



Ava Rose Johnson

The Wolves'
Submissive

Loose Id

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About this Title

Genre: Historical Fantasy

Previous Title: *Beauty and the Beasts*

Six moons have passed since Abigail was mated with the Alphas of Drayzlake, yet she is still as human as ever. Though Caine and Stavros satisfy her every sexual craving, rocking her between their bodies every night until she comes apart in their arms, her desperation to become a wolf remains. But while Stavros is more than willing to turn her, Caine needs a lot more convincing and she soon finds out why.

Caine and Stavros still can't believe how lucky they are to have Abigail in their bed and Stavros can't wait to make her one of them. Caine, on the other hand, swears to resist. To become a wolf, Abigail must first learn to be their submissive and Caine is certain his dominant desires will cause her pain.

As the tension mounts between the three, their ménage threatens to fall to pieces. Determined to save the relationship which she has come to cherish, Abigail sets out to prove she is the perfect submissive. If she can make Caine and Stavros see she's ready to be *theirs* in every way they desire, then maybe they'll finally have the *happy ever after* they've spent so much time fighting for.

Publisher's Note: *This book contains explicit sexual content, graphic language, and situations that some readers may find objectionable: Anal play/intercourse, BDSM, Bondage (mild), Exhibitionism, Ménage m/f/m, Sex while in shifted animal form, Spanking, Voyeurism.*

Chapter One

The creak of a door opening sent light shivers of anticipation down Abigail's spine. At four o'clock in the morning with a full moon hanging over the village above her quarters, she knew the footsteps on the floor of the living chamber could only belong to her two wolven lovers finally returning from their hunt.

Not wanting them to know she'd waited up for them, she rushed across the thickly piled carpet to the oak dresser in the corner of the room and blew out the candle. Then she threw herself onto the bed made for three and pulled the goose-feather blanket over her.

The satin sheets covering the monstrous bed were askew from her tossing and turning earlier that night. She slid her hands beneath her and tried to smooth out the wrinkles, then stopped. No reason to worry about the sheets when, in a few moments, Caine and Stavros would rumple them up again.

Beneath the thin silk of her nightgown, her nipples tightened, hardening into beads as she waited for her wolves to come to bed and claim her as they had for the past six months. The deep rumble of their voices carried from the chambers outside to the bed, teasing her ears. She strained to hear them better, but she couldn't discern their words.

She imagined them roaming the chambers as the maid brought a jug of water for them to bathe with. No doubt sweat was glistening all over their sculpted bodies after the hunt. She wouldn't mind slipping outside to greet them, perhaps slide against them, let her nipples scrape against their hard—

Biting her lip, she struggled to contain her desire. The longing to leap out of bed and greet them with her naked body simmered in her veins, but she

ignored it. Caine and Stavros made no secret of how much pleasure they obtained from finding their mate compliant and ready to fulfill their desires. “*You have no idea, Beauty, how arousing it is to return from a hunt and find your body warming our bed,*” Stavros had told her once. Awaiting their command aroused her too. She loved nothing more than to open her thighs and submit to the desires of her mates.

Tonight, though, would be different. Six moons had passed since she’d first come to Fort Bestial, and still neither Caine nor Stavros had made any move to turn her, to make her a wolf. Despite her many hints, they ignored the subject, Caine worst of all. Time to take a stand. She’d given up her family and her way of life to be their mate. Now it was their turn to accept her fully as their partner, their lover.

The minutes ticked by, and her agitation grew. *Where are they?* Her limbs, stomach, breasts all seemed to vibrate with longing, and the knowledge that the two men who could satiate her desires were standing in the next room, probably naked, was almost too much to bear. Her feet itched to carry her to them, and she was ready to slide from the bed when the door opened.

Her eyelids flickered shut as they approached the bed. Amazing how she’d come to recognize and distinguish the footsteps of each wolf over the past few months, even when they strove to be stealthy.

“What time will the meeting take place tomorrow?” she heard Stavros ask in hushed tones.

“Noon,” Caine replied. Abigail sensed his presence at the side of the bed and nearly lifted her head when he ran a warm hand through her hair. “Krystof arrived just before the moon rose. Delia told me as she brought water to the bathtub.”

The rustle of a robe hitting the floor reached Abigail’s ears, and then the bed dipped behind her as Stavros slid under the sheets. He enfolded her in his strong arms, pulling her back against his smooth, muscular chest. When his

skin touched hers, she bit her lip to hold back a satisfied sigh as liquid heat surged to her core.

"Don't," Caine said to his brother, dropping his hand from her hair. "Let her sleep."

Stavros dipped his head to the nape of her neck, and his lips curved against her skin. "I'd let her sleep," he said dryly, "if she wasn't already awake."

Sighing heavily, she opened her eyes. "Fine," she huffed in mock defeat. "I'm awake."

Behind her, Stavros's laugh tickled her neck while Caine stared down at her in the dark. His eyes pierced into her, and she stared back. Though he didn't speak, she wondered if he'd already sensed the confrontation she'd prepared for. He'd been distant for weeks now, ever since she'd first pressed him to change her. He obviously didn't take pleasure in the idea, and she couldn't understand why.

Caine didn't say anything as he untied his robe and got into bed beside her. He didn't reach for her, and an unsettled feeling washed over her, leaving her cold despite Stavros's warm embrace.

"How did you enjoy your night, Beauty?" Stavros murmured in her ear.

His inquiry provided the perfect opportunity to bring attention to the problem at hand. "I managed," she said, feeling annoyance bubble up within her. Why on earth did she have to make the first move? Surely as the men who'd brought her here, Caine and Stavros would *want* her to be like them. "It was quite sedate."

Neither brother commented on her sharp tone. Instead, Stavros let his hand slide over her silk-covered belly. The heat of his touch seared through her nightdress, and as moisture coated her pussy, she lost her grip on hostility.

"We missed you," Stavros whispered before tracing the tip of his tongue along the shell of her ear. A shiver skipped down her spine, and she shifted back against him, rubbing her buttocks into his groin. The hard thickness of

his erection pressed against her, its length growing with every wiggle of her bottom. His hand slid farther down and cupped her pussy. "I think you missed us too."

The tip of his middle finger grazed her swollen bud, and she moaned, pressing into his palm and feeling her juices seep through the material of her dress.

Damn him, damn him, damn him!

A rumble of approval vibrated in Stavros's chest as his fingers glided over her pussy and teased her clit. "I can smell you, sweetheart." His words were an aching groan.

She turned her head and nuzzled into his stubble-covered jaw, loving how the grizzly hairs scraped her face. There was no point resisting now, not when he knew her arousal.

Reaching down, she gathered her dress up around her hips and gasped when Stavros's hand found her bare sex. He stroked her wet folds and flicked his thumb over her nub, sending tiny electric shocks through her body. Instinctively, she reached out to Caine, her hands finding the wall of his chest. She scratched her nails over his taut skin, and in the dark, her eyes found his.

"Did you miss me, Caine?" she asked, breathless as Stavros continued to strum her pussy.

A few moments passed before Caine replied. "I did," he said, his voice strained with an emotion she couldn't discern. Still, he didn't reach for her.

"How could he not?" Stavros asked, sinking the length of one finger deep inside her. The delicate muscles of her sex tensed around him, and blood thrummed heavily in her veins. Her nipples throbbed painfully.

"Caine," she pleaded when he remained motionless. "Please touch me."

He hesitated a bare second, then reached out and cupped her breast in one large palm. At his light squeeze, she shivered as heat flared across the surface of her skin. Between her thighs, Stavros upped the pace of his strokes,

sliding his finger in and out of her cunt in smooth, quick movements. She sucked her bottom lip between her teeth and pressed into Caine's hand. What skillful devils they were. They knew exactly how to arouse her, how to touch her.

"Did you dream about this while you awaited our return?" Stavros murmured, entering his finger in her pussy and hooking it back to find the pillowed spot which made her writhe. "Did you find release in your sleep?"

She clenched her thighs around his wrist. "No," she whimpered as he stroked the sweet spot again. "I never sleep while you're in the forest."

Caine shifted closer and slipped his hand beneath the neckline of her dress. His expert fingers found one stiff nipple, and he pinched the aching peak. A soft cry fell from her lips as the sharp sensation connected with her clit.

"Why don't you sleep, Beauty?" Caine asked, rolling her nipple between his fingers. His tone was casual, merely inquiring. "Surely it would be easier to rest without our hands all over you."

She shook her head and sucked in a breath when Stavros rubbed her swollen nub again. "I miss you too much. This bed is far too big for one woman."

Caine's mouth descended on her breast, and he sucked her silk-covered nipple between his lips. The walls of her pussy tightened around Stavros's fingers, a sure sign of her oncoming climax. He quickly pulled his finger free, and she moaned at the loss.

"Shhh," Stavros soothed, nipping gently at her shoulder. "I want you to come when I'm inside you."

Her stomach clenched in anticipation at the thought of his cock pushing deep inside her, and she drew up her leg and pushed out her buttocks for him. He ran his hands over her thighs, then gripped her hips. Slowly, he eased inside her, stretching her open with his cock. She sucked in a sharp breath

and tangled her fingers in Caine's silky hair, pulling at it as the base of Stavros's cock brushed her clit. Behind her, he gave a growl of approval and started pumping his hips in long, lazy strokes.

At her breast, Caine closed his teeth around her nipple, sending a jolt of sensation through her body. She tugged at his hair until he lifted his head, then ran the tip of her tongue over his lips. "I wish I could have been with you tonight," she whispered, still needing him to understand, even as she reached between their bodies and wrapped her hand around the throbbing length of his erection.

"Well, we're here now."

We're here now wasn't a good enough response, but her argument stuck in her throat as Stavros's cock pushed even deeper inside her. He burned hot in her pussy, pulsing in a rhythm which matched her heartbeat.

Pushing her head back into the crook of his neck, she squeezed Caine's cock. He was throbbing too, so heavy and thick. She gripped him and moved her hand up and down his length, savoring the velvety-soft skin which covered his shaft.

Why isn't he touching me? The distance between them was palpable. She couldn't climax like this, not when he was holding so much of himself out of her reach.

She released him and pulled away from Stavros. "I want to change," she whispered, climbing over Caine's body and settling in his lap. He stiffened beneath her even as his cock leaped against her belly.

She ignored the tension in his body and focused on the heat in hers. Need clawed through her body, rising with every breath. She needed them. Needed them to make love to her, needed them to make her like them, needed them to accept her fully into their lives. "I want you both inside me," she gasped, feeling tears well behind her eyes. Soon, she'd make them understand. But if they didn't claim her body now, she thought she'd die.

Stavros rose up on his knees behind her and parted her buttocks with his hands. "Then that's what you'll get, Beauty."

As Stavros reached for the jar of lubricant on the bedside table, then rimmed her puckered hole with his thumb, she braced her palms on Caine's stomach and sank down onto his cock, inch by sweet inch. When he filled her completely, she stilled, savoring the way he pulsed inside her. Beneath her hands, his stomach muscles clenched as he lifted himself onto his elbows.

"Move," he rasped in the dark. "Move, Abigail."

The thick need in his voice made her even wetter. She let out a tiny mewl as she lifted her hips and slowly started to ride him. When she'd settled into a steady rhythm, Stavros pulled his hand away from her bottom, replacing his slick thumb with the head of his cock. Carefully, he pressed against her tight hole and entered her slowly.

Jacintha, the white witch who'd acted as her companion since she'd first come to the fort, had once asked her how it felt to make love with her two mates at the same time. She had no answer. She didn't think she'd ever be able to describe the sensations which thrilled her body as Caine and Stavros sank into her simultaneously, stroking the walls of her cunt and the walls of her ass, pleasuring her the way they knew so well. Their bodies moved in sync with hers, proving beyond all doubt they were indeed her mates.

She slid upward along Caine's torso as she rode him, letting the broad head of his cock hit her at a different angle each time she lowered her hips. Stavros followed the pace she set, entering her ass when she rose up and pulling out as she sank down again. His breathing was harsh against the back of her neck, awakening the nerve endings beneath her skin. Though he was behind her, she felt completely connected to him.

She focused forward, staring down at Caine in the dark. His desire was evident in the fierce throbbing of his cock, but he wasn't touching her. She didn't think he was even looking at her, and that was something he always did,

even in the dark. The wolf in him heightened his senses, including sight. No matter what time of night it was, he could see her.

“Caine,” she groaned, scratching at his chest with her nails. “Please put your hands on me.”

She felt his gaze focus in on her, piercing into her skin. *Finally*. She dragged her nails down farther to the wiry curls which cushioned his sex. As she lifted her hips, she scraped her nails lightly against the thick root of his cock. A growl reverberated deep in his chest, and he sat up fully, gripping her thighs with his callused hands and biting at her jaw. His mouth traveled down her neck, nipping and sucking as she rolled her hips in a slow, undulating rhythm.

As Stavros’s thrusts became harder and faster, sweat beaded on her forehead and between her breasts. Heat burned from her scalp to the soles of her feet, curling her toes and making her breasts swell. Pressure built in her stomach as both Caine and Stavros tormented her body. Her climax closed in on her, tugging at her core. Painfully close.

She squeezed her eyes shut, and the muscles of her sex clenched tight around Caine. He made a choked sound against her skin, and behind her, Stavros groaned against her neck. The steady jerking of their hips became as erratic as her breathing, and when Caine reached down and rubbed her clit, she climaxed hard, her cunt claspings his cock. He followed her over the edge, burying his head between her breasts as he came. A few seconds later, Stavros groaned his release, then slackened against her.

Gradually, the heavy rasp of their breathing slowed. Stavros rolled onto his back, pulling her with him. As soon as Caine’s body was free, he sat up. She frowned, watching his outline move to the edge of the bed.

“Where are you going?” she asked him.

He got to his feet and strode to the door. “Thirsty,” he said, pushing the door open and letting the light from the sitting room flood the bedchamber. She drank in the hard lines of his body and licked her lips at the sight of his tight

buttocks. But he quickly closed the door behind him, leaving them in darkness once again.

She leaned back against Stavros and sighed as a little aftershock vibrated low in her belly. She loved this part of the night. Lying between them in the ebb of pleasure, exhaustion soaking their limbs. She twisted in Stavros's arms and looked up at him. "Did you enjoy your night of prowling around the forest?"

He barked a laugh and slapped her lightly on the ass. "I'm enjoying this a lot more."

"I meant what I said, you know." She drew circles with her fingertip over the top of his chest. "I hate being without you."

"Jacintha returns tomorrow," he said, twining a finger in her hair. "She'll keep you company on the next full moon."

"Jacintha is not my mate," Abigail reminded him. "And besides, she won't be here forever."

The bedchamber door swung open once again, and as Caine stepped inside, Abigail noted the tension in the air at his entry. He'd been acting strangely for weeks now, and initially she'd blamed his dark moods on the current situation in Riverend. A potential war against King Marcus was enough to bother any leader, but perhaps there was more to Caine's bad humor than politics.

She was beginning to wonder if she had done something to upset him. His dark eyes, which she'd always found so easy to read, now hid everything. And whenever she reached for him, he would find a way to pull away, some new distraction that would keep him out of her arms. Even when they made love, she sensed his resistance. It was as if he refused to let go of himself when he was around her.

He doesn't want to make you a wolf.

She tried to ignore the niggling voice at the back of her head. Caine wanted her to become a wolf. Why else would he and Stavros have stolen her

from the cave six months ago and made her their mate? Ready to come out and say it, she opened her mouth, but Stavros spoke first.

"We were just discussing Abigail's loneliness," Stavros informed his brother, a hint of laughter evident in his deep voice.

Slightly hurt by his tone, she elbowed him between the ribs. "Don't mock me." He meant no harm, and she'd always enjoyed his teasing, but she needed him to take this matter seriously.

"Why are you lonely, my love?" Caine's words were caring, but his tone was distant. He propped his hands behind his head and stared up at an unknown spot on the ceiling.

"I don't like it when you leave me every full moon," she said, trying not to sound like a spoiled little princess and failing miserably, she was quite sure. She tried again. "I've been here for months now. Surely it's time for a change?"

Caine sighed heavily. "What else can we do, Beauty? We're wolves. You can hardly expect us to resist the change. Even when Jacintha locked us in those chains in the cave, it was still tough as hell not to give in to the moon."

Abigail pursed her lips, struggling not to snap at him. He was deliberately missing the point. "Of course I don't expect you to resist the change. All I want is—"

"Is what?" Caine turned his head to look at her, and she felt her cheeks flush. Why should she feel silly for wanting to be a wolf?

"I want to run with you," she said clearly, sitting up in the bed and glaring down at Caine in the dark. "You both brought me here to be with you as your mate. How can I possibly fulfill my role when I'm still human?"

Caine snorted dismissively and shifted his attention back to the ceiling. "You're not ready to be made into a wolf, Beauty. If you're bored, there are plenty of books in the library to keep you entertained. Maybe Delia could give you some sewing to do. You always seem to enjoy that."

"How dare you speak to me in that tone?" she asked through gritted teeth. "You know very well I'm not some mindless wench to be dismissed at your word."

"Ignore him," Stavros said, pulling her back down beside him. He wrapped his arm around her waist, and she knew he was glowering at his brother in the dark. "He's sulking because we have to entertain guests tomorrow. That's all."

Abigail snuggled against him, letting the warmth of his skin soothe her. But Caine's cold words echoed in her ears. Long moments of tense silence dragged out between them, until finally Caine turned to her and exhaled heavily.

"I'm sorry," he said, reaching out to touch her face. "I didn't intend on being so harsh."

The pain in his voice made her heart ache. She swallowed. "It's forgotten."

He nodded and dropped his hand from her face. Then he turned in the bed so his back faced her. Feeling a pang of emptiness, she moved closer against Stavros and buried her head in the pillow. If she wanted to sleep, she'd just have to forget about the inches of mattress that separated them from Caine.

Chapter Two

The following morning, Stavros and Caine washed and dressed quickly, leaving Abigail asleep in bed. What the hell had possessed them to schedule this meeting for the very day after a full moon, Stavros couldn't understand.

The muscles across his wide shoulders ached, a remnant of the previous night's hunt. As he and Caine strode down the passageway leading to the communal quarters, Stavros thought about how he wouldn't have minded spending an extra hour or two wrapped around Abigail's body...or perhaps *inside* Abigail's body.

He scowled his regret, then searched his mind for a distraction. Glancing to his right, he studied his brother. Caine appeared deep in thought, his mouth set in a grim line. He stared straight ahead, oblivious to Stavros's assessment. Or maybe he was simply ignoring it. Stavros frowned. The latter was the most likely.

"What was wrong with you last night?" he asked carefully, remembering Caine's unusual behavior after they'd made love to Abigail. "I've never heard you speak to Abigail so coldly before."

"Tired," Caine replied, not meeting his eyes.

The uninterested response had Stavros's hands clenching into fists at his sides. He stifled a growl and forced his eyes forward, away from the object of his irritation. Now was not the time to start a row, he reminded himself. Not when they had political guests waiting for them only a few chambers away. "She deserves better than that," he said eventually, keeping his tone even.

"I know," Caine conceded after a pause.

“Good.”

The short conversation should have made him feel better, but all Stavros was aware of was the tension in the air. Something was bothering Caine, had been for weeks. With each day that passed, getting any level of conversation from him proved to be even more of a struggle.

Yes, Caine had always been quiet, the serious brother. The threat of war in Riverend was straining on all of them. But he'd barely said two words in weeks, and Stavros sensed that his continued distance was causing Abigail pain. And Stavros wouldn't stand for that.

He stopped abruptly in the corridor. “Is there something I should know?”

A few feet ahead, Caine turned. He frowned looking confused. “What do you mean?”

Stavros stepped forward so they were face-to-face. “What's making you act like an old bastard?”

An emotion flickered in Caine's eyes and disappeared before Stavros had the chance to discern it. “Nothing,” he said tonelessly and started to walk again. “There's a situation, remember? That's why we're having this meeting. Drayzlake could be dragged into another war.”

Stavros rolled his eyes. Yes, the threat of war was worrying them all, but he suspected Caine was using it to hide the underlying problem. “There's a hell of a lot more to it than that.” He followed his brother's sharp steps. “Even Abigail's affected by it.”

Caine said nothing.

Stubborn son of a bitch. Resisting the urge to throttle the other man, Stavros took a deep breath and counted a slow ten in his head. By the time he'd finished, Caine had pushed open the door to the conference chamber. Stavros followed him inside and scanned the high-ceilinged room. It appeared everyone had already arrived and were seated in a circle at the top of the long room.

Lyson, their predecessor, and his youngest daughter, Rowena, sat in the corner on two high-backed chairs. Five representatives from Fort Bestial's Committee for Peace and Justice had taken over the chaise at the side of the room, and Krystof, the visiting wolf from Riverend had taken a seat along the opposite wall. After greeting everyone, Stavros and Caine took the allocated chairs at the top of the circle and nodded for the committee to get started.

"Firstly I'd like to thank you for inviting me here," Krystof started, moving his gaze briefly from Stavros to Caine in acknowledgment. "I assume you've already heard my story."

Krystof had escaped Riverend's magically reinforced walls some weeks ago, bringing to light the awful state which Riverend was truly in under the rule of King Marcus.

Caine nodded. "But if you don't mind, please reiterate for the rest of the room."

"Of course." The man drew in a breath. "As you know, King James was overthrown almost sixteen years ago and was replaced by Marcus the Great. Unfortunately, Marcus is not the fair ruler that James was." Krystof gave a short, humorless laugh. "In fact, it's been quite the reign of terror for old Marcus."

"But how were we not aware of this?" Rowena asked, her soft voice a sharp contrast to Krystof's gravelly one.

Krystof gave a defeated shrug. "As the northernmost kingdom of the Quartet, Riverend has always been somewhat secluded, and as well as that, the people of Riverend have always prided themselves on taking care of their own business. This time, however, we didn't have enough people to overpower Marcus's evil."

"Evil?" Rowena asked.

"Dark witches," Krystof replied. "Both male and female. Five years into his reign, Marcus asked them to construct a magical barrier around the kingdom.

Its purpose was to prevent everyone and everything in Riverend from escaping, as well as to keep foreigners away from the kingdom.”

“And idea how many witches?” Caine asked.

Krystof shook his head, and Stavros’s gut twisted. No doubt black magic soaked the Riverend’s air, evil hanging in thick opaque clouds over the innocent people. It sickened him to the stomach.

A few moments of tense silence passed as everyone in the room absorbed the weight of Krystof’s words.

“What is Elderwood’s take on all of this?” Caine asked, breaking the silence. “Or Loireville?”

“Both kingdoms are willing to enter talks on preparing for battle,” one member of the committee answered. “Though we want to keep all plans as quiet as possible to avoid Riverend getting word.”

Stavros glanced at Krystof, noting the grayish color of the man’s face. The wolf had been through hell and back. From what he’d heard elsewhere, King Marcus wasn’t a fan of the wolves, it seemed. “Marcus is unaware of your escape, yes?” Stavros asked.

Krystof nodded. “My home is situated very close to the barrier. One night, I watched the entry of a dark witch. The magic within her must have clashed with the magic of the barrier because for a few moments, it ceased to work. A rabbit ran from one side to the other, and I quickly followed it. The witch was too focused on fixing the damage she’d caused to notice my escape. I doubt Marcus knows anything of the incident.”

“What does King Frederick plan on doing?” Lyson asked, leaning forward in his chair.

Stavros tamped down a rush of fury at hearing the man’s name. Fort Bestial was located in the western half of the kingdom of Drayzlake, which was under the control of Caine and himself, the Alphas of the Drayzlake Pack.

Their half of the kingdom was werewolf-dominated and was separated from the human half of Drayzlake by a magical barrier which wound its way through the center of Drayzlake Forest. King Frederick, ruler of the humans of Drayzlake and father to Abigail, had completely ignored the Drayzlake Pack for the past six months since Abigail had been mated with Stavros and Caine. Stavros had no doubt that the man still spent his days sulking in his throne room, not giving a damn that his daughter missed her family.

"We are meeting with the king tomorrow evening," Krystof replied. "We hope he will pledge his support."

"And what is the next step?" Caine asked. "Once you have our support, what will be expected of us?"

Krystof released a slow exhale and shook his head. "We need to get rid of Marcus. His consorts too. But there's so much dark power swirling around Riverend at the moment that I can't imagine what it will take to put a stop to it."

"Then the best thing to do would be wait and see how many kingdoms are willing to go up against Marcus," Stavros said firmly. "The leaders can then confer over the best method of attack."

"Will we seek help from outside the Quartet?" Rowena asked.

Stavros shared a glance with Lyson. They both knew that Britain, France, and the rest of the all-human world preferred to ignore the magical kingdoms of the Quartet. Engaging with werewolves and witches was far outside their spectrum.

"I highly doubt going beyond the Quartet would be of any help," Caine answered. "If word spread overseas of a battle here, the kings and queens in Europe would set a panic among their people. They'd be worried that the war would spread to their countries."

Stavros nodded in agreement. "It would be best to keep this within the Quartet, where it belongs. I'm sure we'll be able to manage the situation if we work together."

"And the white witches will be a great help to the cause," Caine added. "Jacintha, a powerful white witch from Elderwood, is arriving here tonight." He turned to Krystof. "Perhaps you would like to meet with her?"

"Yes." Krystof smiled, and for a brief second, his face appeared young again. "I'll do that."

"Good." Stavros smiled back and shared a glance with Caine. Seeing his thoughts reflected in his brother's eyes, he pledged their support. "Whatever is decided, you will have the full backing of the Drayzlake Pack."

Krystof bowed his head. "Thank you."

"You're most welcome." Stavros rose to his feet alongside Caine. "You'll eat with us now? I'm sure you're hungry."

* * * * *

Behind Fort Bestial's communal kitchens, past the servant quarters, Abigail scoured the pantry for more crumpets but found nothing.

"What on earth are you doing back here, child?"

Abigail spun on her heel and offered a sheepish grin as Delia, the plump housekeeper of the Alphas' quarters, waddled toward her.

"Surely you're not still hungry?"

Abigail's stomach growled its disagreement.

Delia's mouth opened in bafflement. "But you ate three scones this morning!"

Laughing at the older woman's bemused expression, Abigail shrugged. "I've always had quite the appetite, Delia." She didn't want to add that having two lovers made a woman hungry. As one of the few human women in the fort, Delia didn't discuss sexual matters.

With a sigh, Delia jerked her thumb to the door. "Well, sit yourself down in the banquet hall. You'll find some company there." She reached for an apple from the bowl on the dresser. "And take this with you."

"Thank you." Abigail leaned over and pecked Delia's feathery cheek before skipping toward the banquet hall, apple in hand. She slipped through the hall doors, eyes widening when she saw the congregation at the dining table. Both Stavros and Caine headed the table and were joined by Rowena, Lyson, a few members of the Committee for Peace and Justice, as well as a very handsome man Abigail didn't recognize.

"Finished already?" she asked, sliding inconspicuously into the empty seat beside Rowena.

"We adjourned to fill our stomachs," the blonde replied with a smile. She opened her mouth to say something else, but a sudden yawn swallowed her words.

"Tired after your hunt?"

Rowena's smile became tight as she shook her head. Then, in an abrupt change of subject, she tipped her head toward Caine and Stavros. "Those men of yours seem quite irritable this morning. Is there something wrong?"

Abigail's eyes flickered to the top of the table and locked on Stavros's gaze. The corner of his mouth quirked in a small smile before he returned his attention to the man Abigail still hadn't been introduced to.

"I don't know what the matter is with them," she said, looking back at her friend. Temptation to confide in Rowena about Caine's strange behavior of late was almost too strong to resist, but she managed to bite her tongue. She trusted Rowena as a sister, but Caine and Stavros had known the woman since childhood, and Abigail didn't want Rowena to feel caught in the middle.

"Is that Krystof?" Abigail asked, tipping her head toward the graying stranger across the table who was deep in conversation with Caine.

"Yes, he has quite the story."

"He's very handsome."

Rowena wagged her brows. "Looking elsewhere already?"

Abigail giggled. "Not at all. I'm perfectly satisfied. But perhaps you would be interested?" As the youngest daughter of Lyson, Rowena had become an instant companion to Abigail following her arrival at Fort Bestial. Always friendly and helpful, she'd made Abigail feel welcome among the female wolves. But though Rowena always smiled, there was a sadness that brimmed every so often in her eyes. Abigail had once asked Jacintha what made the young woman so melancholy, and it turned out that Rowena had been abandoned by her mate some years ago.

"Not for me." Rowena gave a small smile, then dipped her head, focusing on the meal before her.

Regretting the suggestion that Rowena could feel an attraction toward Krystof, Abigail struggled to find the words to make it better. Obviously, Rowena still felt the pain after her mate's departure. Abigail slid her gaze from Stavros to Caine. Just the thought of losing Caine or Stavros made Abigail's stomach lurch.

As if hearing her thoughts, Caine's head jerked upward, his eyes seeking hers. His deep stare drew warmth to her cheeks and moisture to her core while her heart tightened in her chest. Oh, how she loved him. Still holding his gaze, she smiled, and for a few dreadful moments, she thought he wouldn't smile back. But then he did, a slow curl of his lips that made her heart pound, and the harsh words he'd uttered the night before faded to the back of her memory.

"Jacintha is due back today, isn't she?" Rowena asked, pulling Abigail's attention away from her mate.

Relieved that all trace of pain had vanished from her friend's face, Abigail nodded. "I'm not sure how long she'll stay this time. She misses Riverend."

"Well, she can't return there yet. From what Krystof told us at the meeting, King Marcus has barricaded the kingdom."

Abigail nearly choked on her apple. "Barricaded the kingdom? How?"

"Dark magic."

Out of the corner of her eye, Abigail peered at Krystof, noting the lines around his eyes and the tightness in his shoulders. What horrors must he have faced under the rule of Marcus the Great? She didn't want to think about it.

"You're wanted, Princess."

Abigail looked at Rowena. "Pardon?"

Rowena nodded toward the head of the table. "Stavros is beckoning for you to join him."

She shifted her attention to the top of the table and met Stavros's silvery eyes. He winked at her and motioned with his hand for her to come to him.

"I must go," she told Rowena, getting to her feet.

"See you later, Abigail."

As Rowena engaged in conversation with the woman to her left, Abigail flitted to the head of the table, letting the skirts of her dress billow out behind her. Stavros rose immediately so his large frame towered over her. He dipped his head and brushed his lips over hers, then turned back to the table and took her hand.

"Krystof," he said, catching the man's attention. "I'd like to introduce you to Abigail."

Krystof stood and strode around the table. He gave a short bow and smiled kindly at her. "It's a pleasure to meet you Abigail."

She dipped in a curtsy. "And you. I hope your journey wasn't too uncomfortable."

"Not at all."

As they conversed, Abigail was aware of Caine moving around their guest to stand beside her.

"How long have you been mated?" Krystof inquired.

"Almost six months," Stavros replied. "Though one would be excused for thinking she was born and reared here. She knows everything there is to know about the fort."

The pride in his voice warmed Abigail's soul and when she sneaked a glance at Caine, he smiled down at her, pride shining in his eyes too. Feeling that the walls between them were finally breaking down, she smiled back. Caine and Stavros were proud of her, just as she was proud to be their mate. Standing between them, she felt powerful and strong in the knowledge of their love. All women should be gifted this, she thought to herself.

"When will the meeting resume?" she asked, looking up at Stavros.

"Not for another hour or so. I think I might take a walk before then."

"Would you like me to fetch your coat?" she offered, taking a step toward the door.

Krystof gave a bark of laughter, eyes shining with admiration as he looked down at her. "Only six months here and you are well trained."

She grinned at him, enjoying his humor. Then, as if a gust of icy wind had blown in, she felt Caine pull away from her, his whole body stiffening. She looked questioningly at him, but as he refused to meet her eyes, she turned her attention to Stavros. Though he hadn't distanced himself from her, he did look decidedly uncomfortable.

"I'll take my leave," Caine said sharply, nodding to the rest of the table, who were chatting among themselves. "I'll see you back in the meeting chambers."

He didn't glance her way as he stalked toward the door, and as he disappeared from sight, Stavros dropped his hand from Abigail's.

"I'll walk with him," he said, then pressed a kiss to her hair. "As soon as the meetings are over, I'll come find you." Then, addressing Krystof, he said, "Please enjoy the rest of your meal."

His long legs carried him quickly from the banquet hall, and confused over what had just transpired, Abigail smiled politely at Krystof. “Shall we eat some more?”

* * * * *

That day, silence reigned in the small, enclosed village of Fort Bestial. The cobbled streets were empty; the small shops, which usually vibrated with chatter and long spiels from the various merchants, were void of their usual patrons. A sudden breeze gusted through the village, and a wind chime hanging from one of the merchant’s doors clinked. The silvery sound echoed in the stillness of the afternoon.

As it was the morning following a full moon, Caine wasn’t surprised to find the village so quiet. Instead he breathed in the silence, grateful to be able to stamp along the cobbled streets without making polite conversation with his people. He needed to get a grip on his senses, to shake off the frustration that followed him like a bad stench.

Abigail’s face swam into his mind, and he closed his eyes against it. If only for two moments he could stop thinking about her. But she refused to leave him alone, even when she was deep belowground while he stormed the village by himself.

Remembering his cold words to her the night before, his stomach twisted with guilt. The hurt in her green eyes had ripped through him, reminding him how lucky he was to have her in his life. Her love, her warmth, her passion were gifts he’d never dreamed of receiving.

She was perfection, a beautiful human princess who’d agreed to be their mate despite the anger it would cause the rest of her people. She’d given him and Stavros far more than they deserved. How could they possibly ask her for more? How could he expect her to be what he desired her to be?

Growing fur and sharp teeth wasn’t all that was needed to become a wolf. As a female, she would have to become a submissive first, *their* submissive.

Nobody had divulged that aspect of wolveren life to Abigail yet, and he was determined to keep it that way.

He wasn't sure Stavros felt the same. Over the past few weeks his brother had been hinting that it was time to start the training. Caine ignored every insinuation, using his position within the pack to distract himself. He immersed himself in the day-to-day running of their half of the kingdom, and when news of Riverend's troubles had reached them, he'd almost been glad to have something to tackle. But every time he made love to Abigail, every time he even touched her, the desire to dominate clawed up within him, and it was getting stronger by the day.

"Caine!"

At Stavros's call, he closed his eyes. It seemed the more Stavros pushed the issue of turning Abigail wolf, the more strained their relationship became. Each time Stavros referred to making Abigail one of them, Caine's wolf surged up within him, begging him to agree. Though he battled the needs of his wolf, his true desires made him feel even guiltier, and that in turn had led to a bitter resentment toward his brother.

"What?" he barked, not turning to face Stavros.

"You made a very rude escape back there," his brother said as he fell into step beside him. "I hope Krystof didn't take offense." He paused. "Though I'm certain Abigail did."

Caine clenched his teeth, determined to ignore the topic Stavros was edging around.

"You obviously didn't see the humor in Krystof's comment."

With false ignorance, Caine looked questioningly at his brother. "What comment?"

Stavros smirked in a manner which made Caine's fist itch to slam into the man's face. "His comment about Abigail's training. He assumed we'd already begun the process."

“How strange.”

“Strange?” Stavros shook his head. “Not strange at all. In fact, I think it’s about time we started.”

Caine slowed, processing Stavros’s suggestion, then quickened his steps again. “No.”

A moment’s silence passed before Stavros responded. “It’s hardly your decision, brother.”

“Oh no?”

“No. Abigail has already displayed her desire to turn wolf. I don’t understand your hesitation.”

Caine’s teeth ground together as the all-too-familiar resentment lashed through him. His brother had the irritating trait of always making light of what anyone in their right mind would consider a very serious situation. “You can’t be serious,” he muttered.

“Why wouldn’t I be serious? She’s our mate.”

“She’s a princess,” Caine spat, stopping abruptly in the center of the street. He swung around to face his brother. “She’s too delicate.”

It was Stavros’s turn to laugh. “Delicate?” he asked. “She’s a damn wildcat. Nothing delicate about her.”

Wildcat was the correct word, Caine conceded. She could fuck them both dry, and did so on an almost daily basis. But becoming a wolf required more than a lusty appetite for sex. “She’s too delicate for submission,” he said quietly, walking forward again.

Stavros didn’t reply for a few moments, and the silence was deafening in the emptiness of the village. “It will shock her,” Stavros said eventually. “And maybe she won’t be willing. But we should give her the opportunity to make the decision herself.”

“She would resent us for it.”

"You underestimate her, brother."

Caine shook his head. Tying Abigail in ropes and making her submit to them was unimaginable. She would fear them. Perhaps even hate them. His stomach wrenched at the thought. "I won't allow it."

"It's not your decision to make."

"It's the right decision."

A sudden burst of wolven energy radiated from Stavros, and Caine knew he was having difficulty controlling the beast inside. Finally, Stavros growled and stormed away in the opposite direction, muttering curses under his breath.

Caine watched his brother disappear into the distance, then kicked a stray pebble to the side of the street. A young girl stood there with her thumb in her mouth. She stared wide-eyed at him. He forced a smile to placate her, then frowned as she turned and ran back inside her family's hut. What must she think? he wondered. There's the threat of war in Riverend and the two Alphas of Drayzlake are at one another's throats in the middle of the village.

Not a good omen at all.

Chapter Three

Abigail was drying off after a long soak in the bathtub when she heard the soft pad of footsteps on the carpet of the entrance room. She wrapped a velvety robe around her shoulders and pulled the belt tight around her waist before venturing out of the bathing chamber. She was greeted with the sight of a voluptuous woman lounging on the gray chaise.

“Jacintha!” she cried, scrambling barefoot to the chaise. She leaned over and threw her arms around the white witch’s neck. “How good it is to see you.”

Jacintha laughed and curled her feet beneath her body to make room for Abigail. “It’s good to see you too, Princess.” Her full lips stretched into a smile, and she tossed her curtain of red hair back over her shoulder. “Where are those beasts of yours?”

Abigail grinned. “I have no idea,” she said, ringing the bell to summon a maid.

“Good.”

A maid appeared in the doorway and curtsied.

“Could we have some tea, Mary?” Abigail asked, smiling at the young woman.

“I’ll go fetch some now, my lady.” The girl curtsied again and hurried out.

Abigail turned back to Jacintha and grinned. “How was your trip to Elderwood?” she asked. “Did you see Prince Philip?”

“Yes.” Jacintha winked, and Abigail knew the witch hadn’t just *seen* the handsome prince. “He sends his regards. He hopes you will visit soon.”

"I hope so too." She'd been told many times of the beauty of Elderwood, but she had yet to see it herself. "I trust you had a pleasant journey back?"

Jacintha nodded. "My carriage took a different route back, and I must say the roads were much smoother."

"How did you come?"

"We came through your father's half of Drayzlake instead of going the whole way around."

"My father's half?" Abigail paused as the maid brought in a tray of tea and cakes. She placed it on the low table before the chaise, then left. Abigail sat forward and poured two cups of tea, then handed one to her companion. "Were you not recognized as you passed through?" she asked. She couldn't imagine that Jacintha would be welcome in her father's part of the kingdom. The white witch had played a vital role in her kidnapping and her mating with Caine and Stavros. Not a role which would endear her to King Frederick.

"I noted a few raised eyebrows," Jacintha admitted. "But I think your father would rather forget about the whole mess. From what I hear, his rage has died out. I think he misses you."

Abigail grimaced as a familiar pain stung her chest. Every day she missed her family—her mother, her sister, and even her father, the man who had forbidden any contact between them since she'd entered Fort Bestial.

"I have something for you," Jacintha said, reaching into the pocket on the side of her dress. She retrieved a small piece of parchment and placed it in Abigail's hand. "It's from your sister."

"Annalise?" Abigail stared at the witch in disbelief. "How can it be?"

Jacintha's small smile assured Abigail that magic had been part of the process. "I paid a visit to Annalise while I was passing through the town."

Conjuring up an image of her pretty younger sister, Abigail nearly laughed aloud at the thought of the obedient girl going against their father's wishes. "Has she grown?" she asked, glancing at Jacintha.

“She is perhaps an inch or so taller than you.” Jacintha pointed at the parchment in Abigail’s hand. “You’re going to save it for later?”

“You know me too well.” She was suddenly starving for a connection with her sister, but she wanted to savor the anticipation. Knowing she had a letter from her sister was satisfying in itself.

“I’m going to put this away for now,” she said, rising to her feet. She floated into the bedchamber and tucked the parchment beneath her pillow. Then with a sigh of contentment, she returned to the sitting room.

“Caine and Stavros met with Krystof of Riverend this morning,” she said, reclaiming her seat on the chaise.

Jacintha nodded. “I heard. I think I shall be meeting him myself tomorrow.”

“He will ask you to help his cause?”

“Yes.”

“He would be lucky to have you on his side.” Jacintha, from what Abigail had been told and from what she had witnessed, was one of the most powerful white witches in the Quartet. Her influence with her fellow witches would be great.

“It is a terrible thing that is happening in Riverend,” Jacintha said sadly, bringing her teacup to her lips. After taking another sip, she ran the tip of her finger around the china rim. “I will do what I can to help.”

Jacintha yawned, reminding Abigail of how late it was. It must have been past nine o’clock. Where on earth were Caine and Stavros?

Remembering Caine’s abrupt exit from the banquet hall that afternoon, she stiffened. Would he be back to his usual self when he returned tonight? Or had his bad mood followed him through the day?

“What’s the matter, Princess?”

“What?” Abigail glanced up to find Jacintha studying her.

"You appear quite worried." The witch reached forward and traced the deep V between Abigail's brows. "What bothers you so?"

Abigail took a deep breath. She really shouldn't say anything about the continued tension between her and her mates. She would sound whiny and spoiled, but the idea of making her irritation known to Jacintha was achingly tempting. "Caine and Stavros refuse to turn me," she said finally and lifted her cup to swallow the last of her tea. "They won't entertain the idea."

Jacintha rested her elbow on the edge of the chaise in a move which drew her full breasts together. "That is very strange," she murmured. "Did they say why?"

"No. Well..." She sighed and shrugged helplessly. "Caine said I'm not ready to be made into a wolf. I don't understand. I've tried so hard to be a good mate." She looked at Jacintha. "What do I need to be ready for?"

Jacintha crossed one leg over the other and pursed her lips. She remained silent, a sure sign she had a few thoughts circling in her mind.

"What is it, Jacintha?" she asked, leaning forward and trying to read the witch's startlingly blue eyes. "Do you know why they are so reluctant?"

"Not really," Jacintha said slowly, her gaze focusing on Abigail's. "But I could guess."

"What's your guess?" There was something in Jacintha's tone, a lightness. Yet Abigail felt prickles of wariness too.

"I think—"

The door to the chambers swung open, cutting off Jacintha's reply. Abigail fought a groan of frustration as Stavros strode in. It seemed their conversation would have to wait.

"Ah, the good witch has returned," Stavros greeted as his gaze fell on Jacintha. He walked over and kissed her on the cheek. Then his silver eyes came to Abigail, and he pressed his lips to hers. "Sorry to be so late, Beauty. Our afternoon meeting dragged on longer than we anticipated."

“Where’s Caine?” she asked, looking past him and seeing empty space.

“He’s following.”

She frowned. Was she imagining things or had he tensed up at the mention of his brother’s name?

“I think I shall retire to the guest chambers,” Jacintha said, rising to her feet.

“Don’t go on my account,” Stavros said as he helped himself to a goblet of wine. “I’m sure you have plenty of stories from Elderwood to regale us with.”

“Perhaps tomorrow. But it’s been a long day, and all I want is a bed.” The redhead swept to the door and glanced back at Abigail with a smile. “I’ll see you in the morning.”

Abigail nodded. They’d finish their conversation, then.

After Jacintha left, Stavros settled onto the chaise and stretched his legs out in front of him. Abigail rose up on her knees and ran her gaze over him. He was dressed for meetings—leather boots, black trousers, white dress shirt, purple cravat. She untied the cravat and dropped it on the floor.

“How did the meetings go?” she asked as she unbuttoned his shirt.

“Good.” He closed his eyes and leaned back, letting her undress him. “We have a much better picture now of what’s happening in Riverend.”

“Is it as bad as expected?”

“Worse.” He opened his eyes, and she could see how tired he was. His usually bright irises were a dull gray.

Crawling into his lap, she stroked the side of his face, loving the scratch of day-old beard against her hand. Even when exhausted, he stole her breath. The harsh plains of his face and strong Roman nose were such masculine features, while his full lips were so sensuous. She slanted her mouth over his and tasted him, sucking softly on his lower lip. At her groin, she felt his cock rise against her.

"You're tense," she told him as she pushed open his shirt and massaged his bare chest.

He smiled against her lips and shifted beneath her, parting her robe to reveal her thighs and settling his arousal firmly against her wet pussy. "I think this will help."

The rough woolen material of his trousers felt wonderful against her bare skin. She rubbed against it and sighed as another rush of wetness pooled between her thighs. "You're not too tired?"

He slid his hands along her legs under her robe. "Never. Now take off the robe."

She removed her hands from his chest and tugged the belt of her robe until it fell open. The gap was wide enough to display one of her breasts.

Stavros mumbled his approval and leaned forward, sucking the nipple into his mouth. Closing her eyes as the sharp sensation echoed in her clit, she ground her hips against his cloth-covered erection.

"You need to lie down," she whispered, pulling away from his mouth.

"Mmm." He turned his body and lay back, resting his head on the arm of the chaise. Sitting on his thighs, she threw her robe on the carpet and got to work of the buttons at the front of his trousers. Stavros's distracting fingers made it nearly impossible to focus as he traced the line where her thigh and hip met, before gliding his fingers over the chestnut curls of her sex.

"Stop it," she said, giggling as once again she lost her hold on one of his buttons. "Stay still."

"I can't." He dipped his finger inside her pussy and rubbed against her tight bud. "Damn it, you're wet."

The muscles of her cunt tightened, and her juices ran over his finger. He withdrew it and brought it to his lips. The sight of him sucking her essence from his finger made her thighs tremble. She fiddled desperately with the

buttons of his trousers and whimpered when the last one popped open, freeing his cock to her gaze.

How did I get so lucky? Stavros wondered as Abigail dropped her head and wrapped her lips around his shaft. Her hair flowed forward, hiding her face as she sucked him. He wound his fingers into her curls and savored the moist heat of her mouth, the tight grip of her lips. She swallowed so much of him, taking him right to the back of her throat. So eager to please him. *The perfect submissive.*

With a growl he jerked his hips upward, pushing his cock farther down her throat. She gave a muffled squeal of excitement, accepting his thrusts as she bobbed her head in a steady rhythm.

Her hands roamed his chest and stomach, her nails scratching at his skin as she pleased him. She lifted her head and darted out her tongue, swirling it around the swollen head of his cock. He watched, transfixed by the movement of her pink tongue, and his balls threatened to empty all over her face.

“Abigail,” he groaned, clamping a hand against his sac.

“What?” She tipped her head to the side, a sultry smile tilting her lips. “Are you in pain, my love?”

He laughed breathlessly, rising up on his elbows. “Wicked girl,” he reprimanded her, reaching around to slap her lightly on the ass.

She squealed and straightened sharply, her breasts bouncing. Her green eyes, bright with desire, met his. “Do that again.”

“Do what again?”

She held his hand to her buttocks. “Spank me,” she breathed.

Blood surged straight to his cock, and it swelled painfully against her mons. He swallowed thickly and trailed his hand lightly over the smooth, soft skin of her bottom. Then he lifted his hand and brought it down on her with a

hard smack. She let out a cry as she arched her back. Juices from her cunt slid over his cock.

"Fuck," he whispered. "*Fuck.*"

She looked down at him again, eyes even brighter than before. "Again."

He did as she requested, spanking her a little harder. Her cry of delight echoed in his ears as her slippery pussy hovered over his straining cock. He lifted his hips, finding her heat and sinking an inch inside her, then slapped her ass again, causing her to buck.

"Easy, sweetheart," he soothed, stroking her buttocks softly. Her skin burned beneath his touch, and he ached to turn her over and drink in the sight of her reddened skin. But the way she trembled in his arms told him he needed to make love to her now.

Gripping her hips, he drew her slowly downward until her tight sheath enveloped him.

"Stavros," she whimpered in his ear as she clutched his shoulders. "I feel so... I need the—"

"I know." He leaned back and pumped his hips at an angle which ensured he hit the spot which made her melt. Her pussy dripped her arousal, and tiny goose pimples covered her skin despite the heat. She needed release.

He rocked inside her, watching her lips press together and her eyes squeeze shut as her climax threatened. Then, reaching behind her, he dipped a finger between the cheeks of her ass and circled the puckered hole. She jerked against him, her whole body tightening. She screamed as her orgasm crashed over her, her pussy convulsing around his cock, milking him until he couldn't hold off. He buried his face between her breasts and came with her, spilling inside her sweet body until his balls were dry.

When he could breathe, he rested his head against the chaise arm again and admired the view. She gripped the side of the back cushions for support. Her breasts rose and fell with her rapid breaths. Sweat glistened all over her

naked body. She opened her eyes, and her green gaze found his. They stared at one another for a few breathless seconds before she started to laugh.

“What’s so funny?” he asked, unable to stop himself from laughing too. When she laughed like this, her whole face glowed and her eyes sparkled. He lost count of how many times a day he was struck with an overwhelming feeling of love for her, a constriction of his chest that left him unable to breathe. He’d make her happy and keep her laughing if it was the last thing he did. He swore it.

Still laughing, she shook her head and pushed her mussed-up hair back from her face. “You look so pleased with yourself, my love.”

He grinned, propping his hands behind his head. “And why shouldn’t I be?”

She opened her mouth to respond but paused and turned her head to the door. He followed the direction of her gaze and stiffened at the sight of Caine standing in the middle of the entrance area. The muscles in his face were tight, and his eyes were thunderous.

Damn.

* * * * *

Caine didn’t know what bothered him more. The fact that he’d just walked in on Abigail and Stavros having sex, a visual which didn’t help in controlling his wolverine desires to dominate her. Or the way neither of them appeared particularly happy to see him.

The bright smile which had played on Abigail’s lips before she’d registered his presence had disappeared the moment she’d set her eyes on him. The atmosphere in the room had dropped from jovial to painfully tense in less than a second. Not that he could blame them really. He was sure his bad mood was written plain across his face.

“Where have you been?” she asked him, staying in Stavros’s lap.

His gaze roamed her naked skin, flushed and smooth, before settling on her eyes. "I visited the message tower before coming down."

She nodded and looked away from him. He noted the way Stavros's hand tightened on her bare thigh as if to comfort her, and the gesture tore at Caine's gut. He was hurting Abigail, and he couldn't seem to stop it.

Trying to push his aggravation away, he moved forward. "Here," he said, handing the piece of parchment he'd collected in the message tower to his brother. "It's from Krystof. He met with King Frederick earlier this evening, and the man has pledged his support."

Abigail straightened on the chaise and covered herself with her robe. "My father has agreed to help with the crisis in Riverend?"

Her interest at the mention of her father's name deepened his guilt. If it weren't for him and Stavros, she'd still have a part in her family and wouldn't have had to suffer their loss. "Yes," he forced himself to reply.

"The leaders of the Quartet are to meet in Elderwood," Stavros said after reading the letter. He glanced at Caine and handed back the note. "We should leave before the end of the week."

Caine nodded. "I've asked Delia to have a coach organized for Saturday morning. That will give us two days to prepare."

"You're both going?" Abigail asked, looking between them. "Can I come too?"

"No," Caine replied immediately and wished he could take back the terse response at the flicker of pain in Abigail's eyes. "I mean," he said, softening his tone, "this is a political matter. You will barely see us."

"Is Jacintha going?" Abigail asked.

Stavros pulled her into his arms. "I would assume so."

"Then let me come." She put her plea to Stavros, looking only at him. "If it turns out I'm alone all the time, then so be it. But don't leave me here."

Stavros glanced up at Caine and shrugged. "I don't see why not."

Caine narrowed his eyes but said nothing. He left them wrapped around one another as he headed into the bedchamber, closing the door firmly behind him.

It seemed like hours before they joined him in bed. Abigail settled her head on the pillow beside him but didn't reach for him as she usually did. When her breathing deepened in sleep, he turned to face her, and his heart tightened sharply. Her back was pressed against Stavros's chest, and his arms were closed around her waist. Every instinct in Caine's body begged him to reach for her, to pull her into his arms and keep her there until the pain faded, but he couldn't. Too much time had passed, and now he didn't know how to bridge the gap.

"Abigail," he whispered huskily in the dark. "Wake up, my love."

She didn't wake. Instead she snuggled farther into Stavros's arms.

* * * * *

It was much later that night when Caine opened his eyes. The space between him and his brother now lay empty. The grandfather clock in the corner of the room ticked with each second that passed. He hesitated for a few moments, then pushed back the blanket and reached for his robe.

Her shaky breaths reached his ears before he entered the sitting room. He padded inside and came to a halt, absorbing the sight of Abigail crumpled in a ball on the chaise, sobbing quietly into her hands. His heart dropped. The tensions from earlier that day were instantly forgotten as need to hold his mate shot through him.

He crossed the room in quick strides and bundled Abigail into his arms, holding her tight against him as he took a seat. She buried her face in the crook of his neck, and her tears rolled onto his skin. Breathing in her scent, he rocked back and forth and waited for the trembling to stop.

When her sobs quieted, he stroked the hair from her face. "What happened, Beauty?" he whispered, wiping the teardrops from her cheeks.

Sitting up in his lap, she reached for a piece of parchment. "Jacintha gave this to me," she said, her voice husky with tears. "It's from my sister."

Caine stared at the parchment, not knowing what to say. As Abigail slid the letter into his palm, he glanced at her tear-streaked face. "I can read it?"

She nodded, and he unfolded it, peering down at the looped words in the candlelight, *Dearest Abigail*, it read. *How good it is to write your name. I can't tell you how much I miss you, how much we all miss you. I've caught Mama crying quite a few times since you left, and though Father never says anything, I know he thinks of you often.* Guilt swirled in Caine's chest as he glanced from the letter to Abigail, then back again. It sounded as if Abigail's family missed her just as much as she missed them.

Things have changed since you left. I can finally wear a bodice. Caine grinned at that. *Mama says I may enter society soon, and perhaps I too will have a husband!*

I shall say good-bye, as Jacintha must leave before Father catches her here. Please know we are all well. I do hope to see you soon. With all my love, Annalise.

Caine folded the letter and placed it on the table, then pulled Abigail against him again. "She misses you."

"I miss her too."

He lifted her chin with his hand and stared into her glistening eyes. "I wish I could make this better."

Her soft smile filled him with warmth. "I know," she whispered, tracing the line of his jaw with her fingertip. "If only my father wasn't so stubborn."

"But he loves you," Caine reminded her. "You know that."

"Yes. But not as much as you and Stavros love me."

Caine swallowed. "I don't think anyone can love you as much as we do." He lowered his head and brushed his lips back and forth over her lips. Her mouth, full and pliable beneath his, opened for him, and as he slid his tongue

alongside hers, she moaned softly into his mouth. For long moments, he kissed her, savoring the warm, velvety interior of her mouth, tasting her fully and soothing her pain the best way he knew how. Then, breaking the kiss, he stood and carried her back to bed.

As he lay down beside her, he thought about how much she'd given up to be with him and Stavros. By becoming their mate, she'd lost her family. How could they ask her for more? How could they ask her to be their submissive? It couldn't be done.

Chapter Four

The first thing that struck Abigail about the kingdom of Elderwood was the color. She pressed up against the carriage window, gaze jumping from the roadway lined with tall elder trees in full blossom on either side. She looked past their creamy white flowers and could see that the grass here was green and vibrant, each blade sparkling beneath the sun. Flowers in a vast array of colors—pinks, reds, yellows—dotted the land, and between mounds of rock she spotted springs of water gushing over the dark earth.

“Look at the brooks,” she breathed, glancing quickly at Jacintha, her only companion in the carriage. “The water is as blue as the sky.”

“It’s a magical place, isn’t it?”

“Yes. So different from Drayzlake.” Her heart belonged to her own kingdom, but the land there was lost in darkness most of the time. Forest covered the greater part of Drayzlake, blocking much of the sun’s rays.

“Jacintha!” Abigail straightened in her seat as the hard dirt ground below them became cobble-lock and the countryside melted into town. “We’re here.”

The town bustled with activity on this Sunday morning. The carriage trundled along the winding streets as Abigail kept her eyes on the window, admiring the elegant fashions of the ladies and townsmen. The men wore trousers which reached their ankles. Not a boot in sight. And the ladies clothed themselves in rich purples and greens, the necklines of their dresses as high as their chins.

Abigail glanced down at her own neckline and the deep line of her cleavage.

“Do you think I should have dressed more appropriately?” she asked nervously.

Jacintha looked up from the book she was reading and grinned widely. “Take a look at me, Princess,” she said, amusement sparkling in her voice. “I think you shall look very proper standing beside me.”

Abigail took in Jacintha’s neckline. It plunged so low, she wouldn’t have been surprised if a nipple popped out. Smiling with relief, she sat back in her cushioned seat and folded her hands in her lap.

They’d been traveling since the previous evening, but the journey had felt longer. Caine and Stavros had started out before them, just as dawn had broken on Saturday morning. The tension between her and Caine had worsened these past couple of days. He hadn’t touched her since the night of the full moon, and her body was beginning to feel the effects.

She felt agitated. She could barely sit still in the carriage. Sleep for the past three nights had been almost impossible, even with Stavros’s arms wrapped around her. She had to find a way to break this painful cycle. Perhaps the bright and beautiful surroundings of Elderwood would help Caine to relax a little.

Thoughts of him faded to the back of her mind as the majestic walls of Elderwood Palace finally came into sight. She leaned forward, and her mouth opened in a small O as her eyes drank in the splendor of the building. The palace rose so far, she was sure the tallest tower reached the clouds, and in the sun, the stone seemed to glisten silver, creating an ethereal effect that robbed her of breath.

She reached for Jacintha’s hand. “It’s so beautiful,” she murmured as the palace gates creaked open, allowing the carriage entry. A narrow path, surrounded by green lawns and meticulously kept flower beds, led up to the palace entrance.

The carriage pulled up outside the massive pillars which guarded the entrance. A well-dressed butler stepped outside, followed by two maids.

One of the footmen opened her door and helped her down from the carriage. Grateful to stretch her legs after the long journey, she smiled up at the sun, then turned to admire the palace again. It was more beautiful than Drayzlake Castle, she was forced to admit. Though it had been her home for most of her life, Drayzlake Castle had an eerie appearance with its dark stone and gothic turrets. It couldn't be more different from this bright, beautiful palace.

"Come, Princess," Jacintha said as she ascended the palace steps, holding up the long skirts of her dress in her hands.

Abigail followed quickly, smiling at the two palace maids as she passed them. Her shoes clicked on the marble floor of the entrance hall; it was a grand affair with a large piano in the corner and a round table in the center which was adorned in vases of roses and lilies. Looking up, she saw the floors above had been arranged in a square around the entrance hall, leaving nothing to separate them from the decorated ceiling except for a few hundred feet of air.

"When shall we see the men?" she whispered to Jacintha as they followed the maids up the staircase.

"I assume they'll be in meetings until later tonight." Jacintha replied. "After we have settled into our rooms and greeted Queen Elizabeth of Elderwood, we'll have to find something to occupy our time." Her tone dropped further as she said with a smile in her voice, "I doubt that will be very difficult in Elderwood."

Abigail raised an eyebrow, mulling over Jacintha's words in her mind. She'd heard many whispers about the goings-on at Elderwood Palace over the years, though nothing she'd been able to put her finger on. Now that she was here, she hoped the mystery would be revealed.

The next few hours dragged. After she and Jacintha had bathed and dressed in fresh clothes, they sat and drank tea with the Queen of Elderwood, a very lovely, elegant woman with a penchant for cakes.

Abigail smiled and chatted politely, but her mind was preoccupied with Caine and Stavros and what she and Jacintha would get up to later on. She was unbearably restless as the afternoon drifted into evening. By the time they'd eaten supper—a meal Caine and Stavros were absent from, as the meetings continued until late—and retired to the chambers which Abigail would share with Caine and Stavros, the sun had long since disappeared below the horizon.

"I wonder how the conference is going?" she mused, walking over to the window. The piece of glass, like everything else in the castle, was tall and wide, allowing the moonlight to stream into the room.

"I can't imagine it's the most peaceful event to take place," Jacintha said lightly, slipping into an armchair in front of the hearth. "Not with your father and your mates in the same room."

She laughed softly. "I suppose not." Would she see her father before leaving Elderwood? Did he know about Annalise's letter?

Remembering what she'd been desperate to ask Jacintha on the carriage ride, but hadn't been able to in such close quarters to the footmen and driver, she turned from the windowpane and fixed the white witch with her gaze. "We were speaking about Caine and Stavros on Wednesday evening in my chambers. Do you remember?"

Jacintha's lips curved in a slow smile. "I do."

"You were about to tell me something."

"Yes."

Abigail rolled her eyes. "Stop teasing me. What was it you were going to tell me?"

Jacintha's blue eyes studied her carefully. "I thought it would have happened by now."

"You thought what would have happened?" Abigail pushed away from the windowsill and took a seat on the chair opposite the witch. "You thought they would have made me a wolf at this stage?"

"No, I thought they would have started the process."

Abigail blinked in confusion. "Process?"

Jacintha shook her head in disbelief. "They really haven't told you anything, have they?"

Clinging to the last thread of her patience, Abigail clasped her hands together. "No. That's why you must explain."

Her friend stared at her for a few moments as if debating whether to tell Abigail or not. Then her eyes softened as she appeared to make her decision. She reached for Abigail's hand and squeezed it. "The relationship between a male wolf and a female wolf is different to a human relationship, my lady. Once she is mated, a female wolf is always under the control of the male. Otherwise a female wolf is dangerous to herself and others."

Abigail frowned. Why on earth had she never heard this before? "How does a male wolf control the female?" she asked, trying to piece it together in her mind.

"Submission," Jacintha stated simply. "Before becoming a wolf, you must learn to submit to Caine and Stavros."

Submit to Caine and Stavros? Was that not what she'd been doing these past few months? "What do you mean?"

"I mean..." Jacintha trailed off and rose to her feet. "Come," she said, holding out her hand. "You'll understand better if I show you."

Abigail grasped the offered hand and followed Jacintha from the room. They descended the staircase and swept through the hall leading to the back entrance. Abigail smiled politely as a butler held open the door for them and they stepped into the cool night air.

After several blinks, Abigail's eyes adjusted to the change in lighting, and she let out a small gasp. A wide set of stone steps, illuminated by the light of the stars and the moon led down into one of the most splendid gardens she'd ever seen. Like the lawns leading to the castle, the grass was a rich green and sprinkled with brightly colored flowers. The blanket of green stretched for many yards, stopping at the edge of a round, sparkling lake.

"It's so beautiful out here," she said as they strolled along one of the many pebbled paths in the direction of the lake. "What are you going to show me?"

"You'll find out very soon, Princess."

They veered to the right and circled the bank of the lake. At the other side of the water, a wall of thick shrubbery stood tall, high enough to block anything on the other side of it. Jacintha led the way through a narrow gap in the shrubbery, and Abigail found herself facing a large octagonal glasshouse, empty from what she could see.

"Why don't they grow vegetables in there?" she asked as they approached.

Jacintha said nothing and stopped abruptly at the entrance to the glass house. Abigail kept walking and leaped back when she encountered an invisible barrier. Her curiosity spiked, and she turned excitedly to Jacintha.

"What kind of glasshouse is this?"

The witch's eyes glinted as she murmured under her breath what sounded like a spell. Then she stepped forward, pulling Abigail along with her. They entered the glasshouse without meeting any resistance, but once inside Abigail realized the appearance of the glasshouse was a mere enchantment. Walls of dark mahogany panels surrounded them, brightened by half a dozen fiery torches. Leather masks and canes decorated different points on the walls, and Abigail was reminded of the party she'd attended in Fort Bestial a few days after she'd been brought there. There'd been a chamber at the party, a dark room full of whips and canes and masks. A shiver passed down her spine, and her sex fluttered with excitement. What was she about to see?

The entrance hall was vacant except for a large man, so still he could have been a statue, in the center of the room. He stood with his feet slightly apart and his arms straight at his sides. As if he was guarding something.

"Hello, Dean," Jacintha greeted him, walking forward with Abigail at her side. "Are we the only ones here?"

At Jacintha's words, the man came to life. "Not at all, madam." He stepped to the side, revealing the rectangular opening in the marble floor. "Enjoy the gathering."

Abigail glanced into the opening and saw a staircase leading into darkness. She squeezed Jacintha's hand for support as they began the descent.

"What gathering?" she asked, nerves tightening her stomach. Perhaps she should have waited for Caine and Stavros to return before venturing outside. "I heard nothing of a party."

"This is Elderwood," Jacintha replied, a smile in her voice. "The parties never stop here."

So she was entering a party. An underground party that probably involved leather and masks. *Oh heavens help me.*

Her chest was locked with anxiety by the time they reached the bottom of the staircase and turned onto a narrow, torch-lined corridor. Another burly guard stood at the end of the passageway in front of a red velvet curtain. He nodded to Jacintha and dipped his head in a short bow to Abigail. Then he stepped aside and held open the curtain for them to enter.

The entrance room, like the hall above them, was dark, lit only by a candle-studded chandelier hanging from the high ceiling. But this room hummed with conversation as a few dozen guests stood in the center beneath the light or lounged on the luxurious chaises with goblets of wine. The ladies, Abigail was grateful to see, wore gowns with plunging necklines, unlike the properly dressed women of the town. They flirted with their partners, laughing

and chatting. It was all perfectly normal. Abigail couldn't help but feel a twinge of disappointment.

"Who are these people?" she asked as they mingled into the crowd.

"The ladies and gentlemen of the court." Jacintha pointed to a blonde woman and her dark-skinned partner in one of the dark corners. "That is Nina, another white witch. We practiced on one another as children. Would you like to meet her?"

"Yes."

They wound a path through the crowd to Nina. When the blonde woman noticed Jacintha's presence, her pretty face broke into a wide smile. "Jass!" she squealed, throwing her slender arms around Jacintha's neck. "How good to see you."

"And you." Jacintha stepped back and held out a hand to Abigail. "This is Princess Abigail of Drayzlake."

Nina dipped in a curtsy, turning her smiling eyes on Abigail. "It's an honor, my lady. How are you enjoying Elderwood?"

"It's a very beautiful kingdom," Abigail replied, smiling back.

"And you are attending the parties?" Nina sidled up against her handsome partner and winked. "Have you ventured into the play-chamber yet?"

"Play-chamber?" Abigail glanced at Jacintha and noted the witch's widening smile. "What is that?"

"Jacintha will have to show you," Nina said, her tone lilting with mischief.

"I agree." Jacintha nodded to her friends and pulled Abigail away. "We shall see you later."

Abigail said good-bye to the couple and followed Jacintha farther into the crowd. Her gaze soon fell upon another curtain at the end of the room. The closer they got to the curtain, the more the noise of the crowd seemed to retreat to the background. Anticipation hummed in Abigail's veins, and when the curtain was drawn back for their entry, her heart skipped a beat. But she

didn't hesitate. She stepped through the partition and held her breath at what she saw.

Like the party she'd attended in her first days at Fort Bestial, she was surrounded by contraptions, masks, and chains. The crack of leather on bare flesh filled her ears, along with squeals of pleasure and pain. Heat suffused her cheeks as her eyes darted around the room, drinking in the various visual treats.

"Most of these guests are here for their own pleasure," Jacintha said, breaking into Abigail's thoughts. "They enjoy the dominance and submission. It excites them."

Abigail nodded, her gaze catching on a nude woman chained to a large cross. Her two partners pinched her nipples and ran feathers over her thighs. Sweat glistened on the woman's body, and her face was strained with exertion. Catching her bottom lip between her teeth, the woman cried out, and as Abigail watched her convulse in orgasm, a sudden longing to have Caine and Stavros by her side struck her.

She hardly felt her feet touch the floor as Jacintha led her slowly through this section of the party. Captivated by the sight of a heavily muscled masked man bringing a cane down on a young woman's bare buttocks, she stopped in her tracks and bit back a moan. A vivid image of how Stavros had spanked her the other night flooded her mind, and her pussy contracted.

"Princess," Jacintha said, tugging on her hand. "Come here."

Abigail tore her gaze from the masked man and his partner and followed Jacintha to the left. The witch stopped beside another couple. This time the woman was kneeling on what looked like a kneeler from a chapel. Her knees dug into the lower leather bench while her wrists were locked in two metal cuffs on the upper rail. Her partner stood in front of her, driving his cock into her mouth. The woman had no escape, couldn't halt the act if she wanted to. She was truly submitting to her partner.

“They are wolves,” Jacintha said, keeping her voice low. “They too enjoy the play, but unlike the rest, it is necessary for the female to submit. All female wolves must submit to their mates.”

“Why?” Abigail asked, eyes transfixed on how the man’s large cock disappeared inside the woman’s mouth.

“Females do not have the same control over their beasts as the males do. They find it harder to keep themselves from shifting. Especially after reaching their sexual peak.”

“So the males take control,” Abigail breathed as a deep throb started between her thighs.

“Yes. That is why you must be a complete submissive to Caine and Stavros before they can turn you.”

“But what if I can’t do it?” Abigail asked as a sudden rush of fear rose within her. Caine and Stavros barely had to touch her to make her scream with pleasure. “What if I can’t be controlled?”

“It is in your blood, Princess,” Jacintha soothed, stroking a hand down her back. “You are their mate, remember? You are a natural submissive.” The witch turned Abigail to face her and ran her hand over her breast. “I can feel how heated your skin is. This excites you.”

It did. It excited her so much, she wanted to tear her gown from her skin and soothe the ache between her legs with her fingers. She closed her eyes as the white witch stroked her distended nipple through the heavy material of her dress. It wasn’t enough.

“Let’s go back, Jacintha.” She turned and started back toward the curtain. The party could wait. She needed Caine and Stavros.

Chapter Five

"Congratulations," Prince Philip said to Caine as they exited the conference chambers.

Caine reached behind him to rub the back of his neck. Every muscle in his body was stiff after sitting like a bloody rake all day. He couldn't imagine why the prince would be congratulating him. "What makes you say that?" he asked, turning to face the other man.

"You managed not to kill King Frederick."

Caine snorted. He had to admit it hadn't been easy sitting in the same room as that old bastard, but the situation in Riverend had kept his mind distracted. "It's a bad idea to invade Riverend at this stage. We're not ready."

"I agree. Perhaps Jacintha's input tomorrow will help the others understand the danger we face."

"Yes." Jacintha knew the power of the dark witches more than anyone. She would ensure they were well protected when they entered Riverend, and Caine had a feeling that would take a few months at least.

Stopping at the bottom of the back stairwell, Caine dragged a hand through his hair. "I'm going straight to bed. Let Stavros know where I am if he asks."

The prince nodded as he walked toward the dining hall. "Say good night to Abigail for me."

Caine watched Philip disappear into the dining hall, then started up the stairs. At almost eleven, he assumed Abigail would already be asleep. He knew

he should let her sleep, but the thought of sliding into bed beside her and waking her up with his cock was unbearably tempting.

Reaching the top of the stairs, he shook his head and dug into his pocket for the key to their chambers. Perhaps it was best if Abigail was fast asleep. Since he'd found her crying the other night, he'd made a huge effort to make her happy. But as he laughed with her and made love to her, he was constantly faced with the dominant urges he was growing so tired of fighting.

He stopped outside their door and turned the gold key in the lock. The door creaked open, and he stepped inside, his eyes quickly adjusting to the darkness. He slipped out of his jacket and draped it over the back of a chair before moving farther into the room.

A sharp inhale caught his ear, and his steps quickened. He strode through the narrow walkway, past the small seating area and turned the corner to face the large four-poster bed. Abigail lay sprawled on the satin sheets, her dark curls fanned out on the white pillow.

Moonlight streaked through the paned windows, reflecting off her pale skin and making it glow. She was completely naked, and her legs were spread wide. One delicate hand squeezed her breasts while the other covered her mound. Her lips were parted, and her eyes were closed in an expression of pure bliss as she worked her fingers in and out of her cunt. The musky scent of her arousal hit him with the force of a hard blow.

Fuck.

He never took his eyes off her sweet body as he got to work on his clothes, unbuttoning his shirt and dropping it on the floor. He kicked off his boots and unbuckled his belt. When his trousers fell around his ankles, he gripped his cock in his hand and began to pump up and down.

He'd never watched her pleasure herself before, and the sight proved more than stimulating. Her little whimpers of delight filled his ears and had blood surging to his cock. The lift of her hips and the light bounce of her breasts

made his balls ache. He must have groaned his desire, because her finger stilled suddenly, and she sat up on the bed.

"Caine?" she whispered breathlessly, her eyes focusing in the dark. She rose onto her knees, and he salivated at how red and juicy her nipples appeared against the pale flesh of her breasts. Damn, he wanted to suck them into his mouth.

He didn't have a chance to linger on that thought. The heat of her skin suddenly burned into his as she sprang at him, wilder than any forest animal he'd ever encountered. Her feet dug into his thighs as she climbed up his body. Her breasts flattened against his bare chest, and the silky wetness of her pussy slid along his cock.

"Abigail," he groaned, holding her at the hips. He didn't think he'd ever seen her quite this aroused. "What happened, sweetheart?"

She dug her nails into his shoulders and ground against his arousal, letting out a small cry when the tiny nub of her clit grazed him. "I can't wait, Caine," she whimpered, running her tongue along his jawline. "I need you inside me now. Please, Caine. Please."

Her pleas resonated in his ears as he lifted her hips and drew her pussy down onto his cock. The muscles of her cunt tightened deliciously around him, squeezing him so hard, he had to clench every muscle in his body to keep from coming there and then. When the urge passed, he carried her back to the bed and dropped her on the mattress.

"No," she cried, reaching out for him. "It aches so much."

"I know," he soothed, cupping her face in his hands. He drew his thumb down her neck to the heavily beating pulse at the base and savored the sensation of the rapid pulse against the pad of his thumb, a sensation which proved how much he excited her, how much she wanted him. "Turn around," he whispered before dropping a light kiss on her neck, "and I'll make it better."

A needy sound somewhere between a moan and a cry left her lips as she scrambled onto her hands and knees. He ran his hands over the smooth skin of her buttocks, and between his legs, his cock jerked against his stomach. Moving his hand downward, he found the slickness of her pussy and moaned. The warm, musky scent teased his nostrils, and he dipped his head and inhaled.

She pushed back against his face, and he darted out his tongue, tasting her juices. He drew the tip of his tongue from her sweet cunt back to the pink bud of her ass. Her squeal of delight spurred him on, and he continued to tease her, swirling his tongue around her hole.

She bucked again, and her juices flowed over his fingers. Damn it, she was so wet. He lifted his head and licked a slow trail up her spine. She trembled beneath him, the round globes of her ass quivering deliciously. Swallowing thickly, he pressed the swollen head of his cock against her pussy. She rubbed back against him, and unable to hold himself back any longer, he pushed inside her heat.

She moaned his name as he fucked her slowly, savoring the feel of her cunt massaging every ridge of his cock. He sucked lightly along the side of her neck, letting his whole body bear down on her. He hadn't fucked her in almost two days, trying to keep his distance from her warm body so he wouldn't have to battle his wolf. But now as she accepted his thrusts with her usual enthusiasm, pushing her hips back to meet his cock, he didn't know how he'd kept his hands off her.

What had she been doing to get herself so aroused anyway? Her whole body was on fire, and her thighs were slick with her juices. He reached beneath her body and caught her nipple between his thumb and forefinger. Her pussy clenched around his cock as he pinched the hard bud, and her hips jerked erratically against his. She'd come in seconds if he continued.

"Stop," he ordered, holding her at the waist and withdrawing from her body. "Be still, Beauty."

She whined her desperation, but she did as he told her, bunching the sheets in her fists and breathing hard as she waited.

He hovered over her, beads of his release seeping from the head of his cock as realization struck him in the gut. She was submitting to him, accepting his orders and waiting for more. He gritted his teeth, wanting nothing more than to take her further, to show her the pleasure that could be found in pain.

No. He shook the thought from his mind. She wasn't ready for that yet. And he would never ask that of her. Positioning his cock at the entrance to her ass, he blew out a breath and pushed forward. Her pussy juices acted as a lubricant, and she opened easily for him, the tight ring of muscles relaxing around his shaft.

"Yes," he hissed as he sank deep inside her. "Oh, sweetheart, you feel so bloody good."

"So do you," she said breathlessly. "You could do anything to me, and it would feel wonderful."

Her words washed over him, settling at the base of his sex. He closed his eyes as his cock pulsed inside her ass. And then she rose up, winding her arms around his neck so that her back pressed against his chest. He wrapped his arms beneath her breasts, stroking his thumb over a stiff nipple as he set a slow pumping motion with his hips.

Her head fell back into the crook of his shoulders, and she turned her lips to his neck. "What do you want to do to me, Caine?" she whispered. "Tell me."

He swallowed hard, his mind spinning with everything he was feeling. The walls of her ass squeezed his cock as he thrust inside, and his balls were unbearably tight against his body. He fondled one of Abigail's breasts, caressing the soft flesh and plucking the taut nipple. "I want to touch you everywhere," he told her, biting the curve of her shoulders. "I want to fuck you until you scream."

"Then do it," she begged, pulling at his hair. "Make me scream."

He shook his head. "I can't. I'll hurt you."

"No. You won't."

Her promise filled his head. Pulling her tight against him, he moved even deeper inside her ass. She gasped but didn't object.

Oh hell. Pushing all thoughts of sense to the back of his mind, he untangled her arms from his neck and shoved her forward, covering her again with his body. He pushed her head down until her face was pressed to the bed, and dug his hand into her hair, holding her there while his other hand gripped her hips. Then he started to move, pumping his cock into her ass with more force than he'd ever used with her before.

The sheets muffled her screams as he pounded her body. Sweat poured down his back, and blood surged in his veins. Every muscle in his body clenched as he snapped his hips against her buttocks. He squeezed his eyes shut as her ass muscles tightened sharply around his cock, and he moved his hand from her hip to her pussy. He flicked his thumb back and forth over her clit and growled when her sweet juices coated his fingers.

She likes it, he realized as his legs began to shake with his oncoming release. She fucking likes it. Leaning over her, he nipped lightly at her shoulder, then slipped his finger inside her cunt. She jerked beneath him, and her pussy spasmed as she reached her climax. He held her down through her orgasm, still pumping his hips until his stomach tightened. Rearing his head back, he shouted at the ceiling as he came in thick spurts. His orgasm was long and merciless, sapping all the energy from his limbs, and when it ended, he collapsed over Abigail's spent body, inhaling the intoxicating scent of their sex as he blacked out.

* * * * *

What spectacle have I missed? Stavros wondered when he stepped into their chambers after a grueling debate with the Prince of Loireville at the supper table. He'd missed one hell of a show, he was certain of that. Sexual

energy charged the room, so powerful he could feel it wrapping around him as he undid his cravat. He was almost jealous.

Moving slowly through the suite, he felt his cock lengthening as the scent of Abigail's arousal teased his nostrils. He turned the corner to face the bed and was greeted with the sight of tangled limbs.

He smiled. About time Caine had pulled himself together and given Abigail what she craved. He rounded the bed, slipping out of his shirt as he looked down at them. Caine half covered Abigail's body, but he could see the gentle curve of her hip and the feminine dip of her waist. Dropping to his knees beside her, he pushed a damp tendril of hair out of her face.

"Stavros?" she murmured, her beautiful eyes blinking open. "Where were you?"

"Eating." He grinned down at her, then tipped his head to Caine. "He was obviously hungrier for you than food."

Her lips tilted in a smile, and she reached out to stroke the side of his face. "You missed a good night."

"I'm sure I did." He glanced at Caine, who was still fast asleep. "He satisfied you, I hope."

Abigail's eyes flashed with excitement. "He certainly did."

Her breathy tones had his cock twitching. "Was he rough with you, Beauty?"

She nodded sleepily and lifted her head from the pillow. "Do you want your turn now?"

Her tongue-in-cheek inquiry made him chuckle. "No, my love, you go to sleep. I'll take my turn tomorrow."

Her eyes drifted closed again, and he rose to his feet. After shedding the last of his clothing, he climbed onto the bed beside Abigail and drew a woolen blanket over them.

When he opened his eyes the following morning, only he and Abigail still occupied the bed. He shifted on the sheets, raking his gaze over Abigail's naked body. Red marks marred her ivory flesh at her shoulders where Caine had obviously nipped at the crook of her neck. There were also purplish marks on her hips where Caine's fingers had dug in.

Stavros sat up on the bed and ran a hand over her tender flesh. There wasn't a sound from the bathing chamber, so he assumed his brother had left the suite. He'd probably taken one look at Abigail's reddened skin and fled the room, shame and guilt rising up within him.

Stavros shook his head in exasperation. He didn't know how to break his brother of those emotions. If only he could have seen the excitement in Abigail's eyes last night—excitement that her lovers were finally letting themselves go in her company, loving her the way they were supposed to. Dominating her.

Sliding to the edge of the bed, he reached for a robe. He'd send for a maid to run Abigail a hot bath; then he'd search for Caine.

But by the time the maid had filled the bathtub, Abigail was awake. She stretched her slender arms above her head, making the blanket slip enough to display one rosy nipple. His cock rose to attention, aching to be inside her pussy, and when the door closed behind the maid, he crossed the room in quick strides and gathered Abigail up in his arms.

She squealed as his mouth closed around her nipple. He licked the tight peak, then looked up at her face. Her green eyes were still unfocused with sleep, but love shone clear in her dark pupils. His heart skipped a beat in his chest.

"Where are you taking me?" she asked as he carried her through the suite.

He stepped into the bathing chamber and lowered her carefully into the steaming bathtub. She let out a long sigh as she settled into the water.

"Are you going to join me?" she asked teasingly as he continued to watch her.

He raised an eyebrow. "Do you want me to join you?"

She grinned up at him, drawing up her knees. He climbed in and pulled her to him, sitting her between his legs.

"Did you sleep well?"

"Yes." She lifted a cloth and began to scrub her legs. "I slept better than I have in weeks." She twisted in his arms and ran the cloth over his chest. "Where's Caine?"

"I think he ventured downstairs to sniff out some breakfast," he lied, not wanting to hurt her with the fact that his brother had run away yet again.

She nodded, and a wicked smile formed on her lips. "I should think so. He worked up quite an appetite last night."

A chuckle reverberated in Stavros's chest, and he bowed his head, brushing his mouth over her smiling one. "You're happy, Beauty?"

"I'm glad he's coming back to himself again," she admitted, winding a strand of his hair around her finger. "He has been so distant lately. And so careful. As if he fears I'll break apart in his hands."

Stavros struggled to keep a smile on his face as he wondered what was going through Caine's mind at that very moment. Probably swearing to himself that he'd never touch Abigail again for fear of hurting her.

"I don't have to worry about that when it comes to you," she continued, her nipples grazing his chest as she slid against him. "You're never careful with me."

His body immediately responded to hers, and his cock rose against her belly. "Never," he agreed. Reaching around her, he squeezed her buttocks, reminding himself of how eagerly she'd accepted the weight of his hand the other night. Her cries of pleasure still echoed in his ears. Surely Caine could see how perfect a submissive she was.

His cock was poised to spear her pussy when a hard knock at the suite's door cut through the steam. Stavros groaned and slid downward into the tub as Abigail broke into laughter. She slipped out of his arms and rested her head on the other side of the bath. "That's probably for you, my love."

He nodded and pushed to his feet. Reaching for his robe, he threw it around his shoulders and took one last look at Abigail's glistening skin before sighing his defeat.

"I'll see you tonight, Beauty," he said as he left the bathing chamber. "We shall attend one of Elderwood's famous parties together."

Tying the belt of his robe around his waist, he pulled open the suite's door to reveal Jacintha.

"The meeting begins in a quarter of an hour," she told him, shooing him toward the bedroom. "Dress quickly."

"You are attending today's sessions?" he asked as he pulled on some clothes in the dressing room.

"Prince Philip asked me to give my opinion on the plans that are taking shape."

That made sense. Jacintha would provide some valuable insight into the workings of the dark witches.

His assumption proved to be correct as the day went on. The atmosphere in Elderwood Palace grew darker with every somber word. It would take much more than the army they had now to take down King Marcus. Much more.

"I will need a few months to make contact with the white witches who have crossed the seas," Jacintha said as the meeting finally came to an end. "But gathering the white witches who have remained in the Quartet shouldn't take too long."

"Then we'll wait until the witches have gathered," King James of Elderwood said, rising from his chair at the head of the table. "We shall

reconvene as soon as Jacintha has located every white witch, and then we'll prepare to attack."

They all stood, and a murmur started among them as they exited the meeting chambers. Stavros didn't engage in the conversation. His eyes were trained on King Frederick's balding head as the short man made a quick escape.

Glancing to his left, Stavros saw Caine dart after their mate's father, but Frederick moved surprisingly quickly for a man of his height. By the time they battled through the slow-moving crowd and reached the steps at the front entrance, the king's carriage was already on its way toward the gates.

"I thought he'd stay to see Abigail," Stavros muttered to his brother as they watched the gilded carriage disappear.

"He's too proud," Caine said stiffly. "And ignorant."

Turning to look up at the castle, Stavros focused on their window. Luckily, Abigail wasn't standing by it, watching her father desert her. "She'll be upset when she realizes he's gone," he said, shifting his attention back to Caine. "We'll comfort her, won't we?"

Caine raised a brow but didn't meet his eyes. "Why do you need to ask?"

Stavros swallowed a growl and held on to his patience. "You left her this morning. This disappearing act of yours has been going on for too long."

Caine didn't say anything for a few seconds, then finally lifted his gaze to look at Stavros. "Did you see the marks on her skin?" he asked quietly, a haunted look entering his eyes. "I bruised her last night."

"No, you gave her pleasure," Stavros told him firmly. "She loves it when we take control. Surely you feel that."

Caine shook his head. His eyes were a dull gray, a clear sign he was blocking out what Stavros was saying. "I was selfish. She's a human, and she's fragile. I should have remembered that."

Irritation ripped through Stavros. How could the man be so blind? Before he could start the same argument they'd been having for weeks, they were interrupted.

"There's a feast waiting in the dining hall," Prince Philip said as he stepped outside to join them. "Jacintha has run upstairs to fetch Abigail. Are you coming inside?"

Caine mumbled something under his breath and strode past the prince, back inside the castle.

"Please excuse my brother," Stavros said, rubbing a hand over his face. "He's not himself."

"I know."

Narrowing his eyes, Stavros turned to the prince. "You know?"

Philip shrugged helplessly. "I can't help it."

It had become clear many months ago that Prince Philip wasn't a regular human. He'd foreseen that Abigail was the destined mated of Caine and Stavros, and it seemed the deep insight of his mind didn't stop there.

Stavros exhaled heavily. "I don't know what I'm going to do. He's pushing her away."

"He'll come around. "

"I wish I could be certain of that."

"Come," Philip said, moving toward the door. "Let's go inside and enjoy the feast."

When they entered the dining hall, most of the party was already seated. Stavros scanned the marble-floored room, and his gaze came to rest on Abigail. Her dark curls were bundled up atop her head with tiny wisps floating around her face. The deep red of her lips matched her velvet gown, a gown which molded to the full curves of her breasts. For a long moment, he was riveted to the sight of her creamy cleavage, and his cock stiffened in his trousers. Damn

it, he had a whole meal to get through before he could touch her the way he wanted to.

Her green eyes, sparkling beneath the light of the chandelier, met his across the table, and she smiled. He smiled back, noting a hint of relief in her face. When he glanced to her left, he saw the reason she was so relieved to see him. Caine sat beside her, talking earnestly with the Prince of Loireville. Stavros was willing to gamble every piece of gold in his possession that his brother had barely said a word to their lover since they'd been seated. Fury nearly choked him as he rounded the table and took the seat on Abigail's right, but he masked his anger for her sake.

"How are you, Beauty?" he asked, lifting her hand and pressing a kiss to the tip of one finger. "I hope your day wasn't too tedious."

"Not at all. I spent it in the gardens with Queen Elizabeth and her ladies-in-waiting."

Stavros's smile widened. An afternoon with the queen sounded tedious to his ears, but Abigail was far too polite to admit it.

Beneath the table, he skimmed a hand over her clothed thigh. "Are you looking forward to the party?"

She reached for a goblet of wine and handed it to him. "Are you sure there will be a party?"

He took a sip of the fruity liquid and frowned. "Why wouldn't there be?" he asked, wondering if Caine had told her they wouldn't be attending. If that bastard thought he could put a stop to Abigail's fun...

"Everyone appears so somber," she said, glancing around the table. Stavros saw the way her gaze rested on Caine, whose back was turned to her as he conversed with the prince.

Cupping her chin in his hand, he turned her face back to him. "There will be a party, Abigail," he promised. "And we'll enjoy every second of it."

Her lover's words eased Abigail's mind, and she relaxed back in her chair. If the party tonight didn't take place, her plans were effectively ruined. While Stavros dug into his meal, she sneaked a glance at Caine out of the corner of her eye. Her gaze collided with the solid square of his back and shoulders, and she bit her lip.

When he'd arrived in the dining hall, he'd brushed his lips over her cheek, keeping his eyes averted. He'd then proceeded to launch into a very serious conversation with the equally serious Prince of Loireville. The message was clear. He didn't want to talk to her.

Well, damn him to hell.

She straightened in her seat, surprising herself with the sudden frustration bubbling within her. But she had every right to be frustrated. She'd had enough. Tonight she'd follow through with her plan. She'd already attained Jacintha's help, and the play-chamber would be set up before the party even began.

A small smile on her lips, she finally lifted her fork to her mouth and began to eat. Stavros's hand still stroked along her thigh, making her skin tingle beneath her dress. She swallowed a mouthful of meat, listening to Caine's deep tones as he discussed a possible method of attack with his companion.

Placing her fork on the side of her plate, she had a new idea. She glanced at Caine again and pursed her lips. Her hand itched to touch him.

Looking away, she shook her head. She shouldn't. It would anger him. It would *tease* him.

Oh, why not? Hadn't he spent the past month angering her and teasing her? Keeping her eyes on her plate, she slipped her hand under the table and found Caine's muscular thigh. He tensed beneath her. His assured voice faltered midconversation. She watched his hands ball into fists where they rested on the edge of the table.

A flutter of excitement worked through her and centered in her core. She moved her palm over the top of his leg and slid her fingers downward. Her nails scraped his inner thigh, and she felt him shift slightly. A clear request for her to stop.

She didn't. She stroked along his inner thigh, feeling his trousers quiver. Sliding her fingers closer to his groin, she grazed her knuckles against his growing erection. At the evidence of his arousal, liquid heat pooled between her thighs. She squeezed her legs together and trailed her fingers along Caine's length.

"Excuse me," she heard him say gruffly to the prince. He turned his head to face her, and his eyes bored into hers. "What are you doing, Abigail?"

The sternly voiced question had little bolts of lust shooting down her spine. His eyes ordered her to desist, demanded that her hand retreat, but she increased the pressure on his cock, cupping and squeezing him, watching the muscles in his jaw tighten with every stroke of her hand. She grew wetter the longer she resisted his silent demand. Disobeying him excited her, and disobeying him at such a grand feast while they were surrounded by the highest royalty in the Quartet made it even more thrilling.

She smiled innocently at him, batting her lashes for effect. "What do you mean, my love?"

His eyes flashed, and her smile stretched into a grin. Despite his annoyance, his body responded to her touch. She massaged his lengthening cock, loving how his heat seared through the material of his clothing.

"How are you liking Elderwood, Princess?" one of the female guests asked her from across the table.

"Very well, thank you." With her free hand, she reached for her goblet. "The landscape is spectacular," she said, after taking a sip of wine. "I spent the whole day in the gardens."

As she chatted with the woman about the kingdom, she continued her assault on Caine's self-control. After his initial warning, he said no more, pretending to be oblivious to her presence. But she watched him out of the corner of her eye, and judging from the hard set of his jaw, he was very much aware of her presence. A few times, she fought the urge to laugh. It was a powerful feeling and having him squirm beneath her hand, trying desperately to hide his distress, had moisture gathering between her legs. By the time King James called an end to the feast, her undergarment was soaked through. And she knew her two lovers and their wolverine senses would smell her arousal.

Beside her, Stavros stood and pulled her up with him. To her amusement, Caine remained seated, glaring at her from beneath hooded lids.

"What are you waiting for?" Stavros asked his brother.

Caine raised his goblet. "I'll finish this first."

Stavros lifted an eyebrow at Abigail but said nothing as he led her into the crowd.

Chapter Six

The dining hall was empty by the time Caine's raging erection died down enough for him to stand without putting himself to shame. He pushed back his chair and stalked out of the large room, following the din of chatter and music into the palace gardens.

Abigail's face flashed in his mind, and his steps quickened as his blood began to simmer again. What the hell did she think she was doing? Tempting him, tormenting him. Almost daring him to punish her.

He growled low in his throat, and the sound caught the attention of a nearby couple, who looked his way in both interest and fear. He ignored them and stormed on. Where was he going? So lost in his own thoughts, he was merely following the crowd.

The last thing he was in the mood for was a party. Especially an Elderwood party. From the many tales he'd heard of parties in Elderwood Palace, they tended to involve a high dosage of sex and submission.

Submission. The thought clawed at his mind, filled his head. Abigail had submitted to him last night. He'd made her.

Guilt twisted his gut at the memory of the red welts he'd left on her pale skin. He'd marred her. Hurt her.

How could she stand to look at him again?

Yet she'd appeared eager to touch him at dinner, driving him crazy with her skilled hand.

He raked a hand through his hair as another growl reverberated in his chest. What he wouldn't give to turn wolf this very second. In his beastly form he could run, chase away all the frustration.

He broke out of his thoughts long enough to realize the crowd was heading for a large glasshouse on the opposite side of the lake. They were already entering the celebratory spirit, he noted, as he watched one man slide a hand beneath his partner's dress.

At the entrance to the glasshouse, he found Prince Philip welcoming the guests. His usual easy smile was tighter than usual.

"Not enjoying your own party?" Caine asked, stopping by the door.

The man grimaced as they entered the glasshouse together. "I can't shake Riverend from my mind."

"Maybe Jacintha will be able to distract you."

"Maybe."

As they descended the stairwell in the center of the entrance hall, Philip turned the conversation to Abigail. "She's still human."

"Yes."

"Why? I was certain you'd have turned her by now."

Caine glanced at the prince from the corner of his eye. Philip's expression was politely inquiring, but he wasn't fooled. The prince probably knew their lives better than they did.

"She's not ready to be turned," he said stiffly.

"Does Stavros agree?"

"No. He doesn't."

"I see."

Resisting the urge to snap at Philip, Caine examined the party from the bottom of the stairs. Much to his dismay, the guests seemed primed for sex—

masks, plunging necklines, leather collars. Maybe the best thing to do would be to leave now.

Before he had the chance to step back, a young maid handed him a leather mask to place over his eyes. She curtsied, then gave one to Philip.

"Go find your mate," the prince said as he reached for a goblet from a passing tray. He raised it in salute. "And enjoy the night."

Caine nodded and watched the prince greet and mingle with the guests. Then, lifting the mask to his head, he drew it down over his eyes.

* * * * *

Abigail was glad it was Stavros who was by her side as she tried to lead him toward the play-chamber as subtly as she could. Caine would have seen right through her, she knew. Stavros probably saw through her too, but he would be willing to follow her train of thought. Caine would not.

If only people would leave us alone, she thought to herself as yet another couple stepped into their path and introduced themselves. Excitement and anxiety warred in her stomach. She wanted to get past the curtain and show Stavros how she wanted to spend the rest of the night. She longed to see his reaction, to feel his pleasure as she displayed how good a submissive she could be. And she wanted to do it before Caine arrived and put a halt to her plans.

"What's wrong, my love?" Stavros murmured in her ear after they'd politely bid good-bye to the couple. He lifted her hand and ran a finger over her palm, which glistened with sweat. "Is something bothering you?"

"Not at all." She looked up at him, and her skin flushed at the desire which was evident in his bright eyes. "This reminds me of the party which was held when you first took me to the fort. Do you remember?"

His deep chuckle sent little jolts down her spine.

"Of course I remember." He pressed his lips to her ear and whispered, "I entered your ass for the first time that night."

She closed her eyes and clenched her thighs together at the memory. “But don’t you remember the party?” she pressed. “Do you remember the room we were in before you and Caine decided to take me to bed?”

Stavros stiffened by her side, but instead of ignoring the direction of her thoughts, he slid an arm around her waist and stroked her hip. “I remember.”

“Good.” She turned her head slightly and brushed her mouth back and forth over his neck. Then she slipped from his embrace and took his hand. “Come with me.”

His eyes, brighter than before, studied hers. As she started toward the curtain, he followed. Jacintha met them as they moved into the play-chamber.

She was greeted with the same intoxicating sight as the day before, though the players had changed. Her gaze darted around the dark room, absorbing the naked skin, the harnesses, the rope. Cries of pain and pleasure rang through the chamber. She glanced up at Stavros, who was watching her as if unsure of how she would react to this spectacle.

She took a step back, still holding his hand. “Please, Master,” she whispered, looking up into his curious eyes. “Let me pleasure you.”

He seemed to stop breathing as his eyes widened. The party buzzed around her, but she heard nothing as she awaited his response. He studied her carefully, a mix of excitement and uncertainty glinting in his gaze. Then he seemed to settle, the uncertainty fading away as a slow smile curved his lips. Her anxiety left her body on a long sigh of relief.

“Go to the wall, Beauty,” he said evenly, his eyes never leaving hers. “Chain yourself to it. Jacintha will help you.”

Finally. The simple order heated her blood, and her nipples stiffened against the corset of her dress. On shaking legs she followed Jacintha across the room, suddenly very aware that they were surrounded by strangers, strangers who were about to witness her first true act as a submissive.

"They won't notice you, Princess," Jacintha whispered as she lifted the shackles from the floor. "They're too entangled in their own games."

Abigail nodded, glancing to where Stavros stood. Their eyes met briefly before Abigail lowered her gaze. Jacintha had told her that all good submissives kept their eyes lowered during play.

Metal closed around her wrists as Jacintha snapped the cuffs in place. The coldness reacted with the heat of her skin, and little chills shot up and down her arms. Her breathing quickened as she sensed Stavros approach. Though there was enough slack in the chains to move her arms and legs, she was essentially trapped. She couldn't escape unless Jacintha chose to unlock her.

Stavros closed the distance between them, his large frame covering her. "How does it feel?" He rattled one of the chains, and she jumped, reminded of the many times she'd visited him and Caine in the caves. How many times had she imagined what it would feel like to be the one in chains? And here she was, experiencing the reality.

"It feels...strange," she said shakily. What if she was doing something wrong? Maybe she should drop to her knees. Or—

"Easy, Beauty." Stavros stepped even closer, his masculine scent filling her head. "Stop thinking. Let me guide you." He ran his palm over her collarbone and down to her cleavage, leaving tingling nerve endings in his wake. "Undo the front of your gown. I want to see your breasts."

With trembling fingers, she undid the buttons at the front of her dress. The hooks on her corset were trickier, but eventually she loosened the last one, and the garment fell open. The cool air caressed her skin and tightened her nipples into hard peaks.

"Good girl." He turned to Jacintha and muttered something under his breath. The witch left his side and returned a few seconds later with a thin silver chain in her hands. At each end of the chain was a silver clip, almost like a clothing peg.

Stavros took the chain from Jacintha's small hands and brought it to Abigail's bare skin. "I'm going to clip these to your nipples," Stavros explained, dragging the chain over her breasts. The cool metal sent shivers through her. "When they are attached, get down on your knees and open the front of my breeches."

She held her breath as he opened the clips and fixed them over her nipples. The metal clasps closed, and little shocks of pain bolted from her breasts through her body. The sharp sensations quickly melted into an aching pleasure that made her clit leap in response.

"You're forgetting your orders, Abigail," Stavros reminded her. "Don't make me punish you tonight."

Though the thought of his punishment and the form it would take intrigued her, she couldn't disobey him. Falling to her knees, she got to work on his breeches. The front was temptingly tented with his already erect cock. She wet her lips and unbuttoned him. When his length sprung free, drops of his pleasure gleamed on the broad head. The sight of his arousal quickened her breath and sharpened the ache between her thighs. As moisture filled her core, she lowered her head and sucked him between her lips.

The musky scent of him clouded her mind as he glided over her tongue. She'd never get used to how he felt in her mouth. Hard as steel, yet his skin was soft as silk. And the way he pulsed against her tongue, so hot and alive, left her pussy feeling unbearably empty.

Above her, he dug his fingers into her hair, tugging at the curls as she swirled her tongue around the head of his cock. She dipped the tip of her tongue into the slit, tasting the saltiness of his release. At her sides, the chains clanged together as she lifted her cuffed hands to caress his balls. She rolled them in her palms, keeping suction on his shaft at all times, the way he liked it.

Then he started to move his hips. He held her head steady as he drove into her mouth, the head of his cock reaching the very back of her throat. His

thrusts made her breasts bounce, and the clips on her nipples tightened. The sharp pleasure-pain darted from her nipples right down to her pussy, tugging on her clit until the walls of her cunt began to spasm in orgasm.

She tried to focus on Stavros, sucking when he drove into her mouth, but her breasts were achingly heavy and her mind was spinning. Finally he came, his release pooling on her tongue. He let go of her hair and pulled out of her mouth, leaving her panting and dizzy. She blinked, slowly gathering her senses. Her skin was sticky with sweat, and her vision was blurred.

“Stand up, Beauty.”

Stavros's order reached through the fog of her mind, and she stumbled to her feet. His arms immediately came around her, steadying her. He unclipped each nipple and trailed soothing fingers over her breasts.

“Does it hurt?”

“No, Master.”

“Did you like it?”

Her legs were still shaking, and her nipples felt raw. She loved it. “Yes, Master.”

“Our play is over now.” He cupped her face in his large hands and rested his forehead against hers. “You may call me Stavros again.”

She smiled weakly, then moaned as his lips brushed over hers. “I love you, Stavros.”

He stroked her cheeks, and his mouth curved into a smile. “I love you too, Abigail.”

Her stomach leaped, and a giggle escaped her lips. She rose on tiptoe and kissed him again, warmth filling her. But when she pulled back, a prickling awareness dashed the warmth away. Shifting her gaze to the left, she locked eyes with Caine. A leather mask covered the top half of his face, but she recognized his silver irises immediately. And the fury blazing in his gaze sucked the breath from her body.

“Stavros,” she whispered, unable to tear her gaze away from Caine’s thunderous expression. His body matched his face, stiff and radiating thick, deep anger. She’d never seen him so furious.

Stavros turned his head and stiffened. She watched the two brothers glare at one another before Caine turned on his heel and stalked out of the room.

“Stay with Jacintha,” Caine muttered, stepping back from her. “I won’t be long.”

He strode quickly away and disappeared through the curtain. Then Abigail looked down at where Jacintha was already retying her corset. She felt a sudden urge to cry and had to tilt her head back to keep the tears from falling. This wasn’t what she’d planned. Not at all.

* * * * *

What kind of bastard do I have for a brother? Stavros asked himself as he carved a path through the flock of people crowding the stairwell. Upon reaching the top, he hesitated as his eyes rested on Caine. He was an outline beneath the light of the moon, but just the mere set of his shoulders screamed his fury.

I don’t give a damn how angry you are, Stavros thought as he followed Caine around the circumference of the lake. You’ll never walk away from Abigail again.

Caine’s strides were long and quick. Ignoring the curious glances from the late arrivals to the party who were crossing the gardens, Stavros broke into a run. Up ahead, the lawn rolled downhill in a deep valley. Caine came to a halt and turned just as Stavros caught up with him.

“Hell,” Stavros mumbled to himself in the second before Caine’s fist connected with his jaw. He stumbled backward, nearly falling on the feathery grass. Quickly, he regained his footing and straightened. “What the—”

Another punch, this time in his gut, cut him off midsentence. “I watched you,” Caine spat, shaking out his fist. “You used her the way you used scullery maids as a boy.”

A deep growl rumbled in Stavros's chest, and the muscles in his shoulders flexed as anger flared deep within him. "There's no truth in that," he ground out, meeting Caine's flashing eyes as they circled one another. "She submitted to her master."

"No."

The dark ferocity in Caine's tone stunned him momentarily. He shook his head, trying to make sense of his brother's resistance. Why was he so blind?

"The chains aroused her," he insisted, stalking forward, determined to make Caine see the truth. "The nipple clamps brought forth her release. I watched her with my own eyes."

Caine turned as if the words were too much for him to bear. "Why do you want to hurt her?" he asked, desperation turning his voice into a low rasp.

"I don't want to hurt her. I give her the pain she craves."

Caine snarled his distaste. "She's human," he spat out. "She's a damn princess. You're ignoring that."

"And you're ignoring her desire to be dominated." Stavros raked a hand through his hair. Was he talking to a man or a bloody wall? "She's our mate. It's in her blood to be a submissive, regardless of whether she's human or not."

"She can't take the pain. She shouldn't have to, she's too—"

"Too what?" Stavros challenged, taking hold of his brother by the shoulder and shaking hard. An overwhelming desire to shift into his beast rose up within him, so strong that hair sprouted over his chest. He held his breath and turned from his brother, waiting for the wolf to recede.

When the fury raging in his veins calmed slightly, he spoke again. "She wants to give herself to us. I can't understand why you won't accept her."

"She's human."

"She's our mate."

“Maybe.” Caine exhaled heavily, his frustration radiating from him in draining waves. If Stavros hadn’t been so angry, he would have felt pain for the torture his brother was enduring.

“But no matter what you say,” Caine continued, “she could never handle the brutality we would inflict on her.”

“Brutality?” Stavros barked a laugh at the stars. This was insanity. “We’re not monsters, Caine.”

“But she’ll think we are.”

Caine’s words resonated in the open space as he ripped his mask from his eyes and started toward the palace. Stavros watched him go, a heavy measure of disappointment weighing on him. No matter what he said, he couldn’t put his brother’s fears to rest.

The blades of grass crinkled beneath his feet as he headed back to the party. At the entrance to the glasshouse, he bumped into Abigail, who was accompanied by Philip and Jacintha.

“There you are,” she said breathlessly. “Where’s Caine?”

“Back at the palace.” He stepped closer to her and took her hand. “I’m sorry, Beauty.”

“It’s not...” She trailed off as her eyes focused on his left cheekbone. As soon as she reached out and touched his face, pain flared beneath the pressure of her fingers. Caine’s fist had obviously left quite a mark.

Tears clouded her green eyes, making them glisten beneath the moon. His gut clenched as she dropped her hand from his and turned to Jacintha.

“May I stay with you tonight?” she asked quietly.

The white witch glanced from Stavros to Abigail and nodded. “Yes, Princess.”

Without looking at him, Abigail brushed past, quickly followed by Jacintha. His feet itched to follow, but he didn’t have a notion what he could do to soothe her. He didn’t think he’d ever felt at such a loss.

Chapter Seven

Abigail didn't sleep that night. She tossed and turned in a painfully empty bed. As soon as Jacintha's breathing deepened in sleep, she allowed herself to cry. Big, fat, ugly tears of hurt and anger and guilt. What had she started? Her plan to show Caine and Stavros that she was ready to submit to them could not have played out worse.

Closing her eyes, she bit her lip as torturous images lashed through her mind: the rage in Caine's silver eyes when he'd caught her and Stavros in the play-chamber, the red welt on Stavros's cheek where Caine had obviously attacked him. Her throat burned as she swallowed. The two men she loved more than anyone else in the world were at each other's throats, and it was all because of her.

By the time dawn broke the following morning, her tears had dried up. Though still angry with herself for pushing things too far with her lovers, she was once again furious with their animal behavior. But then again they *were* animals. She laughed quietly at that, then grimaced at the sound of her voice, which was hoarse after crying all night.

She climbed out of bed and moved to the window. Yesterday's fine weather had been replaced with a gray sky and heavy rainfall. She fixed her gaze on one droplet as it fell on the pane of glass.

"Will there be more meetings today?" she asked Jacintha, watching the droplet twist its way down the windowpane.

"Yes, but I won't be attending. Would you like to travel home this morning?"

The thought of escaping Caine and Stavros filled her with relief, and the knot of tension in her stomach relaxed slightly. "I'd love to." She had a sudden craving to be at home in Fort Bestial, to be in her own bedchamber, and to perhaps have a cup of tea with Delia.

It felt strange to bathe and dress alone while Caine and Stavros were doing the same elsewhere in the palace. A maid brought a breakfast of crumpets and tea to Jacintha's chambers, but not even the sight of butter melting into the golden treats could arouse an appetite within her.

As they descended the staircase, Jacintha instructed the maid to load all their belongings onto Caine and Stavros's carriage later in the day. It meant they didn't have to prolong the wait to exit the palace, and for that, Abigail was grateful to her companion.

As the carriage led them away from the magnificence of Elderwood Palace, she couldn't appreciate their surroundings with the enthusiasm she'd felt on her arrival. The colors were as vibrant as they had been two days ago, but to her eyes everything appeared dull, even the roses which bloomed in the gardens they passed.

It was only when they'd left the village behind and entered forestland that she realized her path hadn't crossed with her father's on the visit. She sank lower into her velvet seat. Tears burned her throat.

A warm hand covered hers and squeezed lightly. "Trust me," Jacintha said softly. "Things will come right."

She looked up at Jacintha and forced a smile. Her companion spoke with such conviction. If only she could feel just a smidgen of that assuredness.

The journey home took almost the entire day, yet when they entered the depths of Drayzlake Forest, she felt she'd had no time to think at all. Guards opened the gates of the fort for their entrance, and the carriage trundled inside. Night had long since fallen, and she was grateful she wouldn't have to paste a smile on her face to greet the village children.

With Jacintha and a maid at her heels, she hurried into the hut belonging to the Alphas and began the descent to the chambers belowground.

She managed a few polite greetings to the guards manning the main corridor and breathed a long sigh of relief when she turned onto the hallway leading to the quarters she shared with Caine and Stavros. The maid held open the door, and she stepped inside, feeling the tension in her gut uncoil slightly as warmth embraced her.

"Delia was obviously here," Jacintha commented, nodding toward the fire in the hearth and the silver platter resting on the low table in the middle of the entrance room.

"Mmm." Abigail ran her hand over the marble mantel which encased the hearth. "When do you think Caine and Stavros will get back?"

"It will be morning at least." Jacintha moved up behind her and touched her arm. "Perhaps you should take the time to think about what you'll do when they return."

Abigail shrugged. "What can I do?" She shook her head as anger as hot as the fire she was standing before flared inside her. "Damn them," she swore, slamming her hand on the hard edge of the mantel. "Damn them for being so bloody frustrating!"

If Jacintha was shocked by her outburst, she didn't show it. Instead, she chuckled.

Abigail twisted to face her, feeling a pang of hurt at Jacintha's open amusement. "Why are you laughing?"

"I'm sorry, Princess." The witch reached out and lifted her chin. "You have two mates who would go to the end of the world to make you happy, yet the three of you are miserable as doom."

A weak smile tilted her lips. It was humorous, she supposed, when you took that view of things. Shaking her head, she threw herself onto the chaise in

front of the fire. "I don't know what to do. I can't understand why this is so difficult."

Jacintha dropped onto the chaise beside her, curling one leg beneath her body. She reached for Abigail's hand and squeezed. "Would you like to hear my thoughts on this?"

Abigail sat up and nodded. "Please."

"I think the problem lies mainly with Caine."

Her shoulders slumped forward. "I know that much. I can't understand what's wrong with him."

"He's afraid of hurting you, Abigail. He doesn't want to scare you."

"Scare me?" Her eyebrows drew together as she studied the witch's face. "Why would he scare me?"

"He's still very much aware that you're human. He's concerned that the wolf within him will cause you harm if he lets it go."

Abigail frowned, thinking back to the many times over the past few months when she'd felt him hold back from her. Their night together in Elderwood had been the first time he'd lost his control around her. He hadn't frightened her. Feeling him take what he needed from her body had only heightened her arousal, her pleasure.

"I wondered if he was growing tired of me," she said quietly. "He was so reluctant to change me, I began to think he didn't want me. Or at least that he didn't trust me enough to make me a wolf. I never thought he was afraid of hurting me."

"I believe Stavros is trying to show him that he's wrong to be worried for you. But after their display last night, I think you might get further with him."

"I should speak with him?"

"Yes. He needs to hear the words from you only."

Abigail's gaze flickered from Jacintha to the fire. She stared at the flames until her eyes watered. "Do you think he'll listen to me?" she asked, trying to imagine what Caine would say when she insisted he make her his submissive.

"He loves you, Princess. He will listen to you."

She wasn't convinced he would, but she supposed it was her only chance at this point. She stayed by the fire into the small hours of the morning, long after Jacintha had retired to her own chambers. Her mind hummed as she conjured up images of Caine in her head. What would she say to him? How would she make him understand, make him see sense? She couldn't imagine how the conversation would go. It was nearing six o'clock in the morning when she shuffled into the bedchamber and curled up beneath the blankets. When her eyes blinked open a few hours later, she knew she was no longer alone.

She slid from the bed and crept to the door. The soft thud of footsteps on the carpet in the sitting room reached her ears. Pushing the door open an inch, she peeked around the frame. Relief filled her at the sight of Stavros pondering over a sheet of parchment. Caine was nowhere in sight, and for that she was grateful. She couldn't summon the strength to face him yet.

Her movements drew Stavros's eye. He raised his head in her direction, and seeing her, he smiled. "Good morning, my love."

"Is it morning?" She smiled back at him as she crossed the sitting room. She didn't mention the bruise on his cheek, though the sight of it pained her. "I hadn't realized."

"It's almost noon, actually." He placed the parchment on the mantel, watching her approach. When she was close enough to touch, he pulled her into his embrace. "I missed you last night."

She murmured against the starched material of his shirt and burrowed deeper until the warm scent of man and forest and travel filled her head. If only Caine had been there to step up behind her, to cover her back with the length of his body while Stavros's chest cradled her face.

“Caine is in the conference chamber. He’s informing the committee of the progress made in Elderwood,” Stavros said, as if reading her mind. “He’ll come for you soon.”

She nodded slowly and wrapped her arms tight around Stavros’s waist. She would just have to wait and see.

* * * * *

Almost an hour since his meeting with the Committee for Peace and Justice had come to a close, Caine was still pacing Fort Bestial’s conference chamber. However, his mind was far from politics.

Even as he’d answered the questions of the committee, his thoughts had been elsewhere, with Abigail. Reaching the end of the chamber, he swiveled on his heel and resumed his pace. No matter how quickly he moved, the sharp strides of his legs did little to calm his mind.

When he reached the top of the long room, he slowed to a halt. He needed to stop thinking. The past few days had proven that the more thinking he did, the worse the situation became. And hell, if that weren’t proof enough that his head was working too hard, the splintering headache was damn convincing.

Closing his eyes, he rubbed the sockets with his thumb and forefinger. When he opened his eyes again, the crimson of the walls seemed stronger, brighter. Even as the glaring color assaulted his eyes, he wished he had what it had, clarity.

Clarity. The word resounded in his head like a church bell. He muttered the word aloud as he stared into the panels of red, then cursed himself. Talking to a bloody wall wouldn’t do him any good. He took a step back, turned, and left the chamber and its red walls behind.

The dim lighting of the passageway allowed some respite for his tired eyes. He started in the direction of his quarters, but as he walked on, he found himself moving in an entirely different route.

His head wanted clarity; hell, his head was *pleading* for clarity. Facing up to Abigail and Stavros would be considerably easier if he could see things as clearly as he needed to. Perhaps it was time he asked for help with that feat.

His steps quickened. He rounded a corner so fast, he nearly barged into a housemaid. After making a quick apology, he strode on until he reached the door he was looking for. He rapped his knuckles against it and felt the tension in his muscles uncoil slightly when Lyson's housekeeper pulled open the door. She curtsied before him, then stepped aside to let him in.

"Caine?" Violet, Lyson's mate, stepped into the entrance room, a wide smile of welcome lighting her face. Despite her years, she was still deceptively youthful in appearance. Only a few lines around her eyes and mouth betrayed her age. "How good it is to see you."

"And you." He smiled back at her, feeling a pang of guilt at the same time. How long had it been since he'd last visited her, the woman who'd treated him as a son for half his life? "You're well, I trust?" he asked, leaning in to kiss her cheek.

She nodded. "Very well, indeed." She led the way into the sitting room and toward the library. "Lyson has been catching up on his reading since you and Stavros took over as Alphas." Looking up at Caine, she winked as she pushed open the door to the library. "In truth, I think he uses it as an excuse to get away from me and my chattering sometimes."

"What's that I hear?" Lyson's voice bellowed from where he sat in the corner of the library. He put down his book and leaned forward in the armchair. "Were you referring to me, Violet?"

Violet planted a kiss on her mate's head and told him to be quiet. "I'll leave you to it, then," she said, nodding to Caine. "Perhaps you'll have tea with us afterward?"

"I'd love to." He watched her sweep out of the room, then turned back to Lyson. "I hope you're giving her the attention she deserves."

Lyson chuckled and shook his head. "That woman would have you believe she spends her days in front of the fire alone." He gestured to the armchair opposite him for Caine to sit. "Would you believe that this is the first afternoon I've had to myself in over two weeks?"

Caine lowered himself into the chair and braced his elbows on his knees. Retirement had done wonders for the old man. His gray eyes were bright, and the lines on his face seemed to have faded.

"Are you going to spend the day looking at me, boy?" Lyson asked, "Or is there a reason you've ventured so far away from that beautiful mate of yours?"

Caine grimaced. "Abigail is actually who I want to discuss with you."

Lyson raised an eyebrow. "Oh?"

Caine took a breath to begin, then released it slowly. How did he begin? "I've made mistakes with her," he said finally, wishing it were as simple as he made it sound.

"You're a man. Of course you have."

"No." He clasped his hands between his knees and stared into the decorative rug that covered the floor. "I've hurt her. I'm hurting her."

Lyson's brow furrowed. "Why?"

"I don't know how to behave with her anymore."

"She's your mate. How difficult can it be?"

Caine shook his head but didn't respond. In truth, he didn't understand why it was so difficult. Was Abigail pulling away from him? Or was he at fault?

"I must tell you," Lyson said, breaking the silence. "Violet was wondering only a few days ago why it is you and Stavros haven't turned her yet?"

Caine lifted his gaze to meet Lyson's. "She's not ready." The words were sharp on his tongue, quick, as if he were saying them on cue.

"Really?" Lyson asked in surprise as he leaned back in his chair. "She's not willing?"

He gave a short laugh. "Oh, she's willing. At least she believes herself to be."

"You don't trust her?"

"I trust her."

"Then why the reluctance? She wants you to turn her wolf. That's what you are telling me, yes?"

"Yes." Caine averted his eyes from Lyson's steady gaze. "She doesn't understand what it requires."

"Submission, you mean?" Lyson nodded slowly. "You think she will fear you?"

"Will she?" Unable to stay still any longer, Caine stood and moved around his chair. Bracing his hands on the back, he met Lyson's eyes. "She's a princess. Human. Lovely, gentle..." He trailed off as her face, so beautiful and open, filled his mind. "I don't want to hurt her."

"But that's exactly what you're doing. Becoming a wolf is her destiny, what's meant to be." Lyson rose from his chair. "What does Stavros think of this?"

Remembering the display he'd witnessed between Stavros and Abigail in the play-chamber of Elderwood Palace, he fought a growl. "He'd turn her tomorrow if he had the chance."

"Then perhaps you should trust your brother's instincts."

He straightened and moved forward to face the old man fully. "Why not trust my instincts?"

"Because you are being too cautious. Your love for this young woman has clouded your mind. You're ignoring the reality."

"And what is the reality?" Caine searched the man's eyes, seeking the wisdom he knew lay in their depths. "If I make her submit to me, will she fear me?"

“Submission is in her blood. As is the need to become wolf.” Lyson took a step back. “I have no doubt you’ve heard all this from Stavros. Maybe it would be better to speak with Abigail. Let her tell you what she needs and wants. Let her show you.”

Caine opened his mouth to say more, then stopped himself. Lyson was right. What he needed to do, what he should have done from the beginning, was talk to her. Listen to her.

A sudden desperation to see Abigail flared within him. “I’ll take my leave,” he said, moving backward to the door. “Could you tell Violet I’ll have tea with her tomorrow?”

Lyson grinned. “Absolutely.”

“Good.” He pulled open the door and nodded to his mentor. “Thank you.” He rushed down the hall and exited the chambers. Even though the uncertainty remained, Lyson’s words had eased the conflict in his mind. All that remained to be done was discover once and for all how Abigail truly felt about becoming a wolf.

After that, he’d just have to trust her.

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Fresh air really did make a world of difference, Abigail decided as she and Stavros strolled along the cobbled ground of the village. The light breeze lifted her hair and tugged it back from her face, eliciting a sense of freedom within her. And warmth, generated from where her hand was joined with Stavros’s larger one, circulated through her blood. She felt almost...comfortable. Yes, that was it, comfortable.

She smiled, determined to relish the feeling, and peeked up at Stavros. His eyes were on the road ahead, his face somber. Her smile faded. For a brief moment she’d escaped thoughts of Caine. It appeared Stavros hadn’t enjoyed the same relief.

They walked on. Over the past hour dusk had fallen, and the sky now glowed with dying sunlight. Abigail reluctantly left the clouds of pink and gray behind as she followed Stavros into the hut leading to their chambers. The ease she'd cherished only minutes before sagged into dread as she descended the steps leading underground. Would Caine have returned by now? She wasn't certain what she feared most—his presence when they returned to their quarters or finding the rooms empty.

She clapped a hand to her forehead. "Oh this is ridiculous!" So consumed in her thoughts, she didn't realize she'd made the exclamation aloud until she caught Stavros watching her.

"What's ridiculous?" he asked, brow furrowed as he studied her face.

She inhaled deeply and shook her head. "I'm not certain how much longer I can manage this. My stomach is turning at the very thought of facing him, and yet I can hardly bear the distance between us. "

Stavros pulled her beneath his arm and kissed the top of her head. "Caine will come around." He gave her a tight squeeze.

"How do you know? It's been weeks now, longer. He seems to get worse. And after the party in Elderwood..."

"He wasn't ready, my love."

"How can he not be ready?" She raised her head to meet Stavros's eyes. "You're ready. I'm ready."

A small smile played on Stavros's lips as he tugged a stray strand of her hair. "He worries for you. All he wants is for you to be happy. I think he believes that becoming a wolf, and in turn, our submissive, will be too much for you."

She groaned, even as her heart clenched at the thought of Caine feeling so protective over her. "I love him. I love you both. I want to be what I'm destined to be—your submissive, your wolf." She bit her lip as they neared the entrance to their quarters. "Nothing makes me happier than pleasing you."

Stavros stopped in the passageway and turned her in his arms. His eyes were a striking silver as his gaze held hers. He cupped her face in his hands. "You are the most precious thing in my world, Beauty," he said softly and pressed a light kiss to her mouth. Heavens, how she loved this man. With only his mouth, he could soothe her, warm her, enrich her senses. There was only one other person in the world who could do the same: Caine. Though it had been quite some time since he'd kissed her like this.

Stavros raised his head and turned toward the door of their chambers. His brow creased in concentration. "He's waiting for you inside," he said eventually. "I can sense him."

She blinked and followed the direction of his gaze to the wooden panels. Yes, she could feel him too. It was a strained energy, but it was *his* energy and he was reaching for her.

"I think I'll pay Lyson and Violet a visit," Stavros said, taking a step back. "Why don't you go inside, hear what he has to say?"

She nodded and stepped closer to the door. She glanced back at Stavros once more before finally turning the knob and pushing the door open.

When she stepped into the entrance hall, she heard nothing. Maybe he wasn't here at all; maybe her desperate heart had been playing tricks on her mind. She walked farther inside and shrugged out of her walking cloak, listening intently for any sound from the other rooms. After a few moments, the shuffle of footsteps on the carpeted floor of the sitting room reached her ears. She threw her cloak over the coat stand and hurried into the sitting room.

Caine was by the mantel, walking the length of the embroidered rug with his head lowered. He didn't notice her at first, and she grasped at the rare chance to look at him, truly look at him, without his knowledge. He was so tall, so broad. His presence commanded the room, dwarfed every piece of furniture until the sofas and the dressers faded from notice. His rod-straight back and powerful stride spoke of severity, as did the hard line of his mouth, but she knew how quickly his lips could soften beneath hers and how easily they could

curve into a warm smile. Though in truth she hadn't seen that smile very recently. She ached to see it.

Belatedly realizing her presence, his head jerked upward and his eyes found hers. The sheer strength of his gaze sucked the strength from her body, made her mouth dry. She swallowed and placed her hand on the back of a chair to steady herself.

"Where were you?" His roughly voiced question did nothing to steady the fluttering in her stomach.

"I took a walk with Stavros."

Anxiety gripped her heart as she waited for him to turn away as he had been doing for weeks, unable to bear the prospect of being alone with her. He surprised her. For long moments he held her gaze, not breathing a word. Then he crossed the few feet which separated them in two long steps and covered her lips with his. Firm. Sensuous. Demanding.

Her gasp disappeared into the warm cavern of his mouth; heated pleasure shuddered through her bones. She softened against him, held on to his arms, and tilted her head back to return his kiss. Their tongues slid together, tangling, mating, creating a friction so fierce, her sex clenched in anticipation.

His hands, as demanding as his mouth, slid down her back, over her ass, then back up again to tangle in her hair. He pulled lightly, tilting her head back even farther, giving his tongue better access to hers. She moaned softly into his velvety mouth. His taste, his smell surrounded her.

The urgency of his kiss screamed how much he wanted her, needed her. Behind her closed eyelids, tears of relief welled, and one skated down her cheek. He was finally giving in, letting go of whatever had made him hesitate in the first place.

He pulled her tight against him, and the hard length of his erection burned through the double barrier of their clothing to her skin. Waves of moisture coated her passage. Lust licked at her breasts, her belly, her thighs.

She whimpered again. It was too much. Need swamped her, bright colors burst behind her eyes. The ache in her pussy intensified, throbbing to the beat of her heart. She sucked on his tongue, ground her hips against his, then gasped when he tore his lips from hers.

"No," she shouted hoarsely, without thinking. "Don't pull away from me." She gripped his arms so tight, she expected to see blood stain through his shirt.

"I'm not." He held her against him, pressed his forehead to hers. His harsh breaths caressed her skin, soothing her with the evidence of his closeness. The fire in her body faded slightly, letting her breathe again.

"Why did you stop?" she asked, closing her eyes as Caine stroked a hand through her hair.

"We need to speak first." He laughed quietly. "Look what you do to me, Abigail."

She smiled and opened her eyes. "What do I do to you?"

"You set me crazy. Drive me to the edge of my sanity." He drew the pad of his thumb over her swollen lips. "I want so much of you."

"You can have it all."

"Can I?" His eyes were serious again, searching hers intently. "You say you want to become a wolf, but you have no idea what it requires of you."

"I must submit to you," she said simply. Surely he knew by now how much she wanted this. "I *long* to submit to you."

Caine closed his eyes as if blocking out her words.

She framed his face with her hands and forced him to look at her again. "I have seen what I must become. I'm ready."

He took her hands from his face and held them in his. "I could hurt you, Abigail. This isn't a game."

"I know." She'd felt the pain from the smack of Stavros's hand on her bottom, and the pinch of the metal clamps he'd used on her nipples. The pain

had thrilled her, added to her arousal, and intensified the final release. "I like the pain," she whispered. "I crave it."

At her words, Caine's hands tightened on hers. "If you are unhappy, you'll ask us to stop?"

"I promise." She rose on tiptoe and brushed her lips over his. "Please, Caine. Let us be what we are destined to be."

He hesitated, and she felt every muscle in his body tense. And then he exhaled slowly and nodded. "I love you, Abigail."

A lump formed in her throat, and once again, tears filled her eyes. She swallowed thickly and gave a wavering smile. Finally, they were getting back on form. "I know," she whispered. "I love you too."

He kissed her again, this time softly. Then he bundled her up in his arms and carried her to the bedchamber. She smiled against his chest, feeling relief and satisfaction curl within her. Jacintha had been right. Things would work out in the end. Of that, she was certain.

* * * * *

When Stavros entered the bedchamber later that night, he found Caine and Abigail wrapped around one another. Staring down at them, he felt a combination of relief and concern work its way through him. Relief that Abigail and Caine were intimate again, concern that Caine would once again disappear in the morning.

"I'm not going to leave," Caine muttered, his voice gruff with sleep. "So you can stop worrying."

Stavros grinned. "Are you certain of that?"

"Yes." Opening his eyes, Caine gently disentangled himself from Abigail's limbs, then sat up. "Shall we have a drink?"

Nodding his agreement, Stavros turned to the door. As he was pouring two goblets of whiskey, Caine joined him in the sitting room.

"I spoke with Lyson," he said, tightening the belt of his robe. He gave a wry smile. "He made me see sense."

"Glad to hear it." Stavros passed one goblet to his brother, then took a sip of his whiskey. "And what have you decided?"

"That we must try." Caine stared into his goblet as if searching for an answer hidden in the amber liquid. "Abigail insists she wants to become our submissive. She says she is ready."

"She is ready," Stavros said, taking a seat in one of the armchairs. Remembering her enthusiasm in the dungeon at Elderwood Palace, he felt a frisson of excitement shoot through him. "She's a natural."

Caine was silent for a moment before he nodded. "That may be. But we must be careful with her."

"And we must also remember that she's not breakable." Caine shot him a look that told him the point was taken, and Stavros grinned. "So how shall we proceed?"

"Jacintha and perhaps Rowena are going to take Abigail through the steps of submission tomorrow," Caine said. "From her time in the dungeon in Elderwood, I assume she knows almost everything, so the overview will be brief. Then they will show her to our dungeon. She'll wait for us there."

"Our dungeon." Stavros cast a glance to the bottom of the sitting room. Behind the large dresser stood a door leading to the dungeon they'd set up long before Abigail's arrival. Finally, it would be used. "I can't tell you how happy I am that you've seen sense, brother."

Caine set his goblet down on the table and chuckled. "Me too."

Chapter Eight

Abigail ate supper with Jacintha and Rowena the following evening in Jacintha's quarters. Caine and Stavros had told her that tonight her companions would teach her the basics of submission. Afterward, she would be taken back to her own quarters, where Caine and Stavros would come for her. The knowledge that she would finally submit to them both in a matter of hours thrilled her, and she could barely taste the food that passed through her lips.

"You're not hungry, my lady?" Jacintha asked, studying her carefully.

Abigail offered a smile of remorse. "The meal is delicious. I'm just too..."

"Excited?" Rowena suggested.

She nodded as a blush rose in her cheeks.

"Don't be embarrassed, Abigail," Rowena said, reaching for her hand and squeezing it tightly. "This is a natural part of becoming a wolf."

Abigail looked into Rowena's kind eyes and felt herself relax. "So what will happen tonight?" she asked, resting her fork on her plate.

Rowena glanced at Jacintha before explaining. "We will take you to one of the communal dungeons," she said. "There we'll show you the various instruments your mates may choose to use with you."

"There are also a few things you must be aware of," Jacintha added. "I'm not sure what Caine and Stavros have planned for you, but some male wolves insist that their mates be their submissive in day-to-day life, not just in their play-chamber."

"What would that mean?" Abigail asked. "Will I be wearing shackles as I walk through the village?"

Jacintha smiled softly. "I doubt Caine and Stavros would ask for that. But they may choose that you speak only when you are spoken to when you are around other male wolves. Or they might decide how to dress you each morning."

Trying to imagine her mates sorting through her various skirts and corsets, Abigail stifled a laugh. "I think I understand," she said. "What else must I know?"

"Well, although Caine and Stavros may give you a safe word at the beginning, a word which when uttered would halt play," Rowena said, "once you become a wolf, you will have to surrender that word. When you are a wolf, you need to be under complete control of your mates."

The thought of surrendering so completely to Caine and Stavros was intoxicating. "They would never let me come to harm. I trust them."

Rowena nodded. "That's very good." She looked at Jacintha. "Shall we go?"

"Yes." Jacintha clapped her hands together, and a maid entered the room to clear the table. The three women stood and exited the chambers.

In the corridor, Rowena led the way, her petite frame gliding toward the hall where many of the fort's soirees were held. When they reached the curtained entrance to the hall, Jacintha pulled back the curtain, and they stepped inside. It was empty, and their footsteps echoed in the high-ceilinged room as they crossed the marble floor. They were heading toward the play-chamber that sat at the end of the hall, Abigail realized, a room which held an abundance of contraptions and toys designed to torment a body.

She held her breath as she followed her companions into the chamber and stopped abruptly when she realized they weren't alone. A couple she didn't recognize were making love in the corner of the room. The woman was bound to a large cross, her mouth gagged. Her lover was thrusting inside her, his buttocks flexing with each stroke. Sweat dripped from their naked bodies, and the woman's face was contorted with a mixture of pleasure and pain. Abigail watched, hypnotized by the scene that played out before her eyes. Soon she

would be the one on the cross. And Caine and Stavros would be driving her to insanity with their skilled bodies.

The session came to an end as the man grunted his release and the woman writhed against her binds. Slowly, they stilled, and the man gently uncuffed his mate. She slid from the cross, a satiated smile on her lips. Her partner wrapped his arm around her waist, and they turned toward the door. So enraptured with one another, they didn't seem to notice Abigail or her friends. When the couple had disappeared, she let out a heavy sigh.

"Don't worry, Princess," Jacintha soothed, patting her on the arm. "You will soon feel that relief."

Abigail moved farther into the room, looking from the cross to the furniture that surrounded it. Her gaze fell on what looked like a church pew, an item she remembered from the party at Elderwood.

"This is a kneeler," Rowena said, running her hand along the top rail of the piece. "The female kneels on the bench, and her mate locks her wrists in the cuffs." She pointed to the two metal cuffs on the top rail, then turned to a low metal table which had binds in each corner. "This explains itself, I think. The female lies down, and her mate binds her to the table."

Abigail let her gaze roam to the wall, which was lined with whips and other tools. "What's this?" she asked, reaching for one piece which looked almost like a duster Delia would use. She held it by the leather handle and ran her fingers through the velvety tails.

"It's a flogger," Jacintha said. "It's used like a belt or whip."

They went through the items in the chamber piece by piece, and Abigail wondered as they left the chamber which toys would become her favorites.

"Where are we going now?" she asked as they weaved their way along the meandering corridors.

"To your quarters," Rowena told her.

Her head jerked to the side. "It's time."

“Not quite yet.” Rowena laughed softly. “You’re impatient. I can understand that.”

Abigail gave a sheepish smile. “You felt it too?”

“Oh, absolutely.” Rowena rolled her eyes. “I thought my time would never come. Gabriel was always so stubborn.” She stopped, and her eyes dulled with sadness. Wishing she could make her friend feel better, Abigail reached out and squeezed her arm, earning a grateful smile.

“Here we are,” Jacintha announced as they arrived at her quarters.

“I’ll leave you now,” Rowena said, turning to face her fully. She leaned forward and kissed Abigail’s cheek. “Good luck.”

“Thank you.” Abigail watched her companion walk away, then looked back at Jacintha. “You’ll stay with me.”

Jacintha nodded. “We’re not finished yet.” She held open the door for Abigail, then followed her inside. “We need to get you bathed, Princess.”

As Jacintha used her magic to fill the bathtub with hot water, Abigail undressed. She slid down into the tub with a sigh of contentment and let Jacintha wash her back.

“Do you feel ready?” Jacintha asked, her melodic voice even more soothing than the bubbling water.

“Yes,” Abigail said with certainty. “Will Stavros and Caine be happy with me?”

“I don’t see why not. But there is one last thing to do.”

Abigail’s eyelids drifted closed. “What’s that?” she murmured drowsily.

“We must shave you.”

Her eyes shot open. “Shave me?”

Jacintha nodded. “All female wolves must be shaven for their mates if they are to submit fully to them. It’s tradition.”

Watching as the witch retrieved something from the drawers, Abigail swallowed thickly. "Are you sure Caine and Stavros would like that?"

Jacintha's laugh echoed in the bathing chamber. "I assure you they will take much pleasure from it." She lifted the item which she'd taken from the drawers. The silver blade glinted in her palm. Anxiety made Abigail's fists clench, but knowing that the process would bring her lovers pleasure was enough for her.

"Would you stand for me, Princess?"

Abigail rose to her feet in the tub and tried to keep as still as possible. But as Jacintha brought the blade to the curls which covered her sex, she began to relax. The witch skillfully sliced the hair from Abigail's skin, quickly and precisely, and when she was smooth, Abigail could only stare at herself in the mirrored wall.

"How bizarre," she breathed in amazement. "Thank you, Jacintha."

"You're welcome." The witch passed her a towel, and after she'd dried off, Jacintha grabbed a small jar from beside the tub. "We need to rub this into your skin before you enter the dungeon," she said, unscrewing the lid. She dipped her fingers into the jar and began to rub the substance into Abigail's skin.

It's only oil, Abigail realized as Jacintha coated her body, taking extra care at the apex of her thighs. When she was completely covered, Jacintha took a step back and held out a silk robe.

"It's time, Princess."

Excitement hummed in Abigail's blood as she slipped into the robe and followed Jacintha out of the bedchamber. Instead of turning for the door, Jacintha headed into the sitting room and walked right to the end. She stopped and muttered a spell beneath her breath, and suddenly the dresser was moving, sliding to the side and revealing the mahogany door that lay behind it. Abigail's eyes widened. Had her dungeon been here all along?

Jacintha pushed open the door, and Abigail stepped into the dark chamber. With another chant, Jacintha clapped her hands together, and torchlight filled the room. Abigail came to halt and stared around the dungeon. Just like the other dungeons, she was surrounded by toys and furniture and equipment. The only difference was this dungeon belonged to Caine and Stavros. In this room, they would make her submit to them.

A shiver tripped down her spine as she turned to face Jacintha. "What must I do?"

"Stand in the center of the room and wait. Make sure you keep your head lowered when Caine and Stavros enter."

"Will they be long?"

Jacintha shook her head. "They're almost here." She gave Abigail a quick hug, then stepped back. "I'll see you in the morning, Princess."

"Good night, Jacintha." She watched the witch sashay from the room, her skirts billowing outward with each step. When the heavy door closed behind her, Abigail drew in a deep breath. Time to wait.

* * * * *

When Caine stepped into the sitting room and saw the dresser had been moved, his whole body tensed. The hours leading to this moment had been painfully long, but now the time had arrived, he wasn't certain he could move.

"Relax, brother," Stavros said as he strode through the room. "She's waiting for us."

He gave a grunt of agreement and followed Stavros to the door. Knowing their mate was waiting on the other side, ready to submit to them, both excited and worried him. You won't harm her, he reminded himself. This is what she wants.

Stavros opened the door and the amber light from the dungeon spilled into the sitting room. Both men crossed the threshold, and as the door swung shut

behind them, Caine bit back a groan. Abigail stood in the center of the room, head bowed and hair falling around her shoulders.

In the light, her skin appeared golden, and her whole body glistened with oil. His gaze raked over her, stopping at her full, red-tipped breasts, which rose and fell with each breath she took. Caine dropped his gaze lower to her flat stomach and rounded hips and...*holy hell*. His mouth dried as he drank in the sight of her bare, swollen flesh. He'd wondered if she'd do it, if Jacintha would tell her what was required. He'd never believed it would affect him so. Seeing her like this made him want to drop to his knees and bury his face in her shaved folds.

"Abigail," Stavros said, breaking the silence. From the hoarse tone of his voice, Caine knew his brother was barely reining in his control. "Look at us."

Slowly Abigail lifted her head, and her beautiful green eyes met Caine's before drifting to Stavros.

"You are ready for us?" Stavros asked.

"Yes," she whispered.

"Yes, *Master*," Stavros corrected. "You must always call us 'Master' in the dungeon, understand?"

"Yes, Master."

"Good girl." Stavros stepped forward and circled Abigail's body slowly. "There is something we must discuss before we begin." He glanced at Caine before continuing. "If anything we do tonight is too much, you must stop us. To do that, you can say 'fortress,' and we will halt."

"Say it, Abigail," Caine ordered, moving closer to her. Her body was trembling. He hoped to God she was shivering with desire. "I want to know you can say the word."

"Fortress," she said shakily.

He tried to smile. "Rowena and Jacintha talked you through what will be required of you, I trust?"

She nodded. "Yes, Master."

"Good. Then we shall start." He watched Stavros inspect the table of items in the corner of the room, then gave his head a quick shake and joined his brother. Standing beside Stavros, he scanned the table for the item he sought. His gaze fell on the silver nipple clamps, and his mind flashed back to when he'd found Abigail submitting to Stavros at the party in Elderwood. She'd liked the clamps; he'd seen it in her eyes.

Selecting them from the table, he turned back to Abigail. She stood, arms straight by her sides, waiting. He brought the clamps to her breasts and fixed them on her turgid nipples. Her sharp intake of breath made him smile, and the tension in his muscles relaxed slightly at her obvious excitement. He tugged lightly on the chain which connected the clamps, and a low moan escaped her lips.

"This brings you pleasure, Abigail?" he asked, running the tip of his finger along the dip of the chain.

"Yes, Master."

"Good girl." He glanced briefly at Stavros, who was already reaching for a whip, then returned his attention to their submissive. "You will not speak tonight unless we address you. Do you understand?"

She nodded. "Yes, Master."

With the whip in hand, Stavros circled Abigail and stopped beside Caine. "And you will not make a sound," he added. "No matter what we do to you."

Abigail shivered, and for a moment Caine worried his brother's words had frightened her. But the spark in her green eyes assured him that anticipation had caused the tremble.

He strode farther into the room and placed his hand on the top rail of the wooden kneeler. "Kneel here," he told her.

She slipped behind the contraption and lowered herself until her knees met the bottom bench. She rested her wrists on the top rail. It was a position he'd imagined her in since the first time she'd visited him in the cave.

"She's too free," Stavros noted from his left. Caine turned and watched his brother select a piece of rope from the table.

"Hold your hands together, pet," Stavros said, moving in front of Abigail. He wound the rope around her wrists and knotted it.

Caine stared down at their submissive. Bound to the kneeler, she could only wait for their next move. As Stavros stepped to the side, Caine took his place before Abigail, then reached inside the lining of his coat and withdrew a long-shafted feather.

Abigail tracked the movement of the feather as he dragged it between his fingers. He'd often wondered which sensations would bring forth the most pleasure for her. Perhaps the soft brush of a feather would be the champion.

Holding it out to her face, he drew it over her chin and down her neck. Her eyes fluttered closed as he swirled the tip in the hollow of her throat. Glancing up, he met Stavros's eyes, which were glowing with desire, then lowered the feather to Abigail's breasts. He let the silky bristles sweep over her nipples. Her cry echoed in the dungeon, quickly followed by a sharp crack as Stavros brought the whip down on her bare bottom.

Caine froze, terror shooting through him, fear that they'd caused Abigail pain. But she merely sucked her lower lip between her teeth and bowed her head.

Blood surged to Caine's cock as he absorbed her submissive behavior. "You will stay silent," he reminded her hoarsely. "Is that clear?"

"Yes," she breathed. "Yes, Master."

Stavros stroked a hand through her hair. "That's it, Beauty." He looked at Caine and nodded for him to continue.

Caine refocused his attention on the swollen breasts before him, dragging the feather across her chest and circling her other nipple. He knew how difficult it was for her to remain silent, especially while she endured the dual sensation of both the clamp and the feather on her nipple; yet she struggled through, staying as quiet as the air, obeying their orders. As a rush of love for her filled him, he swallowed. She truly was the perfect submissive.

"Describe to us how it feels," he said as the tip of the feather continued its assault on her breasts. "Calmly."

She was breathing so hard, he wasn't surprised she didn't respond. Stavros's whip sliced through the air and snapped against her buttocks. She straightened sharply. No sound escaped her lips.

"Answer Caine's question," Stavros ordered. "How does it feel?"

Her eyes were dark with desire when she looked up at Caine. Her throat worked as she swallowed. Her face was tight as she tried to control her breathing.

"Powerful," she said eventually, her sweet voice strained with exertion. "My breasts are heavy. Tight." The pink tip of her tongue darted out to moisten her bottom lip. "Each time...each time you touch my nipples, I'm certain..." She shuddered as Caine let the feather graze over one hard peak. "I'm certain they will burst," she finished in a breathless rush.

Her words pulled at his cock, twisting around the base and squeezing mercilessly. "Thank you, Beauty," he said, struggling to keep his voice even. He drew the feather downward over her belly and leaned forward as he twirled the feather around her navel. "What about this?" he whispered. "How does this feel?"

She closed her eyes. "It makes me... It sets my skin on fire."

Enough. Hearing her say the words, describe the sensations, he couldn't stand it any longer. He straightened, shrugged out of his coat, and unbuckled the front of his trousers. His cock, throbbing madly and hard as steel, sprang

free, and he pressed the swollen tip to Abigail's sweet mouth. She opened for him immediately, and he slid over her tongue, closing his eyes as her hot breath and velvety tongue bathed his tight skin.

"That's it, Abigail," he muttered, burrowing one hand into her glossy hair. Her eager sucking heated his blood, and his mind spun into oblivion. He drove into her mouth with the ferocity his body demanded, and she left not an inch of his burning skin untouched, the tight circle of her lips caressing all of him. He could lose himself in this, in the sweet pleasure of her mouth, but he needed to keep his control.

Opening his eyes, he summoned all the self-discipline he could muster and withdrew from Abigail's mouth. He stepped back, lust still thundering in his ears. Her gaze followed him, eyes dark as coal. Then suddenly her head rolled to the side and she inhaled sharply. Caine glanced behind her and swallowed a groan. With the edge of the whip, Stavros was drawing lines along Abigail's buttocks.

"Face forward, my love," Stavros ordered as he stroked the thin strap of leather over her skin. She turned her head and stared straight ahead. Caine looked up from her face and caught Stavros's glinting gaze. His brother nodded, and Caine read his eyes with ease—They reflected his own thoughts. Submission was ingrained in their mate, part of her being. After ignoring it for so long, he could see it clearly now.

The feather was still clamped in his palm, and he approached Abigail again to resume the tease, enjoying the anticipation which blazed in her dark eyes. She watched, transfixed, as the feather swept downward, retracing its trail over her breasts and belly. He let it drift over her bare sex and pressed the fine tip to the seam of her pussy.

"Open your legs for us, Abigail."

She shifted one knee over on the bench and stiffened as he stroked the feather back and forth along her cunt. The sweet musk of her arousal teased his nostrils and made his mouth water. He worked the feather over her inner

thigh and noted the glisten on her pale skin. Dropping to his knees, he leaned down and ran his tongue along her thigh, tasting her sweet moisture and the oil that covered her skin.

Abigail's legs quivered as Caine's hot tongue lapped at the skin between her thighs. She wanted to moan as he ran his tongue up her inner thigh and along the crease which joined her leg and hip. He came achingly close to her pussy, to the throbbing bud of her clit, but never close enough.

"Please, Master," she whispered, unable to prevent the slight push of her hips. "Please lick me there."

The leather whip cracked over her buttocks once again, and the thrilling pain spread fast and sharp over her skin, burning like a forest fire. It was an addictive sensation, one which heightened her pleasure far past anything she'd experienced before. Caine lifted his head, and his silver eyes held hers as he licked her juices from his lips. He stood, his magnificent body throwing her in shadow. His masculine scent coiled around her, and she breathed deeply of it.

Then he circled her until he stood directly behind her. Stavros took his place before her and smiled down at her. "You are doing so well, my love," he said, cupping her face in his hand. "Are you ready for more?"

She nodded. "Yes, Master." Surely he didn't have to ask. She would always be ready for more.

"Good girl." He stroked his hands from her shoulders to her forearms, then untied the knot which held her hands together. When the rope slid to the ground, he caressed the skin on her inner wrists with his thumbs. "Stand up, Abigail."

Her legs trembled as she rose to her feet. Forcing herself forward, she followed Stavros across the floor. He stopped beside the cross, an exact replica of the one she'd seen in the communal dungeon. There was a cuff at the end of

each plank of wood for both her feet and her wrists. The binds would hold her spread-eagled, completely open for her lovers.

"Move your back against the wood," Stavros ordered from his position beside the cross.

She turned and faced Caine as she moved backward until the smooth wood pressed into her flesh. Caine stepped so close, the lapels of his jacket brushed her breasts. He fastened her wrists in the cuffs on either side of the cross and then pushed his knee between her legs until they were parted. The air caressed her aching clit as Caine attached the bottom cuffs to her ankles. When she stood, bare before them, Caine's large palms swallowed her breasts. Her eyes fluttered closed as he squeezed and molded her flesh in his palms, and when he tugged at the chain linking her nipples, she almost let out a scream.

"You will not come," Stavros instructed from somewhere behind her. "Not until we allow it. Is that clear?"

"Yes, Master," she forced out. She could hold on like this. As long as they didn't touch her between her legs, she could last.

But then Caine released her breasts and dropped to his knees. His face burrowed into her sex, and as he dug his tongue inside her wet pussy, she gritted her teeth. This wasn't going to be easy. How on earth was she supposed to hold her orgasm at bay while Caine devoured her from the inside out? His tongue sank inside her cunt, lapping with a hunger she hadn't felt within him before. He drove his tongue in and out, then swirled the tip around her clit, tugging the tight bud so hard, she bucked against the cross.

And then Stavros was behind her and moving his arm beneath the point where the two wooden planks crossed over. He drew a moist probe along the line of her buttocks. Shaking, she tried to hold herself together as he pressed the object against the entrance to her ass. He twirled it against her, then pushed forward, sliding the apparatus inside her tight passage. It was a line of beads, she realized as he slid even deeper. The beads caressed her passage,

bringing the nerve endings there to life. He moved the beads back and forth relentlessly, brushing the walls of her ass until sweat dripped from her skin.

Caine's mouth never let up on her pussy, and as he sucked on her swollen flesh, she knew it was hopeless. Her climax caught her in its grip, racking through her body until she cried out. Her ass ripped around Stavros's toy, and her pussy clenched Caine's tongue. She shivered through the release, then screamed as a whip cracked down on her buttocks once again.

She tried desperately to stop herself from making a sound, but it couldn't be helped. The sharp pain of the leather on her skin increased the strength of her orgasm, and as the waves continued to roll over her, she sagged forward, completely at the mercy of her climax until it finally faded.

Her vision blurred, and she was barely aware of Caine and Stavros unlocking her wrists and ankles. One of them picked her up, holding her to their chest as they moved somewhere. She heard voices and then the sound of water. It wasn't until she was being lowered into the bathtub that she opened her eyes.

"I'm sorry," were her first words as she looked between Caine and Stavros. "I tried, but—" Her words caught on a sob.

Stavros's forehead creased in a frown as he stroked a hand through her hair. "Why are you sorry, Beauty?" he asked softly. "You did so well."

"But I didn't follow your orders," she cried, tears streaming down her face. "I couldn't stop it—"

"Of course you couldn't," Caine told her, reaching into the water for her hand. His silver eyes were kind as he gazed down at her. "It was your first time, my love. Submission takes practice."

She swallowed around the lump in her throat. "So you're not angry with me?"

Caine chuckled and kissed the back of her hand. "No, you silly girl. We love you. And you've given us something we never expected you to give."

She offered a small smile. "I love you too."

"Good." He glanced at Stavros. "Do you have it?"

"Give me a minute."

Abigail watched Stavros disappear from the room, then looked back at Caine. "Where's he going?"

"He's just fetching something for you."

A few moments later, Stavros returned with a velvet box in his hand. He gave it to Caine.

"Some male wolves prefer their mates to be completely submissive at all times," Stavros said, kneeling behind her and kissing her hair. "But we prefer you to be our feisty Abigail, so you will only submit to us when we request it."

She grinned. "I didn't realize I was feisty."

Stavros laughed. "How could you not?"

"We do want you to wear this, though," Caine added, opening the box. "It will signify that you belong to us."

Abigail stared at the pearl choker sitting on a bed of black velvet. "It's beautiful," she gasped.

"I'm glad you think so." Caine lifted the choker to her neck. "Hold up your hair, Abigail."

She bundled up her hair at the top of her head and felt Stavros clasp the choker around her neck.

"Thank you," she whispered.

"You're welcome." Stavros pressed a kiss to the side of her neck, and she smiled. Things were finally as they should be.

* * * * *

The following morning, Stavros left the banquet hall with a spring in his step. He'd awoken early, and as he'd stared down at Abigail's naked body beside him, he absorbed the sight of her marked skin and felt the satisfaction

of being a dominant. The reddened skin not only signified the change in their relationship, but it also proved how much trust Abigail placed in him and Caine, how willing she was to submit to them. He didn't think he could love her any more than he did in that moment.

"You're up early this morning," a deep voice boomed from behind him.

Stavros turned in the corridor and grinned as Lyson's tall figure advanced toward him. "It's my duty to be up early," he said. "The joys of being Alpha. Don't tell me you've forgotten already."

Lyson shook his head. "I never will." He started to walk toward the staircase leading outside, and Stavros fell into step beside him.

"We spoke about Elderwood the other day," Lyson said, "but there is another matter I wanted to discuss with you and Caine."

"Go on."

"It's Gabriel."

Stavros frowned. "Gabriel?" He hadn't heard Lyson mention that name since the man had disappeared. "Has he contacted you?"

Lyson shook his head. "No, but we must contact him. In this war, we will need to gather all the fighters we have, and Gabriel is one of the best when it comes to violence."

Stavros didn't miss the hostility in the older man's tone. Even before Gabriel had left Fort Bestial, Lyson had disliked him. Probably because Gabriel, though almost ten years older than Rowena, had mated with her.

"How will we contact him if we don't know his location?"

Lyson drew in a deep breath and came to a stop at the bottom of the stairwell. "I know his location. But as Alpha, you or Caine must summon him."

After a few moments of silence, it became clear Lyson wasn't going to elaborate, so Stavros simply nodded. "I can't imagine he'll return, though."

"He will."

Stavros was ready to press further, when footsteps on the corridor behind him drew his attention. He turned and found a messenger holding out an envelope.

"From King Frederick," the boy said breathlessly. "I thought it would be important."

"Thank you." Stavros took the letter and ripped it open. As his eyes skimmed the words, he felt a rush of disbelief followed by contentment.

"He's causing more trouble, is he?" Lyson asked.

Stavros gave a bark of laughter. "Not this time. The old bastard finally wants to make amends." He took a step back from the stairwell, itching to return to the chambers and show Abigail the letter. "I'll walk with you tomorrow," he told Lyson. "And you can give me Gabriel's location."

Lyson's reply was lost on him as his feet pounded the corridor back to Abigail. War was looming, but he'd never felt better.

Epilogue

The night of Abigail's turning was calm and peaceful. No breeze rustled through the trees of Drayzlake Forest, no rain chilled the air. Caine inhaled deeply, letting the scents of the forest flood his senses as he and Stavros led Abigail through the woods. A quick glance upward told him that the full moon had nearly reached its peak in the night sky. They didn't have long, but he was determined not to rush what had always been a cherished ritual.

Behind him, Stavros muttered something to Abigail. His tone was soft, comforting. Caine resisted the urge to turn around and pull her into his arms, to study her face in search of the uncertainty he feared she felt.

The past three months had proven how dedicated she was to becoming a wolf. Training as a submissive had been both intensive and relentless, but she'd taken every challenge and mastered it with an eagerness that had both surprised and excited him. Yet a small, aggravating part of him still expected her to change her mind.

A few feet ahead, the clearing which they would use for the ritual came into view. Jacintha had organized a circular wooden platform to be built in the center. A ring of candles surrounded the elevated platform. Jacintha had enchanted them to ensure the flames would flicker for as long as they were needed.

Caine stepped into the empty space and stopped while Stavros led Abigail farther into the circle by the leather leash attached to the collar around her neck. Caine watched his brother remove the leash and discard it to the side of the platform. Then he got to work on the velvet robe she wore. He untied the

sash and pushed the material from her shoulders. It pooled around her feet, leaving her completely naked in the candlelight.

A deep hunger burst in Caine's veins as he kept his distance and let his gaze roam every inch of her smooth skin. She was already aroused, her cheeks were flushed, her nipples hard and distended. The rise and fall of her breasts quickened with each breath she took.

"Move into the center of the platform," Stavros ordered her. She did so immediately and stood facing them. Her head was slightly lowered, and her beautiful eyes stared up at them from beneath thickly lashed lids. For a few moments, Caine felt paralyzed by her beauty. She was exquisite. Most importantly, she was *theirs*.

Then, pulling himself together, he stepped onto the platform and retrieved the items needed for the ritual from the table at the edge of the platform. Glancing at Stavros, he passed one jar to his brother. They needed to coat Abigail's skin in the heavily scented oil before they could begin. The oil, enchanted by Jacintha, held properties which would ease the changeover.

As Stavros stepped behind Abigail and got to work on her back, Caine stood before her and stared into her eyes. "Tonight, there will be no safe word," he told her as he opened his jar. "Are you ready for that?"

Her eyes, blazing with desire, remained on his. "Yes, Master."

"You will carry out our orders, even when the beast takes hold, is that clear?"

The excitement was evident in her breathy tones as she repeated, "Yes, Master."

Confidence that she was truly ready for the change surged through him, and he dipped his fingers in the oil. He took his time massaging the oil into her smooth skin, savoring the fullness of her breasts and the softness of her belly. The thick, heady scent of the oil rose in the air and swirled around them as he ran his hands over Abigail's body.

He didn't venture near her sex until he'd covered her legs and feet. When his hands dipped between her legs, he found her folds wet and swollen, the button of her clit throbbing for attention. Between his own legs, his cock reared, straining against the front of his robe. He ignored his own need and focused on Abigail's flesh, only retreating when felt certain she was entirely covered.

Straightening once again, he met Stavros's eyes over her shoulder. His brother's silver pupils glowed with arousal, and when he turned to the table of items, Caine wasn't surprised to see him select the clamps. They'd quickly become Abigail's favorite toy over the weeks.

Caine took a step to the side as Stavros joined him. He watched his brother attach the silver pegs to Abigail's beaded nipples and as she pulled her lower lip between her teeth, Caine smiled his satisfaction.

"Get on your hands and knees, pet," he ordered, keeping his eyes trained on her.

She obeyed immediately, dropping to her knees and leaning forward to support herself on her hands. Drinking in the view of her shimmering back and buttocks, Caine felt his balls tighten dangerously. Pressing his hand to his groin, he waited for the intense sensation to pass and watched as Stavros slowly began to circle their submissive, whip in hand.

Abigail's whole body trembled with need as Caine and Stavros paced around her. In this position, she felt wanton and extremely sexual, completely bare to her masters. And when one of them began to stroke the edge of a leather whip along her spine, a rush of liquid heat pooled in her already dripping core.

"I believe you enjoy this position," Caine noted, his voice deep with rolling lust. "Am I correct?"

She swallowed. "Yes, Master."

"Perhaps I'll check for myself," Stavros said, humor evident in his dark tones. He slid the whip along the cleft of her ass, then dipped it between her legs, pressing it to the seam of her wet pussy before he withdrew it. The sound of his deep inhale teased her ears, and his grunt of approval tugged at her clamped nipples.

"You certainly do like this position, don't you?" Stavros muttered, moving in front of her. "Lift your head."

She looked up and bit back a moan when her eyes locked with his silver ones.

"I want you to turn around and crawl to Caine," Stavros told her.

Shaking with desire, she twisted around to face Caine. He stood a few feet away, legs slightly apart, gaze trained on her. She started to move forward, the quiver in her limbs ensuring she moved slowly across the platform. The wood bit into her knees. Her breasts swayed as she crawled, and each movement tightened the clamps on her nipples. Heat suffused her skin, and her breath came in short pants.

All the while she kept her eyes on Caine, and as she drew near, he unbuckled his trousers and let his cock spring free. Her breath caught in her throat as she savored the sight of his straining shaft, bulging with need. When she finally reached him, she was compelled to take him in her mouth. The plum-shaped head and the long, thick shaft disappeared between her lips as she sucked him. He burned on her tongue, throbbed the way she did.

Wrapping a hand around the base, she began to move her head up and down, keeping her lips locked around him, sucking the way he loved to be sucked. Merciless as she laved his tight skin with her tongue. Greedy as she inhaled his scent and tasted his seed. She stilled when she had him full in her mouth, then grazed the edge of her teeth along his underside on her way back up. At the top, she swirled her tongue over the slit, which was already oozing droplets of his release.

Caine's hands tangled in her hair, and he pulled her head up. "Get onto your knees, Abigail."

She rose up once again and tried not to squirm with need as Stavros brought her arms behind her back. They tied her up often, something she never complained about. Being held immobile as her lovers took control of her body elicited such fierce excitement that she could climax at the mere thought.

She loved the cold metal of shackles, the softness of a silk scarf. Tonight it was the rough friction of rope as Stavros twisted a piece around her wrists and upper arms in a knot which would hold her arms completely immobile. He tested the knot to ensure its durability. Then he pressed a kiss to the back of her neck, making the tiny hairs stand on end.

"We're going to make love to you now," he said softly, running his finger down the curve of her neck. "And then we'll turn you."

His promise sparked a frenzy of anxious excitement in her belly. She held her breath as she watched Caine finish undressing. His body was a hard mass of roped muscle, a sight which never failed to make her melt. She was dry-mouthed when he lowered himself to his knees before her and placed his hands on her hips. The tip of his cock grazed her navel. Behind her Stavros knelt too, and his cock pressed against the cleft of her ass.

Caine ran his hands up her rib cage and stroked his thumbs over her nipples. "You won't climax until we tell you to," he said as he removed the silver clamps from her breasts and left them strewn to the side. "Do you understand?" He brought his hands down to her pussy and he slid a long finger inside.

She hissed out a breath. "Yes, Master." Her pussy clenched around the single digit. Resisting her orgasm would be difficult, but she was determined to obey her mates.

He removed his finger and drew her forward. From behind, Stavros supported her as Caine lifted her hips. Closing her eyes, she sank down onto his engorged cock and bit her lip as a flash of pleasure flared from where their bodies were joined.

"Breathe, Abigail," Caine whispered hoarsely. "Breathe."

She inhaled deeply in an effort to calm herself. Stavros stroked his palms over her skin, soothing her as she rode Caine's cock. When she'd settled into a slow, aching rhythm, Stavros moved behind her and pushed her forward slightly. His fingers slipped between her buttocks and flicked over the puckered hole of her ass. Her breathing hitched as he teased the tiny nerve endings. His cock throbbed heavily against her skin. A sudden longing struck her, a need to reach behind and grasp his cock and guide it inside her.

He didn't tease for long, his need for release obviously too great. Pressing the swollen head to her hole, he propelled forward. The initial flare of sensation as he stretched her open was deliciously familiar, and she fell forward against Caine, letting both men invade her body and turn her limbs to jelly with the pleasure they sourced.

"Look at me," Caine ground out, his breath harsh against her forehead. "Look at me, Abigail."

Lifting her head, she felt her heart clench when she saw the aching need in his eyes, a desperate love which thrilled her with his every touch. She smiled at him, barely aware of the sweat dripping down her neck and between her breasts.

"I'm ready," she promised, knowing there was nothing in the world which held more truth.

He nodded and glanced down to where they were joined. Then he dropped his head and crushed her lips with his. His tongue swept inside her mouth, stroking and sucking and growing more insistent with every snap of his hips.

Their breaths became one as she kissed him back, accepting the fierceness of his mouth with a ferocity of her own.

Behind her, the strength of Stavros's thrusts increased. He pounded her body, creating a fire which had her dancing along the edge of her climax. It took all her energy to hold back, to clamp down on the pressure which threatened to explode low in her stomach. Tears rolled down her cheeks as the pleasure reached levels she hadn't experienced before. She didn't know how to handle it; she could only hang on and see it through.

Stavros groaned against her neck, and she knew they were drawing near. She whimpered; a cry rose in her throat, but she swallowed it. No sound. Not yet.

And then she felt it. Thick whorls of hair appeared on Caine's chest as he continued to drive into her. The same occurred with Stavros, and the hair scratched her back. She gasped for breath as she was rocked between their demanding bodies, trying to control the beginnings of climax which already fluttered in her stomach.

Finally Stavros roared what she ached to hear. "Now."

She closed her eyes as her climax burst within her. Her pussy vibrated, clenching and unclenching. The spasms fanned outward, spreading until reaching the top of her head and down to her toes. Fire danced along her skin, under her skin. Her blood pumped through her veins hard and fast. She shivered, shuddered.

She could hear a scream in the distance and realized belatedly that the cry belonged to her. Her orgasm continued to hit her over and over, never fully relenting. Forcing her eyes open, she stared up at Caine. Her vision was blurred, but she could see the tension in his face, the veins standing out along his neck. A deep growl began in his chest and worked its way up. And then she saw the glint of a white fang.

She was shaking, barely conscious with the power of her release, but she nodded. She needed to let him know it was time. At her silent approval, his wolven eyes softened. He glanced over her shoulder, meeting Stavros's gaze in the dark. And then their heads came down on either side of her neck, and their fangs sank deep.

She stiffened as the wolven elements in their fangs mingled with her blood, and a light wave of pleasure washed over her. She felt safe. Warm. Her heartbeat slowed and her head spun as a pleasant dizziness held her on the brink of unconsciousness.

A sudden burning had her heart speeding again as fire raged through her limbs. She felt her muscles strengthening, becoming more elastic. Belatedly, she realized that Caine and Stavros were no longer biting her neck and she was no longer on her knees. She was standing, and it was effortless, as if she were floating. The burning intensified, and something shifted in her stomach.

"Easy, Abigail..."

It was Stavros's voice that soothed her, but when she turned, she saw he was in his wolven form, covered in dark fur. She stared into his silver eyes and then glanced at Caine, who'd also shifted.

"Control it," he ordered her with his mind. "Let it happen slowly."

She focused on the words which echoed in her head, then felt her whole body start to shift. She summoned all the strength she had to control the change. It felt perfectly natural as fur sprouted all over her body and she fell forward on hands and knees. Caine and Stavros growled their approval, and she shocked herself by growling back.

A hundred different impulses hit her at once as her heightened senses started to work. Despite the darkness, she saw everything from the silver gazes of her mates to the markings on the leaves of the trees. She heard everything too, and she lifted her head as another wolf howled in the distance.

"Come, my love," Stavros said, prowling toward her. "Let's hunt."

Her paws dug into the dirt floor of the forest as she followed her lovers between the heavy foliage.

The change had begun.

THE END

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Beauty and the Beasts

Ava Rose Johnson

Ava Rose Johnson first delved into the pool of erotic romance during a very lazy summer a few years ago and hasn't looked back since. By day she works in an office and spends most of her time day-dreaming about her characters and possible plot twists. Her hobbies include photography, yoga and reading (of course!).

You can find Ava on the Web at <http://www.avarosejohnson.com> or e-mail her at ava@avarosejohnson.com.