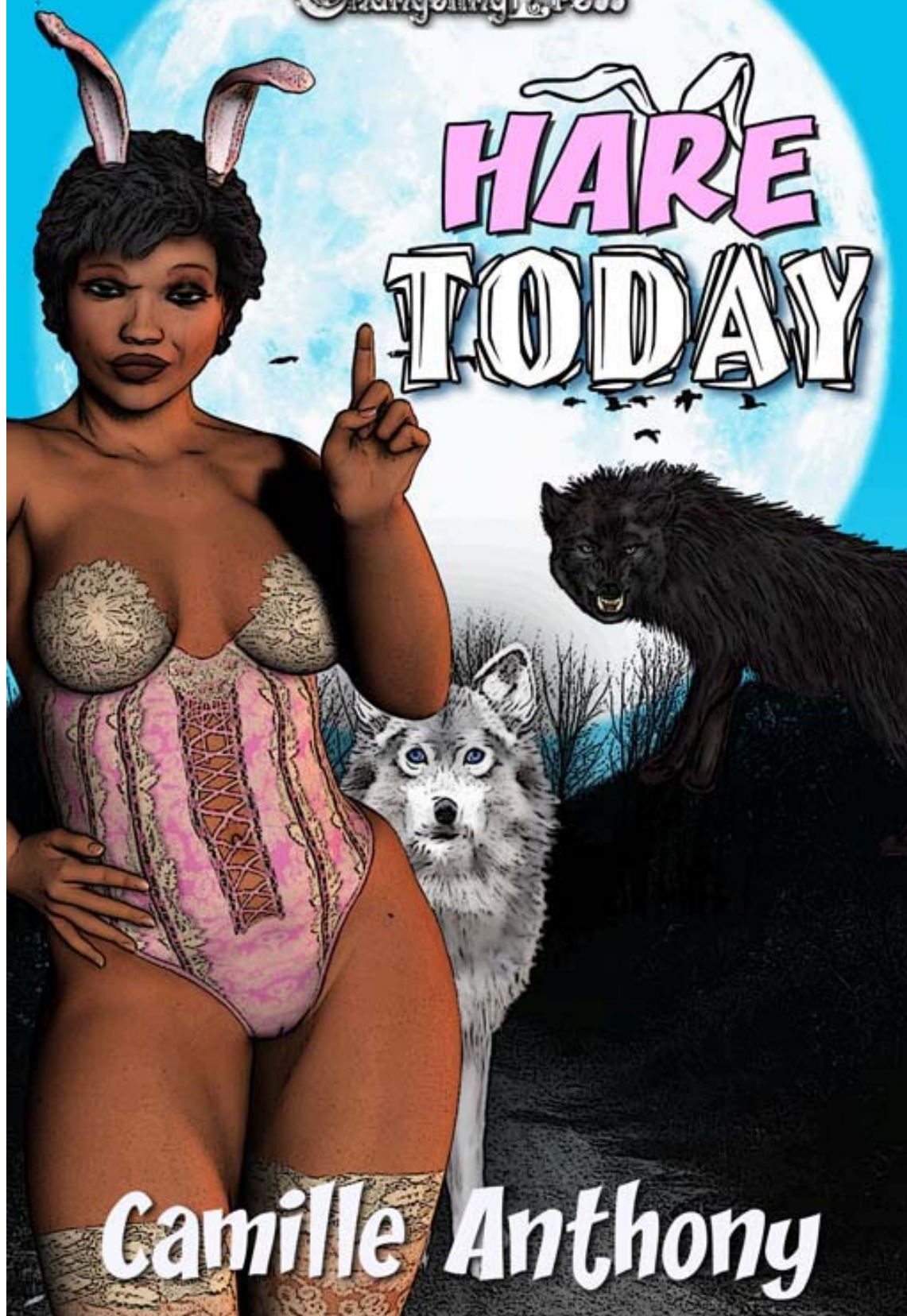


Changeling Press

HARE TODAY



Bunny Tails: Hare Today

Camille Anthony

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Bunny Tails: Hare Today

Camille Anthony

Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow

Ouida -- She suffers from an embarrassment of riches... if being sexed up by four hunky males is suffering. Ouida's reveling in the temporary excess, knowing she'll revert to having only one mate as soon as this year's Fertility Festival ends. Looking forward to settling down with Vance, she's shocked when trouble, in the form of a newspaper article, disrupts her new life. She thought she'd left Yesterday behind... Will it destroy her tomorrows?

Vance -- Sharing his luscious beautiful black mate wasn't his first choice, it was his only one. Vance can't wait to have his Ouida all to himself. He's dying to release the sexual submissive she unknowingly harbors within. When the past intrudes on his plans, Vance can only pray Ouida chooses him over her former life. Is Today all he'll have of her?

Xen -- He didn't plan on falling in love with Ouida. Vance has been his friend since puppyhood and Xen never imagined they'd become enemies. One taste of Ouida's sweet body changed all that. Screw Pack Law. To hell with the Alpha's demands he back off. Xen plans to seize the day and create his own Tomorrows...

Chapter One

Early Morning Romp Interrupted Vance

"What is that gawd-awful stench?"

Startled out of sleep, I opened one bleary eye to find Ouida erupting out of the midst of our warm entangled pile. Stars above, she was a beautiful sight to me, even with that fearsome frown marring her dark brown sleepy face. And she was all mine... well, mostly mine.

For the length of our yearlong Fertility Festival I had to share her body as well as our den with Xen, Usher and Brax -- members of the pack's Enforcer League and my Lieutenants. Much as I didn't like the situation, it being a rare occasion for wolves to share a mate, Westyn had decreed it, making it pack law. I am the enforcer of our laws so I of all wolves must obey. However, as soon as this festival ended, I planned on making damned sure their three furry butts hit the bricks. Got the hell outta Dodge. Vacated my den.

Judging by the stomach-twisting fumes rising on the chill early morning air in the wake of Ouida's thrashing movements, someone had cut the cheese -- stinky cheese at that. My tongue lolled in a wolfish grin. I wouldn't have to wait til the end of the year to be temporarily rid of some of our excess baggage. One or more culprits would be exiting this morning.

Drowsy whines and grumbles sounded as the other wolves, all in fur to help keep our human mate warm, shifted seeking more comfortable positions.

"I'm not playing with you guys. Whoever Dutch-ovened me better get their funky butt out of my bed." She fanned the blankets, scrunching up her nose at the smell she inadvertently stirred up.

Brax let out a long, pitiful whine, which told me he was the guilty one. I swallowed a bark of laughter because I knew what was about to happen.

Sure enough, Ouida asked, sounding betrayed, "Brax, that was you?"

He lowered his head and whined pitifully, having no defense for his smelly offense.

Our mate sucked in a cautious breath. When next she spoke, her outraged tones declared there'd be no mercy offered. "Dude, that's just nasty!"

Brax's tail thumped twice in half-hearted hope. He tucked his head down, nudged her foot with his nose and licked her toes in a blatant attempt to play on her sympathy.

Yeah, good luck with that. From recent experience, I could have told him begging wasn't going to work.

"Out!" Eyes narrowed down to a determined squint, Ouida pointed a stiff finger toward the bedroom doorway, impervious to Brax's pleading whimpers. "My mom used to say, 'If you lay down with dogs you get up with fleas.' She didn't know the half of it. Our agreement was no fleas and no farts. If you can't keep the bargain, you got to get out!"

Brax turned entreating eyes toward me, but I had no sympathy. He knew damned good and well Ouida was the boss in our bed. I ignored him to cuddle closer to my mate, burying my muzzle against her pillowed hip to muffle my snickering. No way was I getting in between them and risking being tossed out, myself.

With another pitiful whine, he slunk out from under the covers and padded toward the door, casting woebegone glances back in the hopes of being recalled.

I snickered again. Like that was gonna happen.

With Brax gone, Usher was fast to act on the opportunity, quickly moving into the vacated position on the other side of our mate. He moved away even quicker when Xen snarled and snapped at his flanks, claiming the spot by reason of superior rank.

Along the length of my body, Ouida's body stiffened, telling me she wasn't comfortable with what had just happened. Or maybe she wasn't comfortable with Xen

being so close to her in fur. He'd tried to take advantage of her during the pack ceremony and though that had been over four months ago, she still hadn't forgotten it. Now, she deliberately gave the wolf her back as she scooted under the blankets and turned on her side to face me.

In the short time it took her to get comfortable, I shifted to biped and wrapped my arms around her, pulling her closer so her large, cushiony breasts, plush and giving, mashed against my chest. As always, my cock hardened and rose between us to prod the full curve of her belly, her soft skin growing damp as my pre-cum wet her flesh.

"I want you," I whispered, hoping we hadn't worn her out last night, knowing we probably had. Last night was the first of the full moon and our blood had run hot and high...

* * *

Xen, Usher, Brax and I joined with the pack hunt. Being free to range the land in our true form was an unimaginable adrenaline rush. Nothing compared to coursing far after game, taking down the prey and drinking its hot, bubbling blood, ripping into the tender flesh of the fresh kill.

My three lieutenants and I took down the first stag of the night, tearing into the steaming carcass to get at the prize -- the still-beating heart. I claimed the first bite, careful to leave a portion for the other three. We'd shared the hunt, we would share the reward. Howling our triumph and joy, we called the others, willing now to share the good fortune of plentiful meat.

We flushed out a goodly number of hares, most of which we shared with the orphans and elderly among the People since we'd be carrying none home to Ouida. For some reason, she wouldn't eat hare meat, claiming the relationship with them she felt as a result of what she'd gone through last winter.

Instead, we set aside a few hefty hunks of venison, wrapped in a portion of the deerskin. She'd eat that, but not before burning it over flames until she'd practically ruined the meat. I allowed her to retain some human foibles because I loved her, but I knew I'd soon have to begin weaning my female from her unnatural habits.

Alphas don't usually carry packs, but Brax and Usher were willing to be our beasts of burden since it was for Ouida. It helped that they were beta to Xen and me. We shifted long enough to fashion halters for the skin pouches from limber twigs and twisted leaves. Once we finished attaching them, we relaxed into our true forms and headed home. Baying joyously, we raced each other, our paws eating up the distance in seemingly no time.

She was waiting for us on the porch, her dark skin gleaming under the light of the full moon. Her teeth -- a wide blunt-edged row of startling white -- were bared in her human expression of smiling and she'd already launched herself from the wooden platform before we shifted into bipeds.

"Wait until we can catch you," I cautioned, rushing to intercept her before her round, plump bottom hit the dirt. I eased her down gently, waiting for her feet to touch the ground before looping my arms about her waist.

She went up on tiptoe to kiss me and laughed. "You guys always catch me, though I can't understand why you haven't put your backs out hefting this big butt of mine around."

Xen came up behind her, growling at her words. He cupped her ass and squeezed until her soft flesh stood up around his fingers. "I love this beautiful ass and I'll hear nothing negative about it, or I'll be spanking it as I fuck you."

I bit back a snarl, wishing I'd thought to say that when Ouida turned bright eyes on Xen and flung an arm out to drag him in for a hearty press of lips. "Sometimes you know just what to say to make my day!"

I tightened my arms around her, drawing her attention away from that damned smooth wolf. "I'm about to make your night."

"Oh yeah?" She tipped her chin up and mock scowled at me, looking like an adorable pup trying to play grown up. "You and what army?"

"Usher and Brax reporting for duty... Sir!" The two stepped up to us, running bold hands over our female's hips and flanks, down her legs. "We'll gladly take kitchen detail."

She looked a question. "Kitchen detail?"

Usher skimmed a hand up her leg, ended with his palm covering her thatch of dense curls. "Where the heat is."

"Oh." Ouida's breasts quivered as her breathy sigh ghosted on the night air. Her thighs trembled, knees relaxing as Usher rotated his hand over her mound, sent a finger questing through the swollen labia to sweep her dainty channel. A sharp, sweet aroma burst from her skin, inundating the area with her arousal, causing all our nostrils to flare. We soaked in her beckoning scent, our cocks rising in response of the powerful aphrodisiac.

Still holding her by the ass, Xen flexed his fingers, pulling the globes of her butt apart to reveal her puckered anus. "I've got the rear covered... to make sure there's no retreat."

She blushed. The wash of color stained her cheeks a rosy dusky brown while generating a heat that radiated off her flesh, painting the night air with ribbons of hot fuchsia lust.

"I suppose that leaves me guarding the front lines," I quipped, dipping my head to capture a taut blackberry nipple between my teeth. The sharp nip I gave her made her squeal and tremble.

"Sounds like I'm in trouble." Her voice shook. She was trying to be calm, but we weren't going to let her keep anything from us. Not tonight.

I released her straining tip with an audible pop. "The moon is still full. Our blood still runs wild. Tonight, we brought down two stags and licked the hot heart's blood from our faces when we finished gorging ourselves on the moon's gift of fresh meat."

Usher pushed two stiff fingers past the fragrant, weeping entrance of her sex. "We gorged, but we're still hungry for another kind of meat."

Brax spoke up next, startling us all. He so rarely spoke in these situations, usually leaving the wooing to the three of us, content to keep his participation physical. "I want to fuck you tonight, Ouida, not just lick your pussy. I want inside you. Deep inside."

His words were uncustomarily somber, lacking his more euphoric phrasing, and Ouida responded in the gentle, caring way she invariably used with him. Lifting a hand, she ran her palm down the side of his face, her touch barely skimming the lean stubbled contour. "I want that too, Brax, for you to take me, be inside me." She glanced around at all of us, catching each wolf's eyes. "I love it when you take me together sometimes. Shall we go inside?"

She turned in my arms to start toward the cabin and was brought up short when Xen stopped her by catching her wrist. "No. I want to take you out here, beneath the moon."

I nodded in agreement. "I want you naked and open before us, here, under the stars."

"But, what if someone comes... what if they see us... you know?"

I could smell her embarrassment, but I had no intention of letting her refuse us. This was right. Fucking her this way, out in the open and together, felt more right than anything I'd ever known. "If anyone comes they will see four wolves worshiping the moon as they pleasure their mate." I shook my head at her continued reticence. "Ouida, my mate, you've got to cast off these unnatural human sensibilities. They have no place among the People."

"But --"

Xen's hand fell on rounded flesh with a loud smacking sound. Ouida yelped and he chuckled. "This is the only butt I'm interested in."

"Hey, dude, that stung!" She pouted, rubbing her ass cheeks. "You're getting a little too free with that slapping and hitting stuff. I don't --"

I cut off her continued protests by the simple expedient of yanking her to me by her elbows and taking her mouth. She shut up and kissed me back, throwing her arms around my neck and hitching one leg up to hook her foot behind my knee. Soon she was humping me, curling her pelvis up to brush my cock and moaning like a ghost on Halloween.

Ouida loved kissing and she was damned good at it. She thrust her tongue in my mouth and her taste exploded on my senses, sending my lust soaring and my thoughts reeling. The other three disappeared from my mind. All I was thinking about was getting my lush, full-figured mate horizontal so I could get my aching cock in her tight juicy cunt.

“Stop hogging her!”

“I can’t get to her pussy when she’s mashed up against you like that.”

“Vance, you promised to share.”

Xen’s growl of disapproval and the others’ howls of dismay brought us both back to reality. With a little laugh, Ouida turned to face the boys, licking her lips at the sight of their rampant cocks bobbing in eagerness. She swept her hands out, indicating her heavy breasts and wide hips. “Guys, as you can see, there’s plenty here for all of you.”

Continuing his abnormal forwardness, Brax ran a hand down her back, his palm coming to rest on the base of her spine, just where her ass began to curve out. He met and held my gaze, causing me to remember he was an alpha, as I was. He might be subordinate to me, however he was only fifth down the totem pole in our pack’s pecking order. I was guilty of often taking advantage of his easy-going manner, of relegating his needs behind mine. Tonight, Brax reminded me he would tolerate only so much. When it came to something he really wanted, Happy-go-lucky went Rambo.

“It’s our turn. I think we should have her first. Me and Usher should fuck Ouida before you and Xen.”

“What the fuck!” My hackles rose. I might have just been thinking he deserved better from me than I’d been giving, but how dare the damned wolf demand to go first with my mate? Before I’d slaked my thirst for her.

Ouida stepped out of my arms and went to Brax. He wrapped his arms around her and I wanted to howl when she turned to face Xen and me from the shelter of his embrace, nodding her acquiescence. “I agree. I don’t think it’s fair that Usher and Brax

are always the ones having to wait. Tonight, they're first." She smiled. "You and Xen can watch."

My howl died, petered out into a whimper as my cock wilted. Then I thought it over and my cock firmed, rising harder than ever as pictures of Ouida held between the two alphas, her thighs wide and her eyes gone blind in helpless lust flooded my mind. My hand fell to my cock when Usher leapt in to join them, his damned tongue immediately finding its way into her mouth. Brax's hands were busy between her legs, playing her pussy with firm, masterful strokes that had her body swaying into his, her hands fisting in his hair to bring him into their shared kiss.

Xen turned his back and flounced away with a rumbling growl, stopping at the beginning of the steps to swing around and face the three lovers. "Be prepared, mate. As soon as those boys finish, I'm going to fuck you so hard, fill you with so much sperm you'll leak it from your ears."

Ouida stopped kissing Usher long enough to make a face. "Eeuw, Xen! That doesn't sound very sexy, but it sure sounds like you want me... a lot."

He stared at her from under beetled brows. "You have no idea... but you soon will, I promise."

Brax growled a warning at Xen, shocking the piss out of me. He placed a hand on Ouida's cheek, turning her face to his. "Stay with me. Ignore them."

"Yes." She lifted her mouth to be kissed. "I'm yours."

I couldn't bring myself to do what Xen had done, leaving the field to our two companions. Instead, I found myself doing as she'd commanded -- watching.

My gut churned, wanting to be Usher as he dropped to his knees, hands trailing down the slopes of her breasts to snag at her nipples, pinching and tweaking the fat nubbins until they firmed and stood erect, begging for a mouth.

Behind her, Brax slid his arms around her torso to cup her heavy breasts in the palms of his hand, bouncing them as Usher worked the tips. He took over the job of petting her nipples while Usher dropped his hands to her hips, trying to hold her still as he plundered her dripping cunt.

I knew he wouldn't manage that. My baby loved having her pussy licked and sucked and she couldn't be still. I could almost feel the moist, fragrant flesh under my tongue. It was all I could do not to attack my friends and rip her away from them, throw her down and mount her.

I couldn't do that. Ouida had made her choice, and we all would abide by it. Yet it seemed that now the fellows had her, they weren't quite sure of what to do with her. Helping them out, I barked out instructions. "Brax, suck her nipples while Usher eats her pussy. Ouida, open your thighs wider. Give him room to pleasure you."

With a broken sigh, Ouida melted against Brax's chest, obeying my instructions. When she opened her legs, her musky aroma slammed into me like a sledgehammer, knocking me to my knees. I dropped to the ground, howling, pouring all my longing into the song our People have sung since time immortal.

I didn't need to see them, now, to track their movements. I could hear Ouida's breathy pleas, her frantic cries as Usher and Brax drove her relentlessly toward a sharp bright culmination. The scent of Brax's arousal was a strong edgy smell in my nostrils, like bittersweet coffee grounds. It mingled with the sweet wildflower aroma that was my Ouida's as his cock breached the small puckered mouth of her anus.

Her grunts of pain quickly segued into groans of passion as both wolves claimed and mastered her in a primal, powerful taking that made my own body tighten with lust.

I opened my eyes to find Ouida on her knees in profile to me, the boys flanking her. She had her head thrown back, eyes closed and her hands curled at the back of Usher's upper thighs with her mouth stretched thin around his meaty cock. Her hair was fisted in Usher's hands as he rocked his cock in and out of her lips, controlling how much of him she swallowed. Behind her, Brax's hips snapped rhythmically back and forth, powering his long hard erection up the dark constricted channel of her ass. It was a glorious sight.

My balls grew heavy even as they lifted to hug the underside of my cock. I resorted to fisting my meat, shuddering along with Brax and Usher when they shouted and began fucking Ouida with sharp, rapid thrusts.

"Drink me down, Ouida," Usher ordered, cupping the back of her head and holding her mouth to his crotch. "Swallow every drop." He howled, body bowing as his semen blasted from the head of his cock to splash against the back of Ouida's throat. I watched him come and it looked brutal and sharp. It had me wondering what I looked like when I came. Before she'd finished swallowing Usher's seed, Brax was snarling his pleasure and hammering Ouida's ass.

"Come for me baby," he crooned, his voice rumbling deep with command. "Come while I fill this plump, beautiful ass full of my seed."

Ouida's big body clenched, thighs quaking and breasts swaying as Brax located her clit and thrummed it in time with his quick, deep jabs. She pulled away from Usher letting his flaccid cock slide from her mouth as she turned her head and cried, "Oh God, yes, harder! I'm coming! Vance!"

Ouida's lusty cries weakened my knees as they softened my heart. How could I doubt my standing with her when no matter whom she was with, she called my name and sought my gaze when she came?

Brax pulled out of her and she looked gorgeous with seed dotting the side of her mouth and rivulets of it seeping out her tight hole, though it wasn't so tight, now. Xen wouldn't have any problem getting in there when we took our turn. I couldn't wait. "Xen! Get the fuck out here or I'll start without you!"

Chapter Two

I thought I'd completely sated the need for her burning inside me last night, but looking at my mate now I felt desire rise in an overwhelming wave. Wanting her, desperate to be in her again, I nuzzled her neck, placing my lips close to her ears and whispered, "Want to fuck?"

She shook her head. "I want to make gentle love. Can it be just you, though? You guys were kinda rough on me last night."

The memory of how often Xen and I had taken her, both almost out of control from having waited for the other two to finish, had me cringing. Thank the goddess my buxom mate was built sturdy and solid. If she'd been some weak scrawny stick, we'd have broken her. Never could she have survived the fierce fucking we'd subjected her to.

I could smell her pussy's fragrant response as her juices welled for me. Lady of the Forest, but I had to fight the urge to howl as my nostrils flared, soaking in the hot scented cloud perfuming the air, proof of how much she wanted me. "Oh yeah, baby. You and me -- exactly the way I like it."

On Ouida's far side, the other two moved restlessly, alerted by the rising smell of our arousal on the chill morning air. She gasped, her body pressed hard into mine and I knew Xen had shifted as I had and was crowding her. I snarled a warning at him to stay back and he growled defiance in return. Between us, Ouida stiffened.

My gums tingled, the sensation an indication of how close I was to growing fangs when once again he hesitated to obey my orders. "If you force me to fight you for dominance this morning, I'll fucking kill you, Xen."

Even to my ears, my voice sounded harsh and guttural. I let my wolf nature rise and glared into the glinting black eyes of the wolf in man-skin watching me over the dark round shoulders of my mate.

"I want her, too."

Even in the pre-dawn gloom of our dark bedroom, I could see the emotion naked in my lieutenant's eyes. My jaw clenched. "You had her last night. Several times."

"I'll always want her. Just like you."

Xen's words and the underlying message they conveyed came as no surprise. I'd known he'd come to love my Ouida. I also knew one day, though we were friends, this issue might come to death between us. I hoped it wouldn't be today, but my wolf didn't care one way or another. It wasn't giving up its mate to anyone. Period.

"It's not about what we want. It's about what she wants. And she's said she wants only me this morning."

"Hate to butt in here, but her wants are going to have to wait."

Both Xen and I turned, snarling and almost shifting to fur in fury at the intrusion. At some point in his charmed life someone must surely have told that fool Brax that interrupting two posturing alphas was dangerous.

Which was probably why he stayed back in the doorway, excitement leaking through his pores, shining through his skin until he glowed like a 1000-watt incandescent light to my senses. "Since I now have your attention..." He held a baton aloft. The royal banner hung from it. "Westyn's herald just arrived. We're summoned to an audience."

I exchanged glares with Xen, wordlessly promising we'd finish our conversation later. While he watched, muscles bunching in his squared jaw, I bent my head to drop a quick but deep kiss on Ouida's mouth, gratified to hear her protesting groan when I pried our lips loose. "To be continued, baby."

A summons by the Alpha took precedence over everything and we males quickly set ourselves to rights and prepared to roll. Almost an hour later, we still hadn't

left. The four of us paced, wild with impatience, while Ouida took her sweet time finding some coverings and fixing her hair. As if she had much to work with.

A residual bitterness over her cutting her long lovely hair added to my current pique so I snarled and paced some more. "It shouldn't take this long to do something with her short mop. It's nowhere near the long, beautiful mass of curls she had when we first met."

Xen ran his fingers through his thick straight mass. "Why does she always cover her body? It ain't cold and she's fucking beautiful. It don't make no damn sense to hide something so goddess-inspired unless it's winter cold."

"Humans!" Usher spit. "They're sure some strange creatures."

Brax frowned, chewed his bottom lip worriedly. "She's gonna get us in trouble."

They all turned accusing eyes toward me. I threw up my hands. "Don't dare try to blame this on me. You try hurrying her up and see if you get any pussy in the next few days."

As I thought, the threat of angering our mate and being denied a dip in her honey pot rendered them impotent. They resorted to muttering under their breath while wearing ruts in the floor. Unable to bear it any longer, I stomped to the bathroom door and banged on it, hollering, "Ouida! Sometime today..."

She hollered back, "Not anytime this month, you keep that shit up, dude."

I backed down, cock drooping.

Xen smirked. "That's telling her, Alpha."

He never saw the sucker-punch coming. I glared down at my unconscious second, absentmindedly rubbing my knuckles. "I don't want to fuck you so I don't have to put up with your shit."

I lifted my head to eye the other two. "Anyone else have an asinine comment?"

Usher barked a laugh. "That a trick question?"

Brax went and sat on the porch.

* * *

"Come in. Take a seat."

Westyn gestured us in, the epitome of a gracious host. I went on guard, not trusting that thin veneer one bit. Thank God I didn't, because I was able to school my features into not showing my shock at his next words. "Here, Ouida, take my seat." He held out the chair from his desk, sliding it behind my knees as I sank onto the firm leather cushion. "You'll never guess who I've been reading about this morning."

He slid a newspaper onto the desk before me and moved back, making space for Vance and the guys. I glanced down and froze, my blood congealing as my eyes focused on the first page article.

Have You Seen This Woman?

The picture in the newspaper wasn't very flattering, and I swallowed sickly, wishing I could cover it up so the guys couldn't see it. Shaking so hard I could barely see the small print beneath the lurid headline, I continued to read.

The article went on to note that neighbors, seeing a growing pile of uncollected newspapers and mail at 1343 Saturn Lane, Sylva NC, had contacted the police.

Vance touched my arm. "Ouida, read it out loud."

I nodded. "Amid escalating concerns upon discovering Ms. Ouida Jackson's whereabouts had been unknown since mid December, authorities entered the house and found it vacant, though without signs of foul play. The interior was neat, though dusty, adding credence to the belief Ms. Jackson had been absent for quite some time.

"The missing woman worked as a secretary at the Jackson County Paper Mill from April 2001 up until late 2008, when her fiancée Patrick Smith, who several sources say met her when he came to work at the Mill early in 2008, delivered joint resignation letters, claiming they were planning to marry and relocate. Though not currently considered a suspect, Mr. Smith is being sought as a witness in this baffling disappearance case.

"Anyone having any information regarding Mr. Smith's or Ms. Jackson's present whereabouts is requested to contact..." I stopped reading at that point, sure my heart was going to pound its way out of my chest. "They must think I'm dead!"

"You almost were," Vance muttered, frowning as he watched me hyperventilating. "Perhaps that's a good thing. You're with us, now, Ouida. Your old life is over."

"Because you say so? I know you said I couldn't go back once I learned about your pack, but you all know me now. You know I would never tell anyone your secrets. How could you dismiss my former life so easily?" I fussed at Vance, batting his hands away when he tried to soothe me. "Don't! Not now..."

My body shook as I continued to stare down at the paper crushed in my hands. I closed my eyes on a long indrawn breath. "Can you understand my life was ripped from me? I didn't choose this..." I waved a hand, indicating everything around me. "This was forced on me against my will. But if I wanted, I could go home now. I mean, can't I?"

The expressions on the wolves' faces said differently. Vance's eyes met mine, their pale blue shimmering with welling moisture. His lips moved soundlessly, but I could read them as he pleaded over and over, *Please don't leave me.*

"Oh, hell --" My gaze fell on the paper and something; some elusive thought that had blipped on my mind's radar came into sharp focus. I looked up at Westyn. "Where did you get this paper?" I checked the date and my temper spiked. "This is last week's newspaper. Why did you wait so long to show it to me?"

"Ouida, calm down. Give him time to answer."

Mala's gentle admonishment robbed me of my ire. I glanced over to where she was breastfeeding her babies, sparing her a rueful smile. "Sorry, Mala. This news from home has thrown me off kilter. I haven't thought about my house or my job for a long time, since I was told I could never go home. This has really shaken me up."

“And it is totally understandable. It’s a lot to have dumped on you all at once. I know you are considering your options, but please realize that some of us have begun to love you. I would hate to see you leave.”

Damn, she was the calmest wolf I’d ever met and one of the nicest, too. More than once I’d wondered how the nicest person ended up mated to the meanest one. Westyn was her mate, and he was *not* my favorite person.

I suppose, to be fair, I should take some of the blame for the acrimoniousness of our first meeting, since I’d been the one who freaked and inadvertently broken Pack Law. On my part, I’d been totally ignorant. Westyn, on the other hand, had wielded his power with a ruthless lack of compassion. I didn’t like him even a little bit.

“I’ve withheld nothing from you. A wolf that visited us during the winter festival lives in the Sylva area and happened to see the article. He recalled the human among us, put two and two together, and contacted one of my couriers. She arrived earlier this morning. I sent for you over an hour ago. It seems you are the one holding things up, not I.”

I gave an indelicate snort, shrugging. “What can I say? Stopping in the middle of something interesting just to see what maggot you’ve got trapped in your muzzle today wasn’t high on my agenda.”

Shocked gasps sounded and suddenly Westyn was very close to me. “Watch your mouth, female, or I will teach you how we muzzle a fractious bitch.”

Tempers other than mine threatened to erupt at his threat.

Before I could even open my mouth to respond to his hateful words, Xen and Vance took up position in front of me, using stiff out-thrust arms to push me back into Usher’s waiting arms. Brax stepped up, bracketing me on the other side, eyes wide and rolling. The poor dear was terrified of going up against the pack Alpha, but he didn’t waver at his post, standing rock steady at my side, offering me the protection of his body. Brax stuck when every instinct within him must be screaming at him to run. In my mind, his were the actions of a true hero.

"Alpha, please address your words to me, not our mate." Vance's low growl brought the heat in the room down to a chilled standoff. I suppose that was the approved way of telling Westyn not to yell at his woman.

Somewhere in the dim background I heard a baby yelp and figured Mala had gripped her son or daughter too tightly. The sound seemed to bring Westyn back to his senses. Gritting his teeth, he glared at me through narrowed eyes. Every snarled word forced through clenched teeth, he accused Vance of overreacting on my behalf. "Your mate was in no danger from me. I take offense at you for reacting as if I were rogue." His chest expanded as he sucked in a huge draught of air. "Inform your mate she must return home. Too many people know where the late Smith brothers' territory lies and know of her connection to them. Her continued absence may serve to bring the humans down upon us."

Return home? What the hell did he mean by that? A rushing sound filled my ears. My eyesight blurred as my knees weakened. A minute ago, I was salivating at the thought. Now, although I still wanted to go back, I wasn't so sure I would want to stay. I turned toward Vance, holding my hands out in panic. "Is he kicking me out of the Pack?"

"Fuck no!" Xen faced the Alpha, fists clenched and fangs exposed. Hair sprouted along his shoulders and down his back as he began shifting.

"Xen, don't do it!" Vance yelled, shouldering his friend and second to the side, breaking his concentration enough to halt his shift. Going furry without the Alpha's permission was like pulling a gun on the President.

Vance took Xen's place in front of Westyn. "Alpha, you cannot expect us to send our mate away. She was lawfully accepted into the People and has done nothing to deserve banishment."

Westyn huffed. "What the fuck is wrong with everyone this morning? I didn't say a damn thing about cutting her loose. I've made arrangements for a car to come two days from now. Two of you need to escort her home so she can check in with the police and decide what she wants to do with her house. Make sure she disappears correctly

this time." He smirked when he met my heated gaze. "Unless she decides not to return. Which, enforcers, shall be totally at her discretion." He held up his hand, halting the dismayed complaints from four throats. "Don't turn this into a soap opera. Get the fuck out of my office."

Chapter Three

Early Morning Romp II Vance

Xen's black eyes glittered with a naked expression of need, and his hands clenched into fists. The muscles in his jaw bunched and relaxed, bunched again, so he spoke through teeth set hard against each other. "I can't watch and not touch."

With Ouida's big body snuggled up to mine, the wet heat of her pussy slicking my thigh, I wanted no distractions and no more interruptions. "Then leave."

He left the bed, but not the room, coming to a halt halfway to the bathroom, where he turned and stopped, staring at the back of Ouida's head as he lowered a hand to fist his rising cock. "Ouida, let me have something."

I was tired of his bellyaching. "I'll let you have an ass full of teeth, you don't cut this shit out. I told you to *mphrrhh* --"

Ouida stopped my lecture by placing a hand over my mouth. "What do you want, Xen? Other than fucking... because I'm worn out from last night. You're a rough lover, and sometimes I like that, but I also need gentleness."

Her eyes weren't good enough in the dim light to see his pained expression before his features hardened into the usual I-don't-give-a-damn cast. "I never meant to hurt you."

"You didn't, not really. I'd have yelled if you did, not screamed. But you don't do tender and that's what I want now."

He hesitated before answering, blowing out a gusty sigh. "I can accept that and stay on the sidelines this morning if you'll let me be part of your loving. Let me orchestrate it."

Oh hell. I could see the idea intrigued her, but I knew the dangers of allowing this type of intimacy. "Ouida, don't listen --"

"Hush, Vance." She didn't even look at me when she shushed me, curling over to face Xen while they talked. *Bargained.*

She had no idea he was already winning.

I rolled, too, spooning her, one hand circling her belly as I went up on one elbow so I could watch both Ouida and Xen. Her eyes were locked on the thick cock he fisted, a spark of interest lighting those brown eyes. Under my hands, I felt her nipples spring erect. We all heard her swallow. "How do you mean, orchestrate it?"

Xen, chest rising and falling as he sucked in huge draughts of air, focused his intent gaze on Ouida's curious face. All the while, he continued working his meat with long, slow deliberate pulls, squeezing it tightly until the engorged head resembled a dark purple balloon in danger of popping.

His voice, when he finally spoke, came husky and low, pressured. "I call the shots." Damned cur nodded his head toward me. "He doesn't touch you except how and when I say. You don't get to touch him unless I tell you, and you don't come without permission."

Under my hand, her pulse sped up, pounding beneath the thin skin of her wrist and I knew Xen had her. He knew my mate almost as well as I, knew she would go for it, no matter how much I protested.

Ouida had been a virgin the night we met, but she'd made up for her lack of experience by being the most enthusiastic virgin I'd ever had. Yeah, okay. She was the only virgin I'd had, but I've heard the usual innocent was far less... energetic... and not so open to new... uh... positions.

I had a problem with my lieutenant's proposed scenario. In the last few months, the four of us had discovered Ouida had a submissive streak a yard wide. Because I'd wanted to wait until the other three were not involved before we went down that road together, I hadn't allowed anyone to take advantage of it. My love had no idea how addictive obeying could be and now Xen was using that knowledge against her, playing

on her healthy curiosity to control her and through her, me. I'm no submissive, and I sure as hell didn't plan on acting like one to satisfy some sick craving of Xen's. "What if I just kick your furry ass out the door until we're done?"

"I thought this was about what Ouida wanted. Did I misunderstand? Is this all about you after all, Vance?" Xen's dark eyes glinted with sly amusement. Bastard knew he had me.

At my side, Ouida snorted. "Stop baiting him, Xen. I may not understand everything about what's going on, but I'm not so stupid I can't see you're still trying to manipulate your way into getting what you want."

Turning her back on Xen, she raised one hand to my cheek, softly caressing my morning beard stubble. "Vance?"

I could feel my hackles lowering as her voice worked its usual magic on me. Damn it, this woman only had to turn her warm brown gaze on me and I melted for her. I leaned down and kissed her full lips, reveling in the plush give of the pouty flesh. I'd never thought to mate with a human female, but since I had, I was thankful I'd stumbled over this full-figured, bold and sassy black woman. Anyone milder would have been like a constant diet of cottage cheese. The stuff is so bland and filling, who wouldn't rather be fat and eat spicy?

"Yes, my heart." It wasn't a question. It was capitulation; total surrender, and she knew it.

"Thank you, sweetie. I really do want to try this. And it'll still be just you and me." Her voice lowered as she admitted, "The idea has me so wet I'm swimming in my own juices."

Her smile was more than enough reward for me, the accompanying closed mouth kiss too brief and tantalizing. Great Moon, did she think she had to coax me? I didn't say a word, didn't have to. Thinking about how this scenario might play out, and seeing her arousal had my cock hard as a nine inch spike, which Ouida had to know since it was drilling her thigh and lower belly and her thick nipples were doing some

poking of their own. She kept them pressed against me as she addressed Xen. "Looks like we're going to do this, but I have a few conditions."

Xen cleared his throat and gave a curt nod. "I thought you might, my dark beauty, but I warn you... Too many strictures deaden the excitement."

"I don't have many, just one."

"Which is?"

"We want to make love, not just have sex. Your job is to help us do so, not sidetrack us or try to use Vance to further your own agenda. You can't tell Vance to do something mean to me."

Xen's lips tightened, making his mouth a straight line, but instead of speaking, he jerked his head in a sharp nod of assent. He strode back toward our bed, face set in harsh lines. Wordlessly, he reached down and yanked the covers from under Usher and Brax, spilling them from the bed. They gained their footing and came up with snarls pouring from their muzzles.

"Cut it out!"

Xen's curt bark stilled their instinctive challenge. Still in wolf form, they tucked their tails, cowering before Xen. Their submissive body language conveyed their acknowledgement of his right to command their obedience.

"Go and guard the door. Allow no one in here."

Brax rose up on all fours, mouth opening wide on a long, lazy yawn. Stretching out his forelegs, he rocked his haunches up and back, working the kinks out of his muscles. With a brisk shake of first one hind leg and then the other, he loped toward the door, pausing only once to give a yearning glance back to where Ouida's exposed full-figured body lay curled next to mine. A moaning whine drifted back, the only sign of his reluctance to leave. Usher was a bit slower, more inclined to test the limits, but he also exited with a minimum of fuss.

I sighed. If only Xen responded to my orders with that same compliant spirit...

* * *

Ouida

God, I was panting, in danger of hyperventilating and we hadn't even gotten started. What we were planning -- some early morning one-on-one action -- was nowhere as kinky as our usual sexual fare, unless you counted Xen watching and calling the shots.

"Are you nervous?"

Vance's soft question, that he felt he had to ask it at all, made my intestines twang like a taut guitar string plucked by a persistent finger. I didn't have butterflies in my tummy. Hell no, not me. I had a freaking horde of hornets buzzing inside my gut. I sucked in a quick gulp of air. "A little. It's one thing to take multiple partners in the heat of the moment, something totally, mind-blowingly different when the action is choreographed... and not by me."

Xen and Vance chuckled at that, their shared amusement at my nervousness making me want to smack the both of them. "What's so funny?"

"You are. You better know by now that I would never allow anyone to harm you." He glanced over at a silent Xen, exchanging a speaking look. "And to give him his due, no matter what his sexual inclinations, Xen would die before hurting you."

That shocked me a bit. Not because I'd thought Xen would hurt me, but because I'd never thought it. And I should have.

With only a little observation, anyone -- even someone relatively innocent like me when it came to sexual deviances -- could see Xen was a sexual dominant with sadistic tendencies who didn't just like being in control, he craved it.

I could also see his focus was not pain in and of itself. In Xen's case, pain was the channel he used to extract pleasure -- his, and his partner's.

"Do you believe I'll keep you safe, sweetheart?"

The concern in his voice wrapped me in warmth as Vance's arms tightened around me. I snuggled closer, thrilled at the closeness and the caring evident in his question. I loved the way Vance was always touching me, taking every opportunity to put his hands on me. And he was always hugging me. "I believe you."

I'd been a virgin when I woke in Vance's bed, but he saw to it I didn't stay that way for long. For a woman who'd spent the majority of her life garnering her romantic interactions from between the pages of books, it was strange finding myself the center of four hungry wolves' attention.

While I was appreciative of the other wolves' attentive devotion, I didn't share the same connection with them as I did with Vance. On the whole, the Festival ménage sharing with Brax, Usher and Xen was an incredible plus, a wild sexy fling for an attention-starved woman who'd spent the majority of her life being passed over by romance, but its main draw was that it was temporary.

Just when I thought I had it all figured out, here came Xen, adding another integer to the equation. His offer to orchestrate my time with Vance was so out there, the sheer audacity turned me on so much my insides had to be glowing bright as Christmas lights. Boy-howdy, I was generating enough heat to account for a thousand hundred-watt bulbs.

My stomach twisted in knots, the promise of mock danger raising the fine hairs all over my body. Did that make me a thrill jockey? Hell yeah. However, I wanted the thrill without the risk. As long as Xen didn't put his hands on me, I could deal with him being in control. The question was, could Vance? "Are you okay with this?"

Vance met my questioning gaze, his pale blue eyes flashing wolf white. "I am not." He huffed; a hard expel of breath that reminded me his wolf was always present, even when he was in human shape. "But for you, I will tolerate Xen's foolishness." He looked beyond me to mesh gazes with his second-in-command. "You and I will speak together about this later..."

"I look forward to it." The smile that stretched Xen's lips stopped short of his eyes. Instead of softening his face, the fierce grin hardened it. He'd stopped jerking on his cock and his hands rested lightly on his hips. His penis remained hard, jutting from between his thighs to hug the lower curve of his belly; the purple tip kissing the hair-swirled indentation of his navel and drawing my eyes like a magnet drew lodestone.

Xen's cock wasn't as thick as Vance's, but it was at least an inch longer. I couldn't deny it had given me hours of pleasure in the last months. A chill shot up my spine, a hollow, empty feeling expanding in my gut as the sensory recall of that hefty cock plowing its way up my ass inundated my mind.

Closing my eyes, I relived him holding my hips, thrusting in tandem while Vance worked my pussy over. The memory was enough to have my juices welling. If he pushed, I knew Xen could talk me into fucking him as well as Vance. He probably knew it, too. I couldn't help wondering if he'd make the attempt.

"Kiss her, but no tongue. Not yet."

"Wait. She needs a safe word."

Xen barely spared Vance a glance. "'Stop!' has always worked in the past." He slanted a teasing look my way. "Think you can remember that, dear heart?"

My smile felt wooden. "I'm pretty sure I can. I've told you 'Stop!' plenty of times before."

Xen's smile soured. "There you go, then." He turned his attention back to Vance. "Now kiss her mouth shut."

Vance turned me to face him, the expression in his eyes soft and dreamy. "As of right now, there is no one here except us. Keep your focus on me."

I nodded, looping my arms around his neck. "I'll try."

Lifting my head, I parted my lips to accept his kiss and was disappointed when he obeyed Xen and withheld his tongue. I flickered mine against his lips, inviting a deeper connection and pouted when he wouldn't engage. "Kiss me, damn it!"

"I am kissing you. Don't rush into this. Let it build."

I rocked my hips, trying to butt against his erection. "I'm built up already."

"No talking!"

I snapped my head around and glared at Xen, fast changing my mind about him calling the shots. No longer interested in playing his games, I was ready to get down to the nitty-gritty. Narrowing my eyes at the smirking Xen, I made some demands of my own. "Hurry up, then. I want to get fucked before lunch time!"

There was no warning before fire exploded in my left butt cheek. Shocked, I twisted to stare up into Vance's face, my mouth falling open at the humorous lights dancing in his eyes. "You hit me! And you think it's funny."

"I swatted you. And you liked it. Ouida, you agreed to this. In fact, you're the one who insisted on doing it Xen's way. Now stop being naughty or he'll make you wait even longer for your orgasms."

"I can and will address Ouida's insurrection, Vance, but for honoring the rules of this encounter, let me reward you. You may use your tongue."

"'Bout damned time..." I mumbled, puckering up for my dose of Vance candy.

This kiss was as different from the last as a fog-shrouded night is to a purple-black sky, studded with a sprinkling of starlit diamond dust. Vance wasted no time claiming my lips, his tongue forging through to tangle with mine and I felt every one of those stars twirling and sparkling inside me.

He captured my tongue, sucking and pulling on it, inviting it back into his mouth where his heated, spicy taste inundated my senses. I sank into his kiss, toes curling as the connection between our mouths and my pussy clicked in, sending a jolt of desire spearing down my spine.

"Take your left hand and palm her right breast. Roll the nipple between your thumb and forefinger. Now tug on it. Harder."

Vance didn't stop kissing me to obey Xen's commands. Thrusting in my mouth like he'd soon be thrusting between my thighs, he slid his hand up my side, skimming the flare of my hip and cushiony indentation at my waist on his way toward the full, heavy tit that was his destination.

He rolled.

I moaned.

He tugged. Harder.

I shuddered as the skin over my chest and upper arms stippled with goose flesh. My nipple stiffened into a firm kernel of want.

"Pluck it. Get it good and stiff."

Oh God, just hearing him voice the commands so sternly released a flow of hot juices to slick my labia and a pulse began beating in the blood-enriched tissue of my clit, making me squirm.

“Now pinch that nipple good and hard.”

Vance’s strong fingers closed over the knot of flesh, pressed together relentlessly. A zing of electricity sizzled down the conduit connecting breast and nether regions. A fireball detonated in my pussy and I screamed with the scorching sensation, belly muscles clenching as my body went haywire.

“Ah! Ah!” I gasped, unable to form the simplest words. Gawd almighty, that was the hottest thing I’ve ever felt. Without penetration, I’d gone off like Roman candles set too close to an open flame.

Was it because another was calling the shots? Could it be I was kinky enough that having someone watch turned me on? I didn’t know what made the relatively tame actions impact so strongly and I didn’t care. I only knew I’d never flown this high, this hard, this fast. Sometime later, I promised myself, I’d take the time to ponder this new revelation, but right now I only wanted to submerge myself deeper in the experience of the morning.

“Show Vance how much you enjoyed that, Ouida. Offer your other nipple to him.”

It was surreal, the feelings welling inside as I cupped my breast, the flesh overflowing my palm, and offered it up to Vance. I chanced a glance up and caught the hard glitter in his eyes, saw his wolf staring out at me and for a moment, just when his mouth fell open to expose his fangs, before his tongue darted out, I felt like prey. And it was glorious.

Anticipation sluiced through my body like melting snow, raising goose bumps along its path. The largest bumps -- my nipples -- stiffened into stone like hillocks, begging for more attention. I arched my torso, inviting Vance to devour me. I wanted him to flip me over onto my knees, force my legs apart and take me like the animal he

was. Needed to feel his fangs sinking into my flesh, reclaiming that spot at the meeting of neck and shoulder, breaking the skin to lap at my blood.

Nothing was better than when Vance held me down and fucked me from behind, filled my cunt with more cock than I could handle. Screw gentle. I wanted him wild and unrestrained, as he was during a full moon -- animalistic and insatiable. The exact same way I felt right now.

With that wolf-like motion of his head, Vance lapped at my nipples, his rough tongue rasping sideways across the sensitive flesh until the rigid tips ached from the repeated attention. Under his ministrations the ache grew into a sting, but the minor hurt only added to the pleasure keeping me awash with lustful desire, making me fight to hold onto my waning control.

Xen, the sadistic son of a bitch, continued barking out commands and Vance segued seamlessly from one to the other. "Place your knee between her thighs and work her clit."

I helped, pulling one leg up, bending it at the knee to give Vance space to maneuver. His stiff cock butted wetly against the top of my thigh, the plum head swollen so huge it had forced the foreskin back from the crown. I whimpered, wanting his cock where his knee was.

"Kiss her as you continue to play with her breasts."

Vance's mouth slashed over mine, his tongue darted out to bat and lave my bottom lip. Every inch of my mouth was tasted, explored, savored. Kissing him back, giving in as he took total control, I moaned softly, never wishing it to cease. That damned Xen must have been reading my mind.

"Stop!"

Chapter Four

"Please don't stop!" I sobbed, holding on to Vance's shoulders, digging my nails in his skin. I was desperate to keep him over me, keep him riding my clit into Nirvana.

I wanted to scream when he ignored my pleas, ripped his mouth from mine and withdrew his leg from between my grasping thighs. With a groan of gargantuan proportions, he flung himself down to lie beside me, flopped over on his back. Between splayed thighs, his hard cock speared toward the sky like a fleshy obelisk, a towering temple of lust I was suddenly desperate to worship.

Xen had ordered us not to speak. Perhaps doing so would earn me another hard palmed swat, but I had to ask, "Am I allowed to suck his cock?"

Xen deliberated a moment, making my heart sink. A sigh of relief left me when he finally nodded his head. "You've earned some mercy from punishment with this show of unselfishness."

I trembled at the mention of punishment, the memory of Vance's hard swat causing my clit to throb with excitement. Still, that was in the future. Right now, I had a luscious cock before me, dripping pre-cum. It would be criminal to ignore such riches.

Licking my lips, I sat up and scooted between his legs. With a wide grin, I circled the thick barrel of his sex, sliding the fingers of my right hand up and down, cupping my palm over the slick head on every pass.

My left hand was busy fondling the round full balls snuggled at the base of the rearing cock. I plumped them, thinking here was the only place Vance's body resembled mine; round and full and heavy. I wasn't lightly furred, though.

Before long, I tired of teasing my mate and leaned forward to take his organ into my mouth. He was thick, stretching my lips until I felt the burn at the corners of my

mouth. I didn't care, struggling to get him all in, marveling how my vagina stretched around him much easier than my throat.

I feasted on his salty wild taste, so caught up on the high I was riding wielding my feminine power I forgot all about Xen. Honestly, as I focused on that magnificent organ, I forgot about Vance, too... at least, until his pained groans and thrashing body shook the bed under us.

With a shudder I came to myself to find his eyes wild, his hands fisted in my hair and his hips pumping savagely, driving his shuttling cock in and out of my mouth. My pulse raced, lips tightened as I drew harder, hollowed my cheeks around the thick column each time he withdrew.

This was the way I loved him. Fierce and untamed, every inhibition flown as he fucked my mouth, his hands guiding me, determining the depth and speed with which I took him in.

"Do not come, Vance. Ouida, release him at once!"

Xen's voice shocked us both into stillness. His command to halt was the last thing I wanted to hear. By the stunned look on his face, it was a sure bet Vance had forgotten our audience as thoroughly as I had. The pained expression in his eyes told me how badly he wanted to come.

Determined to ignore Xen's unreasonable strictures, I clamped my lips around Vance's cock, taking him as deeply as I could. I swallowed, fighting my gag reflex to hold him captive down my throat, but with a harsh cry, he pulled away.

I choked back a wail, dismay and derailed lust clogging my throat as Vance -- unaware of the struggle I faced combating the emptiness yawning within -- made good his escape by withdrawing his cock with a meaty pop, making space between us on the bed.

That was it. I'd had enough and swiveled around on my butt to train burning eyes on Xen. My fingers curled in angry fists as I confronted him. "You sadistic bastard, that's it. I am so done, I --"

Xen strode over to the bed, grabbed me by my shoulders and yanked me up off my knees. "By the Moon... So. Am. I."

The roughness of the gritty words spat through clenched teeth startled me into silence, into actually looking at Xen. The muscles along his jaw bunched as he ground his teeth in agitation.

His eyes were the straw gold of his wolf, his fangs exposed and menacing. He held his body tautly. I could practically feel his tension vibrating through the hands gripping my shoulders. He was emotionally disturbed. So was I. This was the second time he'd stopped me when I was about to tip over into the strongest, most intense orgasm of my life.

Xen's shaking voice interrupted my musings. "You were right, Vance. I shouldn't have done this. I can't stand watching another man touch her, wanting it to be my hands on her. My cock taking and claiming her as my own."

"Never."

I turned narrowed eyes on both men. Scratch that. Wolves. I'd been played. Now it was time for Ouida to get laid.

Mouth grim, I placed my hands over Xen's and dug my nails into his skin, ignoring his surprised, "Hey!" He yanked his hands out from beneath mine and stared at me, speculation in his dark gaze.

From the bed, Vance watched me just as closely. His cock still rode high between his thighs, thick and lust inspiring. Dropping one hand to his crotch, he palmed his erection, pumping lazily as he waited to see what I would do.

I took a deep breath and said, "Stop."

"I'm not doing anything," Xen said, frowning.

"You don't want me stroking myself?" Vance asked, his hand pausing over his flesh.

"No, I mean, yes, you can jerk off any time --" I broke off, frustrated that I wasn't getting my meaning across. "What I meant is I'm saying my safe word, Xen. I'm saying stop!"

If I hadn't been looking, I would have missed it. But I was, and I didn't. An elusive emotion filled Xen's eyes for a flashing segment of a second. The black wolf opened his mouth to speak, stopped. Started again to no avail. Finally, he nodded, giving Vance a quick glance before turning his attention back toward me. "As you wish." For a moment, his shoulders slumped before he consciously stiffened his back, his body settling into its usual proud stance. "No more games this morning dear heart, just pleasure."

If I didn't know better, I'd think he actually felt sad being left out of our coming romp, not just put out because he wanted to fuck and I wasn't making myself available. For some reason, I felt the need to explain my decision. "Xen, it's not that I don't like you..."

His raised hand cut off my words. "Please. Stop before you damn me with faint praise. Just..." He shook his head. "Let Vance give you what you need."

He glanced past me and I started to turn, only to feel Vance coming up to stand close behind me, his hands settling on my shoulders. I leaned back, letting him take my weight. One of his hands dropped to my waist, tugging me until my back rested against his chest, the other cupped my mound. "I'll give her what we both need."

Xen watched as Vance's fingers parted my nether lips to delve into the tight channel of my sex. His forefinger found and compressed my clit before dipping deeper to harness my copious moisture.

He coated his finger in the silky cream, brought it up to swirl around my erect little remote control of pleasure, tapping that button until I went up on tiptoe, squirming in his arms, arching my butt back to rub against the monster cock wedged in my ass crack.

One muscled arm wrapped around my waist, easily holding my weight as the other arm flexed across my front each time his fingers waggled in my cunt.

I rose to a boil quickly, my arousal returning to burn hotter and higher than it had minutes ago. Soon, I was panting, desperate to come, begging Vance to stuff me full with his cock.

Xen spoke up. "Finish this, Vance. Fuck our Ouida good and hard. Make her come till she screams."

"That's a command I'll gladly obey."

Damn it, I'd forgotten his presence again and his terse directions almost startled me out of this new sexual high. Almost. "I'm with Vance on this one, Xen. If you'd been issuing those kinds of orders, I never would have called a halt to your games."

And then Vance made sure I had no more breath for words, other than ones like *Again*, and *Please, oh please, oh please!* and *Oh-fuck-oh-fuck-oh-fuck... yesssssss!* because Vance's fingers hit a certain sweet spot toward the back of my pussy that released a river of cream and sent me flying to the moon.

I honest-to-God don't recall him moving me, positioning me bent over the end of the bed. All I get are vignettes; snatches of what happened between the time he swept me off my feet and when I came to with a four-alarm fire burning between my thighs to find him standing behind me rubbing his cock through my juices before fitting the meaty head to the mouth of my weeping pussy.

"Oh goddess moon, put it in and fuck me hard, Vance!"

His first stroke was so powerful I lost my footing, falling forward onto my elbows. Vance followed me down; riding me so hard he should have been wearing spurs. Muscled hips delivered thrusts so strong they set my entire body jiggling. All of me shook -- titties, tummy and tush -- making me laugh even in the midst of a mind-blowing fuck.

You didn't go through life a big girl without growing a large sense of humor and right now I couldn't help remembering that old southern adage about fat. "Must be jelly cause jam don't shake like that!"

"Ouida!"

That was Xen, alarmed at my sobs, thinking my laughter was tears. Vance knew better and brusquely informed him, "She's fine."

"I'm fine!" I gasped, reaching one hand back to claw at Vance's hip, trying to induce him to fuck me harder. Instead, Chernobyl erupted under my left butt cheek as Vance let me know he didn't take kindly to being rushed.

Damn, why did that make me hotter?

I abandoned clawing his hips for clawing my clit, desperate to come. Not reticent in the least, I let Vance know what I needed. "Vance, I want to come right fucking *now*!"

"Get your hand out of your cunt or I'll really spank this big, luscious ass."

I yanked my hand away from my screaming clit, wanting to scream myself. "Not fair!"

"Xen, suck Ouida's clit. No hands... just mouth."

The muscles in my stomach bunched and cramped, pushing out a gush of cream. I'd thought I was getting every inch of Vance's cock, but on the next advance, what felt like another inch slid in on the extra moisture my pussy had produced when I heard that command.

I might have started the morning wanting only Vance, but the sex play we'd indulged in had jumpstarted my libido. I was so horny our usual five-some was beginning to look good. I was so ready to have Xen's talented tongue eating me out while Vance fucked me to within an inch of oblivion.

* * *

Vance

I wasn't sure I'd judged right, but when her pussy clenched my cock in a death's grip I figured my gamble had paid off. Yeah, my Ouida wanted the extra stimulation of Xen's mouth to help her reach the heights I wanted for her.

Xen's cock had never flagged and now it firmed as he drew near, growing so stiff the tightly swollen length barely bounced as he walked to the bed. He went to his back, sliding between my mate's thighs with an assurance that made my hackles rise. The wolf in me didn't like sharing with another alpha, and Xen was definitely Alpha.

We were too closely matched to be able to say with any assurance which one of us would win a status challenge, which was why I hesitated to initiate a true battle. I didn't want to kill my friend, almost as much as I didn't want him sniffing around my mate. And it wasn't the Festival sharing I minded. It was Xen's long-range plans I was leery of.

"I'm in place."

Glancing down, I changed the cadence of my thrusting to slow and easy as I took in the sight of Xen's lean body nestled face up between Ouida's thighs. She'd gone back up on her hands, full body skimming the lines of Xen's, her mouth close enough to engulf his spearing cock. My balls brushed the top of his head every time I swung my hips forward, impaling my mate's pussy from behind.

"Mother Moon, Vance, give me permission to start."

I appreciated Xen's acknowledgement of my leadership, that this once he waited, acting only at my directive. "Mouth only. All else is at your discretion."

"Oh my good gra-cious!" Ouida's warbled cry, the way her body tremored and her cunt clenched down on my cock gave me a good indication of how much she was enjoying what he was doing to her pussy. The feminine sound, her breathy gasps and whimpers, arrowed straight to my groin, stiffening my cock until I thought it would burst. My balls filled with seed. I wasn't going to last.

I threw off all restraint, determined to hear Ouida's screams of fulfillment ringing in the air before I took my long delayed pleasure. Fisting a hand in her short curls, I tugged her head back and up, lifting her torso so I could get at her neck, determined to reaffirm my claim in the face of Xen's still unspoken challenge.

She reared back, hips dancing over Xen's face, hands coming up to circle my neck and I caught a glimpse of Xen's hand pumping his cock viciously, working his meat with unrelenting strokes while continuing to lap Ouida's cunt with rapid, hard flicks of his tongue.

I had firsthand experience of his technique as I was shuttling in and out of her pussy so fast he occasionally swiped my cock and balls as they sped past.

I shifted my hands to her breasts, kneading the full mounds as I fucked her hard, snapping my hips each time I seated in her, jouncing her strongly enough to keep her tits bouncing. I knew she needed one thing more...

"Bend over, baby. Take Xen's cock in your mouth and show him how well he's lapping your cunt."

Ouida dropped down so quickly she almost unseated me. I tightened my grasp on her hips and kept pumping, heart soaring at the whimpers she made.

My mate was a strong female. Rendering her helpless was a heady, empowering rush that brought my seed boiling up from my balls. Fire raced up my spine, drew a line of electric sparks from the backs of my knees to the base of my neck.

"Going to come!" I cried, increasing my speed, determined to fuck Ouida into the mattress.

"Right behind you. Oh damn... in front of you!"

I barely heard Xen's gruff warning. Tensing all over, I barely managed to fight off the urge to shift.

"Yesssssss!" Ouida flung her head up, mouth open in a primordial scream. Thick white sperm, the overflow of Xen's release, smeared her lips and chin.

I couldn't stop the orgasm slamming into me, scouring my guts. My body jerked spasmodically as seed boiled up my cock and jetted into the hot, clasp of my mate.

Giving in to the wolfish instinct to howl my joy at the sky, I threw back my head and roared. Knotted, I remained inside her as I rolled us over on our sides.

Xen rolled with us, keeping his mouth clamped to Ouida's cunt. I could see his jaw moving, could feel his tongue flicking against my penis where the heft of my thick barrel held her pussy lips stretched open.

Male Wolf Etiquette 101: clean your mate after sex. Since I wasn't pulling out any time soon, cleaning her meant attending to me, too.

I clasped my hands behind my neck and lay back, content and drowsy. I had a satisfied mate curled at my side, my second obedient for once, and an adventure to plan for on the morrow.

Life was good.

Chapter Five

Stirrings Of the Heart Ouida

I would never have fucking believed Xen, Xen of all people, would betray me like this. I'd cried hard and long until my eyes were swollen and my nose clogged up. Now I sat up and took stock of where I was, dejection giving way to anger so intense I could hardly breathe.

Absently, I fiddled with the cord confining my wrists, determined to find a way to free myself before Xen returned, thankful he'd secured my hands in front, and not behind my back. He'd said something about not wanting my arms to go numb or some shit. Hope he didn't think I was giving brownie points for his consideration in making sure my fucking shackles didn't chafe.

I closed my eyes and leaned my head back against the wall, momentarily giving way to despair. Xen had tied the rope in too convoluted a knot. No way was I getting loose any time soon. I bit back a cry, remembered terror screaming through me. This situation was so like the one I'd found myself in last winter, I couldn't stomach it.

Tears spilled down my cheeks at the thought that Xen, like Patrick Smith, had played on my trust, used my emotions to trick me into falling for his lies.

How the hell had he gotten the drop on Vance? And why? That's what I couldn't understand. Xen was already sharing me. We routinely fucked like... well, like bunnies. Other than the occasional morning-after-a-night-before when he'd ridden me particularly hard, I never refused him. And since I'd made up my mind only yesterday to return with Vance to the Pack, where everything would continue as was, Xen's actions made no sense whatsoever.

When had he planned this? It had to be after we first arrived in Sylva because there'd been no inkling something like this was in the offing before we left for the city.

Brax and Usher had been ordered to remain behind, guarding the Pack. Xen had come as security backup for Vance and had been pushing to get the house sold quickly. He claimed his wolf didn't like the city, felt penned in and suffocated. Vance, on the other hand, used to living off Pack lands, was much more laid back. He was content to follow my lead and allowed me to show him all over the town.

In between meeting with the police to establish I was alive and not a victim of murder or mayhem -- we'd decided not to mention Patrick's perfidy in the hopes he would be smart and remain wherever he'd holed up -- and arranging to meet with the realtor willing to take over putting the house up for sale, we spent the majority of our time in and out of quaint antique shops and exploring the turn-of-the-century town. I loved taking my two beaus to all my old haunts, familiarizing them with the places where I'd spent most of my former life.

Which brought me right back to "Why?"

I didn't realize I'd spoken the word aloud until Xen's voice shocked me into renewed awareness of my surroundings. "Because I love you and this is the only way we can be together."

* * *

Xen

"And this was the only way to go about it? Kidnapping me into loving you back? Smooth move, Sherlock!"

Ouida's dark face was swollen with the results of her weeping. The whites of her eyes were bloodshot, the un-wolf-like brown irises muddied with a mixture of hurt, confusion and escalating anger.

She might be the picture of distress right now, but she had reserves of steel. Her voice was filled with her usual sarcasm, her biting comments as sharp and on point as ever. "You are intrepid. This pleases me."

Ouida swiveled around on her butt to face me, the loose nondescript skirt she wore snagging on the uneven ground. She tugged ineffectively at her bonds. "You are an asshole. This displeases me. What the frick were you thinking?"

At her words, I could feel my wolf straining to emerge, my banked fury reigniting that easily. Hackles rising, I stalked over to her and grasped the front of the offensive human clothing she hid behind. I lifted her up, ripped the blouse away, exposing her lush, heavy breasts. "I was thinking I went about claiming you the honorable way, only to have Westyn deny me my rights! He and Vance have abandoned Pack Law."

I'd spit the Alpha's name out with uncontrolled virulence, my hands curling into claws as I envisioned ripping the wolf's throat out. Hearing her gasp and looking down into Ouida's shocked face, I supposed my visage had turned as feral and wild as the emotions roiling inside me. Her scent subtly altered, souring toward prey-fear, and I pulled back, tamping down my righteous rage. I didn't want to frighten her. This was not her fault.

"What are you talking about? None of this is making sense to me, Xen."

I snagged her gaze; let her see the heated need in my eyes as they tracked down her naked torso. My nostrils flared, drinking in the sweet aroma of her reluctant arousal. "A week ago today, I officially challenged Vance for the right to mate you."

I could see the realization dawning in her wide eyes as she assimilated my words. It had been a week ago, yesterday, that Vance had left to return for some meeting on Pack grounds. In his absence, Ouida'd finally consented to let me Dom her.

She'd been a natural, so intoxicatingly eager to please. Her submission had been so total, she'd blasted past the pain I inflicted, into sub space -- a Nirvana-like place where all sensation turns euphoric. I'd kept her floating above the clouds, fucking her through three orgasms, two of them at my command.

The power rush had been phenomenal. Being the one who controlled her passion... that had been a heady undertaking, more intense than anything I'd experienced in the past. Nothing had ever moved me as much as watching her soft

body writhe under my ministrations until her lovely dark skin was highlighted with a fine sheen of perspiration, her ass striped with the hot red marks of my favor. One taste had addicted me. I knew she'd spoiled me for anyone else ever again.

"Xen, you can't keep me."

"I can. As soon as Vance stops hiding behind Westyn and meets me in combat, I will best him and claim you as my own. It is our way. You are of the People now, Ouida, subject to our rules."

Her expressive features softened into a look of pity, causing my heart to drop into the hollow pit of my gut. I knew I didn't wish to hear her next words.

"I didn't submit to Pack Law to become one of the People, Xen. You know that. You were there."

These were not the words I'd expected. Was she thinking to deny her acceptance of us at the night we performed the Fertility rite before the entire Pack? "You submitted at the Festival. You took all of us into your body, became our mates."

She was shaking her head before I finished. "Not then. Back in the room, when you came with Westyn to tell me I could save Vance or myself. I chose Vance." Her earnest gaze was direct; her eyes were steady when they met mine. "I will always choose Vance. He is my Other."

Inside, my wolf whined and whimpered. Water came to my eyes. "Why?" I truly didn't understand. "He and I are evenly matched. I know I give you pleasure. I am as capable of breeding you, of protecting you and any pups you may have, as Vance is... more so. I'm the one who spirited you away from under his nose."

Burnt umber seared the air as her anger flared. "Only because he trusted you. I trusted you, Xen. Look what it got me." Tears fell from her eyes as she held up her bound hands.

I bowed my head before her accusing stare, uncomfortably aware there was some truth to her words. Pain like a sharp tree limb pierced my heart. I wanted to bite something, destroy and rend with my claws. I wanted to howl and mourn as the death

of my hopes withered my soul. I had hurt her. In hurting her, I damned myself. I would cut off a limb before harming her further. "You will truly not have me?"

"I will gladly have you as long as you are my Festival mate. It was part of the bargain I made." Ouida sighed. "Despite this asinine stunt you've pulled, I like you, Xen. Hell, I love you. I'm just not *in* love with you. But I did like the way you Dommed me. That was wicked cool! If Vance doesn't know how to do that, do you think you could teach him?"

I couldn't fight the burp of laughter that bubbled up my throat. "Oh, Ouida, thank the Moon there is no else one like you."

"You say that like it's a good thing when you know you wish I had a twin," she teased, flashing a wobbly smile.

When my laughter died, the sadness returned. "Do you?"

"Nope, sorry. Only child."

"Only one for me, I'm afraid," I whispered under my breath. Louder, I told her, "Lift your arms."

She perked up. "You gonna untie me?"

I scrubbed my hands over my eyes and heaved a heavy sigh before consciously pinning on a smile. "I suppose I must."

I undid her bonds by the simple expedient of slicing through them with extended claws.

"Thanks." Ouida rubbed her wrists, trying to facilitate her returning circulation.

"You're welcome. And for what it's worth, I'm sorry. Too bad I'm a werewolf and not a vampire. I could expose myself to the sun and put an end to this train wreck I seem to have engineered."

Her horrified gasp was music to my ears. I wanted to believe it meant she cared something for me. "Don't say that, Xen. This is fixable. Really, all you've done is tie me up... nothing you didn't do last week, right?"

I couldn't believe her generous heart. I'd snatched Ouida right out of Vance's bed, tied her up and left her fuming for an entire afternoon while I covered our tracks,

only to return and find her ready to forgive me. Damn, I adored her. "This is a bit different. I was ordered to back off. Westyn demanded I leave you alone with Vance."

"Ah! That's why Vance returned and you didn't. You know --" she narrowed her eyes at me in one of her cute gimlet stares -- "I wasn't too pleased to wake up alone after our session. Didn't anyone ever teach you to cuddle?"

"There was nothing I wanted to do more. It killed me to leave you sleeping, however, I felt it was more important to present my challenge to Vance and the Alpha."

Ouida frowned. "Yeah, about that... Tell me again. Why did they refuse your challenge?"

"Westyn used the excuse he couldn't afford the loss of an Enforcer to evade my demands."

"Why would he do something like that?" Clearly confused, she gazed up at me, a small crease between her shapely arched brows.

I recalled the day she'd had them done. She'd banned me and Vance from the nose-wrinkling fru-fru smelling shop she called a health spa, leaving us to cool our heels while she'd spent hours being plucked, tweezed and stewed in mud. Vance and I had been horrified when she'd described what had been done to her.

Later that night, holding her fragrant, supple body between us as we sawed in and out of her waxed pussy and the sweetly naked dark rosette buried between her ample cheeks, we'd come around to her way of thinking: Spas were good.

Lapping and rooting between the smooth hairless lips of her cunt had turned Vance on so much he'd lost control and shifted. Forcing me out of her anus with a vicious snarl, he'd rolled Ouida to her hands and knees and mounted her in true form, rutting in her until she'd bowed up, screaming through an orgasm so intense I wasn't surprised to see her pass out.

Vance had been a fucking machine, his hips surging long after she collapsed beneath him. I'd never seen him go at it like that and when he came, it was so hard he popped his knot, his seed spewing as if it were jet-propelled, targeted for her womb.

As the last of his sperm left him, Vance groaned heavily and slumped to the side, his body gone boneless in an excess of pleasure.

I'd quickly taken advantage of his momentary weakness, pushing him off the rest of the way so I could take his place between Ouida's splayed thighs. Curling my hands under her ass, I lifted her, lining up my cock with her cunt and pushing past the swollen lips, my gliding entry made smooth by the copious juices spilling from her well-fucked pussy.

I fucked her while Vance lolled in a lust-sated stupor beside us, not caring that she hadn't regained consciousness. Aroused as my wolf was, there was no way I could wait for her to awaken. Hell, I'd barely refrained myself from forcing a challenge between us when Vance had shifted while fucking her. I knew he was trying to impregnate Ouida and I was determined to avail myself of the same opportunity.

My hips flexed as I drove my cock in and out of her pussy with quick, deep jabs, frantically fucking her overflowing cunt in an instinctive bid to flood her womb with my own seed.

Fire licked along my spine, making my hair stand on end. Near the end of my control, I felt Ouida stir beneath me, felt her pussy clenching around my cock with little fluttering squeezes that twisted my gut into ribbons and set my heart to pounding harder than a trapped rabbit's.

I bit back a howl, fighting the need to finish, wanting this moment to last longer than my self-control. As much as she was Vance's, Ouida was my mate. *Mine*. And she was awash with Vance's seed. The need to replace it with my own was overwhelming. Giving in to the primal imperative to assure a place in her womb for my pups, I'd shifted to my true form.

The angle was awkward, but if Vance could do it, so could I. Curling my haunches, I pushed my cock deep and held it, allowing the knot to form and lock us together.

The culmination was a mind-blowing, life-altering finish that had my lungs seizing and pulse jumping erratically. My seed burst forth, gushing in a fountain of life as I came and came in my mate, filling her with my viable seed.

That was why I'd crept away before morning lit the room. The new hope I held made it imperative I return to the pack to assert my claim. I'd fucked Ouida in my true form and flooded her with sperm.

She might even now be gravid, her womb nestling my pup.

"...isn't it?"

Moon goddess, she's been talking to me all this while? "Uh... what did you ask?"

With an impatient huff, Ouida rolled her eyes and repeated herself, mumbling something about chewing cabbage twice. "I said... all challenges have to be addressed. It's the law, isn't it?"

"It is. But because I'm just as likely to win as Vance is, Westyn wasn't willing to take that chance."

"Explain."

"Unlike a challenge for rank, a mate challenge can be fought only once. If I win, Vance would have to leave the Pack, lest he's tempted to try and win you back. As the chief enforcer, his loss would be a great blow to the People."

Ouida nodded. "I can understand that."

"Thank you. I was not, however, willing to understand or accept it. Let the Pack have Vance. I will have you."

Again, she shook her head no. "Xen. You cannot keep what you cannot hold, freely. You can't keep me. Domming for fun in bed is one thing, but I'm no sub outside the bedroom." She fisted her freed hands on her hips. "I will never be okay with you calling all the shots all the time."

She was more a sub than she knew, however now was not the time to argue about her erroneous beliefs. "Can you not see I love you more? I am willing to leave my People behind for you. Vance will never do that."

"Oh, babe..." Ouida lifted her hands and cradled my face in her palms. Her thumbs wiped across my eyes, gathering moisture. "I don't doubt you love me as much or more than Vance does. And you're right. Vance would never leave the Pack for me. Then again, I would never ask him to. But you're wrong if you think that's a mark against him. His loyalty is part of his makeup and I honor him for it. I know when it comes to our bond I can expect the same level of commitment that he brings to his role as protector. I have absolute trust in him."

I sank to my knees before her, humbled at her wisdom and saddened beyond despair. Ouida's words did what all Westyn and Vance's shouted demands could not: convinced me I was not worthy of her.

I buried my head in her belly and sobbed for the loss of something not fully grasped, for the loss of hope and the chance at love.

She rocked me, petted my heaving shoulders as she crooned soft nothings to me. Her fingers combed through my hair, gentling me until at last I rested against her, wept out and drained.

My nose twitched.

Today was the first I'd been with Ouida since our time together last week. Earlier, I'd been too busy snatching and grabbing to notice anything peculiar. Now I inhaled again, analyzing the elusive scent weaving about her.

Pulse leaping, I raised my head, tears drying as hope flared anew. My chest rose as I dragged in a long draft of hormone-flavored air.

My spirit deflated as my brain finally caught up with my nose. Ouida was pregnant...

... and the pup wasn't mine.

I threw back my head and howled my misery to the sky.

"Xen! What is it? What's wrong?" Ouida tugged at me, trying in her caring way to ascertain the source of my pain.

I reached up and pulled her hands down, holding them between mine.

I was about to tell her when the door crashed open and an enraged voice shouted, "Take your Moon-damned traitorous hands off my mate and face me honorably so I can rip your fucking head off!"

Chapter Six

Parting is Such Sweet Sorrow Ouida

"Xen Forrester, you stand accused of treachery against the Pack, of attempting to grasp that which is not yours. What answers do you offer us, you who are an enforcer of our laws?"

I'd never heard Westyn's voice sound so harsh and unforgiving. Not even when I'd transgressed Pack Law and come close to being terminally punished.

Xen turned his head and met my eyes for a long poignant moment before facing the Alpha and the rest of the pack. He stood there, black eyes burning with defiance, his spirit unbowed and unrepentant. My heart ached as I watched him, my proud lover facing this hostile crowd of beings supposed to be his family. Then again, isn't it family that most abuses our trust and our emotions?

I wanted to go to him, to speak up for him. Vance squeezed my hand, holding me still at his side. I'd never been so torn in my life. Vance was my mate, my first lover and the man/wolf who owned my heart. However, once having admitted my feelings, I could no longer pretend I didn't also love Xen. The connection wasn't as strong as Vance's and mine, but it was solid and real.

"I deny all claims I have not acted according to the ways of our people. I declared challenge for the right to permanently mate the human pack member claimed by Vance and was denied my rights for the good of the Pack. I deny subsequently taking her by stealth."

"Fool! All here know your actions. Do you dare attempt to call such behavior honorable?"

"Yes."

The growls rumbling the throats of the wolves surrounding me revealed how the majority objected to his simple answer.

"You stole a pack member's mate. That is punishable by death. Banishment at the least."

"Nonsense. I took my mate on a short vacation."

Shocked gasps filled the otherwise silent auditorium. At my side, Vance smothered a laugh, our clasped hands the conduit of our hopes Xen would keep his cool and play this as the three of us had mapped out. So far, so good...

Westyn's lips drew back to expose his fangs as he half shifted into his wolf form. His words were a mangled mix of growls and human speech as he advanced on Xen. "I will not tolerate your unseemly levity any longer."

My grip tightened on Vance's hand in response to the dread making my pulse jump, my heart pound. We'd tried to anticipate every possibility, but the Alpha attacking Xen hadn't been one of them. I just knew the shit was going to hit the fan. Xen was too alpha himself to accept this insult and remain passive.

I stared at him, screaming mentally for him to pay attention to me. After what seemed like hours, he turned his head, gaze tangling with my frantic stare.

Please Xen, please! Just let it go...

An almost imperceptible nod had the tension easing from my shoulders and my breath releasing in a relieved sigh.

"I mean no disrespect." Raising his head, Xen met Westyn's angry glare. "If I may, I'd like to remind you and the rest of the Pack that along with Vance, I, Brax and Usher are mated with Ouida for the duration of the Fertility Festival. As this is a centennial year, the Festival continues. Ouida is my mate and will remain such until year's wane."

This time the silence held a different mood. Stunned instead of shocked. I think most of the crowd, like Westyn, had forgotten that little detail.

While most of them struggled to adjust their arguments, Westyn smoothly backpedaled. "You disobeyed your alpha, then."

Xen's dark brow rose in that haughty quirk I so envied. "If you are referring to yourself, you only alluded to what you wished. You never actually gave me orders concerning this situation. If you are implying Vance has the right to issue orders to me in regards to Ouida, I'll remind everyone here that he has no more rights, where our mate is concerned, than I do." He looked over at me, for once, deliberately revealing his heart. "Only the preferences of my mate holds any weight with me. I am commanded by her choice, not Vance's might."

"I gave orders concerning this situation --" Westyn began, his ire clearly not appeased. Xen cut right over his words, a sardonic half smile twisting his lips.

"You rule absolutely, yet in matters of love it must be with our consent. Not even the Alpha can command the heart. It loves where it will."

Westyn huffed. "So you're saying you committed a crime of passion?"

"No, Alpha. What he's saying is that he's committed no crime at all."

Finally! I'd begun to think Vance would never step up.

The dissenting noise took a while to die down. If not for Westyn holding his hand up to demand silence, and when that didn't do it, issuing an ear-numbing howl, the crowd would probably still be debating Vance's sanity.

"Explain yourself, Vance." Westyn's demand for clarification was tersely delivered.

"When I raised the alarm, I thought Ouida had been taken against her will. I was mistaken. When I found them, she was quite... content... to be with Xen. To claim he broke any laws because they went off together would render me as guilty. No one questioned when I remained away with Ouida earlier this last week, leaving her other three mates behind. I brought the original charges and would now ask to withdraw them."

The Alpha stared at Vance for a long, tense moment. By the time he'd switched his implacable gaze to me, I'd blanked my expression and lowered my face, hiding in plain sight as best I could. As was customary, I averted my gaze. Not in accordance

with wolf etiquette, but because my eyes were expressive. I could never hide my emotions.

Not too long later, I felt the lessening of tension that signaled Westyn had shifted his discerning gaze from me. I looked up in time to witness what seemed an intense non-verbal conflict going on between him and Xen.

"It seems we were mistaken as well." Westyn's sardonic tones clearly said he believed otherwise. "We are done here."

"No, sir. We are not."

Everyone turned back to eye Xen with differing measures of caution. His quiet assertion suggested something portentous.

A knowing smile curled Westyn's chiseled lips. "Speak."

Xen took a deep breath. "While honorably mated to Ouida until the waning of the Fertility Festival, I feel there is nothing to gain by remaining tied to her as she now carries the Enforcer's pups." He paused, sighing. "I wish her well."

Tears flooded my eyes as his steady gaze met mine and clung. *Xen, no!*

His mouth firmed. "Though I no longer harbor hope of wooing her from her primary mate, I still love her. To ensure I cause no future harm to Ouida or her pups, I must separate from the Pack."

Gasps of consternation and disbelief sounded all around me, drowning out my own despairing cries. Why should he have to obey some antiquated law that said he had to go when everyone knew he'd never hurt me?

Vance held me in place when I would have stepped forward. A sharp jerk of his hand and a furtive shake of his head convinced me to wait.

"Our law states: 'There is no such thing as a lone wolf,'" Westyn reminded him. "You cannot go out alone. Without Pack, you would be considered rogue."

Brax and Usher stepped up to stand beside Xen. For the first time since I came among them, they did not bow and bare their throats to Westyn. Somehow, I knew this had been planned, too.

"I will go with him."

"And I."

Westyn frowned. "All our enforcers leaving at once? I cannot condone this. What of the safety of the new cubs? Our females?"

Vance stepped up. "I am the chief Enforcer and I remain here. Pack safety continues to be my first concern. I have trained these enforcers. I can train more." He smiled. "Though I ache at seeing them go, there are quite a few wolves capable of filling these vacancies." His smile turned bittersweet as he addressed his three friends. "They cannot, however, take your places in my heart. I will miss you."

My gentle-hearted Brax's face twisted as he battled tears. Usher, my brash one, shrugged and summed it up in his usual blunt way. "You won't miss us for long. Your heart is filled with Ouida, and soon, her pups. If it makes you feel better, you can name them after us."

"We will always be friends with the Pack of our birth." Though he spoke to Westyn, I was the focus of Xen's tender gaze. "If ever there is need, howl. We will come."

* * *

"He won't return, will he?" Before the words were out of my mouth, I was shaking my head to forestall Vance's response. I already knew the answer.

"He promised he would if we -- if you -- needed him. Otherwise, no, he won't. He can't." His hands rubbed up and down my bare arms, warming the pebbled skin of my upper arms. It was cool in the cabin and I was naked, per Vance's instructions.

I'd promised to shed my clothes whenever we were alone in our home. Partly, it was to be instantly available to his needs -- he'd begun my lessons in submission and so far, I was loving them -- then, too, it was his way of conditioning me to becoming more comfortable in my skin. The People held a lot of festivals and rituals I'd need to participate in, that were performed only in wolf form or sky-clad.

"He's my friend, my brother in everything except actual blood and I grieved to see him go." A heavy sigh preceded his next words. "It's our way. We can share an occasional fuck-partner when we are unmated. Once the choice is made, the bond

forged, our wolf nature won't let us share a mate. Not long term. Eventually, it would end in death."

I wrapped my arms as far around myself as I could, as I wandered over to lean out the bedroom window to catch a last glimpse as Xen and the guys walked over the far hill and disappeared from sight. A few tears escaped to run down my cheeks and I swiped at them viciously. "He looks so damned lonely already. And don't tell me he has Usher and Brax to form a pack," I snapped when he started to say something. "It's not the same and you know it."

Since the trip home, I'd come to realize I was pretty much done being a party animal. I'd chosen Vance and I didn't want anyone involved even short term in our intimate circle. Yet I could no longer deny that given different circumstances, say, if Vance and I had never met and loved, if it had been Xen who came to me in the snow, I could've loved him. He was everything I'd once dreamed of -- a romantic male boldly authoritative, protective and sexually insatiable. It hadn't happened like that, though, and this moment of sorrow notwithstanding, I was content... more than... with my choice. "Do you think Xen and I could have been happy? If it hadn't been you, do you think he'd have made the same decision and saved me? Brought me back with him to the lodge?"

Vance came over and hugged me. "You're not ready to see him go. Follow after him before he gets too far away. Say your private goodbyes." He kissed my brow. With his lips brushing my forehead, he added the last whisper, "Fuck him if you wish."

My pulse leaped at this evidence of Vance's understanding. He knew my heart better than I did, sometimes. Still, I'd learned my lesson. I wasn't about to do anything that might have any of the males questioning my resolve to remain with Vance. I slipped my hand in his and gave a slight tug. "Not without you. Come with?"

Vance went still. His eyes stared down into mine. Whatever he saw made a slow smile part his lips. It crept up to put a twinkle in his pale blue eyes. "A final five-way?"

Anticipation sparkled in my blood, popping like champagne bubbles. I nodded, a chuckle escaping me as I envisioned his proposed scenario. "You up for it?"

My quick glance down rendered the question facetious.

"You noticed?" His fingers tightened around mine in a brief caress before releasing. He dropped to all fours, shifting on the way down in that familiar burst of fantastical energies.

When the magic ended, a white wolf gazed up at me, his pale irises gleaming with a wild emotion too feral for me to compare with anything human. And that was all right. My mate was who he was. I didn't feel any desire to change a single thing about him. Thank God, he felt the same about me.

Leaning down, I ran my fingers through his ruff, scratched behind his ears the way he'd shown me. Then I walked through the house to the front door and flung it open. "Go stop them. Bring them back."

With a swipe of his tongue across my lips and his tail waving high in excitement, Vance whirled around and bounded away after Xen, Brax and Usher, howling and barking as he chased his friends.

I thought I'd be content to wait inside until I heard them baying as they raced back across the fields. I stood in the open doorway, watching as the four of them headed toward me, their paws eating up the distance between us. Vance and Xen galloped far in the lead as usual.

My heart turned over as the four males drew near, the depth of the emotions flooding me, stunning. I loved these wolves. They were my wolf men. Oh, I know some would call them monsters, creatures of nightmares and horror movies. At best, I knew most humans would consider them no more than animals. I couldn't bring myself to care. They'd never been other than kind to me in their own way, accepting me into their Pack, treating me fairly, without prejudice. Despite our rocky beginning, these four had shown me more love and human kindness in the last five months than I'd received from so-called friends in all my prior years. What on earth had I done to deserve them?

They reached the end of the yard as I reached the front door. Milling together in a joyous tumbling pile as carefree as a pack of puppies, they yipped at me to join them. One by one, they shed their wolf and stood on two feet, each sporting an upstanding

cock and a gleam in their eyes that warned I was in for some drawn out, turbulent loving.

And suddenly, I was laughing out loud as I ran across the porch to them, unmindful of my nakedness. Here, in our wilderness home, I didn't have to worry about neighbors or human sensibilities or my fat hanging out. My guys loved every inch of me. With a carefree laugh I launched myself off the top stair into the air, flinging myself into their midst with absolute trust. In spite of my excess pounds and more than curvy body, I knew without a doubt they'd catch me.

And they did.

Camille Anthony

A funny thing happened on the way to the grave...

In 2006, I was diagnosed with Pulmonary Sarcoidosis and given two weeks to live, whereupon I promptly discharged myself against medical advice, since -- as I stubbornly informed the doctors -- I could die at home far more comfortably than at the hospital. Resigned, I prepared to meet my maker but then...

I got an idea for a new story. No way could I check out before finishing it. So I did. Then, another idea came, and another...

Now, three years after the doctors' two week *dead*-line, I'm still coming up with new story ideas. I figure I've found the fountain of youth. I don't plan on cocking up my toes until I've shared the last story whispering in my mind's ear! My goal is to share my imaginary joys and endless possibilities with you, the reader.

I encourage you to embrace adventure, even if the only journey you undertake is through the pages of a book. Enjoy every moment of this life we're gifted with. Whatever you do, keep reading!

Peace!

Cammy

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