



Written by Jessica Coulter Smith

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Other Titles by Jessica Coulter Smith

Whispering Lake (Aug. 2008/Aug. 2009)

Magnolia Magick (Mar. 2009)

Ashton Grove Werewolves

Moonlight Protector (Jan. 2009)

Moonlight Hero (May 2009)

Moonlight Guardian (Oct. 2009)

Moonlight Champion (Spring 2010)

Short Stories

For Now and Always

A Love for All Nights

Dreams by Moonlight (Quart of Blood Anthology)

Praise for Whispering Lake

"The author weaves an amazing and riveting tale of love and desire, hope and fear with a little bit of wicked fun thrown in the mix."

Satin & Lace Reviews

"The author created a unique and interesting storyline that had me guessing until the end as to what was going to happen to all the characters, especially to Cassie and her ghost friend, Matt."

Night Owl Romance

"Miss Coulter Smith writes sweet words with just a hint of naughty thrown in to make you squirm. Whispering Lake is not your normal paranormal; it's better."

Dark Divas Reviews

"Jessica Coulter Smith takes us back again, with an extended and longer version, to where it all began. This is a great re-introduction into her Ashton Grove Werewolves series. I was drawn in from the first page and couldn't put it down until I'd finished it. Definitely her best so far."

ParaNormal Romance (PNR)

Praise for Moonlight Protector

"This is one of those books that I will recommend to any paranormal romance readers out there to really check out as soon as possible you won't regret it."

Talk About My Favorite Authors

"You will come to appreciate how this author blends not only the horrors that Marin will face, but also how she makes the secondary characters come alive within the pages of this book."

The Romance Studio

Praise for Moonlight Protector (continued)...

"It is a page turner that keeps you reading till the very end. The characters are complex, emotional beings."

Night Owl Romance

"Jessica Coulter Smith really has outdone herself with this book... It's captivating and spellbinding..."

The Long & Short of It

"Great story, timeless plot, and ultimate satisfaction of good guy gets girl, and the happy ever after."

ParaNormal Romance (PNR)

Praise for Moonlight Hero

"Jessica Coulter Smith delivers another wonderfully written paranormal romance that had me totally captivated from start to finish, as well as making me want more by the time I read the last sentence of the novel."

Talk About My Favorite Authors

"Ms. Smith did a very nice job balancing their personalities, and making sure that one didn't overpower the other, and the result was a great story. The attraction between the two of them was almost volcanic, and made this a very steamy read."

Romance Junkies

"You just have to love a man who knows what he wants, and puts his heart on the line to get it. Gabriel's character is all about action and honorability, the perfect traits for an alpha...This is an entertaining read with just enough action and romance to keep the characters hopping."

Coffee Time Romance

Prologue

An upside down, backwards little town exists in the middle of southern Georgia; population 300. In the town of Windsor, everything you know to be a reality in the rest of the world is turned inside out. Werewolves are real and a part of society, whether society wants them to be or not. What's more, their pack is allowed to do as they please, regardless of what that means. The townspeople and its leaders are frightened of the werewolves, enough that if a girl goes missing here or there its over-looked, swept under the rug so to speak. Simply accepted as part of life. If your daughter, granddaughter, or girlfriend goes missing, you know she's part of the pack now. Lost to you forever, no longer a normal citizen, but a possession – property of the Vicus Luna, or Half-Moon as the pack is called.

Once per month, when the moon hangs heavy in the sky, the Vicus Luna hunt the streets, looking for another female to add to their group, uncaring of the age of their next victim. As the hum of motorcycles is heard throughout the city, the citizens of Windsor keep to their homes, protecting their female family members. None wish to cross the Vicus Luna, known to be vicious when necessary and easily provoked; the pack is feared.

It is on such a night that our tale begins...

Part One

A new way of life...

Chapter One

Cady Whitmore sat at the kitchen table, staring at her homework, yet not really seeing the pages in front of her. Her brother, Jamie, had insisted she stay nearby and attend the local community college. It had been the one time they had fought. Cady had wanted to escape the town of Windsor. She hated small towns and the small minds they bred. She wanted to spread her wings, explore a little, and see what the rest of the world was like. She knew that other towns didn't know about werewolves much less let them run rampant. There had to be a more peaceful place, a place she could gladly call home.

Cady sighed. Looking out the window, she saw the sun was starting to set, which meant her brother would be going to work soon. The town ran a club for the werewolves called the Sunset Club, open from sunset to sunrise. The pay wasn't stellar, but it allowed them to live comfortably. Their home was small, the furniture old, but it was home just the same.

Jamie walked through the kitchen door, dressed in his standard uniform of black jeans and a white t-shirt with "Sunset Club" blazoned across the chest.

"Did you have a good day at school?" he asked, heading toward the refrigerator.

"Yes, my classes were fine," she answered, not really looking at him.

"Why don't you work on your homework while I cook dinner," he suggested.

Cady shrugged, gathered her books and went to her room. As she closed the door, she tossed her books onto her bed. She was

taking a College Algebra class that was killing her and a Literature class that she loved, along with two other general education requirements. She had a full load, but it wasn't as bad as she had thought it would be. Her classes were longer than her high school classes had been, but she only went twice a week so she had plenty of time to do homework and study.

Opening her math book, she stared at the page. Math had never been her best subject and the college version certainly wasn't any easier. After reading through the chapter twice, her head was hurting and she didn't understand it any better than she had before.

Closing the book, she heard her brother yell for her from the kitchen.

As she stepped into the kitchen, she noticed there was only one plate on the table.

"Aren't you staying to eat?" she asked.

Jamie shook his head. "I have to get to work. Promise me that you'll stay home tonight."

"I have to go to Heather's in an hour," she answered.

"Why? You know you need to be inside tonight of all nights," he responded, a slight tinge of anger in his voice.

"Because if I don't go to Heather's I'm going to fail my math class," she answered tersely.

Jamie sighed, defeated. "Alright, but promise that you'll be careful! Get Heather or her brother to drive you back home. And make sure you're home by nine o'clock! Maybe the Vicus Luna won't be out before then."

"I will," Cady promised.

Jamie nodded. "I'll see you when I get home."



An hour later, Cady slowly made her way to Heather's house. She was only a block away when she spotted a member of Vicus Luna. She paused, knowing she couldn't outrun him. Deciding to act nonchalant, she continued walking. She had only taken a few steps when she spotted a few more members of the pack.

Her heart was racing, her palms were starting to sweat, and she could feel her breath coming out short and frantic. Maybe if she stopped and talked to them, they would let her pass.

"What do you want?" she called out in a voice that didn't quite sound like her own.

"Not much. Just you," one of them answered with a smug smile.

"Why me?" she asked, her voice coming out in a near whisper, her fear having taken over.

"Because you're the only one walking around tonight. Any other questions?" one of them asked, eyeing her up and down.

"What are you going to do with me?" Cady asked, not entirely sure she wanted the answer.

She had heard rumors of what happened to the girls and young women who were taken, but her brother wouldn't let anyone talk about Vicus Luna around her. Looking back, she wished he had. It might have better prepared her for this very moment.

"That's not something I'm going to answer, not yet anyway." He looked over at another pack member, "David, why don't you take her back to the house."

Cady watched as the one called David strode forward. Average height and build with short spiky brown hair and gray eyes lent him a softer look than the rest of the group. He didn't seem to have that same hard edge as the others.

"You're smart not to put up a fight," he said. "I know you're probably scared, but you shouldn't be. No one is going to hurt you."

"How do I know that?" Cady asked. "How do I know that you plan on keeping me alive? Or that I'll ever see my brother again?"

"You don't. You just have to trust me," David answered. "All we really want is to make the townspeople pay. For so long they felt they were superior to us, not allowing their daughters to date us; not giving us jobs or letting us rent homes from them. We're different and they feared us without cause; ostracizing anyone who belonged to a werewolf family, whether they could shift or not. Now they don't have a choice, they have to accept us. The snobs have to face the fact that their daughter's belong to us now."

"I know that's how this whole thing started, but why me? I'm not like them. I don't have money or a big house. I'm just average," she replied. If they had wanted a spoiled little rich girl, they definitely had the wrong person. She only hoped that would work in her favor.

David shook his head. "That isn't going to work. Have you looked around and seen this neighborhood?" he asked, spreading his hands and looking around at the large homes.

"But I don't live around here," Cady insisted.

David snorted. "Yeah right. Your dad is probably a doctor or something."

Quietly, Cady replied, "My parents are dead."

David looked at her with new eyes. "Maybe you're not one of them after all. Sorry to hear about your parents."

He motioned for her to start walking. They walked in silence until they reached the other side of town, the poorer side. When they stopped in front of a small set of townhouses, Cady took in her surroundings.

"Home sweet home," David said, climbing the steps to the townhouse directly in front of them.

"All of you live here?" she asked, wondering how they all fit. The pack had to have at least fifteen members, not including the girls they had taken.

"We share rooms. Each townhouse has three bedrooms, except the one on the end. It has four," David said as they approached the front door.

"Isn't sharing a room a little hard sometimes?" Cady asked.

David shrugged. "Five in each house; the girls get a room and the guys share two and three to a room. It isn't that bad."

"What about the fourth house?" Cady asked, indicating the larger one on the end.

"That's where Marshall and his brothers live. A friend of theirs has the fourth room. Other than that, it's off limits – except to the women they take their beds for the night," he answered.

David could tell that Cady was a little surprised. If the thought of women hopping in and out of the beds of the Creed brothers shocked her, she must have led a fairly sheltered life.

He pushed open the door and ushered Cady inside. They were instantly greeted by all of the pack members, who had gathered to check out the newest addition to their numbers.

"Hey, what did you find tonight?" one of the guys asked, eyeing her openly.

Cady tried not to shiver in revulsion. The look he was giving her made her skin crawl.

"Hands off, Chris," David said. "You know that Marshall decides who gets the new additions."

"Maybe I don't want to wait on Marshall to decide," Chris countered, his jaw set at a stubborn angle.

"Give it up, Chris. You're too drunk to realize what you're saying. Go back over to Cheri. She's looking rather upset with you," David said with a pointed look at a woman in the corner.

Chris didn't need any further prompting. Not wanting to upset the only woman in the pack that actually tolerated him, he slunk back over to the corner.

"Thank you," Cady whispered to David.

"For what? I only reminded Chris that Marshall would be angry with him," he replied.

Cady was appalled. "You mean someone is actually going to give me away like cattle, like a possession?"

"Pretty much," David answered. "Don't worry, you'll get used to the way things are handled around here."

"What if I don't?" she asked.

David rubbed the back of his neck. "Then you pray that Marshall doesn't find out. The last thing you want to see is that man highly pissed off."

Cady chewed on her bottom lip for a minute. "You've mentioned Marshall a few times. Who is he?"

David looked down at her in stunned silence. "How can you possibly *not* know who Marshall is? Everyone in town knows him by reputation if nothing else."

"I usually keep to myself. So, who is he?" she asked again, hoping for an answer this time.

"The leader of our pack," David answered.

He turned slightly away from her, not wanting to answer any more questions. She wasn't what he had expected. All of the others had been stuck up and snobby when they had been abducted. But not Cady; no, she was inquisitive more than anything else. Sure, she had showed a little fear in the beginning, but she didn't seem quite as tense anymore.

It seemed like they waited for hours for the pack's leader, the alpha, to return. Cady became tired and curled in a chair. Just as her eyes were closing, she heard the door open and close with a bang.

"Where is she?" a deep voice asked.



Marshall surveyed the room, looking for the newest addition to his pack. He was anxious to get this part of the evening out of the way. Once he had their latest acquisition settled, he could go about his business. It had been a long day and all he wanted was a drink and a willing woman.

"She's right here, Marshall," said David, pulling Cady to her feet and ushering her forward.

Cady stopped a few feet away from the large man facing her. Her mouth ran dry in both awe and fear. The alpha of the Vicus Luna was the tallest man she'd ever been around, standing easily at six-foot-four inches tall. His muscular shoulders and thick upper arms filled out his t-shirt; the material clung like a second skin, accenting his chest and washboard abs.

She eyed him uncertainly, not sure what to expect. Chancing a look at his face, her breath caught. His dark brown hair fell over his forehead just above his dark eyebrows; his eyes were a dark mossy green and his nose was straight. Full lips rested above a firm, square jaw. Overall, Cady had to admit she hadn't seen a better looking man in all of her nineteen years. If she had to guess, she'd put his age around twenty-three or twenty-four.

Marshall quickly looked her over, taking in her slim form and petite stature. Her long chestnut hair fell to the middle of her back in waves. Eyes the color of chocolate stared at him uncertainly. Her nose was small and dainty, above full sensuous lips, all set in

an elfin face. She was easily the most beautiful woman they'd managed to snag thus far.

"I'm going to do things a little differently this time," he announced, looking around the room. "Anyone interested in claiming her should step forward."

Marshall wasn't sure what had made him utter the words. Something about her brought out a protective streak in him. She may not be able to choose who she wanted outright, but he could narrow the field down a little and then give her a choice. Something told him he would feel guilty if he just gave her to a random guy.

His brothers, Paul and Robin, stepped forward, as well as their long-time friend, Brendan. Marshall wasn't entirely surprised, but he was a little dismayed. It would be hard having her in the same house with him on a regular basis. He had hoped someone else would step forward.

"Only three?" he asked the room.

Marshall sighed. Turning toward Cady, he motioned for her to step forward. "I guess I should at least get a good look at you before passing you off to someone. Come here."

Cady hesitated a moment, but felt a push from behind, sending her sprawling against Marshall. The collision with his hard body nearly knocked the breath out of her.

Reaching out to steady her, Marshall couldn't help but notice how fragile and soft she felt. Her full breasts pressed against him and he immediately felt himself grow hard. He wasn't used to having such a sudden reaction to a female and it took him by surprise.

Setting her back on her feet, he backed up a step. He looked down at her, letting his eyes travel from her head to her toes and back again. He had to admit she was delicious. Marshall wondered what she would taste like, what she would feel like lying under him.

"You're awfully pretty. What's your name?" he asked in a husky voice.

"Cady," she replied softly.

"So, Cady, which of these guys would you prefer?" he asked.

"I don't want to belong to anyone. I just want to go home," she answered.

Cady wished that she had listened to Jamie. If she had, she would be curled up in her warm bed this very moment. She wouldn't be forced to choose a random guy she'd never met and knew nothing about. It was almost as bad as if he had auctioned her off. She felt like a hooker being pimped out.

"Going home isn't an option. If you don't select one of these guys, then I'll pick for you," Marshall replied.

Cady didn't need any further prompting; she knew without a doubt that he meant what he said. She slowly walked over to the guys and looked at each of them. None of them were bad looking, but she still wasn't sure how she could pick one of them. How could you choose a complete stranger? They all had an edge to them, a feral gleam in their eyes. Being part of Vicus Luna meant they were hard and possibly violent. If she chose wrong, it could mean her life. How could she possibly make such a decision at the drop of a hat?

Marshall watched her, watched the various emotions creeping across her face. He knew she felt frustrated and scared, but she was holding up pretty well. All of the others had broken down by this point and were crying, but not Cady. She had an inner strength that would serve her well in their pack.

"Time's up," he told her softly.

She turned to him with wide eyes. "But... I don't know any of them. How can I make a choice when they're all strangers to me?"

Marshall shrugged. "Not my problem, honey."

Cady looked from him to the three guys and back again. "I can't choose."

Marshall wiped a hand across his jaw. Maybe he should just claim her for himself and be done with it. Whether he liked to admit it or not, she appealed to him. Her small frame barely reached his chest. While he typically went for taller women, her petite stature made him feel protective. It was a novelty for him, one that might be worth exploring.

Mate... the word whispered across his mind. His gaze sharpened on her. Was it possible? Was she his mate? It wasn't often that a

werewolf found his mate. An alpha could only sire another alpha if his wife was his true mate. Marshall's parents had been fortunate to find each other. Or maybe not so fortunate... when his father had died, his mother had slowly lost her mind, spiraling into a state of despair. It had only been a few months later that she had decided to join him, leaving her teenage sons alone.

Marshall slowly circled her, taking in every strand of hair, every freckle sprinkled across her nose, the very scent of her. *Mate...* the word slid through his mind again, more insistent this time.

"Or perhaps instead of having you choose, I should just claim you for myself," he told her quietly.

If possible, her eyes widened even more. He wasn't sure if that was a good sign or a bad one. Either way, there was no backing down now. Regardless of what happened, she *would* be his. He couldn't wait to feel her soft skin sliding against his; feel her moist heat as he buried himself in her body.

"What?" she asked softly. "But I thought..." her voice trailed off and she glanced over her shoulder at the three guys still waiting on her decision.

"You said you couldn't choose. When I said I would choose for you, I didn't specify that it would be one of those three."

Cady swallowed, feeling truly afraid for the first time. There was something different about Marshall. It wasn't just that he was the biggest guy she'd ever met, but there was something wild and untamed about him. It both excited and terrified her. She knew that being with him would change her, but she wasn't sure how long their time together would last. She doubted the alpha would be happy with one woman for the rest of his life. What would happen to her when he tired of her?

Marshall took a step closer to her, mere inches separating them. "You don't have a problem with that, do you?"

She shook her head, remembering what David had said about the man's temper. The last thing she needed to do was make him angry. Would he hit her? If she made him mad enough, would he kill her? Her heart thumped against her ribs. She tried to steady her nerves, knowing that to show fear would be a grave mistake. If she was timid around the alpha, he would never respect her.

Turning to face the room, Marshall announced, "I've decided to take this one for myself. Sorry guys, but the show is over."

Marshall fought a grin when he heard one of his brothers growl. It gave him great pleasure to thwart them at every turn. His parents had called it sibling rivalry, but it wasn't. He simply enjoyed rubbing their noses in the fact that he was in charge – they had no power over their lives except what he allowed.

Chapter Two

After his shocking announcement, Marshall took Cady by the hand and led her out the door. Heading across the street, he made a hasty retreat into the woods.

"Where are we going?" Cady asked, looking over her shoulder at the townhomes, almost hoping they would be followed.

"Some place quiet," Marshall answered.

"In the woods?" she asked, looking around apprehensively. All kinds of things lived in the woods. Cady wasn't sure she wanted to meet any of them face to face, not at night. Not to mention that it would be an ideal place to kill someone and hide the body.

"I have a cabin out here. It's about a mile in; think you can make it?"

Cady swallowed. "Do I have a choice?"

He gave a humorless chuckle. "Not really."

Cady tripped a few times over tree roots and loose limbs lying on the ground. Every time an owl hooted or something scurried through the dry leaves lining the floor of the woods, she jumped.

Just when she thought they would be walking forever, she saw a small cabin up ahead.

"Is that it?" she asked, hopeful that she would finally be able to rest.

"Yeah, that's it," he responded.

When they reached the cabin door, Marshall unlocked it and ushered Cady inside. Upon first inspection, the cabin was slightly larger than it had appeared on the outside. There was a small living area, efficiency size kitchen, and a small dining area with a

round table and four chairs. Two doors stood open across the cabin. One opened to a small bathroom and the other was the bedroom.

Giving the cabin a cursory glance, Cady realized there was only one bedroom, and from what she could tell there was only one bed in that bedroom. A rather large bed at that.

Swallowing down her anxiety, she decided she wouldn't panic – at least not yet. Maybe he was a gentleman and planned on sleeping on the couch. For that matter, she would be happy to take the couch if it meant she didn't have to share a bed with a stranger.

David's words from earlier came back to haunt her. Marshall and his brothers were used to women doing whatever was asked of them. What would happen if she refused to sleep with him?

"Why did you bring me here?" Cady asked, looking up at his imposing form, trying to mask her fear.

"To have some privacy," he answered.

Cady swallowed the knot forming in her throat. She was too scared to ask why they needed privacy; the bed in the other room spoke volumes.

"When do I get to call my brother? I know he has to be frantic by now. I'm sure my friend called and told him I never made it to her house," she rambled.

"You don't. Once you're part of the pack, you don't get to be part of your old family any longer," he stated matter-of-factly, immediately dismissing the issue.

"Why not? Jamie is all I have, and I'm all he has. You have to let me call him!" she insisted.

Marshall arched an eyebrow, but said nothing. He wasn't accustomed to having a female talk back to him. Normally he would have back-handed her, but something told him that would be a mistake with Cady.

"Answer me," she demanded.

Marshall quickly closed the distance between them. He glowered down at her. "No one tells me what to do," he practically roared, clenching his hands into fists to keep from striking her.

"You don't have to yell. I'm not deaf," she replied in a miffed tone.

He looked at her, bemused, the anger draining from him. "You're more of a smart ass now; interesting change. At the townhome where you were surrounded by people you were quiet and timid. Now that you're alone in the woods with me you decide to stand up for yourself."

Cady shrugged. "I *was* scared at the townhome with everyone staring at me, the guys wanting a piece of me like I was something to own."

"You *are* something to own," Marshall interrupted.

"No, I'm not. I have plans you know. I'm in college. It may only be the local junior college, but once I put in my time there and make good grades, I'm going to transfer to a four-year school in another state."

He shook his head. "Not anymore."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that college won't be necessary anymore. You'll stay with the pack," he answered.

"But..."

He placed a finger over her lips. "No buts. Besides, I need to take a shower before we have company."

"Company? I thought you brought me out here for privacy."

A smile curved his lips. "I did, but I have something my brother wants."

"What's that?" she asked.

"You," was his simple reply.

He turned from her and walked toward the bathroom. Before closing the door, he looked at her over his shoulder. "Try to be a good girl while I'm in the shower. Don't bother trying to leave, you'd only get lost."

Cady snorted. "As if I have any desire to go traipsing through the woods in the dark."

Marshall fought a grin and closed the bathroom door. It seemed he had chosen wisely. She might still be unsure around him, but she wasn't afraid enough for it to curb her thoughts and opinions. He had a feeling his life was about to get rather interesting. He only hoped she would curb her tongue when the pack was around. If not, he would have to put her in her place.



After his shower, he slipped his jeans back on, but decided to forgo putting on a shirt. He figured it would shock Cady, but it might be worth it to see the look on her face. He briefly wondered if she was a virgin. If she was, it would change things a little. The beast within him howled for him to throw her down on the bed, strip off her clothes, and take her hard and fast. But if she was inexperienced, he would have to take things slowly. He'd give her some space tonight and try to gain her trust. He knew without a doubt that Paul would come for her. It gave Marshall the perfect opportunity to be her knight in shining armor.

Stepping out of the bathroom, he found her sitting on the sofa. He beckoned her with a crook of his index finger. He could tell she wanted to rebel, but she stiffly rose from the sofa and walked over to him.

"You could simply ask me to come over," she said.

"If you aren't careful, I'll have to find a way to curb that sassy mouth of yours," he said, looking at her lips hungrily. He wondered if they felt as soft as they looked.

Cady's breath caught. She wasn't sure if her reaction was more due to his threat, or if it was a response to the hungry look in his eyes. He wanted her, of that she had no doubt.

"Come on, it's time for bed," he said, turning toward the bedroom.

Cady followed him into the bedroom, stopping just inside the door. She watched him uneasily. This was it, the moment of truth. Would he force her? As her eyes travelled over his naked torso, she briefly wondered if he would have to force her. She felt liquid warmth spread through her stomach and lower. Biting on her lip, she waited to see what he would say or do.

Pulling back the covers, Marshall slid into the bed. Propping his hands behind his head, he watched Cady fight her inner battle. Sighing, he realized that she wasn't going to move.

"Cady, get in the bed."

She eyed him indecisively. "We're going to share a bed? But I thought...."

"I don't care what you thought, just get in the damn bed," he replied tersely. The woman was starting to drive him mad. He was starting to wonder if a mate was worth this much trouble.

She walked over to the bed and sat on the edge. Kicking off her shoes, she lay down as close to the edge as possible, turning her back to Marshall. She knew ignoring him wouldn't make him go away, but maybe it would make him leave her alone. She wasn't ready to face the attraction he had sparked in her tonight and she certainly wasn't ready for anything else he might have in mind. Her body craved him, but her mind told her to be wary. She had learned before that just because a guy looks hot, doesn't mean he's worth her time or trouble.

Cady closed her eyes and tried to sleep, but couldn't. The man lying on the other side of the bed was only a small part of her nervousness. She'd never been in the woods before and the strange noises kept her awake.

Across the bed, Marshall sensed her unease. Sighing, he reached over and pulled her into his arms. Turning her to face him, he felt her stiffen.

"Relax, Cady. I'm not going to rape you if that's what you're worried about," he said, slightly irritated. Out of all of the women to claim, why did he have to claim the most obstinate woman he'd ever met? He'd never taken a woman by force and he wasn't going to start now.

Cady winced. She hated to admit it, but the thought had crossed her mind once or twice. Trying to relax her body, she rested her head on Marshall's shoulder. Hesitantly, she draped her arm across his waist. As she breathed in his musky scent, her body slowly started to relax and she was able to finally go to sleep.



A few hours later, Cady was startled awake. Listening intently, she could swear she heard someone moving around in the cabin.

Sensing her distress, Marshall slowly woke up. "What's wrong, Cady?" he asked, his voice husky with sleep.

"I think someone's in the cabin," she whispered.

Marshall turned toward her and pulled her tighter against his body, wrapping both arms around her. "Impossible, I have the only key," he murmured sleepily.

Another rustle in the other room made Cady tense again. "Marshall, I promise there's someone in the other room."

He sighed and released her. Leaning up on his elbows, he peered through the darkness into the living room. "Who's out there?"

Cady pressed herself closer to him, figuring that he was the lesser of two evils. As the saying went, better the devil you know than the one you don't.

With a growl, he tossed the covers aside. "I said show yourself," Marshall all but barked.

A light clicked on in the living room and his younger brother, Paul, strolled up to the bedroom door. "Having a good night?" he asked, his eyes taking in Cady's mussed hair and the sheets now tangled around their legs.

"Paul, how did you get in here?" Marshall asked.

Holding up a key, he answered, "With the key I had made. You really shouldn't have taken her from me."

"I realized how beautiful she was and decided I wanted her. What difference does it make? She's mine," he answered.

Cady looked up at him in surprise. "You think I'm beautiful?"

Giving her a perplexed look, Marshall asked, "What kind of question is that?"

She shrugged. "No one's ever called me beautiful before. Well, no one except my brother and I figure he doesn't count since he's family."

"Have your boyfriends been blind?" Marshall asked, dumbfounded that the woman had never been told she was beautiful. He wasn't one to throw out a lot of compliments, but he made sure his women knew he found them attractive.

"I haven't had that many. Most of my classmates in high school made fun of me and the guys in college don't seem interested either," she answered truthfully.

It explained why she was so skittish. It also infuriated Marshall. He tamped down his anger, chalking it up to the fact that she was his mate.

"Paul, go home. We'll talk about this tomorrow," Marshall said, ready to go back to sleep.

Paul shook his head. "I don't think so. You see, you were wrong to take her from me, and now I'm going to right that wrong."

Marshall wanted to throttle his little brother. While he had expected a confrontation, he had thought it would come sooner. Why had he waited so long? "And how do you plan on doing that?"

"By taking her back." Holding out his hand, he said, "Cady, come over here."

Cady looked at Paul and then at Marshall, uncertain what to do. There was something in Paul's eyes that made her want to stay firmly planted right where she was. He seemed unpredictable. The look in his eyes made her question his sanity.

Marshall wrapped an arm around her waist and pulled her close. "She isn't going anywhere."

Paul reached into his pocket and pulled out a knife. With a click, he snapped it open, revealing a four inch blade with a wicked curved tip and serrated edge. "I beg to differ."

"Are you seriously going to fight me for her?" Marshall asked, unable to believe his eyes. Had his brother lost complete control of his mind and body? Marshall had killed men with his bare hands. There was no doubt who would win the battle.

"I don't know if fight is quite the right word. Now... Cady, come here."

Marshall loosened his arm, giving her the option to stay or go. If anything, Cady pressed even closer to him. He realized that he would have to send her away before she would budge.

"Cady, why don't you go with Paul," Marshall suggested.

She looked up at him in surprise, hurt showing in her eyes before she could mask it. Taking pity on her, he leaned down to whisper in her ear. "Go with him. I promise to come for you, but I don't want him to get carried away and harm you in some way."

He pressed a quick kiss to her temple and gave her a nudge toward Paul. He would give them a few minutes before he followed. It was time to slip into the role of hero – something Marshall wasn't really familiar with. The role of villain suited him better.

Cady slowly climbed out of the bed and walked toward Paul. When she was close enough, he reached out and snagged her arm, dragging her through the living room and out of the cabin, the door slamming shut behind them.

Chapter Three

Paul dragged her through the woods, not caring that her clothes caught on branches along the way, or that her skin was getting scraped.

"Where are we going?" she asked.

"Shut up," he said, pulling her along roughly.

Cady tripped over a tree root and fell to her knees.

"Get up," Paul bit out.

Climbing to her feet, she felt Paul grab her arm again, and then they were off at the same horrendous pace.

"Please... I can't keep up," she said, a little breathless.

Paul turned to snap at her, but the look on her face stopped him. She was terrified of him and looked to be close to tears. When had he become the monster? It was Marshall she was supposed to hate.

"I'm sorry. I shouldn't have taken my anger out on you," he said, trying to make amends.

"Why do you hate your brother?" she asked.

He narrowed his eyes at her. "Because you should have been mine and he knows it."

She shook her head. "I don't belong to anyone, Paul."

He shoved her against a tree. "Yes, you do. You belong to *me*."

Cady bit back a sob. Her heart was racing. She wished that Marshall would come for her. Had his words meant nothing? Had he decided to just leave her with his brother?

Paul pressed his face into her neck, inhaling her scent, his hands brushing the underside of her breasts. He wanted her and thought about taking her right then and there. His hands skimmed down to her waist and crept under her shirt. He was too distracted with the feel and smell of Cady to hear the footsteps quickly approaching.



Marshall paused before stepping into the clearing. He watched his brother paw at Cady and wondered if she was going to let Paul take her while she was pressed against the tree. He quickly looked over Cady, trying to gauge her reaction. She had scrapes from head to toe and looked scared out of her wits. Apparently she wasn't happy with the situation. It was time to step into hero mode.

Quickly walking over to them, he grabbed his brother by the back of the neck and hauled him off Cady.

"Get your hands off of her," Marshall growled at him.

Paul whipped his knife out and lunged for Marshall. "I plan on putting more than my hands on her," he taunted.

Marshall felt his claws distending from his fingers. He was fighting a full-change for fear of scaring Cady even more. His heroic act would mean nothing if she was scared of him. When his brother lunged, he swiped at him, clawing Paul's upper arm.

Jumping back, Paul stared at his arm in shock. Hatred filling his eyes, he lunged for Marshall again, this time slicing his brother along his ribcage.

Marshall hissed in pain, but didn't falter. He countered Paul's attack and managed to snag his shirt, but he didn't break the skin.

Round and round the two brothers went; Paul slashing at his older brother with a knife and Marshall inflicting wounds left and right with his claws. The two were panting from exertion; sweat beaded their brows as blood dripped from their wounds.

Paul lunged for Marshall again, planning on inflicting a final blow to this brother's throat, but Marshall was too fast.

Crouching low, Marshall managed to tackle his brother, knocking him off his feet. Claws pressed against Paul's throat he asked, "Do you yield?"

Paul glared at his brother, hating him even more than he had before. He spit in his brother's face.

Marshall wiped his face clean and pressed his claws tighter against Paul's throat, pricking the skin and drawing blood. "I ask again, do you yield?"

"Yes," Paul said, knowing his only other choice was death. And he had no doubt that his brother would kill him. It wouldn't be the first time Marshall had taken a life and Paul doubted it would be the last.

Pushing to his feet, Marshall backed toward Cady, never taking his eyes off his brother. "You aren't to speak to her or look at her. Is that understood?"

Paul staggered to his feet and nodded his head.

"Pack a bag. You need to find another place to stay for a few days. I don't want to see you until you've cooled off and learned your place," Marshall told him.

Paul turned and walked off into the woods.



Cady couldn't hold back her tears any longer. Sinking to the ground, she sobbed into her hands.

Once his brother was out of sight, Marshall turned to Cady. Dropping to his haunches, he gently ran a finger down her cheek, wiping away her tears.

"It's okay, honey. He's gone," he told her softly.

Sniffing, she raised her eyes to his. "I was so scared," she admitted.

Marshall reached out and pulled her into his arms. He silently congratulated himself on a job well done. His plan had worked and now Cady would be his for the taking. He had no doubt she would be grateful enough to spread her legs for him.

Continuing with his charade, he said, "I'm sorry you had to go through that. I knew that he would be mad and would come after us, but I never thought he would do anything this stupid."

Cady threw her arms around Marshall's neck and clung to him. Having his arms around her made her feel safe. She knew now that he wouldn't let anything happen to her.

Standing, Marshall pulled Cady to her feet. When she winced, he asked, "What's wrong?"

"I tripped over a root on the way here. I think I twisted my ankle."

Marshall effortlessly lifted her into his arms.

Cady immediately protested. "You can't carry me! You're injured."

"I may be injured, but I'm not letting you walk on a twisted ankle. We're a quarter of a mile from the cabin. You'll never make it," he replied.

Deciding it was better not to argue she relaxed against his chest and rested her head on his shoulder. She would look at his wounds when they returned to the cabin. Hopefully they weren't deep enough to need stitches.

"I was worried you weren't coming for me," she admitted in a near whisper.

"I promised I would."

She nodded. "I know, but I thought... I thought you had changed your mind."

"I'm not going to change my mind, Cady. You belong to me," he told her.

"I don't *belong* to anyone," she countered.

He sighed. "Do we have to argue right now?"

Cady bit her lip realizing he was right, this wasn't the time. He had chauvinistic ideas about women and she would definitely have to work on him, but now wasn't the right time. He was injured and so was she. If anything, they needed to work together instead of against each other.

Chapter Four

When they reached the cabin, Marshall opened the door and kicked it closed behind them. Walking toward the table, he set Cady down in one of the chairs.

"Let me see your ankle," he said, reaching for her leg.

Cady lifted the injured foot.

Paul hadn't given her time to put on shoes and her feet were scratched and dirty. Her ankle was slightly swollen.

Marshall gently rotated her foot, wincing when she groaned in pain. "I think you may have sprained it."

"I'll be fine. You're the one I'm worried about," she said.

He looked at her in surprise. "You're worried about me?"

A blush stole across her cheeks. "You're bleeding," she mumbled. "Your wounds will need to be cleaned. You may even need stitches."

Marshall opened his mouth to respond, but a knock at the door interrupted him.

He called out, "It's open."

Brendan entered. "I saw Paul packing a bag. I take it you two finally got into it?"

Marshall nodded.

Cady tried to hide behind him as best she could. After the incident with Paul, she wasn't certain what to expect from their latest visitor.

Brendan noticed the blood on Marshall's arm and abdomen. "You look like you need to go to the ER."

Marshall shook his head. "I'll be fine, but I think Cady sprained her ankle."

"What did you do? Drag her to the cabin?" Brendan asked, trying to hide his irritation. If Marshall thought for one moment that Brendan still wanted Cady, things would end badly.

"No, but Paul decided to drag her through the woods," Marshall answered, stepping aside so Brendan could see the damage his brother had done.

"Damn." Brendan couldn't believe his eyes. What in the hell had Paul been thinking? He had to have scraped her against every tree and bush along the way. "I think I need to amend my statement. You both obviously need to go to the ER."

Marshall sighed. "Look, I'm tired and I just want to clean up and go back to bed."

Cady hesitantly reached for his hand. "I don't think your wounds are going to close on their own."

Looking down into her worried face, Marshall knew he would end up going to the ER, if for no other reason than to ease her mind. He reached out and pushed a strand of hair behind her ear. "I guess we'd better go if we're going."

Cady smiled at him in relief; then looked down at her feet. "I don't think I can put my shoes on."

"I don't think you can walk back to the townhouse either and I know I can't carry you," Marshall told her.

Brendan cleared his throat. "I came in the truck; that's how I got here so fast."

"Do you have psychic abilities now?" Marshall asked.

"When I saw Paul packing a bag, I wasn't sure what I would find out here. Thought I should come prepared," he answered. Truthfully, he had hoped that Marshall wouldn't be here. Cady may not have picked him, but he was sure he could win her over.

"Right now, I'm grateful and I'm sure Cady is, too," Marshall replied.



When they got outside, Marshall waved away the keys when Brendan handed them to him. "It's probably best if you drive."

Brendan nodded and walked around to the driver's side.

Opening the passenger door, Marshall helped Cady into the truck. She slid to the middle, feeling awkward sitting beside Brendan. Once Marshall was in and had closed the door, she scooted closer to him.

Wincing as his wound pulled, Marshall put his arm around Cady and held her close.

The bumpy ride to the hospital wasn't fun, but Brendan got them there in record time. He pulled up to the ER drop off and let both Cady and Marshall out before going to find a place to park.

Marshall carried Cady inside. He knew they made quite a picture; her with bare feet and a swollen ankle, and him with blood seeping through his shirt and trailing down his arm. An orderly rushed over to them.

"Come right this way Mr. Creed. We'll fill out forms in the room," the orderly said, ushering them toward a door at the back of the waiting room.

Cady looked up at him in wonder. "You come here often enough that they know you?"

He chuckled. "I've been here once or twice."

Cady chewed on her lip. What exactly had she gotten herself into? She wasn't sure she could handle a relationship with someone who spent a lot of time going to the emergency room. She knew the pack had a reputation, but she had always thought some of it was based out of fear more than fact.

They followed the orderly through the door and into a curtained room. Marshall sat Cady down on the bed before sitting in the chair beside her.

"You know I'm supposed to fill out forms on everyone who walks through that door," the orderly said.

Marshall shrugged. "Yeah, I figured you'd have to write this up."

The orderly sighed. The alpha of the pack might be acting nonchalant about the whole thing, but he didn't want to take any chances.

"I'm not finished with medical school yet so I can't treat you, but my girlfriend is a nurse. I'll get her to check your girlfriend's ankle and stitch you back up," he told Marshall.

The alpha grinned. "Thanks. I'd appreciate it."



An hour later, Cady's foot was wrapped and her scratches were disinfected. Marshall had ten stitches in his arm and twenty in the cut along his ribs. The orderly walked them back out to the waiting area and handed Cady a pair of crutches.

"You'll need to stay off your foot for a few weeks. Keep it elevated as much as you can," he told her.

Cady nodded. "I will. Thank you for helping us."

He gave her a small smile. "My pleasure. Now get going before anything else can happen to the two of you."

Cady hobbled out to the truck using her new crutches. She was awkward on them, but at least it gave her some independence back. Not that it had been horrible being carried around by Marshall, she admitted to herself. She had liked the feel of his arms around her, possibly a little too much. Once she had realized he was an honorable man, she had quit fighting the growing attraction she felt for Marshall. It might just be lust at the moment, but she knew she could come to care for him rather quickly.

Marshall helped her into the truck and put her crutches in the back. Sliding in, he waited for Brendan to start the engine.

"If you don't mind, we'll drop you off at the house," he told Brendan.

"No problem. I figured you would want the truck, especially with Cady's sprained ankle," he replied.

It didn't take long to reach the townhouse. Brendan got out and waved to them as he hurried up the steps and through the front door.

Marshall got out and walked around to the driver's side. Sliding back into the vehicle, he started the drive back to the cabin. One way or another, he was going to have some alone time with Cady. If his pack knew what was good for them, they would leave him alone for the next twenty-four hours.

Chapter Five

Marshall parked the truck around the back of the cabin. Cutting off the engine, he shoved the keys in his pocket. With a glance toward the passenger side, he realized that Cady had fallen asleep. She'd had a rough twenty-four hours.

He got out of the truck and walked around to the other side. Carefully opening the door, he grabbed her before she tumbled out. Lifting Cady into his arms, he kicked the door shut and walked around to the front of the cabin.

Maneuvering Cady and unlocking the door proved to be a challenge, but Marshall managed. Kicking the door shut behind him, he carried his precious cargo into the bedroom.

He laid her down on the bed and started to cover her up, but stopped. He knew from experience that sleeping in jeans wasn't much fun so he quickly unfastened her pants and slid them down her legs. He was pleasantly surprised to discover her panties were purple lace. It was the last thing he would have expected from her.

Pulling the covers up to her shoulders, he resisted the urge to brush a kiss against her lips for fear of waking her. He brushed her hair out of her face and watched her for a moment. She looked so peaceful and so innocent.

He pulled his shirt over his head and tossed it into the corner of the room. Opening the dresser drawer, he pulled out a clean pair of boxers and headed for the bathroom. The thought of being clean and washing the dried blood from his body held great appeal. When he'd been stitched up at the hospital, the nurse had put a water-resistant bandage over his stitches so he could shower. If he ever saw her again, he'd have to thank her.

Marshall closed the bathroom door so the sound of running water wouldn't wake up Cady. When the spray was the right temperature, he kicked off his shoes, pants and underwear and climbed into the shower. While the warm water felt divine, the bed was calling to him. Washing as quickly as he could, he turned off the water and got out.

Drying his hair and body, he slipped the clean boxers on and hung his towel up to dry. He quietly walked back to the bedroom, pausing in the open door. Cady was curled up on her side, a hand tucked under her chin.

Marshall walked into the room and closed the door. If Paul had a key, there was no telling who else did. The last thing he wanted was another surprise visit.

Sliding into the bed, he moved close to Cady. Wrapping an arm around her waist, he pulled her close, until her back was flush against his chest and her sweet rear was snuggled against his steadily growing erection. A hundred cold showers would never be enough; just being near her made him grow hard.

Tucking her head under his chin, he closed his eyes and tried to relax. Before long, he joined Cady in sleep.



The next morning, Cady woke up to a warm hard body pressed against her. Opening her eyes, she looked around the room and realized she was in the cabin. She had almost thought the previous night was a dream.

It took her a minute to realize that she felt the hair on Marshall's legs against her own. Where were her jeans? Looking around the room, she spotted them on the dresser. A blush stole across her cheeks when she realized he had partially undressed her while she slept. Since the rest of her clothes were on, she didn't feel quite as self-conscious as she had thought she would. It had been a while since she had been in bed with someone.

Marshall stirred next to her and pulled her closer. Her back was flush against his hot, naked skin. She felt his boxers brush the tops of her thighs so she knew he at least had some sort of clothing on, which relieved her. She also felt something else, something long

and hard pressing against her. It was obvious the man was aroused. But would he act on it? He hadn't the previous night.

More importantly, did she want him to act on it?

She had only dated a handful of guys and had only been intimate with two of them. The first had been more of an experiment than anything else. She hadn't wanted to die a virgin and was afraid it might very well happen. Most of her friends had lost their virginity when they were sixteen years old. Cady hadn't lost hers until she was eighteen and had graduated from high school. In a way she was glad she had waited, but it hadn't been all that spectacular.

The second time had been with a guy she dated for a month. The moment he got what he wanted from her he disappeared – stopped calling, stopped returning phone calls. The worst part had been seeing him with someone else and having him ignore her. Cady had wanted the earth to open up and swallow her whole; she had never been so embarrassed in her life. She still hadn't experienced one of those earth shattering moments you read about in books. If she had known how mediocre it would be, she might have waited.

Now, here she was, lying in Marshall's arms, and she had an opportunity. Surely he would know what he was doing, considering his reputation. Maybe it would be different with him; maybe it would be all that the romance novels claimed it could be.

There was only one way to find out.

Looking into his face, relaxed in sleep, she leaned in close and gently touched her lips to his. When he didn't react, she timidly touched her tongue to his lips, tracing his full lower lip with the tip.



Marshall came awake when he felt a soft, warm mouth pressed against his, but decided to wait and see what the delightful Cady had in mind. When her tongue gently licked his lower lip, he couldn't take any more. With a groan, he tunneled his hand through her hair and pressed her face closer. Opening his mouth under hers, he took control of the kiss, sweeping his tongue into her mouth. As his tongue tangled with hers, exploring the hidden

depths of her sweet mouth, he hoped that she wasn't just playing and was ready for all he wanted to give her.

Breaking the kiss he looked into her eyes. "Cady, are you sure this is what you want?"

"Yes," she whispered.

Marshall didn't need to hear anything else. Rolling her body under his, he kissed her lips gently before trailing hot kisses down her neck, across her collar bone and down the slope of a breast.

He gently pushed her shirt up her abdomen, exposing her creamy skin a little at a time. When he saw the purple lace of her bra, his breath caught in his throat. Pushing her shirt higher, he stared at the perfect mounds in wonder. How could anyone be as beautiful as she was? She was perfection.

Lifting the shirt over her head, Marshall tossed it onto the floor.

Leaning down to kiss her again, his hands gently explored the newly exposed flesh. The palm of his hand skimmed over her lacy bra, making her nipple pucker. He dipped his fingers under the edge of the lace and traced the edge of her bra, his finger sliding against her warm, soft skin. When he reached the front clasp of her bra, he deftly popped it open. Pushing the lacy fabric aside, he exposed first one breast and then the other.

He kissed her jaw, placed a kiss against her neck, feeling her erratic pulse, before dipping his head to her luscious breasts. Taking a nipple into his mouth, he suckled, nipped, and laved it, making Cady whimper.

When the tip stood erect, he moved to the other side, teasing it the same way; his hot, wet tongue moving over the tip again and again, making it come to a point. When Cady arched against him, he grinned against her flesh. He was happy that he could please her.

Marshall trailed kisses down her stomach to the edge of her panties. He felt her breath hitch and stopped, drawing out her anticipation. He explored her navel, dipping his tongue into the little cavern until she squirmed. His hands played with the edge of her panties, his thumb rubbing under the edge against her hips, back and forth, until he felt a shudder run through her body.

As his lips found the edge of her panties, he slid his thumb along the edge, between her legs, gently parting her lips. When he lightly brushed the pad of his thumb against her swollen nub, she gasped.

Using both thumbs, Marshall parted her lips under the gauzy panties. Pressing his mouth to her most sensitive part, he sucked and licked her nub through the thin material, using its texture to drive her wild.

He was so hard he was throbbing. He wanted nothing more than to bury himself inside of her, but knew that it was still too soon. He wanted to make her come first, to hear her cry out and feel the hot gush of her juices as she let go completely.

Slowly pulling her panties down her legs, he tossed them on the floor with her shirt. Parting her legs further, he dipped his head between her thighs again. With nothing blocking his way, he was able to flick her nub with his tongue and suck it into his mouth. As he sucked and licked, he eased his thumb into her wet opening.

Marshall began a slow rhythm, sliding his thumb in and out of her, massaging her opening, as his tongue and lips continued to tease her. Sucking her into his mouth again, he sucked on her flesh harder and harder until she became wild beneath him. She arched her hips off the bed, meeting the thrusts of his thumb, and he could tell that she was close.

Continuing his assault on her hot, wet flesh, he gently massaged her stomach and slid his hand up to her breast. The moment his palm passed over her nipple, he felt her let go. A rush of warm liquid enveloped his thumb as she cried out his name and arched off the bed, thrusting her hips upward, trying to take more of him inside of her.

When she was spent and had fallen limply to the bed, he slid her bra straps down her shoulders and dropped it on the floor. Sliding his boxers down his legs, his clothes joined hers.

"That was amazing," she whispered.

"It's about to get even better," he said, positioning himself against her opening.

When she felt the tip of him against her wet folds, her eyes went wide, but as he slowly slid into her, she moaned and closed her eyes in ecstasy.

Marshall knew he wouldn't last. She was so tight and so wet. He'd always used condoms before, but knowing Cady was his mate changed everything. He wanted to feel her, feel his flesh sliding in and out of hers.

He withdrew until just the tip of him was inside of her before thrusting back in to the hilt. Beneath him, Cady shifted her legs, wrapping them around his waist, angling her hips and taking him in further.

Grasping her hips, he began thrusting harder and faster, sliding in and out of her, building a fire within both of them. With each thrust, he felt her grow warmer and wetter. When her orgasm broke over her, he felt her muscles clench down on his hard shaft. Closing his eyes and biting back a groan he began thrusting again, each stroke faster and harder than the first, until he found his own release. Buried to the hilt inside of her, Marshall felt a slight burning sensation on his right upper arm. He knew at that exact moment he had been right – Cady was his mate and he was now marked. It meant that she would also bear a mark – the mark of the quarter moon, forever tying her to their pack and to her mate.

Chapter Six

Cady smiled lazily and opened her eyes. When she noticed the tattoo on his arm, she gasped.

"Where did that come from?" she asked, eyes wide.

Marshall rolled them to their sides, keeping their bodies joined. "It's a mark that's given to alpha werewolves."

"But where did it come from?" she asked again.

"The mark appeared after we made love," he responded, watching her face for her reaction. He had almost said sex instead of made love and was sure it would have been a mistake.

"Is that what this was?" Cady asked quietly too afraid to dare hope that it had been more than just sex to him.

Marshall growled. "What would *you* call it?"

Cady blushed and lowered her eyes.

"Answer me, Cady," he demanded. It was one thing for him to think of it as just sex, but as long as she was mated to him no other man would touch her.

"I didn't know what to call it," she admitted. "I was afraid it was just sex to you; that I was no different than the others you've slept with."

Marshall relaxed a little. He caressed her cheek and kissed her sweetly. "Honey, you're definitely different than the others. The mark shows up when an alpha has found his mate and has bound himself to her by making love with her."

"I'm your mate?" she asked in a soft, stunned voice.

"If you have any doubt, look at your back in the mirror the next time you're in the bathroom," he responded.

"Why? What's wrong with my back?" she asked, a frown marring her brow.

He shook his head. "Nothing is wrong with it, but you've been marked as well. As the mate to the alpha, you now bear the mark of the quarter moon on your left shoulder blade."

"Like the one in your armband?" she asked, indicating the quarter moon dominating the middle of the design.

"Exactly like that one."

Cady looked into his eyes. "What exactly does this mean?"

"It means that whether you like it or not, you are now mine for eternity. Or for at least as long as I live," he answered. What he didn't tell her is that their bond could be broken if he renounced her as his mate. He figured it was better if she didn't know that little tidbit.

Cady pressed herself close to Marshall and snuggled against him, her head under his chin. "As long as you'll let me go back to school and at least get my associate degree, then I think I can handle that."

Marshall chuckled. "Always trying to push me into giving you what you want... in this case, I'll let you have your way. If the classes mean that much to you, I won't keep you away from the college."

Cady smiled against his chest, happy with her first real victory with him.

"Of course, I have one stipulation," he said.

Cady sighed, she should have known. "What is it?"

"One of the guys has thought about going to college. He goes with you when you leave for class and he brings you back home," Marshall said.

"But..."

"No buts," he interrupted.

"I was going to say, but what if I wanted you to take me," she said.

"I guess I could drop you off and pick you back up. Regardless, I will probably let Brendan take some classes." Marshall agreed easily, having an ulterior motive. While Cady was in class, he could have some play time. She may be his mate, but that didn't mean he was going to forgo sex with the other women in the pack.

Cady was surprised to hear that Brendan was the pack member wanting to further his education. She wasn't sure how she felt about having her every step shadowed by someone; especially knowing it would be Brendan. For some reason, he made her a little nervous. He hadn't done or said anything that should make her feel that way, but still... she just couldn't put her finger on it.

"Marshall, could I call my brother today?" she asked sweetly.

He sighed. "Cady, we've been through this already."

"Well, at the very least, could we go to the Sunset Club?" she asked, hoping he wouldn't realize her brother was the bartender.

He eyed her warily; sure she was up to something. "Maybe tonight."

She smiled and silently crowed in victory.

"I thought we would stop by the store today," he said out of the blue.

"For what?" she asked.

"Well, you only have the clothes you were wearing when you were taken. I thought you might like to have a few more outfits," he responded.

She bit her lip. "Or you could take me by my house and I could just get the clothes I already own."

He growled and rolled her underneath him, pinning her arms over her head. "Why can't you understand that your old life is over?"

"I just don't see the reason to spend money on clothes when I already have a closet full," she answered quietly.

Marshall bent his head and gently nipped her on the neck. "Don't worry about the money," he said huskily.

Cady could feel the familiar tingle start low in her belly and knew that their discussion was going to be put on hold. She should be embarrassed, having given herself to him with such wild abandon earlier. And yet, here she was, ready for him to take her again. They were still joined together from their previous bout of love making and Cady felt Marshall growing hard again, slowly filling her up.

"Again?" she asked, wonder filling her voice.

He chuckled and thrust in and out of her, "Yeah, I think it's safe to say I want you again."

Cady purred and lifted her hips.



An hour later, Cady and Marshall lie entwined in each other's arms, satiated. A smile curved Cady's lips. She'd never known that being with a man could be like this. She finally understood what the fuss was all about.

"I guess if you plan on going shopping I should take a shower," Cady murmured.

Marshall made a noncommittal noise and nuzzled her neck, wrapping his arms around her tighter.

Cady giggled and pushed against his chest. "Stop it or we'll never get out of this bed."

"And that would be a horrible thing?" he asked.

She caressed his cheek. "No, not horrible, but it would be nice to have some clothes."

He laughed softly in her ear. "Then I guess we should get up. I'll let you have the shower first."

Cady kissed him and threw back the covers. Sliding out of the bed, she stood and stretched.

Behind her, Marshall groaned. When she turned and looked at him, she asked, "What was that for?"

"If you keep stretching like that, I'm going to drag you back into the bed."

Cady gave him a saucy grin and sashayed out of the bedroom. She had never felt so wanton, so womanly. It made her feel wicked, in a good way.

She walked into the bathroom and flipped on the light. Turning on the shower, she looked at her reflection in the mirror over the sink as the water warmed to the right temperature. There was a glow to her face that hadn't been there previously.

She was a werewolf's mate. An alpha's mate... it still shocked her. She stared hard at herself, trying to discern any changes in her appearance. Other than her rosier than usual cheeks, she

couldn't see anything different. After everything she had been through Cady had thought she would look at least a little different.

Turning away from the mirror, she climbed into the shower. Letting the warm water cascade down her body, she sighed in delight. After wetting her hair, she reached for the shampoo. Lathering her long chestnut locks, she massaged her scalp. Tipping her head back, the water sluiced down her hair, washing the suds down the drain.

She was reaching for the soap when a deep voice interrupted her, "Need help with that?"

Cady squealed and spun toward the shower curtain.

A tall blond man was leering at her.

"Who are you?" she asked, grabbing the curtain to wrap around her body.

"I'm Samuel. I think you and I are about to become a lot better acquainted," he said with a grin. He reached for the curtain and was about to pull it away from her body when he was suddenly jerked out of the bathroom.

Cady yelped and peered around the curtain with wide eyes.

Marshall had thrown the intruder into the living room and had the man pinned down by the throat. She couldn't hear what was being said, but she knew that Marshall was furious. She watched, curious, waiting to see what would happen.

Samuel threw her an insolent glare. It was obvious he blamed her for his current situation.

Cady chewed on her lip and ducked behind the curtain again. She wished that Marshall had thought to close the bathroom door. It was awkward to stand naked in the shower while a stranger was only a few yards away.

When she heard the cabin door slam shut, she peered around the curtain. A scowling, furious Marshall was heading her way.

"Is he gone?" Cady asked, her eyes darting around the cabin.

Marshall crossed his arms and glared at her. "He's gone. He had a few interesting things to say."

Cady swallowed hard. "Like what?"

"He said you came on to him, asked him to join you in the shower," Marshall replied. It was obvious that he would have to

explain to her what being an alpha's mate meant. She belonged to him and *only* him.

Cady narrowed her eyes. Dropping the curtain in her fury, she walked to the edge of the tub and glared up at him. "And you believed him?"

"Why would he lie?"

Cady, hands on hips, was furious enough to rip the man in two. Could he really be so stupid? "Do I really have to spell it out for you?"

Marshall growled and leaned down until his nose was touching hers. "Tread carefully woman. I've allowed a lot from you in the past day, but right now I'm not in the mood."

"You've allowed a lot from *me*?" she all but shouted. "From me? How about all that I've allowed from *you*? You steal me off the street when I'm minding my own business. You force me to choose to become someone's property, a complete stranger at that. Then, after declaring you're going to take me for yourself, your brother drags me off through the woods, spraining my damn ankle. So just what the hell have *you* allowed?"

Marshall's mouth twitched as he fought to conceal a grin. She looked spectacular when she was angry; especially when she was wet, naked and angry. He should punish her for her insolence, but he just wanted to bury himself in her body again.

"You do realize that anyone else who has ever raised their voice to me, argued with me, or acted as you are now has received a sound thrashing, don't you?" he asked quietly.

"I don't really care right now. I'm too blasted mad to care," she replied.

"I take it that Samuel lied to me? That you didn't ask him to join you?" he asked.

"Do I really need to answer that? We just made love and you're honestly going to stand there and ask me if I invited another man, a man I don't know, into the shower with me? With you in the other room I might add..." she replied.

He sighed. "I guess not." A frown marred his brow. "Speaking of sprained ankles, I just realized that you walked in here without so much as a limp. Isn't your ankle bothering you?"

Cady had a shocked look on her face. "I didn't even think about it. I remember it being a little sore this morning, but then we made love and I can't remember it bothering me since then."

Looking over her shoulder, Marshall traced the quarter moon that had appeared on her shoulder blade. "Maybe it had something to do with this."

"What about your sutures?" Cady asked him.

Marshall peeled the water proof bandages off his arm and abdomen. Both wounds had healed. He looked as stunned as Cady did.

"Maybe it has something to do with the tattoos?" she asked.

"I don't know. I've never heard of anything like this happening before," he responded.

"Hmm... well, we obviously aren't going to figure it out right now. Why don't you come in here and wash my back?" she asked with a saucy grin, her anger forgotten.

With an equally wicked grin, he slid his boxers down his legs and climbed into the shower with her. Drawing the curtain closed, Marshall reached for the soap. Getting a good lather on his hands, he cupped her breasts, rubbing the soap gently into her soft skin. His thumbs flicked over her nipples, making them stand erect.

Cady groaned and pressed closer to him, wanting more. "What have you done to me? Until this morning, I'd only had sex twice in my life. Now I can't seem to keep my hands off of you."

Marshall paused. "Only twice?"

"Mmm-hmm. Once was mostly an experiment. I was curious as to what all of the fuss was about. The other time was with a guy I'd dated for a month. Turned out that all he had wanted was sex. Once he had what he wanted, he took off," she answered.

"So you stopped trusting guys enough to ever give it another try?" he asked.

She shrugged. "Not exactly. I mean, yeah, it was harder to trust a guy after that, but... honestly it just wasn't as fantastic as everyone made it out to be."

Marshall's hand slid up her neck and caressed her jaw. "And now?" he asked softly.

Cady reached up and twined her arms around his neck. "And now I understand what all of the fuss was about... the first time we made love was the first orgasm I've ever had."

He smiled down at her. "I'm happy to hear that I pleased you."

"You pleased me very much," she murmured before bringing his head down for a kiss.

Marshall backed her up against the wall. Lifting her body, he urged her legs around his waist, opening her to him. With his cock poised at her opening, he entered her with one hard thrust, filling her completely.

"How about if I try to please you again?" he asked, kissing her jaw, her neck and nipping her shoulder.

Cady gasped and ground her hips against him. "I think that's very possible."

Sliding in and out of her body, his thrusts became harder and deeper, driving both of them over the edge.

As Cady cried out her release, Marshall drove himself deep into her body one last time, giving himself over to the pleasure of being inside of her. When she would have dropped her legs to stand, Marshall pressed her tighter against the wall.

"I like you right where you are," he said gruffly.

Cady grinned and locked her legs around his waist. "While I would love to stay like this all day, it might make it slightly difficult to buy clothes."

Marshall kissed her, long and hard; savoring the taste of her, the feel of her soft, full lips against his. It was like he had become addicted to her overnight.

He was already growing hard again and shifted inside of her. Cady whimpered against his lips.

Continuing to ravage her mouth, he slid out of her body, only to thrust back inside of her. He knew he should stop, but he couldn't. Marshall knew why he was constantly hard around her. It wasn't just her scent and her delectable body. He had yet to take her from behind and the werewolf in him was craving that very thing.

Reaching between their bodies, he pried her legs loose and spread them wide, thrusting deeper than he had before. Her body

was so tight and hot, and so incredibly wet. It seemed the deeper he thrust, the wetter she became.

"Harder," she whispered.

"I don't want to hurt you," he responded.

"You won't. I want to feel you as far as you can go," she said.

Needing no further urging, he began pounding into her harder and harder. He felt a rush of wet warmth as her body began convulsing around him. His thrusts became wild and frenzied as he lost control. Coming deep inside of her, he threw his head back and called out her name.

Chapter Seven

Two hours later, they were going through a local clothing store. Cady had picked out some jeans and knit tops. Marshall was gathering a separate pile of clothes for her try on, most of it short and sexy. Cady had a hard time seeing herself dressed in the outfits, but had decided to humor him.

Walking into the dressing room with her two piles of clothes, she started the agonizing process of trying on clothes and picking out what she would buy.

All of the jeans and tops she had selected fit. Unfortunately, all of the clothes Marshall had selected fit, too. One or two of the skirts were so short she was sure you could see her underwear in back.

"How is it going?" Marshall asked on the other side of the fitting room door.

"Uh, I'm almost done," she answered.

"Don't I get to see any of the outfits?" he asked.

"I thought I'd surprise you when I wore them for the first time," she responded, hoping he wouldn't make her come out in the ridiculously short denim skirt she was currently wearing. The top was just as bad; skin tight with a plunging v-neck. The dark teal looked good on her, but she felt like the shirt had been painted on, leaving nothing to the imagination.

"Come on out and show me what you're trying on now," he said.

With a deep sigh, Cady opened the dressing room door and peered out. Marshall was waiting expectantly, arms crossed.

Cautiously, Cady stepped out of the dressing room, ready to dart back in if anyone should happen to come their way.

She peeked at Marshall from under eye lashes and saw him straighten and walk toward her. If the bulge in the front of his jeans was any indication, he definitely liked the outfit.

"I can't wear this in public," she murmured.

"Why not?" he asked as he circled her.

"It's completely indecent! If I bend over, everyone is going to see what underwear I have on!" she exclaimed.

Standing behind her, Marshall skimmed his hands over her rump, stopping at the hem. His fingers skimmed the tops of her thighs, a scant inch away from her panties.

Cady bit back a groan. Just the simplest touch made her want him. She felt her panties become moist and she ached to feel his hands on her.

Marshall leaned close, his breath warm against her ear, "What I'd really love is for you to wear this skirt with a thong underneath."

A shiver ran through her body. She'd never worn a thong before and could just imagine the feel of the denim against her naked skin.

"Marshall, I can't wear this. It's too revealing. I feel naked in it," she replied softly.

"Isn't that the point? To show off your delicious body... to let other guys see what they can't have?" he murmured in her ear.

"Why would I want to do that?" she asked with a perplexed look.

"It's what a lot of women enjoy," he replied.

"Well, I'm not one of them. I could do without the Paul's and Samuel's of the world. As long as you're happy with the way I look, why should I care what anyone else thinks?" she asked.

He turned her to face him. Wrapping a hand around the back of her neck, he pulled her close. "Then buy the outfit for me. I certainly enjoy seeing you in it." He flashed her a wicked grin. "Besides, it's short enough that if I bent you over, I'd have easy access."

A blush stole across Cady's cheeks.

"Finish trying on your clothes. I'll go wait by the register," he said with a grin, enjoying her embarrassment.

"How many should I get?" she asked, looking at the dressing room and the multitude of outfits within.

"As many as you want. Get them all if you'd like," he told her.

Cady chewed on her lower lip. "But there's so many of them."

Marshall caressed her cheek. "Honey, if you're worried about the expense, I can afford to buy you clothes."

Cady's blush grew brighter. "I'm sorry. I didn't know if any of you actually worked."

Marshall crossed his arms, unsure if he should be offended or not. "Why wouldn't we?"

"I know the town is scared of you. I just thought it would be hard for you to work. I didn't mean anything by it," she said, walking toward him.

"Because the town is terrified of us, we make excellent bodyguards and bouncers. Several of the pack members work for security firms in neighboring towns, where the Vicus Luna aren't known," he replied.

"So, what do you do?" she asked.

"I don't have to work anymore," he answered vaguely. The last thing he needed was for Cady to find out what he had done to earn his money.

Cady looked like she wanted to ask more questions, but she bit her lip and returned to the fitting room. The Vicus Luna had a reputation for a reason. She had a feeling that Marshall had earned his money in a less than honest way, but she wasn't sure she wanted to know the details.

Back in the fitting room, she changed back into her clothes and looked through the outfits she had tried on. While she preferred jeans and comfortable shirts, she knew that Marshall would prefer the outfits he had selected. Since he had offered to buy all of them, Cady grabbed all of the clothes and headed toward the register.

On her way to the front, she paused at the shoe section. She had worn her tennis shoes the night she had been taken so that's all she had available now. Scouting for her size, she grabbed two pairs of strappy sandals and a pair of black boots.

Her arms were overflowing with her treasures and she wasn't certain she would make it to the counter.

"Would you like some help?" a man asked behind her.

Turning toward the voice, Cady stopped dead in her tracks.

"What do you want Finn?" she asked in an icy voice.

Giving her a predatory smile, Finn responded, "Why must I need something to lend a hand, Cady?"

"Because I know you and you don't do anything without a reason," she snapped.

"Now Cady is this waspish attitude because I didn't return your call?" he asked in a soft but deadly voice.

"I couldn't care less if you never spoke to me again," she responded then turned to walk away.

Finn's long fingers gripped her upper arm. "I don't recall saying you could walk away yet."

Cady opened her mouth to respond, but stopped when she heard a low growl behind her.

"Get your hand off of her," Marshall said in a deceptively calm voice. Any idiot could see the anger radiating off of him.

Finn looked between Cady and Marshall, a frown marring his brown. "I don't believe we've met, but this matter is between me and Cady."

"I don't think so," Marshall said, pulling Cady back against his chest, clearly staking his claim.

Marshall turned Cady to face him. Tucking a strand of hair behind her ear, he caressed her cheek. "Why don't you wait for me by the register? I'll be right there."

She nervously glanced between Marshall and Finn, worried the two might get into a fight. "I guess so."

"I won't be long, honey," he responded.

Finn sneered, "Honey? Isn't that sweet. And just how long have the two of you been dating?"

"What's it matter to you?" Marshall asked.

Finn shrugged. "I simply wondered if she was dating you while she was fucking me."

Before Finn had time to react, Marshall's fist connected with his nose.

Crying out in pain, Finn grabbed his nose and glared at Marshall. "Thank you for giving me the excuse I needed to see you hauled off

to jail. Poor Cady, she'll obviously need a shoulder to cry on tonight."

"If you value your miserable life, you'll stop talking," Marshall responded, barely hanging on to his rage. He was fighting desperately to keep the werewolf side of him in check. What he really wanted to do was shift and rip the man to shreds, leaving a bloody mess on the floor.

Footsteps signaled the arrival of the security guard.

"Is there a problem?" he asked as he walked up to Marshall and Finn.

Marshall glanced over his shoulder. He was happy to see the guard was one of his pack members. "Not much Jonas. However, I think there's some trash that needs to be taken out."

Jonas noticed the tattoo on his alpha's arm and his eyes conveyed his surprise. Wisely, he turned his attention to the man responsible for putting a look of pure hatred and rage on Marshall's face.

"Sir, I need to ask you to leave," he told Finn.

"The man hits me and you have the audacity to tell *me* to leave?" Finn asked in an outraged voice.

Jonas looked at Marshall uncertainly. He knew that Marshall had a temper, but he never attacked anyone if he wasn't provoked.

Marshall shrugged a shoulder. "He was pestering Cady. Then he made the mistake of saying some unpleasant things about her after I asked her to head to the register."

Jonas eyed the tattoo again. "I take it Cady is responsible for that."

Marshall grinned. "Yeah, she is."

"Does she have the Vicus Luna on her back?" Jonas asked out of curiosity.

Marshall tipped his head to the side, trying to determine if Jonas was being insolent or just nosy. He decided to give him the benefit of the doubt. "On her left shoulder blade."

They had Finn's attention now. "Did you say Vicus Luna?" he asked in a quiet voice, some of the color having seeped from his face.

"Yeah, he said Vicus Luna," Marshall responded.

"You're part of Vicus Luna?" Finn asked.

Marshall gave the man a slow grin, making sure he showed a little fang in the process. "I'm the alpha."

Sweat popped out on Finn's brow. "I'm sorry, I didn't realize... and you said Cady is yours?"

"Yes, she is," Marshall answered with narrowed eyes.

Finn nodded. "I'm sorry for having bothered the two of you. I'll just leave now," he said, backing toward the door.

After the whiny bastard had beat a hasty retreat, Marshall turned to Jonas.

"Feel free to spread the word about Cady. Paul already tried to take her and Samuel made a move on her this morning, after she bore the mark of the quarter moon. Any man who touches her, or even thinks of touching her, will deal with me," Marshall said in hushed tones.

Jonas nodded. "Understood. I'll make sure the word gets out."

Marshall shook hands with Jonas before walking to the register. Cady was waiting impatiently, chewing on her lower lip. He'd noticed it was something she did whenever she was nervous.

"Everything okay?" she asked.

"Everything is fine. Now stop worrying," he told her with a grin.

Cady eyed him uncertainly, not sure if she should believe him. She stood back while he paid for her outfits and shoes. When she reached for her bags, he stopped her.

"I'll get them. Did you want to get some lunch before we go home?" he asked.

"Lunch sounds good. Did you have a particular place in mind?" Cady asked.

He shook his head. "Whatever you want is fine with me."

As they headed out to the truck, Cady mulled over the eating choices in the area. Since Marshall had just spent a small fortune on her clothes, she didn't want to push her luck and ask to eat at her favorite restaurant.

Marshall noticed her hesitation. "Honey, we can eat where ever you'd like. Just name a place."

"I'm just not sure what I feel like eating, that's all," she hedged.

"Where's your favorite place to eat?" he asked.

"The seafood place on Pecan; it's called Blue Lagoon," she answered.

"Then let's head to Blue Lagoon," Marshall said as he opened the door of the truck.

"But Marshall..."

He shook his head. "If you're going to tell me it costs too much, forget it. As far as I'm concerned, we're celebrating today."

"Celebrating what?" she asked.

Helping her into the truck he grinned, "It's not every day I find my mate."

Cady smiled back. Once she was seated in the truck, she leaned over and kissed him.

"What was that for?" Marshall asked.

Cady blushed. "I don't know; I just felt like kissing you."

He smiled and closed the door of the truck. As he walked around to the driver's side, he realized that life with Cady was going to be interesting. Whether she wanted to acknowledge it or not, she felt something for him. There was no denying that there were sparks between them. The woman turned to putty in his hands and just being near her set him on fire. When he tired of her, he would still have the other women in the pack. He just needed to get her pregnant first, making sure he had an alpha heir to take over when he stepped-down.

Opening the door of the truck, Marshall slid into the driver's seat and started the engine. As he closed the door, Cady slid to the middle of the truck, flush against his side.

With a smile on his face, Marshall put the truck in gear and pulled out of the parking space. Placing a hand on Cady's thigh, he hoped that lunch wouldn't take too long. He was ready to get her home and back in the bed.



After lunch, Marshall headed for the townhome. While it had been nice to have Cady to himself in the woods, he knew they couldn't stay in the cabin forever. The pack needed to know the alpha was around or they would get into trouble.

As he pulled down the driveway, he noticed the inquisitive look Cady threw his way.

"Time to face reality, honey," he said as he parked the truck and turned off the engine.

"We can't stay at the cabin for another day or two?" she asked, craving the solitude. She wasn't ready to face the pack and she most certainly wasn't ready to share a house with three other guys.

"I'm afraid not. Is there a particular reason you don't want to stay here?" he asked in a neutral voice.

She shook her head, not ready to voice her thoughts. Her face, however, portrayed her anxiety.

"Is it the house itself or the fact that the pack will be around us all the time?" he asked.

Cady looked up at him. "I don't know that I'm ready to be around them all the time yet. This is all still so new." She paused, not sure how much more she wanted to say. "I had just hoped we would have more time together before I had to jump in with both feet."

"I would give you all the time in the world if I could, but the fact is that if I'm not around the rest of the pack tends to get into trouble," Marshall explained. "Otherwise, I'd love to hole up in the cabin for a while longer, just the two of us."

Cady nodded her understanding and reached for her things. Swallowing down the nervous knot that had lodged itself in her throat, she took a breath and put on a brave face. She knew better than to show fear around the pack, especially since she was Marshall's mate. He needed her to be strong.

When he helped her out of the truck, his hands lingered on her waist a moment. She gave him a tentative smile and followed him up the walkway to the door.

Marshall unlocked the door and ushered her inside. Locking the door behind them, he started up the stairs.

At the top, there were four closed doors and an open door, which led to a bathroom. Cady hoped it wasn't the only bathroom in the house, but had a sinking feeling it was; sharing a bathroom with three men wouldn't be easy.

Marshall opened the first door and walked into a fairly large bedroom with a king size bed, dresser, and TV.

"I don't really use the closet so you can put your things in there," he said motioning toward a closed door in the corner.

Cady hesitantly walked into the room. It wasn't as cozy as the cabin had been and she felt odd knowing that the other bedrooms would be occupied at night. How was she supposed to be intimate with Marshall with an audience around?

Cady took her new clothes over to the closet and opened the door. Taking down one of the hangers, she started to put her things away. When she was down to only bras and panties, she turned to Marshall.

"Is there a small drawer I could use?" she asked.

Marshall saw that she was holding her new bras. He knew his drawers were full, but he had another solution in mind.

"I don't have an empty drawer, but wait here a minute. I think I have another solution," he said as he walked out of the bedroom.

Marshall returned a moment later holding two small plastic rolling cards with three drawers each. "What if we put these in the closet?"

Cady smiled. "Those will work just fine."

She made quick work of putting away her things, but paused when she realized she didn't have anything to sleep in; she shrugged and figured she could just borrow a t-shirt from Marshall. She could get a nightgown the next time she went shopping.

"I'm all done," she said, turning toward Marshall who was lying on the bed.

"We should probably check the kitchen. Knowing Robin, the pantry is more than likely bare," Marshall murmured with an arm thrown over his eyes.

"I can go take a look," she offered.

Marshall sat up, "I'll go with you."

They walked down to the kitchen and surveyed the damage. There was a bag of chips, some crackers and a can of soup, but otherwise the pantry really was bare. Opening the refrigerator,

Cady discovered that all but one can of soda was gone and the milk had spoiled. If they didn't buy groceries, they would surely starve.

Marshall pulled the truck keys out of his pocket. "Let's go shopping."

Chapter Eight

Later that night

Cady was completely exhausted. Shopping for clothes that morning had wiped her out. Not to mention the anxiety she had felt ever since Marshall had told her they were staying at the townhouse. While grocery shopping with Marshall had been different for her, it had still been tiring.

An hour later, Cady had the groceries put away and had washed the dishes. Following the sound of Marshall's laughter, she had found him in the living room watching TV. She'd collapsed onto the sofa next to him. Brendan had joined them for a movie. At first, she'd felt awkward with Brendan in the room, but she had relaxed part way through the movie.

Now, two hours later, she found herself in Marshall's bedroom. She was so tired that she just wanted to crawl into the bed and go to sleep, clothes and all.

"Do you have a t-shirt I could sleep in?" she asked Marshall.

He opened a dresser drawer and pulled out a blue t-shirt. Tossing it on the bed, he said, "Will this one work?"

Cady picked up the t-shirt; it was a men's large. "It's perfect," she said with a smile.

She kicked off her shoes and slid her pants down her legs. Pulling her shirt over her head, she dropped it onto the floor. She unfastened her bra and reached for the soft t-shirt on the bed.

Marshall watched Cady with hungry eyes, taking in her every move. Walking over to her, he stood behind her and kissed her neck.

Cady paused and closed her eyes. "Marshall..." she murmured.

His hands slid down her arms to her waist. Slipping his thumbs under the sides of her panties, he slid them down her legs.

"Marshall, I..."

"Shh," he said as his hands travelled over her perfect body, enjoying the silky feel of her skin. Caressing her stomach with one hand, he reached for the button on his jeans and unfastened his pants. Pushing his jeans and boxers down his legs, his erection sprang free. It was time for the final step in sealing his claim on Cady as his mate.

He nipped her shoulder and trailed kisses along the top of her back.

"Marshall, I..." Cady began again, only to be silenced by a low growl. The dratted man wouldn't let her finish her sentence. She felt self-conscious knowing that Robin and Brendan were just down the hall. While she wanted to make love to him, she wasn't ready to make love yet with so many people nearby.

Caressing her bare bottom, Marshall gently bent her over the bed, giving in to his desire to take her from behind, completing their bond.

When Cady felt his cock slide against her wet folds, she sat up. "Marshall..."

"Is there a particular reason you don't want me to take you this way?" he asked, wanting desperately to be inside of her, his anger barely controlled.

"I don't want you to 'take' me at all," she said, turning to face him.

Marshall crossed his arms and glared down at her. No one denied him; that his mate had the audacity to do so was too much. She would pay and she would pay dearly. "I see."

"No, I don't think you do," Cady said with a shake of her head.

"So you don't want to be with me anymore?" he asked, a hard edge in his voice.

"Marshall..."

Cady didn't get a chance to finish her sentence. Before another word could leave her mouth, Marshall had grabbed her arm and shoved her toward the door.

"Marshall, I..."

"I think you've said enough," he said, opening the door. "Since you don't care to share my bed, you can find another one to warm tonight," he said as he pushed her into the hall. Normally the alpha's mate would never be allowed to bed another member of the pack, but maybe it would teach Cady an over-due lesson – especially if Paul was home. His brother wasn't known for being gentle. It would make her all too happy for Marshall to take her back.

Cady squeaked and tried to get back into the bedroom before either Robin or Brendan saw her naked in the hallway, but Marshall had already slammed the door shut. She frantically smacked her hand against the door, hoping he would open it.

"Marshall please! Just let me explain," she pleaded. It wasn't that she didn't want to be with him, she just didn't want the others to hear them.

She heard the TV turn on and the volume turn up loud enough to drown her out. Sinking to the floor, she curled up in a ball and cried. She tried knocking on the door again, but she was ignored. How had a perfectly good day ended so horribly?



Brendan heard the commotion in the hall and opened his door. He spotted Cady in all of her naked glory in front of Marshall's door.

He frowned, not sure if he should say something or not. Deciding to brave Marshall's wrath, he took a step toward her.

"Cady, are you okay?" he asked.

If anything, she curled up even tighter and cried harder.

Ducking into his room, Brendan grabbed a t-shirt and walked out into the hall. Squatting down beside her, he handed the t-shirt to her.

"Here, put this on," he murmured in a soothing voice. He had no clue what was going on, but apparently the alpha and his mate had a falling out of some sort.

Cady looked at Brendan with a tear streaked face and puffy eyes, tentatively she reached out and grabbed the shirt. With shaky hands, she pulled the gray t-shirt over her head and pushed her arms through the sleeves, pulling it down to the tops of her thighs. She was mortified that he had seen her naked.

"Want to tell me what happened?" he asked.

She shook her head. "It doesn't matter."

Brendan helped her to her feet just as the bedroom door was jerked open.

Marshall glared at Cady before walking down the stairs and out the front door, only to return a moment later with a blonde woman in tow.

The woman smirked at Cady as she followed Marshall into his bedroom. Without so much as a look at Cady, Marshall slammed the door shut.

Cady fought back a sob, the tears flowing freely again. Not only had Marshall thrown her out of their room, but he was taking another woman to his bed. It was too much for Cady to handle and she collapsed to the floor, sobbing uncontrollably. Her mate had succeeded in making her feel like a cheap whore; he had used and discarded her and now was going to hand her off to someone else. Had his earlier words meant nothing? Had he only fed her a line so he could get into her pants?

Brendan wasn't sure what was going on, but he knew better than to disturb Marshall. He thought the man was an idiot for kicking Cady out and immediately taking another woman to his bed. Leaning down, he scooped Cady up in his arms.

"Wh... Wha... What are you doing?" she asked in a broken voice.

"You can stay in my room tonight," Brendan answered.

Cady frantically shook her head. She'd rather sleep on the hall floor than jump into bed with someone else.

"Relax, Cady. I'm not going to try anything. Regardless of what's going on with Marshall, you're still his mate," Brendan said, trying to ease her fears. It chafed that she was so adamant about not

sleeping with him, but he could understand her fears. Her time with Marshall had been anything but ideal and she probably expected the same treatment from every werewolf in the pack.

Cady sniffled. "I don't think I'm his mate anymore."

Walking into his bedroom, Brendan kicked the door shut. He put Cady down on the bed and sat beside her.

"What happened? Things were going great with the two of you," Brendan said, trying to figure out what went wrong. Maybe it was something that could be fixed if she truly wanted to stay with Marshall.

Cady shrugged and turned bright red. She looked at the floor, refusing to meet his gaze.

"Cady, something had to happen. Marshall wouldn't kick you out and take Mara to bed without some sort of provocation."

"I wouldn't sleep with him tonight," she murmured, completely embarrassed.

"You refused him?" Brendan asked, astounded.

She nodded. "But it wasn't what he thought!"

"Then why did you refuse him?" Brendan asked, trying to understand. He'd never heard of a woman refusing the alpha; usually they fought for the honor of going to his bed.

"I didn't feel comfortable making love to him with you and Robin so close by. I was embarrassed, but he wouldn't let me explain. He just assumed I had decided I didn't want him and he threw me out into the hall," she explained.

Brendan sighed and rubbed a hand down his face. "Wait here. No matter what you hear, stay put."

"But..." she protested.

"No buts, Cady. I mean it. I'm going to try to talk to Marshall, but he won't be happy about it," he told her.

Brendan got up and opened his bedroom door. He could tell that Marshall and Mara were already well on their way to ruining Cady's night, and quite possibly her life. He knocked loudly on the door and yelled, "Marshall, I need to talk to you."

There was a loud growl within the bedroom. "Go away, Brendan."

"I need to talk to you *now*," he said.

The bedroom door was jerked open and a naked Marshall stood before him, completely and totally pissed off if the flash of fang was any indication.

"You're treading on thin ice," Marshall growled.

"Did you let Cady explain anything to you?" Brendan asked, refusing to back down.

Marshall grabbed him by the throat and slammed him into the opposite wall. "Are you questioning my decision to toss her out?"

"Yeah, I am," he choked out. "The only reason she didn't want to have sex tonight was..." he stopped talking as Marshall squeezed tighter, cutting off his air.

"If you want her, you can have her. Fuck her three ways to Sunday for all I care, but do *not* question me again. Next time I won't be so lenient," Marshall replied with a soft, deadly voice.

Marshall released Brendan and turned back to his bedroom, closing the door before another word could be said.

Brendan sat on the floor gasping for air. He had hoped the alpha would listen. It was obvious Cady cared about him at least a little. He felt a small hand touch his shoulder and looked up into Cady's pale face.

"I told you to stay put," he whispered in a hoarse voice.

Cady opened her mouth to respond, but the unmistakable sound of a mattress squeaking silenced her as she glanced toward Marshall's door. Closing her eyes, she took a breath to clear her mind. Marshall had made his bed, now he could lie in it. It was obvious to her that he wasn't the man she had thought he was; she had been duped. Turning back to Brendan, she sat on her knees by his side.

"Why did you do that?" she asked quietly.

"Do what?" he croaked, his voice slowly coming back.

"You knew what would happen when you came out here. Why did you do it?" she clarified.

"What he did wasn't right. The two of you belong together," he answered.

"Apparently we don't," she said.

"The mark says otherwise," he responded.

"I'm not taking him back," she stated.

“Cady...”

She shook her head. “No. He threw me out and took that... that whore to his bed. I know he wasn’t celibate before me, but this is different. I won’t let him touch me after tonight; he isn’t going to sleep with every woman here and then come back to my bed.”

“You don’t have a choice in the matter. He’s the alpha and what he says goes. If he came out here right now and told you to strip naked and bend over, you’d have to do it. Besides, it’s doubtful he planned on being faithful to you. It’s the alpha’s right to bed every woman available if he wishes – whether he’s mated to someone or not,” he said.

Cady blushed, feeling the heat suffuse her face and neck. That was a little too close to the mark for comfort.

Brendan noticed and raised an eyebrow. “Is that what happened? He stripped you naked and asked you to bend over?”

She shrugged. “More or less,” she muttered. “Except I said no and then he wouldn’t let me explain why.”

Brendan groaned. It was worse than he had thought. “This is going to be an embarrassing question, but had the two of you made love that way before?”

Cady stared hard at the carpet, unable to meet his gaze. “No, he hadn’t tried to before tonight.”

“Do you have any idea of what you’ve done?” Brendan asked. The situation was more hopeless than he had thought.

She looked at him in curiosity. “What?”

“He was trying to seal his claim on you. When a werewolf finds his mate, the urge to take her from behind is strong; doing so ensures that she’s yours for the duration of your lives. I know it seems ridiculous, but it’s just our way,” Brendan explained. “When you told him no, it was the same as saying you didn’t want to be with him anymore.”

“But I didn’t know that! And besides, I tried to tell him that I was just embarrassed and wanted a little time to get used to the house, but he wouldn’t listen to me!” she exclaimed.

Brendan sighed. “The damage is already done.”

“Does this mean my mark will go away?” she asked.

"I honestly don't know. It isn't often that an alpha finds his true mate and gets marked. When it does happen, it's always a forever kind of relationship. I've never heard of an alpha and his mate breaking up," Brendan answered.

He stood up and helped Cady to her feet. "Are you sure you don't want me to try talking to him again?"

Cady shook her head. "He could have killed you."

"I know, but if it got the two of you back together it would be worth it. He has no clue how lucky he is," Brendan said, ushering her toward the bedroom. Once inside, he closed the door behind them.

"Do you have a mate?" she asked.

He shook his head. "No one in the pack does. Marshall is the first since his father."

Brendan pulled the covers back. "Come on, time for bed."

Cady crawled into the bed and let Brendan cover her up. She knew she should protest sharing a bed with him, but she was too drained to really care. She'd gone from being hysterical to just feeling numb. She felt like an idiot for believing Marshall, for thinking she was special.

As Brendan cut off the light and climbed into bed, they heard Marshall's door open and close; a moment later the front door open and shut.

Cady curled up on her side and tucked her hands under her chin. She felt hollow. Her life had turned completely upside down in such a short time. She closed her eyes, hoping sleep would claim her. Maybe she would wake up in the morning to find it had all been a horrible dream.

As she was dozing off, she heard Marshall come back into the house. He was talking with a woman. When she heard his door open and close, she tried to harden her heart, but it was hard to do when it was breaking. She'd thought that she'd meant at least a little bit to him. While they had just met a few days ago, their time together had been amazing; Cady had already let herself start to care for the alpha. Obviously it had been a mistake. She should have known better.

When she heard the bed thump against the wall, she felt a tear slide down her cheek. She had thought she didn't have any tears left to shed, but apparently there were still a few. Cady knew he didn't deserve her tears, but that didn't seem to matter. Her brain and her heart were apparently not communicating with one another.

Brendan heard Cady crying softly to herself and wished he could make her feel better. Rolling to his side, he put a comforting hand on her arm.

"Cady, it's okay; things will look different in the morning," he assured her. He only hoped he wasn't lying.

With a sniffle, she rolled toward Brendan and cried softly against his shirt. His arms went around her giving her the comfort she needed. Once her tears subsided, she was able to close her eyes and go to sleep; her ragged breathing slowly evening out.

Brendan sighed and closed his eyes, but he knew sleep wouldn't claim him any time soon. Having a half naked woman in his bed, especially one he knew he couldn't have, was proving to be difficult. If she had been with any other werewolf, he would have comforted her by making love to her. But he valued his life and knew that regardless of what Marshall said and did tonight that in the morning he would want Cady back; or at least Brendan hoped that's what happened. Whether she wanted to admit it or not, he could tell that Cady cared for Marshall.

Part Two

And then there was love...

Chapter Nine

The next morning, Cady woke to find herself in someone's arms. Momentarily disoriented, she thought it was Marshall and snuggled closer, her hands creeping under his shirt to press against his warm abdomen. She nuzzled his neck and pressed her hips against his, feeling his erection through his boxers.

When reality set in and she remembered the events of the previous night, she gasped and jerked her hands back. She stared into Brendan's eyes in shock.

"I'm sorry. I..." Cady stammered.

Brendan caressed her cheek. "Its okay, Cady, I understand."

She saw compassion in his blue eyes and it made her feel even worse. "I wasn't completely awake and thought you were Marshall," she explained.

"I know," he replied, sounding calmer than he felt. He wanted to taste her, to feel the softness of her skin against his – but he knew it was pointless to dream of such things. She would never be his.

"I should probably get up and get dressed," she said, but as she swung her legs over the edge of the bed she remembered that her clothes were in Marshall's room.

Brendan sensed her dilemma. "Want me to go get you something?"

She bit her lip. "You got into enough trouble last night. I should do it."

Cady walked to the bedroom door and hesitantly opened it. The hall was empty and the house was quiet. She walked over to Marshall's door and knocked.

Inside the room, the sounds of bedcovers moving and a woman's voice could be heard. Cady swallowed down the knot forming in her throat.

As the door was opening, she felt the warmth of a body behind her and knew Brendan was trying to lend her some strength.

Marshall looked out at the two of them, a scowl on his face.

"What do you want?" he growled.

"I need something to change into," Cady said softly. Even when he was angry with her, looking into his green eyes made her want to throw herself into his arms. She hoped it was the fault of the tattoo on her back and her status as his mate. She refused to think she just had rotten taste in men.

"As I recall, I bought all of those clothes, and I don't feel like giving them to you," he replied.

"But..." Cady started, but was quickly interrupted.

"I'll give you the outfit you wore the night we picked you up. You'll have to figure something else out to get more clothes," he said.

"You should let her explain," Brendan interrupted.

Marshall growled. "I warned you last night about interfering."

"She's your mate! You know how rare that is, why are you so ready to throw it away because of a misunderstanding?" Brendan asked.

"She's not my mate any longer," Marshall declared in a cold voice.

Cady gasped as a burning sensation crept across her shoulder blade. It felt like a thousand needles were digging into her skin. She grabbed at the spot, trying to make the pain go away.

"Maybe I'll make her the pack whore," Marshall said.

"No!" Brendan exclaimed. "You can't do that to her."

"I believe I can," Marshall replied.

"It hurts," Cady whimpered as she clawed at her back.

Brendan focused his attention on her. "Let me see," he said as he pulled back the top of the t-shirt.

The mark on her back was burning itself away. Marshall declaring she was no longer his mate was apparently all it took to reverse the mark. He glanced at Marshall's arm and noticed the band was slowly fading.

"I think you've made a terrible mistake," Brendan said, nodding toward the alpha's arm.

Marshall glanced down, surprised to see his mark fading. "It doesn't matter. I didn't have the mark before so not having one now won't make a difference," he responded.

Stepping out of his room, Marshall grabbed Cady by the arm and started hauling her down the stairs. It was time to teach both her and Brendan a lesson, one they wouldn't forget any time soon.

"What are you doing?" Brendan asked, running after them.

Marshall didn't answer. He walked out the front door with Cady in tow, dragging her over to the next townhouse. Entering the smaller townhome, he hauled her up the stairs and into a room that had nothing but a mattress on the floor.

Stripping the t-shirt off of her, he shoved her down onto the bed. "You won't need clothes to be a whore," he said.

"No, please don't do this," she pleaded, trying to get up off the bed, but Marshall just shoved her down again.

He looked at Brendan with hard eyes. "Unless you plan on being her first customer of the day, I suggest you leave."

Brendan was astounded. He had never thought to see Marshall act like such an ass. While he had always been a little cold and calculating, he'd always treated women well.

Brendan took his t-shirt from Marshall and handed it back to Cady, earning him a sound punch to the gut. As he landed on the bed with a thud, he gasped for air. Twice in twelve hours the alpha had knocked him on his ass.

"She doesn't get clothes," Marshall stated again.

"Don't do this to her," Brendan said. "The only reason she told you no last night was because she was embarrassed."

Marshall looked between the two of them. "She had nothing to be embarrassed over. She told me no when I tried to claim her."

Brendan shook his head. "She didn't know that's what you were doing. She was worried that Robin and I would hear the two of you and she was embarrassed."

Marshall narrowed his eyes on Cady. "Is that true?"

She nodded, unable to speak. She had tried to cover her naked body with her hands, but wasn't succeeding very well. She'd never been so humiliated in her life.

"I don't know if I can believe you and what's done is done. You're no longer my mate," Marshall stated. He eyed her naked body and felt himself grow hard. As the pack whore, he would use her when and how he wanted. If it weren't for the woman waiting in his room, he would take her now.

"Don't let the men use and abuse her," Brendan said. "She doesn't deserve that because of a misunderstanding."

"Then you take her," Marshall said. When Brendan was going to protest, he cut him off. "Either you take her, or she stays here, spreading her legs for any werewolf that walks through the door."

Brendan snapped his jaw shut. Turning to Cady, he once again put his t-shirt over her head and helped her into it, trying not to notice her body. Gathering her in his arms, he carried her out of the room.

Marshall watched them leave. Cady *would* be a pack whore, but for now he would let Brendan coddle her. He'd let them have their false sense of security before jerking the carpet out from under them. A grin spread across his face. Taking Cady to his bed would be even sweeter knowing that Brendan wanted her.



Back in his room, Brendan sat Cady down on her feet.

"You didn't have to take me with you," she said in a near whisper.

"I wasn't going to leave you there. You have no idea what would have happened to you," Brendan told her, trying to block the images from his mind. The room had been empty because the last woman had died. She'd been forced to do unspeakable things and had taken her life in the end, unable to endure another moment.

"I'm sorry," she said as a tear slid down her cheek.

Brendan cupped her face and wiped the tear away. "You have nothing to be sorry for. You didn't do anything."

"But now you're stuck with me," she said.

Brendan grinned. "Being stuck with you isn't so bad."

Cady took in his dark hair and blue eyes and realized he really was a good looking guy. He had seemed wild to her before, but so far he had been gentle and kind to her. Maybe she had misjudged him. Then again, she'd thought that about Marshall and look where that had gotten her. If only she had time to get to know him... but she doubted she would be allowed that luxury before she had to crawl into his bed.

He frowned down at her. "We do need to get you something to wear though."

Deciding to push her luck, she asked, "Could I call my brother?"

"Marshall would kill me if I let you call your family," Brendan answered.

Cady nodded, having expected that answer.

"Let me talk to Marshall and get at least one outfit for you to wear out today. I'm sure he'll relent at least that much," Brendan responded.

Cady nodded and sat on the bed. "I'll just wait here for you."

Brendan walked over to the bed and brushed her hair back behind her ear. "I'm sorry for everything that's happened in the past few days. If I could change things, I would."

Cady fought back tears. Brendan was being so sweet to her. She just wished she could be sure it wasn't all an act.

"Cady... We should probably talk before the day is over," he said, not really sure how to broach the subject of their future.

Cady paled. "About what?"

"About us," Brendan answered. "About... well, about what happened today. I know that you aren't used to our ways and may not understand everything."

"I know that you saved me," she replied softly.

Brendan hunkered down in front of her. "I couldn't bear the thought of you being abused by every member of the pack, but there are ramifications for me walking out of the room with you."

"What kind of ramifications?" she asked afraid she already knew the answer.

"It means that if Marshall thinks we aren't together, if I take another woman to my bed, then I forfeit my right to you and you end up back in that room." He saw her pale even further. "Do you understand?"

"You mean I have to sleep with you," she replied quietly. She had expected as much so it wasn't a complete shock to her.

"Yes, I mean, no ... I mean... Hell, I don't know what I mean anymore." Brendan sighed and ran a hand through his hair. "What I'm saying is that Marshall has to *think* we're sleeping together."

"And in return you lose the right to take anyone else to your bed," she said looking into his eyes.

"Yeah, but that's okay. It's not as important as your safety," he answered. "If you were any other woman, I wouldn't be expected to remain faithful. But our circumstances have changed the rules. If Marshall thinks for one moment that I'm tired of you, he'll put you back in the room."

Cady scooted forward until her face was mere inches from Brendan's. If they were to appear intimate, she had better get used to being close to him. There was no time like the present. Hesitantly she leaned forward and softly brushed her lips against his. She gasped, feeling as if she'd been struck by lightning.

Brendan felt the spark between them and pulled Cady closer. Slanting his mouth over hers, he traced the seam of her lips with his tongue. When her mouth opened, he slipped his tongue between her lips, tasting her. It was like he was an addict and Cady was his drug of choice – he couldn't seem to get enough.

Cady felt as if a fire had consumed her body. She melted against the front of Brendan and twined her fingers in his hair. She broke the kiss, staring at Brendan in wide-eyed wonder.

"What just happened?" she murmured.

Brendan shook his head. "I'm not sure."

He cocked his head, a noise in the hall catching his attention. Looking at Cady, he pressed a finger to her lips and nodded his head toward the door. She nodded that she understood.

Sitting on the bed, he pulled her into his lap. Burying his hand in her hair, he bent his head and kissed her just as the bedroom door opened.

"I see the two of you aren't wasting any time," Marshall drawled.

Brendan slowly broke the kiss, reluctant to do so, and looked at Marshall. "Last time I checked you had relinquished your claim on her."

Marshall nodded. "I did. I just didn't expect you to actually do anything with her. Didn't think you had it in you."

"Why? Because she was yours?" Brendan asked tersely. He wanted to knock the smirk off Marshall's face, but knew better than to try.

Marshall grinned. "That's exactly why. Hang on a sec," he said as he pushed away from the door frame and walked across to his room. He returned a moment later with a small armful of clothes.

"You're giving me the clothes back?" Cady asked in surprise. His quick change of heart was almost frightening. It made her wonder if something was going on; there had to be a catch.

He shrugged. "I don't exactly have a use for them. Besides, we're all going to the Sunset Club tomorrow. Can't have you showing up in nothing but Brendan's t-shirt."

Marshall walked into the room and dropped the clothes and shoes on the bed. Without another word, he walked out and closed the door. He grinned, realizing that he had left both of them guessing... unsure exactly what he was up to, not knowing if they could trust him.



Cady looked up at Brendan in confusion. "He was furious with me earlier and now he seems nonchalant. Is that normal?"

Brendan wanted to lie to her and tell her everything would be fine, but he couldn't. "No, that isn't normal. Actually, it's downright odd. If I didn't know better, I'd say he's planning something."

"He almost killed you last night. He won't try again, will he?" Cady asked.

Brendan caressed her cheek with the back of his fingers. "Not unless I provoke him."

"Could he though? Kill you?" she asked in a near whisper.

Brendan shrugged. He knew about the men Marshall had killed and knew the man was capable of anything, "Probably. He's pretty ruthless when he fights. I honestly don't know if I could take him or not."

Cady leaned against him. She'd never forgive herself if something happened to Brendan because of her. If he hadn't rescued her, he wouldn't be mixed up in all of this. "Let's hope we don't have to find out."

Brendan rested his chin on her head. He wasn't sure what to make of Marshall. While he was glad that Cady was his, he had a terrible feeling it wasn't going to be for long. For whatever reason, Marshall was toying with them.

Chapter Ten

After Cady dressed in a pair of jeans and a knit shirt, she curled up on the bed with Brendan to watch a movie. While their kiss still hovered in the back of her mind, she found that she was comfortable around him. She knew that he had to be thinking about the kiss too, but he didn't seem to be the type to take advantage of the situation. So far he had been a perfect gentleman.

Cady chewed on her lip. Marshall had seemed to be a gentleman too, but he had been a wolf in sheep's clothing. She briefly wondered if Brendan was playing games with her as well. She glanced at him out of the corner of her eye; he was intently watching the movie. He hadn't made even the slightest move to be closer to her or touch her in any way.

She would just have to give him the benefit of the doubt for now. Marshall and Brendan were two different guys. She just needed to remember that and stop comparing them to one another.

When Marshall had taken her to that horrid room, she had seen the fear in Brendan's eyes. He had genuinely been concerned for her safety, so much that he had been willing to throw away his freedom to protect her.

Cady had never known that the Vicus Luna guys could be so caring. She had assumed, as most people did, that they were ruthless and to be feared. While Marshall and his brother Paul lived up to that standard, she wasn't sure that Brendan really fit in with the group. He seemed different.

"How did you come to be part of Vicus Luna?" she asked him.

Brendan turned to her in surprise. "My parents were part of it just like Marshall's were. What brought this on?"

She blushed and shrugged her shoulders. "You just seem different than the others. I thought maybe you hadn't been around them for very long."

He smiled, genuinely pleased that she would put him in a separate category from the others. "You mean because I don't drag women around caveman style?"

"Well, that, and you just seem more human I guess," she responded. "I mean, Marshall had me fooled into thinking he was a nice guy. I thought that maybe I had been wrong and that he could be a kind and caring guy."

Brendan snorted on the last part as he fought back a laugh.

Cady gave him a dirty look. "Obviously I was wrong about him. He even saved me from Paul! When he held me, he made me feel... I don't know, cherished, like I was important to him and that my safety and well-being were important to him. In the end, I realized that the only thing important to Marshall is Marshall."

"I'm sorry you had to learn that the hard way," Brendan told her. "I have to admit though that I didn't come out to the cabin with altruistic intentions."

"You didn't?" she asked.

He shook his head. "I had hoped that Marshall wouldn't be around. I figured that if I had an opportunity to talk to you and hang out with you a little then you would see that I'm not such a bad guy." He shrugged his shoulders. "I guess I just couldn't figure out why you didn't pick me the other night and I was hoping I could change your mind. I knew that Marshall had a tendency to flit from one woman to another and that he would be bored with you before long. I hoped that when that happened, you might give me a chance."

"Thank you for being honest with me," she replied. "I've actually been sitting here trying to figure out if your actions were part of who you really are or if you were just trying to impress me."

Brendan suddenly wondered if he should have kept his mouth shut. "They are part of who I am."

"So you didn't stop him earlier just to show me that you're the right guy for me?" she asked.

Brendan shook his head. "I may have done some things in the past I'm not proud of, and I may not have stopped some bad things from happening around here when I should have, but it would have torn me apart knowing that you were in that room."

"Why?" she asked softly.

"Because... you seem so small and so delicate; you're beautiful and sexy. There's a vitality to you, a light that shines from within. If you had stayed in that room, all of that would have died. You would have been nothing but a broken shell when they were done with you," he answered. "I couldn't stand the thought of you being like that, of you being hurt."

"In other words, you wanted to protect me?"

"Yeah, I guess I did. I may not be the best guy for you, but compared to quite a few of the guys, I'd like to think I'm different," he answered.

Cady smiled. "I'm glad you wanted to protect me. And for what it's worth, I think you are different from the others."

"It means a lot." He brushed his fingers against the soft skin of her cheek. "I want to earn your trust. I know you haven't been given any choices since you were taken and brought here, but I'm going to give you a choice."

"What choice?" she asked.

"I told you earlier that we have to appear intimate around Marshall and the others. But I don't expect anything from you other than some kisses in public. When we're in this room, alone, you don't have to do anything you don't want to do," he told her.

"Won't the others be suspicious when they don't hear any noises coming from your room at night?" she asked.

"We might have to fake them out a time or two," he said with a grin. "But it can all be an act without us having to actually do anything."

"How exactly can you act out something like that?" she asked with a perplexed look.

"Easy. Bang the headboard against the wall for a few minutes and make some moaning noises," he answered.

Cady laughed. "Do you really think something that ridiculous would work?"

"Well, it's better than the alternative," he answered.

That sobered Cady for a moment. She knew the alternative would be the two of them actually being intimate instead of pretending.

Brendan saw her hesitation. "Relax Cady. I don't expect anything from you."

"What if I decide that I want more than pretending we're together? What if I decide I want the real thing?"

He tucked her hair behind her ear. "If you decide that, then we'll go from there. But I don't want you to feel pressured to do anything you aren't ready to do or that you don't want to do. I'm not Marshall, Cady. I'm not going to trick you into anything or force you to do something just because I want you."

"Do you? Want me, I mean," she asked.

"Very much," he answered in a husky voice. His eyes travelled to her lips, remembering the feel of them against his.

A tremor ran through Cady. The unmasked desire in his eyes made her body run hot. She knew from their kiss that her body would respond well to him, but she wasn't sure if she was ready for that yet. Too much had happened in such a short time. She was afraid of jumping into bed with him too soon and regretting her decision. If she was going to survive being part of Vicus Luna, she needed a protector. From what she'd experienced so far, Brendan was her best choice.



Cady and Brendan had watched movies most of the day, only venturing out of the room long enough to use the restroom or eat. The sun had set long ago and Cady found herself fighting to keep her eyes open.

"Why don't you get ready for bed?" Brendan asked, noting that her eyes kept drooping. "I'll step out into the hall to give you some privacy."

Cady nodded her head sleepily. Once Brendan stepped out of the room and closed the door, she changed out of her clothes. She started to reach for the gray t-shirt from the previous night, but it had too many bad memories associated with it now. She walked over to the dresser and pulled out a clean t-shirt; lifting it out, she noticed a gun hidden underneath.

With shaking hands, she quickly dropped the shirt back over the firearm and selected a different t-shirt. She glanced toward the bedroom door and wondered why Brendan had it. Had he used it before? Was it for protection or something else?

Slipping the blue t-shirt over her head, she gathered her dirty clothes and dropped them in the corner. Taking a few deep breaths, she walked over to the bedroom door and opened it a crack. Peeking into the hall, she didn't see Brendan anywhere.

Cady closed the door and decided to crawl back into the bed. She had just gotten comfortable when Brendan walked in.

He noticed the clean t-shirt she was wearing and glanced at the dresser. Looking back at her, he asked, "Which drawer did that come from?"

"The middle one," she said quietly.

He sighed and ran a hand down his face. "Would it do me any good to tell you that I've never used the gun in a crime?"

"Have you ever committed one?" she responded.

"Yeah, I have. Not one of my prouder moments, but I stole a car when I was a teenager," he answered.

"Is that the only crime you've committed?" she asked.

"There may have been others, but they were small things. Mostly just a kid trying to have fun; the thrill of doing something you shouldn't," he said. "This changes things, doesn't it?"

"You aren't mad that I went through your things?" she asked.

"I'm guessing you were only after something clean to sleep in," he answered.

"I couldn't wear the other one. I didn't want the memories attached to it," she said honestly.

Brendan walked over to her and sat on the edge of the bed. "I should have thought of that and given you something before I left the room. But to answer your question, no I'm not mad."

"But I invaded your privacy," she said, surprised that he wasn't the slightest bit upset.

"Cady, you've invaded far more than my privacy. You came crashing into my life and turned it upside down. But I'm okay with that," he said.

She gave him a hesitant smile. Scooting closer to him, she pushed up on her knees and leaned in to kiss him. It was just a brief kiss, her lips softly brushing his, but she felt it all the way to her toes.

"Good night, Cady," he said softly.

"Good night," she replied, lying back on the bed. She pulled the covers up to her chest and closed her eyes.



An hour after Cady had fallen asleep, Brendan was still wide awake. He heard footsteps outside of his door and had a feeling they were going to receive a visitor. Knowing that Marshall would look for any reason to take Cady away, Brendan had to think fast. If Marshall thought for one moment that Brendan and Cady had done nothing more than sleep, he would have Cady back in that horrible room immediately. Brendan couldn't let that happen.

He stripped off his shirt and tossed it onto the floor. He knew Cady would be mad at him, but he gently removed the t-shirt she was wearing and dropped it on top of his. They both had their underwear on, but since they were covered up no one would know.

Brendan pulled her into his arms and held her close. Closing his eyes, he pretended to be asleep when he heard the bedroom door open. It seemed like forever before their uninvited guest had looked his fill and closed the door.

Heaving a sigh of relief, Brendan relaxed his guard.

"Is there a reason I'm mostly naked?" a soft voice asked.

Brendan looked down into Cady's upturned face; suspicion clearly blazing in her eyes.

"Marshall paid us a visit," he answered. "I heard him outside of the door and had to make it look like we'd..."

"Like we'd made love?" she asked.

"Yeah," he answered. "I'll get your shirt for you."

Cady wrapped her arms around him, pressing her breasts against his chest. "What if he comes back?"

Brendan swallowed. Cady's soft skin pressed against his was torture. He knew that she had to feel how aroused he was and it made him wonder if she was teasing him on purpose. "I can do the same thing if he does."

Cady pressed herself closer, feeling his erection against her. "But if you're asleep, you might not hear him in time."

"What exactly are you suggesting?" he asked.

"That we remain like this," she whispered.

Brendan groaned. "Cady, I don't think I can stay like this all night."

"Why not?" she asked, closing her eyes. While she was aroused, the warmth of his skin against hers was lulling her back to sleep.

Brendan growled. "Because I want you too damn much, that's why."

When Cady didn't answer, he looked down and realized she'd gone back to sleep. He ground his teeth together in frustration and wondered if he'd ever fall asleep. The woman was going to make him crazy.

Chapter Eleven

The next morning, Cady awoke to find herself alone in bed. She looked around the room and spotted Brendan in a chair in the corner of the room, watching her intently.

"What are you doing over there?" she asked in a voice still husky from sleep.

"Watching you sleep," he answered.

Cady stretched and realized that the sheet was down around her waist, giving him a perfect view of her breasts. She blushed and pulled the sheet up to her chin.

Brendan chuckled. "It's a little late for that."

Cady blushed an even brighter red.

Brendan stood and walked to the bed. Pulling the covers from her body, he placed a knee between her legs and leaned down until his nose was touching hers. "We're about to have company," he whispered.

Drawing the sheet over them, he covered Cady's body with his own and kissed her. He buried a hand in her hair and slid his tongue between her parted lips. His other hand skimmed down her body to rest at her waist, pulling her tight against his erection.

Brendan heard the bedroom door open and thrust against Cady, hoping that Marshall would think he'd caught them in the act. Beneath him Cady whimpered and lifted her hips. It was all Brendan could do not to take her right then and there. Rubbing against her heat was driving him crazy. He'd never wanted anyone as much as he wanted Cady.

When he heard the door close, Brendan broke the kiss.

Cady slowly opened her eyes and looked up at him. "I want you," she murmured, pulling his head back down for another kiss.

Brendan gave in to her kiss, but pulled back when he felt her hand rub against the hard length of his erection. "Cady, we shouldn't."

"Why not?" she asked, pulling him back down.

"Because ... I promised I would give you time," he answered, wondering if he was an idiot for telling her no.

"You said I could choose the time. I'm choosing," she said as she lifted her hips, teasing him.

"You aren't going to make this easy, are you?" he asked.

She shook her head and rubbed herself against him again. Taking his hand, she guided it between her legs.

Even with the barrier of her panties, Brendan could feel how hot and wet she was; she was swollen and ready for him.

Feeling brave, Cady reached down and slipped her hand inside of Brendan's boxers. Her fingers skimmed along his skin, feeling his shaft. Grasping him in her hand, she rubbed up and down, enjoying the feel of him in her hand.

Brendan groaned. "Cady, you're killing me."

Pulling him free of his boxers, she rubbed herself against him again.

"Take my panties off," she whispered.

Brendan shook his head. "I really don't think this is a good idea."

With every stroke she made, Brendan lost more and more of his self-control. Slipping his thumb under her panties, he felt her swollen nub. Even if he didn't take her right now, there was no reason she shouldn't find her release.

As Brendan stroked her, Cady arched her body. The only thing that would have made her feel better would have been having him inside of her.

Reaching between their bodies, she pulled her panties aside, her fingers brushing the back of his hand as he pleased her. Grasping his thick length in her hand, she lifted her hips. She felt the head of his cock against her opening and whimpered, wanting more.

Brendan gritted his teeth. Feeling her wet heat and knowing that with just the slightest shift of his hips he could be inside of her was driving him mad. But he had promised to win her trust and that's what he was going to do... even if it killed him.

Brendan flicked his thumb over her sensitive nub over and over. The closer Cady got to an orgasm the wilder she became. With a quick jerk of her hips, she managed to draw him part-way into her.

Brendan sucked in a breath and held still. He watched as Cady tossed her head from side to side. Her hips shifted so that he slid in and out of her body, causing just enough friction to send her over the edge. She thrust her hips one last time and cried out her release.

Spent, she collapsed onto the bed, her breath coming out in heavy pants.

Brendan allowed himself to slide from her body. He knew he'd have to go to the bathroom and take care of himself, but it wouldn't be the same. He was still wet from her juices and so turned on he thought he might explode.

"Why didn't you take me?" she asked.

"Because it wasn't the right time," he answered.

Cady reached for him, but Brendan drew back.

"If you touch me right now, I won't be able to control myself," he said. He bent down and kissed her before rolling out of the bed. Tucking his cock back into his boxers, he grabbed some clean clothes and beat a hasty retreat to the bathroom.

In the bedroom, Cady stared at the ceiling. She was stunned that he had given her pleasure without taking any for himself. It just proved that he was different than the other men she'd been with.



By the time Brendan returned to the bedroom, Cady was dressed and waiting for him. She'd pulled on a blue knit shirt and jeans, unsure of the plans for the day.

"I wasn't sure what we were doing today," she said as Brendan closed the bedroom door.

"I thought we might go to the lake," he answered.

"I don't have a bathing suit."

He shrugged. "We can get one along the way."

Cady nodded and fiddle with the hem of her shirt. "Maybe I should change into some shorts."

"If you want to," Brendan replied in the same flat tone.

Cady turned toward the closet and pulled out a pair of denim shorts and a lavender halter top. Brendan seemed so cool and aloof that it made Cady want to shake him up. What had happened between the time he went to take a shower and when he'd come back to the bedroom? If she didn't know better, she'd say that one man had left and a different one had come back. Holding her clothes close to her chest, she eyed Brendan. He looked the same as before.

"I'm just going to go change," she murmured, slipping past him.

Brendan reached out an arm, blocking her way. "Why don't you change here?"

Cady looked at him, uncertain how to respond. "Are you feeling okay, Brendan?"

He raised an eyebrow, imitating a look she'd seen on Marshall several times. The hair on the back of her neck stood up; something wasn't right.

"Why wouldn't I be alright?" he asked. "Maybe I just want to see you change. You're mind after all."

Cady swallowed and backed toward the bed. Now she knew for sure that something was wrong. This man might look like Brendan, but there was no way it was the same guy she'd been with that morning.



Downstairs, Brendan chugged a glass of orange juice. Glancing out the kitchen window, he spotted a familiar car. His brother was back. Hearing a thud upstairs in the vicinity of his bedroom, Brendan dumped the glass in the sink and took off up the stairs. He had to get to Cady!

As he reached the top of the staircase, he lunged for the bedroom door, only to find it was locked. He pounded on the door with his fist.

"Open the damn door!"

He heard a muffled sound inside, but no one came to open the door.

"Dammit Eric, open the fucking door!" he yelled.

He heard his twin laughing on the other side. "Now why would I do that brother dear? I have a rather delightful toy to play with in here."

Brendan growled. "Stay away from her."

"Oh I plan on getting close to her. Very, very close in fact," he brother answered.

Backing up a few steps, Brendan braced himself and rammed the bedroom door. He heard the wood crack, but the door didn't budge. Backing up again, he rammed his shoulder against the door a second time.

"You know you'll just piss off Marshall if you break the door," his brother said from inside the room.

"I don't give a damn right now. Open the door!"

"So she means that much do you, does she?" Eric asked.

Brendan felt himself go cold. Surely his brother wouldn't hurt Cady just to spite him. He knew his brother could be a bastard, but surely he hadn't sunk that low.

"Don't touch her, Eric."

"What if I want to touch her and a whole lot more?" his brother called through the door.

Brendan could feel the rage building inside of him. With a shout, he rammed his shoulder into the door again, this time busting the lock and knocking his brother flat on his ass.

He glared down at Eric, his chest rising and falling rapidly with each breath he took. "What the hell are you doing here?"

Eric smiled up at him and shrugged. "Figured it was time to come home."

"Why would you think you'd be welcome here?"

"Because Marshall invited me back," Eric stated as he climbed to his feet.

Brendan stared at him in shock. So that was Marshall's game. Eric had been thrown out of the house when he'd been caught in bed with Marshall's girlfriend. The only reason to bring him back would be to drive a wedge between him and Cady. His twin looked

exactly like him. It wouldn't be farfetched for Cady to believe Eric was him.

Cady... he'd almost forgotten. He glanced around the room and spotted her sitting in the corner near the chair. Rushing to her side, he knelt beside her.

"Are you okay?" he asked quietly.

She had a dazed expression on her face. "I knew there was something wrong, but I couldn't figure out what it was."

"What do you mean you knew something was wrong?" he asked.

She shook her head. "You weren't the same. You looked the same, but you sounded... flat, cold, like nothing bothered you."

"And that tipped you off?" he asked with a grin.

Cady chewed on her lip. "Kind of."

The smile slipped from his face. He reached out and gently tipped her head back so he could see her eyes. "What happened, Cady?"

She shrugged. "I told him I was going to change since we were going to the lake."

"What lake?" Brendan asked.

"The one he said we were going to... I had asked if we had plans today."

He nodded for her to continue.

"I got out a pair of shorts and a top and was going to go to the bathroom to change. He told me I could change here. I thought it was a joke and tried to walk to the bedroom door."

Brendan noted a bruise forming on her arm and could guess what happened, but he needed to hear it. "What happened?"

"He blocked my way and told me I could change in here. He said that I belonged to him and he wanted to see just what he was getting."

Brendan fought the urge to hit his brother.

"I knew he couldn't be you. I backed away, but he followed me. When I tried to go around him, he grabbed my arm and threw me on the bed."

Brendan pulled her into his arms. "I'm so sorry, sweetheart. I had no idea he was here."

"I fought him, Brendan. I tried to get away."

Brendan grew still. He noticed her disheveled appearance and feared the worst. "What did he do, Cady?"

She shook her head. "He touched me, but when I fought against him he threw me off the bed and onto the floor."

Brendan hugged her tighter. That would explain the thud he'd heard. If he hadn't gotten here when he had... he didn't even want to finish the thought.

"Sit right here, honey."

She nodded and scrunched further into the corner.

Brendan stood and advanced on his brother who was still on the floor, reclining back on his hands with a cocky grin on his face.

"Don't tell me you're going to believe that tramp over me," Eric said.

Brendan grabbed his brother's shirt and hauled him to his feet. "I most certainly do."

The grin slipped from Eric's face when he realized just how pissed off his brother really was; obviously Marshall hadn't been one-hundred percent honest about the situation. "Brendan, wait... I can explain."

Brendan shook his head. "It's a little late, Eric."

"Marshall led me to believe..."

"Marshall?" Cady asked from her corner. Hearing the alpha's name, she surged to her feet, her fear forgotten for the moment. "What does Marshall have to do with this?"

Eric glanced from his brother to Cady and back again. "Bro, maybe you should tell me what's going on."

Brendan released him. "Sit in the chair and stay the hell away from Cady."

Eric nodded. He skirted around Cady and sank into the chair. He had no doubt his brother had been ready to kick his ass. Something was going on and he wanted to know what it was before he chose sides.

Cady hurried around the foot of the bed, trying to get a little distance from Eric. He made her nervous.

Brendan pulled her to his side and led her to the edge of the bed. Sitting down, he pulled her into his lap and wrapped his arms around her.

"What did Marshall tell you?" Brendan asked quietly.

Eric shrugged. "He said that you had taken a shine to the pack whore and were hogging her; said that she had wrapped you around her finger and was using you."

Brendan growled low in his throat. "He lied to you."

"So she's not the pack whore? Or she doesn't have you wrapped around her finger?" Eric asked.

"Both were untrue. Oh, there's no doubt that Marshall wants her to be the pack whore, but she's not," Brendan responded.

"I think I'm missing something," Eric said, a tired look on his face.

"The Vicus Luna picked me up about a week or so ago. When I was brought here, Marshall decided to claim me for himself," Cady said softly. "He made me trust him, made me believe he was something he's not... I started to have feelings for him."

Brendan tightened his arms around her. He hated hearing about her time with Marshall. He'd never been jealous before, but when it came to Cady he was, without a doubt.

"When our time in the cabin came to an end, he brought me here. There was a misunderstanding and he threw me out of his room," she said.

"And that's where you come in?" Eric asked looking at his brother.

Brendan nodded. "I found her in the hall crying and asking him to open the door."

Eric gave them a skeptical look. "She doesn't seem prone to tears."

Brendan cleared his throat. "There were extenuating circumstances."

Eric just looked at them.

Brendan sighed. "She was naked, okay. He threw her out without her clothes."

Eric eyed Cady in a way that had Brendan wanting to hit him again, as if he were imagining her without her clothes.

"He told her she was no longer his mate and that he didn't care what she did," Brendan said.

"You were his mate?" Eric asked with wide eyes. "What the hell?"

Cady shrugged. "He apparently decided he didn't need a mate in order to rule the pack."

"But you have the mark?" Eric asked.

She shook her head. "I did, but when he said I was no longer his the mark burned away."

"That's when Marshall got the idea to make her the pack whore," Brendan said. "He dragged her over to that room and threw her on the bed."

"Jesus. What's happened to him?" Eric asked.

Brendan gave him a long look. "You did."

Eric had the grace to blush. "Look, she came onto me. I was weak, okay? It's not like I planned on getting caught."

"The one time you needed to keep your pants zipped and you not only fail to do that, but you bedded her in the alpha's bed. I'm surprised Marshall just banned you from the pack," Brendan said.

"It was far better than what he did to Rae," Eric replied softly, thinking of the alpha's girlfriend, the terrified look she'd had on her face as he had taken her to the horrible room next door. He had left her there, left her to be the pack's whore. Eric had heard about her suicide and it had broken his heart.

"I'm thinking he called you here in hopes that Cady wouldn't realize you weren't me. If he caught you in bed together, he would have an excuse to take her from me," Brendan said.

Eric nodded. He glanced at Cady snuggled in his brother's arms. "I'm sorry about earlier."

Cady regarded him with uncertainty. "I would like to say I forgive you, but that might take a little longer."

Eric nodded. "Understandable."

"Do you have a place to stay?" Brendan asked.

"Yeah, I got a room at the local motel. I'll head out tomorrow," Eric replied.

"Why don't you stick around? I have a feeling we might need you sometime soon," Brendan said.

"Then I'll hang around for a while. But for now, I'm going to leave the two of you alone," he said, climbing to his feet.

"I'll see you around," Brendan said as his brother left the room.



Cady looked up at Brendan. "Why didn't you tell me you had a twin?"

"It just never came up. Eric was banned from the pack so I stopped talking about him," Brendan answered.

Cady sighed. "So I guess we aren't going bathing suit shopping and to the lake."

Brendan grinned. "Why not? Sounds like a good idea to me."

"Really?" she asked.

He nodded. "Why don't you change and then we'll head down the road a bit and find a place to buy you a bathing suit."

Cady grinned and got up from his lap. She gazed at the busted door. "What about that?"

"I'll see if the hardware store can deliver a new one while we're gone," he answered.

She nodded and gathered her clothes. "I'll just step into the bathroom to change."

Hurrying out of the room, she stepped into the bathroom and closed the door. She locked the knob just to be safe before changing out of her clothes. As she tied the halter top around her neck, she looked at her reflection in the mirror. She'd never worn anything quite so daring before and she hoped Brendan liked it.

Taking a breath, she opened the bathroom door and walked straight into Marshall.

Chapter Twelve

"Cady, going somewhere?" Marshall asked as his eyes raked over her body, resting on her breasts.

Cady fought the urge to cover her body. "I was just going to let Brendan know I'm ready."

"And are you? Ready?" he asked seductively.

Cady refused to take the bait. "We're going to the lake."

Marshall stepped closer. He reached out and ran his fingers along Cady's jaw. Tipping her head back, he leaned down. With his lips barely an inch from hers, he said, "So he gets the treat of seeing your delicious little body in a bathing suit. Lucky guy."

Cady tried not to shiver. What was he up to now? "What do you want Marshall?"

He smiled. "What I've wanted since the first night you came here. I want you, Cady."

He grabbed her hand and pressed against the front of his jeans. "Don't you miss that? Don't you want to come to my room with me right now and let me slide into your hot body?"

Cady swallowed hard. "You threw me out, Marshall."

"Maybe I made a mistake," he murmured right before his lips touched hers.

Cady tried to back away, but Marshall reached out and held her in place. She put her hands against his chest and tried to push him away, but he wouldn't budge. When he tugged her against his body and wrapped his arms around her, she beat on him with her fists trying in vain to get away.

"Cady, what's taking..." Brendan's sentence trailed off. The sight of Cady in Marshall's arms, being kissed by him, nearing stopped Brendan's heart.

Cady heard Brendan and fought even harder to get free. She wanted to explain, to tell him that she wasn't given a choice. A tear slipped down her cheek from frustration more than anything else.

Brendan noticed the tear and focused on her face. He noticed her tense expression and saw that she was pounding on Marshall, trying to break free.

Walking over to them, Brendan reached between them, breaking Marshall's hold on Cady. "I do believe she'd like you stop."

Marshall glared at him. "I don't recall asking you."

"No? Maybe you simply got me and Eric confused," Brendan replied.

Marshall crossed his arms. "I take it your brother has made an appearance."

"You know he has. You invited him," Brendan replied.

Cady watched the two men as she carefully edged toward Brendan. She thought she's made it, when she felt an arm snake around her waist and pull her back against Marshall's hard body.

"Going somewhere, sweetheart?" he murmured in her ear.

"Let me go, Marshall."

He grinned and chuckled in her ear. "Now why would I do that?"

Cady turned to face him. "You didn't want me. You tossed me out of your room with no clothes and said I was no longer your mate."

"Ah, but see, I didn't say I wanted you to be my mate. I simply said I wanted you," he answered. "I want to feel that hot little body of yours lying under mine again."

Cady only hoped her face didn't show the revulsion she felt. How could she have ever fallen for him? He was crass, crude, and a jackass. That twenty-twenty hindsight was just wonderful.

"What if that isn't what I want?" she asked.

"I didn't ask what you wanted. If I want you, I'll have you," he answered.

"Except that you gave me to Brendan. You told him he could have me," she replied.

"You seriously want to stay with him when you could be with me?" he asked, incredulous.

"Yes, I do. He treats me decently and I enjoy being with him," she said.

"And does he make you come like I do?" he asked as he squeezed her breast.

Cady tried to pull away. "Is there a right way to answer that? If I tell you he's better, you'll just get angry. If I say he isn't, you'll try to take me from him."

Marshall grinned. "You're smarter than I thought."

Brendan decided he'd had enough. "Marshall, let her go."

Marshall relaxed his hold on Cady, but didn't let her go. He smiled at Brendan before jerking Cady against him again. Grabbing a handful of her hair, he bent his head and kissed her again. He shoved his tongue past her lips, which she had clamped shut. The harder she fought, the more turned on he became. It seemed that little Cady was more of a wildcat than he had first thought. She was just full of surprises.

Chuckling, Marshall released her and shoved her toward Brendan. "Remember that the next time he kisses you."

Marshall turned on his heel and jogged down the stairs and out the front door.

Cady walked on shaky legs until she stood in front of Brendan. Her lips felt bruised and she wanted to brush her teeth to get rid of the taste of Marshall. Glancing up at Brendan through her eyelashes she tried to gage his reaction to finding her in Marshall's arms.

"Let's go," Brendan said quietly.

"Brendan, I..."

He shook his head. "Not right now, Cady."

She nodded her head and meekly followed him down the stairs, worried that things had suddenly changed between them.



In the truck, Cady sat quietly and stole glances at Brendan. He was so quiet, but his jaw was tense. She chewed on her lip and looked out the window.

As Brendan drove, Cady wondered if there was anything she could do to make it all up to him. Even if it hadn't been her fault, she still felt like she was being punished for something.

"Brendan?" Cady asked softly.

He quickly glanced her way and gripped the steering wheel tighter, his knuckles going white. "What is it, Cady?"

"I'm sorry," she said softly. "I promise I didn't want him to kiss me."

Brendan let out a breath and pulled the truck over. Unbuckling their seat belts, he pulled Cady into his arms. "You have nothing to be sorry for, sweetheart. I know you didn't ask him to kiss you. I know you had nothing to do with it."

"Then why are you giving me the silent treatment?" she asked.

"Because I was so angry I was afraid I'd yell at you. When I saw you in his arms, my heart stopped. But when I saw the tear slide down your cheek, I knew that you were being forced," he said. "I wanted to kill him for it."

Brendan lowered his head to hers and kissed her gently. When Cady leaned in closer, he wrapped his arms around her tighter and brought her flush against his body.

He broke the kiss and pressed his forehead to hers. "I'm sorry I was an ass."

Cady laughed. "You weren't. I was just afraid you were mad at me."

"Honey, I could never be mad at you for something that isn't your fault," he replied.

She nodded.

"Are you ready to go buy a bathing suit?"

She smiled. "I guess so."

He grinned and slid back over to the driver's side.

They rode the rest of the way to the lake in silence, Brendan concentrating on his driving and Cady watching the scenery. About a mile from the lake, Brendan pulled into the parking lot of a souvenir shop. They had beach towels, postcards, and bathing suits lining the store windows.

"Where are we?" Cady asked.

"West Point Lake, Georgia," Brendan replied.

"I don't think I've ever been here," she replied as the truck came to a stop.

Brendan turned off the engine and climbed out of the cab. Walking around to Cady's side, he opened the door for her. When her feet touched the ground, she wrapped her arms around his waist.

"Thank you for bringing me here today," she murmured before pushing up on tiptoe to kiss him.

Brendan met her half way and gently brushed his lips against hers. "You're welcome. Now let's get you a bathing suit so we can go have some fun."

Cady grinned and grabbed his hand.

Once inside the store, she walked over to the bathing suit selection. Her first instinct was to go for a one piece, but she felt daring. She wanted Brendan to want her as much as she wanted him. Picking out a few two piece bathing suits, she headed for the changing room.

Cady had always been critical of her body, but she was able to find a two piece she liked. The halter style top pushed her breasts up until they were close to over-flowing. The hipster style bottom was flattering. Changing back into her clothes, she left the unwanted suits in the dressing room and walked toward the front of the store to find Brendan.

She found him leaning against the checkout counter with the clerk practically drooling over him. The perky blonde was doing everything in her power to catch Brendan's attention, including showing her cleavage. If the girl's top was cut any lower, her nipples would have been showing.

Cady walked up to Brendan with a smile on her face and twinkle in her eyes. She plastered herself to the front of him. "I didn't take too long did I?" she purred.

Brendan's eyes widened in surprise, but he grinned. "Not at all beautiful. Find something you like?"

"Every morning," Cady replied, flirting right back.

Brendan chuckled and leaned down to kiss her. "Let's buy your bathing suit so we can get to the lake. Otherwise you might tempt me to turn around and head right back home."

Cady grinned up at him. When she turned to place the bathing suit on the counter, she noticed the blonde's glare and wanted to smirk. She'd never felt so empowered before. She'd never been one to flirt and act the coquette. It was a nice change of pace for her, but she knew she'd only been brave enough because it was Brendan she was with. He made her feel sexy and desirable, no matter what she wore.

Brendan paid for her bathing suit and they headed back out to the truck.

"Oh, do you have a suit?" Cady asked Brendan; she didn't remember him getting one before they left.

He nodded. "Yeah, we keep a duffle bag in the truck with towels and we each have swim trunks in there too."

"Go to the lake often?" she asked, trying to keep the jealousy out of her voice. If his grin was anything to go by, she'd failed miserably.

"The guys and I come out here sometimes to get away from the rest of the pack." He looked over at her. "You're the first female that's gone out there with me."

Cady blushed in pleasure.

A few minutes later, they pulled through the gate at the lake. Once they had paid their entry fee, Brendan turned toward one of the swimming beaches. As the truck pulled to a stop in the parking lot, Cady realized that they would have the beach to themselves.

"Where is everyone? You'd think on a beautiful day like today this place would be crawling with people," she said.

"The guard at the gate said he was directing everyone to the other two beaches. He knows I'm part of Vicus Luna and said we'd have this one to ourselves," he smiled at her. "Unless you want to be around other people."

Cady shook her head. The thought of having the beach to themselves was wonderful.

"There are changing rooms and bathrooms over there," he said, pointing to the right.

Cady looked out her window at the small building. Grabbing her swimsuit, she got out of the truck and walked over to the changing rooms. She heard Brendan close his door and follow behind her.

In the dressing room, she slipped out of her clothes and shoes. Taking the bathing suit out of the sack, she pulled the tags off and slipped the bottoms on. Slipping the halter top on, she fastened it around her neck. Cady put her clothes into the sack and opened the door. Brendan was already changed and waiting for her.

She eyed his broad shoulders and washboard abs, hoping she wasn't drooling. Stepping out of the changing room, she handed him her sack. "I wasn't sure what to do with my clothes."

"I'll put them in the truck."

As Brendan walked over to the truck, Cady looked down the beach. The sand felt warm under her feet and there was a slight breeze. She walked toward the water, enjoying the warmth of the sun on her skin. Sinking into the sand, she tilted her head back and closed her eyes.



Brendan locked the truck and walked over to Cady. Looking down at her, he admired her beauty. The sun brought out different shades of brown, red and blonde in her hair, making it golden. Sinking into the sand beside her, he watched her. Watching Cady was starting to be the best part of his day.

He reached out and gently ran his hand down her arm, enjoying the texture of her skin.

She opened her eyes and looked at him, waiting to see what he was going to do. Rolling her body under his, he kissed her earlobe, gently taking it into his mouth and sucking on it. He trailed kisses down her neck to her shoulder, where he lightly bit her.

"You're so beautiful," he murmured, trailing kisses up to her mouth.

"As long as you find me beautiful, that's all that matters," she replied.

"Then you have nothing to worry about," he said with a grin.

She smiled back and gently caressed his cheek. "I'm glad I'm with you."

"Me, too," he said. "Come on, let's go take a swim."

"But I was enjoying the sand," she said with a gleam in her eye.

Brendan laughed. "I was, too, but I think it would be best if we swim a bit."

Cady shrugged and let him pull her to her feet.

Following him out into the water, she wondered if he would make love to her if she asked. He hadn't earlier, but maybe he would now. She wanted to know that she was his, that he wanted her and only her. She wanted to know that things could work between them... because she was afraid she was already falling for him.

Chapter Thirteen

Later that night, Cady stared at the clothes in the closet, trying to decide what to wear to the Sunset Club. She knew her brother would be working. Would the pack be angry with her when they found out? She had intentionally kept that tidbit to herself in hopes of seeing her brother again. Was that really so wrong? He was all she had left of her family.

Brendan walked up behind her and rested his hand on her shoulder. "It isn't a fashion show, you know."

Cady laughed. "I know, but I want to look nice. It's my first outing with the pack since I was picked up."

Brendan reached into the closet and grabbed the denim mini skirt and a low cut white eyelet shirt with capped sleeves. "What about this?"

Cady remembered Marshall's comment in the store when she had bought the skirt, but immediately shoved the memory from her mind. If Brendan wanted her to wear the outfit, it was the least she could do.

Cady took the outfit from Brendan and laid it out on the bed. She reached into the basket on the floor and pulled out a clean white lacy bra and a matching thong. She'd never been one to wear thongs, but she wanted to see Brendan's reaction. She was ready for them to take the next step, but he was fighting her at every turn.

"I need to take a shower before we go," she said, gathering her clothes from the bed.

"Make sure you lock the bathroom door," he replied. "And leave the bedroom door open. That should keep the guys out of the bathroom."

Cady gave him a wide-eyed look. "You mean that Marshall and Robin would come in there while I was taking a shower? Even if I locked the door?"

"I'm not sure what's going on with Marshall right now. I wouldn't put anything past him," Brendan responded.

Cady nodded and with an armful of clothing she headed to the bathroom. Inside the small space, she put her clothes on the edge of the sink and closed and locked the door.

Turning on the shower, she let the water warm to the right temperature. Slipping out of her clothes, she stepped under the spray. Cady pulled the shower door closed and sighed in bliss. The warm water cascaded down her body, washing her troubles away.

Looking at the bottles on the towel rack she almost laughed. Each of the guys had their name on their shampoo and body wash. Reaching for Brendan's shampoo, she poured a quarter size amount in her hand and lathered her hair. Rinsing the suds out of her hair, she wished she had some conditioner. Maybe she could get Brendan to take her shopping tomorrow for incidentals.

Opening Brendan's shower gel, she took a whiff to see if she would like it. The gel had a musky, masculine scent, which she was certain smelled divine on Brendan, but it just wasn't for her. Looking around she spotted a small bottle of vanilla shower gel in the corner. While vanilla wasn't her favorite, it would have to do.

Cady took her time washing her body. As the water washed the soap away, she sank to her knees, the weight of the past few days pressing down on her. Palms against the shower floor, she let the water wash over her, washing away her sins and transgressions. She had allowed herself to be drawn in by Marshall, allowed herself to believe he was something he was not. Her naivety had gotten her into a world of trouble.

She wasn't sure what to make of Brendan. He had seemed wild when she had first met him. In the end, it was Marshall who had been cold and uncaring while Brendan had been her savior.

The rattle of the door knob jerked her out of her reverie. Cady tensed and waited. The knob rattled once more before she heard footsteps walk down the hall. She knew it wasn't Brendan; he would have called out or announced himself in some way. That only left Marshall and Robin. She hadn't had a chance to meet Robin really. She remembered him being present the night she was taken off the street, but it was a fleeting memory.

Why had Marshall given Brendan the ultimatum of either claiming her for himself or leaving her to be the pack's whore? Had he known that Brendan would take her under his wing? Or had he hoped that the other werewolf would back down, leaving her to her fate? None of it made any sense to her. Her intense attraction to Brendan confused things even more.

Getting to her feet, Cady turned off the water. Opening the shower door, she reached for the towel she had set down just outside the door, but she didn't feel it. Wiping the water out of her eyes, she looked down at the floor where she had left the towel, but it was missing. Her gaze quickly travelled the small bathroom, but the towel was nowhere to be seen – and neither were her clothes.

She heard a crash in the hall. Straining her ears, she tried to figure out what was going on. Cady stepped out of the shower and looked through the cabinets. She located another towel and wrapped it around her body. Opening the door a fraction, she peered into the hall and nearly gasped when she saw Brendan and Marshall fighting.

A quick look around the hall yielded the answer for the fight and the question of her missing towel and clothes. It seemed that Marshall had found a way into the bathroom and had escaped with them.

Cady darted out and grabbed her clothes. She paused, wanting to help Brendan, but she was unsure how. She started to take a step toward the fighting werewolves when Brendan managed to get the upper hand, lifting Marshall off the floor and flinging him against a wall. The plaster cracked under the pressure and the alpha slid to the floor, stunned.

Brendan stalked toward Marshall and towered over him, fangs bared. "Stay away from Cady."

A quick nod from Marshall was the only response Brendan received. Apparently it was enough because he took a step back.

Marshall stood and glared at the werewolf. "You realize that I could kill you for this."

Still hyped up on adrenaline, Brendan answered, "You could try."

Marshall straightened, his mouth forming a tense line. Without a word, he went into his bedroom and slammed the door.

Brendan turned to Cady and held his hand out to her. "Are you okay?"

She nodded. "I didn't realize he had managed to come into the bathroom until I got out and couldn't find my towel and clothes."

"Our fight didn't scare you?" Brendan asked, his fangs now retracted.

Cady shook her head. "I was worried about you, but I wasn't exactly afraid."

Brendan opened his mouth to answer when he paused and looked over his shoulder. Robin had appeared at the top of the stairs, a shocked look on his face.

"You just beat Marshall in a fight," he said in an awed voice.

Brendan shrugged. "He was harassing Cady."

"Are you going to challenge him for the position of alpha?" Robin asked.

"No, I don't want it," he answered tersely.

Robin nodded and headed for his room. Before he closed the door, he looked over at Brendan again. You could practically see the wheels turning in his head and Cady wondered what precisely he was thinking about.

With Brendan's hand on the small of her back, she walked into their bedroom.



Closing the door and turning the lock, Brendan slumped against it and closed his eyes. "I hate fighting," he murmured.

Cady looked up at him and placed a hand on his chest. "Then why did you do it?"

Opening his eyes, he looked down at the petite woman in front of him. He noticed her hair was still dripping wet and watched as a water droplet travelled down her neck and disappeared into her cleavage. He reached out with a finger and traced the path of the droplet. When his finger reached the towel, he hooked his finger inside and gently pulled, loosening the towel until it slid away from her body.

Cady never took her eyes from his face. She loved the hungry expression in his eyes, the tenderness of his touch, the tremor of need that ran through his body... she loved knowing she had so much power over him. When he gently cupped her breasts, she closed her eyes and tipped her head back.

"You're so beautiful," he murmured, his hands sliding down her abdomen to rest on her hips. Bending his head to hers, he gently captured her lips in a kiss, his tongue sliding into her mouth and stroking her tongue. When he felt Cady press closer and wrap her arms around him, he broke the kiss and backed up.

Shaking his head, he said, "No, not yet. I won't take you right now."

She looked at him in confusion. He'd refused her twice in one day. If she hadn't felt the proof of his interest in her, Cady would have wondered if he found her unattractive. "Don't you want me?"

Taking her hand, he pressed it down on his cock. "Of course I do."

Cady blushed. "Then why..."

"Because you were forced into this relationship and I want to give you time to adjust. You may think you're ready, but I don't want you to feel guilty tomorrow or regret anything that happens between us," he said before she could finish her sentence.

Cady gave him a small smile and pulled his head down for another kiss. She knew then and there she had fallen for him. As his tongue slid between her parted lips, she felt a tingling sensation down her back. Pulling back, she looked up at Brendan in shock.

"Check my back," she whispered.

Brendan gently turned her, drawing in a breath at the tattoo now trailing down her back. A quarter moon rested at the base of her neck and stars trickled down in a various colors.

"Beautiful," he murmured, trailing his fingers over the design.

Cady turned to face him. "What does it mean?"

Brendan shook his head. "I have no idea."

Cady slid her hand up his arm, revealing a tattoo wrapped around his bicep; an intricate design of swooping lines and stars with a quarter moon in the middle.

"I thought only the alpha could be marked," she said quietly.

"That's the way it's always been. I have no idea what's on going," he responded.

Cady realized she was still naked and reached for her towel.

"Let me," Brendan said as he scooped up the towel. He gently dried the ends of her hair before wrapping the towel around her body. Leaning down, he brushed a kiss against her lips.

"You taste so sweet," he murmured before claiming her lips again. Pulling her close, he nibbled her lips and stroked her tongue with his. Kissing Cady was intoxicating.

Pulling back, he gazed down at her with heavy lidded eyes. "You should get dressed."

She merely nodded, touching her lips with her fingertips.

Turning from him, she reached for her clothes. Picking up the thong, she stepped into it, the towel falling to the floor. Behind her, she heard Brendan groan.

"You're wearing that?" Brendan asked, a tortured look on his face.

Cady smiled but didn't answer. She reached for the matching bra and put it on. Grabbing the skirt next, she stepped into it and pulled it up over her hips. It fastened about an inch under her navel, sitting right at hip level. Reaching across the bed for her shirt, she felt Brendan's hands slide up her thighs and under the edge of her skirt.

"I've decided you're trying to kill me," he said in a strangled voice.

Cady smiled gleefully to herself and slipped her shirt on, making quick work of the buttons. She turned and slipped past Brendan,

her breasts brushing against him, and walked to the closet to get her shoes. Slipping her feet into her sandals, she faced him.

"Do I look alright?" she asked.

He made a muffled sound that she took as agreement.

She pulled her purse out of the closet and took out her brush. Running it through her hair, she decided to let it dry natural. She rummaged around in her bag again until she found her small make-up bag. Walking over to the dresser, she used the mirror to apply a little mascara, blush and lip-gloss.

Brendan walked up behind her and reached down beside her; opening a drawer he pulled out clean jeans and a black t-shirt. He placed a kiss on her neck before walking out of the bedroom door.

Cady curled up on the bed, her back against the headboard, and turned on the TV while she waited on Brendan to shower and dress. She had a nervous energy running through her and could barely sit still. When the door opened a few minutes later, she jumped to her feet.

All six-foot three inches of Brendan was mouthwatering, his t-shirt hugging his muscles. His jeans molded to his thighs like a second skin.

"Let's go," he said, holding a hand out to her.

"Just let me grab my purse," she said.

He shook his head. "You won't need it."

Walking over to him, she reached for his hand. Even in her heeled sandals, she still didn't reach his chin.

Cady followed Brendan down the stairs and out the front door. They stopped at his motorcycle and Brendan eyed her skirt. "This should be interesting."

He climbed onto the bike and held his hand out to help her onto the back. Once she was seated, he showed her where to put her feet.

"Hold on tight," he said, placing her arms around his waist.

Cady scooted up close until she was plastered to the back of him. "Like this?" she asked in a throaty voice.

He looked at her over his shoulder, "Yeah that will do."

Cady rested her cheek against his back when Brendan started the engine. Raising the kickstand, he revved the engine and took

off down the driveway. Leaving the townhome behind, they roared down the road breaking every speed limit in the city limits. The thrum of the bike, the wind in her hair, and Brendan's hard body pressed against hers thrilled Cady. She'd never felt anything like it before.

All too soon, they arrived at the club. Brendan slowed the bike and parked it near the door. He slid off and helped Cady off, enjoying the show of leg her short skirt provided. Knowing how very little she wore under it only made it more enthralling.

She straightened her skirt, what there was of it, and flipped her hair over her shoulder.

Brendan reached for her hand and brushed a kiss against her knuckles. "Ready?"

She nodded and hoped the butterflies in her stomach would decide to flutter around elsewhere. She only hoped that all hell didn't break loose when Jamie saw her. All she needed was to piss off Marshall even more. She had enough trouble with the alpha without adding to it.

Chapter Fourteen

Cady had barely cleared the door before she heard her name. Looking around, she saw Jamie jump the bar and come running toward her.

Brendan held her partially behind him, not sure if the man was a threat or not.

Jamie noticed the move and skidded to a halt. "Why is Cady here with you?"

"What's it to you?" Brendan asked.

Jamie drew himself up to his full height, which was still a few inches shorter than Brendan. "I'm her brother."

Brendan masked his surprise. It seemed his little mate had kept a pretty huge secret from him. Judging by the reigning silence in the previously raucous bar, she'd kept it from the entire pack. A quick look at Marshall showed him that the alpha was royally pissed.

Brendan looked over his shoulder at Cady. "Something you forgot to mention?"

She had the grace to blush as she looked up at him through her eyelashes. "It might have slipped my mind."

"Mmm-hmm, or maybe you knew it was the only way you'd get to see your brother?" he asked.

Cady chewed on her lip. "Maybe. Are you mad at me?"

The corner of his mouth twitched as he fought back a grin. "No, I'm not mad."

"What's going on?" Jamie asked.

"Your sister was out alone a week ago. A couple of the guys picked her up," Brendan responded. "She's ours now. I'm surprised you didn't notice her absence before now."

Jamie looked winced and sadly at his sister. "I noticed she wasn't around, but I just figured she was mad at me and hiding out at Heather's. Does this mean I can't see her anymore?"

Brendan looked at Marshall across the room. He knew the alpha would keep the two apart if he could, but Brendan didn't want Cady to be miserable. "We might be able to work something out."

Jamie smiled and held out his hand to the werewolf.

Brendan returned his smile and shook hands.

"At least she ended up with someone sensible instead of the alpha," Jamie said.

Cady blushed a dark red and stared at the floor. She pressed closer to Brendan's back, wishing she could disappear. In her peripheral vision, she saw a pair of black boots step into view.

"Who's to say she didn't end up with me?" Marshall asked.

Jamie looked between Marshall and Brendan, obviously confused.

"She was with me for a few days. I decided I didn't want her after all and Brendan claimed her," Marshall said, noting Jamie's look.

Cady was glad he'd left out the other parts.

"A few days?" Jamie asked in a quiet voice. "So, in other words, you slept with her and then discarded her."

Marshall shrugged. "She wasn't the right one is all."

Jamie turned to Brendan. "And now she's with you? For how long? Are you going to tire of her in a few days and pass her off to someone else?"

Marshall chuckled before Brendan could answer. "He doesn't have that option. If he decides he doesn't want her, then I have a special place for her... servicing the pack."

As the meaning behind Marshall's words sunk in, Jamie turned red with anger. He glared at Brendan. "And is that likely to happen?"

Brendan pulled Cady around in front of him; pulling her back against his chest he wrapped his arms around her. "No, it isn't."

Jamie nodded. "Then your drinks are on the house tonight. So are Cady's obviously."

Marshall cocked an eyebrow at Jamie. "And mine?"

"You're lucky I don't serve you piss in a bottle," Jamie answered in a deadly voice, furious with the alpha for treating Cady so callously.

"Careful. Don't forget who I am, or what I am," Marshall said in a deceptively calm voice. "It wouldn't be hard to make you disappear."

Jamie shook his head. "I haven't forgotten, but if you make a whore of my sister it won't matter who or what you are. I'll still gut you like a fish."

Without another word, Jamie turned and headed back to the bar.

Brendan and Cady followed, ignoring Marshall completely. It was becoming more and more obvious that something would have to be done about the alpha before too long. He was not only a threat to Cady, but a threat to everyone around him.



At the bar, Jamie handed a beer to Brendan and turned to his little sister. "What do you want to drink?"

Cady eyed her brother, not sure if she should ask for alcohol or not. "Surprise me."

Jamie nodded and fixed her a mixed drink. Placing it in front of her, he said, "Let me know when you need another one."

Before Cady could respond, he turned and walked to the other end of the bar.

As more and more werewolves entered the club, Cady and Brendan became crowded. The third time she was practically knocked off her stool by a rambunctious werewolf Brendan sat her in his lap and put an arm around her waist.

After another hour, Brendan decided he'd had enough. He had always enjoyed hanging out with the pack at the club before, but now all he wanted was to go home with Cady. He didn't like sharing her with everyone else.

"Why don't you signal your brother and tell him bye?" he said in her ear, hoping she could hear him over the loud music.

She nodded and motioned for Jamie to come over.

"Need another drink?" her brother asked.

Cady shook her head and shouted over the noise of the bar, "We're going to go home. I just wanted to say bye."

Jamie held a finger up and walked around the bar. Pulling Cady off Brendan's lap, he wrapped his arms around her and gave her a bear hug. In her ear he said, "If you ever need me, I'm only a phone call away. Come back soon."

She nodded against his shoulder and stepped back.

A few werewolves were watching them with interest.

Cady placed her hand in Brendan's. She smiled at her brother before turning to leave.



Back at the townhome, Brendan carried a tired Cady up the stairs. Setting her down on the edge of the bed, he closed and locked the bedroom door. Walking over to her, he knelt on the floor. He eased her shoes off her feet and gently ran his hands up her legs, stopping at mid-thigh.

"Make love to me," she murmured, looking into his eyes.

He shook his head. "I told you earlier I wouldn't; especially not after you've been drinking."

Cady reached out and slipped her hands under his shirt, letting her fingers glide over the hard muscles of his abdomen and chest. Sliding off the bed and onto her knees, she pushed Brendan's shirt up over his chest and slipped it over his head. Staring in fascination at his hard body, she let her hands roam over his skin, exploring every exposed inch.

"Cady..."

"Shh," she said, leaning up to kiss him.

Letting her hands fall to his waist, she unbuckled his belt and slipped it free from his jeans. She reached for the button, but Brendan placed a hand over hers.

"Cady, we shouldn't do this," he said between kisses.

"Yes we should," she answered.

Brendan buried his hands in her hair and deepened the kiss, drinking her in, devouring her.

Cady unfastened his jeans and slipped her hand inside, cupping his arousal, letting her fingers explore the hard, thick length.

Brendan got to his feet and held a hand out to Cady. If she was determined to do this, he wasn't sure he could say no. He'd wanted her since the first moment he had laid eyes on her.

She reached for his hand and let him pull her to her feet. Reaching for his jeans, she pushed them down his legs.

Brendan kicked off his boots and stepped out of his jeans, standing before her in nothing but a pair of black boxers.

He reached for the buttons on Cady's shirt and slipped one after the other free. Pushing her shirt down her arms, he watched it fall to the floor. Her full breasts were almost spilling out of the top of the demi-bra she wore, her nipples clearly visible through the fabric.

Letting his fingers trail down to her skirt, he unfastened it and let it fall to the floor.

Cady turned and crawled to the middle of the bed, giving him a perfect view of her lace thong.

If possible, Brendan grew even harder. Removing his boxers, he joined her on the bed. When she started to turn around, he wrapped his arms around her, pulling her back against his chest, trapping his cock between them.

He kissed her neck and sucked on her shoulder. Reaching between her breasts, he unfastened her bra and slipped it off.

Cady reached for her thong, but he stopped her.

"Leave it a moment," he murmured in her ear.

Grazing her neck with his teeth, he cupped her breasts. Shifting his hips, he managed to thrust himself between her legs.

Cady gasped and pushed back against him.

Brendan continued to kiss, lick and suck on the sensitive skin of her neck and shoulders. He wrapped an arm around her, pulling her tight against him, while he reached lower with his other hand, slipping inside of her thong.

His fingers parted her and glided into her moist heat.

Cady whimpered, wanting more.

His thumb brushed over her swollen nub as his finger slid in and out of her in a slow, steady rhythm. When she was close to her release, he stopped and slipped her thong down her legs.

"Bend over," he whispered in her ear.

Cady did as he asked, falling to her hands, her rear in the air, her hair cascading over one shoulder. Her prior fear of being overheard completely forgotten, she gave herself up to the moment.

Brendan ran his hands over her bared rear, gently parting her legs. He rubbed his throbbing cock against her wet folds, wanting to bury himself deep inside of her.

Easing into her slowly, he stopped halfway, giving her body time to adjust. He was bigger than most guys and Cady was so tight he was worried he would hurt her.

Realizing what Brendan was doing, Cady pressed back, taking more of him inside of her. "I want to feel all of you," she said softly.

Brendan slowly slid in further, not stopping until he was buried inside of her to the hilt.

Cady pressed back further, grinding her hips against him, loving the feel of him.

"No one has ever filled me up the way you do," she said in a husky voice.

Brendan growled and bent over her back. "And just how many have there been?"

Cady didn't answer right away and Brendan slid out of her only to slide back into her hard and fast.

Cady gasped in surprise and delight. "Only three."

"Including Marshall?"

She nodded, whimpering, wanting more.

"Please," she begged.

"Please what, Cady?" he whispered in her ear.

"Take me hard and fast," she answered.

It was all the prompting Brendan needed. Leaning back on his heels, he gripped Cady by the waist and plunged into her over and over, going deeper and faster each time.

Brendan felt Cady's orgasm rip through her. While her body was still shuddering, he bent over her, bracing his weight on his hands,

and began to use long, forceful thrusts. Ramming into her over and over as hard as he could, he yelled out his release, coming deep inside of her.

Remaining joined with Cady; Brendan rolled them to their sides and wrapped his body around hers.

"That was amazing," she panted.

He grinned against her hair. "Yes it was."

Cady felt the familiar tingling sensation she had come to associate with the odd tattoos, this time around her navel. Glancing down, she saw a crescent moon curved around her navel with small stars scattered around it.

"My tattoo seems to have moved to a new area," she murmured, half asleep.

Brendan looked down her back. "It's still here."

She shook her head. "It's around my navel now, too."

Slipping from her body, he rolled her to her back and examined the new tattoo. He'd never heard of marks like Cady's before. Whatever they meant, he knew that Cady was special – not just to him, but to the pack. She was unique... and she was his.

Brushing the hair back from her face, he saw that she had fallen asleep. Grinning, he lifted her so that her head was resting on a pillow. Pulling her into his arms, he covered them both with the sheet before joining her in sleep. Had he been awake, he would have felt his tattoo spreading; the design taking over his entire upper arm and shoulder.

Chapter Fifteen

The next morning, Cady woke to find herself wrapped in Brendan's arms, her back pressed against his stomach and her head tucked under his chin. Stretching, she turned to face him.

Brendan felt Cady stir and slowly opened his eyes. Looking down at her, he smiled.

"Good morning," he said in a voice still husky from sleep.

"Morning," she responded.

"Did you sleep well?" he asked, trying to judge whether or not she was self-conscious about their night together.

Cady nodded. "I slept very well, thank you. Did you?"

"Yeah. Cady, about last night..." he started.

She shook her head. "You don't have to say anything about last night. Unless you regret it?" she asked.

He gave her a slow smile. "No, I don't regret it."

To prove to him that she not only didn't regret the previous night, but was in fact happy with their situation, she brushed her lips across his. He instantly responded to her kiss, pulling her closer.

When a knock sounded at the door, Brendan ended the kiss and rolled Cady to the other side of his body, not wanting anyone to see her tattoos – or see her naked body for that matter.

A tall, perky red head bounced through the door without waiting for an invitation.

"I haven't seen you much lately," DeLayne said as she stepped into the bedroom.

"DeLayne, now isn't a good time," Brendan told her tersely, eyeing her over his shoulder, shielding Cady with his body.

"Surely you don't want to go so long without playing a little," she answered with a flirty smile. "You know that no one can please you like I can."

"In case you haven't heard, I've been a bit busy lately," Brendan said. Before he had a chance to say more, she interrupted again.

"I heard about some petite little thing sitting with you at the Sunset Club last night, but we all know that someone like that can't handle you," DeLayne responded.

Brendan tried to ignore the pointed looks Cady was giving him. "DeLayne, you need to leave," he said, trying the direct approach since hints obviously didn't work.

DeLayne narrowed her eyes. "Says who?" she asked.

Cady decided she'd had enough. Brendan was hers and the perky woman needed to learn that sooner rather than later. Cady had no intention of sharing him. Lifting up just enough to look over Brendan's shoulder, she snapped, "I do."

DeLayne's eyes narrowed even more if possible before she turned a sweet look on Brendan. "How sweet of you to take pity on a stray you found in the bar, but you can get rid of her now."

Cady growled, surprising Brendan. He grinned down at her, delighted with her display of possession. "She isn't going anywhere," he murmured.

"You can't seriously think of keeping her with you long term," DeLayne said, incredulous.

"She isn't going anywhere, DeLayne, but if you have any self-preservation skills you'll walk out of here now," Brendan told her. "I have the woman I want right here in my arms."

DeLayne huffed, stamped her foot and stormed out of the bedroom.

If Cady weren't so aggravated, she would have laughed. "So you and she were an item?" she asked Brendan in what she hoped was a calm voice.

"I wouldn't really call it an item, per se, more like..." he trailed off, not sure how to finish the sentence.

"Just someone you slept with?" Cady asked.

Brendan shrugged. "Is there a way to answer that question without you getting angry?"

She fought a grin. "Probably not."

"Then I think I'll just leave that one alone," he replied.

Cady slid her arms around his waist. "Are you sure she doesn't mean something to you? I'm not kicking someone out of your bed?"

Brendan hugged her to him. "No, you're not kicking anyone out of my bed. I slept with her because I wasn't afraid of hurting her, but that's all." He grimaced, "I guess I haven't really been all that much better than Marshall."

Cady squeezed her arms around him, "You *are* better than Marshall."

He shook his head. "I used DeLayne just like Marshall uses women. I just saw her as a convenience and never gave any thought to what she might be thinking or feeling."

Cady was silent for a moment. "You hold a fairly prominent position in the pack, don't you?"

He shrugged. "I guess."

"Then maybe she was using you in return," Cady replied.

"You mean for status?" he asked.

Cady nodded. "That's why she was angry this morning. I'm new and she feels like I've stepped over a line by climbing into your bed."

"You didn't just climb into my bed," he bit out.

"But she thinks I did. She doesn't know what happened and honestly she probably would be happy to throw me back into that room," Cady said.

"I won't let that happen," Brendan assured her.

She placed a kiss in the middle of his chest. "I know you won't. Besides, I think a shift is coming soon."

"What kind of shift?" he asked, not sure he wanted the answer.

"A power shift. I think Marshall's rule is about to come to an end," she answered.

Brendan placed a hand over her mouth. "Don't ever let anyone hear you say that. If Marshall got wind that you thought he was going to lose control of the pack, he'd throw you into that room for sure – if not worse."

"Brendan, he humiliated me more than once, made me start caring about him, and then kicked me aside like unwanted trash. It's not like he can do a whole lot more to me."

He caressed her cheek. "Let's not find out if he can come up with something worse, okay?"

She nodded and snuggled against him.



Cady had a hard time finding clothes that would cover her tattoos. Brendan's was getting harder to hide as well. It wouldn't be long before the pack knew that a new leader had been chosen, and Cady was positive that's what had happened. It was the only explanation for the tattoos.

"What are we going to do today?" she asked as she slipped on a pair of shoes.

"We need to go to the college and withdraw you from your classes." At her stricken look, he added, "Just for now... you can register again next semester."

"Why do I have to wait?" she asked.

"You've already missed some of your classes. Wouldn't it be better to start fresh once things have settled down a little?" he asked.

Cady bit her lip and thought it over a minute. "I guess you're right. Promise I can go back?"

He smiled and pulled her into his arms. "Of course you can go back. I may even join you."

Cady smiled, relieved that he didn't have a problem with her going to college. Of course, she hadn't mentioned that she would like to go to a four-year college in another state. She had a feeling he might protest when he found out, but that was an argument she would save for another day.

Shoving his wallet in the back pocket of his jeans, Brendan grabbed the keys to his motorcycle and held his hand out to Cady. They had barely cleared the door before Marshall materialized from his room.

"Going somewhere?" he asked, eyeing Cady.

"I was going to run her by the college so she can withdraw from her classes," Brendan answered.

"And here I thought you would be supportive of her decision to further her education," Marshall drawled.

"I do, but she's missed too many classes this semester," Brendan responded. "It doesn't do her any good to be enrolled in a class if she's going to fail it due to non-attendance."

Marshall shrugged. "Whatever. Don't be out too late. The pack is gathering at the Summit tonight."

Brendan tried to hide his surprise. "The Summit? What time?"

"For dinner. The owner actually insisted we dress nicely," Marshall growled. "So dig out your khaki pants and a button-down shirt if you can find one. A lot of the guys are going shopping this afternoon."

Brendan nodded. "I'll have to take Cady out for something to wear so I might as well grab an outfit for myself."

Chapter Sixteen

Later that afternoon on the way back to the townhome, Cady spotted a small house for sale and tapped Brendan on the shoulder, hoping he would stop.

"What is it, Cady?" he asked, pulling to a stop in front of the house.

She stared at the house longingly. It was a small white clapboard home with a white picket fence around the front yard. A freshly paved driveway led to a small one car garage near the back of the home.

Brendan looked from Cady to the house and his throat constricted. A home away from the pack was the one thing he couldn't give her, and it was apparently the one thing she wanted.

"Come on, let's head home," he murmured softly.

"Can't we just look?" she asked, hope filling her eyes.

"Honey, I would love to buy you a house, but you know that I have to stay with the pack," he replied.

"But what about..." she trailed off.

"What about what?" he asked.

A blush spread across her cheeks. "What about children? How can pack members get married and have kids living three or four people to a room? Or even three or four to a townhome?"

Brendan turned to face her, straddling the bike. He buried his hands in her hair and tilted her head back so she was looking in his eyes. "The pack has lived in the townhomes for several generations. The kids are raised in a group effort, except for the alpha's. As for marriage..." he paused, "pack members don't really

get married. The alpha usually marries his mate, but the other pack members don't."

"Why not?" she asked quietly.

Brendan looked away for a moment. When he looked back at her, there was a sadness in his eyes. "Because the males are expected to breed with the fertile females regardless of all else."

Cady paled. "You mean that I'll have to... to sleep with someone else even though I'm your mate?"

"We have a few years before we get to that stage, but yeah... it would be expected of you," he replied.

Cady felt ill. She couldn't even imagine the life he was describing. How she could be expected to have sex with someone when she was mated to Brendan? And why couldn't they get married, assuming he even wanted to marry her of course.

"I'm sorry, Cady. I wish I could take you away from all of this. If I could turn back the clock, I would. I would make sure they didn't find you that night. But I can't do that. All we can do is try to make the best of the situation," he told her gently.

Cady shook her head, tears falling down her cheeks. "I can't live like that, Brendan. I just can't!"

Brendan wrapped his arms around her and held her close. "Shh, baby, please don't cry. We'll figure something out before that happens, okay? I promise I won't let anyone lay a hand on you."

She nodded against his shoulder and tried to stop her tears. "I'm not usually such a wuss," she said.

He chuckled. "All things considered, I think you're pretty brave. Most women would have run screaming into the night by now."

"Maybe, but I've always prided myself on being strong and I feel like such a weakling this week; it's enough to make me hate myself," she responded.

Brendan gave her a hard, quick kiss. "We better get back to the townhouse."

"Do we have to? Can't we stay out a little longer?" she asked with a quick look toward the house once more.

Brendan rubbed his hands up and down her back. "You really like that house, don't you?"

She nodded. "It seems cozy like a home should be."

"Unless things change in a big way, there's no way we could get a house," he told her. "But if you'd like, I can call the number on the sign and see if someone will come show it to us."

A huge smile lit up Cady's face. "Really? Can you call them now?"

He chuckled at her enthusiasm. "Yeah, I'll call them now," he said as he pulled his cell phone out of his pocket.

While Brendan talked to someone at Sunstone Realty, Cady eyed the house hungrily. She could imagine the flower beds weeded with flowering bushes and splashes of color around the yard. Maybe even an arbor with a swing under the shade tree.

Brendan hung up the phone. "They're booked today, but said they might be able to squeeze us in tomorrow if you'd like to see it."

"What did they say about the house?" Cady asked.

"It's a three bedroom, one bath cottage. Both the front and back yards are fenced. They said some other stuff I don't remember and that it cost about one-hundred thirty-thousand dollars," he rattled off.

"That much for such a small home?" she asked, slightly deflated.

Brendan didn't want to get her hopes up so he didn't mention the savings account he had. The pack didn't know about it, but he'd managed to put a pretty good size nest egg aside. If things in the pack changed and pack members were allowed to live away from the townhomes, he would have enough for a down payment and possibly a small car for Cady. Of course, he needed to get a steady job before they could get a house. Doing handyman work here and there wouldn't be enough to move away from the pack and support Cady.

"If you want to see the inside, I'll call them in the morning to set an appointment," he said.

Cady smiled. "Thank you, but I don't really see the point. I'll just be torturing myself by falling in love with something I can't have."

Brendan shrugged. "If a shift is coming as you said, then maybe the rules will change before long."

Cady gave the house another long look. "Alright, I guess it wouldn't hurt to look."

Brendan kissed her before turning around to face the front of the motorcycle. "Let's get back to the townhouse so we can get ready for dinner."



Tossing their shopping bags onto the bed, Brendan snagged Cady, drawing her close for a kiss.

"Did you plan on taking a shower before dinner tonight?" he asked.

She nodded. "Why? You don't think Marshall will come in again do you?"

"He might. But I was thinking that you might be up for some company anyway," he answered.

Cady eyed him, curious. "What did you have in mind?"

"I was hoping that we could shower together," he responded.

Cady blushed from the roots of her hair to the tips of her toes. She may not be a virgin, but she still wasn't used to doing some of the suggestive things Marshall and Brendan had come up with.

"We don't have to," he said, sensing her discomfort.

"It isn't that I don't want to," she murmured, burying her face against him. She wasn't about to tell him that his suggestion had brought up another shower with a different man not too many days ago.

Brendan wrapped his arms around her, drawing her close. "You don't have anything to be embarrassed about, Cady. You're a beautiful young woman. In case you hadn't noticed, I love your body."

She grinned against his shirt.

"For that matter, half the pack loves your body," he said, a tinge of anger creeping into his voice.

"I think that's going a bit far," Cady said, tipping her head back to look up at him.

He shook his head. "You had four pack members interested in you the moment we laid eyes on you. Not to mention Marshall. Robin was eyeing you the other day and quite a few of the guys were checking you out last night."

"I don't care what any of them thinks," she responded.

"I know you don't, but it doesn't stop them from thinking about your body lying beneath theirs." He snorted. "For that matter, Marshall already knows what it's like to bed you."

Cady paled and looked away. "There's nothing I can do about that," she replied softly.

Brendan reached out and gently took her chin in his hand, turning her face to meet his gaze. "I wasn't blaming you; merely stating a fact."

"I know, but I wish I could just forget the first few days here," Cady responded, a tear sliding down her cheek. "I feel so dirty, so used. He tricked me, used me, and then threw me away."

"Shh, please don't cry," Brendan murmured, pulling her head to his chest, his hand stroking her hair.

"I'm usually much stronger, but ever since the pack found me all I seem to do is cry, feel afraid, and cry some more," she said with a snuffle.

"I'm sorry, Cady. I'm selfish enough to be happy that you're here, but I'm sorry for everything you lost," he replied.

"You're the best part of the whole deal," she said. "I'm glad that we met."

"Come on, let's get ready for dinner," he said, brushing a kiss against her forehead.

Cady nodded, deciding to overcome her self-consciousness. It was only Brendan after all.

Brendan gathered her close and lifted her into his arms. He gave her a lingering kiss before walking to the bathroom.



An hour later, Brendan and Cady were showered and dressed. The back of Cady's midnight blue dress wasn't quite high enough to cover her tattoo so she wore her hair down; curling it into long sausage curls, she pinned it back with a clip, letting the long ringlets hang down the middle of her back.

She dabbed on a little lip-gloss to finish off her make-up and slipped her feet into her high-heels. Cady eyed her reflection, moderately happy with the way she looked. Some nice jewelry

would have completed the picture nicely, but all of her things were still at home.

Turning to face Brendan, she asked "Do I look okay?"

He glanced up from buttoning his shirt and froze. His eyes travelled from the toes of her shoes to the top of her curls. "You're beautiful," he murmured huskily.

He was stunned the gorgeous creature standing before him was his little Cady. She'd been beautiful before, but now she was completely transformed; elegant, ephemeral, stunning... there were a million words to describe her at that moment.

Cady blushed and looked down at her feet. "Thank you," she said softly.

Brendan cleared his throat and quickly buttoned the rest of his shirt. Tucking it into the waist of his black slacks, he buttoned and zipped them.

Cady glanced at him from under her lashes. He really did clean up nicely. The blue of his shirt made his eyes stand out even more. Anyone who saw him dressed as he was now would never associate him with Vicus Luna.

Fastening his belt, Brendan slipped on his new black dress shoes. Reaching for his wallet, he spotted Cady watching him.

Holding out his arms, he grinned. "So how do I look?"

Cady stepped closer to him. She ran her fingers down the front of his shirt, smoothing the wrinkles. Reaching up, she ran her hands over his shoulders and down his arms. "You look wonderful," she said softly.

Brendan cupped her cheek and bent to kiss her gently on the lips. When he pulled back, he grinned at her. "Come here," he said turning her toward the dresser.

Standing with Cady before the mirror, he wrapped his arms around her. "Anyone seeing us like this would think we're just a normal couple," he said.

"I guess being a werewolf definitely puts you out of the normal category," she responded with a grin.

He chuckled and rested his chin on her head. "Probably."

Cady's smile slipped from her face. She turned to face Brendan. "What can I expect tonight?"

"I wish I knew. We've only gone to the Summit on special occasions," Brendan said running a hand through his hair.

"You're worried about Marshall, aren't you?" she asked him quietly.

He nodded. "Yeah, I'm a little worried. If you were still his mate, I could understand going to the Summit. But considering all that's happened I can't figure out what he could be thinking."

With his arms around her, he caressed her stomach, nearly jumping back in surprise when an electric spark shot through his fingers. Turning Cady, he stared down at her in wonder, his hand flat against her belly.

"What is it?" she asked with a curious look on her face.

"Your other tattoo... I think I may know what it means," he said. Brendan looked into her eyes with wonder.

"What?" she asked.

"I think... I think you might be pregnant," he replied softly.

"What!" she exclaimed. Her eyes widened and she backed up until she hit the dresser. "But I can't be!"

"Really? Are you sure?" he asked.

Cady bit her lip. "But I haven't finished college."

He gave her a slow smile. "I don't think it works that way. Babies don't always wait until it's convenient for the parents."

His smile faded. "Are you really upset about it?"

Cady looked up. She saw the uncertainty and hurt in his eyes. She sucked in a calming breath. "It isn't that I'm upset, I just don't know what to feel. I hadn't planned on having a baby this young or with someone I've just met."

Brendan drew her over to the bed. Sitting on the edge, he pulled her down into his lap. "Sweetheart, sometimes we don't get to plan the path our life takes. Sometimes things happen when we least expect them to, but they always happen for a reason."

"But I'm too young to be a mother," she protested. "What if I'm a total failure at it? I can't even take care of myself much less another human being."

"I think you're doing a pretty good job of taking care of yourself," he told her. "And as kind, compassionate, and caring as you are, you would be a wonderful mother."

"You really think so?" she asked uncertainly, biting on her lower lip.

He smiled down at her. "Yeah I really think so."

Cupping her head with his hand, he bent his head to hers, claiming her lips in a gentle kiss.

Cady hesitantly looped her arms around his neck and leaned into him. As Brendan held her gently, kissing her slowly and tenderly, she knew that everything would be okay. If she was pregnant, they would face it together. She wouldn't be alone as long as he was by her side.

A throat cleared behind them.

Brendan broke the kiss, gently kissed her forehead and looked toward their intruder.

Marshall leaned against the doorframe, arms crossed over his chest. "I thought you two might like to use the truck tonight."

Brendan eyed him uncertainly. "That's awfully generous of you."

Marshall shrugged. "The other girls are taking the SUV. I figured Cady wouldn't be too comfortable riding with DeLayne."

"DeLayne is going?" Cady asked Brendan softly.

His eyes flicked down to her. "Yeah, the whole pack will be there."

Cady swallowed. She wasn't ready to face DeLayne just yet. She may have found some bravery to snap at the woman the other day, but tonight would be different. Tonight they would be surrounded by the pack, a pack that didn't really know Cady yet.

"Ah, I see she's already met the lovely DeLayne," Marshall said with a smirk.

"DeLayne made her presence known this morning," Brendan told him. He had a feeling that Marshall was behind DeLayne's morning visit. What he couldn't understand was why Marshall had told him to take Cady if he was going to try so hard to take her away.

Marshall nodded. "I heard her stomp down the stairs."

"Is she planning on causing trouble tonight?" Brendan asked.

Marshall shrugged. "Who knows what goes through that woman's mind?"

Brendan helped Cady stand before climbing to his feet. Resting a hand on her shoulder, he kept her close. He had noticed the way Marshall watched her and he didn't like it.

Cady felt Marshall's eyes rake over her body and she stepped closer to Brendan. "Thank you for lending the truck to us," she said.

"Can't have you getting your pretty dress messed up on the back of a motorcycle," Marshall replied. He tossed the keys to Brendan and then walked away.

Cady turned to Brendan. "He makes me nervous."

Brendan caressed her cheek, trying to reassure her, but the truth was that Marshall was making him nervous as well. "Let's head to the Summit. Maybe the night will end early."

Chapter Seventeen

Brendan parked the truck and cut off the engine. Staring out of the windshield, he watched his fellow pack members park their motorcycles here and there. Most of them were dressed in khaki's, but a few had on nicer slacks and button down shirts like Brendan. The women wore a range of skirts and dresses, but Cady was definitely dressed the nicest.

The Summit was the ritziest club in town, reserved for the elite. A few times a year the pack was allowed to use it for special occasions. Since Marshall had denounced Cady as his mate, Brendan couldn't figure out what the special occasion was, and it worried him.

"Are you ready?" he asked Cady quietly.

She glanced his way. "I don't know that I'll ever be ready."

Brendan opened the truck door and slid out. Holding his hand out to her, he assisted her out of the vehicle. His hands briefly settled at her waist, admiring her. The dark blue dress molded to her curves, the neckline dipping to show a hint of cleavage. The hemline hit her legs at mid-thigh and flared out gently.

"What is it?" Cady asked, noticing his scrutiny.

"Nothing. I was just admiring how beautiful you are," he replied.

Cady blushed, but smiled delightedly.

"Come on, sweetheart. Let's get this over with," Brendan said, wrapping an arm around her and guiding her toward the door. The sooner they got inside, the sooner they would find out what was important enough to warrant an evening at the Summit.

Cady leaned against him as they made their way to the door. She was excited about being at the Summit, but at the same time she just wanted the evening to end. She was anxious to go back home and spend a quiet evening with Brendan. Being around the entire Vicus Luna pack made her nervous. Not to mention that she really didn't want to see DeLayne again, not for a while.

As they walked through the door, Cady stared in awe at the beautiful furniture and paintings in the main hall. With wide, innocent eyes, she took it all in.

"Close your mouth, darlin'," Brendan whispered in her ear with a smile in his voice.

Cady closed her mouth and grinned up at him. "I'm sorry. I just never expected anything like this."

"You don't have to apologize to me, Cady. I'm glad that you're enjoying yourself." Brendan wrapped an arm around her waist and drew her close to his side.

"Well, we just got here, but so far I'm having a nice time," she murmured back to him. Maybe the night wouldn't be so bad after all.

They stopped at the top of a staircase that led down into the dining area. The banister had been polished to a high shine, the steps covered in a beautiful red carpet. Cady and Brendan were about to descend when they heard a voice behind them.

"I wondered when the two of you would arrive," Marshall said, a predatory gleam in his eye.

Brendan shrugged. "We sat in the parking lot for a minute."

"You know, I've been thinking about my decision to give Cady to you," Marshall started, eyeing Cady in her blue dress.

Brendan tensed. "What about it?"

Marshall let his gaze linger on Cady's breasts a moment. "I've been thinking... perhaps I was too hasty in giving her to you."

Brendan had known that it was too good to be true. It had been obvious from the start that the alpha had been planning something. Marshall was going to take Cady for himself. Brendan wondered if he should say something about the baby. He wasn't sure if it would change things or not. There was a chance it would

only piss him off, making him hurt Cady more than he had already. Brendan wasn't willing to take the chance.

He hugged Cady closer to his side. "I don't know, Marshall. I think you did the right thing," he said, keeping his voice light.

Marshall gave him a feral grin. "Of course you would. However, quite a few of the guys would like a turn with her, and I wouldn't mind bedding her a few more times myself."

"What are you saying?" Brendan asked, terrified of the answer.

"After tonight, she goes back to the room," Marshall said in a flat voice.

Cady gasped and glued herself to Brendan's side. Her frantic eyes flicked to Brendan's face, then back to Marshall. Surely if he knew about the baby he wouldn't make her do that?

"I can't do it," Cady murmured.

"Excuse me? Did you just defy a direct order?" Marshall growled, taking a step closer.

"I'm pregnant," she blurted out.

Marshall's eyes widened a moment. His eyes flicked down to her stomach and back to her face. He could tell she was speaking the truth. "When were you going to tell me?"

She shook her head and looked at her toes.

"It isn't yours," Brendan said quietly. "The baby is mine."

Marshall's fangs descended, his claws sprouted from his hands and a growl ripped through him. In a move so fast that Cady could barely see it, he grabbed her and tossed her down the stairs. She tried in vain to grab the banister, but as she hit the first step the breath was knocked from her lungs, momentarily stunning her. She tumbled all the way down to the very bottom.

"Cady!" Brendan shouted, running down the stairs after her.

She landed with a sickening thud at the bottom of the staircase, cracking her head on the bottom step. Brendan reached her side a moment later, gingerly taking her hand in his.

"Cady, please say something," he urged, his hands shaking, his heart pounding hard enough that he could hear it, could feel the pulse pounding in his throat.

He scanned her for signs of life. He detected the slight rise and fall of her chest and breathed a sigh of relief, but it was short lived when he noticed the blood seeping onto the floor from her head.

"What have you done?" he roared up the stairs at Marshall. He could feel the eyes of the pack on him as they stared in silence, waiting to see what would happen.

"When she wakes up, she should not only be free of her pregnancy, but she'll serve as the pack whore," Marshall yelled back, making sure everyone heard him.

Stripping off his shirt, uncaring if anyone saw his tattoo, Brendan growled. His fangs descended, his hands changed into paws with razor tipped claws, his nose elongated into a snout and his ears shifted into points. In a matter of seconds, he had completed his transformation from man to werewolf. He allowed his rage to over-take him completely.

Bounding up the stairs, he sprang at Marshall, who had partially shifted as well. The two werewolves snapped and snarled at one another. Marshall swiped at Brendan with his claws, but Brendan was faster... he twisted, avoiding the blow, and bit down on Marshall's arm, tearing flesh from the bone.

Marshall howled and lunged for Brendan again, his claws slicing Brendan's torso. When he turned to bite down on Brendan's leg, he met air.

Brendan managed once more to get the upper hand, coming up behind Marshall his jaws snapped down on the other werewolf's neck.

Marshall howled and bucked, trying to dislodge Brendan from his back. Running, he slammed Brendan into a wall.

The jostling move broke Brendan's grip on Marshall. The alpha lunged at him, but Brendan bent at the waist and rammed Marshall in the stomach, knocking him off balance.

As Brendan hovered over Marshall, ready to give the final blow if necessary, the alpha changed back into human form.

"You win. She's yours," Marshall growled at him.

Brendan shifted back. With a curt nod at Marshall, he ran down the stairs. The time would come when he would have to finish Marshall off and claim the pack as his own, but now wasn't that

time. Right now he needed to take care of Cady. He ignored the murmurs ripping through the crowd and rushed to his mate's side.

Kneeling beside Cady, he gently lifted her into his arms. Carrying her to the truck, he rushed her to the emergency room.



Brendan carried Cady into the ER, heading straight for the first nurse he saw.

"She needs immediate attention. She was thrown down a flight of stairs... and she's pregnant," Brendan said in a rush.

The nurse's eyes widened and she quickly ushered them into the back.

"I'll get the doctor, but you'll have to complete all of the required forms before he can treat her," the nurse told him.

"Get me whatever I need to fill out. Just help her," he answered.

The nurse nodded and rushed to fetch a doctor.

Brendan laid Cady on the narrow bed. Brushing her hair out of her face, he kissed her brow. "I'm so sorry, sweetheart. I'll do everything I can to make sure he never touches you again."

Cady lay unmoving on the cot. The only sign of life the flow of blood from her wound and the steady rise and fall of her chest.

Brendan watched her with worried eyes, refusing to let go of her hand even when the nurse returned with the papers.

He stared down at the clipboard trying to make sense of the documents in front of him.

A doctor entered the small enclosure. "What do we have here?"

Brendan looked up and recognized the doctor as one the pack had used before. "Marshall threw her down a flight of stairs," he replied. "And she's pregnant."

The doctor raised a quizzical brow, but didn't comment. Removing his stethoscope from around his neck, he listened to her heart.

"She has a steady heart rate. How long as she been unconscious?" the doctor asked.

Brendan shook his head. "It happened about thirty minutes ago. We were at the Summit."

The doctor paused. "He threw her down the main staircase?"

Brendan nodded.

"That's quite a fall, especially for a pregnant woman," the doctor murmured, his attention once more on his patient.

The doctor checked her eyes, cleaned her wound and ordered a nurse to stitch it. They took her blood pressure and arranged for a room.

"She'll need to stay the night for observation," the doctor said.

"Will she be okay?" Brendan asked.

"I'm sure she'll be fine. Right now, we need to make her comfortable. Once she's in a room, we'll check on the fetus," he replied.

"Can I go with her?" Brendan asked, looking down at Cady with longing. "I don't want to leave her."

A grin twitched the corners of the doctor's mouth. "I'm sure we can arrange for a cot to be placed in the room."

"I doubt I'll get much sleep, but thanks," Brendan replied.

Chapter Eighteen

Once Cady was settled into a hospital room, Brendan paced nervously, eyeing his small mate lying in the bed. Nurses were still hovering, checking this and that, watching the monitors. He saw one lift Cady's hospital gown and strap something to her stomach.

"What's that for?" he asked as he stepped closer to the bed.

"We're going to make sure the baby isn't in distress," the nurse answered.

Brendan went back to his nervous pacing as he watched the nurses tend to Cady. Once the monitor was in place, a machine started spitting out paper with jagged lines on it. He had no idea what it meant, but the nurses didn't seem to be panicking so he figured the baby was okay.

One of the nurses turned to him. "Sir, we have to ask you to leave for a minute."

Brendan shook his head. "I'm not leaving her side."

"Sir, I have to insist," the nurse said in a firmer voice.

Brendan swallowed and looked toward the bed. There was something they weren't saying. "Is she... is she going to die?" he asked quietly.

The nurse sighed. "I'm sure she'll be fine, but right now I need you to wait in the waiting room while the doctor comes in to see her."

He nodded and walked out into the hall. Following the signs, he found the waiting room and collapsed into a chair. The clock on the wall told him it was getting late. Spotting a phone on the opposite wall, he got up and decided to call Cady's brother. He was sure Jamie would want to know what had happened, not to

mention he could use some company. Brendan wasn't sure what was worse... having witnessed her fall, or waiting to hear from the doctor.



Back in the hospital room, Cady lay unmoving on the bed, unconscious and unaware of what was going on around her. Nurses and doctors surrounded her, conferring. The baby was in distress. There was no doubt in their minds that Cady would lose the baby, but they still did all they could to make her comfortable and to save the small life growing within her.

As the doctors were about to leave, blood began to pool between Cady's legs, her heart rate dropped and the doctors went to work. A call was made for a gurney and they transported her to an empty operating room.



Brendan stood when he saw Jamie walking toward him in the hospital waiting room. The man looked haggard, but Brendan was glad he had made the call. He knew that Cady would want her brother here when she woke up.

"How is she?" Jamie asked.

Brendan shook his head. "They asked me to leave the room, but they wouldn't tell me anything else."

Before Jamie could respond, he saw a doctor heading their way. "I think we're about to get some news."

"Are you the young man who brought in the pregnant woman?" the doctor asked Brendan.

"Yes, and this is her brother. How is she, doctor?" Brendan asked, ignoring Jamie's stunned look.

The doctor shook his head. He really hated this part of his job. He looked at the young man with compassion. "I don't know how to tell you this, but we weren't able to save the baby."

"And Cady?" Brendan asked.

"She's resting in her room again, but she's still unconscious. I'm afraid that only time will tell if she'll survive the fall," the doctor said kindly.

"Thank you, doctor," Brendan murmured.

"Can we see her?" Jamie asked.

The doctor nodded. "You may, but try to keep your visit brief."

"Can you put a cot in the room?" Brendan asked. "I'm not leaving until Cady can come home with me."

The doctor gave him a sympathetic look. "I'll see what I can do."

Brendan nodded his thanks. He and Jamie made their way to Cady's room. Both men paused outside of her door, uncertain of what they would find inside.

Brendan pushed the door open and stepped inside. Walking to Cady's side, he took her hand in his.

While his heart was broken for the child they had lost, his main concern was the precious woman lying on the bed. As long as she lived, he could deal with the miscarriage. They could always try to have a baby again at another time, but he couldn't replace Cady.

"How did you know Cady was pregnant?" Jamie asked.

Brendan looked at him in surprise, having forgotten the other man was with him. "It's a werewolf thing," he answered, not wanting to get into the details.

"Was it yours or..." Jamie couldn't finish the question. Bile rose up in his throat every time he thought of the way Marshall had used his sister.

"It was mine," Brendan answered in a husky voice. "We just talked about it this afternoon. She seemed happy... shocked but happy."

Jamie nodded. "What happened, Brendan?"

"When we got to the Summit, Marshall was waiting at the top of the stairs. He said he'd made a mistake in giving Cady to me. He planned to..." Brendan swallowed, not wanting to finish the statement.

"He planned to what?" Jamie asked.

"He told her that she would become the pack's whore after tonight, that he wanted another turn with her and knew others did to," Brendan answered in a near whisper. "Cady told him she couldn't do it."

Jamie was shaking with rage. He wanted nothing more than to kill Marshall Creed with his bare hands. The alpha had to be

stopped at all costs. He couldn't continue to do whatever he pleased, hurting everyone in his path.

"When Cady told him she was pregnant, he asked if it was his. I told him the baby was mine. It's my fault she's lying in that bed," Brendan said. "If I had let him think the baby was his, he might have taken her from me but she would be safe."

Jamie shook his head. "She won't be safe as long as Marshall is around. Even if she had been carrying his child, you know as well as I do that he would have found a way to discard her again."

"Maybe, but I know she wouldn't be lying in this bed right now either," Brendan answered.

"Marshall has to pay," Jamie said.

"He already has. He announced in front of the entire pack that Cady belonged to me. If he breaks his word now, the pack will question his leadership," Brendan responded.

The two men fell into silence, standing guard by Cady's bed. When a nurse came in to check on her, she ushered Jamie back to the waiting room. A cot was rolled in for Brendan, but he doubted he would get much sleep.

Not only was Brendan concerned about Cady, but he knew his fight with Marshall wasn't over. There could only be one alpha. Thanks to the night's events, the pack now knew Brendan bore the mark of the alpha, making him a target that Marshall wouldn't be able to ignore. The final fight was looming ahead of him. Brendan only hoped he won. He owed it to Cady to end Marshall's reign as alpha.

Chapter Nineteen

Three days later...

Cady opened her eyes and looked around her at unfamiliar surroundings. Her eyes focused on Brendan. He had fallen asleep in a chair by the bed and was holding her hand. She smiled and squeezed his fingers.

With a frown she tried to remember what happened. She didn't remember coming to the hospital and yet here she was. If the dark beard starting to grow on Brendan's face was any indication, she had been here for more than twenty-four hours.

"Brendan," Cady said with a raspy voice. She frowned. Her throat felt dry and unused. She wondered how long she had been asleep.

"Brendan," she called again a little louder.

He slowly opened his eyes and looked at Cady. When he saw she was awake, he immediately sat up in the chair and became animated.

"You're awake!"

"Of course I am," she said with a smile. "But I could really use some water."

"Of course," he said reaching for the cup and pitcher on the bedside table. Filling the cup, he handed it to her.

Cady sipped it slowly. "I feel like I haven't used my voice in a little while," she said with a smile.

A shadow passed over Brendan's eyes, but he quickly hid it. Cady knew something was wrong.

"What is it?" she asked.

"You've been unconscious for three days," he answered.

She frowned, searching her memory. When she remembered the events at the Summit, her face paled. Her hand sought out her stomach.

"I'm sorry, honey," Brendan said.

"I lost the baby, didn't I?" she asked softly.

"Yeah, I'm afraid you did," he answered.

Cady just nodded her head, not sure what to think or feel. She hadn't wanted the baby when he'd first told her she was pregnant, but... once her initial panic had subsided, she had been excited over having a baby with Brendan.

"The doctor said you could still have children. He just said we need to wait at least six months before we try again," he told her.

She gave him a sad smile. "It isn't like we were trying to begin with."

"I guess this means we just have to be extra careful over the next six months."

Cady nodded and yawned. "How can I be tired if I've been sleeping for so long?"

"I don't know, sweetheart, but I bet the nurses can answer that question. I'm going to buzz them so they'll know you're awake now," he told her, standing to reach for the buzzer.

"Brendan?" she murmured.

Brendan pressed the buzzer and asked the nurse to come down. Turning his attention back to Cady, he asked, "What is it, sweetheart?"

"I'm scared to go back," she whispered, almost as if she were afraid someone might hear her and think less of her.

"Honey, I don't think Marshall is going to bother us again," he told her.

"Why not?"

Brendan sighed. "We fought after he threw you down the stairs. He yielded and said, in front of everyone, that you were mine."

Cady gave him a tired smile. "So it's over?"

Brendan picked up her hand and kissed her fingers. "I think it's over."

He would keep his concerns to himself for now. Cady needed rest. If she started worrying about the future, it could hinder her recovery and Brendan wanted her back home as soon as possible.

"Um, Brendan... if you fought, did you fight as werewolves?" she asked.

"Yeah, why?"

"Because if you had to undress, then everyone saw your tattoo," she answered.

Brendan paused. "I didn't really think about the tattoo. I was thinking only of you. Maybe no one noticed," he said unconvincingly.

Cady gave him a skeptical look. A room full of werewolves with extra sharp senses and the man actually thought no one would notice he had the mark of an alpha? Had he gone daft over the past few days?

Noticing her look, Brendan grimaced. "Okay, so someone probably noticed. We'll cross that bridge when we come to it. Right now, I just want to get you well enough to go home."

Cady opened her mouth to respond, but two nurses bustled into the room.



At the townhouse, Marshall paced in his bedroom. Brendan had been so furious with him that he stripped out of clothes and shifted into a werewolf, allowing Marshall and everyone else to see that he had been branded as an alpha.

Remembering the mark he'd had briefly, he wondered if Brendan's mark had to do with Cady. Maybe it wasn't the men themselves that were being marked. Maybe Cady herself was special in ways they didn't know about yet.

It was a puzzle and Marshall hated puzzles. One thing was for certain, the pack had seen him yield to Brendan and offer Cady to him. There was no going back now. The only way he could possibly undo everything would be to kill Brendan.

Marshall grinned. He had absolutely no problem taking Brendan out. The grin slipped from his face as he remembered that he'd lost to Brendan twice now. The younger werewolf was running on

pure hatred and Marshall had no doubt that Brendan would win in a fair fight.

Rubbing his jaw, Marshall decided he'd just have to make sure the fight wasn't fair. If he could find a way to snag Cady, he could use her as bait. Brendan would do anything for her – even die. He knew Eric was in town and wondered if he'd be interested in helping out. Marshall could give the younger werewolf anything he wanted – women, money, even status in the pack.

There was only one way to find out. Grabbing his keys, Marshall drove to the local motel in hopes of striking a bargain that would ensure his future as alpha. The Eric he had known before had been power hungry. He only hoped that was still true, making his job easy. And if Eric balked at the plan, he was expendable.

Chapter Twenty

Marshall stopped his bike in the motel parking lot. He immediately spotted Eric's room, the car outside was a dead giveaway. Pulling into the parking space next to the vehicle, Marshall killed the engine.

He pocketed his keys and walked to the door. There was a TV on inside, but otherwise the room was quiet. He hoped that meant Eric was alone.

He rapped on the door and waited.

The door opened and Eric was silhouetted by the lamp light in the room, making it difficult to read his expression.

"What do you want, Marshall?" he asked tersely.

"We need to talk," the alpha said, muscling his way into the room.

Eric sighed. "Look, if this is about me not staying with the pack..."

Marshall cut him off. "It isn't, but it *is* about your brother."

"Brendan? What about him?"

"He has something I want. I need you to help me get it," Marshall replied.

"Does this have anything to do with the woman?" Eric asked, dreading the answer.

After seeing his brother with Cady, he didn't want to be part of any more of Marshall's plans. But he wasn't stupid... if he refused to help the alpha, he could end up dead. Regardless of how much he loved his brother, he wasn't ready to die for anyone.

Marshall smiled. "Very good. What did you think of her?"

Eric shrugged. "She's cute, but I don't see what the fuss is about."

"There's something about her; I can't explain it. I screwed up. I let my temper get the best of me and I tossed her out," Marshall said, hoping to gain Eric's sympathy. "I treated her the same way I did Rae and now I can't take it back."

"So, what... you're in love with her?" Eric asked, not sure if he should believe Marshall or not. It wouldn't be the first time he'd caught the alpha in a lie.

"I don't know. I just know that I don't want to live without her by my side," he replied. "But I can't get her back on my own. I need your help."

Eric sighed. He had a feeling he was going to regret asking, but couldn't stop himself. "What do you need me to do?"

"In a day or two I'm going to make sure Brendan gets called out on a job. While he's gone, I need you to show up at the house and pretend to be your brother. Make Cady think you're Brendan so she'll be willing to go anywhere with you," Marshall said.

Eric had a bad feeling about this. "And what exactly should I do in order to make her think I'm Brendan?"

Marshall shrugged. "That's up to you... as long as you don't sleep with her."

"I hadn't planned on it. I learned my lesson the first time," he replied in a cold voice.

Marshall decided to ignore Eric's tone and continued as if he hadn't heard the statement or the icy anger behind it. "You're going to run into a snag though."

"What's that?" Eric asked.

"Your brother has a tattoo on his right arm. You'll need to make sure the top half of your arm stays covered or she'll know you aren't Brendan," Marshall answered.

"And you can't just buy her flowers, grovel a little, and win her over without trying to trick her into going back to you?" Eric asked, hoping there was another option.

Marshall crossed his arms and glared at him. "Do I even need to answer that ridiculous question?"

"Right... you don't grovel."

Marshall nodded. "So, are you going to help me?"

Eric sighed. "I get the feeling I'm going to regret this, but sure. What exactly is the plan?"

"I need you to convince her you're Brendan. And then I need you be an ass to her. Maybe start a fight with lots of yelling. I'll come in and rescue her and she'll see I'm the better guy," Marshall said.

Eric looked at him like he was crazy. "And you think that's going to work?"

"Why wouldn't it?"

"I don't know Cady very well, but from what I gathered this morning she isn't going to fall for that. I think she's in love with Brendan," Eric answered.

Marshall growled and stepped closer to Eric.

Eric held up a hand to hold him off. "Wait, I said that I *thought* she was in love with him, not that she was. Anyway, if she's even a little in love with him, I don't think your plan is going to win her over to your side."

"So what do you suggest?"

"If she caught me in bed, in our bed, with another woman, you might have a better shot. Just make sure you happen along when she discovers us, giving her a nice big shoulder to cry on."

Marshall grinned. "That's rather devious. I like it."

"But if the pack knows Brendan and Cady are together, it might be hard to find a willing woman."

Marshall shook his head. "DeLayne has been furious ever since Cady showed up. It wouldn't take anything other than a smile to get her into your bed."

Eric tried to hide his revulsion. There was no love lost between the two of them. He saw DeLayne as an opportunistic bitch, one who used his brother over and over. The thought of being intimate with her repulsed him.

"Are you sure she's my only option?" Eric asked.

"She's your best bet."

Eric sighed and rubbed a hand across his eyes, trying to rub away the image of him and DeLayne in a bed. A naked DeLayne wasn't something he cared to see at any point in his life. He briefly wondered how he kept getting himself into these situations. He

must have done something truly horrendous in a past life; karma was a bitch.

"Well, it's not like I have much of a choice so I'll do it. But for the record, I'd prefer another woman," Eric said.

"Duly noted. Now, wait for my call. It's probably best if you aren't around Brendan and Cady a lot right now. Besides, she probably won't be released from the hospital for another day or two," Marshall told him.

The hair on the back of Eric's neck stood on end. "Hospital?"

"Yeah, she took a tumble down the stairs at the Summit. I'm pretty sure she lost the baby, but I haven't heard from Brendan," Marshall answered in a flat voice.

When Eric didn't say anything further, Marshall nodded his head and left.

Eric was stunned. He knew the alpha was cold, but he was discussing Cady's accident as if it were the weather. Or was it an accident? He wouldn't put it past Marshall to have had a hand in the event. And if that was the case, Eric knew he had to make sure Cady stayed away from him. Besides, if she was pregnant, that was his niece or nephew. As far as Eric was concerned, family was more important than pack politics.

He needed to talk to Brendan, but wasn't sure how to pull it off. Marshall would be watching him, or would have someone else do it. There was no way he would take a gamble on his plan failing.

Shaking his head, Eric decided that his bleak future might look brighter with a little alcohol in his system. Grabbing his keys, he decided it was time to visit the Sunset Club.



Eric stepped into the cool interior of the club and walked over to the bar. Grabbing a bar stool, he sat down and waited on the bartender to come over.

When Jamie looked down the bar, he hurried toward Eric, a pensive look on his face.

"Did they release Cady? I thought you were staying with her," Jamie said as he approached.

Eric realized the bartender had mistaken him for Brendan. If he was worried about Cady, he must be friends with either her or Brendan.

"I'm not Brendan," Eric answered.

Jamie looked him over, skeptical. "You sure look like Brendan."

Eric grinned. "I'm his twin brother, Eric."

A look of surprise crossed Jamie's face. "I didn't realize Brendan had a brother, much less a twin."

"I've been gone a while. I just got back a few days ago."

"Do you know Cady?" Jamie asked.

"I met Cady my first day back," Eric said evasively.

"Do you know she's in the hospital?"

Eric nodded. "I heard that she had an accident. Someone just mentioned it to me today."

Jamie snorted. "It was no accident. Marshall tossed her down the stairs at the Summit. I guess you could say he won, Cady lost the baby."

"You seem to know a lot about it," Eric said, trying to figure out exactly where Jamie fit into the picture. Was he someone Eric could trust?

"She's my sister. Brendan called me after they got to the hospital."

Eric was surprised but hid it well. "Is she okay?"

Jamie nodded. "I think she'll be home today or tomorrow."

"Maybe I'll see them later," Eric murmured.

"I only wish Marshall wasn't around when Cady got home. She's dreading a confrontation. Brendan assured her everything would be fine, but she isn't convinced. I'm not either for that matter," Jamie said.

Eric thought that made Jamie and Cady pretty damn smart. Looking around the bar, he realized he was alone with the bartender.

"Can you get a message to my brother? And maybe to Cady?" he asked in a hushed tone, wanting to play it safe.

Jamie looked intrigued. "Sure."

"Tell him Marshall has a plan to get Cady back. He's forcing me to help him, which means I need to stay away from Brendan and

Cady for now. Marshall would become suspicious if I didn't keep my distance. Make sure Cady knows not to believe everything she sees over the next few days," Eric said before taking a drink of the ice cold beer Jamie had placed in front of him. "I can't give details, but Marshall will use deception, and anything else he needs to, in order to ensure Cady is back by his side."

"He wanted to make her the pack whore. Why is he so intent on getting her back now?" Jamie wanted to know.

Eric shrugged. "I haven't figured it all out, but I don't think he plans on sharing her this time."

Jamie just shook his head. If he had stayed home from work that night, or made sure Cady had a ride to Heather's house, then none of this would be happening. His sister wouldn't be part of Vicus Luna and wouldn't be in the hospital. She would be safe and sound at home instead of having her life turned upside down, inside out, and just royally screwed up all the way around.

"I'll let them know what's up. I don't know how much more Cady can handle. She's been through so much since Vicus Luna picked her up."

"Like what?" Eric asked, truly curious about the young woman who had captured his brother so completely. He had no doubt that Brendan loved her, even though his poor sap of a brother didn't realize it himself.

"Well, Marshall claimed her when she first joined the pack. Then he got tired of her after a few days and threw her out. That's where your brother comes in."

Eric nodded, waiting on Jamie to continue. Maybe the missing piece of the puzzle was in the background Jamie was giving him.

Jamie sighed. "Marshall apparently threatened to make her the pack whore so Brendan stepped in and claimed her. He seems to genuinely care for her though."

"And Marshall has constantly tried to get her back since then?" Eric asked.

Jamie nodded. "From what I've gathered."

Eric rubbed a hand across his jaw. "Something doesn't make sense. Marshall isn't the kind of guy to have regrets over a woman. So what's so special about Cady?"

Jamie arched a brow.

"Come on man. I know she's your sister, but surely you've wondered why Marshall can't seem to let her go. There's something there, something we're missing. Without that missing puzzle piece, I have no clue what I'm up against," Eric said.

"Yeah, I guess it is slightly odd. Cady hadn't dated much and now she suddenly has two Vicus Luna members fighting over her? Something is up. I love her and I think she's beautiful, but this is definitely a first."

Eric cocked his head and looked at Jamie. "You know, she really is beautiful. If my brother weren't so crazy about her, I'd try to steal her for myself."

Jamie chuckled. "Who knew... all this time I've heard her crying herself to sleep and all she needed to do was try dating werewolves to be a hit."

"She hasn't dated much?" Eric asked, curious about the woman who had captivated Brendan.

Jamie shook his head. "None of the guys in her high school class had any interest in her. She dated a guy in college for a short time, but then he dumped her. Then she found another loser to date. Once he got what he wanted, he left her high and dry."

Eric clenched the beer bottle. Learning more about Cady was going to make it difficult to hurt her, but he didn't have a choice. He only hoped she could figure out his cryptic message in time. Otherwise, it wouldn't only ruin her life, but would also ruin his brother's life.

"I better head back to the motel. It was nice meeting you. Hopefully this whole thing won't blow up in my face and we'll have a chance to talk again."

Jamie nodded. "See you around."

Eric left the bar and drove back to his motel. When he entered his room, he locked the door and flopped down on the bed, throwing his arms wide and closing his eyes. Who knew deception could be so exhausting? He wasn't looking forward to the next few days.

Chapter Twenty-One

Two days later

Brendan helped Cady out of the truck; wrapping an arm around her waist he assisted her to the door of the townhouse.

Cady balked when Brendan opened the door. "I can't go in there."

Brendan hugged her close. "Sure you can, sweetheart. I told you, there's nothing to worry about."

Cady bit her lip. Her brother visited the day before and told her what Eric had said. From what she'd gathered, she had every reason to worry. She hadn't wanted to worry Brendan so she had kept quiet. Maybe she should have told him. If Marshall was up to something, they would need to work together.

"Come on, honey. I promise you'll be fine. Wouldn't you like to go in and lie down?" Brendan coaxed.

Cady sighed. "Actually a shower sounds nice."

He smiled. "Then a shower it is, but you have to go inside before you can take one. The neighbors might talk if you strip naked on the lawn."

She laughed before she could stop herself. "Okay, I'll go in, but promise me you'll stay close?"

"I won't leave your side. I'll even shower with you," he said, waggling his eyebrows.

Cady laughed again and allowed him to lead her into the house and up the stairs. Walking into the room, she sat on the edge of the bed. Kicking off her shoes, she tucked her legs under her.

“Brendan...”

He closed the door, leaning against it. “What is it, honey?”

“Come hold me?” she asked in a soft voice. “I’ve missed feeling your arms around me.”

He gave her a slow smile. Reaching behind him, he locked the door before walking over to the bed. He knew it was too soon for them to make love, but the doctor hadn’t said anything about everything that led up to the act itself.

Brendan walked slowly toward Cady, stopping in front of her and dropping to his knees. Leaning toward her, he placed an arm on either side of her body. As he moved closer, he saw the rapid rise and fall of her chest and knew she was just as turned on as he was, not having been intimate in about a week. He gently brushed his lips against hers, his tongue lightly flicked against her lower lip. He tasted her, savoring the moment.

Cady slipped her arms around Brendan’s neck. She’d missed this – missed him. While he had never left her side in the hospital, they hadn’t been able to cuddle or be close. He’d held her hand, but it wasn’t the same. She missed the comfort of his body being pressed against hers.

Brendan broke the kiss and leaned his forehead against hers. “We better stop before I forget myself.”

Cady nodded her head. She understood, really she did, but she didn’t like it. The doctor had said they needed to wait at least a week before having sex to give Cady’s body time to heal properly from her fall and miscarriage. It was going to be the longest week of her life.

Brendan stood and pulled Cady to her feet. “Come on, let’s gather some clothes and go take that shower you were talking about.”

Cady wrapped her arms around his waist, hugging him for a moment. “Okay.”



In the bathroom, Brendan adjusted the water temperature while Cady undressed. He wasn’t certain this was the best idea he’d ever

had, but it allowed him to be near her; and should Marshall decide to try anything, it would let him protect her. Cady had come to mean the world to him in such a short amount of time that it was rather frightening at times.

Pulling his hand out from under the water, he glanced over his shoulder at Cady. "I think the water's ready."

Slipping past him, she stepped into the shower. As the warm water cascaded down her body, she sighed in relief. The temperature was just right and she felt her tense muscles loosen ever so slightly, enough to start making her feel human again. She'd been able to rinse off at the hospital, but it wasn't the same as taking a shower at home.

Opening her eyes, she saw Brendan watching her, a hungry look in his eyes. "Are you going to join me?" she asked softly, hoping his answer would be yes.

Without a word, he pulled his shirt over his head and let it drop to the floor. Kicking off his shoes, he pulled off his socks. As he reached for his belt, he paused.

"Are you sure, Cady?"

She nodded, a smile tugging at the corners of her lips.

Not needing any further urging, Brendan unbuckled his belt, unfastened his jeans and let them slip down his legs, landing in his pile of clothes, along with his boxers.

He stepped into the shower and slid the doors closed. Unsure what to do, he stood awkwardly – wanting to hold Cady, yet not sure if he should.

Cady, however, had no such qualms and wrapped her arms around Brendan. Laying her cheek against his chest, she hugged him tight, not ever wanting to let go.

"Brendan, there's something I should tell you."

Brendan stroked her hair, enjoying the feel of her in his arms. "What is it, Cady?"

"It's about my brother's last visit to the hospital."

Brendan set her away from him and tipped her head back so he could see her eyes. "What about his visit?"

"He mentioned meeting Eric."

Brendan stiffened at the mention of his brother's name. If his brother was involved, her news couldn't be good. "What about Eric?"

Cady shrugged. "It didn't make much sense to me, but apparently Eric was trying to get a message to us, to warn us about something that's going to happen."

Brendan closed his eyes a moment. "In other words, Marshall is going to use my brother again."

"I guess. The message didn't make a whole lot of sense to me. Eric told my brother that I shouldn't believe everything I see over the next few days."

Brendan focused on Cady. "That could only mean that Marshall plans on Eric trying to take my place. But why?"

Cady shrugged. "I don't know."

Brendan shook his head. "I guess we'll just have to keep our eyes and ears open the next few days. Marshall isn't very patient so I'm sure it won't take long before their plan is put into action."

Cady nodded.

Slipping his hand behind her neck, Brendan brought her closer. Bending his head to hers, he gently claimed her lips in a kiss. As his tongue slid into her mouth, he felt himself grow hard. Going a whole week without making love to Cady was going to be agony.

Breaking the kiss, Brendan sighed. "Enough of that or I'll drive myself crazy."

Cady grinned wickedly as she reached for him.

Brendan chuckled and backed up. "I don't think so, sweetheart. Showering with you is bad enough, but if you touch me I might lose control."

"Would losing control really be so bad? After all, there are other ways to enjoy each other."

The grin slipped from Brendan's face as he reached for Cady. Pulling her close, he allowed his erection to press against her. "You realize you're playing with fire."

Cady grinned and leaned forward to take his nipple into her mouth. As she licked and sucked, she heard his indrawn breath and knew she had won.

Brendan groaned. "You don't play fair, woman."

"Now what fun would that be?" she asked.

Cady reached for Brendan's body wash. Pouring a decent amount into her hand, she lathered his chest and shoulders. She let her hands glide over his skin, massaging his muscles. As she worked her way down to his waist, she lost herself in the pleasure of touching him. His muscles were firm and his skin was hot. Reaching lower, she grasped his cock, letting her hand slide from the tip to the base. She let her hand slide up and down the length of him, enjoying the feel of his velvety soft skin stretched taut over muscle.

Brendan braced his arm against the wall. He watched Cady with heavy-lidded eyes, watched as she took pleasure in teasing him. He wasn't sure which was more arousing – her hand stroking his cock or the look on her face.

He reached out and cupped her breast with his free hand, gently stroking his thumb over her nipple. When she gasped and arched into his palm, he decided it was time to take control.

Pressing Cady against the shower wall, he lifted her legs around his waist.

"Brendan, we can't..."

"Shhh. Just relax, Cady."

He could feel himself pressing against her moist heat and wanted to bury himself inside of her, but knew he couldn't. Instead, he had to find a way to pleasure them both without hurting her. Reaching between the bodies, he found her sensitive numb and gently rubbed it with his thumb.

Cady whimpered and rested her head against the shower wall. "Brendan...."

"Just let go, honey. Relax."

As Brendan teased her, he rubbed himself against her wet folds. Bending his head, he took her nipple in his mouth, sucking and nipping at it. He felt Cady arch against him and hoped she was getting as much pleasure as he was.

"Brendan, I..." Cady couldn't finish her sentence; all coherent thought took flight as her orgasm broke over her, shattering her.

At the rush of warmth Brendan felt, he thrust against Cady, finding his own release.

Chapter Twenty-Two

Showered and dressed in clean clothes, Cady felt a hundred times better. She was snuggled up next to Brendan on the bed watching a movie when his cell phone rang. She hoped he wouldn't answer it, not wanting their pleasant afternoon to be interrupted.

Brendan looked at his phone and gave her an apologetic grin. "Sorry, honey, but I have to take this."

Untangling himself from her body, Brendan answered the call.

"Hello."

"Brendan, this is Mr. Thompson in Ridgemont. How are you today?"

"I'm fine, Mr. Thompson. What can I do for you?"

"Well, I have a project that I need some help with. There's an old house on Main Street that I just bought last week and it needs a tone of work done to it. Do you think you'd have a few days to help me get started on some of the repairs?"

Brendan glanced at Cady. He hated to leave her alone, but he knew the money would come in handy. Besides, Marshall had yielded in front of the pack. Surely she was safe now, regardless of what Eric had said.

"I sure do, Mr. Thompson. Just tell me when and where to meet you."

"Excellent! Tell you what, why don't you come down tomorrow morning. I have a small guest apartment over my garage where you can stay. Think you could stay about four days? I'd pay you double your usual fee."

Brendan was stunned. It wasn't like Mr. Thompson to offer such a large amount of money for a job. He must be desperate for help. "I'll be there, Mr. Thompson!"

"Wonderful. I'll see you in the morning, Brendan."

Brendan stared at the phone in his hand, slightly stunned.

"Who was that?" Cady asked.

"Mr. Thompson. He lives a few towns over and calls me on occasion for odd jobs. He has a house he wants to restore and needs my help for a few days."

"And you're going?" Cady asked.

"Yeah. Look, I know you're worried about Marshall, but he yielded to me and announced to the entire pack that you were mine. There's no way he can go back on that now."

Cady looked at him skeptically.

"I promise, he won't hurt you," Brendan assured her.

"Are you sure you have to go?"

Brendan sighed and wrapped his arms around her. "I'm sorry, Cady. I know you just got home from the hospital, but if I don't take this job he might not call me the next time he has work."

She nodded and held on for dear life, worried about what the morning would bring.

"Since I'll be gone a few days, I'll let you pick what we do tonight. Do you want to stay in and watch movies? Or do you want to go out to eat?"

"I don't care as long as I'm with you," she answered.

Brendan absently rubbed her back. "Are you up for going out? If you're tired, I can always run over to the video store and pick up a DVD or two for the night."

"I guess I am a little tired," she admitted grudgingly. She hated feeling weak.

"Why don't you take a nap while I run out and get some movies and a pizza. I bet you'll feel better after you've rested."

"Hurry back?"

He grinned at her. "You know I will."

Brendan caressed her cheek then got off the bed. Walking to the dresser, he grabbed his wallet and his keys. "Be back in a flash."

Cady gave him a weak grin and watched him walk out the door. She knew a nap was out of the question. She didn't feel safe enough to sleep in the house alone. Not that she was any match for Marshall when she was awake.



Marshall heard Brendan walk down the stairs. When he heard the front door open and close, he knew Cady was alone. Now was the time to start laying the foundation for his plan.

He quietly opened his bedroom door and stepped out into the hall. Brendan's door was partially open and he could hear the TV going. He cautiously approached the door, not wanting to startle Cady. Gazing around the edge of the door, he saw her curled up on the bed. She looked small, pale, and tired.

Pushing the door open wider, he stepped into the room. "I see you're home from the hospital."

Cady gasped and sat up on the bed, her eyes going wide in fear as Marshall approached.

"Look, Cady... I just... I wanted to apologize. I'd been drinking the other night and... well, the thought of you being pregnant by someone else just got to me."

Cady didn't budge, didn't say a word, just watched him.

"It doesn't justify what I did, but I wanted you to know that I'm sorry for what happened."

Cady continued to stare at him with wide eyes.

"Dammit, would you say something?"

"What do you want me to say? Congratulations, you broke me. Isn't that you've wanted to do from the start? Turn me into one of your simpering, terrified women? You've won."

Something in Marshall's gut tightened. No, that hadn't been what he had wanted. While Cady's grit had irritated more than once, it was part of what he actually liked about her. She was a fighter; a true alpha's mate.

"That wasn't my intention. If anything, that's the one thing about you I would have never changed. I always liked your spunk."

"The feisty young woman you found weeks ago no longer exists."

Marshall shook his head. "No, she does exist."

He watched her shake her head and something in him snapped. If she didn't believe she still had fire in her, he'd show her! Taking the two steps that would carry him to the edge of the bed he reached out and grabbed her arms. Hauling her off the bed, he pulled her up to eye level. With a growl he stared into her eyes.

"You are *not* broken!"

Cady felt a spark, a slow fire that was building within her as she stared into his eyes. He was right. She wasn't broken. She was absolutely, positively pissed off!

With a growl of her own, she lashed out with her foot, kicking him in the shin.

Marshall laughed and pulled her into his arms. "Now, there's the Cady I knew."

She fought like a hell cat. "Let me go you big jerk!"

"Now Cady, stop struggling before you hurt yourself. You're still healing."

Cady grew still and stared him in the eye, nothing but hatred showing in her face. "You're right. I'm still healing. I'm still healing from the bruises and concussion you gave me. I'm still healing from the miscarriage I had when *you* made me lose my baby."

The venom in her voice wiped the smile from Marshall's face. "Yeah, I did all of that. And while I'm sorry for hurting you, I'm not sorry you lost the baby."

Something inside of Cady snapped. With a growl she leaned forward and bit down on Marshall's shoulder, sinking her teeth in as hard as she could, until the coppery taste of blood filled her mouth.

"Dammit, Cady, stop that!" Marshall swore as he tried to dislodge her. The little demon had a set of teeth on her to rival a dragon!

Cady let go and spit the blood from her mouth. She glared up at him, blood dripping from the corner of her lips.

"Can I at least explain?" he asked in a fairly quiet voice.

"There's nothing to explain," she replied.

"Cady, don't you understand? It was at that exact moment that I realized what I had lost. It should have been my baby growing inside of you, not Brendan's."

Cady shook her head, his lies falling on deaf ears.

"It's true Cady. I only said and did the things I have to hurt you. That night in my room... I can't tell you how much you hurt me that night."

"Brendan told you that it was a mistake, a misunderstanding."

He nodded. "Yeah, he did, but by then it was too late. I could tell by the look on your face that you weren't going to forgive me. Not for just putting you out in the hall, but for taking those other women to my bed."

"So you decided the answer was to make me the pack's whore? To throw me down a flight of stairs, nearly killing me, and threatening to put me back in that room? You thought *that* was the answer?"

He gave her what he hoped was a sheepish grin. "Not the most sound of ideas to be sure. I guess I just lose my head when I'm around you. You make me want things I've never wanted before and it ... well, I guess it scares me a little."

Marshall put her down on her feet. Reaching out, he wiped the blood from her lips. "I really am sorry, Cady."

She crossed her arms and glared up at him. "I don't know that I believe you."

He shrugged. "Maybe you'll be able to believe me some day. Until then, I guess I'll just have to prove it to you."

She stiffened, not sure what to expect. "And how do you plan on doing that?"

"What would it take? What's my punishment to be?" he asked quietly.

"No women for a week. Not a single kiss."

He grimaced. It figured she would pick his one weakness – the fairer sex. "Fine. No women for a week." He glared down at her. "I hope you know what kind of sacrifice you're asking for; I've never lived like a monk a day in my life."

She smirked. "I know. That's why I chose the punishment. It seemed fitting."

He cocked his head to the side and studied her a moment. He knew why she had been chosen as the alpha's mate. She was an absolutely amazing woman.



Brendan entered the townhouse and walked up the stairs carrying Cady's favorite pizza and a few DVDs. He heard voices coming from his bedroom and realized Marshall was talking to Cady. She didn't sound distressed so he slowed his steps, intent on hearing their conversation.

As he listened to Marshall telling Cady what a mistake it had been to let her go, he felt a dread unlike any other crawling across his skin. Would Cady believe Marshall? Would she go back to him? He had to admit he was rather stunned when Marshall agreed to Cady's terms of no women for a week.

Brow furrowed, he wondered if Marshall really did have feelings for Cady. And did she feel the same? He could hear the steel and determination in her voice. It was the strongest she'd sounded since... well, since the night he'd found her outside of Marshall's door. Was that the real Cady? Where was the soft woman who needed him?

Deciding he'd heard enough, he stepped into the room.

"I got your favorite pizza," he said, sitting the box down on the dresser.

Marshall turned toward him, a scowl on his face. "I was just apologizing to Cady."

Brendan crossed his arms and looked at the alpha in disbelief. "I didn't think you ever apologized for anything."

Marshall narrowed his eyes and glared at Brendan. "I don't, which is why she should be thankful I felt the need to give one now."

"Well, I'm sure she's grateful you lowered yourself enough to apologize for nearly killing her," Brendan responded in a flat tone.

Marshall growled and advanced on him. When he was close enough that they were nose to nose, he stared Brendan down. "Regardless of how safe you feel right now, remember that I'm the alpha. It wouldn't take much to make you disappear."

Brendan shrugged as if he could care less. "You could try, but so far you've lost two fights to me. Do you really want to try for a third?"

Marshall felt his claws distend from his hands. As he was reaching for Brendan, he felt a small hand on his upper arm.

"Stop."

He looked down at Cady in surprise. "What makes you think I'll stop just because you say to?"

"Because you want me to think better of you than I do right now, and at the moment my opinion is dropping rather quickly."

His claws detracted and he took a step back. He'd never backed down from a fight before, and he'd *certainly* never done as a woman demanded. Cady was making him lose his mind and his manhood, but if it meant that she was his in the end, it would be worth it. With her by his side, his rule as alpha wouldn't be questioned.

"This isn't over," Marshall said quietly before he walked out of the room.



"Are you okay?" Brendan asked, pulling Cady into his arms.

"I'm fine, Brendan. I realized something today."

"What's that honey?"

"I'm more angry than scared. I reached down deep and found the anger that has been building over the past few weeks and let it loose," she answered.

"I see."

And Brendan really did see. Cady was strong, a fighter. She was the type of woman who could stand on her own two feet. She didn't need him to protect her. And if she didn't need him for protection, he wasn't entirely sure what she did need him for. Granted, they were mated and marked as such, but what did that matter to Cady?

"What exactly do you see?" she asked him quietly, having watched a myriad of emotions cross his handsome face.

"I see that you no longer need me to protect you. You're strong, Cady. Stronger than any woman I've known."

Cady cupped his cheek with her hand. "I may not need protecting, but it's still nice to know you're there when I *do* need you. I like to fight my own battles, but I know that if I get in too deep you'll be there to bail me out."

"And is that all you need me for?" he asked.

Cady smiled up at him. "Do you really need to ask?"

"Yeah, I guess I do."

She pulled his head down and kissed him softly. "I need you because I've fallen in love with you," she whispered against his lips.

Brendan pulled back in shock. "You love me?"

"Of course. Why do you seem so surprised?"

"It's just ... I mean, we haven't known one another all that long."

"Brendan, if you aren't sure of your feelings yet, it's okay. Just because I told you I loved you doesn't mean you have to say it back."

"Cady..."

"Shhh," she said, placing a finger over his lips. "Right now I just want you to feed me, hold me, and snuggle with me all night. It's our last chance to spend time together before you go out of town."

He kissed the palm of her hand and did as she asked. Grabbing the pizza box and the movies, he walked over to the bed.

Part Three

Nothing is as it seems...

Chapter Twenty-Three

Cady woke the next morning to an empty bed. She found a note on Brendan's pillow.

Cady,

I didn't want to wake you, but I had to leave early this morning. I will be back as soon as I can. When I return, we'll talk.

Love,

Brendan

She wondered what he meant by "we'll talk." What was there to talk about? Had she said too much last night when she'd told him she loved him? Had it been a mistake? Or was he still hung up on her not needing a protector any longer?

Sighing, she stretched and rolled over, burying her face in Brendan's pillow. It still smelled of him. She was going to miss him over the next few days.

Sitting up, she decided to face the day. First a shower was definitely in order; otherwise she'd never wake up all the way.



Cady had just finished putting on her lip gloss when she saw someone standing in the bedroom doorway. Turning, she gasped.

"Brendan! I thought you were going to be gone for a few days," she said, rushing over to him.

Eric hated lying to her, but knew his life depended on it. "I decided I didn't want to be away from you that long," he responded, wrapping his arms around her.

"I'm so glad. It didn't feel right waking up to an empty bed this morning."

Eric smiled down at her. How could she not see that he wasn't Brendan? He knew they were twins, but still... he expected the woman in love with his twin to be able to tell the difference.

"It looks like you're ready to go out. Were you heading anywhere in particular?"

Cady shrugged. "I thought about wandering around the mall a bit. Except I wasn't sure how I was going to get there."

"I have a surprise for you."

"You do?"

He nodded. "Why don't you come outside and see it."

Cady smiled. Grabbing her purse, she quickly followed him down the stairs. "You didn't have to get me a surprise."

"I wanted to."

As they walked out of the door, Cady gasped. In the driveway was a small SUV. "Is that for me?"

Eric smiled. "Yep, she's all yours."

"But Brendan..."

He held up a hand. "It was the least I could do."

Really, it really was the least he could do. Eric hated lying to Cady. The car seemed like a small consolation since he was about to wreck her life.

Cady jumped up and down, squealing in excitement.

Eric laughed and handed the keys to her. "Now you have a way to get to the mall."

"Are you coming with me?"

He tipped his head to the side. "If you want me to."

She nodded enthusiastically. "Of course I do!"

"Then I'll be happy to come along."

As Cady ran around to the driver's side of the shiny blue vehicle, she anxiously unlocked the doors and slipped into the driver's seat. No one had ever bought her anything as big as a car before, both

literally and figuratively. It amazed her how kind and generous Brendan was; she really had lucked out.

She started the vehicle as Eric slid into the passenger's seat. With a big smile on her face, she leaned across the console and kissed him.

Startled, Eric froze, but Cady's enthusiasm rubbed off on him and he found himself kissing her back. Losing himself in the feel of her soft lips, he buried a hand in her hair and pulled her closer.

Cady pulled back with a dazed expression. "Wow, maybe I should get presents more often. One of us just got a whole lot better at kissing and I'm not sure if it's me or you."

Eric grinned, but inwardly he was wincing. Every minute he was in Cady's presence he was digging himself a deeper grave. If Marshall didn't kill him, his brother was certainly going to handle the task.

"Let's go to the mall."

Cady grinned and put the vehicle in reverse.



As Cady pulled into a parking space at the mall, Eric admired her profile. There was something different about her today. Not just the happiness over the new car, but something else, something he couldn't quite put his finger on. There was a light in her eyes he hadn't seen before.

They climbed out of the car and headed for the mall entrance. Cady used her key fob to set the alarm on the car. Grinning, she grabbed Eric's hand and practically skipped into the mall.

"Where to first?" he asked, eyeing the map. It had been a while since he'd been to the mall and it seemed to have grown a bit.

Cady shrugged. "I don't really care. How about if we just walk for a bit and stop if we see something interesting?"

"Works for me."

Looping her arm through Eric's, she started off to the right. She noticed more than one envious look thrown her way and it made her even happier. She had a shiny new car and the best guy in the world. Things couldn't possibly get better.

Cady stopped outside of a clothing store she'd always loved and peered through the window at the newest fashion trends. A reflection in the glass caught her attention. Glancing over her shoulder, she saw Marshall standing on the opposite side of the mall – watching them.

"Brendan, don't look now, but Marshall's here."

Eric followed her gaze. The alpha shifted his head slightly, an invitation for Eric to come over.

"I think I'd better go see what he wants," Eric told Cady.

"Must you? You already know what he wants; he wants me," she responded.

"Cady, he knows your mine."

She snorted. "Like that would stop him."

He grinned down at her. "He indicated I should go over there. I can't ignore the alpha, so what would you have me do?"

"Kiss me."

Her answer surprised him. "Excuse me?"

"Kiss me. If you kiss me, he'll see you aren't afraid to stake your claim to me in front of him and everyone else."

He crossed his arms and narrowed his eyes. "Are you sure this isn't just a ploy to get me to kiss you?"

Cady grinned in response. "Well, I always welcome an excuse for you to kiss me. But, honestly, I think it would be a good idea."

Eric's gut tightened. He knew kissing Cady was like playing with fire. Not only would Marshall be angry, but his brother was likely to kick his sorry ass. "Very well, if that's what you demand."

Reaching out, he roughly pulled her against him. Burying his hands in her hair, he leaned down and claimed her lips in a searing kiss; his tongue probing the inner depths of her mouth, tasting her, memorizing her scent and taste. When he finally pulled back, both he and Cady were dazed from the experience. Once his life was settled, he really needed find a woman like her.

"I'll be back in a minute. Why don't you go in the store?"

She nodded, unable to find her voice. She and Brendan had always had sparks, but this was different. Her body was engulfed in flames, desire gnawing at her from the inside out. Her body screaming for release, she entered the store.



Eric approached Marshall with confidence he didn't quite feel. "You wanted to see me."

"I would have preferred to see you without your tongue down my future mate's throat," Marshall rumbled.

Eric shrugged. "She wanted me to kiss her before I came over. Something about making sure you knew who she belonged to; well, except the part where she thinks I'm Brendan."

"So she doesn't suspect anything?"

"Not so far, but she might later. I'll have to make sure I change clothes when she isn't around." Eric paused. "It's also going to make our little hoax a little more difficult. The moment she sees that my arm isn't tattooed, she'll know I'm not Brendan."

Marshall frowned. "We'll think of something. This has to work."

"And if it doesn't?"

"What's that supposed to mean?"

Eric held a hand up. "I just mean that she seems completely head over heels for my brother. What if she doesn't react the way we think she will?"

Marshall grinned. "Trust me. She will."

Eric nodded. "Well, if you're certain... I'd better get back to her before she starts to question our little impromptu meeting."

"Of course. Can't have her suspecting anything."

Eric nodded to him once more before walking away.

Finding Cady wasn't hard. She was near the front of the store with her nose practically pressed to the window. He should have been angry that she was spying on him, but he wasn't. If anything, he felt proud. She wasn't afraid of him and it appeared that she wasn't afraid of Marshall.

"Find anything you like?" he asked as he approached her.

"Hm? Oh, well, I um..."

"Weren't really shopping?"

She blushed. "What did Marshall want?"

Eric shrugged. "Just making sure things were okay between us. Nothing for you to worry about."

Cady frowned. "He's done a complete turn-around yet again. Last time, it cost me our child and a trip down a staircase. What could he be plotting this time? My demise?"

Eric wrapped his arms around her and held her close. "Don't even think that! He's not going to hurt you, Cady. I won't let him."

"What if you don't have a say in the matter?"

"I promise, I won't leave your side unless you want me to."

She smiled up at him. "Then I guess you plan on being glued to me."

He chuckled. "I can think of worse fates."

Cady sighed. "You know, I'm not sure I'm really up for the mall after all. Could we just grab something to eat and go home?"

"Are you sure you don't want to buy a few more things? The closet seems a little bare."

She chewed on her lower lip and looked around the store. "Well, I *do* like this store. Maybe I could look at one or two things, but that's all. I don't want you spending all of your money on clothes for me."

"Cady, money isn't a problem."

"Is that why you gave up the job today?"

He shrugged a shoulder. "I just didn't feel right leaving you alone. You seemed so upset by the job that I figured others would come along."

"It's just... you made it sound like you needed the money."

Eric wondered if his brother really did need the money. They'd never really discussed finances before. None of them were as well off as Marshall, of that he was certain. Then again, when you made your money as a mercenary, you tended to be rather well off.

"I have plenty of money to buy you some clothes, Cady. I was just thinking long term."

"Well, if you're sure..."

"I'm sure. Now, go find some outfits you like. I'll go sit in the chairs by the fitting room and wait on you."

Cady flashed him a smile and took off like a shot, threading her way through the clothing racks.

Chapter Twenty-Four

When they returned to the townhome, Cady and Eric were both loaded down with bags. He'd convinced her to buy an entire wardrobe, including shoes. Guilt had gone a long way in loosening up his wallet.

"Want to dress up in one of your new outfits and go out to dinner?" Eric asked as he dumped an armload of bags on the bed.

"That sounds like fun," Cady answered with a smile. She was a little tired, but being around Brendan seemed to be good for her. She was more energized than she'd been in a while.

"I should probably shower and change, too."

She gave him a coy look and sauntered over to him. "Why don't we take one together?"

Eric was startled. He hadn't thought of her offering something like that. She'd see he didn't have a tattoo and the jig would be up for sure.

"Wouldn't you prefer to take one on your own? Relax under the hot water?"

He saw a flash of pain in her eyes and realized he'd hurt her feelings.

"It's just... I know you haven't been home from the hospital long and I'm sure you're a little tired from today's excursion to the mall. I thought it might make you feel better and give you a little time to yourself."

Cady smiled at him. "Well, when you put it like that... but I still prefer taking one with you. Are you sure you won't join me?"

"Cady..."

Before he could finish the sentence, she'd pulled his head down for a kiss. The woman was intoxicating – and dangerous! She could easily be his sister-in-law and here he was kissing her like there was no tomorrow. He realized in that moment that he was more like his brother than he had thought, because he had done the unthinkable – he had fallen in love with Cady.

A tingling sensation travelled along his upper arm. Breaking the kiss, his eyes widened in shock. He took a step back from Cady and eyed her uncertainly. What in the hell was going on?

"I, uh, I think you should go and take your shower if we're going to dinner tonight," he stammered.

Cady's brow furrowed. "What's wrong, Brendan?"

He shook his head. "I got carried away. I didn't mean to, but..."

Her face softened and she smiled. "And you're worried that you're going to throw me on the bed and have your wicked way with me, disobeying the doctor's orders of no sex for a week."

He swallowed. "Yeah."

"Okay. I'll go shower by myself." She paused. "But, can I leave the bedroom door open? You know, in case Marshall decides to break into the bathroom again while I'm in there?"

Eric nodded, not trusting himself to speak.

Once Cady had gathered her clothes and closed the bathroom door, he walked over to the mirror in a daze. Lifting his shirt over his head, he stared in amazement at the intricate tattoo on his shoulder.

If he now bore the mark of the alpha, did that mean it had disappeared from Brendan's shoulder? Surely his brother would notice something like that and would be calling or rushing home.

Eric glanced at the cell phone by Cady's purse, expecting it to ring. When it didn't he went back to staring at the tattoo in the mirror. How had this happened? Marshall was sure to kill him now.

Hearing the bathroom door open, he glanced toward the hall. Cady's hair was still wet, but she had on one of her new sundresses. Barefoot and fresh from the shower, she was a goddess. A goddess he couldn't have.

"What's wrong?" she asked, closing the bedroom door behind her.

"Nothing, I was just looking at the tattoo."

She smiled and ran her hand over the design, pausing over the moon. "That's strange."

"What?"

"The moon is a little different. It has more of a tribal look and its filled in with pale yellow."

"Oh? I guess I didn't pay attention to it."

"You haven't felt it tingling lately?"

He wondered how much he should admit. "Actually, it tingled a bit right before you took a shower."

"Ah. When you wanted to have your wicked way with me," she said with a grin.

"Yeah," he answered with a grin of his own.

"Well, that explains it. They seem to shift when something major happens, when we get closer, or..."

"Or?"

She blushed. "Mine changed a little today too."

"Changed how?" And why, he silently asked.

She lifted a shoulder. "The design has a more tribal look here and there."

"When did it happen?"

"At the mall, when you kissed me outside of the store."

"But why?"

Cady blushed and didn't answer. Her eyes travelled the room, looking anywhere but at the man in front of her.

"Cady, tell me. Why did it change outside of the store?"

"Because I realized I love you," she blurted out. "I mean, I really love you. Like, I want to be with you from now until eternity type of love."

Uh-oh. Eric figured this couldn't be good. "Cady...."

She shook her head. "I know I told you the other night that I loved you, but it really hit home today. When you kissed me outside of the store, I felt like every nerve in my body was on fire. Your kisses have always weakened my knees, but I've never felt

anything like that before. It was at that moment that I realized exactly how much I loved you."

"Cady..."

"No, please don't say anything. When you finally tell me you love me, I want you to do it because you really, truly love me. Not because you feel obligated to say something."

Eric shut up. His brother hadn't confessed his love to Cady? Was he a moron? Anyone who saw them together could tell that Brendan doted on the woman. Why wouldn't he tell her how he felt?

Eric slowly walked over to Cady. He reached out and caressed her cheek with his hand. Feeling a million emotions run through him, he lowered his head to hers and kissed her gently.

He pulled back and looked down into her eyes. "Any man would be lucky to say you were his. Any man would be lucky to have your love. But only an idiot wouldn't love you in return."

She gave him a hesitant grin. "Does that mean you're an idiot or that you love me?"

He gave a humorless chuckle. "Well, I'm definitely an idiot, but I do love you."

Cady wrapped her arms around him and hugged him tight, happier than she had ever been before.

Eric closed his eyes, locked in his own personal hell. He had the woman he loved in his arms, and she belonged to another, thought he was someone he was not. He couldn't imagine anything worse. A sour feeling hit his stomach as he did think of one thing that would make his situation worse – his deal with Marshall. By tomorrow night, Cady would despise him.



In the town of Ridgemont, Brendan was working hard. The house needed more work than the owner let on. He was starting to wonder if a few days would be enough to complete his task. He wanted desperately to call Cady, but was afraid he would wake her from much needed rest.

Pulling his sweat soaked shirt over his head, he headed to the bathroom to wet his face. The house didn't have working air

conditioning yet and the temperature was stifling. Splashing cool water over his sweat drenched face he looked in the mirror and paused. Turning slight to the side, he studied his tattoo. A frown marred his brow. Something seemed off. The design was different, but he couldn't figure out why.

Shrugging, he figured the heat was just messing with his head. It probably looked the same as it always did. Draping his shirt over the towel rack to dry, he headed back to the living room to finish his work for the day. The sooner he finished the project, the sooner he could go back home to Cady.



Dressed and ready for a night out, Cady and Eric headed to the restaurant. He'd chosen a nice steak place, wanting to pamper Cady. She'd been through so much and was about to put through more – by him. Eric wished more than anything that he could take back his promise to Marshall.

"Where are we going?" Cady asked, excitement showing on her face.

"It's a surprise."

Cady stopped in the driveway and stared at Eric's car. "Why do you have your brother's car?"

"He let me borrow it," he lied smoothly.

Cady looked at him carefully. Walking up to him, she placed her hands on his chest and stared into his eyes. Pulling his head down, she kissed him. The same fire she'd felt at the mall and in their bedroom sped through her, consuming her.

Cady broke the kiss and took a step back. Her eyes wide and she looked confused. She loved Brendan, but his kisses hadn't been as hot. Was she with Brendan? Or had her beloved werewolf truly gone to Ridgemont for work?

"What is it, Cady?" Eric asked her softly.

She shook her head, afraid to voice her fear.

Eric caressed her cheek. "Come on, let's go to dinner."

"Brendan, why did you borrow Eric's car?"

He paused. "I know you have your new car, but I wanted to drive tonight."

"And you couldn't have driven my car?"

"I wasn't sure if you would want me to."

She eyed him uncertainly. It didn't add up. He looked like Brendan, sounded like Brendan, but he didn't kiss like Brendan. Something wasn't right.

"Come on, honey. Let's go to dinner."

She allowed him to guide her over to the car. When he opened the door, she slid into the passenger seat. There had to be a way to determine whether or not she was with Brendan or Eric. She supposed she could just ask him, but there was no guarantee he would tell the truth.

The drive to the restaurant was silent. By the time Eric had parked the car, Cady had decided she would let the matter lie. If the man sitting beside her really wasn't Brendan, the truth would come out before long.

The only thing she had to figure out was how to react if he was indeed Eric and not Brendan. Why did her life have to be so complicated? She'd had such a boring, ordinary, mundane life before running into the Vicus Luna. There were times she missed her old life, but if she were completely honest with herself, she'd admit that she preferred a chaotic life with Brendan than a life without him.



"So, what do you want to do tomorrow?" Eric asked as he sipped a glass of wine.

"I don't know. We've been to the lake. We went to the mall. There isn't much else to do around here," Cady answered.

"That's not entirely true."

Cady chewed her food and waited for him to continue.

"There's a place not far from here, one that most people don't know about."

"What kind of place?" she asked.

"It's an old antebellum home out in the woods. Marshall scared the owners off a few years ago. They moved out one day, leaving their furniture and most of their belongings behind."

Cady frowned. "That's actually pretty sad, Brendan. Why would you want to take me there?"

He shrugged. "I don't know. I thought it might be peaceful and give us some time together away from the pack. No one's been out there in a while. There's a large pond out there with a small rowboat. I thought we could take a picnic lunch with us."

"A picnic sounds nice," she said with a smile.

"Guess you better finish your dinner then so I can get you back home. You'll need your rest."

Chapter Twenty-Five

Eric lay awake most of the night. Cady was pressed against his side, her head resting on his shoulder. He knew he should savor the moment while he could. He had less than twenty-four hours before everything turned inside out. After their picnic, he'd bring Cady back and convince her to go see her brother. While she was gone, he'd have to convince one of the other women to come to bed with him, timing it just right for Cady to find them together. Just thinking of the heartache he was going to cause her made it hard for him to breathe.

Cady whimpered in her sleep. Eric caressed her cheek and smoothed the frown lines creasing her brow. Pulling her closer, he turned to his side and pulled her into his arms. At least he had tonight. It would have to be enough. He'd been given a special gift in an odd way. He'd have his memories of Cady to last him a lifetime. She'd shown him that he really was capable of loving someone again. Maybe there would come a time when he would be able to fall in love again – after he had Cady out of his system. It was clear to him that she belonged with his brother; he'd never really doubted it. But, regardless of whether or not it was intentional or unintentional, she had given him a precious gift.

Breathing in her scent, Eric closed his eyes. Before long, his breathing evened out and he fell into a deep, dreamless sleep.



Sunlight streaming into the room woke Cady. She slowly opened her eyes. Brendan was still asleep, his arms wrapped firmly around her. With a smile, she snuggled into him. No matter how long she lived, she'd never tire of waking up like this.

Placing a kiss against his chest, Cady gently untangled herself from his embrace. Sliding out of the bed, she grabbed some clothes and headed to the bathroom. Her body felt stiff and she knew a hot shower would ease her aches and pains.

While the water heated, Cady made sure the bathroom door was locked. The last thing she needed was a surprise visit. Once she was satisfied that no one would be able to enter the bathroom while she was bathing, she stripped out of her clothes and stepped into the shower.

The water cascaded down her body in hot rivulets. Cady sighed in relief. She could feel her muscles loosening, could feel some of her stress melt away. Her aches from her tumble down the stairs weren't quite as bad under the hot spray.



Marshall quietly opened his bedroom door and crept through the hall. He knew Cady was in the shower and needed to speak to Eric while he could.

The bedroom already stood open and he quietly walked into the room.

"We need to talk," he said, startling Eric who had been lying in bed with his eyes closed. As Marshall's eyes raked over him, he realized something. There was an alpha tattoo on Eric's shoulder.

"That's pretty ingenious," Marshall said, indicating the tattoo. "Quick thinking to draw something on your arm to keep Cady unaware of who you are."

Eric decided to ignore the comment about the tattoo. "What are you doing in here? If Cady comes out..."

"She won't. Listen, I know we were supposed to end this charade tonight, but Brendan will be home day after tomorrow. If I'm going to have enough time to get Cady to trust me again, I need to speed things along."

Eric's gut clenched. "What do you mean?"

"Ingrid is waiting downstairs. I told her you, or rather Brendan, was interested in her."

"But..."

Marshall raised a hand to silence him. "It's better to get this over with. Unless there's a reason we shouldn't?" he asked with a raised eyebrow. "You haven't gone and fallen for the delectable little Cady, have you?"

"Of course not," Eric lied.

"I'm not entirely sure I believe you, but that doesn't matter. Once she finds the lovely Ingrid in your arms, she'll hate you regardless of how you feel about her."

Eric felt nausea well up inside of him. It had been bad enough pretending to be his brother, but now... having fallen in love with Cady, it tore him apart to know how much he was about to hurt her.

"What do you want me to do?" he asked Marshall in a resigned voice.

"Since you're already mostly naked," Marshall paused, "you are *mostly* naked right, and not entirely naked?"

Eric sighed and showed Marshall that he had a pair of boxers.

"Good. I had to make sure you had kept your part of the bargain and hadn't slept with Cady."

Eric shook his head. "Whether I had wanted to or not wouldn't have mattered. Thanks to your stunt, the operation she had made sure she couldn't have sex."

"What are you talking about?"

"Cady had an operation at the hospital when she lost the baby. The doctor told her she couldn't have sex for at least a week."

Marshall pursed his lips. That certainly hadn't been part of his plans. It definitely put a wrench in things, but he supposed it couldn't be helped at this late date.

"Well, use that as an excuse then," he told Eric.

"As an excuse?"

"When she finds Ingrid in bed with you, just explain that you have needs that need to be met while she's incapacitated in that way."

Eric shook his head. "Brendan would never do that. In case you've missed it, he loves her."

Marshall shrugged. "Doesn't matter. I'm sending Ingrid up here. Make it look believable."

As Marshall exited the room, Eric hung his head. He had never been so miserable in his life. As if falling in love with a woman you couldn't have wasn't bad enough, now he had to hurt that woman. Cady was never going to forgive him for this. And Brendan wouldn't either.

He looked up when he saw a tanned blonde woman walk into the room. He had to admit that Ingrid was pretty, but she wasn't Cady.

"Brendan, I'm so glad you sent Marshall for me," she said with a genuine smile.

"You are?"

She nodded. "I've waited a long time for you to notice me."

Eric's gut clenched even more. Great, now he was not only going to hurt Cady, but he was going to hurt Ingrid too. Granted, he didn't know Ingrid like he did Cady, but it still wasn't right.

"Come here," he told her softly. Better to get the dirty deed out of the way.

Ingrid padded over to the bed and sat down facing Eric. She gave him a smile and scooted closer, sliding her arms around his neck. Leaning in to him, she kissed him softly on the mouth.

Eric had to force himself to kiss her back. He felt hollow, almost like a puppet on a string as he kissed Ingrid. He gently placed his hands on her waist, trying to make it look real. A gasp from the doorway told him it had worked.



"What are you doing?" Cady asked with a tremor in her voice. She couldn't believe her eyes. She'd stepped out of the bathroom and had turned to find Brendan kissing a blonde woman – *in their bed!*

Eric broke the kiss and looked over at Cady. The despair and pain written across her face broke his heart. "Cady, I..."

She shook her head and backed away. "How could you? How could you?" she screamed as she steadily backed away from the horrific sight in front of her.

"Cady, wait I..."

"No! Don't lie to me, Brendan! I saw you with my own eyes."

Eric bounded out of the bed and chased after Cady. She was nearing the top of the stairs and his heart nearly stopped. If she didn't stop backing away from him, she was going to fall.

"Cady, please, just stop and let me explain."

"Explain? Explain what? That everything has been a lie? That you used me all along?" she asked, biting back a sob. A door opened to her right and she knew it was Marshall, but she didn't care, didn't care about anything at the moment. She stepped back and her foot met air. Eyes going wide, she started to fall backwards.

She opened her mouth to scream, but a pair of strong arms caught her. Secured against Marshall's body, her heart thundered in her chest; not only from the fear of her near fall, but from the pain and rejection she felt. How could he have done that to her?

"What's going on?" Marshall asked. "Cady, are you okay? What's all of the screaming about?"

"She found me with Ingrid," Eric said quietly. He watched the silent tears stream down Cady's face. He had done as Marshall had asked of him. He no longer had to worry about the alpha trying to kill him, but it no longer mattered. The look on Cady's face shattered his heart and his soul. The amount of pain he had caused her wasn't worth it, his *life* wasn't worth it.

Marshall gently ran his hands up and down Cady's arms, as if trying to comfort her. "I see."

"Do you? Do you really?" Eric asked staring him in the eye. He wanted Marshall to see the destruction he had rained down upon them all.

From the bedroom door, Ingrid watched them. She wasn't sure what was going on. Surely Brendan had known they would be caught if Cady was still in the house. "Brendan, come back to bed."

Eric glanced at her over his shoulder, but all he could feel was disgust. Disgust for himself and disgust for the lack of emotion

Ingrid was showing. But most of all, he was disgusted with Marshall, the ring leader of this three ring circus.

He watched Cady turn and bury her face against Marshall and heard the sobs she was trying to control. His jaw clenched. He wanted nothing more than to walk over to her and confess everything. She would hate him, but at least she wouldn't be so broken. If it lessened her pain, he would do it, he would do anything for her.

"Cady, I..."

"I think you've said enough," Marshall said, cutting him off. Turning, he walked into his room with Cady and closed the door, effectively cutting off whatever Eric might have said. Regardless of what the werewolf had told him, he could see how much the man cared for Cady. Love was written all over his face. Marshall couldn't take a chance on Eric confessing the truth. It would ruin everything!

Chapter Twenty-Six

Inside Marshall's room, Cady sat on the edge of the bed. Her hands were shaking and she felt as if she'd been ripped in two. How could he have done that? Hadn't he just told her last night that he loved her? He may not have said the words exactly, but in a round-about way he had confessed that he loved her. Why would he do something so horrible this morning? Did he regret his words? Did he change his mind?

Marshall knelt at Cady's feet and looked at her with concern. "Are you okay?"

She shook her head, unable to speak.

"Cady, what happened?"

She opened her mouth only to close it again. If she spoke, she'd start crying again. The last thing she wanted was to start crying again. She'd embarrassed herself enough already.

Marshall sighed and took her hands in his. "Look, I don't know what's going on, and I know I'm not your favorite person, but let me get you out of here for a while. Let's go somewhere and relax, okay?"

She looked at him uncertainly. "Why?"

"Because I think you need to get out of the house for a little while. Why don't you grab your bathing suit and we'll go to the lake? Maybe the peaceful surroundings will help."

She shook her head as her tears started to fall again. The lake reminded her of Brendan. "I can't."

"Why?"

"He took me there not too long ago."

Marshall looked at her thoughtfully. He gently reached out and wiped the tears from her cheeks. "There isn't a place in this town or this house where you won't run into his memory. Isn't it better to face them head on?"

She looked at him in surprise. "Why are you being so nice to me?"

"Because I'm sorry. I'm sorry for what happened between us and I'm sorry that you've been hurt again."

Cady shook her head, not ready to believe him, but hurting too much to really care one way or the other.

"Cady, let me take you to the lake today. Let me do this one small thing for you."

"My bathing suit is in my... in Brendan's room."

Marshall tucked her hair behind her ear. "Would you like me to get it for you?"

She nodded. At least she knew where she stood with Marshall. She knew he was an asshole and expected him to act as such; although, at the moment, he was being rather nice to her, just like he'd been at the cabin. Which one was the real Marshall? Brendan had insisted the mean, uncaring man she'd seen after coming to the townhouse was the real Marshall. But at the moment she wasn't so sure. She didn't know what to believe any longer. She was hurt and confused. All she wanted was for the pain to go away.

Marshall returned a moment later, her bikini in his hands along with a towel. "If you'd like, we can stop along the way for some lunch and have a picnic while we're there."

"That would be nice," she said softly. "But I don't feel like eating right now."

He shrugged. "You might later. Besides, you'll need to eat something today."

She nodded and allowed him to pull her to her feet. "I need to get some shoes."

Marshall glanced down at her bare feet. He held his hand out to her. "Come on. I'll go with you to get them."

Placing her hand in his, she allowed him to guide her out of the bedroom and into the hall. When they stopped in front of

Brendan's room, her heart began pounding painfully in her chest again.

Marshall turned the knob and opened the bedroom door. Ingrid and Eric were still in the bed. It looked like she was doing her level best to seduce Eric, who looked positively miserable.

"Hope we aren't interrupting again," Marshall said as he strolled into the room.

Eric looked up and saw Cady standing in the doorway. "Cady, please, I want to explain."

She shook her head and hurried over to the closet. Reaching inside, she grabbed a pair of sandals and hurried out of the room.

Marshall grinned at him, the smile not quite reaching his cold eyes. "Don't worry about Cady. She's in good hands."

Without another word, Marshall turned and walked out of the room, closing the door behind him. He found Cady standing at the top of the stairs, her sandals still clutched in her hands.

"Here, let me help you," he said, gently taking the sandals from her. Kneeling, he slipped the shoes on her feet.

"We'll take the truck. I keep a suit in there just in case I end up near water," he told her, walking slowly down the stairs.

"I'd rather not," she said softly. "Could we take my car?"

Marshall paused. "Do you have your keys?"

She made a strangled sound and he turned to look at her. Her luminous eyes were glassy with unshed tears and her hands were clenched at her sides. She shook her head, unable to answer any other way.

Stepping up closer to her, Marshall pulled her into a hug. "Just tell me where they are and I'll get them."

"Dresser," she whispered.

Marshall looked into her eyes and caressed her cheek. "Wait right here."

She nodded as he stepped past her and up the stairs. She heard the bedroom door open. A moment later, a slight jingle told her that Marshall had found her keys. She slowly walked down the stairs, unable to be in the house a moment longer. Opening the front door, she stepped out onto the porch and waited for Marshall.

Footsteps on the stairs told Cady that Marshall was about to join her. She stared blankly at the neighborhood around her. The pain was starting to recede ever so slightly, leaving a hollowness in its wake.

"Are you ready?" Marshall asked as he stepped up behind her.

She nodded. "Would you mind driving? I don't think I'm up for it right now."

"Of course," he said, closing the front door behind them. "Come on. The sooner we get out of here, the sooner you'll feel better."

Cady allowed Marshall to lead her over to the car. He was a perfect gentleman, opening the car door for her and helping her inside. As she buckled her seatbelt, she watched him walk around the car and slide into the driver's seat. The car felt smaller with him inside of it for some reason. He and Brendan were close to the same size, yet she felt claustrophobic.

Marshall sensed her distress and turned to her. "Cady, look at me."

She glanced his way.

Reaching out, Marshall cupped her face with his hand. His thumb smoothed over her cheek in a caress. "You're going to be okay."

"How can you be so sure?"

"Because you're strong and you're a fighter. You haven't let anything get you down so far, so why start now?"

When she didn't respond and just stared at him, Marshall leaned in slowly. He watched her face to see if she was going to pull away, but she just watched him steadily. His lips brushed hers gently, a kiss meant to comfort more than anything else.

With a soft cry, Cady leaned closer, opening her mouth slightly, and kissed him back.

Marshall felt something inside of him crack. He still had a mission. He had to stay focused, and yet... and yet, he found himself kissing Cady not as a way to seduce her, but as a way to comfort her. He found that he truly did want her to feel better. He had been a cold, calculating son-of-a-bitch over the past several weeks, but there was something about Cady that was different. She made him feel... and that wasn't something he was used to.

Pulling back, Marshall gazed into her eyes. "Everything will work out."

Caressing her cheek one last time, he put the car into gear and backed out of the driveway. He had the whole day to console her, talk to her, and gain her trust again. Not only did his mission require it, but he found he wanted it as well. Life with Cady by his side had been better than life without her. He wasn't sure how she would react when he told her that he had no intention of remaining faithful to her, but he would cross that bridge when he got to it.



They arrived at the lake just before noon. The beach wasn't quite deserted, but only two other couples occupied the sandy area by the lake. Marshall had packed a blanket and was spreading it out over the sand while Cady changed into her swimsuit.

As Cady approached, his breath caught in his throat. The two piece swimsuit made her look mouthwatering. He watched the sway of her hips as she walked toward him.

"Do you need any help?" she asked, sinking to her knees on the blanket.

"You can lay the food out if you'd like. I'm going to go change."

"Okay," she said with a smile, the first genuine smile she'd made since finding Brendan and Ingrid together.

Marshall grabbed his swim trunks and walked over to the changing room. Cady watched him walk off, wondering if he was lying to her yet again or if he was really and truly worried about her.

Shaking her head, she decided it was a mystery that was best solved on a full stomach. Getting out the napkins, she pulled their sandwiches and chips out the bag. Marshall had stopped at a gas station and gotten them some drinks, which he already had out on the blanket. Their picnic, such as it was, was ready.

Cady unwrapped her sandwich and took a bite, her stomach growling loudly. She was about to take another bite when a shadow fell across the blanket. Squinting against the sun, she saw a tall blonde man standing over her.

"I saw you sitting over here and thought I'd come say hi," he said with a smile, openly checking her out.

"Um, hi," Cady responded.

"So, do you come here often?" the guy asked.

Cady opened her mouth to respond, but was cut off by a growl.

"Whether she does or not is no concern of yours," Marshall growled at the guy.

"Hey man, I didn't realize she was with someone. No harm, no foul," the guy said, backing away.

"I can't leave you alone for even two minutes," Marshall said, sitting down across from her.

Cady blanched, not sure if he was mad at her or not.

Marshall watched the color seep from her face and cursed under his breath. "I'm not mad at you, Cady. I just meant that everywhere you go men fall over themselves to be near you."

"I wish they wouldn't," she said softly.

Marshall studied her a moment. He watched her tear a potato chip into small pieces as she stared at the blanket. The wind gently blew her hair around her face, the strands caressing her cheeks.

"You're so beautiful," he murmured.

She smiled bitterly. "No one thought so until the Vicus Luna picked me up."

"They were blind. Must be our excellent eyesight."

"Marshall, why did Brendan do it? Why did he throw away what we had?"

Marshall sighed. "I don't know, Cady."

"Why did you?" she asked.

"I guess I at least owe you an explanation. I've put you through so much."

"You think? Being threatened with being the pack whore was a bit over the top. Dumping me out of your room without clothes wasn't that great either."

Marshall winced. "I thought you were rejecting me. I lost my temper and reacted badly. You'd hurt me and I was trying to lash out."

"I tried to tell you why I didn't want to do anything that night."

He nodded. "I know. If I had only let you explain, then things would have been different. I can't ever apologize enough for the things I've done to you."

"And the things you did after you kicked me out?"

"I was jealous. I was hurting from your rejection, but at the same time I didn't want anyone else to claim you."

She had an incredulous expression on her face. "They couldn't claim me, but you wanted to make me the pack whore so anyone of them could... could..."

"I didn't say it made any sense," he bit out tersely.

"Let's just forget about it. Talking about it won't change anything."

"When you told me you were pregnant, and I thought it was mine, that was the happiest moment of my life. I just thought you should know that," he said before taking a bite of his sandwich.

Cady eyed him thoughtfully.

"What?" he asked, noting her look.

She shook her head.

He reached over and took her hand. "It's not nothing. Now tell me what you were thinking."

"I was wondering how you could be so cruel and hateful one minute and be kind the next. I was trying to figure out how you and the guy who threw me down the stairs could be one and the same."

Marshall shrugged. "I never claimed to be a saint, Cady. I've done things and seen things you couldn't even begin to imagine, and I wouldn't want you to. I'm not Brendan and I never will be, but when I was with you, I wanted to be a better man. I didn't want to do anything that would scare you or repulse you. And without you... well, without you, I went back to being the man I was before."

"Before what?" she asked quietly.

"Before I met you."

She shook her head and looked out over the lake. "I'm in love with Brendan, Marshall. It's too late for us."

"Is it? Are you sure that it's too late? Sure that there isn't room left in your heart for me?"

"I... I can't do this right now, Marshall."

Sighing, he reached for her hand. "I'm sorry, Cady. I shouldn't have pushed so hard. You've been through enough today without me adding to it."

She gave him a wan smile. "It's okay, Marshall."

"I guess your relaxing time away from the house isn't working out so well."

She leaned over and kissed his cheek. "Thank you for bringing me here."

With a nod toward the lake, he asked, "Care to take a swim?"

"I'd like that."

Chapter Twenty-Seven

Later that night, Cady stood uncertainly in the upstairs hallway of the townhome. She stared at Brendan's bedroom door. It was closed and there was dead silence on the other side. Was he out? Or would she find him lying in the bed if she opened the door?

Taking a breath, she steeled her nerves. Walking toward the door, she turned the knob and pushed it open. The room lay in complete darkness. Fumbling for the light switch, she stepped into the room. When the light clicked on, she saw the bed was made and everything looked untouched, except for a square of white in the middle of the bed.

Cady walked to the bed and picked up the paper. Opening the note she read:

*Cady,
I'm sorry for the way things ended and I'm more
sorry than I can say for hurting you the way I did.
I hope that you'll be able to forgive me one day. I
won't be back tonight. I'm not sure I'll be back at
all.
I'll always love you.*

It was unsigned, but Cady knew that Brendan had left it. A tear slipped down her cheek and splashed onto the paper. She swiped the moisture from her cheeks and sniffled. She wouldn't cry! He had done this all by himself. If he was suffering, good. She hoped he hurt at least half as much as he had hurt her.

Tossing the note back onto the bed, she turned to the closet and pulled out her pajamas. After being at the lake, she was going to need another shower.

Cady turned out the light and stepped into the hall, running into Marshall.

"Easy," he said, reaching out to steady her.

"Sorry. I was just going to take a shower."

He nodded. "I take it Brendan isn't in there?"

She shook her head. "No, he isn't."

"Look, Cady. If you don't feel comfortable staying by yourself tonight, you can always stay in my room."

She looked at him skeptically.

"I promise, no funny stuff! We'll just sleep," he assured her.

"Well... as long as you only have sleep in mind, then I'll accept."

He smiled. "I'll let you take a shower first."

Cady watched him walk back into his room. After he'd closed the door, she turned back to the bathroom. A noise stopped her.

"So you and Marshall are getting friendly again?" Robin asked.

"I don't know what you're talking about."

He grinned. "Sure you don't."

"In case you hadn't heard, I caught Brendan with another woman earlier. So what I do, or don't do, is no longer his concern or anyone else's."

Robin looked shocked. "Seriously? Brendan wouldn't do something like that."

"Yeah, well, he did."

Robin frowned. "That doesn't sound right." He glanced at his older brother's door. "I know my brother well enough to know that he always gets what he wants. If he wants you, he would find a way to make that happen."

"What are you trying to say?"

"I'm saying that you shouldn't believe everything you see."

Something at the back of Cady's mind tried to emerge. Hadn't someone else told her that not long ago? She tried to remember, but couldn't seem to focus.

"I need to get cleaned up."

Robin nodded. "Just remember what I said. Marshall doesn't stop until he has what he wants – and he wants you Cady. He wants you bad."

They heard a door open and turned to find Marshall watching them.

"I thought you were going to take a shower," he said calmly.

"I was."

"Looks to me like you were talking to my brother."

"Maybe she just prefers my charm to yours," Robin said.

Marshall stalked over to them. Glaring down at his brother, he growled. "Maybe you need to leave her alone."

Cady placed her hand on Marshall's arm. "Marshall, it's okay."

He transferred his menacing gaze to her troubled one. "Is it? Would you prefer to stay with Robin tonight? Is that what's going on?"

Cady wasn't sure what had happened, but she knew she had to fix it fast. "We were just talking, Marshall. He hadn't heard about earlier – with Brendan."

Marshall backed her against the bathroom door. "And what precisely is there to talk about?"

"Robin was surprised to see the two of us together, that's all. I told him about earlier, about catching Brendan with another woman," Cady said, staring him in the eye. She wasn't going to back down. She wasn't going to give an inch. He wasn't about to accuse her of something she didn't do.

"I don't buy that for a minute, Cady. You're going to have to learn to lie better."

Cady felt her face flush as her anger took over; poking him in the chest she decided to let him have it. "That's enough! I've had enough abuse, verbal and otherwise, from you to last me a lifetime! I told you what we were discussing. If you don't want to believe me, fine! Don't! But I'm tired of you trying to muscle everyone into obedience. I'm not a lap dog, Marshall, I'm a human being."

Surprise flashed in his eyes before a grin tugged at his lips. "Is that so."

Cady growled at him. "You're impossible!"

"I think I like it when you get angry," he said in a husky voice.

Cady glowered up at him, refusing to let go of her anger just yet. "Don't think I'm letting you off easy."

Next to them, Robin nearly choked. He couldn't believe that Cady had just said that. What was more unbelievable was the humorous expression on his brother's face. If he didn't know better, he would have sworn that hell had just frozen over. There was apparently one person on the earth who could talk back to Marshall and live to tell the tale.

Marshall turned to glare at his brother. "You're free to go."

Robin just nodded and ducked back into his room, closing the door firmly behind him.

Cady sighed. "Why must you terrorize everyone?"

He grinned at her. "Maybe I enjoy terrorizing everyone."

"I don't doubt that for a minute."

He leaned forward pressing his forehead to hers. "Take your shower and get ready for bed."

She nodded and reached behind her, opening the bathroom door, she took a step back onto the cool tiled floor. "I won't be long."

Marshall grinned and watched her shut the door. Shaking his head he returned to his room. Nothing was ever dull with Cady around.



Cady was reclining in Marshall's bed watching TV when the door opened. She pulled her eyes away from the show she was watching to see Marshall step into the room wearing nothing but a pair of boxers. Did none of the werewolves own pajamas?

"Better?" she asked.

He grinned. "Much. I take it you found something interesting on TV?"

She blushed and mumbled the name of the show.

"What's that? I didn't hear you."

She sighed in exasperation. "I said I'm watching *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*."

"Well, as long as it's not about slaying werewolves, we're good."

She grinned. "No, but there's a witch who's dating a werewolf. Does that count?"

Marshall climbed onto the bed and settled against the pillows, propping his arms behind his head. "Yeah, that will do."

"There wasn't much else on. I used to watch this show all the time, but ..."

"But?"

"Jamie has done a good job of taking care of me, but his job doesn't pay much. When our parents died, we had to give up a few things. Cable was one of them."

"That had to have been hard. Not only losing your parents, but having the comforts you were used to taken away at the same time."

"I knew it wasn't something Jamie could help," she answered.

"Wasn't there insurance money?"

"Enough to get the bills caught up and make sure we didn't lose the house, but that's it. There wasn't enough for anything extra."

"Well, you never have to worry about losing cable around here."

"Why's that?"

He grinned. "Because the cable guy is afraid one of us will eat him if he shuts it off."

"Marshall! That's horrible."

He shrugged. "It's life. At least, it's life for a Vicus Luna. Half the town is terrified of us and the rest hate us."

"Well, your people skills *could* use a little work."

He looked to see if she was serious and caught her grinning at him. "And just what's wrong with my people skills?"

"They're a little lacking. You tend to bite first and ask questions later."

"Yeah well, around here if you wait to ask questions, you tend to be the one getting bit. I don't have time to play politician."

Cady chewed on her lower lip. "Why are things set up the way they are around here? I don't know much about the way the Vicus Luna live, but Brendan did tell me a little bit."

"Like what?"

She lowered her eyes to the bed. "I saw a house I really liked. When I made a comment about it to Brendan, he told me that we

could never have a house of our own, that the werewolves had to live together.”

“And that bothered you?” Marshall asked.

“I guess. I mean, I always thought that when I feel in love I’d get married, have kids, and buy a house. But if I stay with the Vicus Luna, I won’t get to do those things.”

“You’ll get to have kids,” Marshall said vaguely.

“Brendan said that if I wasn’t mated to the alpha that I would have to...” she trailed off, unable to even finish the thought much less the sentence. Being with someone when you were in love with someone else was horrible no matter which way you looked at it.

“Have to sleep with other guys in the pack,” Marshall finished for her.

“Yeah. And that our kids would be raised by the pack as a whole, we wouldn’t be able to have our own place.”

Marshall dropped his arms down to the bed and sat up. “I take it those things are important to you.”

She shrugged. “I’ve always liked my privacy.”

“So what exactly is your question?”

“Is all of that true? Was he right when he told me I would have to sleep with other pack members and couldn’t have my own home?” she asked quietly, almost afraid of the answer.

Marshall took a minute to answer. “That’s the way the pack has operated for over twenty years.”

“Is it a written rule that can’t be changed? Or, as the alpha, can you change the way things are done around here?”

Marshall growled at the underlying challenge in her words. “Just what’s wrong with the way things are now?”

Cady reached out and gently laid her hand on his arm. “I don’t have any choices, any freedoms. I’m no better than a slave or an animal.”

Marshall looked at her small hand on his arm. “There’s only one way for you to get the things you want.”

“To be mated to the alpha?” she asked softly.

His eyes flicked up to meet hers. “Yeah.”

"But what if the alpha can't give me everything I want? What if he can't promise me love and devotion? What if he just plans on using me?" she asked.

"Is that what you think I would do? Use you?"

"Isn't that what you were doing before? Can you honestly say that you were going to be faithful to me? That you wouldn't have taken another woman to your bed?"

He shook his head and looked away. That's exactly what he'd planned to do, and if he won her back, that's still what he would do. He just wasn't the type of man to be happy with just one woman, but he couldn't very well tell her that.

"I don't know what I would do, Cady."

"That alone tells me the answer. If Brendan who professed to love me couldn't remain faithful, why would you? As long as I'm here, I'm going to be passed around or have to share my mate with someone else. I can't live like that, it would break me, tear me in two."

"It's not something we have to worry about right now. After all, Brendan could walk through the door at any moment and beg you to take him back."

"Why would I take him back if I didn't take you back?" she asked.

Marshall tensed. "I already said I was sorry for that, Cady. I should have let you explain, but I didn't and I've ruined whatever we had. I accept that, but must you continually throw it in my face?"

She had the grace to blush. "I'm sorry, I don't mean to."

"Maybe we should just get some sleep."

Cady nodded and slipped her legs under the covers, sliding down until her head hit the pillow. "Goodnight Marshall."

"Goodnight Cady," he rumbled as he flicked off the TV and the light.

The room was dark except for moonlight filtering through the blinds, casting shadows on the walls and ceiling. Cady could hear Marshall's deep breathing, but the rest of the house was silent. Turning onto her side, she closed her eyes and forced herself to go to sleep.

Marshall waited until Cady's breathing evened out. Once he was sure she was asleep, he rolled onto his side and pulled her into his arms, her back flush against him and her head tucked under his chin. It wasn't often he let women spend the night in his bed, but having Cady in his arms made him feel at peace. Closing his eyes, he drifted to sleep.

Chapter Twenty-Eight

Brendan had finished his work early. He'd slept a few hours and then headed back home. He was anxious to see Cady. He'd tried to call her the day before, but she hadn't answered her phone. If anything had happened to her, he would never forgive himself. She'd been so nervous about being left alone; maybe he should have listened to her.

Parking in the driveway, he eyed the small new car with curiosity. He hadn't heard of any visitors and wondered if one of the pack had bought it. Shouldering his bag, he quickly jogged up the steps and opened the front door. Taking the steps two at a time, he paused when he saw his bedroom door partially open.

He crept through the hall and peered around the door. The bed was empty except for a piece of paper. His heart leapt into his throat. Had Cady left?

Dropping his bag, he quickly walked over to the bed. Picking up the note he scanned the lines at least three times. What did it mean? Who was it from?

Brendan listened for other sounds in the house, but all was quiet. Walking back out into the hall, he stared at Marshall's door. Had the alpha done something to Cady? Had he tricked her into leaving, or maybe harmed her in some way?

He walked over to the door and slowly turned the knob. Pushing the door open, his breath froze in his lungs. He couldn't believe his eyes. Cady was in Marshall's bed with his arms around her, sleeping as if she hadn't a care in the world.

"What in the *hell* is going on?" Brendan roared, startling them awake.

"Brendan?" Cady asked in a soft sleepy voice.

"What is the meaning of this note?" he asked, showing her the paper he had crumpled in his hand. "Just who have you been with that thinks they have the right to say they love you?"

"I... I've been with you," she said, looking at him like he'd lost his mind.

He shook his head. "Try again, sweetheart. I've been in Ridgemont for the past few days. So who have you been with?"

Cady gasped. "You mean, you really did go to Ridgemont? You... you left me here?"

Some of the anger left Brendan's face. "Of course I was in Ridgemont. How could you possibly think otherwise?"

"But... you were here, with me. You came back that morning and we went to the mall."

He shook his head. "It wasn't me, but I'm starting to get an idea of who *was* here with you."

"Eric," she whispered. "But that's impossible!"

Brendan raised an eyebrow at her. "How is it impossible? He tried to trick you the other day, why wouldn't he try again?"

She shook her head, "You don't understand. It couldn't have been Eric."

Brendan took a step further into the room. Marshall was eyeing him over Cady, his eyes cold and flat. He was like a snake waiting for his prey to come within striking distance.

"Why couldn't it have been Eric?"

"Because of the tattoo."

Brendan froze. "What tattoo?"

"The one on your shoulder. It was the same tattoo you have on your shoulder, except the moon looked a little different and was a pale yellow," Cady rambled.

Brendan crossed to the bed and grabbed Cady. Pulling her up out of the bed, he shook her. "What did you do?"

Cady gasped, "What... What do you mean?"

"He couldn't have gotten the tattoo if you didn't do something."

Cady tried to pry herself out of Brendan's hands. "Let me go!"

"Not until you answer me," he shouted at her.

Cady's eyes went wide. Brendan had never raised his voice with her before.

"In case you've forgotten, the doctor said I can't do anything for a few more days," she answered quietly.

"Like there aren't ways around that," he sneered at her.

Marshall, deciding enough was enough, got out bed and pried Brendan's fingers from Cady. "Let her go, Brendan."

Brendan growled at Marshall, baring his fangs.

Marshall gave him a cold look and pulled Cady into his arms. "I think you need to leave now. You've scared Cady and you aren't acting like yourself."

"This isn't over," Brendan declared before turning on his heel and walking out the door.

Marshall and Cady heard his boots clunking down the stairs and out the front door.

"Why was he acting like that?" she asked.

Marshall shook his head. "I don't know. Maybe he was just jealous."

"How should I have known it was Eric with me and not Brendan? They were both marked so should I have known?" she whispered.

"You couldn't have known, Cady. None of this is your fault," he soothed.

"But he hates me now. He thinks I should have known it wasn't him. And maybe he's right, maybe I should have known."

"Come on, stop torturing yourself over it. Why don't we go do something today? Anything you'd like."

Cady hesitated. "Anything?"

Marshall briefly wondered what he'd gotten himself into. "Yeah, I said anything."

"Could we go see the house I like? Even though Brendan said we couldn't buy it, he was still going to let me see the inside of it."

Marshall smiled. "I think I can handle that. Why don't you get ready and I'll go call a realtor. Do you remember where the house is?"

"It was on Pecan near Elm. Brendan said it was a three bedroom one bath cottage. It had a picket fence around the front yard," she said over her shoulder, already walking to Brendan's room for some clothes.

Marshall grabbed his cell phone and called a realtor who owed him a favor, a big favor.



Cady and Marshall had showered and dressed in record time and were now on his bike heading toward her dream home. If she wouldn't have had to hold on for dear life, Cady would have been fidgeting. She was beyond excited over seeing the house inside and out, even if it wouldn't ever be hers.

They flew down the streets of Windsor, the wind whipping through Cady's hair. The scenery went by in a blur as they broke every speed limit in town.

When Marshall slowed the bike, Cady lifted her head from his back and smiled. They were at her dream house!

Marshall pulled the bike into the driveway and killed the engine.

"So this is your dream house," he murmured, taking in the white picket fence, the immaculate paint, and small yard. It was the ideal setting for a family. Maybe it really was time for a change.

A car pulled in behind Marshall's motorcycle and a man in a suit stepped out.

"Marshall, I see you beat me."

He grinned at the realtor. "Yeah, well, I didn't exactly have to watch my speed or anything."

"True enough," the man said with a grin of his own. "And this must be the lovely Cady. I'm Bryce Holloway with Windsor Realty."

Cady smiled at him. "It's nice to meet you."

Bryce gestured for them to follow him as he walked to the front door of the house. He quickly walked up to the door and pushed a code into the lockbox on the door. Once he had the key in hand, he unlocked the door.

"Are you ready to see your house?" Bryce asked with a smile.

Cady smiled, "I'd love to see it."

Marshall hid a smile. Cady was so excited she was practically vibrating. He followed them into the house, watching Cady's face as she exclaimed over the rooms.

The living opened into the dining room with a beautiful archway. There were built-in bookcases and a built-in entertainment center on one wall of the living room. One window overlooked the front lawn and the other looked out over the driveway. Along one wall was a door that led into a small hallway.

As the group stepped into the hall, Cady peered through one open door after another. It was obvious she was completely in love with the house.

"Would you like to see the backyard?" Bryce asked.

"Can we?" she asked enthusiastically.

"Of course, it's right through here," he said, motioning toward a door at the end of the hall.

He opened the door and ushered them into the backyard. They stepped out onto a small stone patio. The lawn was neatly trimmed. A six-foot privacy fence surrounded the backyard and there was a small white storage shed in the corner.

"The previous owners didn't care much of landscaping, did they?" Cady commented.

Bryce chuckled. "I think the husband had a hard enough time cutting the grass. Actually, the house was lowered this week because it seems the couple is going to get a divorce and wanted a quick sale."

"Wanted? You mean it's already sold?" Cady asked, disappointed even though she knew she couldn't buy it.

Bryce glanced at Marshall. "Um, yeah, it sold just this morning actually. The new owner just has to sign the papers, but it's been paid for already."

"Well, I hope they love it half as much as I do," she murmured.

Bryce hid a grin, having figured out that he was supposed to keep quiet. "I tell you what, I'm going to leave this key with you and the two of you can roam around here as long as you'd like."

"Really? The new owner won't mind?"

Bryce shook his head. "No, I'm sure the new owner won't mind in the least."

Cady smiled and wandered around the backyard.

"So, what do you see when you look at this place?" Marshall asked, walking to her side.

"Really? You really want to know?"

"Of course, I wouldn't have asked otherwise."

"Well, I'd put a swing set over in that corner," she said motioning to the corner opposite the shed. "And I'd plant roses along the side of the storage shed, maybe some gladiolas along the back fence."

"A swing set?" he asked quietly.

"The doctor said I can still have children, so yes, a swing set. Maybe one of those nice wooden ones with a club house, slide, and swings."

Marshall fought a grin.

"Around the patio, I'd plant a variety of colorful flowers in reds, yellows, whites, and purples. I want to be able to smell fragrant flowers when I step out back in the mornings. I'd put a small table and chairs out here too, or maybe one of those outdoor wicker sofa sets."

"It sounds like it'd be a nice calming place to be."

"Exactly," she said with a smile.

"What about the inside?" Marshall asked.

"Well, I was thinking of painting the master bedroom in a soft sage green. It's a nice tranquil color. One of the other bedrooms would be a pale yellow."

"Yellow?"

"It's a good color for a nursery."

He grinned. "So it is."

"I'd strip the wallpaper in the kitchen and dining room. I'm not sure what colors I'd them though. I'd have to get some samples."

Marshall walked back into the house with Cady. When they reached the kitchen, he stopped and pulled her into his arms.

"What is it?" she asked, looking up at him.

"There's something I need to tell you."

She cocked her head and looked at him. "What?"

"I, um..." Marshall looked into her eyes and momentarily lost himself. "I'm the buyer. I bought the house this morning."

Her eyes widened in shock. "What?"

"I bought the house, Cady."

"But why? You'd never seen it before."

"Because you had seen it and fallen in love with it."

Cady looked at him with uncertainty. "Marshall, I..."

"Don't say anything right now. I just wanted you to know that the house was now part of the pack's property, part of my property."

Cady shook her head, "Marshall, I don't know what to say to all of this. I don't know what you're wanting."

He reached out and caressed her cheek. "You should have seen your eyes light up when you were describing the changes you would make, when you mentioned children. I know you're still young, Cady, but I think you'd make a wonderful mother."

"To how many of the pack's children?" she asked stiffly.

"I was hoping you'd agree to have those children with me," he answered.

She shook her head. "Brendan already told me the alpha can't live away from the pack. And if you're only here part of the time, I'll know for sure there's another woman, possibly several. I can't live like that, Marshall."

"Things were good between us at the cabin, Cady. It can be like that again."

"No, it can't."

"Cady..." he whispered right before he leaned down and kissed her.

Chapter Twenty-Nine

Across town, Brendan banged on Eric's hotel room door.

"Eric, I know you're in there. Open the damn door!"

There was a slight sound on the other side before the door opened and his twin was face-to-face with him.

"I take it you came back early," Eric said.

Brendan shoved his brother back and forced his way into the room. Slamming the door shut, he eyed his brother with contempt.

"I want to see it."

"See what?" Eric asked.

"The tattoo! I want to see the damn tattoo."

Eric sighed and lifted the sleeve of his t-shirt.

Brendan felt like he'd been punched in the gut. It was true. His brother also had the mark, which meant Cady had lied and something had happened between her and Eric.

"How could you? How could you do that, knowing that I cared about her?" Brendan asked.

"Cared about her? Cared! Why can't you say that you love her?" Eric shouted.

"What?"

"She mentioned something to me the other night; that she said she loved you and you hadn't reciprocated. I assured her that only an idiot wouldn't love her."

"What are you getting at?" Brendan asked.

"Are you an idiot, Brendan? Or do you love her?"

Brendan swallowed and took a step back. "How can I love someone who's obviously been intimate with my brother? Someone who is now involved with Marshall again."

"She turned to Marshall because there was no one else. She doesn't love him."

"Does she love you?" Brendan asked.

Eric blushed. "She thought I was you so how would I know?"

"Do you love her?"

Eric sighed. "Who wouldn't? She's wonderful, Brendan, she really is. The hardest thing I've ever done was making her think I'd cheated on her, or rather that *you* had cheated on her."

"Why did you do it?"

"Marshall threatened to kill me if I didn't. He wants her for himself." Eric paused. "I have to be honest. I don't think he realizes why he wants her. I mean, yeah, he's realized that whoever she has feelings for gets marked as alpha. But I think it's more than that, I think he may actually care for her."

"So... three men and one woman. Sounds like we have a problem."

Eric grinned and shook his head. "Not really. You're the one she loves."

"Not after today. We figured out it was you and not me that's been with her. Now she's mad that I left her for a job."

"That doesn't sound like Cady. I mean sure, she might be upset about it, but not enough to be with Marshall right now," Eric said.

Brendan grimaced. "I might have yelled a little."

Eric wasn't that surprised. Most people didn't realize that Brendan had a temper; he tended to keep it hidden. "I'm sure that went over well. No wonder she didn't launch herself into your arms."

Brendan glowered at Eric. "None of this would be happening if you had stayed away from her."

"Yeah, well, I prefer keeping my head attached to my neck! Marshall said he would kill me if I didn't help him, and you know he meant it. How many men has he killed already? What would one more be to someone like him?"

Brendan had to admit his brother was right on that score.

"Look, I tried to warn her. I stuck my neck out and talked to her brother. I told her not to believe everything she saw, but she didn't put it together," Eric said.

"Why did you try to warn her?"

"Because... the two of you seemed really happy together. I didn't want to wreck that."

Brendan sighed and went to sit in a chair by the window. "I don't know what to do. I'm not sure I can fix this, Eric."

"Why don't you try talking to her?"

"And say what?" Brendan asked.

Eric shrugged. "Just tell her the truth. Tell her how you feel."

"You mean I should tell her that I love her. I don't know that I'm ready to say that just yet, especially in light of everything that happened while I was gone."

Eric shook his head. "You're an idiot."

"And what would you do in my place?"

"Anything I had to," Eric replied softly.

Brendan was taken aback. "You really are in love with her, aren't you?"

Eric grinned ruefully, "Yeah, I am. Looks like I'm just not destined to love the right woman."

Brendan winced. "You can't blame yourself for what happened before."

"It doesn't matter. The end result is the same – I've fallen in love with a woman I can't have."

"I don't think telling her how I feel will be enough. If Marshall orchestrated this whole thing, then he'll just try again. I need to eliminate him from the picture all together."

Eric was surprised. "You think you can take him down by yourself?"

Brendan shrugged. "I got close two other times. This time I just have to follow through and not hold back. It was a mistake to not kill me the night he threw Cady down the stairs, but I was more worried about her than anything else that night."

"Then I'll go with you. I can act as a back-up if things look like their getting out of hand."

"No, if things start getting out of hand, I want you to promise that you'll get Cady out of there. I want to know that she's safe."

"What about her brother? Can't he take care of her?"

Brendan stared at his brother a moment. "Are you worried about me? Or are you worried about being alone with Cady?"

"Both. I haven't seen her since I left that note and I know she must hate me right now."

"So use it as time to explain what happened."

"When are we going to do this?" Eric asked.

"Tonight. I'm sure Marshall will go to the Sunset Club tonight. We'll confront him there. Or rather I will and you'll get Cady the hell out of there."

Eric looked at his brother's tattoo and then his own. "Maybe we can use the time between now and then to do a little research. I don't know about you, but I've been wondering why we have these marks. Don't get me wrong, I know Cady is special, but..."

"But why is she special enough to mark the alpha of the pack?" Brendan finished for him.

"Yeah. What do we know about her family?"

Brendan shrugged. "Not much. Her brother, as you know, is the bartender at the club. Her parents died several years ago, but that's all I really know about them."

"I don't even know her last name," Eric said.

"Whitmore."

Eric's eyes widened. "I know that name."

Brendan frowned. "From where?"

"I ran across a journal once. It had belonged to Marshall's dad. The name Elise Whitmore was in there. We have to find that journal!"

"But where would it be after all this time?" Brendan asked.

"Storage or at the cabin," Eric muttered, not thrilled with going to either location.

"Let's try the cabin first, less places to look," Brendan responded.

The brothers headed out to Eric's car and began their mission. It was time to find some answers.

Chapter Thirty

Cady hadn't expected Marshall to kiss her and she was taken by surprise. He might be an ass, but the man definitely knew how to kiss. Broken-hearted and confused, Cady leaned into him letting him kiss her, hoping she would forget the pain of losing Brendan.

When Marshall felt her respond to his kiss, he thought he had finally won; Cady was going to be his. Grabbing a handful of her hair, he deepened the kiss. His cock was throbbing against his jeans and he knew he had to stop. It was too soon for him to take her without hurting her, and he wanted her bad.

Breaking the kiss, Marshall looked down at Cady, taking in her kiss swollen lips and her half-lidded eyes. "No one affects me the way you do."

Cady blushed and ducked her head. She'd gotten a little more carried away than she had planned. "I bet you say that to all of the women," she replied flippantly.

He shook his head. "No, no I don't. There's never been anyone quite like you."

She looked up at him in surprise. It wasn't a confession of undying love by any means, but it almost sounded like he really did care for her. He had a strange way of showing it most times, but she wondered if he really did act out because of jealousy, because she was with Brendan instead of him. Could it really be that simple?

"So," Marshall said, trying to steer the conversation in a more comfortable direction, "what do you think of the house?"

"It's only mine if I'm with you, right?" she asked.

He grinned. "Well, that was kind of the idea."

She looked around the house longingly. She wanted the house more than anything, but she wasn't sure she was ready to tie herself to Marshall for it, not just yet. "I don't know, Marshall. Everything is happening so fast."

"So take some time to think about it," he answered. "Spend some time with me for a few days and think it over."

"And what becomes of me for those few days?" she asked, thinking of the horrible little room he had taken her to weeks before.

He reached out and cupped her cheek. "Was sharing a bed with me last night so horrible?"

"You know it wasn't. All we did was sleep."

"And that's all that will happen over the next few days. Come on Cady, give me a chance."

She wasn't sure it was such a good idea, but what choice did she have? She couldn't sleep in Brendan's room or anyone else's for that matter. And she couldn't very well sleep in the hall. That only left Marshall.

"Okay," she said softly.

Marshall smiled at her. "I promise you won't regret it. Now, what do you say we go over to the hardware store and you can look at paint samples, window treatments, and anything else you think this place needs."

She smiled back. "That sounds like fun."

Reaching for her hand, Marshall led her to the front door. After making sure the house was locked up tight, they walked to the bike hand in hand.



Later that night, Cady slipped on one of the new dresses Eric had bought her. She'd come to realize that afternoon that the clothes and car had been from Eric and not Brendan. She wondered if it had been his way of apologizing for what he was going to do.

Her hair hung in curls down her back and she had put on a little eyeliner with her make-up, making her eyes stand out even more.

After putting on a little perfume and her heeled sandals, she was ready to go.

She turned to find Marshall watching her from across the room.

"Do I look okay?" she asked nervously.

He stalked toward her, as if she were prey, stopping a mere inch from her. He ran his fingers through her hair and inhaled her scent. Leaning down to claim her lips in a kiss, he murmured, "You look delectable."

His lips brushed hers softly, the gentlest kiss they'd ever shared. When he pulled back, he grinned down at her, seeing the questions in her eyes. He figured it was best to leave her wondering what he was up to.

"Will you be able to ride on the bike in that?" he asked as his eyes raked over her short dress.

She nodded.

"Then let's go."

Taking her hand, Marshall led her down the stairs. It was the first time they had gone to the Sunset Club together. He knew there would be talk, but he didn't much care. Let the pack think what they wanted. With Cady by his side, he was assured his spot as alpha.

Stepping out of the front door and walking down the path to the driveway, he breathed in the night air and stopped. Tilting his head, he listened. Something seemed off, but he couldn't place what it was.

"What's wrong?" Cady asked, looking around to see if danger was heading their way.

He shook his head. "Probably nothing. Something just didn't seem right for a minute."

He gave her a reassuring smile and climbed onto the motorcycle. Once she was situated behind him, he turned it on and backed down the driveway.

Once they were on the street, he revved the engine and took off.

Cady held on tight, pressing herself against his back. Marshall always seemed to drive like the hounds of hell were after him. She had to admit it was rather thrilling to careen down the street and around corners at maximum speed.

Within minutes they were pulling into the parking lot of the club. There were already a dozen motorcycles in the lot. Cady climbed off the back and stood, a bit unsteady as her legs were still vibrating from the thrum of the machine.

Marshall wrapped an arm around her waist and they walked into the club together. The raucous laughter and talk died down a bit as everyone saw the two of them together.

Cady glanced toward the bar and noticed the livid expression on Jamie's face. As he started toward them, she shook her head, hoping he would back down. The last thing she wanted was a fight between Jamie and Marshall. She had no doubt that Marshall would win.

"I take it big brother isn't too happy that you're with me," Marshall murmured in her ear.

"He knows about what happened before. He's just worried about me."

Marshall caressed her cheek with his free hand and kissed her lightly on the lips. "He doesn't have anything to worry about."

A quick look toward the bar showed that Jamie was heading their way. She only hoped she could stop the blood-shed before it began.

"Marshall, I think I should talk to Jamie."

Marshall saw her brother fast approaching and grinned. "Let him come over."

She gave him a worried look.

"Relax, Cady, I'm not going to hurt your brother."

"Do you promise?" she asked.

"I promise, now stop worrying."

Jamie came to a stop in front of Marshall, fury etched across his face. "What are you doing with my sister?"

"I brought her here to have a good time," Marshall answered.

"But why is she with you?"

"Jamie, please stop," Cady interjected. "I'm fine."

"Where's Brendan?" Jamie asked her.

Cady looked at the floor, uncomfortable talking about Brendan. "I don't know where he is."

"What do you mean you don't know?" Jamie asked.

Marshall tightened his arm around her. "He said some things this morning, hurtful things, and then he stormed out of the house," he answered, saving Cady from having to talk about it further.

"But... that doesn't sound like Brendan," Jamie replied, stunned. The man had promised to take care of his sister and now he'd abandoned her? He thought things were going well for them. Brendan had seemed genuinely concerned about Cady when she'd been in the hospital.

"That still doesn't explain why she's with you," Jamie said.

"Is there someone else you'd prefer she be with?" Marshall asked quietly.

Jamie looked around the bar. He'd been serving drinks to the Vicus Luna for years, but he didn't really know any of them that well. From what he'd heard, they were pretty much all a rough and tumble lot, getting into trouble for one thing or another.

"Why is she safer with you?" Jamie finally asked.

"Because I'm the alpha. No one will dare touch her as long as she's with me."

Jamie snorted. "You mean no one but you."

Marshall grinned. "Something like that. But if it makes you feel better, we haven't had sex and I don't plan to tonight either."

Jamie blushed. His baby sister and sex were not two things he wanted to put in the same sentence. "How gracious of you," he muttered.

"Jamie, Marshall has been pretty good to me the past few days," Cady said.

"Few days? I thought your fight with Brendan was this morning," he said.

"Brendan went out of town, even though I begged him not to. The three days he was gone was... well..."

"It's okay, Cady. You don't have to think about it," Marshall told her.

Looking at Jamie, he said, "Look, whether you like it or not, your sister is here with me and I'm looking after her."

Jamie didn't look to happy about it, but he nodded. With one final glance at Cady, he stormed back over to the bar.

No sooner had Jamie walked off than the front door opened and in walked Brendan and Eric. The two werewolves were dressed identically in sleeveless black tees, showing off their alpha tattoos, jeans, and black boots. The duo paused inside the club and looked around. When they spotted Cady and Marshall, they started toward the couple.

"Looks like we have company," Marshall murmured in her ear.

Cady watched the brothers approach, unsure of what she should feel. Why were they here? And why were they walking toward her?

Marshall pulled Cady slightly behind him when Eric and Brendan stopped in front of them. "What can I do for you two?"

Eric held up the small journal they had found at the cabin. "Have you ever read this?"

"My father's journal? No, but apparently you have."

"I found it once before. Cady's last name triggered something and I decided to find the journal again," Eric responded.

"So why did Cady's name trigger your memory?"

"Her last name is Whitmore. Your father claimed a woman off the streets, back before Cady was born, by the name of Elise Whitmore."

Cady gasped. "My mother?"

Eric nodded at her. "Yeah, it seems that she and Marshall's father were together for almost a year."

Marshall shook his head. "But how can that be?"

"It seems your father loved her enough to set her free. When he saw that pack life was destroying her, he released her," Eric said. "It seems she met Cady's father a month later, but by then she was already pregnant."

Cady's eyes widened and she looked for her brother.

"Yeah, Cady, Jamie was the baby Elise was carrying when she left Vicus Luna."

"But, my brother isn't a werewolf," she said.

Eric shook his head. "I haven't figured that part out myself. He should by all rights shift like the rest of us, but for some reason he doesn't."

Marshall quietly digested everything he was hearing. "So Jamie is my half brother?"

"Yeah. Cady isn't related to you. It's just that you each share a brother – Jamie."

Cady looked from Marshall, to Jamie, and back again. Her brother seeing her agitation walked over to see what was going on.

The two men didn't look anything alike, but then she and Jamie hadn't favored each other much either. There really wasn't a way to tell if the journal was telling the truth unless Marshall and Jamie had a blood test done.

"What's going on? Why does my sister look so freaked out?" Jamie asked, glaring at the three werewolves.

"Show him the journal," Cady whispered.

Eric opened the journal to the first entry about Elise Whitmore and handed it to Jamie. "You need to read this."

Jamie took the journal and started to read it. After reading about his mother's pregnancy, he raised his eyes to Cady's. "I guess this explains a few things."

"What do you mean?" Cady asked.

He shook his head. "I've always been careful to not lose my temper. When I do, I feel like I'm being engulfed in a horrible rage. I've fought it my whole life."

"That's your werewolf side trying to break through," Marshall answered.

Jamie nodded. "That makes sense now."

"But you've never turned into a werewolf," Cady said.

"No, I haven't, but I think if I had ever let my temper get the best of me that I might have."

Eric eyed Cady thoughtfully. "So maybe mother nature is evening things out by giving Cady the capability of choosing the pack alpha."

"But that didn't work either," she exclaimed. "You both ended up with marks."

"Yeah, about that," Brendan said, stepping toward her.

"I think you've said enough to her," Marshall said, blocking Brendan's path.

Brendan glared at Marshall and then promptly ignored him. "Cady, we need to talk. Can you just let me explain?"

Cady braced her shaking hands on Marshall's back. Should she? Or would her heart just get broken again?

"Please, Cady," Brendan said.

She stepped around Marshall. "Okay, but just for a minute."

Brendan took her hand and walked a few steps off to the side.

"I talked to Eric. Marshall put him up to the whole charade, threatening to kill him if he didn't go along with it."

Cady was surprised, although she shouldn't have been. After all, look at all of the things Marshall had done to her thus far. Why not finish wrecking her life?

"Look, I don't know what happened between you and Eric and I'm not sure I want to. Either way, I owe you an apology for yelling at you this morning."

Cady listened in silence.

"I was out of line. When I came home and found the note and then found you in Marshall's bed, I just came apart. I was hurt and jealous and I lashed out at you."

"Where did you expect me to go after it seemed like you had left me?" she asked quietly. "I couldn't stay in your room when I thought you didn't want me. Going home wasn't an option. I had to pick someone to stay with and Marshall was there, understanding and comforting."

"It was part of his plan, Cady."

"I know that now, but..."

"But?" Brendan asked.

"He really has been good to me the past two days. It might be a lie, but he didn't hurt me, Brendan."

"What are you saying, Cady?"

She shook her head. "I don't know. You left me and then when you got back you didn't trust me enough to let me explain what had happened. How can I be with you knowing that you don't trust me?"

Brendan swallowed painfully. What she said was true, but he didn't like it. "Cady, I'm sorry. I'm so very sorry for the way I acted and the things I said."

"Brendan..."

He pulled her into his arms and kissed her. "Please say you'll forgive me, Cady."

She looked into his eyes and saw that he meant what he said. He really was sorry. "I forgive you."

He smiled. "Good. Now I have some other business to handle."

He led her back over to his brother, keeping her hand firmly within his own.

"Whether we're half brothers or not, I'm not joining the pack," Jamie informed Marshall. "I'm staying in my parents' home and continuing with my life as I have thus far."

Marshall nodded. "Since you don't shift into a werewolf, I don't see a problem with that."

"However, I do have a problem with you dating my sister."

"I don't recall asking for your permission," Marshall responded dryly.

Brendan cleared his throat. "First off, that won't be an issue because Cady is with me. Second, Marshall, I challenge you for position of alpha."

The entire room went dead silent at Brendan's words. Every eye in the club was focused on Brendan and Marshall.

"No, Brendan, don't do it," Cady implored.

"I have to," he answered.

Marshall gave him a chilling smile, "I accept."

Now he could not only get Brendan out of the way, but he could claim Cady for his own without any other obstacles. Sure, Eric was marked, but he had already shown that he wouldn't stand up to Marshall. Brendan was the only threat.

Chapter Thirty-One

Brendan handed Cady off to Eric.

"Take care of her," he told his brother.

Eric nodded and pulled Cady off to the side.

Jamie had also backed out of the way, sensing the major battle that was about to ensue. The dance floor was empty except for Brendan and Marshall. This was it, the fight everyone had been waiting for, the moment of truth.

"Eric, please don't let him do this," Cady begged.

"He has to, Cady. It's the only way you two can be together," Eric answered.

As the two werewolves circled one another, Cady gripped Eric's hand tightly. She feared for Brendan's life and her own. If she had just gone peacefully with Marshall, things would have been better. Maybe it wasn't too late.

"Eric, I'll go with Marshall if he'll spare Brendan. Please! Just don't let them fight!"

Eric shook his head. "Brendan won't accept that Cady. He wants this fight, has been waiting for it ever since he was marked. There's no backing out now."

They watched as Marshall gave Brendan an icy smile, his eyes flat, a killer's eyes. He was waiting on Brendan to make the first move, his claws and fangs were already extended. Every muscle in his body was coiled, ready to strike.

When Brendan charged toward Marshall, Cady turned and buried her face in Eric's shirt. She couldn't watch. Just the thought of Brendan being hurt made her sick. She could hear them

growling and snapping at one another, heard the sound of claws and teeth breaking through flesh and bone. Biting back a sob, she turned and glanced at the fight.

Marshall had two bite marks and was slashed in three places, but Brendan... Brendan had fared worse. He was limping from a gash down one leg and had three long claw marks that ran diagonally from his left shoulder to his right hip. Blood dripped down his arm from a deep wound that ran from elbow to wrist.

Cady whimpered when she saw Marshall charge, lift Brendan in the air, and toss him across the room. He crashed onto a table, smashing it into pieces. She tried to run to his side, but Eric wouldn't let go.

"Please, Eric, I have to go to him."

"No, Cady. He said if things got bad that I was to take you out of here."

Eric pulled her toward the door, but she dug her heels in, wanting to see if Brendan was okay.

"Cady, I made a promise to him. A promise I intend to keep," he said as he swung her up into his arms and quickly walked out of the club. He buckled Cady into the passenger seat of his car and ran around to the driver's side. Before the door was even closed he was peeling out of the parking lot, speeding toward his hotel.

Cady cried, wishing she knew what had happened with Brendan.

Eric grabbed her hand, trying to comfort her. "Shh, please don't cry, Cady. Brendan is tougher than he looks."

"I'm just so scared. I don't want anything to happen to him."

"He has to do this. He's doing it for you, so the two of you won't be looking over your shoulder all the time, so the pack laws can change."

"But Marshall was going to change some of the laws! We just talked about it this afternoon," she said.

Eric was surprised, but he hid it well. "Maybe Marshall was just telling you what he thought you wanted to hear."

"Then why did he buy the house I wanted so badly?"

Eric pulled to a screeching stop in the hotel parking lot. "He did what?"

"He bought a house. I'd shown it to Brendan before, but he'd told me we couldn't live away from the pack. When I told Marshall about the house, he said he'd take me to see it."

"Marshall took you to see the house?"

She nodded. "But he'd already bought it. When he called the realtor that morning, he made arrangements to purchase it before we even went to the house."

Eric was quiet a moment. "Maybe he really does have feelings for you, Cady, but that doesn't change who he is. Marshall has killed men, more men than I can count. He threw you down a flight of stairs!"

"I know. I know he did, but I'd gladly go to him if it meant that Brendan would live."

Eric grinned. "You really love him, don't you?"

"Yeah, I guess I do," she said quietly.

"Come on, let's go inside and wait. Brendan or Jamie will call us when the fight is over."

Cady got out of the car and walked into the hotel room with Eric. She looked around, not quite certain where to sit or what to do. She felt lost.

Eric rubbed a hand down her back, trying to comfort her. "You can lie down for a bit if you'd like."

She shook her head. "I wouldn't be able to sleep."

Eric pulled her into his arms. "You're shaking."

Cady cried softly against his shirt. "I'm just so scared, Eric."

He hugged her tight. "I know you are, but this is what Brendan wanted."

She nodded her head and clung to him.

A few minutes later, the phone rang.

Eric stepped into the bathroom to answer it, shutting the door behind him. If it was bad news, he wanted to time to prepare before he had to tell Cady what had happened. He didn't think his brother was dead, he was fairly sure he would know, but the fact that Jamie was the one calling didn't bode well.

Cady sat on the foot of the bed, waiting on pins and needles, anxious to hear if Brendan was okay.

When Eric emerged, his face was tense. She jumped up and ran over to him.

"What happened? Is he okay?"

"Brendan lost the fight."

"No," she whispered, sinking to the floor.

"He's not dead. Jamie convinced Marshall to let him live, but he's not in good shape either."

Cady cried softly. "Can I see him?"

"Yeah, I'll take you to the hospital. You're brother is up there with him right now."

"How bad is it?"

Eric pulled her to her feet and sat her down on the bed. "It's pretty bad, Cady. He has several broken bones, too many lacerations to list, and they think there is some internal damage as well."

Cady swiped the tears off her cheeks and tried to be brave. "Do they think he'll live?"

He shook his head. "They don't know right now. He's in the ER and once he's stitched up, they're going to move him to ICU."

Cady nodded and stood. "I want to see him."

Eric caressed her cheek and pressed a kiss to the top of her head. Grabbing his keys, he walked her out to the car.



At the hospital, Jamie was pacing in the ER waiting room. When he saw Cady, he held his arms out to her.

Rushing into her brother's arms, Cady wrapped her arms around his waist and cried.

Eric nodded to Jamie from across the room and slipped back out the door. His brother was in good hands, but there was something he needed to take care of. Marshall had been a problem long enough.

Speeding down the highway, Eric pulled into the parking lot of the Sunset Club. Marshall's bike was still parked outside, along with a few others.

Stepping out of the car, Eric clenched his hands into fists and entered the club. He was either coming out of there the winner, or he wasn't coming out at all.

The club went silent when they saw him. Marshall raked him over with his eyes, not sure what to expect.

"How's your brother?" Marshall asked with a grin.

"A lot better than you're about to be," Eric growled as he advanced on the alpha.

"Oh really? Come to avenge him?" Marshall taunted.

Eric shook his head. "No, I've come to give Cady some peace of mind. I've come to rid her of her number one problem – you!"

"Big words for a wolf that ran away from his pack. What makes you think you can take me? Your twin didn't do so well in a fight against me," Marshall responded calmly. Did Eric really think he could best him?

Eric gave him a chilling grin. "I think I'll do better."

Marshall laughed, but decided to indulge him. "Okay, but when you end up sharing a hospital room with your twin don't blame me. Remember this was your folly."

Before Marshall had finished speaking, Eric had morphed into his werewolf form. With a roar, he lunged for the alpha, taking him by surprise. Gripping the alpha by both arms, he bit down on his shoulder, ripping out a chunk of flesh.

Marshall howled. Changing shape, he fought back against Eric, slicing and biting where he could, but the other wolf seemed to always be one step ahead. He'd managed to inflict some damage, but not enough to slow Eric down. If anything, each bite and slice seemed to infuriate him that much more.

Eric was running on pure hatred. With a feral growl, he leaned forward and snapped his jaws around Marshall's throat. The alpha kicked and scratched, trying to pry Eric loose, but to no avail. With a quick jerk of his head, Eric ripped the alpha's throat out, his body slumping to the floor in a bloody mess. The fight had lasted a matter of minutes and was rather anticlimactic all things considered, but the end result was what mattered. Marshall wouldn't bother Cady anymore.

Throwing back his head, Eric let lose a victory howl that could be heard for miles. Every pack member in the room bowed their heads, recognizing their new leader.

Epilogue

Two months later

Brendan had only been home from the hospital for a few weeks. After Eric's victory over Marshall, news had spread fast that a new alpha was in town. The first thing Eric had done was burn all of Marshall's things. Then he'd moved into the alpha's room in the townhouse.

Eric and Cady had spent a lot of time together while they waited on Brendan to recover. Having not only inherited the pack, but also Marshall's wealth and property, he'd given the cottage on Pecan to Cady as a present and had set up an account with a monthly allowance. The two had worked for weeks getting the house decorated just the way Cady wanted it.

Brendan still went to the townhouse on occasion and helped Eric out. They had put a lot of new laws into place and everyone was adjusting nicely. Those who didn't want to be ruled by Eric had been given the opportunity to leave and find a new pack. Some had taken him up on his offer, others stuck around to see how things would go.

As Cady looked out over her backyard, she smiled. Her life had been calm and pleasant the past two months. She and Brendan were together again and she was happy. Jamie stopped by on a regular basis for dinner and got along well with Brendan and Eric.

Brendan stepped up behind her and placed his hands on her shoulders. "What are you going, sweetheart?"

"Nothing, just admiring the garden."

"Is there anything you want to tell me?"

"About what?" she asked.

"About the home pregnancy test in the bathroom trash," he answered.

"Oh, that," she said with false calm.

"Cady," Brendan said with a warning tone.

She laughed. "You're going to be a father."

He smiled and walked around her chair. Kneeling at her feet, he took her hands in his. "Really? You're really pregnant?"

She nodded. "I'm really pregnant."

"Are you happy about the baby?" he asked quietly. Last time she'd been pregnant had been a shock.

Cady sank to her knees in front of him. "Of course, I'm happy. How could I not be happy to have your baby?"

Brendan smiled and pulled her close. Caressing her cheek, he kissed her gently.

"Brendan, I'm not going to break," she said before crushing her lips to his.

He chuckled and deepened their kiss. Sitting on the patio, he pulled her into his lap. In the midst of the various flowers surrounding them in the garden, and under a setting sun, Brendan made love his mate, his life, his Cady.

About the Author

Jessica Coulter Smith was born in Tennessee, but travelled all over starting at the age of ten. Having lived in Georgia, California, Texas, and Louisiana, she has once again made her home in Tennessee... for now. A wife and mother, she often finds herself chasing small children around the house. An avid animal lover, she has two cats, two dogs, a bird, and a horse.

Her first book, *Whispering Lake*, was first published by Hearts on Fire in 2008, and was re-released by Wild Horse Press in 2009 as an extended edition. However, this wasn't the first attempt Jessica made at writing. *Vicus Luna* is an adaptation of a YA book she started in junior high. In addition, she has received several awards for poetry and has five published poems in various anthologies, the first of which was published when she was sixteen.

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