the two acre lake covering part of our property. It was a scene I never grew tired of looking at. On the eastern end of the lake, a stream trickled into the water over a succession of small cliffs making a stair-step series of waterfalls. In my swan form I stayed at that end of the lake, mainly because I enjoyed the rippling water and the scent of fern and wildflowers that grew profusely on the edges of the stream that fed the lake.

Sipping on my coffee, I watched Ke'lan swimming in the lake. His black feathers glistened with water droplets as he made large figure eights, reminding me of an ice skater on a frozen pond. He was enjoying himself, mentally relaxing while he toned his muscles with the repetitious movements.

I lifted the cup to my mouth, momentarily blocking my view and when I looked back, Ke'lan wasn't in the lake. He couldn't have reached either side that fast. A bubble of fear began to rise within me. I put the cup on the counter, hesitant to believe something could have

happened so quickly. He'd probably dived beneath the water and would surface in a moment.

I waited.

He didn't surface.

I began to run, willing myself into my swan form as I dove into the lake. I heard a loud crack and the water splashed in front of me. As a cop, I recognized that sound. They were rifle shots, someone meant to kill me. Ignoring the danger, I sped to the last place I'd last seen Ke'lan in the lake.

When I reached the spot where I thought he should be, the blood was unmistakable. Rivulets of pink stained the water and I dove downward. He'd been hit badly if he couldn't surface. I searched the bottom of the shallow lake; grateful my eyesight stayed nearly as good underwater as above. Ahead of me I spotted a dark mass of feathers crumpled into a ball and trapped in the limbs of a sunken tree. I shot forward to examine how severely Ke'lan had tangled his wing in the mass of bark and ragged branches.

Even from a distance I knew his wing was broken. The feathers bent at an impossible angle and bits of stems and bark had torn through the sensitive skin. I winced, trying to spare him as much pain as possible as I untangled him from the deadly trap.

All the time I worked at the ensnared wing, his dark eyes watched me with quiet agony. We were running out of time. Swans can't stay underwater forever. Even paranormal water creatures like us need to surface for air. My lungs felt ready to explode and I could only imagine what Ke'lan must be feeling. He'd been down a lot longer than me.

I yanked and tugged at the heavy branch, unwilling to give up. I couldn't let him die like this. I refused to give up, but my strength ebbed and my efforts grew weaker by the minute. Black spots formed in front of my eyes and I felt disoriented from lack of air. Giving one last hard yank I felt the tree give way, hitting my chest when it broke. I went tumbling back into the muddy bottom of the lake before I

could stop myself.

For a moment, I thought I'd seen a dark shape behind me and felt the brush of something on my shoulder. But nothing was there. I struggled to kick loose from the lakebed, swimming back over to help Ke'lan before it became too late for both of us.

Freed from the tangle of limbs, I saw the full extent of Ke'lan's damaged wing. He'd been shot with a high-powered rifle, shot from some distance I thought, or the damage would have been considerably worse. As a shape shifter he would heal the terrible wound, but we had to get him moving and to the surface quickly, so that he could breathe. He'd been underwater a long time. I helped him swim until our heads broke the water. As soon as we surfaced I heard another crack from the rifle.

Damn. The shooter was still around.

Just as quickly as we surfaced we dove back down. At least we managed to get a gulp of air, but not enough. I swam as hard as I could, pulling us steadily forward, toward the waterfalls. A small ledge lay hidden behind the bottom fall that would provide safety if we could only reach it in time.

Ke'lan struggled to help as much as he could. A quick glance at his wing told me the water was speeding up the healing process. Already his feathers looked brighter and healthier than when I'd pulled him out of the tree. Still a long way from being healed, the break still looked painful and the wound oozed blood.

I guided us close to the bank so our heads could surface without drawing the attention of the shooter. If I picked the wrong bank, we'd be the perfect target, unprotected from the flowers and rocks that might provide a bit of cover. I hoped the shooter's location remained on the same side of the lake as we surfaced. If he waited on our side, then our heads would be blocked from his sight.

I cautiously stuck my head out of the lake and didn't hear a sound. No shots were fired. Good. He either couldn't see us, or he'd left the area. I pulled Ke'lan's head out of the water high enough he could

take a deep gulp of clean air. We still had several yards to swim before we reached the safety of the waterfalls.

Taking a minute just to breathe, we stayed silent until we both dove under the surface again, heading for the rocky ledge. At last, I saw the churning water and knew we'd reached the goal. We had to swim under the falls to climb upon the ledge. I hoped Ke'lan was up to the challenge, because I couldn't lift him.

When we swam through the heavy spray I saw him wince with pain as the water pounded his injured wing. He shut his eyes for a moment, but didn't make a sound. When we reached the ledge he pulled himself up with one arm, collapsed on the rocky floor and heaved with pain. I tried to comfort him, but could do nothing to help his suffering except stroke his hair back from his forehead and wait for the healing to begin.

"He's here," Ke'lan said weakly, reaching out for me to take his hand. I could feel him burning with fever. It was normal, I'd been told, but the elevated temperature frightened me anyway. A human with a fever that high would be convulsing.

"Who's here?" I asked softly, sticking my hand into the running water to touch his parched lips with my fingertips.

"The human."

"Human?" I repeated stupidly, trying to get my mind around what he said. I bent closer, looking into Ke'lan's liquid black eyes. "Do you mean Caton Lee?"

Too weak to answer me aloud, he nodded.

"Is he the one that shot you?" I asked, knowing my voice had filled with anger and disappointment. What had changed Caton so much? I knew he had no love for the paranormal faction, but Caton had always played fair.

"N...no...saved me..."

I dipped my hand back into the water. It cost Ke'lan a great deal of effort to speak. "Shhh..." I soothed him. I rubbed my wet hand over his face, his mouth, and his eyelids to ease the burning of his

skin. “We’ll talk when you feel better.”

He slipped into unconsciousness and I stayed beside him holding his hand so he’d know I was there. He’d clearly said Caton saved him. But what did that mean?

## Chapter 6

E'than broke through the water, propelling himself up and onto the ledge with graceful agility. His worried eyes took in the sight of Ke'lan curled on his side now, his head in my lap, sleeping peacefully while his wing knitted back together.

"How is he?"

"I think he's going to be fine. It was rough for a while though."

E'than came to stand behind me, rubbing my tired shoulders as he left go of the tension he'd been holding in his own body. He leaned over, dropping a kiss on the top of my head before he sat down beside me looking out through the curtain of water that hid us from view.

"How did you know where to find us?" I asked, studying his troubled features. I reached over to touch his arm in reassurance. He needed that as much as his brother right now.

E'than stared into the water a moment longer before turning to me. "I got an anonymous phone call that said Ke'lan had been shot and you'd gone into the lake to retrieve him. The caller said neither of you surfaced. I've been diving in the lake..."

"Oh, E'than, I'm so sorry." I reached over to hug him as tightly as I could with Ke'lan's head still in my lap. "You must have thought we were both lost."

He looked at me with tears welling in his dark eyes. "You're alive, and that's all that matters."

We managed to get Ke'lan back to the house and into a comfortable bed where his healing could be completed in a measure of comfort. After helping me get his brother settled, E'than spent a lot of time on the phone, closing the door to his office so he wouldn't

disturb me.

I didn't think it odd that he wanted to be alone after the trauma he'd went through. I needed time for myself too, a sort of depressurization space to ease down from the stress. I suspected that E'than would be getting a task force together to hunt for the shooter.

I'd forgotten to mention what Ke'lan had told me about Caton. Not that I thought E'than would be particularly comforted by that thought. He didn't have much more respect for the humans than Caton did for the paranormals. It was a mutual dislike and mistrust on both sides.

I went in to check on Ke'lan, finding him awake and propped up on pillows, favoring his mending wing. He gave me a weak smile when I came in to sit down beside him on the bed.

"How do you feel?" I asked him, examining the wing without touching. It had knitted together but the skin still looked red and angry where the bullet had entered. Downy black feathers were already sprouting over the scars to replace the ones he'd lost.

"I'm fine. Angry as hell, but I'm fine."

I desperately wanted to ask him what he'd meant back in the cave about Caton saving him, but I didn't know how to approach the subject so I headed toward it in a roundabout way.

"Can you tell me what happened out there?"

"Someone shot me while I swam. That's all I know."

I sighed. This was going to be like pulling swan's teeth. "Okay, we both know that much. Can you tell me anything else?"

He grinned, knowing his obtuse answers drove me crazy. We'd talked about how that had been a pet peeve of mine while I worked on the force.

Ke'lan grew serious and reached out to take my hand in his. "The shots came from a high caliber rifle. I could tell by the sound of it. The sniper shot from the southern bank of the lake, high on the hill, maybe in a tree. I didn't see anything. Lucky for me I had started a dive just as he shot. I think the bullet was aimed for my head, but it

hit my wing instead. The force of the impact sent me spiraling into the debris on the lakebed. You know the rest.”

“I’m just glad you’re alright,” I said, leaning over to give him a leisurely kiss. “I didn’t think I could get you untangled in time. I’m sorry I hurt you.”

“You didn’t hurt me as much as that damn human ripping my wing out of the branches.”

My heart did a free fall. A human freed his wing out of the tangle? Could it really have been Caton I’d seen from the corner of my eye?

“I thought I saw something,” I admitted, “but when I looked, I didn’t see anyone but you and me. I thought I’d imagined it. I was getting pretty desperate for air by that time.”

“He came up behind you and bumped your shoulder as he grabbed the limb. You were in his way so he gave you a hard shove backward, pushing you into the mud. Then he tore my wing loose and hightailed it back to the surface without a backward glance. I think he meant to be gone before you recovered from the push.”

“Why didn’t he stay to see if we needed help?” I wondered aloud.

Ke’lan almost shrugged before he caught himself and eased back against the pillows managing to keep his shoulder motionless. “I think he helped as much as he wanted, Beauty. I’m not going to second guess his motives.”

I nodded in agreement, my heart feeling lighter than it had in weeks. “I’ll go downstairs and tell E’tan you’re awake now. He’ll want to see you.”



## Chapter 7

To celebrate Ke'lan's healing, the three of us went for a moonlight swim in the lake. It was something we did often as a prelude to sex. Think of it as sort of like aquatic foreplay for our kind.

A full moon cast its pale reflection on the still surface of the black water. Nocturnal sounds filled the night with a haunting wild melody that echoed off the rocky cliffs surrounding Ornitha. Night flowers and ferns scented the warm air with a natural earthy perfume. We swam quietly for a few minutes, each knowing where we would end up. I had no doubt we would be having sex under the waterfall before midnight.

E'than seemed distant as he led the three of us in a complicated pattern of loops that gave away the complexity of his thoughts. While Ke'lan preferred large figure eights when he daydreamed, E'than's swimming had a direct correlation to his thoughts. If he was worried, or under stress, his daily swims reflected the tangle of his mind. Tonight was no exception. We kept getting closer to the falls and I felt myself responding to the anticipation of their bodies pleasuring me.

As we swam through the cascade of water, E'than turned into his human form, shedding white feathers for pale skin kissed silver by the moonlight. A light breeze lifted his damp blond hair off his shoulders, tossing it recklessly about his face. He reached down to help me onto the ledge, pulling me into his naked embrace.

I felt his lips cover mine with an urgency that should have left me breathless. Instead, I met him with a sliver of reserve in my heart. I couldn't completely give myself to him, or Ke'lan, and I understood

the problem. A little piece of my heart still remained with Caton Lee.

Ke'lan joined us on the ledge, pulling me out of my thoughts as he stepped up behind me, dropping soft kisses on my shoulder and neck while E'than claimed my lips. I concentrated on the feel of Ke'lan's mouth as he nibbled gently at my skin, running his hands down my sides and over my hips with the lightest of touches. His fingertips brought a sigh of pleasure from me and I let myself be carried away, lost in the arms of two seductive men who were hell-bent on giving me pleasure.

Ke'lan ran one finger down my back, trailing my spine from my neck to the junction of my hips. When he reached the crack of my hips, he parted me, running his finger down and around the dark hole that waited for his entrance. He circled me first, feeling my muscles clench in expectation of his entry.

E'than felt me tense with need and dropped his lips to my nipple, drawing it inside his mouth with a hard suck that made me curl my toes. Involuntarily, I thrust my hips back toward Ke'lan. I needed to feel one of them inside me and *I needed it soon*. I could feel my juices lubricating the way for them and I spread my legs just a little wider, leaning into the skilled administrations of E'than's mouth while Ke'lan slipped his finger inside my ass, playfully stroking me with a gentle thrusting curl that made my inner muscles tighten into a nearly painful squeeze. I wondered what the sensation felt like on his finger. The pressure had to be strong, giving him a hint of what would come when he sheathed his erection in my ass.

My legs trembled, and if E'than hadn't been holding on to me, I would have probably sunk to the floor. Instead, he picked me up, pulling me gently out of Ke'lan's grasp to carry me over to the pile of blankets we had stashed on the floor of the small cave.

I was only partially aware of the curtain of water sending a light spray over our bodies and the muffled sound of the night along with the gurgle and splash of the falls. We remained hidden from the world, in our own little universe of sex and need.

I lay on my side, with Ke'lan to my back and E'than to my front. Both men were ready to enter me simultaneously, in a pattern they had learned pleased me most over the weeks that we'd perfected our mating. I would place my leg over E'than's hip, giving easy access to Ke'lan as he entered me from behind. It was a special kind of release when they both entered my body together, opening me to a world of pleasure I'd never known existed until they had taught me to take them both.

E'than caught my leg just behind the knee, placing it over his hip so he could position himself at my pussy. While the head of E'than's cock stretched my inner pussy lips, Ke'lan breached the outer ring of muscles in my ass. They halted their invasion of my body, holding still while they looked at one another to get the timing just right.

"Now," Ke'lan whispered and they both pushed inward while I arched between them, feeling myself be torn apart only to be mended with their loving strokes, attentive hands, and eager mouths.

Ke'lan buried himself until his balls bumped against my hips and he groaned with satisfaction. "You feel so damn tight, Beauty. I feel like you're crushing me. I love it. Work your ass for me, honey. Let me know you like it."

Like it?

*Oh yes indeed.*

I definitely liked it.

I ground my ass back into him, which wasn't hard considering E'than shoved me backward with the strength of his assault into my pussy. I clamped around E'than with the same greedy clenching of my inner muscles that drove Ke'lan over the edge. I could tell Ke'lan was close to his orgasm by the harsh unevenness of his breathing. He held on to his control on by sheer willpower, waiting until I screamed for his release to trigger my own. It wouldn't be long. I skated on the edge, feeling every thrust of E'than's thick cock into my heated pussy.

"I need you both to come now," I said in a breathless, sexy

whimper that I knew would make the guys respond. “I want to feel your cum shooting inside me.”

E’tan gave a brutal shove and groaned hard, spraying me with his juices which sent me spiraling into a climax of my own. I rode his release, milking his cock with my inner muscles until I heard Ke’lan give a low moan that signaled his surrender. He grasped my hips, yanked me back hard against him, and convulsed into me over and over. I writhed with the sensations, holding on to both men to anchor myself to reality as I spiraled into bliss.

When we had come down and our breathing evened out, we barely disentangled ourselves from one another. Snuggling tightly, with me in the center, we slept as we always did after a round of good sex.

## Chapter 8

The unmistakable sound of silenced gunshots roused me from my sleep and I sat up quickly, partially disoriented, trying to focus on what was happening. Caton stood at the rim of the ledge with a pistol in his hand. Sprawled on the floor before him, Ileana lay face down in a puddle of blood, with two bullet holes in her back.

Ke'lan sat up, motionless with shock. He stared at Caton for a moment before scrambling to reach Ileana, kneeling down beside her to check the severity of her wounds.

"She meant to kill you," Caton explained with detached calmness. "She shot you while you were swimming today. I came to warn Beauty. When I got to the lake, I watched Ileana swim through the falls and climb onto the ledge. She meant to kill you while you slept."

Ke'lan shook his head no as if he couldn't believe the words he heard.

E'than stirred behind me, moving to join Ke'lan beside the fallen swan. "I don't believe that," he said. "Ileana would never turn on us, no matter how angry she got. She was our partner."

"She did turn on you," Caton insisted quietly. "I tried to take her out when she shot at Ke'lan and Beauty in the lake, but I couldn't reach her in time and I didn't have a high-powered rifle to pick her off from a distance."

E'than gently rolled Ileana over onto her back so he could look at her face. "Why?" he asked. "Why would you betray us, Ileana?"

"Because we paid her to," a gravelly voice said from the water as a male javelina stepped out of the falls.

Caton whipped around with his gun aimed, but the boar stood

ready for him. He slashed out with his arm in a motion so fast it looked like a blur and Caton fell back on the ledge with a wickedly large knife protruding from his chest.

"This is turning out much better than I'd hoped," the javelina said with a cold smirk of triumph. "I get to watch you all die for what you did to Rolerrak." He looked at me with his beady dark eyes. "You will die last."

Without warning, he tried to charge us, but Caton reached out with both hands, clutching the javelina's ankle in a martial arts grip that brought the wild pig to a crashing halt. He went skidding head first on the slick stones, his face bones crushing under the force of his fall. Even though the boar seemed badly hurt, he wasn't nearly dead, and without intervention, he'd begin to heal almost instantaneously. There are several ways to kill paranormal creatures, but none of them are easy. I knew the only way to kill the rugged javelina was to make sure his injuries were too severe to repair.

Grabbing the gun that had skidded across the floor when Caton fell, I went to the boar, emptying the pistol at point blank range into his heart. He wouldn't be healing from those wounds. Not without a blood measure from another were-animal, and I didn't see any volunteers.

Ke'lan knelt on the floor beside Ileana, holding her hand as she writhed in pain. "You sold out to Rolerrak's tribe? How could you, Ileana? Do you hate us so much?"

"You should have been mine," Ileana said, remaining defiant even as the light faded from her eyes. "Everything should have been mine. I should have been your mate. The human doesn't deserve you."

"But to sell out to the javelinas?"

Ileana flopped one wing when a severe spasm of pain hit her. "I wanted to make you pay. I wanted you to hurt like me."

"It hurts enough that you betrayed us. After you heal, you're going to have to face the tribunal. You'll be outcast, Ileana."

"It's your fault," she charged through clenched teeth. She beat her

heels against the stone floor as her body dislodged two flattened bullets from her chest. "Your fault."

I left them watching over her as she healed, going to where Caton lay. He'd lost so much blood that I couldn't imagine how his heart kept beating. Settling beside him I pulled him into my arms, cradling his head in my lap and stroking the strands of black hair away from his eyes as his life drained away.

I knew I could change his fate with a measure of my blood. But in order to save him, it would also turn him into a swan like myself. He wouldn't like that, but he wouldn't like dying either, I suspected. Therefore, I had to make a judgment call. Save him, or let him die.

I couldn't hesitate much longer. We were at the turning point now. In a very few minutes, Caton would be beyond recovery and I would have to let him go forever. I couldn't imagine my life without him being in it.

With a sigh of resolve I started to open the vein on my wrist, but E'than stopped me. He left Ke'lan to attend to Ileana and he came to my side, squatting down to be at face level with me. When he spoke his words held a certain tenderness. "Beauty, he hates our kind. To save him would be cruel. He would forever be an outcast in both societies. Say your goodbye to him."

Caton stirred in my arms, groaning quietly as his eyes opened to fasten on mine. "I'm so sorry," I whispered, dropping a kiss on his forehead. "I wish it didn't have to end this way, Caton. I love you. I've always loved you."

"Do it," he whispered, his hand clutching at my arm with an amazing amount of strength for a dying man. "I don't care what happens. I just need to be with you, Beauty. Do it."

"Are you sure?" I asked, knowing if he accepted the change, his life would be a living hell.

"Yes." The single word trailed into the air as he slipped into unconsciousness.

E'than took my wrist in his hand, opening up the vein so that I

could administer the life saving blood that would allow Caton to make the transformation and heal his fatal wound. Then he opened his own wrist and held his arm over the stab wound in Caton's chest, letting his own blood drip into the deep gash.

I exchanged looks with E'than while he let his blood save the human in order to please me. The reserve I'd felt for him earlier melted under his selfless act of kindness. "I love you," I whispered. "You know that, don't you? I love the three of you so much."

E'than gave me a smile of understanding while at the same time his eyes reflected sadness at Ileana's betrayal. "I know, Beauty, and now you will have us all as life mates. Caton will abide by the same customs as us. To disobey is to be outcast. His future is with us now."



## Chapter 9

The old adage that time heals all wounds is true. Ke'lan and E'than managed to get through the trials for Ileana, and as they predicted, she was banned into the outcast territory of Gypsy Cay for the rest of her days. For a while they remained saddened by her treachery, but having Caton in our midst seemed to lighten their spirits as he changed from human to swan.

Caton embraced his transformation with a sort of childlike wonder that astonished all of us, including himself, I think. He took to being a swan well, like a duck to water. It wasn't long before he could outmaneuver E'than on the lake, darting back and forth with martial art-type moves and a heartbreaking gracefulness that has caused a stir of envy within the community.

Tourists sometimes stop to watch the striking swan that dances with reckless abandon on the surface of the flower-scented lake. Ke'lan tells him he is an exhibitionist, but it doesn't slow Caton down. I think maybe there's a shred of truth in the statement, or he has found freedom out there on the water that he couldn't find on land.

Caton and I are now on the Gypsy Cay security team, only this time we work for the paranormals instead of against them. The action is a whole lot different when you're playing for the other team. Ke'lan, Caton, E'than and I have become an undercover unit and we work exceptionally well together.

Mom and Dad have visited me on the island, and despite their initial shock at my unconventional lifestyle, they enjoyed their stay and will return again for a longer visit during the winter months when

the Midwest is miserable with cold and snow. Mom confided to me that she thought I had the best of both worlds. Dad remained stoically silent about his thoughts on the matter, and it's probably best that way.

"Hey, Beauty!"

I heard Caton calling for me, interrupting my thoughts of domestic bliss. I couldn't help but smile as I ran down the steps to greet him.

He stood at the bottom of the stairs and I launched myself at him. "What do you want, Caton Lee?"

He gave me a sultry calculating look shifting me a little higher in his arms. "What do you *think* I want, Beauty?"

"Well, dinner's not for another hour," I teased, ruffling his hair with my fingers.

"Ummm, then how about a little snack?"

I felt myself go wet at the thought.

"That would be really nice," I sighed, wrapping my arms around his neck and drawing him to me for a long tongue filled kiss.

He started up the stairs, carrying me like I weighed no more than a child. I loved the play of his muscles as they bunched and tightened with me in his arms. I snuggled a little closer to him, burying my face in his neck, kissing the skin exposed by the open collar.

In the bedroom, he deposited me on the bed, leaning down with me to place gentle kisses on my mouth while he unbuttoned my blouse and stripped me of the clothing I wore. When I lay naked he stood up to look at me while he got rid of his own clothing.

"You weren't going to start without me, were you?" Ke'lan asked from the doorway. He stood with his shoulder against the doorframe, his arms crossed, watching us with a hungry intensity in his eyes.

"Hey, you snooze, you lose," Caton replied flippantly. He had a grin on his face that let me know he was aware Ke'lan had been right behind him when he'd carried me up the stairs.

"I just wanted to wait until you got her undressed for me."

Ke'lan shed his clothes as he walked toward the bed. "Thanks,

dude, I'll take over from here."

"Like hell you will," Caton laughed. "I'm going to have a little Beauty snack before dinner."

"Now that you mention it, I'm a hungry too," Ke'lan added, joining us on the bed.

"*Guys! Eat already!*" I ordered them, positioning myself so they both had plenty of room to nibble anywhere they wanted. I couldn't wait to feel their mouths on my skin, and they didn't disappoint me.

Caton lowered his head to my left breast while Ke'lan took possession of my right. Their dark heads nearly touched as they laved me with their tongues, sucking and nibbling until I arched my back and sighed with the double pleasure.

Caton's fingers traced my stomach, wandering into the mass of reddish curls that had dampened with need for the two men. He swirled his fingers in the crisp hair until he found the hardened bud of my clit. With easy assurance he pinched my clit lightly between his fingers and massaged the end with a gentle rubbing of his thumb.

I arched off the bed with pleasure. "C'mon guys, give me what I need," I coaxed. I hoped one of them would let go of my breast and bury his face between my legs. I didn't really care which one did the deed, I just needed the release only they could give me.

Caton began a slow nibble down my stomach, to my navel, where he dipped his tongue into the indentation and blew his breath causing me to shiver with the sensation. His teeth became harder on my skin as he playfully nipped my abdomen, dropping lower and lower with each bite until his mouth clamped over my clit and he scraped me with his teeth, sucking hard at the swollen nub.

I gave a strangled scream of delight before Ke'lan put his mouth over mine for a long hard kiss while Caton lapped at the folds of my pussy. My clit positively tingled now, throbbing with need, while my inner muscles clamped with disappointment on the empty core aching inside of me.

Ke'lan lowered his head again, continuing to suck at my nipples,

adding to the delicious sensation of Caton's mouth on my wet pussy. With a feathery flick of his tongue, Caton traveled from my clit to the opening of my center, thrusting his tongue inside to swirl around the sensitive interior walls. I locked my legs around his head and held on until he brought me to a climax that left me breathless and shaken.

I needed them inside me.

Both of them.

*And I needed them now.*

It was as if they could read my thoughts. Ke'lan shifted so that he lay on his back, and I straddled him, easing myself down on his large cock while Caton bent me forward so my ass became available for his penetration. He reached over for the jar of lubricant and greased me with generous swipes of his fingers, moving in and out of my ass with a thrusting of his hand that had me clenching Ke'lan's erection so tightly he moaned.

At last, Caton parted my hips and slid inside, sheathing himself until he couldn't go any further. I had the sensation of stretching to the breaking point and both men groaned their pleasure.

They remained still, letting me rock back and forth on them and setting my own pace, my own control of each plunge inside my body. It didn't take long for me to pick up speed, searching for that perfect combination of rhythm and pressure that would bring all of us to a simultaneous climax.

I knew when I found the right tempo. Ke'lan stiffened under me, his legs growing rock hard as he pushed upward to impale me on his cock. Caton sucked in a sharp gulp of air as he grasped my hips and began to move with fevered determination.

E'than had entered the room, undressed, and watched the show while stroking himself. It was one of his turn-ons to watch me getting fucked by both Caton and Ke'lan until he couldn't stand it any longer. Then he would join the action.

"Got room for me, Beauty?" he asked.

I licked my lips and he guided my face to his erection, stroking

the back of my head with gentle fingers while he pushed my mouth downward on his large cock. When I felt him reach the back of my throat, I swallowed, taking him deeper. He groaned in appreciation.

I wanted to feel all of them inside me forever, but I had to find release. I encouraged their movements with verbal and physical reactions until Caton put his hands on my breasts, lightly pinching my nipples as he shot his essence into my body. Ke'lan quickly followed suit, pumping me full as he groaned out my name in a long slow drawl of satisfaction. E'than came with his brothers, and I sucked him dry, riding all of their climaxes with an extended one of my own until none of us had anything left to give. We fell back exhausted on the bed, watching the sun go down in the lake outside our bedroom window.

"I don't want to move," I said, snuggling closer to the three men, sandwiched between them as they touched and played with my body like they always did after lovemaking.

"Me either," Ke'lan said, idly stroking the side of my hip as he dropped kisses on my temple.

"So what are we going to have for dinner?" I asked, skimming my hands over the three naked and muscled bodies that encased me like a pearl in a shell.

"Pizza delivery again?" Caton asked.

We all laughed, but no one made a move to get out of bed. I had a feeling we'd be ordering a lot of pizza in the future.

# THE END

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## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Blaze Ballantine studies the supernatural and has a certificate in paranormal investigations. She enjoys writing, photography and staying in haunted hotels.

# **CLAIMING KRISTEN**

*Sea Island Wolf 3*

**Jenny Penn**

# CLAIMING KRISTEN

*Sea Island Wolf 3*

JENNY PENN

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## Chapter 1

The automatic doors whooshed open and a breath of frigid air breathed out. The cold shiver barely made a sigh into the thick, soup of the hot, humid night air. Kristen rushed under the icy blast of arctic air coming from the vents over the door.

Even as she made it into the more comfortable side of the grocery store doors, she didn't allow her feet to slow down. They shuffled quickly forward with the momentum of her fear and apprehension. She'd entered Covenanter country. If her brother, Alpha of the Narin pack, found out she'd strayed into these dangerous waters there would be much unpleasantness to face.

He wouldn't find out unless she got caught. The only ones around to do such a thing would be a Covenanter. If a set of Covenanters caught her then her brother, Derek, would be the least of her problems.

They wouldn't catch her. It was 10:30 and most of the citizens of Collins County had already put their tired bodies to rest. Kristen would have been part of that group if it hadn't been for the business meeting in Savannah that had run over. The location of the meeting was what had really screwed her.



If it had been in Charleston, like they normally were, then she would never have had to cross into Covenanter territory. She had no choice tonight. With an empty refrigerator waiting for her at home and a stomach that wouldn't stop growling, she'd made the decision to violate one of Derek's most strongly asserted rules.

She'd parked her car and entered the Covenanter's Food Lion. She had to do this. She had no choice. This was the last grocery store on the way to her house that was open. At least the place was empty.

She didn't waste time with shopping aisle by aisle. She barely managed to pause long enough to swipe a basket from the stack near the entrance. This had to be a hit and run experience. She couldn't get caught by a Covenanter. She'd just buy the essentials and get out. Five minutes, that's all she needed.

Five minutes and she'd be back in her car safe. Five minutes, that shouldn't be too much to ask the fates to grant her after the shitty day she'd endured. Five minutes just to get something to eat...and a toothbrush.

She needed a damn toothbrush to replace the one she'd dropped by the toilet this morning. Surely fate had enough mercy to let her at least wake up tomorrow and brush her teeth. It was little enough to ask, but Kristen didn't trust fate that much.

Her heels clicked and clacked a rapid gunfire across the linoleum floor as she cut through the banks of registers and headed straight for the frozen food aisle. There was no time to be picky and her eyes cut darted between pre-made, boxed crap lining the cooler shelves in panicked frenzy.

*Italian. Pasta, sauce and meat in one damn bag.*

That was about as good as it was going to get. A frozen log of garlic bread might make the meal more palatable, but wine definitely would.

Dropping the both frozen delicacies into her basket, she paused only long enough to snatch a box of frozen waffles out another freezer

door and grab a bottle of chocolate syrup off the end cap as she turned the corner into the beer and wine aisle.

The stately rows of bottles drew her into the shelves stacked with a seemingly endless variety. After today's hectic schedule, she deserved to sit in a good soak in a tub with a large glass of wine.

*Large glass of white wine.*

*Doesn't go with Italian.*

*Get a different dinner.*

*Hmm. What would I get?*

*Is this going to take long?*

*It certainly can't take long to cook. I'm hungry.*

*The hell with it, just get two bottles of wine.*

*Hey now, there is an idea.*

At a distance she heard the harmony of deep male voices and the high pitched chatter of a female, but it didn't really register. Her eyes glimmered with the possibilities as she studied the labels. She needed a strong red wine to help take the hard edge off. Then something soft and sweet to relax with while she let the warmth of her bath soak her through.

When she got out of the tub, there wouldn't be a part of her that didn't feel soft and pliant. It would be perfect. She'd curl up underneath the covers naked, keeping all that warmth tucked in around her. The only thing that would lull her into a peaceful slumber with more ease would be an orgasm.

Just a small one, an easy one. She could reach down with her own hand and rub her clit to release, but wouldn't it be so much better to have a real man do it? Even as the thought whispered through her mind the unbidden images of some hard bodied male pressing into her, running his callused hands softly over her while his lips feathered kisses, she could almost feel him surrounding her with his heat.

Something prickled at her senses, the subconscious recognition that the air around her had warmed with a deep, masculine scent. Her shadow along the rows of bottles thickened and the click of her heels

as she shifted on the linoleum floor was softened by the shift of another set of feet.

None of it penetrated the static of the gathering fantasies entertaining her brain. They had her so roundly mesmerized that she could have stood there all night. She certainly didn't have the willpower to break the spell that had woven its thick cocoon over her. She needed the helpful prod by an impatient person to get her moving.

"Hey, Kort, you got that damn beer yet?"

Kristen snapped back to the reality of her situation. She'd trespassed onto dangerous territory and forgotten it. The ramifications of that stared her in the face as she watched her shadow separate, becoming two for a moment before shifting back into one impossibly thick outline. Whirling around she stepped back to take in the sight of the man who had matched her stance with the perfection of a well seasoned hunter.

To match their size in the perspective of their shadows, he'd had to stand back. Now that she faced him, he stepped forward and she stepped back. The clinking tinks of the wine bottle swaying ever so slightly into each other told her that her second step back had been her last.

Cornered, Kristen could feel her heart begin to race over that realization as the male came to a silent stand-still, towering over her. Kristen swallowed hard as her head tipped back to keep eye contact with the man. She had to. Something inside her demanded it.

He had the most amazing eyes. They were whirling vortexes of green shards and blue lightning bolts. They trapped her gaze with their brilliant lighting show. As she watched they turned greener and greener, going pale and beginning to glow with internal heat that she could almost feel like a sensual breeze across her flesh.

The slight shift of air carried with it an odor that had her tensing as her blood heated, gaining speed as it rushed through her veins in a torrent that drove her heart rate from a simple pound to a tormented

pace. She couldn't catch her breath or even a thought as her body began to melt under the heat of his gaze.

She could feel her breasts tighten. Her nipples puckered painfully with the ache to be exposed, touched, mauled by those too perfect lips. God, the man was gorgeous. Bright eyes, dark hair, and hard features, but nothing compared to those lips. There was so much she wanted to do with those lips.

Those naughty, wonderful images began to pop through her mind again. Images of her naked with her hands buried in those soft, silky looking locks, directing his head and those lips over her body until her arms locked and she buried his head between her legs. Her pussy quivered with the first shocks waves of a mini-release.

She could almost feel his heated breath fanning across her cunt, that soft, devilish tongue stroking into her sheath, going faster, deeper, fucking into her, and twirling to hit that magical spot. Then those soft looking lips would close over her clit and suck, just a little kiss...

Kirsten gasped, her body going slack. The wine bottle slipped free and crashed onto the floor. Red liquid splattered across her ankles, her legs, and over the linoleum as a visible sign of her loss of control.

*What the hell?*

She'd actually climaxed, even if it was a very small one, right here in the middle of a public grocery store. Her eyes darted back up to the man who hadn't flinched under the sudden chaos of the bottle shattering. No, the man smirked, a smug, knowing twist of the lips.

*Covenanter.*

She had known that minutes before. Some primal, primitive part of her had felt the shift around her, sensed the male werewolf pacing in dangerously close. Those instincts prickled to life with a vengeance, making her way too aware of every detail of this man.

She didn't doubt why he affected her to this degree. Kristen had heard all the rumors, all the stories. They all failed to truly describe the experience. Oh, God, she was in deep shit now. If she didn't

escape while she had the opportunity the bastard would take away her will to resist and she would be doing any kinky ass thing he wanted.

“What happened?”

The dufus from the manager station groaned as he appeared at the head of the aisle. He had his own shadow, a replica of hers. The twin had appeared. Identical in appearance, there could be no question now of just what these men were or what they were capable of.

“I don’t need this. It’s almost closing time,” the man muttered to himself.

“I’m sorry.” Kristen pulled herself together. No eye contact with either of the Covenanters and get the hell out of the store as fast as possible. “I’ll pay for the bottle.”

“That’s fine. I guess *I’ll* clean it up.”

That got a reaction from the man mostly responsible for her dropping the bottle. He turned his head, narrowing his eyes on the smaller man. Kristen could hear the growl building in his chest.

“The lady apologized. You should be a gentleman and accept it gracefully.”

*He’s going to lecture somebody on how to be a gentleman?*

“I did.”

*Wrong response, buddy.*

“She shouldn’t have to pay for the wine. It was an accident.”

*My God. Look. He’s moving.*

Moving away from her, the Covenanter began to crowd the little clerk back into his brother. Apparently the human didn’t find the Covenanters’ show of aggression impressive. He tilted up his chin defiantly and argued back.

“Accident or not, she broke the bottle and I certainly can’t sell it now.”

“Then you pay for it.”

“Me? Why should I pay for the bottle she broke?”

“It was an accident.”

*Oh crap. Now the other one is growling.*

“That’s irrelevant.”

“But I’m not.”

“Listen here, I don’t have to take this from you. If you gentlemen have a problem with the policies of this store or the service, I suggest you take your business elsewhere. As for the woman, she pays for the wine. If you have a problem with that, I would be happy to call the police to help explain the matter to you.”

*Wow, wrong thing to say, but bravo for the balls to actually say it. And what am I waiting for?*

Both brothers began to close in on the little guy, leaving her the opening to grab another bottle of wine and shoot off down the aisle. She had to go the long way around because she didn’t dare pass by the Covenanters and risk drawing their notice again.

She ended up going down the health and beauty aid aisle to get back to the front of the store. A stroke of luck, she needed a new toothbrush after she dropped hers on the floor that morning. Not bothering to even look at the one she selected she tossed one into the basket. A display of bubble bath on sale caught her eye and she snatched a bottle of that, too. If ever a night deserved some bubbles, this one did.

She skidded into the register only to be brought to a sudden stop by the cashier. She had her shirt pulled half way up to reveal her too-tight tank top beneath. That part actually didn’t disturb Kristen half as much as the fact that the young girl had one arm bent over her head so she could look at her pit in the mirror she held up.

When the young girl turned her gaze on Kristen she could see the vast emptiness dulling her brown eyes. It helped prepare her for what came next as the girl ignored the basket before her on the conveyor belt and began to talk to Kristen in a too familiar way.

“Can I ask you a question?” Before Kristen could respond to that, the girl turned to present her arm pit for Kristen’s inspection. “What do you think that is?”

Kristen blinked. “A rash?”

“Yeah.” The girl turned like a puppy chasing its tail as she tried to get a good look at it. Worse yet she began to touch the raised, reddish mass. “It feels lumpy. I wonder if it will spread.”

Kristen looked down at her basket, her toothbrush and dinner. Yeah, she wondered the same thing. “Never mind about the groceries.”

“What?” The girl blinked then glanced over her shoulder. “Oh, hey, Kort. Did you find the beer you wanted? Jakob was telling me you were going to steam some oysters in the beer. I got to tell you I love oysters. Have you ever...”

*Oh, God. They’re behind me.*

Kristen could feel the heat, smell the scent of male and knew that if she didn’t get the hell away now it would be too late.

“Hey, where you going?”

Kristen ignored the cashier’s call as she fled for the door. She didn’t even care if she were making an ass of herself or amusing the Covenanters. It didn’t matter what it cost, she had to escape.

“What about your groceries?”

\* \* \* \*

“Way to go, Jakob. You scared the little lady off.” Kort dumped the twelve-pack into the bed of his truck. “I thought when I saw the way you were looking at her we were going to have a little dessert with our dinner.”

“We are.” Jakob ignored his brother’s mocking as he climbed into the truck.

“Really?” Kort asked as he piled in behind the wheel. “Did I misread the signals and you actually got her number?”

“I don’t need her number. I already know who she is.”

“Who? How?”

“I saw her picture in the paper before. She’s Derek Jacob’s sister.”

“Derek Jacob? As in Alpha of the Narin pack?” At Jakob’s nod, Kort sighed and turned over the truck’s engine. “Well there goes that fun time.”

“She’s our mate.”

The truck stalled out with a jerk as Kort’s foot slipped from the gas pedal. “You’re sure? Derek’s sister? Do you know what that means?”

“We wasted twelve years in the Marines traveling all over the world to find what was right next door the whole time?”

“It means that our mate is in Narin territory and if Derek doesn’t have our asses for trespassing, he’ll certainly try to chew them off for touching his sister.”

“JD and Caleb will help smooth that over. After all, we’re talking about our mate.”

“JD and Caleb wouldn’t back us until she bears the mating mark. Until then she’s a Narin and under Derek’s protection. You know how he feels about our kind messing with his women.”

“Yeah.” Kort grinned. “I guess we’re going to have to break some rules, huh?”

“Some Narin rules.”



## **Chapter 2**

Kristen made the rest of her forty minute drive home in half that time thanks to her complete lack of regard for any kind of speed limit or traffic law. She almost drove straight to Derek's house. She was that freaked out.

She couldn't do it though. Telling Derek what had happened would not only be embarrassing, but it would send her brother on the warpath. For the most part, things were good between the Narin and Covenanters packs. They each had a strength the other lacked. The Covenanters tended to be stronger, more powerful werewolves, but they had a mating curse on them.

That issue had always been the weak point for the Covenanters. They couldn't just claim any woman as mate. They had to find their perfect mate and once found she must be claimed by both brothers for there to be any offspring. The unions always bred another generation of twin males and only twin males.

Given their need for just one specific woman and their inability to breed their own women, it made the Covenanters desperate when it came to finding their mates. It made them unconcerned about technical or legal details such as abduction or adultery. If a Covenanter found his woman, it didn't matter if she were married, mated or even gay. He would musk her into submission and carry her off to his home. That was any woman that wasn't part of the Narin pack.

Derek had secured a blood oath from the McBanes that no woman mated to a Narin would ever be seduced away from her mate by a

Covenanter. While the Narin males might find it easier to find their mate and could technically claim any woman they wanted as such and still bear children by her, once mated, the male couldn't become aroused by another woman. If his mate left him, his life would suck. Only with her death could the mating bond be lifted.

Kristen wasn't mated though, which made her fair game for the Covenanters. Still, she lived and worked in Narin territory. Any male Covenanter who pursued her into her home territory would need Derek's consent or would be in violation of the pack bonds. That technicality did not reassure her as she parked her car under the carport.

*Get real. They wouldn't chase you all the way here for a quick screw.*

Even if they hadn't had the advantage of their musk, those two men could easily have gotten laid by more than a dozen women. Kristen reminded herself of that fact as she got out of the car. She scanned the darkness, scenting for any sign of interloping males.

Nothing. The night around her smelled of the usual after scents of dinners gone by, of cars parked and clothes being cleaned with fragrant dry cleaning cloths. The only movement was the tips and dips of the flowers and the tree branches under the gentle persuasion of the humid breeze.

There was absolutely no reason to run to her door and jam the key into the lock with a rush as if her life depended on getting into her house, but she did anyway. Once secured behind the solid wood door, Kristen finally breathed an easy breath. Something about being in the familiar embrace of her house comforted her, as if nothing bad or wrong could happen now that she'd come home.

Dropping her purse on the little table by the door, she kicked off her heels and padded into the kitchen in her stocking feet. The refrigerator might be empty of food, but it still held a bottle of white wine with barely a glass worth in it. Forgoing the waste of a glass,

Kristen took the bottle with her and headed straight down the hall toward her bedroom.

Barely five sips later, the bottle was empty. Submerged in a tub full of bubbles thanks to half a bottle of shampoo unloaded under the faucet, Kristen nevertheless finally began to relax. Everything would be all right. She'd made a dumb mistake and treaded into dangerous waters, but she'd gotten out with her dignity intact even if it had taken a slight dent.

No matter how small the climax, the very fact that she had one publicly, without being touched by a man or even herself, would go down in her hall of fame for shameful moments. The good news was it had happened in a grocery store she'd never been to before, one she would never go back to. Nobody knew her there. Nobody would be able to spread any God awful rumors about her. It would be like it never happened. If only she could forget that it actually had.

The wine helped with that. What little there had been still managed to help her down the road to amnesia. It diluted her brain enough to make it stop thinking and left her body two stages past pliant, almost to the edge of sleep. She'd have drifted off into that wonderland if it hadn't been for the soft squeak of a floorboard being pressed down under the weight of somebody's foot.

Kristen's head snapped up, off the rim of the tub as she looked toward the bathroom door. All around her silence reigned. She sniffed the air, but all she could smell was the overpowering floral scent of her bubbles.

*It didn't happen. I imagined it.*

Even if she hadn't, she had an old house that tended to groan and bemoan its age.

*But it never squeaked.*

She had to go see. It was probably nothing, but she needed to know that with absolute certainty. Plucking her robe off its hook as she rose out of the tub, Kristen didn't bother to dry off before she shrugged into the short, silken garment. All she bothered to do was

pull out the clump of wet hair raining water down her back and belt the thing.

With the ability to shift into a wolf within seconds, she felt no fear at opening the bathroom door. After all, there was nothing to fear because it was just her overactive imagination playing tricks on her tired mind after a long day spent in a strange and stressful courtroom.

Everything in her bedroom was as she left it. The little lamp on her nightstand bathed the room in a warm, golden hue. Her bedspread, her discarded clothing, nothing had been disturbed. She eyed the closet door, not fully closed and fought the urge to go check for monsters lurking behind its white painted surface.

To give into the urge would be to give into childish fear. Even with the pungent odor of flowers clogging her nostrils, she'd have smelled anybody if they lurked in there. Forcing herself to behave like the mature adult she knew herself to be, she moved on into the hall.

Peeking into each room as she made her way back toward the living room, she had to fight the urge to do a thorough inspection. If she gave into the fear she'd be on her hands and knees looking under each guestroom bed.

The only reason she even thought such silly thoughts was because of those damn Covenanters. They'd freaked her out, especially the one who'd mesmerized her with his gaze. It hadn't been lost on her that in actuality he hadn't said one single word to her. No, he'd watched her the way a hunter watched its next meal.

At the time she'd been too overwhelmed by his stupid musk to be unnerved by his silent gaze, but that insanity had faded. Now a new one had taken its place. One where she blindly feared he intended to hunt her down. Why would he? No reason.

*Just like there is no reason to look under the...oh, shit.*

Kristen froze in the doorway of her kitchen. She'd left the light on, hadn't she? Did it matter? She knew she hadn't bought groceries tonight, so the big, brown paper bag proudly bearing the Food Lion logo hadn't been placed on the counter by her.

Paralyzed by conflicting urges, Kristen stood there just staring. She didn't know whether to rush toward the bag to see what was in it, run for the door to escape into the night, or dive for the phone and call for help. The chaos in her mind condensed around one certainty, he was behind her.

Spinning around, her eyes widened at the sight of the Covenanter who had dared not only to enter her pack's territory, but break into her house. Words should have come easily to her, accusations, threats, demands. They all died as that alluring scent began to wind around her. She could feel her mind begin to slip away from her as lust once again began to drive wanton images into her thoughts.

She barely had the breath much less the reason left to speak. Still she managed to get the question out that burned through her brain.

"Why?"

\* \* \* \*

Kort almost smiled at her whispered plea. He knew the answer. It was just as Jakob had said. She was their mate. Their short, delicious mate flushing all pink with desire as the scent of her arousal sweetened the overwhelming scent of flowers coming off her body.

They'd interrupted her bath and the water still dripped down over all the smooth, luscious looking skin revealed by her short little robe. That was not all that the robe revealed. Its silken fabric clung indecently too her body, leaving him in no doubt of the fullness of her breasts, the sweet roundness of her stomach or the heavenly V between her legs.

Kort wanted to see it all, though. He wanted to know what color those puckered nipples were, wanted to see the creamy smoothness of her stomach and to know what color of fuzz blocked the path his mouth was about to make down her body and to that delicious little pussy already creaming for him. He would know, he would see, touch, taste and know all of his woman before this night was out.

He stepped forward intent on removing that robe and beginning the celebration. She spoke again though, surprising him that she still had the ability to form words. He knew the musk had thickened in the air to dizzying proportions, an uncontrollable reaction to being so near his mate for the first time.

“Why?”

She asked the simple question for a second time. Kort reached out to grasp the edges of her belt as he answered her. “Because you are mine.”

“No.”

She shook her head in denial but made no move to stop him as he pushed the robe off her shoulders. She was perfection. So very beautiful he hesitated to touch even as his cock swelled to painful proportions in a silent demand that he do a good deal more than simply touch. He needed to feel her beneath him, every soft, rounded curve of her.

When he stepped into her, she stepped back, surprising him again that she had any will power to offer even the weakest of defenses.

“No.”

“Are you denying me?” The thought was untenable.

“I...I...” Her eyes closed as if she needed darkness to help find the words.

Kort didn’t plan on letting her find them. His hands burned so badly with the need to feel her that he was just as helpless in this moment of desire as she. He let his hands trace over the beautiful swell of her breasts. So full and flushed, he growled in response to her whimper as his fingers flirted lightly over the hard, puckered points of her nipples.

She arched into the caress in a silent demand for more. He ignored temptation as his hands slid down into the curve of her waist before tracing the flare of her hips. Soft and resilient, his fingers bit into the padded flesh of her ass and dragged her forward. Her legs shifted

around his thigh and the moist heat of her pussy pressed into his muscle.

Then she did the most arousing thing, she stroked herself against him. With slow, little rolls of her hips his mate pressed her sweet folds against his thigh so tightly they split and he could feel the intimate contours of her pussy.

This time she tilted her head back and moaned as her body instinctively began to move harder against him. Rubbing her tight little nipples into his shirt, he could feel the tension building in her body as she humped herself along his thigh.

Oh God, she was going to push him past his control with those enticing motions. He couldn't let that happen. Not yet. Not until Jakob joined them. What the hell was taking his brother so long? He should have been here by now.

If he didn't show up soon, he'd miss all the fun. There was only so much patience Kort had. He had almost none left as he felt his little mate's motion grow more frantic as she approached the pinnacle of her arousal. Grasping her neck in a firm hold, he forced her head to tilt back and forced her heavy lidded gaze up. He wanted to watch those beautiful features as she came.

And she would come. Many, many times tonight. Right now would only be the first.

Fanning his fingers across the swell of her ass, he settled his other hand into the graceful curve of her spine. With his hold he forced her cunt tighter against his thigh and helped guide her motions into a faster pace. Her lips parted as she began to pant with her growing need and Kort took immediate advantage.

Sealing the lush curves of her mouth with his own, he tried to go slowly, to commit the feel and flavor of her kiss to his memory. Kristen wouldn't allow him that little treasure. Too frantic with her own desires, she locked her lips around his tongue and sucked the control right out of him.

With nothing left but the fiery burn of naked need ruling his actions, he repeatedly plundered the sweet, moist depths of her mouth. She nearly came undone in his arms as he stroked deeper and faster into the heaven of her kiss. The motions mimicked the push and pull of her thighs over his as she ground herself in time with the ever increasing rhythm of his kiss.

He wanted to push her over that edge, to watch her completely lose control, to hear her climax, feel it as it soaked through his jeans. His hand spanned over her ass, bouncing her up over his hard thigh faster and faster until she tore her mouth away to pant out moans of her escalating pleasure.

Her arms twined around his shoulder, her nails digging into his muscles. She clung to him even as her hips lifted under his prodding, leaving his hand just enough room to slide along the seam of her ass and discover the hot, molten well of her desire.

“Your pussy is so soft, so hot, so wet. It begs for my touch.”

Kort slid his finger upward, through the thick river of her cream to the opening from which it wept out of. At just the brush of his fingertip he felt the tiny opening contract and gasp in a silent plea to be filled. He answered the plea with a deep thrust of three fingers deep into her clenching sheath.

Kristen screamed and arched, bouncing her ass as she fucked along his fingers. Kort kept her pinned to his thigh, forcing her pussy lips to stay open and leave her clit vulnerable to the rough rub of his jeans. She went wild in his arms, screaming and thrashing as her climax broke over her.

Kort shifted fast to his knees. That was his release and he planned to taste it.



### **Chapter 3**

For a second, Kristen thought she might actually be floating through the air. She'd lost contact with the hard male body keeping her grounded and felt the world shift. Without his support she'd have floated off, but that gravity pulled her back into the thick, secure arms of another man.

She couldn't wonder or worry over him. Not when her body had shattered into a thousand tiny fragments, all swirling in the frantic beat with the vortex of rapture sucking her deeper in. It spilt wide and shot her screaming out into the ether at the feel of a soft tongue licking straight up her slit.

"Such a tasty, little pussy."

She felt the words more than heard them as they were growled out against her tender folds. Then all she could do was feel. Feel his tongue tasting her, tracing over every line, gliding over every curve as he learned every intimate detail of her pussy.

With gasps and panted moans, she arched against him, following the movements of his tongue like the mesmerized doll she had become. Lured by the slow, sensual discovery of her nether lips, her head rolled across the hard bone of a man's shoulder. When her forehead bumped into a rigid jaw line her eyes fluttered open.

It was him. The other one. The one who had hypnotized her with that intense gaze back at the grocery store. Just like before the jade crystals condensed, darkened and began to glow with an unholy light. The transformation enthralled her. Rational thoughts faded along with the blue, leaving nothing but naked need controlling her motions.

Her body continued the smooth arch and grind of the primitive dance inspired by the beat of the hungry mouth tasting her pussy. The beat shifted, changing tempos in such slow degrees she could define every single sensation. His tongue slid around her clit, pressing it up for his teeth to rake over.

The tiny nibble electrified her, making her jerk out of the sensual rhythm. Two, large, callused-tipped hands formed an anchor around her breasts and jerked her back into the solid warmth of the brother behind her as his brother's kiss disintegrated from a sweet exploration to a ravenous devouring.

Relentlessly he toyed with her clit, licking, nibbling, sucking on the little bundle of nerves until she cried out, blindly fighting the hold of the man behind her as her body erupted into wracking shudders. She could hear the incoherent words tumbling out of her lips as she tried to beg, plead, say anything that would bring the moment to a head and release her from the bone crushing tension spiraling out of her womb.

A finger dipped into the opening of her cunt and widened her just enough to snap the ties of reality. She became a thing of wanton needs, desperately flexing her hips as she fucked herself along the solid length of first one, then two and then four fingers. They pushed back, pressing into the sensitive walls of her sheath spasming around them.

She could feel the utopia cresting over the horizon of her soul when his fingers slid from her body, leaving her on the precipice of the greatest orgasm she'd ever experienced. He didn't give her time to cry out any denials, before his mouth slid down and a warm, soft, playful tongue in to fill her aching pussy.

Gasping she twisted in the arms trying to hold her still. As nice as the fingers teasing her nipples were, as sweetly playful as the tongue tormenting her sheath was, none of it filled the hard demand in her body for the rough, pounding that would send her over the edge.

His fingers, wet and sticky with her own cream, followed the crease from her clenching cunt to the tight pucker of her anus. Kristen's eyes widened. Her entire body stilling as he pressed one finger into her hidden back entrance. The usual pressure sent thousands of little tiny pain chills scampering over the edges of her pleasure, sinking into it and mutating the nearly orgasmic weight of ecstasy's wavering wing.

Kristen didn't know if she enjoyed this new direction or not. The brothers didn't give her time to make a decision. They upped the ante. First, the fingers teasing the tender tips of her breasts became rough and demanding, sending out sparks of pained mixed pleasure. Then the little tinge of dark hardness electrified the sparkly pleasure radiating out of her womb.

As the two waves of sensations crashed into each other they collided, spiraling tightly together until she couldn't tell one sensation from another. Pain became pleasure and the pleasure became painful as her body twisted and writhed beneath the heated whips of ecstasy beginning to sear across her body.

The tongue dancing deep inside her began to roll and plunge, fucking into her with greater and greater speed. It mutated the pressure coming from her ass into a beautiful tension that had her twisting to attain a little more. He gave it to her, widening her back sheath with another and then another finger until she felt impaled on rapture's peak.

Everything blurred as those amazing fingers began to move. Kristen screamed as the lover kneeling before her began to fuck her twice over in a ceaseless rhythm of push and pull, rotating front to back with no relief in either direction. She just grew tenser, more desperate. Then in a one blinding moment his fingers pressed down as his tongue pushed up. Both hit a sweet spot that had her body shattering.

The reality of the world around her ripped apart as the pleasure holding her captive vaulted her up into the heavens. The sensation

flashed through rapture to project her beyond into the captivating brilliance of the heavens beyond.

Threatened by the fear that all her control had been shredded, her mind began to revolt with apprehension at the warm, liquid utopia drowning her body in its sweet embrace. Her anxiety didn't have a chance to shred the beauty of the moment. A protective, cossetting, masculine presence wrapped around her to fill her with a strangely comforting sense of security and strength.

The warm scent of him soothed over the ragged threads of her sanity while his smooth, deep voice worked over the frayed edges of her control. He whispered dirty, dark, forbidden desires that twined around her, filling her mind with erotic images that heightened the ecstatic pleasures thrumming through her body.

"I can smell your pussy, the sweet odor of your release. You think that felt good, wait until I bury my head between your soft thighs and devour that sweet flesh. I'm going to stretch you out across my bed, tie you down and then feast on you for hours.

"I won't be rushed or hurried. I won't show mercy or compassion as your voice goes hoarse from screaming with pleasure and begging me for a just a moment, one moment to rest. I'm not going to stop until you're a limp rag-doll, completely obedient to every command, every wish, every perverted little need I have.

"I'm going to own your body. While you lay there weak and sweaty, I'm going to come over you and take you with a slow deep fucking that you wouldn't be able to resist. You'll whimper and whisper that you can't take any more, but you will.

"Just like you are going to now. I'm going to let my brother have first dip into that pussy. He's going to bury his thick, hard cock deep into that tight little cunt of yours and I'm going to let him. I'm going to take something else.

"I'm going to take this lush ass of yours, sweetheart. I'm going to fill you to capacity where no man has ever taken you before. It's going to hurt a little at first, but I'll feed you one more inch and then

another until you're so packed full of cock you don't know where we end and you begin.

"For a moment, just one perfect moment of silence will pass as we all savor the sensation. It's going to be wonderfully tight and hot. You'll tremble between the both of us and before you can stop yourself, you'll flex driving the whiplash of need up our cocks. Heaven have mercy on you girl because we're not going to.

"We're going to ride you hard and fast, deep and rough, from front and back. You're going to come apart at the seams. You'll be so hot, so hungry, your sweet little holes will be trying to suck our dicks back in every time we pull out, leaving you empty and aching for more. You'll beg to be filled again, beg for every goddamn inch we feed you."

Kristen shuddered as his words took on meaning. As she drifted slowly down from the peak of insanity her mind returned to her body and began to take stock of the situation at hand. It picked up on traces and pieces because of the magnitude of what had just happened.

Given time she might have come completely to her senses, but the two men holding her body captive didn't give her the chance to make that last final plummet back to reality. They were lowering her, right over a pair of hard, rough, denim covered knees and directly onto the harder, thick shaft of a cock.

Her thighs shifted slightly, instinctively making room for the bulbous head that brushed over her pussy. It pressed against her clit sending a shower of almost painful sparkles of pleasure through her pussy. She didn't know if she could endure any more. The question popped with both fear and desire as his thick head settled against the opening of her sheath.

With a little push and sigh, she melted down over him. Her body lost all its strength and she sank into her lover's lap. Collapsing onto his chest, Kristen moaned as the rigid shaft settled deep inside her. Thicker, longer than any cock she'd ever known, the satin covered

steel stretched her wider, igniting nerve-endings that had never been charged before.

Her hips flexed, rotated, trying to adjust her position to a more comfortable angle. Instead of comfort, she discovered a whole new world of popping, sparkling pleasure. The sizzling tingles were addictive and she rotated her hip again, enjoying the pressure of having a hot, hard rod rolling against the walls of her ultra-sensitive sheath.

Faster and faster she swung her hips until her ass lifted and she'd have started to hump and grind as the primitive instinct in her body demanded. She wanted to fuck, needed to, would do whatever it took, even doing the deed herself. Big hands clamped around her waist, holding her motions still. Kristen growled over the contrary grip and bit down on the side of the man's neck.

"Frustrating, isn't it, baby? To want something so bad and be denied."

She bit him harder and jerked against his hold. All she succeeded in doing was to amuse him. He chuckled over the assault as he pulled backward. The hands on her waist kept her following him until she was seated on him with her knees bent while he stretched out over the floor.

"Go on and bite me if it helps, but things are about to feel a whole lot better."

A second set of hands palming her ass cheeks left no doubt about just what he meant. Kristen's eyes fluttered open as her mouth went slack. Surely they didn't meant to do this, here and now on the kitchen floor. There could be no mistaking the urgency of the finger filling her back entrance with a cold, sticky lubricant.

Kristen's eyes focused on a pair of boots resting near the doorway. Even as she felt the hard slide of a cock down her split cheeks her eyes rose over the long, thick denim clad legs. Her eyes traced over the taut, smooth planes of a wide, t-shirt covered chest as she felt the thick, rounded head lodge against her back opening. Deep,

dark chocolate eyes captured hers just as she felt the painful pressure of being over stuffed by cock.

An inch in and then withdraw, the pattern set up as Kristen felt herself opening up in a way she'd never been. All the while she stared, panting, at the dark haired Adonis watching this scene of depravity and perverseness. She could see the image they must have painted, one naked, wanton woman trapped between the clothed, hard bodies of the two men penetrating her.

The image moved, flashing over the movement of those big, leather boots coming closer. The rasp of a zipper being lowered over her head drew her gaze up. A big hand came to hold her chin, to brush a finger over her lips.

"Open up, baby, let me in."

Her lips parted, her tongue peaking out to taste his thumb only to be greeted by the salty tang of man. She kept her eyes open, locked on his so she could watch his gaze turn from molten chocolate to dangerously black as she licked the evidence of his desire from the head of his cock.

He snarled as she licked him again, his fate growing tighter as the glint of carnal threat sparked to life in his eyes.

"Lick it," he growled, sounding more beast than human.

With tender, slow laps of her tongue she explored the naked length of flesh before her. She tasted the many different textures of his cock. Savoring the salty fluid dripping out from the slit, she stroked her tongue over and around the smooth, heated head before dipping down over the crest and discovering the vein-ridged satin of his stalk.

He tasted different here. More tangy, spicy, she could almost taste the tightly, coiled tension strengthening his cock. Such a powerful thing of pleasure she let her mouth worship its length, learning every intimate shift and ripple of his length.

Still she watched him. Could see his stomach muscles tighten, quiver, and then his jaw clenched and his body hardened just a

fragment more beneath her kiss. His breathing roughened to a chop as her head dipped and her lips surrounded the soft sack of one of his balls. She'd barely sucked when the hands in her hair jerked her painfully away and back up the length of his dick.

When the tic in his strained cheek muscles stilled and his lips began to move, she knew the words she couldn't hear over the ringing in her own ears...

\* \* \* \*

"I'm in, baby."

In a blink, the fantasy dissolved before her and the dark-haired Adonis zoomed back into focus across the room. She lay there crushed between only two men. One buried deep in her pussy with the other's full length burning her from backside down.

"Oh, God, baby. So damn tight."

The words growled into her neck made her jerk, setting off a cluster bomb of popping utopia balls. They snapped with little, addictive explosions that made her jerk again. She found her motions once again stopped short by a set of rough hands clamping down on her hips.

"Hold still, baby."

Kristen let her hips go lax enough to fool the man into loosening his hold. With a quick twist and pull, she found the freedom to chase after those euphoric little detonations. The man behind her growled. This time his arm fastened around her waist.

"Damnit, woman, be still. I'm trying to be considerate here."

"That must be quite difficult for you."

She hadn't responded. The words floated past her in the opposite direction, but she didn't bother to focus on who had said them. Her concentration remained fully on trying to break free of the arm holding her back from the pleasure she desperately needed.



“You don’t know the half of it. If she doesn’t stop wiggling,” the arm tightened around her stomach, “she isn’t going to be able to sit for a week.”

“I say fuck her. I can’t hold on much longer.”

“No, damnit. This is her first fucking time and I’m not going to let urgency ruin it.”

She had no idea what they were talking about. Her whole focus remained fixated on breaking free of her bind. She twisted, bucked, arched her head back on his shoulder and just pushed in an attempt to be let free.

For a moment she thought she had gained an advantage when his arm slipped. A second later a warm palm was fitting between the top of her mound and the pelvis pressing into it. One lone, callused finger tip wormed its way down to cover her clit.

*Oh, God.*

Kristen collapsed against the man’s chest in total submission as he began to rub her sensitive little bud around. The drum beat of rapture’s march began to beacon out of her womb. Quivers turned to ripples and wound into sharp lashes of pleasure as her body began to tremble and writhe beneath the onslaught.

Her hips shifted, lifting fractions off the cock filling her from behind only to grind the cock in her pussy that little distance deeper. Small as the motion was, it set off a magnificent shower of pleasure that spider-webbed across her body with a greedy demand for more.

An inch this time, but not nearly enough. She chased the need filling her every motion, driving her to thrust and buck between the two men. They grunted under her motions, finally releasing her to chase the frantic rhythm set by one lone finger circling her clit. Then it snapped out of existence and sent her spiraling further in an uncharted rampage.

“Oh, man, that’s fucking tight. So damn good, baby.”

The words were grunted into her ear from behind. Dark and dirty, they matched the rough hands that came to grip her hips, setting a

fast-paced bounce that had her fucking herself not just along his dick, but his brother's as well.

“Take it just like that. Oh, fuck, yes. You love it like that don’t you, baby? Nice and hard.”

He slammed his hips upward on the last word, meeting her downward glide with a savage thrust that embedded him hard and deep into her. The motion snapped the leash holding in her first climatic detonation. They boomed one right after another, gaining in speed and intensity as the men began to actively fuck her back as she bucked between them.

Between the grunts, the slap of sweaty bodies against each other, and the dirty little words whispering through her ears, she felt the men surrounding her growing tense. As they pressed her body more firmly between them she could feel their muscles shaking. A moment later the last explosion went off as she felt the sharp twin points of fangs begin to pierce her skin on either shoulder.

With a sonic boom, Kristen shot right out of her own body. She could hear the shattered fragments of reality tinkling down around her as she burned past. Past the bright colorful world into the soothing abyss of space, she sank into the blackness with a sigh.

## Chapter 4

Kristen came awake with a start. Her mind snapped to the reality of her situation even as she still felt the invisible touches of her dream lovers. Perhaps, that was all they had ever been. Naked and laying in the middle of her own bed, her head jerked around looking for any sign of another person.

*Nobody.*

Awaking alone should have reassured her, but as she tried to discern memory from fantasy the details merged and she couldn't manage it. Her head felt like it had been stuffed full of cotton balls and left to gather dust. Most of her body felt weak, but some parts felt sore. That was all the answer she needed. Groaning with both discomfort and disgust, Kristen dragged herself out of bed and went to confront the evidence in the mirror.

There they were. Two identical bite marks, a physical brand of ownership she would wear the rest of her life. Everything as she knew it would be irrevocably altered from now on. It could only be worse with two Covenanters mates to attend to.

Kristen knew all about them and their tendency toward sexism and machismo. It would never work between them because she would never be reduced to a simple baby making machine the men kept locked up at home.

She had a career that kept her mind sharp and engaged, a house where she could relax and be herself, and a community that had all she'd ever known of comfort and security. She'd be damned if she would let them get away with this.

It didn't matter how good the sex had been. Kristen jerked her head.

*No thinking about sex.*

Great sex did not compare with everything she'd have to give up. Worse, it wouldn't be like she was trading her good life for a better one. If she had to give up everything then it wouldn't be to become imprisoned by two overbearing Covenanters. She'd rather revel in her freedom and just haul ass.

Which is exactly what she should be doing since, miracles of miracles, it didn't appear her mates had lingered over their morning coffee. Dashing about in a crazed fashion, she still managed to get showered, dressed and out the door within twenty minutes. A personal best without any coffee propping her up.

She'd been too unnerved by her own memories to even look toward the kitchen. She knew the first thing she would see would be the memory of that third man watching. Just watching. Conflicting shivers of both fear and desire make her jerk and slam the door behind her without ever looking in that direction.

She'd get her coffee somewhere else. Coffee and then a plan. There had to be some way to undo what had been done. If there was, there would be only one person who might know about it.

\* \* \* \*

"You did what? Why I ought to clock you two bone heads together and make some firewood. How completely dumb can two men be?"

Kort shifted under that harsh reprimand. For the first time since bumping into Kristen at the grocery store, he actually felt a little bit of guilt. Damn. His eyes lifted to JD McBane and he felt a moment of pity for his Alpha.

"I'm talking to you three jerks and you'll do me the honor of looking at me when I'm speaking!"

Kort's eyes snapped toward Samantha McBane. She filled out that doorway with her overgrown stomach. Like a little avenger she fairly glowed with her rage.

"Samantha," JD sighed as he shoved out of his chair. "What are you doing out of bed?"

"Don't try to change the conversation on me, JD. I want to know how you are going to punish these three jackasses and, don't be smiling like that Tex." She shouted right over JD's shoulder. "I know all about you and Cal's little obsession. Best you wipe that smug smile off your face and get out of my sight before I say something I might regret."

"I don't know what she's talking about," Tex denied even as he stood up. "Still I think I'll take my ass out of here while it's got enough padding to keep the seats from hurting. Good luck, guys."

"Sit down, Tex," JD snapped before turning on his mate. "And you don't order my men around."

"Don't you tell me what to do. I'm lugging around thirty extra pounds right now as I attempt to grow your future heirs, so why don't you be a little grateful and help me to my seat."

"You are going back to bed."

"Not until this matter is resolved."

"This is a pack matter. A matter between the men. Meaning you have no place in the conversation."

"Ah!" Samantha shrieked. "How dare you! I have no place in this conversation? Do you mean to say that I can contribute nothing of value?"

"No, I didn't—"

"What am I? Too dumb to participate?"

"I didn't—"

"It's because I'm a woman. You like to claim we're not bright enough to understand the intricacies of male mind, well I hate to break it to you, but a two year old could understand your motivations. You're all greedy, selfish, sons-of-bitches. You just walk in and think

you can musk a woman into having sex with you and that gives you the right to suddenly rule her life?

“Did it every occur to any of you that if you just asked the girl out on a date she might agree to go and then she might respect you in the morning, or at the very least, didn’t think you were the total scum of the Earth? Huh? Did it ever?”

“Now you’re going to sit here and talk about it like it’s all some big deal when the facts are fairly obvious. Those two jerks broke into a woman’s house, drugged her, fucked her in front of that dumbass and then mated her. As if that wasn’t criminal enough, you’re all going to sit here and discuss her fate without ever once asking the woman what she thinks.

“And don’t even growl at me like that JD! I’ll show you a growl. I got that right. I know exactly what all you brilliant male minds are going to come up with. You’re going to snatch that poor girl up. It’s not bad enough what those two did last night, you’re going to help them commit an even greater crime and steal her away from her life.

“You think you control everything. Well I got news for you, JD. If you don’t do what’s right here and now, I’m going to put you on suspension.”

“On what?”

Kort could hear the indignation in his Alpha’s question and cringed.

“Suspension. Until this wrong has been righted, you can sleep in your own bed.”

With that dangerous proclamation, Samantha turned and stormed off. It surprised the hell out of Kort when JD didn’t chase after her. Instead he muttered obscenities and slammed the door shut. Continuing with his low growled tirade, he dug a little notebook out of his back pocket and went for a pen on his desk. Aggressively he began to scribble with sharp, hard jerks of his hands.

“What’s that?” Kort leaned in to Tex to ask.

“That’s her punishment list. JD’s been keeping a detailed list of every single punishment she’s earned through her pregnancy.”

“And she’s going to suffer with each one,” JD snarled as he snapped the notebook closed. “All 83 of them.”

“Now see.” Tex grinned. “That’s the kind of diligence a mated man has to have. It’s going to be months before Sam will be able to put up with that kind of sexual activity, but JD’s not going to forget. Are you?”

“No.” JD leaned across his desk. “Let me tell you this, for as annoyed as I am with my mate, she has a point. You two really screwed this up. Why didn’t you come to me first?”

“Because we knew you wouldn’t get involved until she was mated.”

“And so the best you could come up with on your own is breaking into the girl’s house and drugging her into submission? You do know her brother is the chief of police, right? While I might give you some leeway around here, Derek isn’t going to be as tolerant, especially when his sister is the victim.”

“She’s not a victim. She’s our mate.”

“Well, I guess that depends on how she tells the story. How do you think she’ll tell it? You think she’s going to look kindly on two men who basically assaulted her in her own house. Add on that you brought along a witness and then ran out before she even woke up. What do you think her reaction to you two is going to be?”

Kort cringed. It did sound bad in the light of the day, but last night with heat and need fueling his blood the plan had actually sounded quite good. It certainly had gone well. It had gone well many times after they’d shoved Tex out the door and carried their little mate off to the bedroom.

She’d been asleep and they hadn’t been gentlemen enough to let her stay that way. They’d taken her together again in her not-so-big bed. Then in the shower, against the bathroom door, and, his favorite position of the night, bent over the bed. Oh, yeah, that had been good.

“Then we’ll use leverage. I mean she can’t possibly want to start a war between the two packs. Especially with her brother being recently mated and a new father.”

Jakob, always the thinker, had an answer. Even if it wasn’t a very good one as JD pointed out a second later.

“I see, so on top of assaulting her, you’re going to threaten her family as a way to make sure she tells the story you want. That’s really great. What are you going to do when Derek finds out the truth?”

“That’s the whole point. That’s only between the four of us and Kristen. If nobody talks—”

“And Samantha. What do you think my mate is doing right now? I’d bet you money she is up there on her cell phone already relating every detail to her friend Claire Jacob, who just happens to be the mate of Derek Jacob who is for the second time the police chief. You two are really screwed.”

“Are you saying you won’t back us?”

“Of course, I’m going to fucking back you. I got no choice, but right now you’re going to take your sorry asses home and wait for my call. Don’t go anywhere and especially do not go into Narin territory. I’ll get you your damn mate, so don’t do anything dumb.”

Normally Kort would have taken exception to that reprimand. JD was his Alpha though, and that gave him the right to say pretty much whatever he wanted. Besides, he had a point. So far his generally thoughtful brother had done nothing but come up with one short sighted move after another.

Short sighted and totally irresponsible, the rewards had been sweet. Sweet and addictive. JD better come up with something soon before the itch came back to lure them into another act of stupidity.

\* \* \* \*



It had been nothing short of stupidity to go to Claire. She'd needed a woman to talk frankly with. There had been no other choice, but still she should have held her worries inside and come up with a plan. Despite the release of just telling somebody the insanity that had spun out of control last night, Claire had been no help.

She'd wanted to do just what Kristen didn't want her to do, tell her husband what had happened. Derek would flip out and very likely demand retribution. Real people could get hurt.

Her own brother could be hurt and he had a family to look after, a family that could also feel the repercussions from the turmoil. All because of her. That knowledge weighed heavily on her shoulders as she pointed her car toward home.

Lost in her morbid thoughts she didn't know what her speed was, but guessed it had been excessive when a set of blue and red lights went off behind her. The cop gave her the normal single wail of his siren and then tracked her car into the grassy shoulder bank. Kristen knew the drill and began digging through her purse for her license. She'd just leaned over to find her registration in her glove box when a knock on the window alerted her to her company.

With a sigh of recognition that life just intended to crap all over her, she rolled down the window. "Good afternoon, officer. I got my license and—"

*McBane.*

The words froze in her throat as her eyes widened over the unsmiling face of the Covenant Alpha. It couldn't be a coincidence after what happened last night that her mates' Alpha now stood glaring down at her.

*Damnit! I knew I wasn't speeding.*

## Chapter 5

“Sheriff—”

“Please step out of the vehicle.” He cut her off, opening her door for her.

“I don’t think—”

“Now.”

Kristen obeyed the harsh command of an officer of the law without thought and then immediately regretted her actions. She hadn’t broken the law or taken any vows to obey the Covenanters Alpha’s authority, but with her submission she created the appearance that she had.

“Listen, Sheriff McBane, I don’t—”

“This way.” He took her elbow in one large hand and tried to direct her toward the back of the car.

“I’m not going anywhere with you.” Kristen jerked free of his hold only to be captured again a second later.

“Don’t make this more difficult than it need be.”

“Make what more difficult?”

McBane didn’t answer her. He just tugged her along, continuing on with his own conversation. “Your brother will be here shortly.”

“My brother?” Kristen could feel the blood rush out of her head at that statement.

“We’ll have this all sorted out when they get here.”

“They? Sort what out? Damn it! I demand to know what is going on here.”

As if in answer to that, the passenger side of the patrol car opened up. It could only have been worse if one of her mates had stepped out, instead it was *him*. The one who had watched.

*The witness.*

It made sense now, what that smug bastard had been doing there last night. He had bared witness to everything and could tell anybody the details.

Kristen paled even further with that realization. Shame paralyzed her. It wasn't just the fact that he had watched or the reason behind it that humiliated her. The fact was she had enjoyed being watched and from the satisfied little twist of his lips, the man knew it.

Being drugged and forced into a sexual embrace could be forgiven. Her brother would see her as the victim, the innocent at the hands of perversion, but with desire quaking to life in her body there could be no hiding the horrifying truth she had enjoyed it. Nothing prompted her arousal but her own needs and wants.

If she didn't get herself in hand, it wouldn't just be her own kin that knew her dark secret, but the Covenanters as well would be able to scent the creaming of her pussy.

*Oh, God. Save me now.*

A prayer, too little, too late, wouldn't help her get out of this situation. Obviously her mates had rushed off that morning to go tell their Alpha of their adventure last night. She wouldn't get the reprieve she had hoped for. Just the opposite. Those maniacal bastards had planned this down to the witness. If they were here she'd blush to the very tips of her roots.

That's exactly what she did as a large pick-up pulled in behind the sheriff's car. She could see quite clearly through the windshield, enough to know that her mates had just arrived. The code red strobe light flashed in her eyes. The countdown to the nuclear explosion had begun. Detonation would occur when Derek arrived.

*Oh, God. Think, Kristen, think! Is there any way to save this situation?*

No. Nothing she could come up with but the very obvious. If she admitted to the mating, accepted them publicly before both JD and Derek, her brother would have no choice but to accept the situation. Hell, he might actually be somewhat happy for her. The desire to find one's mate drove most werewolves to search long and hard.

Not Kristen. She'd have been happy never to mate. What did she need one for, really? She had a good life. The only thing a man could have contributed were a few orgasms, something she could find whenever the urge struck her. She certainly didn't have to take on the permanent of a mate for that reason.

"Keep an eye on her." McBane shoved her at the last man she wanted to be with. "I'm going to go keep the Nickel brothers entertained."

"The Nickel brothers?"

Hell. That must be her mates' last name. How sad was it that she had just now found that out. Pretty sad from the disgusted look McBane shot her. Her babysitter in the mean time snorted back a laugh. McBane's annoyance shifted it to the man behind her.

"Behave yourself, Tex."

With that, the sheriff strutted off toward the two men climbing out of the truck and left her alone with a man who had watched her in her most intimate moments. Watched her, but not been intimate with her. It didn't help that she could feel his eyes on her. On her inappropriate locations.

"Stop staring at me," Kristen hissed.

"How did you know I was looking at you? You weren't looking at me."

"Just stop it, okay?"

Kristen couldn't stop herself though from looking over her shoulder to study her mates. Daylight didn't reveal any flaws that detracted from their mesmerizing appeal. If anything, the golden rays highlighted the streaks of honey lightening their rich, chocolate colored hair. She bet their eyes really sparkled now.

She'd know if at least one of them would look her way. They didn't and the shame of that slight snub had her glancing back to the ground. She felt worse than humiliated now. She felt defeated. They'd won.

They'd gotten just what they wanted from her, a mate, and a vessel for their children. She was nothing more to them than a means to an end. Her importance ranked so low, they couldn't even bother to say hello when they showed up.

She had no choice but to put up with it. Here, with all these men, she was outnumbered and outmaneuvered. Even when Derek showed up, she wouldn't be able to escape the nightmare. With their witness standing by and the evidence of their mating marks, the Nickel brothers had all the power. If she tried to deny their claim or object to their methods, she'd only be making others pay for the decisions she'd made.

She couldn't do that.

"Just so you know, if you ever need an itch scratched, I'm always available."

Tex's smooth comment had Kristen's head snapping up to catch him staring at her body with that knowing smile back on his face.

"Excuse me?"

"I'm just saying. You are one passionate little package and if those two can't keep you satisfied, I'm always available."

"You have got to be kidding me. You realize that I'm mated to them."

"I never let technicalities get in my way. Given your reputations as a lawyer, I'd say we have that in common. It would seem to me that two attractive, intelligent individuals such as ourselves could find a way around just about any obstacle."

Technicalities? Obstacles? This guy's arrogance knew no bounds. "You realize they'd kill you if they found out, right?"

"You sure about that, beautiful?"

"They're Covenanters. They don't share their mates."

Tex shrugged. "I'm Covenanter and I don't mind sharing their mates."

Kristin blinked for a moment, trying to follow that logic. "What?"

"Problem is finding a mate. Those boys wear out their women, but I got hopes for you. You did pretty good last night."

She didn't need any help understanding that statement. Her reaction was instantaneous. She cracked the side of his cheek so hard that it blossomed a beautiful shade of red before it had finished swinging to the side.

\* \* \* \*

"Don't even think about it." JD blocked Kort's path with a shift of his body. "We're about five minutes from getting you your mate. Now the party is about to get bigger and there are going to be some contestants trying to get into the ring. Just you keep your head and remember fighting isn't going to get that woman in your bed tonight. You hear me, Kort?"

Kort's eyes shifted from where his mate and Tex stood to JD. He didn't relax, but he did step back. A silent signal that he had heard. Even if he didn't like the words, he would abide by them. He could kick Tex's ass for whatever had caused Kristen to slap him like that later.

Right now, he had to remain focused on a single goal, keeping his temper from screwing him out of having a pleasant night. JD's speech earlier had really gotten to Jakob and he'd been drumming in his ear all day about what they could do to make things right with Kristen. Hell, he'd go along with just about anything once he fucked the desperate need clawing at his balls.

After that, he would be happy to wine and dine the little woman. Hell, he would pull off pretending to be happy with the relatives and be tolerant of some male's more provocative actions. He would play the perfect good boy just as soon as he wore out the desire fueling his

aggression on Kristen's little, pink pussy. It would be pussy for him tonight. All he had to do was survive the next five minutes then he could have her naked and riding his lap on the drive home.

Kort focused on that the way a dog focused on a treat, allowing it to remind him of why he stood only twenty feet from his prey and yet hadn't pounced. The will power holding him back got tested under the strain of a new arrival.

"Remember, let me handle this," JD muttered before turning and leading the brothers into the path of a charging police chief.

"What the hell do you think you are doing detaining my sister like this?" Derek roared at JD. Not giving him the time to respond before he turned to snap at Kristen. "Get over here, now!"

Kristen moved to obey, and Kort couldn't help the growl that escaped his throat. It drew a dark look from JD and a startled one from Kristen. Derek turned on him with a look darker than hell itself.

"What the hell do you think you are doing?" Derek demanded. He didn't pause for an answer but snapped back to Kristen. "Damnit, Kristen, get over here!"

Kort couldn't help it. Seeing his mate move toward another man, respond so instantly to his command, made the wolf inside him growl with aggression. It didn't matter that the other man was her brother. The beast wanted her just for himself.

"If you growl at me one more time, I swear to God I'll—"

"She's my mate."

"Mate?" Derek's eyes widened before snapping toward JD. "What the hell is going on here?" There wasn't even a whole second before Derek's attention turned toward Kristen. "You mated a Covenantan?"

"She did." JD grunted, not only answering for Kristen, but moving in on Derek just as she'd been ordered to. "What of it?"

"Was it consensual?"

"Are you implying my men would do anything dishonorable?"

Derek jerked around to get into JD's face. "Don't play me, McBane. I know enough about you Covenanters to know you don't

think the rules apply to you. Now I want to know if my sister consented to this mating or if it was forced upon her with that mind altering musk you guys like to use on women. Tell me now, Kristen!"

"She is no longer a Narin and no longer under Narin rules. She is a Covenanter and now under my authority. You do not command her." JD turned toward Kristen. "Answer your brother, Kristen."

"You don't command her!" Derek roared.

"As a mate of two Covenanters, that brings her into my den and under my authority. If you do not respect that bond then you will be breaking the good-will between our packs and calling for unnecessary hostilities considering the fact remains she is mated to my men and that is an unbreakable bond."

"Not if it was forced. Was it, Kristen?"

Kort tensed as Kristen hesitated. He could see her weighing the threat JD had made against the need to tell the truth. If she made any comment, any small movement that indicated she would not accept their claim, there would be bloodshed today. He could feel the wolf beating on the reigns of his control.

It had been hours since he'd last satisfied himself on her, too long to curb the desire fueling his every breath. Each inhale brought the tent of her sweet scent. The slight odor of her arousal fueled the beast in him. Demanding that he take now what was his, capture it, defend it, devour it.

"Answer him," JD snapped, visibly jarring Kristen. "Tell him if you were forced into this mating."

Kristen's mouth opened and Kort could feel the tension of the moment as every male readied for the fight her words might bring. It all got cut short by the blaring honk of a horn and the sudden squeal of breaks. The rush of motion had all the men jerking with an instant need to react.

"Hey, honey!"



Kort watched as the brunette yelling and waving out the window of her old Mustang as she pulled the tank to a stop on the opposite shoulder.

“Oh, crap.”

Silently Kort echoed JD’s groan.

## Chapter 6

“Ah, crap.”

Kristen heard the sheriff mutter to himself about the inconvenience of females as he stormed off toward the car that had just pulled up. She didn't have to cram her neck around the sheriff's massive frame to see the stomach that first emerged out of the door. It was followed by the rest of a very pregnant, dark haired woman.

A second, skinnier woman came around the bumper to help. Kristen's eye widened over the sight of her sister-in-law giving the pregnant lady a helpful tug to get her out of old Mustang. What the hell was Claire doing here? Did it really matter? The situation had gone from bad to worse from the very beginning. Why not let it sink a few feet deeper?

“Samantha.” JD intercepted his mate with what could only be best described as restrained tolerance. “You should not be here.”

“Don't you even start with me, JD.” Samantha might have been a foot shorter than her mate, but she pushed past the oversized male as if he were barely a pebble in her path. “I'm going to have my words with you later. Right now I have duties to attend to.”

“Your only duty right now is to stay off your feet and grow my babies,” JD snapped back at her.

“I'll certainly attend to that once I'm done here. Now you can either threaten my fragile condition further by annoying me more and elongating this moment or you can behave as a gentleman and help me expedite this matter.”

*Wow.*

Kristen had to admit that she was impressed. She'd heard a little bit about Samantha from Claire. As two converted werewolves, both queens of their own pack, the women had formed a bond over the months. Claire had often commented on how much Samantha amazed her for not just putting up with one arrogant ass, but two of them. Seeing her stand up to her mate in person, Kristen bowed her head to the woman's gumption.

"Kristen."

"Don't touch my sister."

She barely had a chance to recognize the brush of a hand along her arm before Derek smacked one of her mate's hand away. Suddenly she found herself the only barrier between two snarling, bristling males.

"She's my mate. I can touch her whenever I want."

"Over my dead body."

"That can be arranged."

"Hey! Hey, hey." Claire pushed her way between Kristen and her brother, saving the moment when all Kristen could was stand there in a stupor. "There is not going to be any death arranging today. Okay, guys? Why don't we give Kristen some room? You," Claire pointed at the Nickel brother, "whoever the hell you are, why don't you back up and stand right over there. Then we'll," she began to pull Derek backward, "go over here and leave Kristen right there in the middle. Nobody will touch her and she wouldn't show any favoritism by moving. All right?"

Kristen didn't think the men were really all right with the situation, but they obeyed, backing off and giving her some room. She stood there in the middle of the dangerous debacle she'd helped create like a silent twit. It hurt to admit that in this moment she found herself obeying the dictates of others.

Normally she'd be barking at all of them, breaking skulls and holding her own. Today though, she felt anything but normal. Her body begged to be taken back into her mate's embrace while her

emotions rolled in the opposite direction, wanting to rail at them for doing this to her. It was her mind though that caused her the most grief.

The constant turmoil held her paralyzed as her brain churned painfully fast. Then suddenly it all blinked out of her consciousness when a hard bulge hit her stomach and she suddenly found herself engulfed not only in a hug, but in the insanity that had to be Samantha McBane.

“Welcome to our pack.” Samantha jerked Kristen back to arm’s length with impressive strength. “I’m Samantha Hark-McBane and I’m here to help.”

“Samantha, you have got to let me handle this situation.”

Samantha turned and gave her mate a bright smile. “By all means continue to handle it, dear. I’ll just take care of Kristen.”

“You don’t understand. I—”

“I understand. Kristen is mated to Jakob and Kort, right?”

“Technically, yes,” JD growled.

“Then technically that makes her a Covenanter bitch and under my authority. Now given the details as *I* know them, I would say that Kristen has a valid grievance against her mates for their treatment of her.”

“What the hell does that mean? How did you treat my sister?”

“I’m not sure that’s proper for us to discuss outside the individuals involved.” Samantha lopped her arm around Kristen’s shoulders and pulled her close.

“I’m her brother!”

“Really?” Samantha had to be faking that surprise. She’d arrived with Claire after all. Still the woman pulled it off like a seasoned actress. She turned to flash Kristen a big smile. “Let me congratulate you on your fine and proud heritage. Sister of the Narin Alpha is quite a position. I’m sure your family will be pleased to learn that you have mated second lieutenants in the Covenanter pack. Such strong and capable men will give you many fine sons, however—”

“Samantha, please let me handle this.” JD groaned. It sounded more like a plea than a command.

“Oh, I am. I’m going to let you handle Derek and the details of how this marvelous event took place. I’ll see to Kristen’s comfort.”

“That’s her mates’ job,” JD growled.

“That’s my job.” Derek corrected him.

“Actually it’s my job.” Samantha overruled both Alphas without blinking. “As the authority of the pack rules give me, I am completely in my rights to govern over any complaints a female brings to me and am allowed to grant judgment on how to handle the matter without question.”

“What the hell are you talking about, woman?” Derek snapped. “What complaints?”

“JD will answer all your questions.” Samantha shot her mate a too bright smile. “After all, that’s his area of authority.”

“You are pushing it, Samantha.”

Kristen guessed Samantha liked to push it. “After due considerations of all the details, I think I have come up with a perfectly acceptable conclusion to the problem as it presents itself.”

“You do?” JD obviously tried to glare his mate into submission as he stepped dangerously close to her. Not too close, her stomach wouldn’t allow for that.

“Yes. Given the situation as it is, I think Kristen should live with us until such time as she agrees voluntarily, as in without being musked, to move into her mates’ household.”

“That’s insane!” JD erupted.

“I like it.” Claire declared loudly. “Don’t you, Derek?”

Obviously, Derek didn’t like it. JD though overshadowed anybody else’s objection.

“No. I forbid this.”

“You can’t forbid it. This is my right, if you interfere in this ruling you will be breaking Covenanter law,” Samantha shot back. “This

woman is as of now under my protection and she'll be staying with me."

"If you do this, Samantha, I'll—"

"What? What will you do?"

"You don't want to find out."

Samantha shrugged off her husband's threat with amazing ease, Kristen thought. She'd seen a lot of men make threats in her lifetime. That had been a vow. Instead of worrying over her husband as she probably should have, Samantha turned her attention to the other three Covenanters lurking about.

"As for you three, let me make this quite clear. There will be no scheming, no manipulating, and no mischief making. Even if you get around my ruling with such underhanded methods, you will be showing an even greater level of disrespect for your mate than you already have. Trust me, I won't need to punish you after the hell your life will become."

Kristen's eyes widened at that and she stared in amazement down at the petite sized woman.

"From this moment on, Kristen Jacob is under my protection. She'll stay at my house until she decides otherwise. While she is under my protection you will not touch her, not force her in any way to desire you or do anything she has not consented to in a rational frame of mind. You will treat her with the dignity and respect that her position demands. If you fail on any of these accounts then I will have to consider you unschooled pigs and sign you up to take some deeply needed manners classes. Understand? Good."

*Talk about a Napoleon complex. Hail to the chief.*

Out of everybody there worth following, Samantha had proven herself to be the most worthy one. She'd found a way around the mess that had become Kristen's life. Without a single objection or even word, she allowed the other woman to drag her off to her car.

JD followed along, bitching to his wife while Claire appeared to dance excitedly about. Kristen barely noticed them. She was too busy enjoying the sudden escape she'd just been given.

\* \* \* \*

"What did you do to my sister?" Derek growled, stepping into Kort's personal space.

"Nothing she didn't beg me to do."

"I can testify to that." Tex chipped in, sounding way to happy not to ignite the flare of The Narin's temper.

Jakob sighed as Derek and Kort went down in a flailing of all fists. He didn't really care to join his brother in an ass whopping. What he cared about was getting his mate back. With every intention of forcing JD to see the wrong in what his mate had just done, he went after his own Alpha still standing across the road, watching the fading tail lights of Samantha's Mustang.

"You got to do something about this, JD. It ain't right to separate us from our mate."

"You think I like this?" JD snorted, before shaking his head and turning toward Jakob. "Now I got your damn woman in my house when it's already overfilled with my damn woman."

"Well, then do something. Go stand up to your woman."

Instead of lashing back at him for that disrespectful remark, JD snickered. "Yeah, right. You want me to go have words with my seven-month-pregnant mate for your ass? I tell you what, whenever you want, you come on over and tell my mate exactly what you think of her decision. Okay? You try to handle her."

Jakob rolled his eyes at that. "Yeah. I'm going to go piss off your mate, so she pisses you off, and then you take a strip out of my hide."

"Well then I guess you better figure out something else to convince your mate to live with you." JD smirked. "And might I

suggest that the next time you manage to get the clothes off her back, you leave Wonder Boy, here, at home.”

“Hey.” Tex puffed up as he came to join the party. “I happen to think the little woman liked being watched.”

“Shut up, Tex,” Jakob snapped.

“Don’t worry. He’ll get his reward some day. If there is any justice in this world, she’ll make him suffer.” JD monitored the fight still raging between Kort and Derek. They’d rolled off the grass and into the sandy ditch. A quick look had Jakob seeing his brother needed some help. Instead of stepping in, he kept his attention on Tex.

“You stay away from my mate or I’ll give you your reward now.”

“I ain’t going to touch the little woman,” Tex snorted. “I don’t have anything, but respect for the mating bond.”

“Then why’d she smack you earlier.”

“Just a little misunderstanding.”

“Better not be anymore misunderstandings in the future.”

“Don’t worry.”

“How can I not when I know the Casanova of Collin County is sleeping next door to my mate?”

“Well, then why don’t you sleep there?”

“What?” That jarred JD’s attention. “No. Hell no. My house is not a bed and breakfast, okay? You cannot just invite whoever the hell you want to stay there, Tex.”

“Ah, think about it. It is the perfect solution to the problem. It not only puts Jakob and Kort in perfect position to seduce their mate freely, it will also piss off your mate with a taste of her own medicine.”

JD appeared to consider that. “Fine, they can move in, but everybody is going to be double bunking. I’m not undoing the nursery to make room for all you people. So Cal and Tex will share a room and Jakob and Kort will have the other one. You don’t like that, go stay at the Holiday Inn. Now help me separate these two before one of them actually gets hurt.”



## Chapter 7

“This is very nice.”

Kristen looked around the room Samantha had shown her. Claire had taken off to pack up her stuff for her and get it brought over before nightfall. At least that was what she'd said. Kristen suspect Claire was really in a rush to get everything done before Derek caught up with her.

Kristen didn't blame her. She knew Claire and Samantha intended to help with this little intervention, but she'd seen the look in her mate's eyes. Jakob's haze had been a beautiful kaleidoscope of vibrant blues and greens. The whirling chaos had been focused completely on her and beneath his gaze she'd seen the intelligence clicking to life as he planned his next move, a move that would ultimately end in revenge.

His gaze had unnerved her. Kort's gaze had terrified her. The blanket aggression she'd seen kept his gaze crystal blue. Like a beast on a leash, he watched her with barely restrained ferocity. Just the memory of that look had chills swirling through her stomach. Fear blended into the lust just being near her mates had awakened in her.

She'd been controlling her reaction to seeing her mates for a while, but the need was getting to where she actually regretted not going with them. What stupidity was that? What sane woman would go off with two men who couldn't even be bothered to tell her their names before they screwed her?

“I remember that look.” Samantha had both arms locked in perfect support beam mode as she lowered herself into the oversized reading chair placed under a window at a perfectly tempting angle. “That

totally disgusted look which means you are probably wondering how you could possibly desire two men who annoy you so damn much.”

“You a mind reader?”

“No. I just saw it in my reflection enough to recognize the look.” Samantha smiled. “Trust me there isn’t a single Covenanter mate who doesn’t get that look on their face at the beginning.”

“That common of a condition is it?”

Kristen smiled at the thought as she settled down on the bed. Samantha was easy to be around. She drew Kristen in. Maybe it was the pregnancy, but Samantha glowed with an inner spirit, a spunky aura that made Kristen feel somewhat bonded to her.

“Yeah. They’re so annoying at first with their arrogant ways and sexist attitudes. They irritate the living hell out of you, but you still want them. That just makes you even madder, doesn’t it?”

“If being around them didn’t make me so damn horny, I’d kill them.”

“While I understand that impulse, I must tell you there are a lot more interesting ways to get your revenge.”

“Like what?”

“Do not answer that question, Samantha.”

The deep authority of that command had Kristen snapping her head to the door. A replica of the sheriff filled the passageway. With his dark look and arms crossed, he didn’t look anymore happy than his brother had. Thanks to the all black military dress, he created the same dangerous, intimidating image JD had in his sheriff’s uniform. Thankfully this one’s attention remained solely focused on his mate. In fact, he acted as if Kristen didn’t exist. That kind of smarted.

“I would like to have some words with you, wife.”

Samantha rolled her eyes and shot Kristen a smirk. “He only calls me that when he’s displeased.”

“Do not think that just because you are pregnant, I’ll tolerate such disrespect.”

“Lighten up, Caleb. You’re beginning to sound just like JD.”

Right before her eyes the couple disintegrated into an argument that had Caleb promising certain types of threats that Kristen didn't think she should be hearing. Despite the improperness of such behavior, Kristen couldn't look away from the scene.

Samantha amazed her. She gave back to the towering Covenanter as good as he was giving. It impressed Kristen and also depressed her. She could see a lot of herself in Samantha, the same strength and desire to rebel against the authority of men. At the same time, Kristen didn't want to live her life bouncing from one argument to the next.

As much as she could tell, Samantha and her mates thrilled at the challenge of testing each other. That was not a life Kristen would enjoy living. She got her kicks in the courtroom. Her very job demanded her to be in constant competition with the prosecution, so when she came home, she liked to relax and be happy.

Samantha burst into sobs jarring Kristen out of her introspection to watch as the girl fled out of the room. Caleb exhaled a deep breath before shooting Kristen a dirty look and storming out after his mate. He nearly knocked over Claire, but she stepped out of the way at the last minute. Kristen caught her smile as she filed back into the doorway behind Caleb.

"What's that grin for?"

Claire dropped the suitcase she'd been holding and held up a hand for patience. With a cock of her head, they both listened to the heavy footsteps charging down the hall. A second later a door opened and immediately got slammed shut.

"I taught her that move." Claire grinned. "And I must say Samantha has become an expert at it."

"What move?"

"Promise you wouldn't tell Derek or any other living male."

"Cross my heart."

"After several months of pregnancy, trust me, you'll be able to cry at the drop of a hat. It's the greatest revenge you'll ever know. Men can't handle the emotional tears of their women, especially their

pregnant women. You can end any argument with tears and before it's over not only will they be apologizing for breathing, but they'll be agreeing to any damn thing you want. It's the golden phase of pregnancy."

"It sounds kind of cruel."

"Sometimes that's just what love is."

"Love? This isn't about love."

"Yes, it is. That's why Samantha gave you this opportunity to adjust, but you are going to have to work at it. It won't be long before those men come up with something, some way around this obstacle—"

"Too late, doll. They already have."

Both Claire and Kristen jumped as Tex strolled into the room.

"How long have you been standing there?" Claire rose off the bed with barely restrained aggression.

"Long enough to know just how beautiful you are in profile. I have to say, I give my compliments to The Narin for picking such a delicious looking mate."

"Watch yourself, Tex. I know all about you."

"Do you now?"

"Lilly's clued me in on some details."

"I'm honored to know that such a beauty as Miss Masterson would take note of my details."

"I wonder how she'll take note of your adventures last night."

That, for some unexplainable reason, finally wiped the smile off of Tex's face. The man actually appeared to grow nervous as he considered Claire's threat. "There isn't any reason she needs to be informed."

"I guess that depends on whatever future details might occur, doesn't it?"

*Damn. Look at him shrink.*

Almost right before her eyes the man seemed to lose the cocky, self-assured attitude. “Fine. No more details, but you can tell Lilly I’m going to be giving her details one of these days.”

With that he jerked to the right and stormed off through a side door, Kristen had thought led to a closet or bathroom. She could see clearly as he threw open the door it simply led to another bedroom. Her eyes cut to Claire who still glowered at where Tex had been standing.

“Is he sleeping there?”

“No. We are.”

Kristen spine straightened as her head snapped around to confront her two mates as they filtered through the door. The bruises and cuts over Kort’s face only amplified the rugged cut of his features. Sexy in one complete hard-bodied package with eyes so intense and focused, it sent the desire whipping through her with merely a look.

In an instant she went from somewhat relaxed to itchy and edgy. Conflicting needs tore at her soul. Desire surged forth, undeterred by doubt and fears, but it only fed them with its intensity. She’d never felt a pull this strong and it made age-old instincts fire off demands to flee and hide.

Kristen looked quickly away, avoiding Jakob all together. Instead she focused on her hands, taking deep breaths to try and calm her clamoring nerves.

“Where the hell is my mate?” JD had arrived in no better mood then when she’d last seen him. “And what the hell are you doing here?”

He must have been talking to Claire because she responded instantly. “I brought over some of Kristen’s things and Samantha was a little upset so she retired to her room.”

“A little upset. She’s going to be a whole lot upset when I get done with her.” JD muttered before his voice rose into a bark. “Get out of my way. You two jackasses might be staying in my house, but don’t ever, ever get in my way. I don’t want to hear shit out of you

while you're here. You're ghosts, you got that? And you. I believe your mate is looking for you? Perhaps I should give him a call and let him know where he can find you."

"No need." Claire retorted. "I'll be happy to find him myself."

Before Kristen could think of a way to hold onto her remaining barrier, Claire was hugging her and whispering, "It'll work out. Just give them a chance to do right."

Then she was gone and so was JD. He stomped off down the hall muttering all sorts of threats to himself in obvious practice for the coming confrontation with his mate. A moment later the bang of a door slamming shut shook the walls. Kristen kept her eyes on the floor, tensely waiting for her mates to make their move.

"Kristen." She felt the bed depress beside her even as the warm, spicy scent of a man enveloped her. "I'm...will you please look at me?"

She didn't want to, didn't trust herself to behave in a rational sane manner with those brilliant eyes mesmerizing her. She didn't want to appear to be weak either. She'd shown enough of that disgraceful characteristic already. Squaring her chin, she lifted her face with steely determination not to disgrace herself.

"What?"

"I'm...I'm Jakob Nickels and I'm sorry for how I handled our previous introduction."

Kristen waited for a moment, but when he didn't say anything more she couldn't believe it. "That's it? That's all I get? Sorry? That's the best you can do?" She jerked off the bed with indignation. "After our previous introduction, as you so politely refer to your breaking into my house and molesting me on my kitchen floor while you let that," her hand waved off toward the open door, "ogre watch—"

"I can hear you," Tex shouted out from the other bedroom.

"I don't care," Kristen roared back.

"I told you it wouldn't work," Kort grunted, drawing Kristen's enraged attention in his direction.

“What? What wouldn’t work?”

“Apologizing.” Kort shrugged. “You don’t really want to hear how sorry we are because we all know we’re not. We’d do it again. We’d do it here and now. If we could get away with it, we’d have you naked and begging on all fours while we fed you cock anyway you wanted it. Hell, if Tex wanted to watch again, none of us would think to stop him. Not even you.”

That did it. She charged him. While it impressed her that he went down under the impact of her body, the arms that snaked around her waist to take her with him made her doubt that he hadn’t volunteered to go down. The ramifications of that had the fight turning in her and she battled to break his hold.

It was impossible. He rolled and a second later she found herself pinned to the floor with her wrist trap in his hands. He held her still even as she tried to find a break in his unshakable hold. The effort did little more than wear her out.

“See,” Kort stated as she calmed down. “You don’t want apologies. You want revenge.”

“Damn right I do,” Kristen spat.

“You have a right to it.”

“After what you did, you’re damn right about that.”

“And we’re going to give it to you.”

That took her a minute to process and even then it left her suddenly quite confused. “You are?”

“It’s got to be good though,” Kort warned her. “I don’t want to spend the rest of my life with you lording how we met over us. So you got to have enough revenge now to get it out of your system completely.”

“Kort.” She could hear the groan in Jakob’s voice. “Don’t tempt the woman.”

“I’m not.” Kort released her so he could turn and confront his brother. “We tried it your way, but it’s like I told you on the way over here. This ain’t going to be fixed with a few flowers and some humble

words. She's our mate. She's like us. We'd want revenge and that's what she wants. Right, Kristen?"

Slowly, not at all sure of what was being negotiated at that moment, she sat up. "I guess it depends on what kind of revenge."

"Well, like I said, it's got to be good."

"Damnit, Kort, don't give the woman any ideas."

"Oh, yeah." She couldn't help but smile at the worry in Jakob's voice. "It's going to be good."

"Obviously, it's your revenge, so you got to be the one to figure it all out," Kort fairly purred.

"Yeah." She liked the sound of that. "It's my revenge and I'm in control."

"I don't like the way she is smiling, Kort."

"Just don't make it bloody or fatal and we'll roll with the punch."

"No blood or death." She could live with that.

"It's probably going to take you some time to come up with something." Jakob sounded almost desperate now.

"Hmm."

"At least you want some time before you spring it on us. After all the surprise lends something to the act."

"Oh, you're going to be surprised."

"That's going to make you happy?" He sounded resigned now.

"Very happy."

"Well, until then, can we just build on that emotion and try to work on settling into being mates?"

"What?" Kristen blinked the world back into focus at that. They'd lured her in with their talk about letting her get her revenge and now they'd sprung their trap. Their negotiation techniques had been somewhat amateurish in their obviousness, but they'd made up for that with their offer.

She could have her revenge, but they would still get their mate. Not a completely even swap in her book.



"I don't think so." Kristen used Kort's shoulder as a support post as she pushed herself back onto her feet. "I'm not just going to move into your house and play happy Mary housekeeper because you agreed to let me have my revenge. You don't have that power. It's my revenge. I have a right to it and it's at my discretion whether or not I exercise my right."

Jakob rose to his own feet as he confronted her. "Fine, you don't want to move in with us, we'll all stay here. But can we at least proceed on a course that would lend itself to one day moving into our own house?"

"What course is that?"

"Doing what mates do?"

So that's what he wanted. "I'm not having sex with you."

"I'm not talking about sex," Jakob snapped.

"Excuse me?" Kort scrambled to his feet. "I want to talk about sex."

Too bad nobody wanted to talk to him. Kristen kept her focus on Jakob who continued on with a certain amount of indignant air. "I'm talking about the normal things, like eating dinner together, talking about our day, vegging out in front of the TV together. You know normal, everyday things."

"Like getting naked at the end of the night and having some fun," Kort retorted over Kristen.

"Shut up, Kort!" Jakob snapped.

"At least I agree to that," Kristen snorted

"To what?" Jakob rolled his head slightly as he emphasized his point. "To Kort shutting up or to what I was saying?"

"To both, actually. I mean what you're talking about is going to happen regardless. After all, we are living together."

"Yes, but it could happen without a constant tense, bickering. We could actually try to be nice to each other."

"I'm sorry. I can't do nice with this boner bothering me." Kort interrupted again, this time drawing Kristen's complete attention as he

continued to complain about his hard cock. “I mean I can try, but I’m not going to be able to truly relax and be a pleasant fellow until my dick gets a little loving from my mate. That’s just the way it is.”

“Is it?” Kristen demanded stepping into him. “Is it really that way? You can’t function without sex? That’s all you think about?”

“Well, I didn’t say—”

“What you did say was that you were a pathetic loser who can’t even go a day without getting distracted by your own raging hormones.” With each word she stepped closer to him. She’d have walked right into him if he hadn’t started backing up. “Poor little baby, can’t function without getting screwed every hour because all your brains are in your pants. Well how about this for revenge? How about I screw your brother without you? What if I make you wait weeks, months, whole fucking years before I let you back in my bed? What do you think of that, Mr. Blue Balls?”

By the time she was done, she was screaming at him. All the anger she’d pent up that morning unleashed itself and she shoved him hard right through the open door. This time when he landed on his ass, she knew she’d put him there. It felt good. Almost as good as slamming the door in his startled face.

Turning, she breathed out a deep sigh of release and faced Jakob. He looked pained but patient.

“I accept.”

“What?”

“I accept the terms of your offer. We’ll put the past behind us and start on a new foot in the morning. You can court me and I’ll be receptive, but we both know I’m going to get my revenge.”

“Um, I kind liked the revenge you just mentioned to Kort.”

## Chapter 8

Jakob jerked the towel off the rack and wrapped it around his waist with angry motions. Two weeks. Two weeks of playing nice, being charming, letting his mate set the slow paced tune that he had danced to and what had he gotten? A sore palm and a tension that just wouldn't let go until he'd buried himself balls deep in his mate's heat.

When Kort had suggested giving her the time to think up some revenge, Jakob had anticipated that they'd spend that time in bed. Hell, the woman had a right to her pound of flesh. Jakob had figured he's let her claw it off his back while he screwed her into the mattress.

By the time Kort and him finished with her, she'd have been so grateful to find her mates that she'd have forgiven them anything. That had been the plan.

*Leave it to a woman to ruin a perfectly good plan. No sex and I still have to endure whatever unpleasantness she can dream up.*

As if walking around with a fricken hard-on all day wasn't unpleasant enough. There could be no hiding it. He'd gotten shafted. So had his brother, but that dumbass had created the situation they found themselves locked in. Now instead of helping Jakob bring this insanity to some kind of end, his brother worked on making it worse with all his lewd and suggestive come-ons.

It had to stop. They were the running joke through the pack now. There wasn't a twin set in Covenanter country that hadn't heard about what their Alphas' mate had done to the Nickel brothers.

Every male had taken a deep breath as the reality that their queen had offered sanctuary to a newly mated female settled in over the horror that their Alphas had done nothing to stop her. Covenanter

males were a lust lot. Dividing the men from their mates was an aggression worthy of killing over. To do it to a newly mated couple...that was just evil.

What the hell had he done to deserve such persecution? He'd found his mate and overcome every obstacle to claim her. Despite whatever feminine sensitivities might have gotten bruised along the way, he hadn't done a damn thing different than any other man would have done. Including his Alphas.

When he'd made that point last night to JD and Caleb, they'd both snickered. Neither had been motivated to put a stop to this nonsense. Just the opposite. They'd suggested he take his points up with their mate.

*Like I'm that masochistic.*

Jakob snorted to himself as he yanked on a pair of jeans. He'd had enough problems without getting out a whip and a chair to go confront his queen. His main problem made it difficult to button up his damn pants, the lingering effects of taking a shower right after his mate.

The steam enclosed room had drowned him in Kristen's sweet scent, citrus spiced up with the faint tones of arousal. That little undertone had him thinking how soft her body had been, how delicious tasting, how all he had to do was turn his head, brush his lips over hers...sweet nectar of the gods, that's what she tasted like.

He could so easily lose himself in her, knew she would get lost, too. Like a delicate bud rising with sensual grace toward the sunlight, she'd open up to him, press her body into him as she kissed him back. Kristen had that smooth subtle way of rubbing against a man that let him feel all her secrets, the firm roundness of her breasts, the hard tips of her nipples, that sweet little pussy humping against him with each slow, sultry rotation of her hips.

All those little instinctive motions she made that had driven him wild. The details of that first night haunted him. Awake, asleep, it

didn't matter. He walked around in a state of perpetual hardness and he'd gotten tired of it.

It was way past time to lay down some rules and bring this insanity to an end. If Kristen felt the need to get revenge then she could have it. He'd gladly give it to her right after he fed her every single aching inch of his erection. That was exactly what he would be doing five minutes from now once he found where his mate hid.

Despite JD's house rule that no man could go about the place minus any article of clothing, Jakob stormed out of the bedroom with nothing more than his jeans on and even they were only half buttoned.

It was just after three, which meant Kort wouldn't be getting home from the station for another couple of hours. Nobody could or would stop him. Not even Samantha. Her and her little pious rule about not using the musk, suggesting that to use it would be disrespectful.

*What crap.*

He respected Kristen. He respected her so much he'd make sure she came three times, hell four, before he gave her any rest.

With single-minded determination he tracked her scent through the house. Finally, he ended at the door to the den. About an inch open the sound of his mate's voice had him stilling.

"I don't think I can take this any longer."

"Be strong." Samantha's voice sounded unusually cheery.

"I'm trying, but every time one of them comes around I get all itchy."

"That's just part of the mating. Thank your stars you were lucky enough to get two Covenanter mates."

"Are you serious?"

*She should beg on bended knee.*

"Why wouldn't I be?"

"Because Covenanters are known for being aggressive, arrogant, outspoken beasts. From everything that I have seen of my mates that is exactly what they are."

“But you like them, right?”

*Of course she does. She’s our mate.*

“Sometimes.”

*What?*

“Only sometimes?”

“Well, I have fun with them. They’re both so different they sort of fit into my different personalities.”

“But?”

“But you know how men are. They put on a front when they’re dating. That’s when they’re their most attentive, their most charming. You can’t trust that.”

*That’s why she was holding back?*

“So you are afraid they’re going to change once you agree to move into their house?”

“It’s not just that they may change, but that my whole life will change.”

“Hasn’t it already?”

“Yes, but I know this is temporary so it feels safe, you know. Once I agree to leave, everything will change. I’ll be moving into their house, forming my life around them, their rituals and habits. What if I disagree about something or want to change something? It’s two against one. My opinion is basically pointless.”

“You don’t know that. They’re twins, they don’t share one mind. Besides you guys seem to get along fabulously here.”

“That’s because they’re on their best behavior.”

Jakob eased back from the door. An idea had just come to him. A very good idea and he was actually kind of proud of himself for having it.

\* \* \* \*

“Would you at least tell me where we are going?”

Kristen told herself she was a fool to let Jakob guide her out of the McBanes' house. The house represented security to her. She didn't trust herself alone with either brother. She'd actually gone through great pains over the past couple of weeks to make sure she was never alone with either Kort or Jakob.

As long as there were other people around, she knew she'd control herself. No matter how much she wanted Kort and Jakob, there was a part of her that just wouldn't let her have them. A part of her she hadn't had the strength to reveal to Samantha earlier because it was a weakness.

Raised in an active werewolf pack, she knew all about and understood a male's need to mate. Rationally she could accept what Jakob and Kort had done, had been driven to do when they first met. Emotionally that acceptance left her hurting. That first night had been so intense, so special, but it hadn't been anything more than instinct.

They hadn't chased her down and brought her to a quivering mass on her kitchen floor because of who she was. It hadn't been her breath-taking beauty that demanded their focus. Nor had her charm and quick wit captured their attention. No. She had at some level been completely irrelevant.

That stung. It made her hesitate with her mates. Part of her wanted it to be something special the next time they were together. She wanted them to want her more than need her. She just didn't know how she'd ever be able to tell if she'd gotten that.

"I already told you it's a surprise." Jakob's oversized hand kept her much smaller one protected in his grasp. The warm, callused palm rubbed against hers causing little rivulets of pleasure to roll down her spine.

"We're walking there?" It was the obvious conclusion when Jakob began escorting her down the long drive. Still her surprise had the statement coming out like a question.

"We're just going a few houses down."

"Friends of yours?"

“You are impatient. Haven’t you ever enjoyed waiting for the surprise?”

“No. As I already told you, I’m not a fan of surprises.” She added just enough annoyance to her tone to make sure he didn’t get any ideas.

Kristen suspected he just might be. His thumb had shifted to rest over her wrist, right against her beating pulse. He’s already started a small, mesmerizing rub over that sweet spot. The tiny little ripples of pleasure cascade up her arm and through her body.

“You’ll enjoy this one.”

“That’s what all the men say,” Kristen muttered to herself.

“Excuse me?”

“Don’t look so injured and don’t think I’m not keeping my guard up for any fast moves you might try to pull.”

“That’s insulting. Have I tried any moves on you in the past two weeks? No. I’ve been respectful and a gentleman.”

“Only because you had to be. We’re alone now and I’m trusting you. Don’t blow it.”

“I’ll try my best.”

Kristen couldn’t help but smile at the tinge of indignation that colored his stiff response. Jakob could be so cute when he got huffy. She’d always thought of Covenanters as being sort of dark and mysterious, but Jakob broke that mold for her. With his honest responses he had a tendency to give it all away. Not just what he felt, but what he thought, too.

“After these past few weeks, you’d think I earned a little trust instead of losing even more.”

Kristen rolled her eyes at the insult he affected in his tone. “I do trust you, Jakob. It’s that oversized bulge in your pants that I don’t trust.”

“That oversized bulge just wants to be your friend.”

“Does it?”

“It likes you, Kristen. It means you no harm.”



“Just remember to keep it on its leash.”

“You’re the one keeping it on the leash.”

Kristen clenched her jaw fighting the seductive charm of his voice going lower, deeper as he turned to whisper in her ear. “At some point, sweetheart, you’re going to have to let it off to play.”

Kristen dug her heels in and came to a stop. She knew how to handle this, knew she had to handle it right up front. The problem was that was getting harder and harder. Jakob wasn’t the only one who wanted to play. For now, though, she still had enough resistance left to sound authentic when she snapped back at him.

“That is not being on your best behavior.”

“Give a man a break, Kristen. You’re not naked and moaning in the middle of the street. I consider that a hell of an accomplishment.”

“Accomplishment? You think I’d really let you strip me here in the middle of the—” Kristen stopped short. Jakob’s eyebrow had risen slightly, his lips kicking up into a smirk. Best not to turn this into a challenge. She didn’t have the defenses left to hold him off.

“We’re here.”

“What?” Kristen looked around the street before focusing in on the large, darkened house in front of her. “Here?”

“Come on,” Jakob began pulling her up the driveway.

“It doesn’t look like anybody is home.”

“That’s because we’re not inside.”

“What? Wait a minute. Is this your house? I didn’t agree to go home with you, Jakob.” She said it. She meant it, but she didn’t put up any resistance as he prodded her up the front steps.

“Just relax, Kristen. It’s not what you think.”

“It’s exactly what I think. I trusted you not to take any advantage of the situation and what do you do? You blow it by taking me to your house and you think I don’t know what that means? I know what you’re trying to do, buddy. It ain’t going to work. I’m not going in...it’s empty.”

Her indignation ran flat when he finally managed to open the front door. She could see straight through the massive great room and right out the towering windows on the other side of the house. It was a breathtaking view. The floor to ceiling windows framed the pink and purple hues of the sunset over the marsh with such warmth and vibrancy that it almost drew her straight to them.

"You like?" Jakob asked from behind her as her hands smoothed over the glass.

Kristen looked back at him. Her eyes traveling across the distance realizing just how easily he'd lured her into his den. Now he filled in the doorway, blocking her only exit. She could almost sense his anticipation.

"It's an amazing view."

She turned back to admire the rest of the room, all but dismissing him. Completely vacant it appeared oversized with a kitchen made for feeding a small army off to the right. Granite countertops, stainless steel appliances, it looked as empty and void of all personality as the great room did.

"Is this really your house or did you just buy it?"

"It's where we live, but technically the pack owns the house."

Kristen nodded her understanding. She knew the Covenanters were a wealthy pack that pooled their money to assure that all their members were provided for, but this was more than she imagined.

"It has five bedrooms, four baths and an extra two rooms that can be used as offices or game rooms or whatever you want to make them into."

"Me?"

Jakob ignored her question and gestured down the hall. "You want me to give you the grand tour?"

"I don't know," Kristen glanced down the darken hall. "Are there anymore surprises waiting for me?"

"I just want to show you the house."

Reluctantly, she gave him her hand and let him lead her into the shadow mysteries of the house. It didn't remain a mystery any more than it did a dark suggestion. Flipping on the lights as he went, Jakob showed her one oversized bedroom after another, one opulent bathroom after another, until they finally came to the end of the hall and the stairs that led up to the two extra rooms.

Only one door remained unopened on this floor and as Jakob turned the knob, Kristen held her breath. Just as she suspected the last bedroom in the series was an even grander version of the rest. Here the ceiling soared up to a point.

"Wow." Kristen couldn't help but be impressed. This room had it all, elegant architecture, amazing views, a platform for the massive bed seated just opposite the windows.

"This is what you will wake up to every morning as our mate."

There could be no hiding the pride in Jakob. Whatever uncertainties that had kept him a little nervous had faded. He knew he'd scored with this room.

"Wait until you see the bathroom."

She could imagine, but first she had to take her eyes off the bed. The only piece of furniture in the whole house and it was already made.

"I don't get it."

"What?" Jakob hesitated on the other side of the room.

"Why the bed?"

"What do you mean? Why the bed?"

"There is no other furniture in this house, but I can smell Kort and your scents everywhere. This is your house, but where is everything?"

Jakob smiled gently as he closed in on her. "This was Kort and my house, but now it's ours."

Kristen shook her head, confused and softening beneath the look in his eyes. "I still don't get it."

"We're going to make a new life together, Kristen. Not yours or mine, but ours." His words warmed some part of her that had been

stiff and cold for the past two weeks. She could offer no resistance, but melted into his touch as he cupped her cheeks.

“But the furniture?” Kristen whispered, not wanting to break the spell she could feel weaving its way around this moment.

“I had it packed up and sent to a storage unit. We can go through it together and figure out what we want to keep and what we want to change. There will be a lot of changes in the future, Kristen. For all of us.”

“You’re willing to change? For me?”

“For only you. Don’t you understand, Kristen? It’s important to me that you’re happy. If you’re not happy, then I’m not happy.”

“How do I know that isn’t just a line?”

“Well, you’re going to have to trust me.” He started this little hypnotic rubbing motion with his thumb over her lips. “Haven’t we earned a little trust? We’ve obeyed all of the rules so far, haven’t we?”

They had. They had earned a little bit of trust. She’d earned a release from all the tension staying away from them had caused her. Kristen couldn’t fight it anymore. Her defenses had been worn down not just by Jakob’s sweet words or grand gesture. Her own desires had been pecking away at her willpower for days.

There was simply nothing left to hold onto but Jakob. She wanted to hold onto him. He was solid and strong and so damn appealing to all her senses. When his head dipped, she couldn’t have been sure it hadn’t been her who had moved first.

It didn’t matter. When their lips met, Kristen knew she wanted this, needed it.

## Chapter 9

Jakob brushed his lips over Kristen's gently. Very gently, giving her time to withdraw. Instead of moving backward, she pressed herself inward. Curving her body in to his, her arms twined around his neck. All signals were a go, but still he held back.

He feared rushing her and scaring her off. His plan had come together so well, too easily. He just didn't trust it. Slow and easy that was the way to capture a wild mate. Slow and easy, it was the hardest thing he'd ever tried to do.

His muscles trembled under the strain as he traced the delicate curve of her mouth, teasingly sucking her lower lip. He captured the plump sweetness in his teeth, biting down ever so gently even as his fangs ached to be released, to be allowed to pierce and mark her once again as his.

Kristen whimpered under the restrained assault and pressed herself even closer against him, molding her curves perfectly into his angles. His cock jolted inside his jeans, his hips reflexively grinding against the softness of her stomach.

Another whimper preceded the tentative flick of a warm, wet tongue along his lips. The playful of caress was an invitation he could no longer resist. He reached up to cup her face and hold her steady as his lips broke open over hers. The sweet exploration quickly flamed out of control.

Kristen matched his passion as he stroked deeper into her mouth. Their tongues tangled and danced until he felt like he was drowning in her taste. Just as it had been that first time, he couldn't get enough. He couldn't control the rampaging need for more.

He'd fuck her right now, standing right there if he didn't have his damn clothes on. The layers of fabric saved her from the savage screwing that his cock wanted to give her. The wolf howled, growling at the leash he held it back with. He couldn't let the wildness break through. Not this time. This time was for Kristen.

That vow got lost in the static of pure lust that swamped him when her lips closed down over the tip of his tongue and sucked him straight into her moist depths. The sharp edge of her teeth scraped over his sensitive taste buds, firing each one with a tinge of pain and too much pleasure for him to remain focused on holding the wolf back.

Deep down in his balls he could feel the punch of desire flare almost painfully hot as if he'd been tapped with a red-hot poker. His muscles tightened, tingling with the need to transform as a primal growl fluttered out of his chest. He felt the snap as the wolf began to burst free of the silken strands his control had become.

God bless her, Kristen didn't understand the danger she was in. If she had she'd never have reached down to mold a hand over the hard length of his erection. With her hand encasing him, squeezing him, he could barely catch breath much less think clearly. Thinking was a waste. Right now all he wanted to do was to feel, to taste. His lips returned to hers again. A savage taking, he'd lost control of the beast. It reared its head, demanding its turn at plundering the sweet, moist depths of her mouth.

*Delicious.*

Her flavor only fueled the beast into more reckless behavior. There were still too many clothes in the way of the fucking he needed. The beast knew how to solve that problem, rip the damn fabric out of the way. He heard the tear of her shirt even as he recognized it was his hands curling over the edges of her collar.

Sanity surfaced briefly when he felt warm liquid slip over his fingers. The strong scent of blood overpowered the sweet scent of her creaming pussy. He heard her groan, felt her tremble against him.

*Shit.*

Jakob jerked backward. He'd cut her. He could feel the claws his fingers had twisted into and see the jagged line of broken skin along her shoulder. He'd meant to rip off her shirt. Instead he'd ripped into her. Horrified by his own actions, by his own loss of control, Jakob stumbled further away from Kristen.

"Jakob?" Kristen's lust hazed eyes blinked, clearing as she looked at him. "What's wrong?"

Jakob couldn't believe she had to ask. He'd hurt her. He'd hurt his mate. His mate, the woman he had sworn to protect, to cherish. She bled because of him. Shaking his head, he turned and fled out of the bedroom.

"Jakob!"

He heard her running after him.

"Wait!"

"Stay away from me, Kristen." Jakob made it to the great room and put the full width of the oversized room between them before turning to face her.

"Why? What's wrong?"

"Stay back! You can't trust me right now, Kristen. You have to stay back."

"But I do trust you, Jakob. I trust that you will ease this ache that has been painning me."

Jakob closed his eyes, unable to bear the sight of her without giving into his own aching need. He couldn't risk it, not until he had the wolf under control. Neither could he close his ears. With every huskily whispered word Kristen ripped off another layer of his barely there control.

"I can't take it anymore, Jakob. I need you. I need you deep inside me, stroking in and out of me, going deeper and harder with every thrust. I need you to fuck me, Jakob. Now."

He knew she stood in front of him, barely inches from him. He'd felt the heated glide of her breath, could smell her own seductive

musk creaming out of her pussy. Every muscle tightened in memory of how hot, how tight she'd been. That ravenous little pussy sucked in every hard inch of cock he'd given her and demanded even more.

"Please, Jakob."

He flinched back from the hand that warmed a spot right over his heart.

"Don't."

"Why not? I can feel how much you want it. Your heart is racing."

"Too much," Jakob managed to growl the words out as a last defense as she cornered him against the wall. "I want you too much, Kristen, but I don't want to hurt you."

"Hurt me? The only thing hurting me right now is being left empty and unfilled."

"You don't understand." Jakob's eyes popped open. He tried to implore her not just with his words, but his eyes as well. "I can't control the beast, Kristen. If I take you now, it wouldn't be me."

The slow, seductive twist of her lips sent shivers of both excitement and fear up his spine. "Who said I would object?"

"You don't understand."

"Don't I?"

"Kristen—"

The words, whatever they had been, got strangled in his throat. His mate stole the very idea of them when she raised a hand to the thin line of blood bubbling out of the cut on her shoulder. She swept a finger over the tiny, little droplets.

"Is this what you are afraid of? A little blood?"

She lifted the finger to her lips and he groaned as she sucked off the red liquid, her tongue swirling out to catch the rivulet that tried to escape. When her skin shined golden and wet, no blood left, she gave him a smile that made him shudder.

"Do you think I'm afraid of a little blood, Jakob? Don't you remember? You already made me bleed once when you sank your fangs in me and marked me as your own."



He did more than remember. He relived the moment anew as she pressed her warm, willing body into his. She wrapped her arms around his neck and rubbed, showing him just how unafraid she was.

“Remember when you sank those teeth into me?” She breathed against his lips before taking a little nip. “Remember how you sank your cock deep into my ass at the same time? Remember how I exploded around you? I loved every second of it. I’ve craved it every second since. Don’t deny me any longer, Jakob. Give me what I want. Give it to me hard and rough. Let the beast free.”

He couldn’t deny her or himself any longer. Her demands overwhelmed any consideration or worry he had for her. As he took the lips teasing his in a brutal kiss, his hands skimmed down over her hip. With a hard grip he curled his fingers into the firm, well-rounded globe of her ass. He’d take her there again but not tonight.

Tonight he would drown in a more rapturous heat. With a rough grip, his hands dipped and bit into her thigh. Dragging her upward, he lifted her until her soft heat pressed into his throbbing erection. Kristen returned the demand with one of her own. Wrapping her legs around his waist, she ground herself against him, igniting the wolf’s savage need to mate. Mate now.

It couldn’t be delayed even long enough to divest her of her clothes properly. This time he shredded every piece of fabric that barred his hands from feeling the soft, silken feel of her flesh. She fought him. Not in an attempt to escape, but to keep herself pressed tightly in his embrace.

He had no choice but to take her to the floor, to pin her down as he tore the clothes from her body. Despite her flailing struggles he managed to reveal the lush beauty of her body to his eyes, his touch and taste. Oh, but she was the sweetest fruit the wolf had ever devoured.

With long, sensual swipes of his elongating tongue he discovered the addictive taste of his mate’s neck all the way down to the flushed, heaving globes of her breasts. A nip at the tip of one lush globe had

her moaning, arching as her hips flexed upward over the band of his jeans to grind her pussy into his stomach. The damp heat of her desire burned through the thin fabric of his t-shirt to scald his flesh with the proof of just how wet she was for him.

With the scent of arousing cream flooding his head the erotic motion of her hips had him growling, clamping his hands over her waist and lifting her ass straight up until he could taste the intoxicating proof of her arousal on his lips. The wolf had no tolerance for hesitation, no room for restraint. The beast plunged it oversized tongue deep into the delicious cunt that had offered itself up to his feasting.

His mate groaned, twisting as her back flexed and her neck strained under the extreme arch he'd dragged her into. He growled back a warning to the woman to be still, to not resist or fight the tongue fucking he gave her. He wouldn't tolerate such defiance. This pussy was his. His to plunder, to savor, to taste and take at his leisure.

Even if his mate doubted, her cunt knew it. The long, velvety walls of her cunt tightened down around his tongue, sucking him deeper and fighting to hold onto him when he withdrew. His cock swelled with angry demand at the seductive motions of her sheath. Swelling with blood, the angry tyrant demanded release, release from his jeans, release to plunder her sweet depths and find release buried deep inside her.

His own jeans suffered his annoyance when his fingers came to rip at the zipper blocking his path. The stiff denim was no match for his claws and he shredded the material until the cool air breathed over his naked flesh. Cold wasn't what he wanted. He wanted to bathe himself in his mate's liquid heat.

With a jerk he forced her hips back down and plunged himself deep into his mate, eliciting a scream from her even as her cunt pulsed and wept over his invasion. Too absorbed in finally being able to touch heaven, he didn't have the attention to notice her response.

In that moment, all he could feel was the strange mixture of emotions buffeting him. The beast had never felt these things before—a sense of closeness, of perfect completeness as though they had truly become one. She was his mate, as precious a gift as any beast could hope to have. In that moment, the wolf felt a gentleness it had never known.

His eyes drank in everything, savoring the sight of his woman flushed and panting, twisting with the hard tips of her breasts pebbled and becoming, and the beautiful sight of the swollen pink folds of her pussy split wide around the darkened length of his cock. He'd never seen such an amazing sight, never dreamed of feeling it.

In a move that he wasn't expecting, his mate pushed herself off the floor. Her hands latched onto his shoulders as she used his solid strength to straighten up so that he no longer impaled her. Now she controlled the moment, sitting straight up on his lap with his cock filling her completely.

She caught his mouth in a questing, hungry kiss. Catching his lip in her teeth she sucked it into her mouth at the same moment she flexed and fucked herself along his length. With the force of a lightning bolt striking him, pure heat shot down his spine to engulf his balls in an inferno of flames that licked their way down his cock forcing him to move.

Taking control once again he began a slow, steady pattern of withdraw and return. He relished in the small moans of enjoyment that broke from her lips over his. She twisted and writhed, trying to force him to increase his speed. He wanted that, but he enjoyed the soft demands that she panted out.

Sweat beaded between his shoulders and trickled down his forehead as he exerted more control than he had ever expected himself to be capable of. The pain of holding back was worth it as her sheath tightened even further around him, forcing him to forge through the tight fist of her muscles. Still he managed to hold back, to maintain his rigid control until she began to beg. Her lips fell from his

to settle on his shoulder. In a perfect imitation of the mating bite, sharp, little fangs pierced his skin and broke the beast's willpower.

With that tiny little bite she shattered him, reducing him to a thing of wild need. He gave into the unquenchable hunger plaguing him and began to pound into her helplessly. Faster, harder, deeper until the sweat rolled off him in waves and his ears rang with the cries of her passion and the erotic slap of flesh against flesh.

Drawn to the mating mark he'd left on her weeks before, his lips locked over the healed wound. His tongue lapped at the sweet skin seconds before he pierced her with his fangs, driving his cock deeper than ever before at the exact same moment. Beneath him his mate screamed as her cunt pulsed and spasmed into complete chaos.

The feel of his mate coming apart beneath him had the beast roaring seconds before its own release had crashed down over him. The tidal wave of pleasure seared through flesh and bone to fill his soul with a primal sense of victory, possessiveness. She was his.

The satisfaction, both physical and emotional, had his balls swelling anew, firing out another shot of seed deep into her very womb even as the beast trembled and collapsed on top of his mate. If he'd been in wolf form, he'd have rolled onto his back for a long nap, so content was he.

The man though resurfaced, taking enough control to recognize Kristen's small body, flattened beneath his own, still twitched and trembled with the aftershocks of her own climax. Jakob rolled, taking Kristen with him so that she draped over him like a sweaty, heated blanket. The soft feel of her secure in his arms had him chasing down that nap the wolf had suggested.

Thoughts, however, got in his way. He'd never had a release like that. Not even before when they'd mated her. That first time had been good, setting a new standard in pleasure for him that he'd never imagine he'd surpassed.

He had. Tonight the Earth had shattered beneath him and he'd flown with the angels to very heights of Heaven's peaks. He'd lost

complete control, another first. Even more frightening he'd almost allowed the full change to sweep over him. His gut told him that would have been disastrous, but maybe not. Kristen had surprised him more than once tonight with her own savage nature.

His fingers followed his eyes to the mark on her shoulder. Blood swelled up from the puncture wounds as the skin around darkened into the deep, somber shades of a bruise. Unable to help himself, he leaned down to lick the small hurt clean. He heard the wolf growl in contentment and only realized that it was Kristen a second later when she curved inward, arching her neck to give his lips better access.

He nuzzled her abused skin gently, feeling a tenderness he'd never experienced before flood through him. Kristen was his mate, but she was more than that. In the past two weeks she'd slowly started to fuse into him, making him feel incomplete and strangely empty when she wasn't near.

He needed her. He would always need her. As his lips parted, his throat stumbled for the words to tell her how he felt, he heard the front door slam open.

"There you two are. I brought dinner, but I guess I'm too late for dessert."

\* \* \* \*

"I don't know about that." Kristen smiled up at Kort as he sauntered over to tower above her and Jakob. Kort and Jakob really were good men. They'd shown that to her in so many small ways over the past two weeks, but this final act had left no doubt in her mind. She'd really been blessed.

She had needed time and they'd given it to her. She had needed some small gesture to show they cared about how she felt and they'd given it to her. They understood, more amazingly Jakob had understood. There might be rough times ahead, but she knew they'd weather them.

The one thing she'd come to realize in the past two weeks was that she needed them, felt incomplete without them. All the fears she'd held onto had been nothing more than an attempt to avoid the truth. She'd started to fall in love with her mates and she hoped they just might be feeling the same way.

"Are you offering?" Kort asked and she could hear the caution in his tone.

"Anything you want."

"But her pussy," Jakob corrected. "That's all mine tonight."

"Greedy bastard," Kort smirked.

"There is always tomorrow," Kristen promised.

"Only if we get you to tomorrow whole and healthy enough to play with." Kort jostled the grocery bag in his arms. "Which is why I have this offering for you."

"Offering?" Kristen didn't want to move much less think about something as complicated as getting an offering.

"I got your favorites from the store."

"My favorites?"

"An Italian dinner, garlic bread, red wine, chocolate syrup and even the bubble bath to help get whatever syrup I failed to lick off your body."

Kristen smiled. She liked the sound of that.

# THE END

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

I live near Charleston, SC with my two biggies (my dogs). I have had a slightly unconventional life. Moving almost every three years, I've had a range of day jobs that included everything from working for one of the worlds largest banks as an auditor to turning wrenches as an outboard repair mechanic. I've always regretted that we only get one life and have tried to cram as much as I can into this one.

Throughout it all, I've always read books, feeding my need to dream and fantasize about what could be. An avid reader since childhood, as a latchkey kid I'd spend hours at the library earning those shiny stars the librarian would paste up on the board after my name.

I credit my grandmother's yearly visits as the beginning of my obsession with romances. When she'd come, she'd bring stacks of romance books, the old fashion kind that didn't have sex in them. Imagine my shock when I went to the used bookstore and found out what really could be in a romance novel.

I've working on my own stories for years and have found a particular love of erotic romances. In this genre, women are no longer confined to a stereotype and plots are no longer constrained to the rational. I love the anything goes mentality and letting my imagination run wild.

I hope you enjoyed running with me and will consider picking up another book and coming along for another adventure.

Please visit Jenny at [www.jennypenn.com](http://www.jennypenn.com), or send her a comment at [jenny@jennypenn.com](mailto:jenny@jennypenn.com)



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