



Carol Lynne

Resolution

REFUGE SHIFTERS SERIES

Resolution

Refuge Shifters *Book Four*

By Carol Lynne

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Table of Contents

<i>Chapter One</i>	6
<i>Chapter Two</i>	16
<i>Chapter Three</i>	27
<i>Chapter Four</i>	37
<i>Chapter Five</i>	50
<i>Chapter Six</i>	65
<i>Chapter Seven</i>	77
<i>Epilogue</i>	86
<i>About the Author</i>	94

res·o·lu·tion (rěz□o-liü□shən; rěs□o-lü□shon)

n.

1. the act or an instance of resolving an issue
2. the condition or quality of being resolute
3. something resolved or determined; decision
4. a formal expression of opinion agreed upon by a vote
5. (Law) a judicial decision or judgment

Chapter One

Two months after getting the first of the bird shifters into their new homes, Enapay was still unsettled. Although he had a new home he loved, he couldn't rest easy until Takoda was out of the clinic.

Lately, it seemed Takoda had more bad days than good. Takoda wasn't the only shifter still suffering the effects of the poisonous gas, but the others appeared to be getting stronger every day.

Enapay put on his soft buckskin pants and laced up the waist. He'd received word that Dr. Gray Whitmore wanted to talk to him about Takoda's condition, but Enapay wanted to go by the clinic first to check on the man he'd always loved.

He climbed down the ladder of his tree house and headed toward the overcrowded clinic. Construction had begun on a bigger and better hospital, but until recently, houses for the shifters had been the number one priority.

It wasn't yet clear to Enapay whether or not Gray would stay at Refuge once his research was complete, but the visiting researcher had settled in nicely. When not in his lab, Gray had worked right alongside the shifters to build hundreds upon hundreds of tree houses.

Enapay had spent a great deal of time with the handsome doctor, which had prompted even more visits to Takoda's bedside. There was just something about Gray that made Enapay feel guilty whenever they were around each other. On several occasions, he'd had to remind himself that he wasn't a free man. The overwhelming desire to touch the human doctor was strong, and it scared and shamed Enapay.

Stepping into the clinic, Enapay waived to his favorite nurse, Nancy. "Good morning."
"Morning, handsome," Nancy replied with a grin.

He strode into the small private room they'd given Takoda and stopped. The curtain had been drawn around Takoda's bed, which usually meant his doctor, Refuge's newest physician, Sam Sparrol, was examining him.

Enapay crossed his arms and leaned against the wall. Sam was a good guy. He'd been brought in five weeks earlier to replace one of the other doctors who'd had a family emergency. The curtain opened and Enapay got his first look at Takoda that day. The man he loved appeared pale, but awake.

Enapay kept his position. "How's the patient today?"

After opening the window blinds, Sam approached Enapay. "Weak." Sam shook his head. "Maybe you can get him to eat something."

Enapay glanced over Sam's shoulder to Takoda. "Has he had anything yet?"

Sam shook his head. "He sent his breakfast back. I told him if he didn't start eating, I'd be forced to hook up a feeding tube."

"Would you please ask someone to bring me some grits or oatmeal?" Enapay asked.

Sam nodded before leaving the room.

Enapay approached Takoda and took his customary spot in the chair next to the bed. He knew Takoda's lack of appetite was a reflection on his inability to shift. So far, they hadn't been able to figure out why his crow refused to come out, but that was what Gray was researching.

Enapay reached through the bedrails and took Takoda's hand. "You need to eat."

Takoda shook his head. "I've no taste for human food."

"You're in human form. You need to eat the right kind of food to get your strength back," Enapay tried to explain.

Takoda gazed at Enapay with tears in his eyes. "Why do I have to stay here?"

"Because you're still sick." Enapay concentrated on rubbing the skin between Takoda's thumb and forefinger. How many days had he sat wanting nothing more than to pull the man into his lap to protect him from the world?

"But I don't feel sick, just tired." Takoda ignored Enapay's touch like he had every day.

"Maybe if you'd eat, that would go away," Enapay argued.

"Why can't I shift?" Takoda asked the same question every time Enapay visited.

"I don't know, but I've got a meeting with Gray after I leave here."

"He's nice."

“Yeah, he is.” Although Enapay agreed, he found the observation strange. Takoda didn’t take well to humans, at least the full-blooded variety. To know Takoda liked Gray was unsettling.

Takoda’s eyes had started to drift shut when Kelly brought in a bowl of grits.

“Thanks,” Enapay said, taking the bowl.

Takoda tried to turn his head away when Enapay lifted a spoon toward his mouth. “I’m not hungry.”

“Please. Just a few bites,” Enapay begged.

“Two and then you have to leave me alone about it,” Takoda offered.

“Three and I’ll leave you alone until this evening,” Enapay countered.

Takoda rolled his eyes. “Why do you care so much? If I don’t want to eat, I don’t want to eat.”

“Three,” Enapay repeated. He thought about once again telling the small shifter how much he loved him, but those words always seemed to make Takoda uncomfortable.

In the end, Takoda managed to get down two and a half spoonfuls of grits. Enapay had no doubt Takoda could have eaten more, but the shifter refused to fully do as asked. Enapay eventually set the bowl down and held out a glass of water.

Takoda took several sips out of the straw before rolling to his side, his back to Enapay. “You can go now.”

Enapay took a deep breath. There were times Takoda was damn infuriating to deal with. He could tell Takoda was in one of his moods, so he knew there was no sense staying any longer. Enapay got to his feet and readjusted Takoda’s blankets. “I’ll be back later.”

“No need to hurry,” Takoda mumbled.

With a shake of his head, Enapay left the room.

* * * *

Enapay knocked on Gray’s door. Because the clinic was still full of healing bird shifters, the doctor had turned the living room in his small cottage into his office. Enapay hated to admit it, but he’d actually made it a point to run by his house and ready himself for the meeting.

The door opened and the gorgeous, somber-looking doctor attempted a smile. “Come in.”

Enapay followed Gray into the house. Instead of heading toward his desk, Gray gestured to the sofa that had been shoved to one side of the room. “Have a seat.”

Suddenly uneasy by the doctor's demeanor, Enapay stayed where he was. "What's wrong?"

Gray grabbed a folder off the coffee table and sat at one end of the sofa. "I think you need to sit down for this."

Enapay wanted to argue, but the expression on Gray's face was grim. With his knees growing weaker by the second, Enapay eventually joined Gray on the couch, sitting as far away from the tall, lean doctor as he could. "What's wrong with Takoda?"

"I don't know, which has me really concerned."

Enapay's eyes immediately began to burn. "Why?"

Gray shook his head. "Because Dr. Sparrol can't find anything wrong with him, yet he continues to have these periods of weakness. And we still don't know why he can't shift."

"Maybe he just needs to regain his strength," Enapay offered.

"Maybe. But that doesn't solve the problem as to why he's been so up and down lately. Dr. Sparrol says there's no explanation for it."

"Why don't *you* try?" Enapay asked.

Gray ran his fingers through his short blond hair. "I'm a geneticist, not a medical doctor, and Dr. Sparrol's one of the best at treating the human side of shifters. I was brought in because I've been studying shifters for years, but in their shifted state."

Enapay could tell by Gray's expression that there was something else. "There's more, isn't there?"

Gray nodded. "It's possible the gas Takoda breathed has done irreparable damage to his crow. It's completely possible he may never regain the power to shift."

Enapay shook his head and stood. "No. I won't believe that. Takoda's crow means everything to him."

Gray stood and reached out to place a hand on Enapay's shoulder. "I'm sorry."

Enapay's breathing started to increase from the simple touch. He pushed his desires away. "You can't tell Takoda he may never shift again."

"Someone has to."

"Why? He's not strong enough. The news will kill him," Enapay tried to argue.

"He's weak, but he's no longer knocking on death's door," Gray tried to reason.

Enapay shook his head. “You don’t understand. Takoda would rather die than live without his crow. He hated life as a man.”

Gray’s eyebrows drew together. “He’ll figure it out eventually, and then he’ll be pissed no one prepared him.”

Enapay held his hands out, palm up. “Please. Just give it some time. If anyone tells him, it needs to be me, but I need to put a few things into motion before then. If he’s told now, I guarantee you he won’t last the week.”

* * * *

Two days later, Gray walked into the clinic and straight to Takoda’s room. He knew the clinic’s head physician, Dr. Sam Sparrol, was signing Takoda out, and Gray wanted to talk some sense into the man.

Gray rounded the corner and almost ran into Daniel and Hakan. He stopped short. “Excuse me.”

“Our fault. We were on our way to find Enapay,” Hakan explained.

“He’s not here?” Gray questioned.

Hakan shook his head. “Takoda’s been asking for him for two days.”

Gray was more than a little surprised by the news. “He left my house almost forty-eight hours ago. I hoped he’d have talked to Takoda by now.”

Hakan’s eyes narrowed. “Do you think something’s happened to him?”

Gray pictured the way Enapay looked when he practically ran out of the house. “He was upset. He’d said something about setting a few things into motion. Maybe he’s off somewhere processing what I told him.”

“Which is?” Hakan probed.

Gray glanced around. Other than the lab, which was in use, there really wasn’t an available space to talk in the small clinic. “Let’s step outside.”

Hakan wrapped his arm around Daniel and followed Gray to the side of the clinic, well away from the open windows. “What’s going on?”

Gray explained Takoda’s condition to the two men.

“And there’s nothing else you can try?” Daniel asked when Gray finished.

Gray shook his head. “Like I told Enapay, there’s nothing any of us can do about Takoda’s crow. His ability to shift either will or won’t return.

Hakan pulled away from Daniel and walked into the timber before Gray could say another word. Gray glanced at Daniel. "Have I angered him?"

Daniel shook his head. "He's going to talk to Father Sky." The smaller shifter ran a hand through his hair.

Gray had seen Daniel's gift first hand, and if the Coyote King hadn't been able to heal Takoda, he didn't hold out much hope. "I would think if Father Sky could heal the shifters he would've already done it."

Daniel nodded. "It's not the first time Hakan has communicated with Father Sky since this whole nightmare began."

"Well, Takoda's man-skin, as he calls it, is getting healthier every day. He should be happy he's alive at all. Takoda's going to need to pick himself up by the bootstraps and move forward. No sense dwelling on what may never again happen."

Once again, Daniel shook his head. The expression on his face was one of disgust. "You have no fucking clue who we are. You sit in your lab and dissect parts of us, but you've never learned what really makes us who we are. Until you can do that, save your opinions."

Gray felt like he'd been slapped. He gave Daniel a short nod and turned to go back into the clinic. He knew they thought he was being heartless, but facts were facts. In his opinion, it was no different than asking a diabetic to give up his legs in order to save his life. Wasn't the important thing to live?

One thing was certain. Takoda couldn't be discharged from the clinic—not yet. Not only did Takoda need to be informed of his condition, but also he simply wasn't strong enough.

Gray was lucky enough to catch Dr. Sam Sparrol coming out of a patient's room. "Sam. Can I have a word?"

"Sure." Sam glanced around, finally indicating a corner of the nurses' station. "What's up?"

"I need you to hold Takoda here for at least another day," Gray explained.

Sam shook his head. "We need the bed. Quite frankly, from what I can tell, Takoda needs rest, nourishment and to be out of here. He hates it, ya know?"

"I'm aware of that, but you're only seeing his human side. He needs to be told he may never regain the power to shift, and I've promised to let Enapay do that."

"So where is he?" Sam asked.

“I don’t know, but when he does tell Takoda the news, I’d feel better if he was in here. We have no idea what his reaction might be, and at least here, we can sedate him if we need to.”

Sam shook his head. “I’m sorry, Gray, I can’t. He’s demanding to leave, and I don’t have the authority to keep him against his will. You’re a doctor. If watching Takoda means so much to you, take the needed supplies and convince him to go to your place.”

Gray felt like screaming. Having Takoda in his house wasn’t an option as far as he was concerned. It had been hard enough being around Enapay almost on a daily basis, but Takoda brought out his protective side, and that wouldn’t do. He’d worked damn hard to keep an emotional and professional detachment to Takoda.

Unfortunately, it didn’t seem Gray had much choice. Sending Takoda out into an unsupervised world simply wasn’t an option, at least not yet. Gray glanced back at Sam. “Fine. Give me an hour to get my house ready.”

Sam nodded. “I’ll have one of the nurses gather the items you might need.”

Gray strode out of the clinic. His mood was iffy at best, so when Daniel rounded the corner of the clinic and stood in front of him, Gray was prepared for a fight.

“Sorry,” Daniel said, surprising Gray.

The fight left Gray in a heartbeat. “You were right. It doesn’t matter how much I try to understand or how much I want to, I’ll never know what it feels like to be a shifter. Unfortunately, other than Sam Sparrol, I don’t know any shifters who are also doctors.”

Daniel held his hands up and shook his head. “I shouldn’t have said what I did. You’re right about not having enough doctors, and the fact that you’re here at all is commendable. I know what the outside world thinks of us. Since someone leaked the truth about what was going on here at Refuge to the press, almost every hate group out there has target us. Most of them claim to be Christian groups, which pisses me off even more.”

“They just don’t understand the facts. Maybe you should think about holding some sort of press conference or something to educate people,” Gray offered.

Daniel shook his head yet again. “Humans will continue to believe what they want to believe.”

Gray didn’t agree with that statement. Hadn’t his own mind been changed by learning the truth about the shifters DNA? When Ryker had first hired him, Gray had been uneasy about get-

ting close enough to the shifters to test their blood. It had been the amount of money Ryker was willing to give him to fund the project that had clinched the deal for Gray.

Without anything else to add to the discussion, Gray pointed toward the used car he'd bought in Seattle and driven up to Refuge. "I need to get home. Sam won't keep Takoda here, so I'll be taking him to my place until I know he's going to be okay."

"You don't have to do that. I've already offered to sit with him during the day while Enapay is working," Daniel said.

"You can help out at my house if you'd like, but I think Takoda needs medical supervision." Gray shrugged. "At least until he comes to terms with his condition."

Daniel started to say something but stopped.

"What? Are you going to warn me about Takoda's sharp tongue? Believe me, I've already been on the receiving end a time or two." It was a shame, too. When Takoda slept, he looked like an angel. The thin, sharp features of Takoda's face seemed to soften, giving off more beauty than a man had a right to possess. It was when Takoda's black eyes opened that you had to duck and cover. The small crow-shifter was obviously so full of pain and hate, he knew no other way to act.

"Just watch your back," Daniel warned. He glanced over his shoulder, obviously looking for Hakan. "Do you know about Takoda and Hakan?"

"That they used to be lovers? Yeah. Enapay mentioned it."

Daniel shook his head. "It was more than that. They loved each other. It was Father Sky who commanded Takoda to break away from Hakan. Even though Hakan didn't know it at the time, he was meant to be mated with me and Ryker."

Tears filled Daniel's eyes. "Takoda never has been able to get over Hakan. He feels he was cheated out of his true mate. Crows mate for life, ya know? So in Takoda's mind, Hakan was it. Enapay loves Takoda and has for years, but Takoda won't even look at Enapay that way."

"So why won't Enapay move on?" Gray had to ask. How many times over the previous month had he witnessed Takoda's cruel words hurt Enapay? How many times did Gray wish he could wrap his arms around the slightly bigger man and soothe him?

"Because golden eagles also mate for life," Daniel explained. He sighed. "I think for Enapay, he's already mated his heart to Takoda, even though the two of them have never been sexually involved."

Gray nodded. It was what he'd expected. He'd seen the way Enapay gazed at Takoda when he was sleeping. Sadly, it was probably the same way Gray gazed at both men. "I'd better get going."

"Holler if you need me," Daniel yelled as Gray shut the car door.

He drove the distance to the house he'd been given. Evidently, it used to belong to Mica and was more than adequate for his needs. Gray rushed inside and began clearing his research material out of the spare bedroom, thankful the house had come already furnished.

After the room was cleared of boxes, Gray found a clean set of sheets in the hall closet and quickly made up the bed, making sure to put extra covers on. Takoda had lost quite a bit of weight, and even though it wasn't cold outside yet, the small shifter never seemed to get warm enough.

He was surveying his work when he heard a knock at the door. Gray started for the living room when the knock came again, only this time it sounded like a desperate pounding. Gray picked up his pace and opened the door. "Enapay."

"You didn't tell Takoda did you?" Enapay asked.

"No. I was waiting for you to do it. Where've you been?"

"Thinking. Praying to Father Sky."

"Dr. Sparrol won't keep Takoda. He's insisting he be released within the hour. I'm going to bring him here. I don't think he's ready to be without medical supervision, but Sparrol won't listen to me."

"Here?" Enapay shook his head. "I need to look after him."

Gray glanced over his shoulder at the couch and sighed. He knew from dealing with him in the past that Enapay could be quite stubborn at times. He also knew he couldn't blame the bigger man for wanting to be at Takoda's side. "The sofa folds out."

"You want me to stay here?" Enapay appeared uncomfortable with the suggestion.

"If you want to be close enough to Takoda to keep an eye on him, you don't have much choice," Gray tried to explain.

"But my home is in the trees," Enapay argued. "It's where I belong."

"And Takoda? Would you have him reminded daily of what he may never be again?"

Enapay turned and stepped off the front porch, running his slender fingers through his long hair. "I can't think about him never being able to fly again. It truly will kill him."

Enapay put his hands on his hips and began pacing back and forth beside Gray's car.

Gray wasn't sure what was going on, but Enapay appeared to be arguing with himself about something. Finally, the eagle-shifter turned and marched back up the steps.

"For two days I prayed for Father Sky to take my power to shift and give it to Takoda."

After listening to what Daniel had to say about shifting, Gray was stunned Enapay would go that far for Takoda. "And?"

"He refused to answer. Evidently, he was either not listening or didn't care."

Chapter Two

“What? Of course he cares. He created your shifter half,” Gray argued.

Enapay shrugged. He felt like he’d been abandoned in his hour of need.

Gray took a step forward. “You’d really give up your eagle for Takoda?”

Enapay narrowed his eyes at the handsome man. He’d been over the situation many times in his head, and this was the only solution he’d come up with. “I would.”

Tears swam in Gray’s dark blue eyes. “You love him that much?”

“More. If I have to, I can live without my eagle, but Takoda *is* his crow.”

“And if Father Sky eventually grants your wish, what are you going to tell Takoda?” Gray asked.

Enapay stared Gray in the eyes and walked up the porch steps to stand in front of him. “Nothing. As far as he’s concerned, I like being a man and have no need for my eagle. Are we clear?”

Gray started to reach out to Enapay but stopped before actually making contact. “He has no idea what he has in you.”

Enapay swallowed around the lump that had formed in his throat. “Even if he never knows, it’ll be worth it to me to save Takoda’s crow.”

Gray tugged at his earlobe for several moments. “I’ll need you to convince Takoda to come here. We’ll tell him his crow is sick and it will only make it worse if he tries to shift. Hopefully he’ll regain his strength before either facing the truth or Father Sky grants your wish.”

Enapay nodded. “I’ll continue to ask Father Sky every day until he answers.”

* * * *

Takoda groaned when Enapay carried him to the bed in Gray's house. He hated the claustrophobic feeling buildings elicited, much preferring to fly through the wide-open spaces of nature.

"Why do I have to stay here?" he asked once again.

Enapay tucked the blankets around Takoda and sat on the edge of the bed. "You're still not well. Dr. Whitmore wants you close in case you need medical attention."

Takoda glanced around the room. He wished he had the energy to put his foot down on the matter. Unfortunately, he was well aware of his deteriorating health. "Am I going to die?"

"No," Enapay said flatly. "As long as you do what the doctor tells you, you should be okay eventually."

Enapay reached out and brushed his hand over Takoda's forehead, sweeping away the loose tendrils of hair. "For now we need to concentrate on getting your strength back."

Takoda closed his eyes, unable to meet Enapay's emotional gaze another moment. It wasn't that Enapay's touch didn't affect him in a sexual way, but Takoda knew a relationship between them could never work.

There was a time when he'd been close to accepting Enapay's offer of love and companionship, but then Hakan had needed his and Enapay's help. It wasn't helping his old lover that caused the doubt in Takoda's heart. It was Enapay's constant shifting that had convinced Takoda his friend would rather live in his man skin. Takoda couldn't imagine a greater torture.

"I'll let you rest," Enapay whispered.

Takoda feigned sleep until Enapay left the room and shut the door. Takoda opened his eyes and surveyed his surroundings. It was full of human trappings he wanted no part of. The nurses in the clinic had tried to get him to watch television. They'd even offered him something to read.

Takoda had screamed at the women, informing them birds don't read. Dr. Sparrol had run into the room to try and calm him. The doctor had gone on to explain that some birds did, in fact, know how to read. He'd had the nerve to offer himself as an example.

Beyond pissed at the condescending tone of the man's voice, Takoda had informed the doctor he wasn't a real shifter. Takoda knew for a fact that Sam Sparrol had grown up in a house, raised by parents who were not shifter at all.

Sam had tried to give him some mumbo jumbo about being orphaned by his real parents. He'd claimed he was grateful the Anderson's had taken him in when they had.

Takoda snorted. Yeah, like that was a real favor. The humans had taken away the gift Father Sky had graciously given the Native American population.

After that day, Dr. Sparrol rarely said more than two words to Takoda when he came to his room. That was just fine with Takoda. The less he had to speak to the faux-shifter, the better.

Turning onto his side, Takoda fit the blankets closer to his ears. He couldn't believe how much colder he was without the warmth and comfort of his feathers. It had become obvious to him that many of the bird shifters, including Enapay, were re-adapting to life in their man skins. He doubted he ever would. He loved his crow too much to ever give him up.

Takoda could remember being a child and looking up at the soaring birds overhead. He'd longed to be one of them. When his tribe had been given the gift, they'd been dying of starvation. As crows, they'd been able to eat much less and become full. Even the harshest winters hadn't kept them from finding something to eat. It was the life Takoda had always dreamt of, and one he couldn't wait to return to.

As his eyelids grew heavy, he imagined himself floating on a gust of wind over the many cornfields to the south. He drifted to sleep with a smile on his face for the first time since he'd become sick.

* * * *

"Did you get him settled?" Gray asked as he set a platter of steaks on the table. He wasn't sure how much a shifter the size of Enapay ate, but he did know enough to serve him meat.

"Yes. I think he's tired."

Gray gestured to one of the chairs. "You hungry?"

Enapay rubbed his stomach. "Yes. Thank you."

Gray tried to concentrate on his food as Enapay started cutting up a large steak. He'd known it wouldn't be easy to share such close quarters with a man as charismatic as Enapay. It wasn't just the expanse of bronzed muscles on display from the shirtless man that sat across from him. There was so much more to Enapay than his looks. Gray had found very few men he could say the same about.

In his experience, there were the lookers and the keepers. Lookers rarely had anything going on under the surface, but keepers were usually very nice men who did little to turn Gray

on. It was a shame he'd finally found a man who did both for him, only to discover Enapay was unavailable, at least emotionally.

Enapay talked for a few minutes about the housing situation with the bird shifters. According to him, the remainder of the shifters should be settled within the month. They were still planning to build a few extra houses in case they got more in, but the arrivals had slowed to a trickle over the past week.

As Gray listened to Enapay talk, he became entranced by the Native American's cadence. He knew he'd never tire of hearing the man speak. Gray was so enthralled he hadn't even noticed he'd stopped eating and was leaning on the table, his chin resting on his palm.

"Are you tired?" Enapay asked.

Gray snapped out of his trance and sat up. "No. Just listening."

Enapay finished his meal and stood. "If you'll show me where everything goes, I'll do the dishes."

"If you'll wash, I'll dry and put stuff away," Gray offered.

As Enapay filled the sink with hot soapy water, Gray began clearing the table. He had a question on his mind he'd been dying to ask since he'd first become involved with the shifter project. The recent developments with Takoda had made Gray even more curious.

Table cleaned, Gray took the first dish from Enapay and began to run his towel over the bright blue plate. "Would you mind if I asked you something?"

Enapay handed him another plate and shook his head. "Ask away."

Gray concentrated on the plate in his hands. "What's it like?"

Enapay turned and faced Gray, his head tilting to the side. "What's what like?"

"Shifting. Can you feel it happening?"

Enapay's lips pursed as he seemed to ponder the question. "It doesn't hurt if that's what you're asking. It's..." Enapay shook his head. "I'm not sure how to explain it. You know when you drink too much and you get that feeling that you're not quite in your body? Like...you see your hand, but it doesn't want to do what you want it to?"

Gray nodded.

"It's kind of like that, but only for a second. I'm standing there and I think about shifting, and then I feel...off. In the next second, I've shifted." Enapay shrugged. "Does that make sense?"

Gray once again felt lost in Enapay's dark eyes. He nodded his head slowly, imagining what it would be like. "What's it like to be something different?"

"What do you mean?"

Gray dropped the towel on the counter and wrapped his arms around himself. "There are times when I wish I was anything but what I am. I wish I could run away, or in your case, fly away. I guess I wonder what it would be like to see the world from two different points of view."

Enapay reached out and put his hands on Gray's shoulders, giving them a comforting squeeze. "I think it depends on who you are. For Takoda, life as a crow means everything. He's not comfortable living as a man even though that's what he started out as."

Enapay's touch felt warm on his skin even through the layer of cotton between them. "What about you?"

"Me?"

Enapay's entire expression changed. Gray could see the dark clouds settling over the bigger man's features. Gray bit his bottom lip. He hadn't meant to hurt Enapay in any way. "I'm sorry. I shouldn't have asked."

Enapay shook his head. "I like to fly, but there are things I've missed about living in my man skin."

"Like?" Gray dared to question.

"Stupid things. Smiling. Talking like we're doing now." Enapay's grip moved slowly down Gray's arms to clasp his hands. "I miss touching and being touched."

Gray threaded his fingers through Enapay's and leaned forward as the bigger man did the same. Their lips were mere inches from each other when...

"Enapay?" Takoda called from the bedroom.

Enapay blinked several times before pulling away. "I'd better see what he wants."

Without looking back, Enapay fled the kitchen.

Gray turned and braced his hands on the sink. What the hell had they almost done? What bothered Gray more than anything was he wanted to do it again. He had to keep reminding himself Enapay was in love with Takoda.

* * * *

Enapay rushed into Takoda's room. "Is something wrong?"

Curled into a tight ball on his side, Takoda looked up from under the pile of blankets. "I'm cold. Do you know if there are anymore covers?"

Enapay leaned over and put his hand to Takoda's forehead. Takoda's skin was extremely warm. Enapay glanced toward the door. Gray said Dr. Sparrol couldn't find anything wrong with Takoda. If that was the case, why did the man he loved feel feverish? "Let me go ask."

Takoda's eyes closed again despite the shivers currently wracking his frail body. Enapay gave in and bent to place a kiss on the side of Takoda's head.

"Don't," Takoda grumbled as he moved his head out of Enapay's reach.

"I just...I worry," Enapay admitted, hurt at the rebuff.

"You smell like a human."

Enapay sighed. "I am human and so are you. When I'm in my man skin, I'm human. Gray said our blood proves that."

"Yeah? Well, why don't I feel human? I still feel like a bird that can't fly. I'm cold without my feathers." Takoda gazed up at Enapay. "I don't want to be human again. I never will."

Enapay couldn't help but feel Takoda was trying to tell him something besides the obvious. He sat down on the mattress beside the man he loved. "What're you trying to say?"

Takoda's eyes filled with tears. "I can't live like this, and by nature, we can't be together in our bird skins. My feelings for you aren't enough. I'll never be able to be with you, Enapay. You need to understand that."

Enapay swallowed around the lump in his throat. "That's not true. What about Hakan? The two of you made it work for years."

"That was a long time ago. Seeing him the way he is now..." Takoda shook his head. "It's not that I hate being in my man skin. It's just not comfortable for long. I find it...suffocating. A relationship, even one built on love, wouldn't last."

The news tore a hole in Enapay's heart. He stood and walked out of the room without a backwards glance.

As he made his way through the living room, he ran into Gray. "Will you try to find Takoda another blanket? I need to go out for a while."

Struggling to breathe, Enapay didn't wait for an answer. He burst out the front door and shifted. As he took flight, in the orange glow of the setting sun, he tried to appreciate the beauty around him. He knew if he could get Father Sky to listen to him, it was possible he could lose the

ability to transform into the other half of himself. Was it worth it? After what he'd said, was Takoda worth it?

Enapay flew to Suni's house. The cougar Alpha had become a good friend. Enapay wasn't sure what he was looking for, but he needed to talk to someone. He shifted and knocked on the front door.

Mica opened the door and smiled. "Hey."

Enapay stepped into the house when Mica gestured him in. "Is Suni busy?"

"Nope. We're just finishing up supper."

Enapay followed Mica into the kitchen. Suni and Jarek were leaned back in their chairs, talking about the day. Enapay hated to interrupt. The two men looked so at ease with one another.

Suni glanced up and grinned. "Did you smell the garlic?" Suni gestured to the bowl of spaghetti and left over garlic bread. "Jarek's trying to kill us with his newfound love for spices."

Enapay shook his head. "I was hoping I could talk to you about something."

Suni looked from Enapay to his two lovers. "Sure." He stood and gave both men a quick kiss before leading Enapay back out onto the porch. "Have a seat."

Enapay opted for the chair instead of the swing. His life felt rocky enough as it was without adding external forces to his precarious mood.

"What's up?" Suni asked, setting his muscled frame onto the swing.

Enapay wasn't sure where to start. He began informing Suni of his prayers to Father Sky.

"Wait. Stop right there. You're going to risk losing your eagle for Takoda?" Suni questioned.

Enapay nodded. "I don't have much choice."

"Bullshit. Life is full of choices. I can't believe Gray would even consider letting you do something so reckless."

Enapay suddenly felt the need to defend Gray. "He trusts me. I had to convince him that I could live without my eagle if necessary."

"And can you?"

Enapay started to immediately answer yes, but stopped himself. "I know I can't live without knowing Takoda's happy."

Suni sighed and rubbed his hands over his face. “Love doesn’t always have to be about sacrificing who you are.”

“I know that, but the things I really want in life I can have living as a man. It’s not the same for Takoda.” The part that sucked was, after his discussion with Takoda earlier, he knew he couldn’t have what he wanted regardless of what form he chose to live in.

“And what’s that?” Suni asked, bracing his forearms on his knees.

Enapay stared into Suni’s blue eyes. His friend was so different from when they’d first met. Enapay knew Suni’s lovers had everything to do with the changes. “I want what you have. It’s all I’ve ever wanted.”

Suni nodded. “And you think this is the way to get it? By sacrificing your eagle for Takoda?”

Enapay looked away and shook his head. “Takoda told me earlier that we’ll never be able to be together. I finally got him to admit he has feelings for me, but he also admitted he has no desire to live as a man. I guess I’d always hoped I’d be enough for him. I never wanted him to give up his crow, but I thought maybe being in my arms would be enough for the majority of the day.”

“And it’s not.” Suni confirmed.

Enapay shook his head again.

“And you’re not still going through with this harebrained plan of yours?”

Enapay’s head snapped up to regard his friend. “Of course I am. Takoda may not love me enough to live with me, but I love him enough to save the part of him that makes him happy.”

“So where does that leave you?” Suni questioned further.

“I don’t know,” Enapay said with a sigh. The episode with Gray in the kitchen came to mind. “Do you think it’s possible to be attracted to someone other than the person you love?”

Suni laughed. “Sure it is. Why? You attracted to someone?”

Enapay felt a blush creep up his neck and face. “Yeah. I wouldn’t do anything about it, but it’s there.”

“Why wouldn’t you do anything about it? You pretty much just told me there’s no hope of you being with Takoda. So why not grab what happiness you can find?”

It wouldn’t be right and he knew it. “I haven’t been with anyone since I met Takoda.”

“It’s not cheating unless you and Takoda are in a monogamous relationship.”

“I think for me, it would feel like cheating regardless of the situation.”

Suni sighed and shook his head. Enapay could tell his friend was holding back his true thoughts.

“You loved Jarek right away didn’t you?” Enapay finally asked.

Suni nodded. “The moment I laid eyes on him to be honest. I fought it for about five minutes, but it was there.”

“What about Mica?”

“That took longer. But just because I didn’t love him right away, doesn’t mean I love him any less.”

“But you had sex with him before you loved him, right? How did Jarek feel about that?” Enapay questioned.

Suni chuckled. “It was Jarek’s idea.” Suni held up his hand. “You really can’t base your decision on my relationship with Jarek and Mica. You have to do what works for you and the other people involved.”

There it was again. The look from Suni told Enapay something was on his friend’s mind, and he had a strong feeling he knew what it was. “You don’t like Takoda, do you?”

Suni shook his head. “Didn’t say that.”

“But you’re thinking it.”

Suni started to shake his head but stopped. “I just think he’s an idiot. Don’t forget I lived for years as a cougar. But my life now is so much better than what I had then. Life should be about loving and laughing, not struggling every day to survive only to end up alone in a cave at the end of the day.”

Enapay shrugged. He felt the same way, but he knew Takoda was different. He always had been. “Maybe someday Takoda will realize that.”

“And what? Until then you’re going to live alone, waiting for him to figure out there’s more to life than flying through it?” Suni shook his head. “Don’t wait on him. You’ve done that for far too many years already.”

“I’ll think about it. Maybe the next time Gray tries to kiss me, I’ll let him.”

“He’ll try again. Trust me.” Suni crossed his arms over his chest and grinned.

* * * *

Gray took the quilt off his own bed and began to carry it to Takoda's room. The way Enapay shot out of the house still had Gray worried. He hoped it wasn't the near-kiss that had caused the hurt in the other man's eyes.

Gray knocked lightly on the door before pushing it open. He glanced at the bed and found Takoda to be awake. Gray held up the blanket. "This is the only one I have left, but I can always call and borrow some if you need me to."

Takoda turned to look at Gray. "One should be okay," he mumbled.

Gray could see the moisture in the sick man's eyes. "Are you okay?"

Takoda shook his head. "I hurt him."

Gray didn't need to ask who Takoda was talking about. "He loves you."

Takoda nodded. "And part of me loves him."

"Really?" Gray didn't want to admit the proclamation caused his stomach to roll. After the incident in the kitchen, Gray had started dreaming of a future that included Enapay. If Takoda loved his fellow shifter, Gray knew there was no hope for him.

"Of course. How could you be around him and not?" Takoda rolled back to his side. "Doesn't matter though. I already told him it would never be possible for us to be together."

"Why?" Gray morbidly had to ask.

"Because even though my man loves him, my crow thinks only of being free. I'm not meant to live in your world. He needed to know that. I knew it would hurt him, which is why I put it off until I thought the time was right."

"And it's right now?" Gray realized he was still holding the quilt and lifted it to spread over the pile of blankets already covering Takoda.

"There are people here who want the same things he does. He can be happy here if he isn't bound to his feelings for me."

Gray felt a lump forming in his throat. He walked toward the window and stared out at the darkness beyond. If he hadn't been so attracted to Enapay, he might argue with Takoda to try and make things work with Enapay. Gray knew it was incredibly selfish of him, but he hoped Enapay did break away from Takoda enough to give him a chance.

"You like him," Takoda said from under the covers.

"Yes," Gray confirmed without turning around. "But he loves you beyond what I thought possible."

When Takoda didn't reply, Gray eventually turned to face the man. Takoda had pulled the covers over his head. Gray assumed it was Takoda's way of shutting him out.

Gray headed for the door, giving Takoda the space he obviously needed. Before he could leave the room, he heard Takoda's soft voice. "If he comes to you, promise me you'll take care of him?"

Gray closed his eyes and nodded. "It would be a gift beyond what I deserve. Of course I would take care of him."

Without another word, Gray retreated to his bedroom. He undressed and slid between the sheets. How was it possible for his attraction to Takoda to deepen within a span of ten minutes? Gray knew he could no longer think of the smaller man as the bad guy in all that was happening. Like Enapay, Takoda was willing to sacrifice his own feelings to make sure Enapay ended up happy.

Maybe the two of them did belong together after all.

Chapter Three

After a fitful night's sleep, Enapay folded his bedding and put it back into the hall closet. Every dream he'd had included either Takoda or Gray. Enapay woke feeling like he was being torn in two. How could he possibly want both men?

A noise off to his left got his attention. He turned to find a disheveled Gray leaning against the doorjamb. With the sheet wrinkles still evident on the side of Gray's gorgeous face and his hair standing straight up in odd tufts, Enapay couldn't help but smile. "You're up early."

"Couldn't sleep." Gray propelled himself from the doorway toward the kitchen. "Coffee?"

"Sure," Enapay answered. He couldn't take his eyes off the tight set of butt cheeks wrapped in faded blue sweat pants. He'd never worn a pair, but they did look comfortable. Enapay took a seat at the kitchen table and watched Gray as he worked at getting the coffee on.

"What're your plans today?" Gray asked without turning around.

"I have a meeting with Jack and Suni. Since the housing is nearly finished, we're going to come up with something else for me to do. I've never been the kind of person or bird that could sit around and do nothing."

Enapay swallowed as Gray's hand wandered down to dip below the waistband of his sweats and scratch at his balls. He knew it was something all men did, but seeing Gray do it was incredibly erotic. He'd tried his best not to wonder what Gray had between his legs, but with a simple unconscious move like that, Enapay couldn't help himself.

He reached under the table and readjusted his growing cock, picturing himself buried deep in Gray's ass. *I want him.* He pushed the thought away. "How long will you be staying at Refuge?"

Gray, who'd been reaching to the top shelf for coffee mugs, spun around, almost losing his balance. Enapay jumped up and steadied the man before he fell.

Gray righted himself and chuckled. "I'm a klutz. Always have been."

Enapay didn't bother taking his hands off Gray's hips. It felt perfectly natural to hold the man in this position. "So...you didn't answer my question."

Gray's face flushed. "I don't know. Ryker's offered to build me a lab here instead of down in San Diego where I've been working, but I've not decided."

Enapay slid one hand to Gray's back, resting it at the top of the man's fine ass. "What's to decide? Don't you like it here?"

Gray nodded. "I like it, but..."

Enapay waited for Gray to finish his sentence, but instead Gray pulled away and turned to pour two cups of coffee. Enapay stepped forward and pressed the front of his body against Gray's back, effectively trapping the slightly smaller man against the counter. "But?"

"But I need to see how things go."

A horn honked and Enapay groaned. "That's probably Suni."

"So early?" Gray asked, pressing back the slightest bit against Enapay's aroused body.

"Yeah. We're shifters. We're used to getting up with the sun." Before pulling away, Enapay couldn't help himself. He leaned down and kissed Gray's neck where it met his shoulder. "Do you mind if I take a cup with me?"

Gray shook his head. "Hang on. I've got a travel mug up here somewhere."

Enapay held onto Gray's slim waist as the man once again reached to the top shelf. The soft feel of Gray's bare skin made Enapay rock-hard. He longed to bend Gray further over the counter and fuck him until they both were sated.

The horn sounded again, drawing Enapay back. "I guess I'd better get going."

Gray filled the cup with coffee and screwed a lid onto it. "Will you be home for supper?"

Enapay nodded. There was something so comforting in the simple question. What would it be like to have someone waiting for him at the end of the day? In his heart, Enapay knew he'd never have that kind of relationship with Takoda. It simply wasn't who the crow shifter was.

"Yes. I'll be here," he finally answered.

Gray nodded and smiled. "Have a good day."

“Thanks for the coffee.” Enapay took one last look at Gray before walking out of the room. He may not be able to get over the love he felt for Takoda, but Suni had been right, he was tired of waiting for happiness.

* * * *

Gray slammed the oven door. He was still pissed with himself for not telling Enapay what Takoda had told him the previous evening. The man should know that Enapay did want him, but knew he couldn't make him happy. Gray threaded his fingers through his blond hair and gave it a sharp tug. “Dammit!”

“Something wrong?” Takoda asked as he shuffled into the room wrapped in one of the thicker quilts.

Gray let his hands fall to his sides. He looked at Takoda for several moments. The smaller man had been completely honest with him the previous night. It was only fair Gray show him the same respect. “Being around that man is driving me crazy.”

“Enapay?”

Gray nodded. “I want him so much, but he doesn't love me.”

Takoda took a seat at the kitchen table, laying his head on his arms. “He will.”

Gray sat beside Takoda, noticing the smaller man looked pale. “Are you feeling okay?”

“My body feels better today,” Takoda informed Gray.

If Takoda really did feel better, why was he looking worse than he had the previous day? Gray wondered if it had something to do with not shifting. Maybe Takoda truly was meant to live in his crow form. Gray gave himself a mental kick. There was a large part of him that wanted to heal Takoda so the crow could fly away and leave Enapay to him.

“Will you tell me what's really wrong with me?” Takoda asked, his voice barely above a whisper.

Gray winced. Once again, it was time to be honest with the smaller man. He took a deep breath and reached out to put his hand on Takoda's back. “We don't know.”

“Is it because of the gas?”

“Maybe. We can't figure out why you can't shift. It could very well be because of the gas, but without shifting, there's no way to tell.”

Tears pooled in Takoda's eyes. “What're you trying to tell me?”

Gray swallowed. He'd promised Enapay he would hold the secret of Takoda's crow's dilemma, but Enapay should have told Takoda the truth about what was wrong. "We don't know if you'll ever be able to shift again."

"That's why Enapay told me I shouldn't try to shift," Takoda mumbled, obviously working out what Gray had just told him.

"Yes," Gray answered simply. He knew there was no sugarcoating the fact.

Takoda scooted his chair back and stood. Gray had never seen a man appear so lost. It was as if Takoda's spirit had been sucked from his body. Despite the distance he'd tried to keep, Gray couldn't help but want to soothe the hurting man.

When the first tear escaped and ran down Takoda's cheek, Gray couldn't hold back any longer. He reached out and pulled Takoda into his lap.

"Shhh," he tried to soothe. He rubbed circles against Takoda's back. "It could all change. It's possible once you regain your strength, everything will come back to you."

Gray heard the screen door open and close. "We're in the kitchen."

Enapay stepped into the brightly lit room and stopped in his tracks. "What happened?"

Gray glanced down at Takoda before looking up at Enapay. He knew the man standing beside him might very well hate him for what he'd done. "He knows about his crow."

"You told him?" Enapay asked.

Gray nodded. With Takoda staring down at the table, Gray met Enapay's stare, knowing he deserved whatever he got.

Enapay bent down and pulled Takoda out of Gray's arms. Takoda's cheek went from resting against Gray's chest to the much broader bare chest of Enapay.

"Why would you do this?" Enapay asked Gray with hurt in his eyes.

Takoda lifted his head and gazed up at Enapay. "I asked him. Don't blame him for being honest with me."

Enapay gave Gray one last glance before carrying Takoda out of the room.

Gray was left with a very strong feeling he'd just lost everything he'd hoped to someday have.

* * * *

Enapay settled Takoda under the covers before climbing in to lie beside him. He couldn't believe Gray had been so cruel. He wrapped his arms around Takoda and brought the man he loved to rest against his chest once more.

"Don't worry. We'll figure it out." Enapay felt Takoda's arm tighten around him.

"Please don't be mad at Gray," Takoda whispered.

"I am mad. Beyond mad. He had no right to tell you anything." He felt betrayed by Gray's actions. Gray had to know what the knowledge would do to Takoda.

Takoda leaned up and stared at Enapay. "You should've told me."

Enapay shook his head. "How could I? Your crow is everything to you."

Everything.

Takoda's crow meant more to him than even Enapay's love, and Enapay knew it. He felt it every time the two of them were together. Wasn't it the reason he was risking his own eagle?

"It's something I need to prepare for. What were you planning? To let me find out on my own that I've lost the ability to shift?" Takoda shook his head.

Enapay knew he couldn't tell Takoda about his daily prayers. "I hoped Father Sky could do something."

Takoda leaned down and placed a kiss over Enapay's heart. It was the first time Takoda had ever shown that level of caring.

"You try too hard to protect me," Takoda said, meeting Enapay's gaze once again.

"I love you," Enapay stated. "You protect what you love."

Takoda collapsed back against Enapay's chest. "I know I hurt you yesterday, and I'm sorry. That was *me* protecting *you*."

Enapay wondered... "Are you trying to tell me you love me, too?"

Enapay felt his spirit soar at the declaration. Takoda's next sentence had him plummeting back to earth once again.

"That's why I want you to give Gray a chance."

Enapay stiffened. He knew there was no way Takoda could know about his attraction to the other man. Had Gray planted the seed in Takoda's mind? "What?"

Takoda ran his hand idly over Enapay's bare chest. "He likes you. He wants you."

“But I love you,” Enapay tried to argue. *Gray wants me.* The confirmation of what he’d already suspected added fuel to his anger towards the man. Had Gray told Takoda about his illness to drive some sort of wedge between Enapay and Takoda?

“But I can’t make you happy the way Gray can. I know it, and deep in your heart, you know it too.”

Enapay pulled Takoda up his body until they were face to face. “What’re you talking about? I just found out you love me. Why in Father Sky’s name would that not be enough to make me happy?”

“You know me better than anyone else. Search your soul and you’ll find the answer to that question.” Takoda rolled away from Enapay and stood beside the bed. “I need to use the bathroom, and then I’m going to eat the dinner Gray prepared for us. If you can forgive Gray for telling me what I had a right to know, join us.”

Takoda walked out of the room, leaving Enapay to figure out what had just happened. He rolled over and buried his face in the pillow. The conversation with Takoda the previous day played over and over in his head.

“I can’t live like this, and by nature, we can’t be together in our bird skins. My feelings for you aren’t enough. I’ll never be able to be with you, Enapay. You need to understand that.”

Enapay squeezed his eyes shut as Takoda’s words continued to assault him.

“It’s not that I hate being in my man skin. It’s just not comfortable for long. I find it...suffocating. A relationship, even one built on love, wouldn’t last.”

Clutching the pillow in his arms, Enapay rolled over onto his back. Evidently, the news about his inability to shift hadn’t changed Takoda’s mind. Was Takoda planning to do what Enapay had feared?

Enapay tossed the pillow onto the bed and struggled to untangle himself from the blankets. He walked into the kitchen and stared at Takoda, who was sitting calmly at the table. He had to know the truth. “Will you kill yourself if you can’t shift?”

Takoda set down the glass of water and shook his head. “If my crow dies, my spirit will soon follow. I will be a living, breathing man, but I won’t be the man you’ve come to love.”

Enapay fell to his knees at Takoda’s side, aware that Gray was still in the room. “I’ll love you no matter what,” he tried to argue.

Takoda cupped the side of Enapay’s face. “I won’t let you.”

Enapay swallowed. He could see the truth in Takoda's eyes. "Please don't do this."

Takoda surprised Enapay by reaching for Gray. "Come here."

Enapay's attention swung to the blond man standing beside the counter. He could see the hesitation in Gray's expression. Enapay held his breath as Gray walked slowly over to join them at the table.

Takoda took Gray's hand and looked at Enapay. "Do you have feelings for Gray?"

Enapay had a strong feeling he knew where this was going, and he didn't want any part of it. He stood and started to walk out of the kitchen.

"Enapay!" Takoda yelled, his voice stronger than Enapay had heard in a long time.

Enapay stopped but didn't turn around.

"Do you have feelings for Gray?" Takoda asked again.

"I'm not answering that question," Enapay informed Takoda. He knew if he admitted his attraction to the man, it would be used against him. There was no possible way Enapay would allow Takoda to "fix" him up with Gray. It was wrong, plain and simple.

"You'll have to sooner or later. Why can't you be honest with me?"

Enapay spun around and crossed his arms defensively over his chest. "Because honesty hurts. I know because I was just given a big ole dose of it from you."

"I take that as a yes, then," Takoda murmured.

Enapay couldn't understand why Takoda was pushing so hard. It was obvious the smaller man wasn't planning to stop anytime soon. "Okay, yes. I'm attracted to Gray. I want to stick my cock so far up his ass he feels me for days. Is that what you wanted to hear? Does that make you feel better?"

Takoda actually grinned. "Actually, yes, it does."

"You're sick." Enapay shook his head in disgust.

"Yes, I am." Once again, tears filled Takoda's eyes. "And whether or not I find my way back to my crow, I need to see you happy. You won't get that from me, but if you'd open your eyes, you would see Gray is right in front of you. Offering you what I'll never be able to."

Enapay found himself speechless. He glanced at Gray who appeared completely dumbstruck by the entire conversation. Did Takoda just expect Enapay to say 'okay' and drag Gray into the bedroom?

"I'm going home," he called as he headed to the front door. His head was spinning as he tried to imagine Takoda giving him to Gray. *Yes*. That's exactly what it felt like.

"What're you trying to do?" Gray asked Takoda after the slam of the screen door.

"Open his eyes."

Gray sighed and sat beside Takoda. "Why? Do you really not want him to love you? Would you honestly give away what should be, and is, yours?"

Takoda rubbed his hands over his face. "I don't know anymore. I'd give almost anything to make love with Enapay, but I can't give away who I am. Don't you see? That's the price I'd have to pay."

Gray reached out and pulled Takoda's hands away from his face. As much as he hated the thought of seeing the two shifters learn to work out their differences and create a life together, his heart wouldn't let him remain silent. "Maybe what you're able to give Enapay would be enough for him."

"For how long, a year? Maybe two? He'd wake up one day and realize he gave up a chance at a real relationship to live on the scraps I'd be able to give him. That's not fair to him. We both know that."

Gray decided to lay his cards on the table. "What about me? Am I supposed to invest my heart in a man who I know would rather be with you?" Gray shook his head. "I don't think I could live like that."

He stood and squeezed Takoda's shoulder. "Why don't the two of you leave me out of it. If you want him, go to him, but don't push him toward me. It's obviously not where he'd rather be."

With a few hours yet before bedtime, Gray decided to go back to the clinic's lab. With luck, he'd be able to work himself into exhaustion. Otherwise, he knew he wouldn't be able to get a wink of sleep.

Although Gray wanted Enapay more than ever, he certainly didn't want to be a substitute for what Enapay really wanted.

* * * *

"Did you hear?" Sam Sparrol asked Gray when he walked into the clinic.

"Hear what?" Gray asked.

“They think they caught the people responsible for the gas attacks.”

Gray flipped the light in the lab on and turned back to his colleague. He struggled to muster enough emotion to even care. “Who were they?”

“Humans.”

“Duh. I mean who were they supposedly representing?”

Sam shrugged. “Some religious group, I think.”

The door opened behind him and Hakan, Ryker and Daniel stepped into the hallway.

“We need to speak to you,” Hakan said to Gray.

Gray immediately wondered if Enapay or Takoda had talked to the three men. He gave Sam a nod, dismissing him, and gestured to the lab. Once the group assembled in the small room, Gray crossed his arms. “What can I help you with?”

Hakan shut the door. “We just received a call from the United States Department of the Interior.”

“About the guys they caught?” Gray asked.

Hakan nodded. “They think they might be shifter.”

“What? Sam just said they were human.” Gray couldn’t believe a shifter, any shifter, would do something as heinous as what had been done to a large population of the birds and shifters.

Hakan shook his head. “The press is reporting the information the government fed them. But according to Roger Laughlen, our contact, the men taken into custody have refused to answer any of the questions they’ve been asked.”

“So why do they think they’re shifters?” Gray asked.

The three men looked at each other before Hakan finally spoke up. “According to Roger, the detainees are exhibiting odd, animal-like behavior.”

Gray shook his head emphatically. “No. I’ve already told you. When in human form, shifters are one hundred percent human. There is no mixing.”

Hakan nodded. “That’s why we need you to go to D.C. As far as we know, you’re the only shifter expert that can explain it to them. They won’t listen to us because of who we are.”

Gray continued to shake his head. “I can’t.” He didn’t want to tell the three men he couldn’t leave with things the way they were between him and Enapay. “Things with...” He shook his head. “I need to work some stuff out with Enapay.”

Ryker scratched his jaw and elbowed Hakan. "Can you do that if he goes with you? Honestly, Gray, you're the only hope we have of getting those bozos in Washington to believe these guys aren't shifters. Besides, Enapay might be able to help you flush out the truth about the men being held."

The first thing Gray thought of was being alone with Enapay, but then he crashed back to reality. Hadn't Enapay rushed out of his house earlier to get away from him? "He won't go."

"Ask him," Daniel pleaded. "Please. We need your help."

"How long will it take?" Gray asked.

"Couple days, maybe more, maybe less," Hakan answered.

"I've got the private jet standing by. We can get you into D.C. by morning," Ryker told Gray.

"What about Takoda?" Gray asked.

"We'll take him to our house," Daniel informed him. "I'm sure once we explain the situation, he'll understand."

Gray shook his head. There was no way he would betray Enapay's trust a second time. "About me going, yeah, but how are you going to explain Enapay?"

"So we think of another excuse why Enapay needs to go with you," Hakan said.

Gray knew exactly what he could say to Takoda to help the smaller man understand the need for Enapay to travel with him. "I'll take care of Takoda if one of you can talk Enapay into going."

Gray's only consolation was he knew Takoda's human body was getting stronger by the hour. At least he didn't feel as guilty about leaving him for a few days. "I'll talk to Sam about checking in on Takoda once a day or so."

Hakan turned and opened the door. "I'll go talk to Enapay. You do what you need to and call us when you're ready for a ride to the airport."

As the three men left the lab, Gray mentally went over the research materials he'd need to prove to the United States Government the men they had in custody weren't shifters. He knew if word got out the men were indeed shifters, Refuge would be besieged by radical groups hell bent on wiping the shifters from the face of the earth.

Hakan had been right. Gray's ability to talk for the shifters was of the utmost importance.

Chapter Four

Gray glanced over his shoulder at the white-knuckled man toward the back of the private jet. Enapay wouldn't even speak to him, which Gray figured he deserved. It still wasn't clear what Hakan had said to convince Enapay to go on the trip to D.C., but the shifter definitely wasn't happy.

Gray turned back around and fought with himself. It was obvious Enapay wasn't dealing well with the flight, but it seemed equally clear the bigger man wanted little to do with Gray.

When he heard the clank of the metal seatbelt landing against the seat moments before Enapay ran past him to the restroom, Gray became increasingly concerned. He unfastened his own safety belt and strode toward the small restroom.

"Enapay?" Gray knocked on the door. "Can I get you some water?"

When Gray received no response, he crossed to the service area and extracted a bottle of water from the small refrigerator. It was several moments before Enapay opened the door, wiping his face with a wet hand towel.

"Are you okay?"

Enapay shook his head. "It's different."

Gray lead Enapay to a long couch stretched against one side of the aircraft. He was more than a little surprised Enapay actually let him. "The flying?"

Enapay nodded and leaned forward, clutching his stomach. "I don't like it."

Gray had nothing to compare it to, so he kept his mouth shut. He took the towel from Enapay and carried it back to the restroom to run more cold water over it, returning moments later.

“Here.” Gray parted Enapay’s long black hair and pressed the towel against his neck. “Just breathe deep.”

Enapay rolled to his side. “I need to lie down.”

Gray got up and lifted Enapay’s long legs onto the sofa. “Let me get you something to make you more comfortable.”

Gray rose and walked to the small closet. He carried back two small pillows and a blanket. Kneeling beside Enapay, Gray carefully lifted his head and slipped the pillows underneath before spreading the blanket over the top-half of his body.

“Thank you,” Enapay mumbled.

Once again, Gray took the hand towel to the restroom to run more cool water over it. “Would you like some water now?”

Enapay nodded. “Sorry to be a child about this.”

“Don’t worry about it. A lot of people have issues with flying.” Gray found the bottle he’d dropped earlier and helped Enapay lean up enough to take several sips. He refused to acknowledge his body’s response to the warm bare skin against his arm.

He knew Hakan had packed a small bag of clothes for Enapay out of his own closet, but the stubborn shifter refused to wear them. Gray couldn’t help but wonder what the people in D.C. would think of the bare-chested man.

Even after Enapay was finished with his water, Gray continued to touch him, trying to soothe the scared, sick shifter. “Maybe you should try to sleep. We still have three hours before we touchdown in Washington.”

Enapay glanced down at the moving blanket. Gray’s hand stilled as he held his breath. “I was angry with you.”

Gray nodded. “I know. I’m sorry.”

Enapay moved his hand under the blanket to cover Gray’s where it rested on his chest. “I’m confused.”

Gray nodded again, threading his fingers through Enapay’s. “So am I.”

Enapay continued to stare into Gray’s eyes. Gray felt like he was on the cusp of his future. He knew Enapay was still trying to work things out, but Gray hoped...

“I want to kiss you, but...” Enapay gestured to his mouth.

Gray smiled, squeezing Enapay's hand. He didn't really care what Enapay's breath smelled like, but he wanted their first kiss to be special. "Just knowing you want to is enough for now."

Enapay reached up with his free hand and pulled Gray's head toward him. He pressed their foreheads together and closed his eyes. "Is it wrong of me to want you?"

"I can't answer that for you. If it helps any, I want you, too," Gray confided.

Enapay rolled to his side. "Lay with me."

Gray bit his lip. Could he press himself against Enapay and not want more? Was this him, grabbing the scraps Enapay threw his way?

When Enapay released Gray's hand and lifted the blanket in invitation, Gray knew he was lost to his body's wants. He kicked off his loafers and stretched out in the narrow empty space. *Skin. Oh fuck.* The heat of Enapay's skin burned through the thin material of Gray's shirt.

Gray draped his arm over Enapay's side and buried his face in the bigger man's neck. Enapay smelled like pine and fresh air. Gray wondered if it was the man's natural scent or cologne. He inhaled again. It was definitely one hundred percent Enapay.

Wrapped in Enapay's arms, Gray couldn't help but to kiss the skin against his lips. He felt Enapay's hand move under the hem of his sport shirt to rest on his bare flesh.

Gray's tongue snaked out to taste the skin he'd set about kissing. Enapay moaned and pulled Gray's body even closer. Gray could feel the hard ridge of Enapay's arousal pressed against his own.

He knew things were progressing too quickly, but when Enapay's hand moved down to squeeze his ass, Gray ground his cock against Enapay's buckskin-covered erection.

No longer concerned with Enapay's sour breath, Gray lifted his head and captured the mouth he'd longed to feel against his own.

"Mmm," Enapay moaned and thrust his tongue into Gray's mouth. There was no finesse to the kiss, just repressed longing as Gray accepted Enapay's ardor.

Gray reached down and released the slide-catch on his dress pants, pushing the expensive material down as far as he could without breaking the kiss. He wanted this more than he'd ever wanted anything else in his life.

With his own clothes out of the way, he reached to Enapay's waist and released the tied leather laces that held the bigger man's hand-sewn pants closed.

Enapay seemed to welcome Gray's touch on his bare hip as Gray pushed the buckskin down. "Touch me," Enapay begged, finally breaking the kiss.

"It's too fast," Gray groaned as he touched the hard length of Enapay's cock.

"I don't care." Enapay thrust his hips, sliding his cock against Gray's palm.

The plane chose that moment to hit an air pocket, bouncing Gray unexpectedly to the floor. Enapay lurched up, holding his stomach.

"What was that?" Enapay asked, his eyes wide.

With his pants and underwear around his thighs, Gray struggled to right himself. "Just an air pocket. Nothing to worry about."

Enapay swung his legs over the side of the couch and stood. For a brief moment, before the bigger man pulled his pants up, Gray had the perfect view of Enapay's glorious cock.

"I think I'm gonna be sick again."

The statement snapped Gray back to the problem at hand. He helped Enapay to the restroom. He leaned his upper body into the small space enough to hold Enapay's hair back as the shifter once again threw-up.

Their passionate interlude interrupted, Gray concentrated on the man he was all-too-quickly falling for. When Enapay held out his hand, Gray handed him a clean, wet hand towel.

Enapay clutched the towel to his face for several moments before he spoke. "I'm sorry."

Gray slid into the small space enough to help Enapay to his feet. He wrapped a supporting arm around the man's waist and helped him to the sofa once again. Gray's guilt was starting to overwhelm him. He had no idea the shifter would react so violently to the plane ride.

"Please don't apologize. I feel bad enough for agreeing to this trip in the first place."

Enapay shook his head and pulled Gray down to lie beside him. "It's not your fault. Man thinks he's mastered flying, but he doesn't have a clue what it's really like."

"What's it like?" Gray asked, resting his head on Enapay's shoulder.

Enapay shook his head. "I'm not sure I can put it into words."

"Will you try, for me?" Gray asked, kissing Enapay's strong jaw.

"It's like being completely at peace with yourself and your surroundings. It's a mixture of adrenaline and being asleep. Like your body is pumped full of energy, but your mind is left to wander. To notice and appreciate the beauty of the landscape below." Enapay shook his head. "I told you, it's not something that can be described to someone who's never experienced it."

Gray may not fully understand, but he knew there had to be a good reason Enapay was willing to sacrifice his eagle to save Takoda's crow. He wondered if Takoda enjoyed flying more than Enapay, or if it was truly love that had Enapay willing to do anything to save the crow.

Gray squeezed his eyes shut. What would it be like to have someone love him that much? He felt Enapay's arms tighten around him.

"I'm sorry I can't describe it better."

Gray shook his head. "You did just fine."

"Then why do you seem sad?" Enapay asked, smoothing his hand down the side of Gray's face.

Gray looked up to meet Enapay's gaze. "Because no matter how much I want to know and understand you, there will always be things I won't comprehend."

The corner of Enapay's mouth lifted. "Like I'll never understand how you can fly in a plane without feeling sick?"

Gray tried to return the grin, but he knew it fell short. "You'll get used to planes, but I'll never know what it's like to really fly."

Enapay kissed Gray's forehead. "I'm still confused as to why I want you so much, but I like the way you feel in my arms."

He knew what he felt for Enapay wasn't simply a physical attraction. "I can't..." Gray squeezed his eyes shut, not sure if he should verbalize what he actually felt.

"What?" Enapay prodded.

"I'm afraid of completely losing my heart to you, and then being left behind when Takoda finally opens his eyes to what's really important in life."

Enapay placed a soft kiss on Gray's lips. "What's important to Takoda now will always be what's important to him. I've finally come to realize that."

"But you'll always love him."

Enapay nodded. "Yes, but that doesn't mean I can build a future with him. As much as it hurt to hear, Takoda was right. I do want things he'll never be able to give me."

Gray's chest tightened. "And us?"

Enapay nipped Gray's lower lip. "That depends on you. Can you be with me knowing I also hold Takoda in my heart?"

"I'm not sure if I'll be happy being second best," Gray admitted.

“Second best?” Enapay shook his head. “You misunderstand. In my heart there’s no need for first or second.”

Gray once again rested his head on Enapay’s shoulder. Was the man in his arms telling him the truth? Was it really possible to love two people equally? Although Gray was incredibly fond of Takoda and found him sexually attractive, he doubted he’d ever truly love the crow shifter. It just didn’t seem possible to fall for someone you were competing against.

Gray sucked in a sharp intake of breath as realization struck him. Takoda’s choice had already been made. Gray had no reason to compete for Enapay’s love. If a relationship between him and Enapay didn’t work out, Gray knew it wouldn’t be because Enapay still loved Takoda. Didn’t he?

Still confused, Gray allowed his hand to wander over Enapay’s muscled chest. Lying within the bigger man’s comforting embrace, Gray knew he’d do everything in his power to make it work between them. For the next few days, Enapay was his, and he planned to take full advantage of the separation from Refuge.

* * * *

The weather in D.C. was cool and rainy when they landed. Gray managed to get him to put on one of the shirts Hakan had packed, but Enapay hated it. The scratchy material felt like it was making his skin raw in patches.

What should have been a simple ride from the airport had been pure hell for Enapay. Although he’d flown over towns and small cities, he’d never seen anything like Washington, D.C.

The harried pace along with the overabundance of noise was a complete shock to his system. His ears hurt, even when he muffled the sound with his hands. Gray had done what he could, trying to comfort him on the long, torturous ride to the hotel.

The cab stopped in front of a high-rise building, and Enapay gazed up before opening the door. “How far up there are we going?”

Gray reached around Enapay and opened the passenger-side rear door. “Knowing Ryker, he’s booked us the best.”

“What does that mean?” Enapay asked.

“Top floor,” Gray answered. “Come on. The quicker we get to the room, the more settled you’ll feel.”

Enapay climbed out of the cab, his hands covering his ears once again. He looked up and shook his head. How would they get up to the top? He waited on the sidewalk, jostled by the crowds of people that seemed to come out of nowhere. "I hate this place."

Gray put a comforting hand against Enapay's back and gestured to the man in the pretty red coat with gold buttons, who was getting their luggage out of the car's trunk. "He'll get our stuff."

Enapay removed a hand from his ear. "What'll he do with it?"

Gray smiled. "Take it inside, and then up to our room."

"Oh." Enapay watched the man in red carry their luggage into the building. He started to follow, but Gray led him to a different door instead. Enapay stopped dead in his tracks as the door spun around in circles.

"It's okay. When an opening comes, step inside, hold onto the bar in front of you, and then get out when you reach the inside," Gray tried to explain.

Enapay shook his head. "You do it."

He could tell Gray was trying to hide a smile as he broke away and easily walked into the strange passageway. What was wrong with using the door the man in red had used? Inside, Gray gestured for Enapay.

Once again, Enapay shook his head as the door continued to spin. He stepped back and glanced at where the man in red had disappeared and walked toward that door, easily slipping into the large building.

Gray was chuckling when Enapay reached him. "I'll get you through that revolving door before we leave D.C."

Enapay made a face at the man in front of him. "It's stupid. What's wrong with the regular door?"

"It's a climate control issue as well as a traffic flow solution."

Enapay didn't understand anything Gray said. "Whatever."

With a sympathetic smile, Gray led Enapay to a long desk. He stood patiently as Gray gave a woman his name as well as Ryker's.

Moments later, she gave Gray two plastic cards. Gray thanked her and steered Enapay to the side of the big room. They were being followed by the man in the red coat who was carrying their stuff. Enapay didn't understand why he was carrying them. They weren't heavy. He and

Gray could have easily taken them from him, but Gray made no move to do so. Enapay followed suit, not wanting to draw more attention to himself than he already had.

“I’m guessing you’ve never taken a ride in an elevator?” Gray asked.

Before he could answer, the wall slid open in front of him. Enapay jumped back and stared as Gray gripped his hand. “It’s okay. It’s perfectly safe. This will take us up to the top of the building.”

Enapay shook his head. “Are there stairs?”

Gray squeezed Enapay’s hand tighter as the wall slid closed again. “Yeah, but I can’t walk up thirty-six flights of steps. Trust me on this one, okay?”

Enapay looked into Gray’s eyes. He didn’t want to be a child about everything new. He’d already refused to learn the stupid turning door. With a deep breath, he nodded.

Gray gave him a reassuring smile and once again pushed a button on the wall. The doors opened, and Gray led Enapay inside. The man with their bags followed them in and pushed a button.

Enapay pressed himself against the back corner and held his stomach as the entire room began to move. He could tell the man in red was trying hard not to laugh, which made Enapay feel even more self-conscious.

“It’s okay.” Gray stepped directly in front of Enapay and kissed him softly on the mouth. “We’ll be on our floor in no time.”

Enapay swallowed the rising bile. The elevator was as bad as the airplane. Without the ability to fly, Enapay couldn’t understand why humans just didn’t build stuff on the ground. Why try to reach for the sky when nature hadn’t equipped them for it.

The room gave a little jump and stopped, throwing Enapay off balance. Gray caught him easily and smiled. “We’re here.”

The door opened onto a long hallway. Enapay stepped out of the room and followed Gray to a door with a number on it. He watched as Gray handed the small plastic card to the man in red. The man put the card into a box and Enapay heard a click. It was hard for Enapay to believe how many things he knew nothing about. Gray seemed to take everything in stride while Enapay was left floundering.

The man put down the suitcases and opened the door. Enapay was beginning to wonder if the man in red knew how to talk, but a steady “Thank you” when Gray handed him some money proved that he could.

The man left and Gray led Enapay into the room. He couldn’t get over the size. Evidently, this wasn’t the only room.

“Wow. When Ryker does something, he sure does it right. This room must be costing him a fortune.”

Enapay barely heard Gray as the view out the wall of glass captured his attention. He strode toward the windows and pressed his hands against the glass. For the most part, the views up and straight ahead were common to him, but when he looked down, everything seemed wrong. There should be trees and grass, not moving cars, people and buildings. The rain had stopped since they’d arrived and the sun was streaming through the clouds, shining light in sprays upon the buildings below.

Enapay felt Gray’s arms as they slid around his waist.

“Cool, huh?”

Enapay covered Gray’s hands with his own. “This is why humans build to the sky. I never understood.”

Enapay took a deep breath. “I’ll move a chair here.”

Gray kissed the side of Enapay’s neck. “Are you feeling better now?”

“Yes.” It was the truth. Safely in a rented home with Gray, the city didn’t seem so bad.

“I need to make a few calls. Would you like to take a nap?”

Enapay glanced around the room until he spotted a clock. It was almost nine in the morning. “What time do you have to leave?”

“My meeting’s at eleven, but I need a shower first.” Gray grinned, tilting his head to the side. “Would you like a quick shower?”

The thought of standing with Gray naked in the warmth of the shower began to have a direct effect on Enapay’s cock. He’d never bathed with a lover, but then again, it had been more than seventy years since he’d had someone to hold and kiss. He nodded his head, afraid his words would give away his eagerness.

Gray threaded his fingers through Enapay's hair and pulled him into a kiss. Enapay felt Gray's tongue as it rubbed against his own. Their kisses earlier came to mind and Enapay drew back. "I need to brush my teeth first."

Once again, Gray gifted Enapay with that beautiful smile. Enapay had noticed Gray doing that a lot since they'd left Refuge. He wondered if maybe Gray wasn't as happy at Refuge as he'd pretended.

"Come on. We have plenty of time to play before the car is here to pick me up." Gray took Enapay's hand and led him into another room. The bedroom was almost as big as the living room with another wall of windows.

As he waited for Gray to dig clean clothes out of his suitcase, Enapay's attention went back to the view. He knew if he ever had to live in a city, he'd want a place like the one they were in.

"Did you bring a toothbrush?" Gray asked. "If not, you can use mine, and I'll pick one up while I'm out."

Enapay turned back to Gray. "I have one."

He crossed the room to the small leather bag Hakan had loaned him and found his toothbrush. Enapay spotted something else in the bottom of the suitcase and pulled it out. "What's this?"

Gray's eyebrows rose as he took the bottle from Enapay. "Lube. Did you pack that?"

Enapay shook his head.

Gray started to chuckle. "Hakan must be fairly hopeful."

"What is it for?"

Gray's cheeks turned red as he opened the bottle. "Hold out your hand."

Enapay did as asked and watched as Gray dripped several drops onto his hand. He rubbed his fingertips together, noticing the silky feel of the liquid.

"Human's use this when they have sex. It prepares your lover's...entrance," Gray explained, his face reddening even more.

Enapay looked back down at his hand. He rubbed his fingers together again. "Much nicer than spit or animal fat."

Gray's eyes widened. "Yes."

The thought of Hakan putting something used for sex in his suitcase worried Enapay.
“Do you think Hakan knows I like you?”

Gray shrugged and held up the bottle. “I think he must.”

Enapay wasn’t sure if that bothered him or not. He knew how close Hakan and Takoda were. Was his friend mad at him for wanting Gray?

Gray stepped forward and kissed Enapay’s cheek. “Don’t worry. Hakan is one of the wisest people I’ve ever met. I think this is his way of giving his blessing.”

“But Takoda...”

“Hakan loves two men equally. I guess he doesn’t see anything wrong with you doing the same.”

“What about you?” Enapay asked, running his hands down Gray’s sides to rest on his hips.

“Do I think it’s wrong?” Gray questioned, his light brown eyebrows drawing together.

“Could you ever love two men at the same time?” Enapay knew he might be asking the impossible, but he had to take a chance. Being with Gray meant the world to him, but he knew he’d never fully get over the desire to be with Takoda.

Gray’s face reddened yet again. “I don’t know. I’m not...” Gray cleared his throat. “I haven’t had many lovers. I’ve spent the majority of my life in a lab.”

By the tone of Gray’s voice and the expression on his face, Enapay could tell the man was embarrassed by the confession. “Are you saying you don’t know if you could please two men?”

Gray bit his bottom lip. “I’m not sure I’ve ever pleased one, let alone two. What if...”

Enapay cut Gray off with a deep kiss. He tried to put all the passion he felt into the exchange. “Shower with me. Let me be the judge.”

Gray shook his head. “I don’t think the shower would be right for our first time.”

“Then what would the shower be right for?”

Gray rubbed his erection against Enapay. “Sucking you off. Besides, I’d rather not get up and leave immediately after you make love to me.”

Enapay smiled. He liked the idea of sleeping with Gray in his arms. The idea of Gray sucking his cock sounded fun, too. “Okay.”

Without further conversation, they began to undress. Enapay was happy to get out of the scratchy shirt as he flung it toward the bed. He reached to his side and untied the leather knot holding up his pants and let them fall to the floor, completely unashamed of his body.

Gray took more time when it came to his pants. Enapay didn't understand the man's hesitation. He'd seen and felt Gray's nice-sized cock.

"What's wrong?" he asked, his hands going to Gray's zipper.

"You're just so beautiful. I don't compare."

Enapay grunted and pushed Gray's suit pants to the floor. He pulled off the man's shoes and pushed down his socks. The lovely shaft he'd felt earlier was still as glorious as he'd remembered. Enapay couldn't help but to swipe the crown with his tongue.

"You're the beautiful one," Enapay told his lover. He nuzzled the short thatch of hair with his nose, inhaling the scent of the man standing over him. Enapay found he quite enjoyed being with a man who had hair surrounding his cock and sprinkling his chest.

Gray moaned when Enapay licked up the length of his cock. "Nice."

Enapay liked pleasing the softhearted man. As much as he wanted Gray to suck his cock, he realized the other man needed it more. He wrapped his hands around Gray's hips and slid his mouth as far down the erection as he could, rubbing the protruding veins with his tongue.

"Oh, fuck!" Gray cried as he put his hands on Enapay's shoulders.

Enapay grinned around the cock in his mouth as he began to move up and down the shaft. He relished the taste clinging to his tongue as Gray's crown released large amounts of pre-cum.

With his throat full, Enapay began to move Gray's hips, willing the man to fuck his mouth. Gray caught on quickly and soon was thrusting in and out of Enapay's mouth. It was all Enapay could do to keep up with the silky fluid running down his throat.

"I'm gonna come," Gray warned.

Enapay released one hand from Gray's hip and wrapped it around the base of his lover's erection before nodding. With the head and nearly two inches of Gray's length still in his mouth, Enapay began sucking, willing the seed of his lover to erupt.

With a loud grunt, Gray's fingers dug into Enapay's shoulders as the first jet of cum filled Enapay's mouth. He touched the tip of his tongue to the slit on Gray's cockhead, begging for more.

With the taste of Gray's seed, the relationship between the two of them was cemented in Enapay's heart. He wasn't sure if it was a trait common to shifters, but Enapay knew in that moment that Gray was meant to be his mate. He pushed thoughts of Takoda away, not wanting to spoil the feelings of love that began to overwhelm him.

When the last of Gray's cum had found its way to Enapay's stomach, Enapay pulled his lover down into his arms. "We've been blessed."

"Huh?" Gray asked, his gaze still unfocused.

"Your seed is different from the other lovers I've been with," Enapay tried to explain.

"Different? Like in a bad way?" Gray questioned.

Enapay shook his head. "Whatever else happens, I know Father Sky brought us together for a reason. I will no longer question his wisdom."

Gray didn't appear convinced. "What about Takoda?"

Enapay shrugged his shoulders. Although he knew Gray was his chosen mate, he couldn't help wonder why Father Sky had drawn him to Takoda in the first place. "I don't know. Hopefully things will become clearer once we're all together again."

Gray curled his body around Enapay's. "Will you leave me if you discover Takoda should be your true mate?"

Enapay shook his head. "What has happened between us cannot be undone, nor do I wish it to be."

Gray nodded and rested his head on Enapay's shoulder.

Enapay wondered if Hakan could shed some light on the situation for him. He knew the human, Jack, was mated to Toby, the King of the Wolves. Maybe Father Sky had a similar human/shifter arrangement in mind for Enapay and Gray. But why?

Chapter Five

Takoda sat at the kitchen table, sipping a cup of coffee. Even though he'd not had the strange dark brew before coming to Refuge, he'd quickly become accustomed to the taste.

He watched as Daniel prepared breakfast, uncertain of the foods he saw the man cooking. "What's that?"

Daniel paused and turned to Takoda. "Sausage links. Have you had them before?"

Takoda shook his head. "I had some bacon at Gray's. Is it the same?"

Daniel shook the sausage back and forth. "Kind of. They're both from pigs, but they have a different flavor. Do you eat eggs?"

Takoda's stomach growled. "I eat just about everything lately."

"It's good to see you're feeling better. You'll gain your weight back in no time." Daniel turned back and placed the sausage in the pan.

Takoda still couldn't figure out the King of the Coyotes. He knew he'd been hard on Daniel since they'd first met a few years earlier, but the man had never been anything but kind to him. He wondered if it was that trait Hakan had fallen in love with.

Although he didn't think of himself as a happy person, Takoda did enjoy his life as a crow. He wondered about Daniel. "Are you happier in your man skin than when you are in your real form?"

Daniel turned a knob on the stove and took a sip of his coffee. "This is my real form. I was a man first. The same as you."

Takoda shook his head. "I may have been a man first, but I was always meant to be a crow."

Daniel narrowed his eyes and set his cup on the counter. "Can I speak honestly without you getting your feelings hurt?"

Takoda nodded. He braced himself for what was to come.

"I think you like being a crow because you don't have to deal with the everyday emotions humans do."

Takoda started to disagree but Daniel continued talking. "You didn't feel this way when you were in your relationship with Hakan did you?"

"No, but that was a long time ago," Takoda tried to defend himself.

"And with the hurt of that break-up still fresh in your mind and heart, you took to the sky." Daniel shrugged. "All I'm saying is, if you really wanted to, you could get used to living as a man. I know life was hard for you, it was hard for all of us, but things are different now."

Takoda turned his attention back to his coffee cup. He knew there was no sense in denying what Daniel said. Life *was* much easier as a crow. When Father Sky had guilted him into leaving Hakan, he hurt more than he thought possible.

Although the devastation of losing Hakan continued to haunt him, Takoda thought he'd done a good job of getting on with his life. He knew his heart wouldn't handle another broken relationship, so he didn't indulge. Loving Enapay wasn't supposed to happen. He'd fought his feelings for years before finally falling for his best friend.

"Are you pouting?" Daniel asked, setting a plate of food in front of him.

"No. I'm thinking. That was the entire point of your speech, wasn't it?" Takoda answered. He knew it came out snide, but he could only be civil for a short time to the man who'd finally won Hakan's heart.

Daniel sighed. "Yeah, I guess so."

"Breakfast is on the table!" Daniel yelled toward the ceiling.

Takoda knew he should apologize to Daniel, but he hated it. He hated himself even more for still holding a grudge against the man. It wasn't Daniel's fault he'd been the chosen one to bridge the earth and sky. He heard Hakan and Ryker laughing before they even came into the room. Takoda braced himself. It was never easy being around Hakan, even more so now that his old lover appeared so fucking happy with his life and men.

"Morning," Ryker greeted Takoda as he stopped to give Daniel a quick kiss.

"Morning," Takoda replied.

Hakan came into the room and immediately headed for the coffee pot. “How’re you feeling, Takoda?”

“Physically? Good. The best yet.”

“Good.” Hakan took a seat at the table. He threaded his fingers together and apparently said a quick prayer before looking down at his breakfast. “Looks good, baby.”

Daniel gazed at Hakan with so much love in his eyes it made Takoda uncomfortable. After spending time with the three men, there was absolutely no doubt in Takoda’s mind they all loved each other. His thoughts drifted to Enapay and the things Daniel had said. Was he pushing Enapay away merely because he wanted to live as a crow, or was he also protecting his heart by making it impossible for the two of them to be together?

* * * *

By the time Gray unlocked the door to his hotel room, he was completely drained and out of sorts. The men in custody continued to claim they possessed shifter abilities, yet not one of them would demonstrate that special trait.

As much as he hated to do it, he’d have to beg Enapay to go with him in the morning. His only hope of proving the men weren’t what they claimed to be was another shifter.

When he walked into the room, Enapay was exactly where Gray knew he would be, in a chair in front of the window. It was obvious by the expanse of bronzed skin showing above the chair, his lover had opted not to put the shirt Hakan loaned him back on.

Gray set his briefcase down as Enapay glanced over his shoulder.

“How’d it go?” Enapay asked, holding out his hand.

Gray pulled off his suit coat and tie before joining Enapay in front of the wall of glass. “Not good.”

He took Enapay’s hand and rounded the chair. “Fuck,” Gray gasped as he realized Enapay was completely nude.

Enapay grinned. “It’s the way I’m most comfortable.”

Gray held up his free hand as he was guided to straddle Enapay’s lap. “Don’t let me stop you.”

With his knees on either side of Enapay’s hips, he leaned forward and kissed the lips he’d thought about for the last six hours. With the first swipe of Enapay’s tongue, Gray began to feel better. His mood slowly perked up as Enapay continued to lavish him with licks and kisses.

“I missed you,” Enapay said, nipping Gray’s lower lip.

Gray scooted closer, rubbing his cock against the hard ridge of Enapay’s erection. “I missed you, too. I wish you’d have been with me. I could’ve used your help.”

Enapay’s entire body stiffened. “Was someone mean to you?”

Gray smoothed Enapay’s long black hair out of his face to trail over the back of the chair. “Not mean exactly. Nobody threatened me or anything. It was just an overall feeling of distrust, even by the government officials I was trying to help.”

Gray leaned against Enapay’s chest, resting his head on his lover’s shoulder. “Ignorance is the main culprit. They just don’t understand shifters. I tried to explain it to them, but they shook their heads in disbelief. I became so infuriated that I told them I’d give them one more day of my time before I returned to Refuge.”

“And the men who poisoned my people?” Enapay asked as he rubbed his hands up and down Gray’s back.

“They still claim to be shifters, but I still disagree. They’re mimicking animals and birds while in their human form. We both know that isn’t the case for real shifters. I tried everything I could think of to convince them to shift, but I got nothing.”

“You want me to go with you to see if I can tell what they are,” Enapay realized.

“Yes. We have to get to the bottom of this thing before the public starts blaming the shifters for their own misfortunes.” Gray felt Enapay’s hand roam to his ass. It didn’t matter just then that Enapay hadn’t answered him in regards to going with him. The press of his lover’s fingers to his hole, even through the thin fabric of his pants, was exquisite.

Gray pushed against Enapay’s touch and began kissing the bronzed skin of the man’s neck. He reached between them and unfastened his slacks. “More.”

With a deep reverberating groan, Enapay began to push Gray’s pants down. “Want you.”

Gray nodded as he slid off Enapay’s lap and removed his shoes and clothing. “Lube?”

Enapay reached deep into the space between the low arm of the chair and the cushion and produced the gifted bottle of lube.

Gray’s eyebrow quirked up. “You planned this?”

Enapay shook his head. “I got horny earlier just thinking about you. I...uh...”

Gray smiled. He loved that Enapay jacked off while thinking about him. “I don’t care how many times you take yourself in hand as long as you leave some for me.”

Enapay chuckled. "No threat of that not happening."

Gray resumed his position on Enapay's lap, lifting his ass enough to give Enapay room to play. "I'm all yours."

"Really?" Enapay asked, slicking his fingers.

"Yeah, really." A momentary image of Takoda flashed through Gray's mind, but he pushed it away when he felt the first touch of his lover's hand against his hole. Gray felt goose bumps rise on his arms and legs as Enapay rimmed the sensitive puckered flesh. He sighed as the pad of one finger added pressure to the tight muscle until it pushed inside.

"Been a long time?" Enapay asked.

Gray nodded, and Enapay began sawing the long digit in and out of his body. As good as the blowjob was earlier, it truly was foreplay compared with the feel of Enapay inside of him. He wanted more. He needed Enapay's cock.

"Need you," he groaned.

"Not yet. One more." Enapay slid another finger inside Gray. "Don't want to hurt you."

Gray's body wanted to scream in protest, but his heart melted at the thoughtful gesture. He fought hard not to wrap his hand around his cock. Wait. It was already apparent Enapay was a lover like no other he'd ever had.

Of course, bars and backrooms weren't the place to find meaningful connections. The few actual boyfriends he'd had over the years hadn't lasted long. Gray's obsession with his work had always been a problem. Combine that with the fact he'd simply never found someone he wanted to spend more than a few hours with at a time, and his love life had suffered.

Enapay rubbed across his prostate, sending Gray's body into spasms that threatened to push him over the edge.

"Please," Gray pleaded. Had he ever begged before?

Enapay ran his tongue up the side of Gray's face as he removed his fingers and applied lube to his cock. "I like this stuff."

Gray chuckled. He knew Enapay's days of spit and bear fat were over. "I had a feeling you would."

Enapay placed his hands on Gray's hips and lifted him to hover above the thick lubed cock. "You do it."

Gray reached behind his back, found the slippery erection and positioned it to his hole. He slowly lowered himself, pushing the first two inches inside. He was forced to stop and take a breath, not from pain but an overwhelming pleasure that threatened to envelop his entire soul.

“Are you hurt?” Enapay asked, his hands still holding Gray up.

Gray shook his head. He gazed into Enapay’s eyes and whispered, “This was meant to be.”

Understanding dawned in Enapay’s expression. “Yes. Father Sky must be pleased.”

Without an ounce of pain, Gray lowered himself on Enapay’s lap. His lover’s entire length fit perfectly inside him. Gray felt as though someone had taken the blinders from his eyes. Everything was incredibly clear to him. The reason he’d made the decision to join the shifters at Refuge. The undeniable draw he felt toward Enapay had been designed before he’d even arrived.

“I’m your mate,” Gray realized verbally. He shook his head as he began sliding up and down on Enapay’s erection. Why had he been chosen? What purpose could Father Sky possibly see for him?

A vision of him and Enapay making love to Takoda clouded his mind. It was more than a thought. Premonition? He felt he was being bombarded with flashes of the future. He remembered his head tipping backward, and the next thing he knew, he was on the floor with Enapay on top of him.

Gray opened his eyes. “I saw things.”

Enapay nodded but continued to thrust in and out of Gray’s hole. “As did I.”

Gray bit his bottom lip at the exquisite bump and grind of Enapay’s hips as he hammered into Gray at lightning speed. His body couldn’t get enough, and Gray hitched his legs higher around Enapay’s torso, opening himself even further.

Enapay cried his name as his body shook with the force of his release. With the first jet of seed, Gray’s visions returned. *Flying*. He was soaring over Refuge with Enapay and Takoda beside him.

Enapay had been right. It was an indescribable feeling. One he’d hold within himself for the rest of his life. He thanked Father Sky for the gift so graciously given as he gave up control. His climax was like none other before. Each pearled strand of cum that shot from his body felt more like a promise than a simple orgasm.

He pulled Enapay down into a kiss, pushing his tongue deep into his mate's mouth. Gray's hands grabbed on to the man he loved, trying to find his rock in the storm of visions that assaulted him once again.

Gray was unsure of how much time had elapsed when he opened his eyes to find Enapay cleaning him with a warm cloth. "Takoda," he whispered.

Enapay nodded, but said nothing for several moments. "You are meant for great things."

Gray shook his head. In his visions, he stood in front of crowds of people from all over the world, Enapay by his side, Takoda overhead. "*We're* meant for great things."

"Together we will educate humans on shifters."

The cell phone in Gray's coat pocket began to ring, threatening to interrupt their epiphanies.

"Ignore it," Enapay growled.

Gray didn't have a problem with that until the room phone began to ring. *Shit*. "It must be important."

"And so is this," Enapay countered.

"Yes." Gray pulled Enapay down for another kiss. To know he was chosen for two men was overwhelming. What if he wasn't successful in convincing the people of the world they were under no threat from the shifters?

A knock on the door surprised them both.

"Dr. Whitmore? There's an urgent message for you from Hakan," someone yelled through the door.

Gray released his hold on Enapay, sliding his legs to the thick carpet below. He knew it had to be a life or death matter if Hakan contacted the front desk. Gray could only think of one thing. "Takoda."

Enapay jumped to his feet and headed for the door as Gray struggled to get his pants on.

"You're not dressed," he called to Enapay.

Enapay shrugged and opened the door, evidently unconcerned with his nudity. The man's eyes went wide as he held out a slip of paper. Needless to say, the man didn't stick around for a tip. Enapay shut the door and carried the paper to Gray.

"What does it say?" Enapay asked.

Gray was momentarily surprised Enapay hadn't read the message for himself until he realized his lover probably couldn't read. "It's just Hakan's phone number with the word urgent underlined.

He reached for his suit coat and pulled out his phone, hitting speed dial.

"Gray," Hakan answered. "Something's wrong with Takoda."

"Why, what's going on?" Gray asked.

"He was fine earlier but he collapsed after his follow-up appointment at the clinic. Sam doesn't know what's wrong, but Takoda's temperature is sky high and he's delirious. They have him strapped down with a damn tube down his throat to help him breathe, but Sam isn't sure he'll make it."

"Tell Ryker to call the pilot. We'll be home as fast as we can." Gray started to close the phone but stopped and put it back to his ear. "Hakan?"

"Yeah."

"Make sure you tell Takoda that Enapay is on his way."

Hakan made a noise in his throat. "Before they got the tube down him, he was gasping both of your names."

The information knocked Gray on his ass. Were his visions coming true already?
"Thanks. Just tell him, okay?"

"Will do."

Gray hung up the phone and turned to Enapay. His lover had gone pale. "We need to get back to Takoda. Something's wrong with him and they don't know what it is, but he's calling for us."

"Us?"

Gray nodded. He wondered if Enapay knew what the bit of information would mean.
"We'll need to talk on the plane ride back. Right now we need to get the hell out of here and to the airport."

Enapay wrapped his arms around Gray. "He can't die. It will all fall apart if he dies."

Gray couldn't help but to think Enapay knew more than he was willing to say. It couldn't be good if his lover was hiding the truth from him. Although they'd yet to verbalize their individual visions, Gray wondered if they'd been the same. "Let's get out of here."

* * * *

Stretched out on the couch, wrapped in each other's arms, Enapay kissed the top of Gray's head. He'd held his tongue until after they'd taken off from the airport. The conversation he knew was coming could become touchy, and the last thing he wanted was to hurt his new mate. "He's meant to be with us."

Gray surprised Enapay with a nod. "Yes."

"How do you feel about that?" Enapay asked. He knew Gray cared for Takoda, but loving him was an entirely different matter.

"I think it's the only way it'll work. Unless we bring him into our relationship, the love you feel for Takoda will always feel threatening to me."

"Does it anger you?" Enapay asked.

"No." Gray moved to lean up on his elbow, meeting Enapay's gaze. "I think I saw the future when you made love to me. Is that a normal part of the mating process?"

Enapay grinned. "No. I think it was a gift from Father Sky, but I saw it too."

"Do you think Takoda will be open to us?" Gray questioned.

"I think what Takoda wants in life is to be loved but accepted for who he is. A relationship with him won't be easy, but it will have its rewards. Despite what most people think, Takoda has a loving heart. I know I didn't even see that side of him until recently."

"In my visions, Takoda was always there, either making love with us or flying overhead."

Enapay had the same vision, although he knew not to take the sight of Takoda overhead literally. "I think it means that even if he's not with us physically, he'll always be in our hearts."

Gray settled back down against Enapay's chest. Since the phone call earlier, Enapay had wondered if he'd read his visions incorrectly. What if Father Sky was trying to tell them Takoda would always be with them in spirit if not in body? Did Father Sky know Takoda's health would take a turn for the worse? Maybe Enapay and Gray were being prepared for Takoda's death.

As the plane leveled out, Enapay's body slowly became more settled. From his visions, he knew he'd be spending a great deal of time on airplanes. Gray was meant to educate the masses, and he wouldn't be able to do that from the comfort of Refuge.

Enapay still wasn't sure what he thought of a life on the go, but he knew Gray would need him. Gray shifted several times in Enapay's arms. He knew something was bothering his new mate. "What's wrong?"

Gray shook his head. "I can't help but wonder how far back Father Sky's plans for me go. Was I always meant to be a geneticist, or am I here with you now because I became one?"

"Did you always want to be a doctor?" Enapay asked, rubbing Gray's back.

"Not always. When I was a boy, I wanted to be a policeman. I think it was a pretty normal thing back then. But then my brother and sisters started to get sick."

Enapay didn't understand what sick siblings had to do with Gray's choice of careers until his lover continued.

"I was the oldest. Then came Sarah, Julie and Jacob were the twins. They all appeared perfectly healthy. When Sarah was around six, she started to trip and fall a lot. At first, my parents thought she was just being careless, but then her vision started to decline. They took her to a number of specialists and she was diagnosed with Batten disease which is a neurodegenerative problem."

Enapay struggled with the terminology Gray used so easily. He didn't know what all the words meant, but he could tell by the tone of Gray's voice it wasn't good.

"I've already told you I was a klutz. Well, once Sarah was diagnosed and they found out it was genetic, my parents became concerned and had all us kids tested. Julie and Jacob tested positive. I was negative." Gray shrugged and rubbed his cheek against Enapay's chest. "They all died within a matter of twelve years."

Enapay felt a lump form in his throat as his eyes began to sting with unshed tears. "I'm sorry."

Gray nodded. "I don't know if I ever forgave myself for being the lone survivor. I think my parents had a similar reaction. They spent so much time taking care of my brother and sisters I was pushed to the side."

Enapay placed a kiss on the top of Gray's head. He couldn't imagine the scared boy watching his family fall apart around him.

"Don't get me wrong. I didn't blame my folks. I know it was hard for them to know it came from them. I think when they looked at me, I was a reminder of everything they would miss out on with their other children. When it came time to go to college, genetics seemed like an obvious choice. I needed to know why I was spared."

"And did you find out?" Enapay asked.

"No. But now I'm wondering if I was saved for a reason."

Enapay thought about it. Father Sky was known to see far beyond the obvious. It was entirely possible Gray was saved the same fate his brother and sisters were subjected to for a higher purpose. Unfortunately, they would probably never learn the truth.

What was apparent was Gray's place in the future of the shifter world. Through educating the public on what shifters are and aren't, perhaps life would be easier for everyone. No longer would shifters be forced to live in fear. They would have more freedom to venture out into the world and enjoy the same things most humans took for granted. On the other hand, humans would learn there was no need to fear something simply because they didn't understand it.

Enapay settled in for the long flight with his mate in his arms. Whatever happened, he knew he'd always stand by Gray. If it meant getting used to airplanes, then so be it.

* * * *

Gray put a comforting hand on Enapay's shoulder before joining Hakan, Ryker and Daniel in the corner of the room. "How's he doing?"

Hakan lowered his eyes and shook his head. "He's not responding to anything Sam tried."

Gray knew medicine could only do so much. He turned to Daniel. "What about the spring you told me about?"

Daniel bit his lip and glanced at Hakan. "We've tried it before with the other birds and it didn't work, remember?"

Gray nodded. "This isn't a shifter illness anymore. This is a human illness."

Daniel shook his head. "Doesn't matter now. I don't think Takoda would even last the trip up to the spring."

"What the hell is wrong with you people?" He walked out of the room to the nurses' station. "Give me Takoda's file."

Nancy handed Gray the thick file.

"Thanks," Gray mumbled as he carried it back towards his lab. He studied the documents on the way, stopping in his tracks before he ever reached the lab. "What the fuck?"

Gray turned back around and approached the nurse again. "Where's Dr. Sparrol?"

"He left almost two hours ago after he got off shift. Why? Is something wrong?" Nancy asked.

"Who ordered this medication?" he asked pointing to an entry in the file.

“Dr. Sparrol. Why?”

Gray held out his hand. “Give me the keys to the medicine closet.”

Nancy dug into the front pocket of her smock and produced a small key ring. Gray snatched the key and took off, not even thanking the nurse. He grabbed what he needed and raced back to Takoda’s room.

Without taking the time to say anything to the others in the room, Gray whipped the sheet off Takoda and injected him with the proper dose of epinephrine. After pulling the needle out of Takoda’s thigh muscle, he looked at Hakan. “Find Sam Sparrol.”

“Why? What did you just give Takoda?” Hakan asked.

“Epinephrine. According to his chart, Sam gave Takoda penicillin earlier today. It clearly says in his file he’s allergic.”

“Maybe he just didn’t see it,” Enapay piped up.

“If it was truly a mistake, he would have caught it when he saw Takoda’s reaction to it. Besides, what kind of doctor leaves a man dying in his clinic just because it’s time for him to be off duty?” Gray shook his head. “This was intentional. My guess is he’s running. If you told him I was on my way back here, he had to know I’d figure it out.”

Hakan’s eyes narrowed, but it was Ryker who spoke up. “I don’t understand. Sam’s saved hundreds of shifters.”

“Has he? And how many died under his care?”

Hakan simply nodded and left the room. Gray could tell by the expression on the Guardian’s face he’d stop at nothing to find Sam.

“I’ll call Toby and Jack,” Ryker announced, leaving in Hakan’s wake.

Gray recapped the syringe and placed it in the sharps bin before going around the opposite side of the bed. He stepped up behind Enapay and placed both hands on his lover’s shoulders. “Are you okay?”

Enapay leaned back, resting his head on Gray’s chest. “Is he going to live?”

“Yes.” Gray turned to Daniel. “Would you do me a huge favor and find Takoda’s folder? I think I left it at the nurses’ station, but I was so upset, who the hell knows.”

The moment Daniel left the room, Gray knelt at Enapay’s side and kissed him. “He’ll be okay in a few minutes. I’m going to remove the oxygen tube once he’s able to breathe on his own.”

Enapay stared at Gray through glazed eyes. "Why would Dr. Sparrol try to kill him?"

"I'm not sure, but it makes me question a lot of things."

Daniel came back into the room with Takoda's file.

"Thanks. Can I ask you one more favor?" Gray asked.

"Sure."

"Bring me my briefcase from the car? I need to check the file I have on Takoda with this one."

"You think..." Daniel began.

"I don't know, but I need to figure it out. Once Takoda's breathing on his own, I'd still like to get him up to that spring of yours."

"Of ours," Daniel corrected.

Gray nodded. He knew Daniel was trying to tell him he was one of them, shifter or not. "Of ours."

* * * *

Enapay continued to hold Takoda's hand. Gray had taken the tube out of Takoda's throat, but Enapay was still worried. Actually, he was worried about both the men he loved.

He glanced at Gray. His lover sat in the corner on the floor surrounded by charts and other pieces of paper. Enapay wondered if Gray was blaming himself for something Sparrol had done. "You okay? Want me to get you something to drink?"

Gray looked up from the tablet he held. "Huh?"

"I asked if you needed anything."

Gray shook his head. "There are a few gaps in Takoda's chart. There are four different occasions when the nurses noted Dr. Sparrol visiting Takoda, but then Sparrol didn't write anything in the chart before he left."

"Is that wrong?" Enapay asked.

Gray nodded. "Sam should've at least signed the chart." Gray blew out a heavy breath. "It's all pretty suspicious."

"Go do what you need to do. I'll stay here with Takoda."

Gray set down the tablet and stood. He walked over and sat on the end of Takoda's bed. He held out his hand and Enapay threaded their fingers together. Gray rested his free hand on

Takoda's lower leg. His gaze seemed riveted on the small sick shifter. "He looks so peaceful in sleep."

"He does," Enapay agreed. He could see the pain and guilt in Gray's expression. "None of this was your fault."

Gray looked away from Takoda. "Really? I was brought in to help save your people. I'm afraid I got so caught up in my attraction to you that it made me sloppy. I should've known..."

Enapay leaned over and captured Gray's mouth in a deep kiss. He would not let his lover take the blame for something a mad man did. Gray was the most loving and caring human he'd ever known. He tried to put all his feelings into each swipe of his tongue. There was no longer any doubt in his mind he was meant to love Gray, and love he did.

A noise from beside him caught his attention and he drew back. He glanced at Takoda and smiled. "Hey."

"I see the two of you have figured it out." Although Takoda's voice was scratchy, the meaning came through loud and clear.

"Some of it," Gray answered.

Enapay looked at Gray. What did his lover mean by that? He noticed Gray's hand idly stroking Takoda's lower leg and began to wonder.

Gray reached for the button on the side of Takoda's bed. "Nancy, could you bring in a cup of ice chips?"

"Right away," she answered over the intercom.

"I'd like to give you a breathing treatment if you think you're up to it." Gray looked hopefully at Takoda.

Enapay saw something else in the look, caring. Did Gray really care about Takoda? He knew Gray had been concerned for Takoda, but this was the first real indication Gray's feelings might go even deeper.

"We need to get you well enough to make a trip up to the spring," Gray informed Takoda.

"The spring?" Takoda asked.

"It's a healing spring where miracles are meant to happen," Enapay told Takoda.

"Will it heal my crow?"

Enapay and Gray looked at each other before Gray finally answered. "We don't know."

Enapay knew Gray didn't believe it would, but Gray was so concerned with keeping Takoda's spirits up, he refused to tell him the truth. Enapay knew there was only one man he could ask and that was Hakan. Surely Father Sky had informed the Guardian of his plans.

Chapter Six

Takoda woke to find Daniel at his bedside. “Where are Enapay and Gray?”

Daniel turned off the television and squeezed Takoda’s hand. “They’re outside talking to Hakan.”

“About what?” Takoda asked.

“I’m not sure. When Hakan returned from Jack and Toby’s, Enapay and Gray asked to speak with him privately.”

Takoda released Daniel’s hand and rubbed his eyes. He couldn’t believe he’d been asleep so long. “Did you find Dr. Sparrol?”

Once again, Daniel squirmed. “Yeah. They’re holding him at Toby and Jack’s house until someone from the Department of the Interior comes to take him.”

“Because of what he did to me?” Takoda asked.

“You and all the others. Hakan and Ryker tracked him for several hours before they caught up with him. When faced with going up against Ryker in his grizzly bear skin, Sam broke down and told them everything.”

“Which is?”

Daniel started to open his mouth but snapped it shut. He seemed to war with himself for several moments. “I’m not really supposed to talk about it, but I think you should know he was working with the others they captured.”

“Those men who’re pretending to be shifter?”

Daniel nodded. “Two of them are like Sam.”

“You mean shifters who don’t shift?” Takoda knew he didn’t like Sam for a reason.

Daniel winced. "It's not that they don't shift, it's that they can't shift. Their parents denounced their abilities and chose to live as humans."

Takoda couldn't imagine someone throwing away such a sacred and beautiful gift. No wonder Sam and the others were screwed up. "Were Ryker and Hakan able to get out of Sam what was in the gas? Maybe that could be the reason I can't shift."

He used the handrails to pull himself to a sitting position. "Take me to them."

Daniel shook his head. "You're in no condition to go wandering around the halls. Besides, Enapay and Gray would not be happy about it."

"Tough." Takoda swung his legs over the side of the bed. "You go out and get some coffee if that's what it takes to let you off the hook, but I need to see them."

"I'll go get them." Daniel rose and squeezed Takoda's hand. "Lie back down and take it easy or you'll get me into trouble."

Takoda eventually followed Daniel's orders. Earlier, while unconscious, he'd felt Enapay and Gray with him. He still didn't understand it, but since then, he needed both men near him. The moment he'd opened his eyes after being given the shot by Gray, Takoda knew the two men had mated.

The realization that he'd officially been left behind hurt at first, but the love evident in Enapay and Gray's eyes when they looked at each other quickly eased the ache in his chest. All he'd ever wanted for Enapay was happiness. If Gray was able to bring him that, then things had worked out for the best.

* * * *

With one arm wrapped around Gray's waist, Enapay began asking Hakan questions. "Did you know Gray and Takoda were my chosen mates?"

Hakan crossed his arms in front of his chest. Gray could see the defiant pose for what it was. Although Enapay and Hakan had been friends for years, Hakan was still Enapay's Guardian and demanded a certain amount of respect from the shifter.

"I did," Hakan answered simply.

"Why didn't you tell me?" Enapay asked.

Hakan shook his head. "That's not how things work and you know it."

"What about Takoda's shifting? Is that part of this, too?" Gray spoke up.

Hakan tilted his head back, gazing toward the starry sky. Gray watched as the Guardian's eyes closed, presumably communicating with Father Sky.

Gray glanced at Enapay. "Be nice," he whispered.

Enapay didn't answer, but he did lean in for a quick kiss. "We deserve answers. That's all I'm trying to get."

After several moments, Hakan once again joined them. "The ability to shift was not taken from Takoda. It was suspended."

"Why?" Enapay asked with a horrified expression.

"To be shifter is to embrace both sides of yourself. Takoda has forgotten. He needed to be reminded," Hakan stated.

"So it was a punishment? Takoda's been through hell over this. Why would Father Sky do something like that to him?" Gray asked.

"Because without it, Takoda would have become lost to his people. He must learn to embrace both of his skins."

"And you knew this all along?" Enapay took a step toward Hakan.

"Since the day Takoda was released from the hospital the first time." Hakan reached out and placed a hand on Enapay's upper arm. "I was not allowed to interfere, but I was allowed to prod the three of you in the right direction."

"You mean we really are all destined to be together?" Gray asked.

Hakan grinned. "No one has control over that but the three of you. I can tell you Father Sky always has reasons for what he does or doesn't do."

Enapay shook his head. "And Takoda almost dying? Is that Father Sky's doing?"

"No. Father Sky could not stop Sam's actions, but he could send Takoda a message." Hakan's gaze went from Enapay to Gray. "Takoda is confused. He feels things for both of you, but doesn't understand why. Some things are not to be questioned."

"So, since he survived Sam's attack, will he be able to shift?" Gray couldn't help but ask.

"As I've told you. Only Takoda has the power to regain his abilities."

"But how? By mating?" Enapay asked.

"By embracing his man skin as being part of who he is. Find a way to get him to do that, and his powers will be restored."

The clinic door opened and Daniel stepped outside. "Takoda is asking for the two of you."

Gray started to walk toward the door, but Enapay's arm held him tight. "Is there anything else you're not telling us?"

Hakan nodded but offered nothing else.

Gray kissed Enapay's cheek. "Come on, Takoda needs us."

They walked into the room and Takoda's face lit up for just a moment before his usual scowl replaced it.

"I thought you would be here when I woke up," Takoda mumbled.

Enapay pulled Gray toward the bed. "We're sorry. We just stepped outside for a moment, but we're here now."

Gray switched to doctor mode and quickly assessed Takoda's condition. The smaller man was still weak, but breathing fine. He glanced around the sterile room. "Would you like us to take you to my house?"

Takoda's gaze met Gray's. "I know you and Enapay have mated. Am I still welcome?"

"Of course. You'll always be welcome in our home, wherever it might be." Gray leaned forward and placed a soft kiss on Takoda's lips.

After a few seconds, Takoda nodded. "I'd like that."

"Then let's get you home," Gray announced.

* * * *

While Enapay settled Takoda in bed, Gray locked up the house. It was late and they were all tired, but he had an idea. He thought maybe they could get Takoda to reconnect with his man side by showing him the pleasure that could be found in simple human touch.

Gray wasn't planning to seduce Takoda. Hopefully, there would be plenty of time for the three of them to explore a sexual relationship. What he had in mind was soothing the smaller man with words and hands.

He met Enapay coming out of the bedroom. He gestured for his mate to follow him and shut the door to his own bedroom. "I think we should sleep with him."

Enapay's black eyebrows shot up in surprise. "Takoda?"

Gray nodded and told Enapay his plan. "Do you think it'll work?"

“I don’t know,” Enapay said. “But at this point, I don’t see that we have anything to lose.”

Enapay quickly took off his pants and waited for Gray to change into a pair of his sweats. “Are you sure you’re ready for this?”

Gray paused. “You heard Hakan. It’s meant to be.”

“I know what Hakan said, but I’m asking you. I know you aren’t in love with Takoda, so why?”

Gray shrugged and wrapped his arms around Enapay. “Sometimes you have to take a leap of faith. This is me jumping into the unknown.”

Enapay swiped his tongue across Gray’s lips. “I love you.”

Gray smiled. Deep down he already knew, but it was the first time his mate had verbalized his feelings. “I love you, too.”

They walked hand in hand into Takoda’s room.

“Do you mind if we lay with you?” Gray asked.

Takoda rose up on his elbows. The full moon streaming in through the window illuminated the otherwise dark room. “Both of you?”

Enapay lifted the covers on one side of the bed and climbed in. “Either both of us or neither of us.”

Takoda looked to the opposite side of the bed where Gray stood. He folded back the covers in invitation. “Does this have something to do with the dream I had in the hospital?”

Rolling to his side, Gray faced Takoda. “What dream?”

“That we were together. I thought it was just a dream, but then I also dreamt the two of you mated, and I know that came true.”

Gray laid a comforting hand on Takoda’s bare chest. “It wasn’t a dream. It was a glimpse of what can happen.”

“I was a man,” Takoda whispered, almost to himself. He turned to regard Enapay. “Does that mean I won’t get my crow back?”

Enapay shook his head and leaned down to kiss Takoda softly on the lips. “In my vision, you were both.”

“Both? How is that possible?” Takoda asked.

“We don’t want to take your crow away from you,” Gray tried to explain. “We’re hoping you can find joy and happiness in both of your skins.”

Gray felt Enapay’s hand reach toward his. His mate threaded their fingers together and began rubbing Takoda’s chest in a circular pattern.

“I don’t know how to be happy as a man,” Takoda admitted.

“Let us show you,” Enapay suggested.

Gray held his breath. He knew things were developing rapidly. His cock hardened and rose between him and Takoda. Gray’s body evidently knew what his mind and heart hadn’t yet grasped. Takoda was also meant to be his mate.

With the realization, Gray became bolder with his touches. He maneuvered his hand to brush across Takoda’s nipple, smiling at the soft moan. “Do you like to be touched?” he whispered.

Takoda nodded.

“Tell me? Ask us to touch you. To love you.”

Takoda shook his head. “I’ll only end up hurting you if you fall in love with me. Ask Enapay. He’ll tell you how I hurt the people who care for me.”

“No. You hurt people only because you push them away. We want to love both sides of you. We want you to love...yourself,” Gray explained.

“I do love myself,” Takoda argued.

Gray shook his head and rubbed the small brown-pebbled nub on Takoda’s chest. “You love your crow, but not your man. Feel how joyful it is to be a man. Embrace this skin as much.”

Enapay’s hand began to wander independently from Gray’s as the two of them set about reminding Takoda how good it felt to be touched. Gray continued to worship the lean chest of the crow shifter as Enapay’s hand moved south.

Gray was surprised he felt no jealousy as he watched his mate fondle Takoda’s cock and balls. He leaned down and swiped his tongue across Takoda’s nipple before latching on to the taut nub. He never considered himself an adventurous lover, but Gray’s inhibitions seemed non-existent as he worshipped Takoda’s body.

Without taking his lips and tongue from Takoda’s soft skin, Gray reached down and guided Takoda’s long thin cock to Enapay’s mouth. Gray licked his way up to Takoda’s ear.

“Can you feel the man you love bringing you pleasure?”

“Yesss,” Takoda hissed.

“Tell him what you want.”

Takoda moaned. “Squeeze my balls.”

Gray’s eyes widened as he watched Enapay, his mouth stuffed with Takoda’s cock, squeeze the heavy sac. Fuck. It was hotter than he’d anticipated.

“Harder,” Takoda begged, spreading his legs.

Gray groaned and reached down to also manipulate Takoda’s nipples, pinching them between his thumb and forefinger. Takoda’s body writhed with the dual onslaught. A satisfied grunt coming from Enapay as Takoda cried out his pleasure signaled the shifters climax.

An overwhelming desire to taste the seed of his new lover prompted Gray to reach down, catching a strand of thick white cum as it escaped Enapay’s mouth. He brought his fingers to his mouth.

The moment the satiny cum hit his tongue, Gray was lost. Just like what had happened with Enapay, a series of images flashed through Gray’s mind. Pictures of the three of them together interspersed with images of him alone with Enapay confirmed Gray’s suspicions. Loving Takoda wouldn’t be easy, but it was inevitable.

* * * *

Enapay opened his eyes and smiled. He was sandwiched between his two mates and loving every second of it. Takoda drifted to sleep soon after the blowjob earlier. In the small shifters already weakened condition it was to be expected.

Enapay, who’d been pumped and raring to go another round, soon buried his cock deep into Gray’s ass. The sex with Gray was even better than the first time in the rented room in D.C. Enapay knew the reason. Being with the men he loved only seemed to enhance the overall spiritual quality of their lovemaking.

With Gray pressed against his back, Enapay ground against the handsome doctor’s flaccid cock. He grinned when he felt a definite hardening against his ass. Enapay glanced over his shoulder and found Gray looking at him.

“What’re you doing?” Gray asked around a yawn.

“Enjoying the moment,” Enapay replied. Although it had only happened once, Enapay felt the need to experience Gray’s cock. “Make love to me.”

Gray leaned up on his elbow and stared into Enapay’s eyes. “Me?”

Enapay chuckled, waking Takoda.

“What’s going on?” Takoda asked.

Enapay pulled Takoda tighter against him, rubbing his erection against Takoda’s ass.

“Trying to get Gray to fuck me while I hold you in my arms.”

Takoda’s eyes widened. “You’re just going to hold me?”

Enapay was trying to figure out Takoda’s shock when Gray leaned over him and gave Takoda a short, but deep kiss.

“If you want Enapay to make love to you, tell him.” Gray’s mouth moved from Takoda’s to Enapay’s.

Enapay sucked Gray’s tongue into his mouth and moaned. He heard a noise and returned his attention to Takoda. The crow shifter had spat into his hand and was wetting his own hole. Enapay couldn’t help but laugh. “We have something much better for that.”

Right on cue, Gray slid out of bed. “Be right back.”

While Gray retrieved the needed lube from their luggage, Enapay took a moment to question Takoda. “Is this really what you want?”

Takoda nodded. “I’ve always wanted you. I just didn’t want to give you the wrong impression about who I really am.”

“A crow,” Enapay surmised.

“Yes. But now I’m wondering if it really is possible to be both and still be happy.”

Enapay tilted Takoda’s chin up and kissed him. It wasn’t the kind of kiss you give out of passion, but hoped it would convey to Takoda the love and understanding he felt in his heart. “Gray was being honest when he told you we would love you no matter what.”

“You think he really loves me?” Takoda asked.

“I’m getting there,” Gray answered, stepping back into the room. Gray climbed back in bed and pressed his cold body against Enapay. “I know the love is already in my heart. I just need time to get over my fears.”

Takoda rolled over and sat up. He seemed to study Gray for several moments. “What’re you afraid of?”

Enapay repositioned to his back so he could better watch the exchange between the two men. He knew it was scary for all three of them, but he really needed to hear Gray’s response.

Gray's attention suddenly seemed to be on the bottle of lube in his hand as he picked at the printed lettering on the container, refusing to meet Takoda's gaze. "I'm afraid of falling in love with you, and then you deciding to leave and never come back."

Gray bit his bottom lip and glanced up. "I'm afraid of Enapay following you, leaving me alone."

Enapay reached out and pulled Gray to his chest. "Oh, sweetheart. There may be times when I feel the need to break away and enjoy my eagle for a few hours, but I know life with you will be even more fulfilling than life in the sky."

"I need to use the bathroom," Takoda mumbled as he got out of bed.

As soon as Takoda was out of the room, Enapay pulled Gray up until they were face to face. "You know if Takoda stays, it'll only be for brief snatches of time, right?"

Gray nodded. "I figured it out when I tasted his seed earlier."

"What did you see?" Enapay questioned.

"It was like the first time the two of us made love. I saw flashes of our future. The three of us together mixed with images of you and me without him," Gray explained.

Enapay sighed. He knew it would be the way of things with the three of them. Not wanting Takoda to overhear, Enapay leaned in and whispered in Gray's ear. "Giving him back the gift of shifting will be the greatest act of love we can provide him."

"I know, but that doesn't make it any easier. I know as soon as he's able, he'll fly away."

"But if we let him know he's always welcome, he'll come back." Enapay brushed his lips across Gray's.

Takoda came back into the bedroom and leaned against the doorjamb. "I don't want to hurt you, Gray."

Gray rolled to his back and held out his hand. "Come here."

Takoda pushed off the jam and neared the bed. Enapay took a moment to appreciate the beauty of Takoda's nude body in the morning sunlight. He lifted the covers and waited for Takoda to rejoin them.

The cool feel of Takoda's skin against him made Enapay shiver. "You okay?"

Takoda nodded. "Just needed a minute to think."

"And?" Enapay prompted.

Takoda's features softened as he ran his hand across Enapay's chest. "As a man, I'd love nothing more than to be with the two of you."

"That's good," Enapay encouraged. He knew where the conversation was going, but he also knew Takoda needed to verbalize his feelings.

"Yeah," Takoda agreed. "But what if I get my crow back?"

Enapay knew they were all concerned about the same things. He decided to stop dancing around it and laid it all out on the table. "Winters are hard, don't you agree?"

"Yes."

Enapay took a deep breath. "Why don't you spend the winters here with us? The rest of the year you can live as your crow and come and go as you need to, but reserve the winters for nights snuggling with us in front of the fire."

Enapay waited for several long moments while Takoda seemed to ponder the compromise.

"Will that be enough for you and Gray?" Takoda finally asked.

Enapay knew it wouldn't be easy, but with Gray by his side, he knew he could live with the weeks or months Takoda was in his crow skin. The genuine concerned expression on Takoda's face told Enapay his lover was worried. Hell. They were all worried, and rightly so. It was a big decision they were about to enter into.

"Knowing you're happy will go a long way in making it enough." Enapay pulled Takoda into a kiss. "Just promise me you'll let us know you're okay?"

Takoda smiled. "I will." He looked at Gray. "Does that sound good to you?"

Gray closed the distance and gave Takoda a deep kiss. Enapay's cock hardened as he watched the two men he loved sucking at each other's lips and tongues. He wondered what it would be like to watch the two men make love and groaned.

Gray and Takoda broke their kiss and stared at him. It was Gray who finally started to laugh. "You liked that did you?"

Enapay grinned. "A lot."

Gray stared into Takoda's eyes. "Will you let me make love to you?"

At that moment, Enapay fell deeper in love with Gray. He knew how hard it was for Gray to make the leap of faith he'd spoken of earlier. He reached above the pillow and grabbed the bottle of lube Gray had dropped earlier.

Takoda answered Gray's question by launching himself across Enapay into Gray's arms. Enapay let out a groan as he received an elbow to his ribs.

"Sorry," Takoda mumbled before engaging in a tongue battle with Gray.

Enapay scooted over, giving the two men more room to express their growing feelings for each other. He sat up and watched the play of hands as Gray and Takoda began exploring each other's bodies. Not wanting to be completely left out, Enapay repositioned himself behind Gray. He opened the bottle of lube and trickled a generous amount over Gray's fingers as they began to explore Takoda's ass.

Gray broke the kiss and looked over his shoulder at Enapay. "Get me ready for you."

Enapay smiled. Although he wanted to be with both men, he didn't want to intrude on their first time together. The invitation from Gray seemed to cement the three-way relationship in Enapay's mind.

He wasted no time slicking his own fingers. As Gray began stretching Takoda's hole, Enapay rimmed Gray's. Moans, sighs and words of love filled the small room as Enapay worked two fingers deep into his mate.

"Aahhh," Gray sighed as he removed his fingers from Takoda's hole. "Now."

With all three of them on their sides, facing away from each other, Enapay hooked his arm under Gray's knee and opened his lover's ass for his cock. Gray followed suit and positioned Takoda in the same fashion.

Despite already mating himself to Gray, Enapay was nervous. He knew what such a three-way fuck would do. He only hoped Gray was truly okay with being mated to two shifters.

Because Enapay knew it had been a long time since Takoda had been entered, he waited for Gray to ease his way inside the smaller man.

Takoda moaned in pain for several moments before his body became accustomed to Gray's thick cock. Once Gray rocked his way into the base, Enapay placed the crown of his shaft to Gray's waiting hole.

Having made love only hours before, Gray's body accepted Enapay's cock willingly as it pushed in to the hilt.

"Gods you feel good." Enapay leaned in and nipped at Gray's neck. "I love you."

Enapay had never experienced a three-way and wasn't sure who should move first. Gray took the lead and began moving his hips back and forth. Once again, the room was filled with the sounds of pleasure as the three of them finally established a rhythm.

The squeeze of his lover's body as Gray continued to fuck himself on Enapay's cock was indescribable. He felt truly connected to both men. Although he was buried deep inside Gray, Enapay would swear he could also feel the pull of Takoda wrapped around his cock.

"Love you, Takoda," he whispered, thrusting his hips even faster.

Takoda reached back over Gray to put his hand on Enapay's hip. "Love you."

The sound of Enapay's balls slapping back and forth between his leg and Gray's ass became an erotic song filling Enapay's head. He pictured years spent in bed with these two men, years of loving and living as a family. The one thing he'd always dreamt of having was finally within his grasp and he wasn't about to give it up.

Gray's body jerked as he came, squeezing Enapay's cock in a vise-like grip. Takoda's cry of release drowned out all noises in the room as he shouted Enapay and Gray's names.

At the moment of climax, Enapay closed his eyes and prayed to Father Sky to bless their union. With each burst of cum, Enapay's bond with his two mates increased. By the time he released Gray's leg and collapsed back onto the pillow, he felt complete peace invade his soul.

It was several moments before Enapay's breathing returned to normal. Whatever happened from this point forward, he knew in his heart he wouldn't face it alone.

Chapter Seven

The ringing telephone woke Gray several hours later. He untangled himself and stumbled to the kitchen, barely reaching it before the caller hung up. "Hello."

"Gray?"

"Yeah, Jack, it's me."

"Can I get you to come down to my place? We've got an issue and Hakan thinks you can help us with it."

Gray glanced at the clock. It was nearly noon. How the hell had they slept so long? "I'll get dressed and be down."

A noise behind him alerted Gray he was no longer alone. He turned to find a sleeping-looking Enapay standing just inside the room. Gray hung up the phone. He wondered if things would get weird between them after he'd spent the morning making love to Takoda.

"Who was on the phone?" Enapay asked.

Gray's fears were quickly put at ease when his mate pulled him into an embrace. "Jack needs me down at his house for some reason."

"He didn't tell you?"

Gray shook his head. "He just said they had an issue and Hakan thought I could help."

"You want me to go with you?" Enapay asked as he peppered kisses along Gray's neck.

Gray loved the feel of Enapay's naked body pressed against his, but he knew if he didn't get dressed, it would be a while before he got out of the house. "Why don't you go back to bed with Takoda? I shouldn't be long."

"We'll wait for you." Enapay ran his hands down Gray's back to land on his ass.

As good as that sounded, Gray knew they still hadn't completely convinced Takoda to accept his man skin. "Make love to him while I'm gone. After all the years you've loved him, you both deserve some time alone."

Enapay released his hold on Gray's ass and cupped Gray's face. "You know how much I love you, right?"

Gray smiled. He knew his mate was trying to reassure him, but after the things he'd felt in the bedroom earlier that morning, there was no need. "I know you love me." He bit his lip. "I'm starting to fall for Takoda. Is that part of the mating process?"

Enapay nodded. "It has something to do with it. The rest is all you and Takoda."

Never had Gray felt so lucky. Not only did one incredible man love him, but hopefully soon, Takoda would also learn to love him.

* * * *

Gray climbed the porch steps and knocked on Jack's door. Toby answered almost immediately.

"Hi."

Gray nodded. "Sorry it took so long."

Toby jerked his head to the side. "We've got visitors, big wigs from Washington."

Gray wondered if it had something to do with Dr. Sparrol. "Did they already pick-up Sam?"

Toby shook his head. "They'll take him with them when they leave."

Gray peeked around the corner. Four men sat at the dining table with Jack, Hakan, Ryker and Daniel. Toby started to go in, but Gray grabbed the back of his shirt. "What do they want?"

Toby grinned, the same mischievous smile Gray had seen upon their first meeting. "And ruin Jack's big moment? No way. The couch is no fun to sleep on."

Gray chuckled. He seriously doubted Jack would ever kick Toby out of his bed. He'd seen the two of them together and their affection for each other was almost sickening. Gray released Toby and followed him into the dining room. "Gentleman."

Jack stood and walked around the table to shake Gray's hand. "Thanks for coming."

"What's going on?" Gray glanced from Jack to the four men in suits. Two of them he recognized. One from The Department of the Interior and one was a popular and powerful senator.

Jack started with the man on the left and introduced the men one by one as Gray shook their hands. It turned out there were two senators, the guy from the Department of the Interior, and someone from Homeland Security.

The visitor list was quite impressive, but Gray still wasn't sure what it had to do with him. He assumed it was in regards to the poisonous gas let loose on the avian population.

"Have a seat," Jack offered as he gestured to the only available chair.

Gray accepted the offered chair and rested his forearms on the table. Instead of jumping in, he waited them out. It was Jack who finally cleared his throat first.

"The United States government wants to hire you," Jack stated.

* * * *

Enapay sat on the front porch, Takoda between his spread legs on the next step down. He'd just finished braiding Takoda's hair when Gray drove up. What he'd presumed was going to be a short meeting had turned into one lasting almost four hours.

Gray looked tired, but satisfied when he got out of the car and walked toward them. Enapay held out his hand and pulled Gray down on the step beside him. "How'd it go?"

Before answering, Gray leaned down to capture Takoda's mouth in a deep kiss. Enapay could feel his cock taking notice, and with nothing on, he knew Takoda felt it pressing against his back.

Enapay couldn't help but moan as he watched Gray's hand wander down to fondle Takoda's cock as their kiss continued. By the time the two men came up for air, Enapay was rock hard and wanting. He tried to keep his lust in check, needing to know what the big meeting had entailed.

It wasn't easy when Gray's mouth settled against his, the sexy doctor's tongue exploring the depths of Enapay's throat. He felt a shift between his legs as Takoda began to touch his aroused cock.

Takoda quickly replaced his hand with his mouth, and Enapay was lost. *Forget the meeting.* He leaned back until his head rested on the porch, pulling Gray down with him. Enapay wasn't sure how much experience Takoda had in giving blowjobs, but the man was fucking fantastic at it.

Enapay spread his legs and lifted them up a step as Takoda's tongue swirled and pressed against Enapay's most sensitive areas. He began pulling at Gray's cloths, needing his mate naked and accessible. The way he felt, Enapay wanted to bury his cock deep inside both men.

His climax took him by surprise when Takoda entered Enapay's seldom-breeched hole with his finger. One moment he was enjoying the expert mouth working his cock, and the next he lurched into a sitting position, as his cock seemed to explode with long bursts of seed.

Enapay was left speechless as he sucked air into his lungs. Never had he shown so little control over his own body. He stared down at a chuckling Takoda.

"Damn. Have you been practicing?" he joked.

Takoda shook his head and crawled up to lie on the porch beside Enapay. "I did good?"

Enapay rolled his eyes. "If you'd done any better, I think my dick would've been blown off."

Takoda settled his cheek on Enapay's chest as Gray helped lick away the cum that had escaped Takoda's mouth. After cleaning Takoda, Gray gave him another deep kiss, taking the time to lick and tease the smaller man.

It really did seem as if the two men were falling for each other. Enapay wondered if it was time they visited the spring. He knew his friends had all been there, at least once, to make love to their mates. Maybe it would help cement their new relationship.

"Let's have supper beside the spring," he suggested.

Gray and Takoda broke their kiss and stared at Enapay.

"Like a picnic?" Gray asked.

Enapay shrugged. "Is that what you call it?"

Gray nodded.

"Then, yes a picnic." Enapay ran his hand down Gray's back, dipping a finger into the delectable crevice of Gray's ass. "Don't put your clothes back on. I like you like this, besides, your ass needs some sun."

Gray chuckled and looked behind himself. "You don't like my white ass?"

"I love your ass, but I'd also like to see it in the sunlight."

Gray bit his bottom lip. "I don't think I'd be comfortable traipsing around naked."

Enapay knew humans tended to be more modest than shifters. "You can wear pants up there then as long as you promise to remove them for our picnic."

Enapay couldn't help but smile when he said the word. *Picnic*. It was such a strange word. Lying with his two mates in his arms, Enapay, once again, began to think of Gray's meeting. "So what did Jack want?"

Gray shifted slightly and looked up at Enapay. "There were men from the United States government at his house."

Enapay tensed. His people had never trusted the government. "And?"

Gray shrugged. "They offered me a job."

"And?" Enapay once again prompted his mate when it didn't seem Gray was going to continue.

Gray kissed Enapay's chest. "I turned them down. I've spent the majority of my life working because I had nothing more fulfilling than my job, but things are different now. Besides, I'm not the kind of guy who can play the bureaucratic games required to work for the government."

Enapay remembered the visions he'd shared with Gray. "So you won't be traveling and speaking to large groups of people?"

Gray smiled. "Yeah, I'll probably do some of that. I told them no on the job offer, but I agreed to help educate the worlds' population on shifters. I was quite specific in my demands though. I don't necessarily need a lot of money to do the job, but there are certain accommodations I've already outlined for them."

"Such as?" Enapay wondered if he was going to really play a part in Gray's future.

"I'll travel wherever in the world they need me, but I'll only work six months out of the year." Gray reached over and cupped Takoda's cheek. "I'll never travel in the winter. Those will be our months together."

Takoda grinned but said nothing.

"I also requested a private plane and housing outside of the city." Gray crawled up Enapay's body and kissed him. "I know how uncomfortable you were in D.C. I wouldn't put you through that again."

Some of Enapay's fears dissipated. "So you do want me along?"

"Want you?" Gray shook his head. "I need you along. If it's something you don't think you can do, just tell me, and I'll say no to the whole thing."

The idea of traveling from place to place didn't appeal to Enapay at all, but he knew it was Gray's destiny. Unless the humans were taught about the shifters, there would always be a large amount of fear and distrust. If Gray refused to do it without Enapay, he knew he couldn't voice his concerns.

Enapay realized none of them had talked about their fears that Takoda may never again be able to shift. He wondered if they should address the possibility. He reached down and ran his fingertips over Takoda's spine. "What do you think?"

Takoda's black eyebrows drew together. "Me?" Takoda shook his head. "I don't know."

Enapay knew his visions hadn't involved Takoda traveling with them, but the last thing he wanted was for his second mate to feel left out. "Would you be more comfortable sticking around home or going with us?"

Enapay felt Gray's body stiffen as they both waited for Takoda's answer. It took several moments, but eventually Takoda sat up and looked around.

"Here, I think. Although I love you both, this feels like my home. It's where I should be," Takoda said in a voice so soft Enapay could barely hear it.

In the blink of an eye, Takoda transformed into a crow. Enapay gasped as he stared at his greatest joy and most frightening outcome all in one small black package. With Gray clutching at his chest, Enapay reached out and ran his hand down the shiny, black-feathered back of the crow.

He knew it was the moment of truth. Now that he had the power to shift again, would Takoda take to the sky for good, or would his crow remember the love they'd shared only moments earlier?

"I love you," Gray whispered to Takoda.

"We both love you," Enapay added.

With a loud caw, Takoda took off. Enapay was left still wondering. He felt moisture on his chest and glanced down as Gray began wiping the tears from his eyes.

"Will he come back?" Gray asked.

Although Enapay wanted to reassure his mate, he knew he couldn't mislead him. "I hope so."

* * * *

Gray spread out the quilt they'd brought and took off his pants. He still couldn't believe he'd agreed to a naked picnic. What would they do if Daniel, Ryker or Hakan decided to take a

walk? The spring was close enough to the Guardians' home that it was a very real possibility they could be discovered.

Enapay unpacked the basket of food and handed Gray the selection of cubed cheeses. "I don't know how you eat that stuff."

Gray smiled although his heart still felt like it was breaking. "Man cannot live on meat alone."

"This man can," Enapay countered.

Gray popped a square of pepper jack into his mouth and moaned. "It's sooo good. You don't know what you're missing."

A noise above them caught their attention. Gray looked up just as a crow descended onto them. It landed on their blanket and shifted into one of the most gorgeous men Gray had ever known. "You came back."

From his standing position, Takoda acted surprised by the statement. "Of course I came back. Enapay promised me a picnic."

Gray and Enapay launched themselves toward Takoda, tackling the smaller man to the blanket. Gray concentrated on kissing Takoda's neck while Enapay thrust his tongue into Takoda's mouth.

Gray's lips eventually found their way to Takoda's mouth and shared a three-way kiss with his two lovers. He knew in his heart Takoda wouldn't always be as accessible, but at least, even in crow form, Takoda knew where his home was.

* * * *

Three weeks later, Takoda entered the house through the backdoor and followed the voices to his mates. Gray and Enapay were snuggled together on the couch, watching Enapay's newest obsession, westerns. Takoda admitted he couldn't see the appeal, especially the ones depicting Native American's in a negative light, but Enapay loved them.

According to his mate, white men had made the movies. Enapay thought it was the perfect way to understand why so many people's opinions were jaded when it came to the real American history. Enapay often analyzed historical events depicted in the movies with laughter in his voice. Having been alive at the time, most shifters had a much better sense of true history than books could ever hope to capture.

“See, this drives me crazy. Who does the research for these movies? The Cherokee didn’t live in Tepees,” Enapay commented with a shake of his head.

He couldn’t wipe the smile off his face as Gray nodded and soothed Enapay with a kiss on the cheek. “I know, sweetheart.”

Takoda wondered, not for the first time, if he was doing the right thing. In his heart, Takoda knew it was time for him to go, at least for a while. He would miss his men, but a few hours flight per day just wasn’t enough at the moment, and with Enapay and Gray leaving on their first trip in the morning, Takoda didn’t see any reason why he should put it off.

Since he’d regained his ability to shift, Takoda hadn’t spent more than a few hours away from his mates. He knew he wouldn’t be forgotten, and he knew his lovers understood, but the thought of leaving them bothered him.

Takoda wondered how long he would stay away before the overwhelming desire to see his mates brought him home. He’d struggled for weeks with the decision to leave. Living his life as a crow was what he’d always wanted, but now he had reasons to embrace his man skin.

He walked further into the room and made room for himself on the couch beside Enapay. “Are you packed?”

Enapay wrapped his free arm around Takoda and gave him a quick kiss. “Yes. Gray made me pack, what he calls, real clothes.”

Takoda wrinkled his nose. He had yet to put on the type of clothes Gray wore on a daily basis because he knew he’d hate them.

“I’m sorry, but there’ll be times when we need to go out in public. Naked is fine when we’re at the house they’ve rented for us, but you’re not even allowed into a gas station without a shirt on.”

Enapay glanced at Takoda and rolled his eyes. Takoda bit back a laugh and leaned in for a kiss. He lured Enapay’s tongue into his mouth and sucked. Takoda knew how horny the simple gesture made Enapay.

Within a matter of seconds, Takoda was hoisted up and repositioned to straddle Enapay’s lap. As good as Enapay’s hands felt on his bare ass, Takoda knew he needed to talk to his men. He broke the kiss and stared into Enapay’s black eyes. “I won’t be here when you wake up in the morning.”

“What?”

“I can’t watch the two of you leave me. It’ll be easier this way,” Takoda explained.

“You know it’s not too late to change your mind and go with us.” Gray said as he leaned in for a quick kiss.

“It’s not for me, but I will truly miss both of you. I’ll find you once you return home.”

Takoda smoothed Enapay’s hair behind his ears. “We knew this had to happen.”

“I know,” Enapay mumbled. “Doesn’t make it any easier. I’ve gotten used to you flying overhead during the day and sleeping in my arms every night.”

Takoda didn’t know what to say. He would definitely miss the routine they’d established in the previous weeks, but he’d always known it was temporary. Takoda still wasn’t positive he’d be happy living as his crow and being away from his mates for long stretches of time, but there was no way to know for sure until he did it.

Enapay squeezed Takoda so hard it nearly knocked the breath out of him. “I love you.”

Takoda sighed. “We still have the rest of the day.”

Enapay’s hands returned to Takoda’s ass. “Guess we’d better make the most of it then.”

Gray’s hand joined Enapay’s as they began to make love to Takoda. Before he lost the ability to form a coherent sentence, Takoda had one last thing he needed to say.

He put one hand on Enapay’s cheek and one on Gray’s. “I want to thank you for allowing my crow the freedom it needs to be happy.”

Gray turned his face and kissed Takoda’s palm. “We love you, and we know we can’t cage you. We’ll miss you though.”

Takoda nodded, blinking back the tears. “I’ll miss you both.”

Epilogue

After giving a statement to the press outside the gates of Refuge, Gray turned and climbed back into the security truck. He glanced at Mica and sighed. “You think they’ll go away now?”

Mica grunted. “I doubt it. The recapture of Sparrol has just kicked up the shifter frenzy to a whole new level.”

Although Sam had been convicted in the United States years earlier for his part in the crimes against the shifters, he’d fooled prison officials into thinking he was ready to be transferred to a minimum-security prison. During his transfer, Sam had escaped and gone on the run for nearly a year before the authorities had finally captured him in Naples, Florida.

Mica was right. The public was in a frenzy to learn everything about the shifters. Gray rested his head against the passenger window. For more than five years, he’d traveled around the world trying to educate the people of the world about shifters. What they’d expected and what had actually happened were two entirely different things.

The whole purpose was to convince citizens that shifters weren’t a danger to them or their families. Never in a million years did they expect the shifters to become almost like rock stars in the eyes of teenagers, twenty-somethings and even a large number of thirty-somethings.

Mica and the rest of the guards at Refuge had their hands full trying to keep shifter-groupies out of the compound and away from the front gate. Gray’s job had gone from informing the public to begging them to leave the shifters in peace.

“I’m so tired of it,” Gray mumbled.

Mica reached over and squeezed Gray’s shoulder. “I know. We all are, but Ryker said he’s working on something that might help. He’s promised to tell us at dinner tonight.”

“Shit. I forgot about dinner.” Gray rubbed his eyes. All he wanted was to go back to his house and collapse on the couch. Maybe he’d get lucky and Enapay would offer him a massage.

Gray loved his friends, but he and Enapay had just arrived home after a three-month stay in Asia. The last thing he felt like doing was going to a dinner party. “You think Enapay and I can get out of it?”

Mica chuckled, his deep voice reverberating in the small confines of the truck cab. “I told them it would be hell getting you there.”

Confused, Gray lifted his head from the cold glass and glanced at the huge man beside him. “Told who?”

“Daniel, Jarek and Toby. You get the three of them together and you never know what they’re going to come up with. They insisted on welcoming you and Enapay back. They’ve been planning this for weeks.”

Gray groaned and rolled his eyes. “So in other words, if I don’t show up, I’ll have the three of them plotting my death.”

Mica laughed even louder. “Yeah. Something like that.”

Mica pulled the security truck to a stop in front of Gray’s house. Gray reached over and slapped Mica on the leg. “Don’t take so much pleasure out of my misery.”

“Right. I’ll remember that.” Mica gave Gray a big grin.

Shaking his head, Gray opened his door. “Thanks for the ride. I’ll see you in a couple of hours.”

Gray felt like his legs were made of lead as he climbed the front porch steps. He still wasn’t sure what it was about a crowd of story-hungry reporters that exhausted him so much. After nearly five years of dealing with them, Gray knew he should be used to it.

He opened the front door and collapsed on the couch. “Enapay?”

“Be right there, sweetheart.” Several moments later, Enapay stepped into the room.

Though completely worn out, Gray’s cock took notice of the naked man who’d obviously just stepped from the shower. His gaze followed a drop of water as it slowly worked its way down Enapay’s chest, heading for the hairless groin he loved so much.

Gray licked his lips and glanced up to meet Enapay’s stare. “Why’re you torturing me? Do you have any idea how tired I am?”

Enapay bent over and kissed Gray. "Take a nap, honey. I promised Suni I'd help him fix one of the wind turbines before the dinner later."

As much as Gray wanted to argue and pull his naked mate down on top of him, he knew he needed a nap. "If I go to sleep now, will you put that same outfit on for me later?"

Enapay looked down at his nude body. "I'm sure that can be arranged."

Gray settled back into the deep couch and sighed. "Don't suppose I could get you to bring me a blanket?"

Enapay grinned and disappeared. When he came back into the room a few minutes later, he not only had put his buckskin pants on, but also was carrying Gray's favorite cashmere throw blanket they'd picked up in Ireland.

"Thank you, love." Gray puckered his lips and waited for Enapay to kiss him. His lover didn't make him wait long. "Have you heard from Takoda? I thought he'd be here by now."

Enapay shook his head. "He'll be here." Enapay gave Gray another deep kiss. "Love you."

"Love you."

Gray's eyes managed to stay open until Enapay walked out the front door. He settled into sleep, hoping Takoda would be with them soon.

* * * *

Gray glanced at the clock on the dash as he pulled up to Hakan's house. He was thankful Enapay had called to tell him he was running late and he'd just meet Gray at the party. If it hadn't been for the phone call, Gray knew he'd still be sound asleep.

From the number of vehicles in the driveway, it appeared Gray was the last to arrive. He climbed the porch steps and knocked on the door. The dreams he'd been plagued with lately had come back full force during his nap. He knew in his heart that it was time to take a step back from the life he'd been living for the past five years. Enapay never complained, but Gray could tell his mate would rather be home.

The door opened and Gray's jaw dropped. "What're you doing here?"

Takoda grinned and pointed behind him. "Oh. Well, I guess I can go if you want."

"Don't be an ass," Gray said and pulled his wayward mate into his arms. He didn't give Takoda a chance to say another word as he kissed him. There was nothing he waited for more

than the first kiss from Takoda after being separated for months at a time. His lover always smelled like the mountain air and tasted like the crystal clear streams he drank from.

Gray slid his tongue against Takoda's, not caring who may be inside waiting for them. "I've missed you."

Takoda's tongue peeked out and rimmed Gray's lips. "I'm home now. I plan to stick around as long as you and Enapay do."

Gray grinned. "You may be here a while then. I don't think I'm going on the road again anytime soon."

Takoda's features gentled. "Is something wrong?"

Gray stared into the eyes of the man he missed every moment of the day when they were apart. Their relationship may not have started off as a true love match, but it hadn't taken long at all for Gray to fall completely head-over-heels in love with Takoda. "I'm just tired of being away from my family and friends."

Takoda's eyes narrowed. He led Gray over to the porch swing and sat him down. "There's more to it and we both know it."

Gray shrugged. "I don't feel like I'm getting anywhere lately. I try to educate people, but all I really seem to be doing is feeding into the media frenzy. Maybe it's time for us to take a step back. If we're lucky, the shifter craze will die down."

Takoda leaned in and kissed Gray again. "Is it really that bad out there?"

Gray nodded. "People around the world have formed clubs, fan websites..." Gray shook his head. "I wanted the shifters to be treated as equals in the eyes of the world. Instead, people are treating them like their favorite television show come to life."

Enapay stuck his head out the front door. "You two coming in?"

"Gray's sad," Takoda informed Enapay.

"I'll be okay." Gray gave Takoda a hug and stood.

He gave a confused looking Enapay a quick kiss before entering the house.

"Surprise!" the crowd in the foyer yelled.

Gray stopped and stared at his friends. *What the hell was going on?* "Why're you surprising me?"

Enapay's arms wrapped around Gray's waist as he pressed against Gray's back. "Happy Birthday, sweetheart."

“What? My birthday isn’t until the twenty-eighth,” Gray tried to argue.

Enapay kissed Gray’s neck and whispered in his ear. “It is the twenty-eighth.”

Gray closed his eyes and used Enapay’s powerful body to support him. His life had been so busy lately. He’d completely lost track of time, yet another reason for him to slow down. Something occurred to him. “Shifters don’t celebrate birthdays.”

“That’s just because we’ve had too many of them and most of us don’t know what day we were born. You’re a baby at only forty-two,” Daniel explained.

Gray chuckled. “Never thought forty-two would be considered as young, but I’ll take it.”

Gray broke away from Enapay and began hugging his friends. He knew Jarek, Daniel and Toby were the masterminds of the celebration and he gave them each a kiss on the cheek.

Once he’d worked his way around the circle of his friends, he turned and walked back to Enapay and Takoda’s arms. He honestly couldn’t remember a birthday that had meant more. Not only was it the first time in years since he’d been home for his birthday, but he had both the men he loved and the friends he respected all in one space.

“Let’s eat before my dinner gets cold,” Daniel announced.

For the first time, Gray noticed the heavy smell of home cooking in the air. “Fried chicken?”

Daniel nodded. “Takoda told us it was your favorite.”

Gray glanced at Takoda. “When did you tell them that?”

“A couple weeks ago. I stopped in to make sure you and Enapay were still coming in today.” Takoda gave Gray a quick kiss. “I’m glad you’re home.”

“And it’s where I plan to stay,” Gray announced.

“What?” Hakan questioned.

Gray gestured to the dining room. “I’ll tell you over dinner. I’m starved.”

* * * *

Gray sat between Enapay and Takoda. Enapay’s hand remained on Gray’s back, offering the support he obviously knew Gray needed.

After filling his plate, Gray addressed the table of friends. “I’m not going to accept any more assignments, at least for a while.”

Hakan rested his elbows on the table and clasped his hands together. “We thought it might be time.”

“Time? Gray questioned.

“I’ve liquidated most of my assets and purchased a small island in the South Pacific. Some of the cat shifters have had a hard time adapting to the much colder climate here. They’ll be the first to be given a chance to relocate, but after we get them settled, the island will be open to any of the shifters who are interested,” Ryker said.

The idea of living out his days on a warm island appealed to Gray, but he knew his mates wouldn’t be happy. After sacrificing his time for five years to follow Gray around the world, Enapay deserved to live in the place he considered home.

Takoda loved to explore new things in his crow form. Gray knew an island wouldn’t offer him the same opportunity. Besides, winters had become Gray’s favorite time of year. It was a chance for him to lock himself inside his home and reconnect with his lovers.

Although Takoda and Enapay hadn’t said anything, Gray felt them both stiffen at the announcement. “This is our home and as long as Refuge is here, I vote to stay.”

Gray felt Takoda’s hand join Enapay’s as the two men rubbed his back. Gray looked at Enapay. “Does that sound okay to you?”

Enapay nodded with a smile plastered on his gorgeous face.

Gray then turned to Takoda and asked him the same question. “Yes. This is the only home I have. I’m not ready to leave it.”

Gray gave each man a quick kiss before addressing the rest of the table. “What about the rest of you? Will you be relocating?”

Jarek, Mica and Suni shook their heads. Toby and Jack followed suit. Once all eyes were on the threesome at the head of the table, Ryker cleared his throat. “We’ll be splitting our time between both locations.”

“We’ll miss you, but we understand,” Gray said. The Guardians were responsible for all shifters and it was only fair they divide their time in such a way. “Will you tell the press about the new acquisition?”

Ryker shook his head. “The island was purchased through a shadow company. My hope is that Newday Island will always be kept hidden from the media.”

The shifters had been through a lot, and Gray knew they deserved a haven. “I’m hoping if I stop touring, the hype will die off as well. It may take a few years, but hopefully Refuge will once again be what the name implies.”

“And until then, I intend to make sure everyone is safe,” Mica added.

“You’ve done a damn good job so far, babe,” Jarek said, rubbing against his mate.

“Yes, you have,” Gray agreed. Despite their need for additional security guards, the stone men had gotten together and begged Earth Mother not to create any more of them. Their transition had been far too painful and they didn’t wish learning to deal with human emotions on anyone. They had finally decided to recruit and train the other shifters on Refuge. Gray knew they’d lose many of the big cat shifters to Newday Island, but the wolves and cougars would more than likely stay put.

As the conversation died down, Gray began to work his way through his overly full plate. He was amazed at Jarek and Daniel’s cooking skills. “This is damn good.”

“Thanks,” Jarek answered.

By the time Gray finished his birthday dinner, he was more than full, he was revived. As he glanced around the table, he couldn’t keep the smile from his face. Years spent isolated in a laboratory had given him the ability to appreciate friendship like nothing else ever could. He loved the men gathered around the table, and he knew no matter where they lived, nothing would ever change that.

* * * *

With his cock buried deep in Enapay’s ass, Takoda groaned as Gray worked his way inside Takoda’s hole. It had been months since he’d felt the touch of his lovers, and Takoda was more than hungry for it. “Yes.”

“Missed you,” Gray grunted as he seated himself to the hilt inside Takoda.

“I’m here now,” Takoda managed to reply. The conversation earlier in the evening had Takoda thinking. He knew Gray would enjoy the year round sunshine Newday would provide, but he’d agreed to stay at Refuge for his mates.

The gesture wasn’t lost on Takoda. Flying off to new places had lost some of its appeal in the last few years. If it hadn’t been for Enapay and Gray’s travels, Takoda knew he might have very well stuck closer to Refuge than he had.

With Gray’s announcement of taking himself off the road, Takoda knew it was time to adjust their lifestyle. He pistoned his hips faster, fucking Enapay with even more enthusiasm as he took pleasure in his mate’s gasps and moans.

“Love you,” he cried, spilling his seed.

Takoda's hand continued to work Enapay's cock until his lover, too, slipped over the edge. The squeeze of Enapay's body as he came milked the remaining cum from Takoda's body. The fat cock still hammering in and out of Takoda's hole didn't give him time to relax. The pleasures he'd found in his mates had far surpassed anything he'd experienced as his crow.

"Fuck me," Takoda begged as his cock slipped from Enapay's hole.

He felt Gray's grip on his hip tighten as the gorgeous man cried Takoda's name in release. Takoda squeezed his sphincter muscles as tight as he could to prolong Gray's climax. He felt his lover collapse and released his hold.

"Damn," Gray gasped.

Takoda grinned. He'd noticed something about Gray that he doubted Gray had noticed. Although it had been five years, Takoda didn't think Gray had aged at all since they'd made love in the healing spring so long ago.

The prospect of Gray growing old and ultimately dying had been troubling to all three of them. Early in their relationship, Enapay had grown quite depressed over the thought of living without one of his mates. They'd finally decided to live each day to its fullest.

After all their heartache and worry, Takoda suspected the spring had granted them more time with their mate. He'd decided not to say anything to Gray in case he was wrong, but he knew Gray's slow aging process would become evident in the next ten years or so.

Until then, Takoda would hold the secret and glory in the idea of loving his two men for many years to come.

About the Author

An avid reader for years, one day Carol Lynne decided to write her own brand of erotic romance. Carol juggles life as a full-time mom and a full-time writer. These days, you can usually find her either cleaning jelly out of the carpet or nestled in her favorite chair writing steamy love scenes.

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Extinction

Professor of Environmental Science/Wildlife studies at UNLV, Jack McBain has spent his adult life trying to track a legend overheard during his youth. Born and raised in the Canadian Province of Newfoundland, Jack remembers his grandparents telling stories of a race of people eradicated by European settlers in 1829. According to the legend, the Beothuk people didn't die out as first thought, but were transformed into wolf shifters.

When Newfoundland wolves began to appear in great numbers, the European settlers began killing them under the guise of population control. In 1910, the last of the Newfoundland wolves was shot, making them one of the few extinct species of wolves in the world.

Following spotty leads, Jack begins to track what he believes are Beothuk/Newfoundland shifter wolves. His search leads him to the Lake Mead National Recreational Area outside of Las Vegas. There, on Spirit Mountain, he finally comes face to face with not only the shifter he's been looking for, but the man of his dreams he didn't know he needed.

Retribution

Three lonely souls find each other in the midst of an all out war between the shifters and the Hunters.

Mother Earth gave Ryker Allen rebirth over a century ago, his main purpose to protect Mother's shifter children. Ryker has never begrudged his duties, but the loneliness is something he'll never get used to.

Daniel was the King of the Coyotes until a mistake led to the decimation of his species. Alone and half-dead, he was taken in by a pack of wolf shifters as a pet for the Alpha's mate. When he's given a chance to live as an Alpha once again, he's reluctant to accept, afraid he's no longer worthy to lead.

Hakan is the son of Father Sky. He was awarded rebirth over a thousand years ago to protect the Native American Bird Shifters. When animosity towards Native Americans escalated, Hakan's

charges took to the sky permanently, leaving him without a purpose. He's lived his long life alone, waiting for the day he can once again serve his Father.

Three men, three very different backgrounds, one thing in common. Loneliness. Can these three souls come together to form a family?

Evolution

Jarek, a young cougar shifter, arrives at Refuge full of hope. He is finally in a place where he can have a lover and his first-ever home. Meeting Mica feels like icing on the cake, but his dreams are quickly shattered by a night of pain and violence at the hands of his Alpha.

Mica, a stone man, is trying to get his emotions under control. He likes Jarek, but isn't sure what to do with the overwhelming lust he feels whenever Jarek is near. After the two of them are caught in a compromising position, Jarek goes missing, and Mica will do anything in his power to track him down.

Suni, the true-blue Alpha of the cougars, doesn't want anything to do with the rest of his kind. He is perfectly content to live out his life in seclusion. When he stumbles across a young cougar shifter near death, he realizes he's found his mate. When Jarek regains consciousness and tells Suni about Mica, the true Alpha is left wondering where he'll fit in.

Three men, one who wants to feel, one who doesn't know how to feel, and one who refuses to feel, come together on the side of a mountain. The resulting clash of personalities and sexually charged energy will change their lives forever.

***Also Available from
Resplendence Publishing***

In For a Penny by Carol Lynne

What's the old saying...you can never go home again? Raven Black resigned himself to never returning after being ordered from the only real home he'd ever known. Now, seven years later, Raven is back to face the man who sent him away.

Zane Conner is not only Raven's foster brother but the only man Raven ever loved. Despite his mixed feelings about the situation, Raven can't deny Zane when the older man asks for his help in saving the Lazy C Bar Ranch. A boy found dead on the ranch clinches Raven's decision.

Why did the young boy look so much like he had at that age—the same age he'd been when his own father had beaten him and left him for dead?

Going Deep by G.A. Hauser

Dylan Conway thought he had a chance at the big leagues when a pro football scout invited him to try out for the team. After a successful college career, Dylan figured it was a sure thing.

It wasn't.

With his dream of playing pro ball shattered, Dylan takes a job in LA delivering pizza until he can figure out a new direction for his life. What he doesn't expect is to be propositioned at every delivery, and to his amazement, he's asked to work for a photographer of male nudes. He accepts, and begins his journey into a deeper, darker industry.

Sean Dean, AKA 'Rippin Long', is tired of working as a gay porn star. For seven long years he was the top earner for Tartarus Studios, but now he's sick and tired of the demands. He yearns for a real life and respectable work.

But even the jaded Rippin Long is stunned to see the latest addition to the Tartarus studios stable of stars: The delectable Dylan Conway. To make matters worse, Dylan makes no effort to hide his instant attraction to Tartarus' prized stud, and he's after more than sex. Dylan wants a 'relationship', something Sean has avoided after continuously being idolized as the porn star, and not the human being behind the façade.

One man jaded and at the end of his porn career, the other fresh and just beginning a new life in

the industry—the possibility for any kind of future between the two seems daunting. Yet, the two men collide on set, burning up the screen like no other men before them. Could there be a chance for a real bond between them? With faith, hope, and a little help from karma, could true love bloom from what was once two broken lives?

***Saving Noah* by Carol Lynne and Cash Cole**

Dexter Krispin arrived in the small Kansas town of Schicksal with one thing on his mind: finishing his doctoral thesis. He hoped getting away from his hectic life in Pittsburgh would allow him to concentrate on the long overdue paper and to forget about his last lover.

Life-long Schicksal resident, Noah Stoffel, has managed to keep his sexuality a secret. Yet, after one look at the dark-haired newcomer, he knows his life in the sleepy town will never be the same.

But more than Noah's desire for privacy stands between him and Dexter. For years, the residents of Schicksal have been hiding a horrific secret, one that takes Dexter mere days to uncover and expose...a secret that could destroy—or heal—they all.

***Tropical Hedonism* by Dakota Rebel**

After a boating accident, Sean Harris wakes up staring into the eyes of a handsome doctor. Even when he discovers that he is on an island within the Bermuda Triangle, and there is no way for him to get back to his old life, he can't be too disappointed if it means being stuck with the doctor.

Dr. Wesley Carpenter cannot believe that the younger Sean Harris would want anything to do with him. After half-heartedly turning down the advances of his patient, he realizes that resistance is futile.

The men find themselves falling for each other quickly, but ghosts from their pasts and outside influences try to get in the way of their happiness. Sean and Wesley may be on the island forever, but neither is sure if that guarantees they'll be able to continue their *Tropical Hedonism*.

***Mind F*cked* by Mia Watts**

Sage has the ability to read minds, but only in high passion moments when thoughts transmit at a higher frequency. But the gift is double-edged. Sage is inordinately handsome. Some might even say he's a walking orgasm. So what's a half-breed to do when every person he meets seems intent on seducing him, and how will he know if the man he chooses will love him for more than his looks?

Joe has never been the object of anyone's lust before. Now Sage, the hottest guy he's ever laid

eyes on, has Joe starring in his sexual fantasies. It would be perfect if only Sage could shut up for one minute, and quit talking about his own hotness—or about how he can read minds.

Meanwhile, Joe and Sage must secure the last three Zodiac Stones and prevent their theft while they wait for exhibition. Can they put their sexual tension aside long enough to stop a clever thief? And even if they do, will Joe's heart be a casualty of their inevitable fling, or could Sage really be looking for more than a one-night stand?

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