



# IN THE SHADOW OF THE WOLF

By

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ISBN 978-1-60394-406-9

New Concepts Publishing

Lake Park, GA 31636

[www.newconceptspublishing.com](http://www.newconceptspublishing.com)

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## Chapter One

Sayuri could feel her throat begin to close up, a nervous lump making it hard to swallow. Although she wasn't going to be doing much of that, since her throat had become bone dry.

She had been so meticulous in planning her trip. She'd felt sure she had thought of every detail, every nuance, and accounted for everything. She had been so confident when she'd left home that she'd accounted for everything. And, she'd had a right to feel such confidence, after all she'd planned the trip for a year. She'd been beside herself, blown away by the fact that she had decided to do something so spontaneous. She was

finally breaking the constrictive mold of her life. She was doing the unexpected for the first time in her life, and it felt fantastic. With this trip, she was not only proving to herself but also to everyone that knew her that she wasn't the anal retentive organized stick to the plan person that everyone thought she was. She could deviate from the beaten path.

Of course, when she'd sat down a year before, she'd known full well that she couldn't possibly calculate the outcome of everything that could or would take place while she was on vacation, especially since she was going to be so far out of her element. But she hadn't expected the unexpected before she'd even gotten to her destination.

She could feel the muscles painfully straining in her fingers as they gripped the rental car's immaculate steering wheel, her grip so tight that her nails bit into her hands. She didn't notice that though. She desperately wished she did, wished she could think about something besides the extreme drop offs mere feet from her car as she drove increasingly slower through the narrow, winding mountain passes that were necessary to get her to the ski lodge she was headed to. They certainly hadn't looked so damn narrow on the map she'd Googled. She would have to post a comment on that later, that is if she made it back. If she'd even had the slightest inkling, she would definitely have changed the venue for her vacation.

If the insidious road wasn't bad enough, she now felt a new tremor of fear course through her as she saw it was beginning to snow. She'd only seen snow once in her life, and that was

when she'd been very little. In fact, that was one of the main reasons she'd decided to go to a ski lodge on her vacation. The other main deciding factor for selecting the lodge had been something more practical.

She'd called several lodges before she'd called Premier Skiing. The owner of Premier had been the only one that had admitted to screening his employees for not only drugs but for sexually transmitted diseases, since most of them also worked search and rescue and sometimes were injured in the process. It was exactly what she'd wanted to hear, exactly what she needed if she was going to have a vacation and safely get pregnant. And the location couldn't have been more perfect, since the lodge was situated just several hours driving distance from where she lived and worked in the city. It was a cost effective drive. Everything was going according to plan. She'd checked before she'd left and she was definitely ovulating. So far, so good, everything was right on schedule, except for the extra hour of driving because of the dangerous road conditions.

She had been so excited when she had thought about seeing snow again for the first time in years, positively childish in her enthusiasm, but it failed to be awe inspiring at the moment as the road began to become life-threateningly slick. She'd read up on black ice and became increasingly worried as she recalled the details she'd read and then eyed the diminutive "safety" rails that were the only buffer from her car plummeting over the side of the mountain should she swerve in that direction.

Gritting her teeth in her dogged determination to continue driving, she passed another vehicle that had pulled over onto the side of the road, what little there was, probably waiting for the snow to subside. Glancing down at the car's digital monitor, she could tell from the pedometer that she was almost to the ski lodge. She couldn't give up now. Just a little bit further and she could relax, just a little longer and the death defying road trip would be over.

Just as she rounded another winding curve in the road, she spied a sign indicating the road she needed to exit onto. She exhaled a deep breath she hadn't realized she'd been holding. She could feel her body slowly relax in melting degrees. She was stiff from being so tense behind the wheel for so long.

Finally, she had arrived at the ski lodge, relief was tantamount. She followed signs and parked her vehicle in the parking area. Grabbing the sole enormous suitcase she'd packed, she trudged the short distance through the snow from the parking area to the main entrance of the lodge. The main building of the lodge was fairly large. She'd looked at a detailed map of the lodge online, but it was completely different looking at it in person. It was breathtaking beneath its blanket of snow, nestled beneath evergreens, the rustic wood logs of its construction reminding her of a log cabin building set she'd had as a child.

As soon as she entered, she became enveloped by the warmth and beauty of the interior.

"Hello! Welcome to Premier Skiing," a man behind the front desk said, an inviting smile deepening the wrinkles on his face. "My name is Carter, can I help you?"

Sayuri walked over to the desk where the man stood behind a computer, leaning to one side to set down her suitcase on the floor beside her.

"Hello, and yes, my name is Sayuri Williams. I reserved a cabin for three weeks."

"I just need to see some identification."

Sayuri reached into her thick coat and into an interior pocket for her wallet. She fished out her identification, handing it to the man.

"Well, Ms. Williams, if you could just sign in, it'll only take me a few minutes to get you registered and then I'll give you directions to your cabin."

After some search and peck on the keyboard with his index fingers while Sayuri put her name and arrival date in the ledger, Carter handed her back her identification and she slid it back into her wallet.

"If you just exit the front doors and turn immediately to your left, there's a path with signs that will lead you directly to your cabin, Cabin E. The cabin is furnished with a full kitchen, but if you need anything, you can dial the front desk or room service. There's a menu for room service located by the phone, which also details the hours our dining hall is open."

He turned and grabbed a set of keys with a key ring attached to it bearing the letter E and glanced at the clock on the wall. He turned around and handed her the keys to her cabin and then reached for a pamphlet in a display by the computer monitor on the desktop, handing her the leaflet.

"Here's a list of a few activities the lodge features, and, if you hurry, you can make it to the last of the skiing lessons for the day, it's a beginner lesson on the bunny slopes and it's going to be taking place in about forty-five minutes. There's a map on the kitchen counter in your cabin that has a layout of the lodge and its facilities to help you get around. Do you need any help with your luggage?"

"Thank you, but no, I can manage," Sayuri said, putting the keys in her pants pocket and grabbing her suitcase before turning and heading out the front door in search of her cabin.

The distance to her cabin wasn't very far, thankfully, because she wasn't used to trudging through snow, especially not carrying half of her closet in a suitcase, but she took her time, enjoying the scenery and the sound of the snow crunching beneath her heavy boots. The snow was still falling. It was more beautiful than she remembered. She hadn't been able to enjoy it while she'd been confined in the rented death trap on dead man's pass.

Once she made it to her cabin, she stopped for a minute just a few feet away to admire the place she'd be calling home for the next couple of weeks. It looked so cozy and picturesque



huddled in its snow bank. She tilted her head back to let the snow fall on her face. It was cold and tickled a little, but it felt wonderful and refreshing.

She couldn't recall the last time she'd been so excited. The fact that she had actually arrived was starting to sink in. Work, everyday worries, the extreme bustle of the inner city, they were all suddenly so far away. She'd never taken a real vacation in her life, and, although she had ulterior motives for taking one now, she was determined to enjoy herself. If she was successful in her extracurricular endeavors, it would be a long time before she took one again.

Taking in a deep fortifying breath of the cold mountain air, Sayuri fished for the keys Carter had given her that she'd put in her pants pocket and unlocked her cabin door, stomping the snow off her boots on the door mat before heading inside. She flicked on the light and shut the door and turned to look at the modest surroundings of the cabin. It wasn't massive, but it definitely had a lot more room than her place in the city.

Back home, she stayed in a loft apartment. Although it was hard living in such cramped quarters, she'd decided years ago that it was completely necessary since it was the only way she had to save money for a better home in her future, a home she could call her own. It seemed she had been preparing for her future her whole life and had never taken the time to stop and enjoy the benefits of all her hard work. She had also been trying to make everything in her life just right so that she could start a family. Unfortunately, 'just right' had never come, and

she'd suddenly realized she was mid-thirties and still hadn't had her first child. She didn't even have a steady beau, let alone a husband prospect. How was she going to have at least four children by the time she was forty? When she had sat down and thought about it, the prospects had looked dire indeed, but, after having watched a special on the news about the rise of single women giving birth to babies that they had received from sperm banks, she had decided then and there that she needed a plan and took all of her free time from work for a few days to make one. She had discovered soon enough that she couldn't afford to be impregnated artificially, that would have taken everything she'd worked so long and hard to save up, then she wouldn't have any way to buy a home for her new family, so she'd opted for the next best thing-an in person donation. And, now that she was here, the hunting for her future donor could commence.

Walking around, she found the kitchen/dining room to her right. To her left was a modest living room slash sitting area and past that was the bedroom and bath. She walked through the living room and into the bedroom, turning on the light as she made her way through the door. The queen sized bed took up most of the room. She set her bag on the end of the bed and sat down beside it, resting her legs and feet for a moment. She reached into her pocket and pulled out her personal digital assistant device and reviewed her vacation to do list. The first thing she had wanted to do was ski. If she went ahead and got dressed instead of unpacking, she could make it to the lesson the man at the front desk had mentioned.

She brightened as she considered how spontaneous she was becoming, a warm smile spreading across her lips. She had planned to ski the next day after settling in for a little bit, but she was so excited about being here she just couldn't wait until the next day to get started having some fun so she jumped off the bed and unzipped her large suitcase, searching for the only skiing outfit she'd brought. This day was going to be the start of a new life for her, she could just feel it.

\* \* \* \*

Thanking the employee in the rental/sales building located just off of the skiing grounds, Sayuri finished snapping her rental helmet securely under her chin. She then grabbed up her rental skis from the counter and hefted them against her shoulder, as she'd seen the customer that had been ahead of her do, heading out the door for the slopes. They were long and not too light, which made them difficult to carry.

Once outside the building, she realized after walking for a minute that they were getting heavier and heavier by the minute. They were not nearly as light as everyone else made them appear to be, especially when her walking was already hampered by her thick suit, large boots, and the deep snow.

Slowly trudging past other guests wearing their skis on their feet and actually skiing from place to place, Sayuri started seriously debating whether she should go ahead and put on her skis. Having never skied before, she didn't want to have trouble making it to her first lesson. But there was the possibility that it would be something she was very naturally

good at like roller skating had been. It was probably a much better idea to wait, though, just in case.

Caught up in her mental reverie as she studiously examined the ski encased feet of several passersby, she was surprised when she heard an angry man's voice.

"Woman, watch what you are doing."

The unexpected shout brought Sayuri's head up like a whip and she turned to see what the commotion was all about, the skis propped against her shoulder swinging as well with the movement of her body as she twisted around to see who was yelling, nearly whacking the man who'd spoken to her, who happened to be right behind her, in the head.

With an audible gasp, Sayuri covered her mouth in horror when she saw the man ducked behind her, obviously trying to miss getting hit in the head, and she nearly dropped her skis on him in the process. "Oh!" she said when she realized she'd nearly hit him. Fortunately, they missed him and landed harmlessly in the snow at his feet.

"Oh," she repeated a little lamely as the skis fell beside the crouched man and clanked against each other in the snow. "I'm so sorry. I didn't . . . mean . . . to . . .," Sayuri started, trying to apologize, but she was so stunned by the man before her she had a hard time trying to recall what she'd been about to say, and all that managed to escape her lips was another, "Oh." The word faded on her lips as if it had been nothing but a whisper in the breeze.

Like an angry predator ready to pounce on its unsuspecting prey, the man she'd nearly decapitated recovered from the protective crouch he'd assumed to miss a head injury to loom over her in a very intimidating manner, nearly a full foot above her five-six average size frame. She was surprised that he was so much taller, since most of the men she worked and met with on a daily basis were her height or only a little taller than her, but she completely forgot all about that when she looked him in the face and saw his eyes. His dark green eyes seared her down to the core, making her brain receptors too feeble to process even the simplest of tasks. If her body hadn't reverted to autopilot, she felt sure she wouldn't still be breathing.

It was entirely possible she'd never seen a man more darkly beautiful in her life. And he was heart-stoppingly breathtaking at that, what she could see of him that wasn't covered in a snow suit.

It wasn't that he was handsome in the traditional sense, he was ruggedly handsome. His shoulder-length midnight black hair was windswept by the frosty mountain air, sprinkled with snow, and he had a days worth of stubble on his square jaw where a muscle flexed. By far his most startling feature, though, was his lusciously dark green eyes fringed with impossibly long black lashes as they raked her figure with what she could only interpret as malice directed at her. Never in her life had she seen eyes like that. It was almost as if they weren't human because they were so exotic and intoxicating she could hardly blink, either because their intensity wouldn't allow it or for fear

he'd turn away and she wouldn't see them again. This was the kind of man she'd waited her whole life to meet. He wasn't just gorgeous; there was something about him, almost, she couldn't put a finger on it, it was so basic and primal it was almost animalistic in the attraction.

Faolan tried to collect himself as he found himself staring into the most beautiful pair of dulcet brown eyes he'd ever seen. His tone was much quieter but still scolding when he repeated his warning, "Watch what you are doing, woman. You could have taken my head off with those skis."

Sayuri blinked a few times and nodded her head like a child in open-mouthed understanding, not sure if she could talk at the moment or if her body would betray her and she would sputter like a blithering idiot before the wrath of the god-like being who'd deigned to talk to her. What was available in the dating scene in the city didn't hold a candle to this fine specimen. And she knew without a doubt that he had ruined her, she'd never be able to look at men the same way again. She would always be comparing them to him, and they all fell so short. As she continued to examine him with unadulterated lust, she couldn't help but wonder what in the world were they feeding these country boys?

Feeling a little guilty for reacting badly, Faolan felt compelled to offer his assistance.

He bent down, gathering her skis, and handed them back to her. "Do you need some help?" he said a little more gruffly than he'd intended, realizing his attraction to her had caught him off

guard.

Sayuri's dirty mind immediately leapt to the image of the bed she'd left at the cabin. But she couldn't just outright ask for help in that part of her agenda . . . or could she? She wasn't sure how they did it way out here in the sticks. In the city, a man wouldn't think twice about a woman asking for sex out of the blue.

But that was another reason she'd chosen to find a suitable donor so far away from where she worked, she wouldn't be seeing him around town and they didn't have access to so many women.

What did it matter if she acted out of character here? She wasn't trying to get a commitment, just a baby. But still, she didn't think she could throw herself at a man having only just met him, having known him for seconds really, especially one who was so intimidatingly attractive. She told herself that she had time, a few days worth. She could ease her way into her proposition.

"Um . . . I'm heading for the slopes for a skiing lesson. Thanks anyway, though, perhaps I'll see you around."

She turned and heaved her skis on her shoulder, trying to be more aware of them this time, and began again her trek to the bunny slopes, which, based on the signs on the path, were only a few more feet away. She felt like knocking herself in the head after a few minutes, though, when she'd had time to think about what had happened. Less than an hour here and she'd met up

with a wonderful specimen and like a fool she hadn't even asked his name or anything. It really shouldn't have come as a surprise to her, though, attracting men was not her forte. The skill hadn't come to her naturally like it had her mother, and, unlike everything else that she was originally bad at, she hadn't taken the time to get better at it. Of course, it was because she'd thought about it and had decided she didn't need to get better at it. She wished now that she'd thought about the advantages it would have brought her a little bit more.

She supposed, at any rate, she was thankful that she'd been able to walk away like a normal human being because she hadn't been sure she would be able to walk very far after having stood in the presence of a man so magnificent, his ferocious gaze making her legs feel weak and her heartbeat erratic. The thought that he might actually be watching her walk away suddenly sprang to mind and made her steps falter.

He probably wasn't interested in giving her a sexually once over, though. If he was looking at all it was to give her a burning hateful stare in the back for nearly injuring him. She mentally shrugged. She supposed she could live with that if that was the case, it wasn't as if she could do some come hither sway in the snow, at any rate, and after what had just happened he'd probably think she was a maniac that had nearly decapitated him purpose if she had. Again, it was just as well because the way her figure appeared in the layers she'd put on to keep warm didn't bear thinking about. And the mountain was crawling with fit men in tight snow suits. If she'd ruined her chances with him, there were other potentials. Of course, she



knew there was absolutely no way they could compare to him. Men like that weren't made every day.

Having spotted a bench right in front of the bunny slopes, Sayuri sat down and started putting on her skis. Once she had everything locked in place, she set off at a snail's pace and very carefully made her way to where she heard an instructor speaking.

It was at that time that she noticed that the only other guests lined up in front of the instructor were decidedly short. As she inched closer and made her way to the end of the line, making herself even with the shoulders of the other 'students' that were turned slightly toward the instructor, she discovered that not only were they short, they were extremely young. The oldest couldn't have been more than six.

The instructor noticed her and quit talking. All of the children turned to look at her as she struggled to remain upright beside them, realizing she sounded like an old windbag because as soon as the talking stopped her hard breathing from the effort to walk in skis sounded painfully loud.

"Do you want to join this skiing lesson?" the female instructor asked.

"Yes, um, I do, but are there any beginner lessons that . . . ," she paused, trying to be tactful as she tried not to look down at the children between the woman and herself, "are for older students?"

"We have a class first thing in the morning that has some ten year olds," the helpful instructor replied with a smile.

Sayuri felt her face redden despite the cold wind and snow whipping at it. Figuring she was going to make a fool out of herself anyway, she consoled herself with the fact that at least there wouldn't be anybody around that she would see at dinner later.

"That's okay. This is good. I'm good."

The 'class' stood, listening to the instructor intently for the next few minutes while she displayed moves and gave pointers and talked a little bit about safety.

Sayuri couldn't help but feel like she was the only person out on the slopes that was skiing for the first time.

After all of the instructions, she discovered that she must assuredly be the only virgin to skiing or else kids were more adept at new things than she was because she was the only one that didn't take off like a shot. She took off at a speed so slow a turtle could have passed her, but she didn't want to rush herself. If she went faster, she could injure something or someone. Well, she wouldn't be injuring anyone else since they'd all left her in their dust, but if she got seriously hurt, the whole purpose for taking a vacation probably wouldn't get resolved.

After a little bit, she noticed that she wasn't headed in quite the same direction that the others had taken. Trying to adjust her

course, she failed miserably, but succeeded in picking up some speed. The harder she tried, the more she seemed to pick up speed, or it could have been that the slope she was now headed down was steeper than the bunny slopes she'd begun on.

Sayuri tried to stay calm. Everything was fine. She was still technically practicing, even though she wasn't with the group. Just as she was starting to feel better about how well she was skiing and taking the situation, after all she was still in an upright position, she looked up to see where she was headed and saw imminent disaster ahead.

Not far down the slope was a copse of trees. If she didn't change direction or stop, she would run right into one. And now that she had picked up some speed, she would most definitely hurt herself. She looked around but didn't see anyone nearby that could help her. It was official, she was totally fucked. She silently wished she'd brought the whistle she normally carried around her neck in the city. She'd used it for protection, to get necessary attention many times. She hadn't brought it to the mountains because she had worried that such a sound might cause an avalanche. She wasn't snow savvy and didn't want to take any chances. However, now that she was in desperate need, it would've been nice. It was probably just as well that she didn't have it with her, her mouth was dry with fear and she didn't think she could have used it anyway.

Faolan watched as the woman who'd nearly knocked him in the head with her skis not twenty minutes before slowly left the

bunny slopes and headed toward danger without any signs of stopping. He wondered briefly if she didn't see the trees yet because she appeared so calm or if she had such big balls that she thought she could maneuver around the trees. He shook his head and sighed to himself. This one was going to be trouble. He could feel it, in more ways than one.

He set off down the slopes, racing to get to her. He saw that she was clearly headed for the dense thicket of trees, her pacing hadn't slowed and still she didn't act as if she realized she was in danger. If he didn't reach her in time, she could get seriously injured. He crouched down, picking up speed.

Just when it looked like Sayuri was about to make contact with a tree, she saw a black blur out of her peripheral vision and something hard nearly knocked the breath out of her, taking her to the ground and effectively ending her first skiing lesson.

Not sure of what had happened, the adrenaline still coursing heavily through her veins, she started flailing, trying to get whatever had hit her off because it was heavy and making it hard to breath, panic quickly setting in.

"Hold on, woman," Faolan growled, grabbing Sayuri by the wrists and wrestling her back to the ground. "Hold on. Calm down," he said, breathing heavy from his exertion and the force of the impact of their bodies. The sudden urge to yell at the little fool for nearly killing herself was overwhelming, but as he looked down at her, he felt an entirely different growl fight to break free.

When he had pushed her back down to the ground, her helmet had fallen back off of her face and she lay beneath him now, looking up at him with her doe brown eyes and her lips forming the sweetest 'o', looking like the most innocent woman he'd ever seen in the world. It didn't help matters that she wet her lips like the most subtle of invitations. Trying to shake off the beast that was riding him, he put up his defenses, turning to anger.

"Woman, you are going to get yourself killed.

## Chapter Two

For a moment, it had almost felt like they were going to have some kind of romantic interlude as he'd bored into her soul with his piercing green eyes as he breathed heavily over her, his hot breath fanning her wind swept cheeks, infusing the air around them with his masculine scent. It was a heady aroma, and she couldn't help but to breathe deeply of it and close her

eyes for a moment, basking in it. He smelled of wood and leather, the great outdoors, a very masculine scent, the likes of which she had never encountered before. She hadn't known men could be that sexy without having done anything at all, that they could smell so good without wearing some name brand cologne. Of course, she had to admit that rescuing her and wrestling slash lying on top of her was pretty hot, those things might have had a little something to do with adding to his sex appeal.

He glared at her when she closed her eyes and took a deep breath. His glare intensifying when, as he watched, she smiled faintly. What the hell was she doing? She'd almost been killed and now she was smiling? "Why didn't you scream for help?" he chastised, shaking her a little more roughly than he'd intended.

Her eyes popped open when he shook her, became round with worry at the tone of voice he used. She saw that he was glaring at her again. She was beginning to think that his scowl was a permanent feature of his countenance.

Disappointment flitted across her face. He'd just had to go and spoil the moment. The tone of voice he took with her was a complete turn off. And worse, she could feel her temper rise as she began to analyze his chastising her like a child, but she tamped it with monumental effort. It wouldn't do her any good to get angry. She should just be thankful to him that he had rescued her before she'd gotten herself hurt. She should be thankful that she'd gotten the chance to see him again and that

she'd even gotten the chance to get close to him, although this wasn't exactly what she'd had in mind. It was what she had wanted, sort of. She'd definitely wanted to see him again, but under different circumstances, ones that didn't put her in such bad lighting. She liked to think that she was a strong independent woman, a very capable individual, but to him she probably looked like a complete moron who couldn't do anything for herself, one of those people who always had to have someone with them so they didn't do anything foolish and kill themselves, one of those future winners of the Darwin award.

"You should have stayed with the group," he said, gritting his teeth when he realized he'd spoken with more severity than he'd intended to. He couldn't help it though. For some reason he couldn't define, even though he'd only just met her, he realized when he'd seen her headed for disaster that he'd been worried about her. He hadn't wanted her to get hurt. Yes, it was his job to make sure that none of the tourists got injured, but, somehow, this one was different. His heart had leapt into his throat when he'd thought she was going to ski straight into a tree, which was strange since he didn't even know her name. But there was something about her that had been driving him crazy since he'd laid eyes on her.

Sayuri could hear the irritation in his voice. Again she had to suppress the urge to verbally retaliate. Wasn't it obvious she didn't know what she was doing? She hadn't strayed on purpose. She wasn't an idiot. And yes, she had thought about screaming, she'd just spent too much time analyzing the

situation to react properly. Hadn't he ever heard of people being frozen with fear? In the next instant, he surprised her by his actions, effectively redirecting her thoughts.

Faolan grabbed the infuriating woman by the ankles and made quick work of taking off her skis, making sure she wouldn't be endangering her life or his with them again.

Sayuri couldn't help but compare his angry movements to those of a parent taking away some unsafe toy from a child. Why was he so irritated? What did it matter to him if she got hurt? But, as she thought about it for a second, she had a feeling she knew why. It was his job to take care of visitors to the lodge, and he probably didn't want anyone to get hurt because not only would it make him look bad but most injuries nowadays usually ended in lawsuits.

When he was done he stood, hoisting her rented skis under one arm with ease. With minimal effort, and as little physical contact as he could manage, he helped her to get back on her feet.

It seemed as if he would be headed on his way, but, instead of leaving her there in the snow, which she half-expected since they hadn't really hit it off, he proceeded to grab her by her upper arm behind the elbow. He then proceeded to escort her uphill to the lodge in a manner very reminiscent of juveniles under their parent's restraint. Although things weren't panning out the way she might have liked, she decided she shouldn't let the opportunity go to waste completely.



Again, she worried over the fact that she'd never really had the time or the desire to want to attract the opposite sex. So she wondered now, since she wasn't trying to opt for a permanent relationship, should she be herself or not? She decided that playing the dumb bimbo slut even for a minute was just too much for her. She would have to get a baby on her own terms. After all, hadn't the media bombarded women with the fact that men thought about sex all of the time and most of them, if given the opportunity, would jump at the chance at sex without strings.

"I didn't get the chance to thank youuuuu . . .," she said, being sure to leave the rest of the sentence hanging, drawing the word 'you' out so that maybe he would take that as a hint and tell her his name.

Faolan responded with a sound that was more grunt than acknowledgement. He heard the woman, but he was so busy trying not to look at her, trying not to breathe in her intoxicating scent, that he was having trouble concentrating on the task at hand, and he thought he might pass out from trying to haul her up the slope and hold his breath at the same time. He had to get her to a place where he could leave her, and quickly, because she was driving him crazy, her scent had put all his primal senses on alert. The worst part was that she had no idea what she was doing to him or what he could do to her. Perhaps that was for the best, if she knew she might have made the situation worse.

Frustrated at his response and his apparent lack of understanding that she had been subtly trying to get him to

introduce himself, Sayuri's thin dark brow furrowed in irritation. She was nothing if not determined, though, so she tried again. This time she decided the direct approach would probably work better. Men, they were so thick sometimes. If she could stop and find a big enough stick, perhaps she would just hit him over the head and carry him home cavewoman style, that would probably be more on his level.

"What's your name?"

Faolan stopped mid-stride and stared at the woman he had been hurriedly leading to safety. For a moment, he found himself lost in the limpid depths of her rich brown eyes again. He had to work very hard to shake off the very strong affect those eyes were having on him. Turning away from her, he hoped that she could not see the evidence of his arousal.

"My name is Faolan," he said, his voice terse, his words clipped. The struggle to restrain himself from snatching her up and throwing her down right there in the snow, far away from the site of others, was great and growing much stronger the longer he was in her presence. But as he looked ahead of them, he was relieved to see light at the end of the tunnel. A few more feet would bring them off of the slopes and to safe ground where she could make her own way unassisted. He picked up his pace, practically dragging her along behind him.

Despite his seemingly more urgent pace, Sayuri smiled with triumph. So the ill-tempered, unsocial, gorgeous lug had a name.

"My name . . . is Sayuri. I'm here . . . on vacation . . . for three weeks," she said, her speech a little broken because she was a little out of breath from the pace he was trying to make her much shorter legs keep up with in the thick snow.

A few seconds later, Faolan dropped his hold on her arm and unceremoniously thrust her skis that he'd been holding at her. He barely waited for her to get a good grip on them before he turned and left.

Sayuri stared at Faolan's backside slack-jawed. What did she say? Was it the way she looked in her suit? Was it that obvious she was looking to get laid? Had that actually offended him? He had seemed to be trying to get uphill faster than necessary, but she hadn't really paid it any attention because she was so focused on prying a name out of him. She supposed he must have been horrified that she'd even tried to flirt with him.

Disappointed, but determined not to let it get the best of her, she turned toward the building where she'd rented her skis.

Making his way to the safety of the trees, Faolan found Ulrich, one of his pack mates, watching him.

Ulrich gave him a nod, indicating the woman he'd escorted uphill.

"What's the story on that one?"

Suddenly feeling oddly possessive, Faolan didn't really want to discuss the woman.

"Tourist."

Ulrich grunted in agreement. It was all that needed to be said. It really epitomized most of their troubles on the job throughout the years. However, Ulrich had noticed that Faolan was tense, he could hear his heart beating unusually fast. Something had gotten to him. He looked back at the woman again. Could she have gotten to him, he wondered? He mentally shook his head. Impossible.

They turned in unison, making their way through the familiar woods in companionable silence. Normally, it would have eased much of the tension in Faolan to be with one of his pack mates, after a long hard day saving humans from themselves, but today was different. Somehow, the woman had gotten to him. The imminent mating season came to mind, and he suddenly wished he could have a woman like Sayuri choose to accept him for coupling, but her kind never would. Even had she done so, she was human, an 'outsider', and the rules of their kind said that she wouldn't do, but that hadn't stopped her from arousing his beast. He'd never had that happen with a human before. Perhaps, though, it wasn't really her, maybe the main reason he felt such a drive was because the mating season was so close and he'd never been mated before. He needed to put her out of his mind. He needed to keep his distance, but now that he had her scent, that was going to be increasingly difficult.

\* \* \* \*

Sayuri finally got back to her cabin. The exhaustion from skiing and nearly killing herself, desperately flirting up a storm with a handsome stranger, and then trudging uphill back to her cabin in the snow was really setting in. She was glad she had decided to go to the main part of the hotel and get dinner to go, she didn't think she would be able to sit and look like a decent human being while eating in the dining room with all of the other hotel guests, not to mention the fact that she would have to eat alone while she watched everyone else eating and carrying on with someone. That would've be a hard pill to swallow at the moment.

She knocked the snow off of her boots before she made her way into her cabin. Once inside, she kicked her boots off at the door and took her clothes off with her free hand that wasn't holding her supper in a box while she walked, letting the clothes fall where they may on her way to her bedroom. This being impulsive and spontaneous was really setting in. She was normally so neat and organized, making sure to put everything in its place. It felt great to make a mess and not clean it up immediately.

Pulling out a small moving dinner tray that she found located next to her bed, she set down her boxed supper and made her way to the bathroom for a shower. She didn't care if her supper was stone cold when she got out, what she really wanted was a shower, hot water washing away all of her troubles, all of her indecent thoughts about Faolan, the darkly handsome man who'd rescued her.

By the time she was done with her shower, the bathroom was so full of steam she could hardly see to get out, but she felt much better, warm through and through, all of her muscles deeply relaxed.

Toweling off, she sifted through her open suitcase and found a night gown, putting it on before flopping into her oversized bed.

She lay back, enjoying the plush pillows and comforter beneath her. Looking around, she found a remote on her bedside table. She picked it up and turned on the t.v., flicking through channels before deciding to rent a movie. There wasn't much to choose from, but she found a werewolf movie that she hadn't seen before that showed some promise, so she selected it.

She eyed her boxed food on the adjustable dinner tray by the bed but decided she was entirely too comfortable and too lazy to move the few inches necessary to get her food, let alone eat, so she just relaxed and settled more deeply into her covers and let her cares unwind as she soaked in the thriller.

In all his years, Faolan had never lost control, but this woman was new to him.

She brought out something dangerous in him, and it took every ounce of strength he possessed to reign himself in. He kept telling himself that he couldn't afford to be out of control, not now with the mating season so close. It could put his chances of landing a mate for him and his pack in jeopardy.

He became deathly still, only his gaze moving cautiously, an ominous predator analyzing the currents in the air for recognition.

There was no doubt in his mind it was the woman from the slopes, Sayuri. Her scent was unmistakable, undeniably feminine, alluring. It intoxicated his senses and compelled him to go forward into the night, to find her, to quiet his beast by sating his lust.

The cabin was dark except for the bedroom, illuminated only by the television. As he drew closer to the window and was able to see inside, he became still again, seamlessly blending in with the darkness of night around him. Through the window, his burning gaze found her and claimed her.

When they had been together on the slopes, her snow suit had hidden all physical evidence of her femininity, but now, as she lay on her bed, in nothing but a silken night gown, her figure lay exposed to his hungry stare. He could do nothing but envy the silk as it clung to her skin like a lover, hugging her thighs, caressing her breasts, laying bare the line of her throat, the creamy skin of her neck and shoulders.

For many long minutes, he fought to breathe. She was exquisite, beautiful, her sweet brown eyes fringed with thick, long black lashes, her sumptuousness called to him. Her movements, as she lay watching the television, drifting to sleep, were innocent, yet somehow erotic.

His beast stirred. His.

He shook his head. The thought shocked him. Where had that come from?

But, he realized, he had denied his primal urges for far too long, this time the beast would not be beat back, this time his beast would slowly devour the man until there was nothing left.

Sometime during his internal struggling while he stood in the snow, Sayuri had fallen asleep.

He continued to watch her through the window and admired her pale skin, imagining how soft it would feel beneath his touch, how it would taste, how it would feel pressed hard against his body. His body tightened unexpectedly until there was a savage, burgeoning, relentless ache, a need demanding release.

\* \* \* \*

Sayuri roused slightly at a thump. Looking around blearily, she saw two glowing eyes set in the shadow of a wolf and the full moon shining through the bedroom window. She had left the curtains open so that she could see the view and had fallen asleep without closing them. She felt her heart jerk with fright, but when she looked again, there was a man, not a wolf. She decided she must be dreaming because of the movie and suddenly felt drugged. The next thing she knew, there was a man over her.



Faolan knew the exact moment when Sayuri had awakened.

His hands moved over her. His strong fingers encircled one of her ankles, experienced the texture of her skin. His breath became lodged in his throat as anticipation tightened every muscle in his body. He ran his hands slowly up her lower leg, massaging, teasing, moved higher up her body to her knee, her well-sculpted thigh. His palms discovered the inside of her thighs, petted, caressed.

He could tell by the frantic pounding of her heart that her body ached for his touch, for his possession.

With a will all their own, his hands moved further up her body, found heat and silk, found the apex of her thighs. He covered the juncture with a palm possessively, held tight against the moist heat he found there. His deft fingers moved, explored, and discovered her most sensitive spot.

Closing his eyes, he was able to temporarily subdue the raging beast coursing through his body. For a moment, he broke contact and realized that his body was bathed in perspiration and his cock was hard and pulsating.

With resignation, he realized he had come too far, he had known he had trespassed into unsafe territory, but he had not known the desire that the woman would instill in him and now it was too late, he did not have the strength to stop his inner beast from breaking free. He was on fire with the hunger she had created, consumed with it, delicious flames licking along his skin and nerve endings. The beast was unleashed.

The war within him to deny the other half of his true self had raged for what had seemed like an eternity. This time, he didn't want to fight it. What he felt was not just a strong sexual attraction, it was much more than that. There was something primal calling from deep within him to something deep within her.

Sayuri licked her lips. It wasn't something that would normally require much effort, but at the moment it seemed very hard because a strange lassitude had descended upon her. The muscles of her body were heavy and limp. She found she was having difficulty concentrating on anything other than arousal, which appeared to be building, gathering strength, until pleasure seemed to dominate her mind.

Her skin prickled with chill, and she realized she was naked. She didn't remember taking off her nightgown. Her skin tingled as though she was electrically charged, fine hairs standing on end all along her body. Warm hands slid over her skin, caressing the curves of her body, stroking her nipples until they hardened into taut peaks of pain and pleasure.

She arched her back, pushing toward him, needing to feel more, lingering on the edge of consciousness, in a drowsy state of arousal. She wanted to open her eyes, to know if it was all an illusion. But a longing enveloped her, spread through her, making her afraid to open her eyes, scared that illumination might chase it away if it was indeed just a dream.

Her pussy contracted with throbbing need, becoming wet with

desire. She gripped the bed sheets, her knuckles white from the tension, needing something to hold on to, wanting desperately to touch him, but afraid.

Hardened palms skimmed down across her stomach, down further, on her hips. She gasped in surprise and shuddered as his fingers slid along her naked pussy and moved lower to spread her thighs apart with ease.

Nimble fingers spread her pussy lips apart, rubbing the juices of her arousal around her clit. She moaned deep in her throat and writhed on the bed beneath his masterful hands.

Muscular thighs rubbed against her own, rough against the soft flesh of her inner thighs. She felt his hot cock against her thigh, felt his nimble fingers stroke her clit and then caress circles around the nub with deliberate precision. An unfamiliar hardness suddenly pressed against the lips of her pussy, demanding entry, burning like fire, searing her nerves.

He bit gently at the sensitive skin along her jaw, along her throat, moving down her body until she felt his heated breath caressing the tops of her breasts. Her nipples puckered, stood erect. A moan of encouragement escaped her lips as his mouth covered one pouting peak. He lathed one sensitive tip with his tongue, flicked it back and forth, suckled it.

She gasped as heat and moisture flooded her pussy.

It occurred to Sayuri fleetingly that the strange feeling that had come over her was much like the euphoria drugs generated.

She felt dizzy, disorientated and yet she found it virtually impossible to center her mind anywhere else and ignore it.

His hot mouth came down on hers.

Sayuri gasped in surprise, unwittingly allowing him entrance. She whimpered as he savagely plundered her mouth possessively, sweeping aside her feeble attempts at protest, and cupped a breast, pinching her nipple as his tongue tangled with her own.

She felt shaky and lightheaded, completely assaulted by swift, searing desire. He was wild and dangerous. He was intoxicatingly exciting. When he moaned with pleasure into her mouth, she inhaled his breath, his essence. Her senses became heightened until they were raging out of control. Her blood boiled as though she was on fire, burning her deep down to her core.

She couldn't think clearly. All she knew was that her pussy begged for satiation, that she needed him deep inside her, thrusting into her. Her sex was soaked now, dampening her thighs, the molten moisture increasing the burning need driving her.

He broke away from her mouth suddenly, and she groaned at the loss of him, at the loss of contact, moaning as he blazed a trail of kisses along her jaw to her ear. He nipped at the sensitive shell, lathing it with his tongue, his hot breathe in her ear eliciting goosebumps all along her body, making her shudder beneath him.

Her thighs parted on their own accord, instinctively allowing him nearer, nudging him closer as he moved between her splayed thighs. She squirmed, unable to lie still another moment, needing something ... something she couldn't name.

He suckled her neck, hard, kneeling between her legs, moving forward until the massive length of his cock nudged her bare cleft, parting the swollen folds of her pussy. And then she felt his hot, hard invasion.

He bent and kissed her lightly, nipping her lips in a teasing nibble that stoked the flames of need high in her belly. Her sex felt drenched with it, and she couldn't imagine waiting any longer. She clutched his shoulders, eager for him to proceed, but he pulled back, moving down her body, denying her.

He slid his tongue down her throat, down the valley of her breasts, nipping her breasts with lips and teeth. She reached for him to beg him to stop, to not torture her, but he grasped her wrists and pinned them to her sides as he closed his mouth around one taut peak.

Wet heat latched onto her nipple, sucking hard, burning and aching and bliss in one potent combination. It lanced through her breast, deep in her belly, pulsing between her legs. Ecstasy nudged her, teasing the edges of her mind. She gasped as pure pleasure arced through her body. Her insides coiled around it.

He raked his teeth over her distended flesh, freeing one wrist

as he thrust one hand down to cup her sex roughly, plunging into her cleft to find that swollen, achy bud. She groaned as he stroked her, suckled her. Her nails dug into the bed trying to hold on as white hot electricity coursed through her veins and scorched every thread of sanity.

He tore his mouth from her breast, freeing her other wrist to cup her buttocks, raising her hips from the bed.

She wrapped her legs around his hips, jerking toward him as he propped on his arms, looking down at her with smoky, passion filled eyes. The head of his cock nudged the opening of her womanhood, stretching the edges. He closed his eyes, his brow furrowed with pain, damp with perspiration. He pushed forward and the dull ache became pain, burning, damning pain.

He was huge, too large to fit.

She panted with exertion, trying to hold back her gasp of agony, trying to hold on to consciousness.

The pain eased, became no more. Only pleasure hovered now ... and the vast emptiness of her soul. The slickness of her cleft eased his passage, and he edged inside her, moving in small degrees.

His arms shook as he held himself above her, sliding inside her, so slowly she thought she would die before he was fully inside.

But he couldn't hold back anymore. The beast would not be held at bay. A strangled groan tore from his throat as he plunged deep inside her.

She arched her back, screaming with the ecstasy, the stretching fullness.

He nibbled her hungrily, rotating his hips.

She whimpered, her muscles spasming, clenching tightly around his cock. He withdrew, sliding out and then in with long, torturous strokes, grinding against her swollen clit, making her jerk with the pleasurable sensation.

He set a rhythm, short and fast, each stroke causing her to arch and quiver with sensation. Her muscles twitched as he withdrew, gushed with wet arousal, and welcomed him inside her core with pulling, sucking muscles that clenched hard around his engorged cock. She could feel the taut muscles of his thighs and hips, the hardness of his ass against her crossed legs.

He moved faster and faster until her heart galloped and her lungs froze. Sudden, soul shattering bliss stole through them like a bolt of lightning, surrounding them as the waves of orgasm crashed and engulfed them in searing, painful pleasure.

She wrapped her arms around him, holding him tight as he plunged into her and spewed his hot seed deep in her belly.

She breathed weakly against his temple, dropping her arms and legs from his body as she collapsed feebly back against the bed, almost instantaneously asleep.

Faolan raised a hand and stroked her cheek lightly. His brow furrowed and his eyes grew dark. "I will never let you go."

## Chapter Three

Sayuri woke up decidedly uncomfortable. It was hard to believe how cold she was. But, much more than that, she was completely shocked and surprised to find that she was downright naked. She had never slept naked before. Although her brain was still a little foggy from sleep, she did remember that she had put on her silk nightgown the night before just after she'd taken a shower, right before settling down to watch some t.v.. She looked around but the nightgown was nowhere in sight. How in the world had she disrobed herself in her sleep? And where was the nightgown?

Shivering as goose bumps coursed all over her skin, she



moved to cover herself with some of the comforter that was now lying at the foot of the bed. As she moved, though, she gasped in surprise. The movement had brought to her attention an intense ache in the muscles in her arms, neck, and lower body. She lay back against her plush pillows and tried to massage the cramped muscles around her neck and shoulders for a minute to assuage the soreness.

After a few minutes, though, feeling no better than before, she gave up, figuring that she would just have to go about her day and ignore the discomfort. It was probably the strange bed she was sleeping in that had gotten her neck muscles in such a knot. Or, she thought after a moment, it just might have been all that reckless skiing the day before. It must have really given her an intense workout. She had been so distracted by her near death experience, first in her car on that insane mountain pass that the locals tried to carry off as a road and then on the slopes by her inept skiing and her brooding yet handsome rescuer, that, at the end of the day, she hadn't really paid any attention to how her body had felt other than tired. She also wouldn't doubt it if she had whiplash from when Faolan had slammed into her so hard in his rescue efforts, although she wasn't going to complain about that. Yes, because he had saved her life, but that wasn't really why and she knew it.

She wistfully sighed to herself, closing her eyes as she recalled his hard body pressed against hers, so tough it felt as if it was wrought of iron, his hot breath fanning her cold wind swept skin, his intoxicating green glare. Any time that man wanted to throw himself all over her, she'd be more than happy to

accommodate him, even if he was perpetually pissed. She could handle it.

She noticed as she stretched languidly in bed that the television was off. She wondered briefly when she had turned it off, but when she spotted the remote tangled up in the sheets lying next to her in the bed, she figured she must have rolled over onto it during the night and turned it off.

Pleasurable shivers erupted all over her body as she recalled the extremely realistic dream she'd had during the night. She didn't remember a whole lot of it, just some foggy images, but wasn't that the way of it? If it was a hot dream, you couldn't hold on to it. Regardless of the tantalizingly sexual nature of the dream, she decided against watching any more late night werewolf movies.

Of course, she couldn't really say that she regretted the dream. In fact, she had liked it so much, she had wanted it to continue as she'd floated briefly in that almost conscious state right before full awareness, the place where if you're having pleasant dreams you try to stay asleep. It was a shame that sex in real life wasn't nearly as entertaining, but that was exactly why they called them dreams, because they weren't true to life. It was strange that she had taken the images from the movie and put a sexual twist to them in her dream. She supposed though that was only because her subconscious was focused on making a baby, combined with the real life hunk who'd ignored her and berated her for her reckless behavior the day before, she supposed they were all elements that combined

with the late night horror flick to create the ingredients for the perfect perverted wolf dream.

Well, the hot dream was over and she was wide awake. There was no point in lying in bed anymore. She couldn't get back to her strange wolf like lover if she wanted to. She needed to get up and get going on having some fun and meeting some potential baby-makers.

First, she realized as she sat up and tossed her legs over the side of the bed, she needed to go to the gym to work out some of the soreness in her body. Her muscles were excruciatingly sore and in some weird places, but then, that was to be expected, especially since she was sure that she hadn't been skiing appropriately. Getting out of bed, she made her way over to her suitcase, which she had placed on a dresser by the door, and got an outfit out that would be easy to work out in.

After she had showered and gotten dressed, she examined the map that laid out the facilities of the lodge and found the gym. Leaving her bedroom, she noticed the clock on the kitchen stove indicated it was only seven o'clock. Even though she'd promised herself that she was going to be more spontaneous on this trip, which was why she hadn't requested a wake up call, she was glad that her inner clock had gotten her up at her usual time. It was a good time to workout. The gym would most likely be empty.

She liked it better that way. She didn't really like being alone most of the time, but working out was one of those times when she especially didn't want anyone paying her any attention. She

never felt attractive in her day to day life, but she particularly didn't really feel very attractive working out. Who could feel attractive when you are sweating, breathing hard, and making strange faces as you strain with heavy equipment? It was good that she had decided to start the day with a workout, as she always did back home in the city. She did want to try to be as spontaneous as possible, but she didn't think it was a good idea to get out of the habit of working out first thing in the morning, especially if she was going to get pregnant. She didn't want to get out of shape during her pregnancy. It would make being a single mom that much harder on her, and besides, she needed to set a good example for her child.

Throwing on a her thick jacket that she'd hung on the coat rack by the front door, Sayuri slipped her already sneaker encased feet into her large snow boots and headed out the door and to the main part of the lodge where the gym was located. It didn't take long to find the work out room located in the basement.

The sounds of equipment and muffled voices reached her ears before she actually saw the interior of the room. Her brow furrowed in disappointment when she heard the sounds. Damn. Who in the world was working out this early in the morning?

But as she rounded the corner in the hall and got a glimpse of who was occupying the gym, she forgot all about her initial disappointment at discovering that she wouldn't be able to workout solo. It took a few minutes for everything to really sink in, but when it did, she couldn't help the shock that stole over

her entire being.

Not only was Faolan, the gorgeous sullen man that had been so short with her the day before, in the room, with his shirt off and his glistening muscles straining with heavy equipment, but he had two other handsome men with him that were also impossibly good looking and, wouldn't you know it, shirtless.

Trying to recover from her shock at the wall of man meat before her, Sayuri quickly closed her mouth. The men hadn't noticed her. That was good. They hadn't gotten an eye full of her staring at them like she was some sex crazed maniac who was trying to stalk them. But another problem presented itself. She was all set to work out, but she didn't know how comfortable she would feel going into the room with Faolan, especially after the way he had acted toward her the day before. The urge to take flight and run all the way back to her cozy cabin was tempting. She bit her lip in indecision.

No, she wouldn't tuck tail and run. She had paid for this vacation, and she had the right to use the damn gym, too. She also had the right to walk right in there and pretend as if Faolan didn't exist, and that was exactly what she was going to do. She wasn't going to let one guy ruin her good time or her workout. Well, he might make her feel uncomfortable despite all her efforts to the contrary, but she was going to do her best to not let any of that on. And, who knew, perhaps she could get some interested glances from one of his companions. She had every intention of looking for men with possibility today, and they completely fit the bill.

She opened the glass door to the gym, her head and vision pointed in the opposite end of the room from the guys. She didn't look over in their direction, but she did hear them stop working out for a moment as she took off her coat and hung it on a hook and kicked off the snow boots that encased her sneaker clad feet and walked over to some equipment on the other side of the room from them to start working out. The silence seemed very loud in the room, almost overwhelming her conviction to stay, but she was determined to ignore it and appear as if she was completely focused on her workout.

She stood with her back to the men and examined a row of equipment for a few minutes, anxious and tense, but soon she was flooded with relief when she heard the guys begin their workout again. Maybe they weren't paying her any attention now.

She was so twisted. One moment, she was thinking about how she needed to meet a man and have a baby, and the next she was thankful that three gorgeous men weren't paying her the least bit of attention, three gorgeous men who would make beautiful babies. That was what she needed if she was going to get what she wanted. It was just hard, focusing on catching a man when she'd never been good at it, hard to act as if she wasn't totally aware of them, hard to act as if she was confident in catching a man when she was probably the most hopeless and helpless woman when it came to relationships that had ever lived. If she got laid once while she was on vacation she should count herself lucky. If she got pregnant at all it was going to be an act of a merciful god.

She went through a routine on some of the equipment, which was extremely difficult since she was having a hard time staying focused since the group of delectable men were in her direct line of vision and she could make out every detail of their glistening, sexy toned muscular bodies.

Now that Faolan wasn't in a snow suit, she could tell a lot more about him. She'd noticed before that he was tall, nearly a full foot taller than her, and dark. He was very muscular, every bit of his upper torso was perfectly defined, but not in a bulky sense. He had a sort of rangy or lanky look to him, a build much like a swimmer's physique. His shaggy hair was a deep shade of black and fell just below his chin. She couldn't see his eyes from across the room, but she didn't think she'd ever forget their intoxicating shade of dark green, eyes the likes of which she had never seen before. It was without a doubt that he was the dark one of the group. It was almost as if he had an ominous thunder cloud that was hanging over him, and even now that he wasn't talking to her directly, now that he was surrounded by what she assumed were his friends or at least men that he felt sociable with because they worked together, he seemed to be even tempered-evenly bad most of the time that is.

The other two men talked a little. She couldn't make out what they were saying over the sounds of the machine she was using. His friends seemed at ease, comfortable as they talked. Faolan remained stonily silent, like a dark obelisk in their midst. He was obviously not very articulate even among his co-workers-a man of few words. She thought that she rather liked

that about him, though. In the city, every man she'd met had a thousand things to say, usually topics centering around them or the expensive toys they bought that they felt defined them as men. Finding a man that chose his words carefully was a rare feat indeed. Or perhaps she just liked that he was the silent brooding type, imagining that he was like some romance novel hero who was dark because he had a tortured past. When they were quiet and mysterious, you could imagine they had all sorts of character. She supposed that's what made them so great, you filled in all the blanks with what you wanted.

The next man in the group that she examined was a few inches shorter than Faolan. But, from what she could tell from across the room, he seemed broader than him. He was also sculpted like some ancient Greek statue. She wondered briefly if it was the skiing or the gym that had created their scrumptious physiques, she wasn't going to complain either way. His shoulder length icy blond hair wasn't tied back, it fell into his face repeatedly as he worked out. She couldn't tell what color his eyes were, just that they were light. She wondered briefly if they were blue. It was so rare to see blue eyes and blond hair. It was such a compelling combination that you almost never saw an attractive man that had both that was single. She'd also heard that that was the first sperm to be sold out at sperm banks, she knew from talking to other women when she'd made an attempt at looking at that venue for impregnation, that was until she'd found out how expensive it was and how every once in a great while the woman didn't actually get the sperm she'd chosen. The entire concept had been completely unacceptable.



When she noticed that he was looking at the clock on the wall behind her, she leaned forward a little and strained harder to try to see if he had blue eyes. A second later, his gaze shifted from the clock to her, and he caught her staring at him and winked at her playfully. Extremely embarrassed to be caught staring, she quickly diverted her attention to the fitness equipment directly in front of her. Obviously he was the flirt and the happy one, as he seemed to have a perpetual smile about him. Even when she noticed that he wasn't smiling, he just seemed to exude some sort of pleasantness about him. He had something akin to an inner glow that seemed to radiate from him. It was infectious, and it made her want to smile as well. He caught her looking at him again a few minutes later and wriggled a brow at her. Oh! He was incorrigible!

The last man in the group was the smallest of the three, not small by any normal means of measurement, but smaller than the giants he kept company with. He was as tall as the blonde, but slender, slightly more so than Faolan, which made him the runt of their group. His hair, from what she could tell, was a dark chestnut. It was thick and fell in waves to his shoulders. She had also mistakenly made eye contact with him when she had been casting glances their way to examine them. He had been quick to look away, and she had seen what she thought was a blush as he blundered to regain his composure and tried to refocus on his workout. He must have been shy with females. Although most of the women she knew wouldn't have found shyness to be an attractive quality in a man, she thought it was an endearing quality.

Again, she hadn't really met a lot of men like them in the city. The ill-tempered men she'd met had always been in a position in the company above her and had treated her like a pile of shit that they had wanted taken out with the rest of the garbage. They hadn't had any of the redeeming qualities that Faolan possessed. They didn't have a heroic bone in their body. If she'd been mugged right outside of her building in the company parking lot, and they had been standing right there and been witness to it, they would have just looked the other way, pretended they didn't see what was going on, convinced themselves later that they couldn't have made a difference in the situation even if they had tried.

The flirtatious men she'd always met had never been interested in her. None of them had ever tried to work any of their well rehearsed charms on her because they were always too busy making moves on the more attractive women she worked with, those women that had a stream of bad relationships, that had all the qualities that men desired most, the women that were in every way her complete and total opposite.

And she'd never really known any shy men. The business world just wasn't the place for them. She had been surrounded by loud-mouth, overbearing business men for what seemed like her entire life.

Yes, every one of the men in the room was attractive, not just physically, which was more than she could have ever possibly imagined she would discover on her vacation. She just hoped against hope that perhaps one of them would find her pleasant

enough to share the company of her cabin bed at least once, especially Faolan, although that looked like a lost cause. She was quite sure she had really screwed the pooch on that one. He probably thought that she was a raving lunatic and wanted to put as much distance between them as he possibly could. She wouldn't doubt it if he thought now that she was stalking him like a desperate woman because she'd run into him several times in the past twenty-four hours. She also wouldn't doubt it if he thought she'd nearly killed herself the day before on the slopes on purpose. She'd heard of women doing crazier things than that to grab the attention of a man. She felt like telling him she wasn't so desperate for a man's attention that she would risk hurting herself. She couldn't help the fact that she was a magnet for disaster. But she had a feeling he wouldn't believe her if she pleaded her case, besides, if she did, she'd wind up sounding desperate, exactly what she didn't want.

\* \* \* \*

Ulrich could smell the scent of his alpha on the woman. He had picked up the scent the moment she had walked through the door. When he glanced over at Torolf, he could tell from his expression that he had also picked up the scent, and he didn't look any happier about it than he himself did. He knew the only reason that it was so strong was because Faolan had done the unthinkable. He had marked her. He exchanged a look with Torolf and then they turned in unison to give Faolan a knowing look.

Faolan snarled at them under his breath for their close scrutiny, but he didn't have to guess at their thoughts. He knew exactly why they were looking at him like that. And he didn't give a damn. He was the pack alpha. He didn't have to explain himself to them.

Ulrich could feel his beast raging beneath the surface because of the scent of his alpha on the woman across the room. His beast was going to drive him insane if he had to endure it much longer, and he knew that Torolf was struggling with his demons as well.

Ulrich watched her work out, continuing to feel his beast trying to take over, fighting for dominion over his self-control. The woman was now doing jumping jacks which caused her delicious breasts to bounce up and down until his eyeballs were rattling in his head and he had the beginnings of a headache. She proceeded from there to doing stretching by touching her toes and turning her ass up at them until it was all he could do to keep from striding across the room and mounting her right then and there. He envisioned doing just that, and he could feel his beast aroused to new heights by the lust she incited in him.

\* \* \* \*

Sayuri worked hard to draw out her workout, but when none of the three handsome men came over to speak to her, she knew she might as well leave because she wasn't going to get up the nerve to strike up a conversation with any of them herself, not after what had happened between her and Faolan. Several

other guests came in, and she decided it was time to get on with her day. She went to the door to gather her belongings before she headed out of the main building and back to her cabin to take a shower.

As she laid down her clothes in a lodge bin in front of the sink area in the bathroom, something dark on her pale skin caught her attention out of the corner of her eye in the mirror. She had already turned on the shower and the heat from the water had begun to fog up the glass. She swiped at it to try to get a better look at what she had seen. There were some strange bruises on her neck and chest and an odd mark on her breast. The bruises she figured were from one of her many falls the day before, but the mark-she couldn't think of how that could have gotten there. She mentally shrugged at the injury. She was such a klutz. There was really no telling how she had gotten herself all banged up. She stepped into the shower that was waiting for her and let the heat consume her. It was just what she needed. The hot water soothed away her worries, the tiredness of her muscles, washed away her doubts about her ability to secure the company of a man, at least for a little while.

She was still sore in spite of the workout and a long shower and decided that it would be best to take it a little easier for the day. What she needed to do was something that was a little less physically daunting. She didn't remember everything that she had seen when she had purchased her room that the resort had listed among their activities. She would have to go back to the main lobby and get one of their brochures.

Once she made her way through the thick snow back to the main lobby, she found the display with all of the brochures she'd seen when she had first arrived. One of the other tourists noticed her at the front desk flipping through a brochure that offered details on resort activities.

"You know," the woman said, a pleasant smile lighting up her features, "this resort has a horse-drawn sleigh ride. My husband and I went on it yesterday, and it was just wonderful. You should really give it a try if you're looking for something to do. It's a great break from skiing everywhere. You have to wait in a short line, but it doesn't take that long, and it's worth every minute."

Sayuri smiled at the woman. "Why, thank you for the suggestion. That sounds like an excellent idea. I've never been on a sleigh ride. Where do you sign up?" she asked as she slipped the activity brochure into an interior pocket of her thick jacket.

"The line is behind the rental building. There's plenty of other guests to talk to while you wait, or you can explore the gift shop if you don't want to wait out in the cold."

"Thanks again," Sayuri said as she made her way out the front doors of the main building to make her way over to the rental building.

The woman was right. It was a wonderful idea. Besides, after all she'd been through since she'd come to this place, she could use something where she just kicked back and relaxed.

Surely there wasn't anything that could go wrong with a beautiful sleigh ride led by horses?

## Chapter Four

Ulrich and Torolf stopped working out as soon as Sayuri was out of sight.

"We need to talk to you Faolan," Ulrich said, working hard to keep the emotions that were running rampant through him at bay.

Torolf nodded his agreement, crossing his arms in front of him, a muscle ticking in his jaw.

Ulrich and Torolf wanted to confront Faolan about what they already knew had happened the night before with the woman from the gym.

Faolan growled low in his throat, brushing past them to the back door of the gym, stepping out into the snow without looking back to see if his pack mates followed.

They left the lodge together, Faolan taking the lead. Their long legs and fast pace quickly ate up the distance to their quiet meeting place, located far away from all the tourists and the lodge.

By the time they stopped, Ulrich couldn't hear anything aside from the thrum of his rapid heartbeat pulsing in his ears. The sound had been getting louder and faster with each step he had taken until it almost deafened him. He wanted to shift. He wanted to challenge Faolan to a fight. He wanted to tear into his flesh, to draw blood. He hadn't been this angry in years. And he knew exactly why he was so angry.

He knew that he was letting his long term frustration with the lack of willingness from the females of their kind to mate with them combine with his irritation at Faolan for breaking the rules and endangering any slim chances they might have had this mating season to acquire a mate. He knew that since it was so close to their time of mating and because of the fact that they had never been mated that their tempers would be on the rise, that their hormones would be hard to keep in check. The part of him that was a man knew that he should be using logic and reason to deal with their situation, but he couldn't. He wasn't thinking logically, and he had a feeling it had everything to do with the woman. There was something inexplicable about her. She had thrown all of them into utter chaos since her arrival the



day before. And she had absolutely no idea that she was doing it. He didn't know whether that was a good thing or not.

But he didn't want to care about anything anymore. He didn't want to think logically anymore. He had grown weary of trying to maintain logic and reason. He wanted to let his beast take the reins, let it take control. He wanted to fight, especially since Faolan had been the one drilling him and Torolf for so many years on the rules of mating and how their kind could never mate with a human. The fact that Faolan had gone and marked the woman was unbelievable, completely unforgivable. He hadn't breathed a word of his intentions because if he had, he would have talked him out of it. What the hell had he been thinking? Right now he really didn't give a fuck what he'd been thinking. He'd put their chances of getting a mate at risk, and he'd done it without talking to him or Torolf first. He'd been entirely selfish. He'd been thinking only of his own needs and desires. Something he himself had longed to do many times, but he had shown self restraint. He had followed the order given by his pack alpha. But no more, following orders was a thing of the past, at least where mating was concerned. If Faolan was going to mark the woman, he could damn well have a piece of her, too. They were pack mates, they shared everything. He didn't give a damn what Faolan said to the contrary, if he was going to mark the woman, he could too.

Faolan was pissed off. He honestly couldn't remember marking Sayuri. He'd been so incensed by her. He'd been out of his mind to have her. He really couldn't explain that either, although he knew that Ulrich and Torolf were going to want to hear

something, some kind of explanation for what he'd done, something to reason why he'd gone and done the unthinkable. The fact of the matter was, though, he didn't have any real answers for them. He could sit and speculate all day as to why he'd gone and done the worst thing imaginable, gone and marked a human woman, but it was all pointless. And, besides, it was a moot point now. He felt sure that the fact that they had already missed two mating cycles hadn't helped his inner beast maintain any semblance of control. It also hadn't helped that it didn't look likely that his pack would get the chance of a mate this time around either. They had done what they were supposed to do. They had shown the utmost loyalty to their kind, even though they had been shunned by all of them since birth. They had gone by all of the rules their kind had thrown at them with regards to their mating practices. They had fought and won battles, battles to which the winning pack was favored by a woman. But the women had done nothing but slight them despite all of their continued efforts, even though they could plainly see that his pack had been victorious, even though it was obvious that, despite all the odds that had been stacked against them because of their size at birth, his pack was strong, capable, and good for breeding.

Their numerous victories over the other packs hadn't changed a damn thing, hadn't changed any perceptions. The women of his kind had been prejudiced against all of them, had stereotyped them since birth as unworthy, especially since Ulrich and Torolf had been the runts of their litters and he'd been born an unfavorable color. It wasn't how they were born that mattered, it was what they had become, how they had

triumphed over adversity to become strong. All of it combined was enough to make him in favor of ignoring the pack rules and taking the woman. He'd been strong for his pack mates since he'd taken them in as pups, and when they'd grown into men, he'd stood before the leader of his kind, presented his case time after time, lead his pack into battle after battle, and for what? Their kind hadn't played by the rules, and if playing by the rules had gotten them no where, then what in the hell was the point of trying anymore?

As they all stepped into a small clearing in the forest, Torolf turned to Faolan first.

"Let's not beat around the bush. It's blatantly apparent what happened last night. Your scent was all over the woman," Torolf snarled.

"How could you do this Faolan? After everything we've been through?" Ulrich demanded, circling Faolan. "You drag us around on a leash before the rest of our kind. We dance to whatever tune that they like, while they laugh at us, because you keep telling us it's in our best interest. Because you tell us it's what we have to do if we are going to have a woman of our own to mate with. And yet you've gone and . . ."

Before Ulrich could finish his tirade, Faolan interrupted him, his voice low and ominous. "If you're looking for an apology, you can forget about it. I'm not sorry for what I did. I will admit, though, that I didn't set out to mark Sayuri."

"Whether you had every intention of it or not, you did it just the

same," Torolf said menacingly, his dark brow furrowed in irritation.

They were all at each other's throats. Their tempers were rising. They couldn't hold back their aggression any longer. Almost instantaneously, all of them shifted to their wolf form. Torolf and Ulrich began to circle Faolan, growling threateningly, baring their teeth, looking for the opportunity to strike.

Faolan dashed and bit first Ulrich and then Torolf. Ulrich leapt onto Faolan's back, sinking his teeth into the flesh of his neck.

\* \* \* \*

Sayuri was enjoying her ride in the horse drawn sled. She sighed with a little bit of sadness as she recollected the couples that had been lined up around her waiting for the ride. A lot of them had been snuggled up together, their gloved hands entwined, looking at each other as if there were no other people in the world. She wished suddenly that she had someone that cared about her like that. The only two people who had ever cared that much had been gone so long she had a hard time remembering what it was like to feel loved. She tried to console herself with the fact that if she was successful in her endeavors she would have a child, someone who would love her unconditionally, someone she could love unconditionally in return, and she wouldn't have to be alone anymore.

She looked around again at all the couples waiting in line. She had been the only person that was taking a ride in the sleigh by

themselves. It wasn't hard to see why. The ride had a definite romantic element to it. It was a great opportunity to get that someone special all alone, get them snuggled up next to you while you sat back and admired the beautiful scenery. It made the lack of a relationship in her life even more of a gaping hole in her heart than it had been before. She had never really done a lot of activities that had featured mostly couples before. It appeared that couples were about all she saw now that she was out looking for someone, or perhaps it was because she was just more conscientious of being alone now that she was on the prowl for a man.

The sled driver pulled up and held the sled door open while a couple exited and then stepped over to the ticket dispenser. Taking out a ticket, he then called out her number.

"Here," she called, waving her ticket stub. She shook off the melancholy nature of her thoughts and headed over to the man who was smiling at her amiably.

His expression then turned to one of confusion as he looked at her and saw that no one else was following close behind. "Just you?" the driver asked, a little unsure.

Sayuri pursed her lips. As if she really needed this. She had just been stressing about that fact herself, but she tried not to take it out on the man. It wasn't his fault. "Yes, it'll just be me. I'm sure the horses will appreciate it, less work and all."

"Let me help you then," he said and offered her his hand, helping her step into the sled.

She hadn't put on her snow suit today, since she wasn't skiing. She had chosen instead a thick faux fur coat. It felt great against her face, and it warded off the cold extremely well. She felt so warm and cozy as she settled back against the plush cushions of the sled, except for her face, of course. But she didn't mind the cold nipping at her skin. It felt good, refreshing, it kept her feeling awake and aware of her surroundings, and she didn't want to miss a thing.

As the driver snapped the reins and set his team of horses in motion, a light snow began to fall. As the snow drifted down she couldn't help but feel that it was magical, purely breathtaking. She was so glad that she had decided to visit the skiing resort. She'd known she would love the snow. It was so beautiful, so pure, so thick and wonderful. She wanted to get down and play in it, flop on her back and make snow angels. But she didn't give in to the childish impulse. She leaned her head back and let the drifting snow fall onto her face. The lodge was such a wonderful place. It was a shame she had waited so long to do this. But now was not the time to be feeling regret. She should enjoy herself, cherish the time that she had here.

She'd known when she came that she wouldn't be doing any more vacationing for a long time. She tried to focus on the lush scenery, the hills of snow, the snow-capped trees, the fresh scent of the trees that made up the woods and the leather harnesses of the horses. She focused on the soft jingling bells that were attached to the horses, listened to their breathing,

their soft whinnies every now and then, to the sound of the metal of the sled as the horses forced it over the freshly fallen snow. It was so picturesque and serene here on the edge of the wilderness, so far away from the city. How could anyone want to leave? Why didn't more people vacation at this wonderful place? Sure, there were lots of tourists running about, but she had taken in the immensity of the lodge. She was sure in it's hayday that it had been host to as much as five times as many people as were visiting it now. But perhaps she'd come at an off time of year for the lodge.

She was so relaxed by the tranquility of the snow and her surroundings, by the gentle sway of the ride, that when she first heard a strange sound it didn't really register. The sound came again, only this time much louder, closer. Her heart picked up its pace. She wasn't sure why. She shouldn't feel alarmed. It wasn't as if she was alone or on foot. But what was that noise? It was strange, yet somehow familiar. It almost sounded like a pack of dogs, as if there were dogs fighting in the woods. That couldn't be, surely people didn't bring their dogs with them on vacation to a ski resort. She sat up, straining to hear it again, to determine what it was that she had heard. The sound came again, much louder than before. By this time, the horses had picked up the scent of the animals making the noise, and they were beginning to give the driver trouble, stomping their feet and shaking their heads. The driver began to talk to them in a soothing reassuring voice, words that didn't register with her. She couldn't think, all she could do was center in on the menacing sound that became clearer and clearer as the sleigh continued on its path through the woods, the sound of animals

snarling. It almost sounded as if they were in the heat of battle.

When the sled rounded the next bend in the trail, she saw them. She gasped, covering her mouth in shock. Through a flurry of fur, she made out the animals. It wasn't dogs that had been making all of that noise. It was wolves, and there were three of them.

Her breath suddenly caught in her throat as she realized the sled was headed directly toward them. They were fighting each other, viciously snapping at one another, biting, clawing, snarling menacingly. She wanted to scream in fear. She'd never seen a wolf or any other kind of dangerous wild animal. But she didn't get the chance to do so much as whimper.

The horses, although they were wearing blinders and hadn't actually seen anything, had sensed that danger was close by, that the driver hadn't detected because of his struggle with them, and reared up in fear. The driver, who had been valiantly trying to control his team, hadn't anticipated the violent reaction of the horses and was thrown from his seat at the front of the sled when they reared up.

The horses heard the loud thud directly beside them as the man hit the ground. Gripped with a new fear, they tore into the woods, completely out of control now, foaming at the mouth.

Sayuri did scream now. She screamed and held onto the sides of the sled for dear life, bracing herself as much as she could.

"Help! Help me please! Somebody help me!" she screamed.



She screamed until her throat was sore and then stopped. Why was she screaming? There wasn't anybody out here that could help her. She was in the middle of the woods. She tried to calm herself. It was difficult, but she knew that continuing to scream wasn't going to help, it might even possibly be scaring the horses more than they already were.

Her mind raced as she maintained her death grip on the sides of the sled. She had absolutely no experience with horses. She had no idea what she could possibly do to calm them. She thought about the reins the man had been holding, but they were no where in sight. They must have fallen to the ground when he'd been thrown off. She tried not to cry in fear, that wouldn't help anything. But she couldn't help the overwhelming fear that consumed her, fear of dying. And she thought about the baby she had wanted so desperately, a baby she might never get the chance to have now. She wanted to live. She wanted to fight for her survival, but what could she do?

Faolan, Ulrich, and Torolf all stopped when they heard the woman scream. They turned almost in sync towards the sound. They had been so caught up in their fight that they hadn't heard the horses and sled approach. They realized in an instant that their scent and fighting had spooked the horses.

With a sinking feeling of dread gripping him, Faolan realized he knew who was in the sled. He had caught her scent. It was Sayuri.

Sayuri is in that sled, Faolan spoke through his mind to Ulrich and Torolf.

What do you want to do? Ulrich asked. We spooked the horses and they bolted into the woods.

We have to save her, quick, follow me," Faolan said, leading the way.

As all of them raced after the horses, still in wolf form, Faolan realized that it could look suspicious if he rescued Sayuri two days in a row.

When Ulrich caught up to him, he spoke to him as they continued to chase after the sleigh. Ulrich, when we get the horses stopped, I need you to break away and return in human form to rescue her.

I don't understand. Why?

Because I saved her yesterday on the slopes! We don't need her questioning why it is that I was able to be there for her twice, especially since we're so far from the lodge and the rest of the tourists. She might grow suspicious. Just do it dammit!

All three of them finally caught up with the out of control horses and sled. They managed to get past the team of horses, Faolan and Ulrich on one side of the horses and Torolf on the other, and herded them into a group of trees from which they couldn't escape.

The horses halted abruptly when they saw the trees blocked their escape. They began to kick and struggle against their restraints when they realized that the wolves had them cornered.

While Faolan and Torolf kept them at bay, Ulrich dashed off into the forest to shift out of site.

Now in human form, Ulrich emerged from the woods. He bent down and grabbed a stick and ran up to the wolves snarling at the horses and shooed them off. "Get out of here," he yelled, waving the stick, fighting back a smile.

After Faolan and Torolf left without much fuss, he reached down to grab the reins of the horses, which were hanging on the ground. Holding the reins tight in his hands, he caught the horses' attention. "Sh. Shh now. There there. Everything's going to be alright," he cooed, rubbing them on the head. After a few minutes, having subdued the horses, he then knew he needed to check on the woman.

Sayuri couldn't believe her eyes. One of the men she had seen in the gym earlier that morning had come to her rescue. It was the blond one with the smile in his eyes. Now that he was near, she had the chance to get a better look at him. He had a very square jaw, a regal aquiline nose, and, if she didn't know any better, a dimple in his cheek. As he drew closer to her, she saw that his eyes were an icy shade of blue. They were magnificent, breathtaking. She'd never seen eyes that shade of blue before.

"Are you alright miss?" Ulrich asked, smiling at her dazed expression as he took a seat next to her in the sled, the reins confidently in hand.

It took her a minute to register that he'd spoken to her. The experience had really addled her wits. And his close proximity certainly wasn't helping matters. She smiled back at him half-heartedly. "I am now, thanks to you. My god," she breathed, the full brevity of the situation just now hitting her, "Why, I could've been killed. I'm so lucky that you were way out here."

When she didn't say anything else, Ulrich breathed a small sigh of relief. He was glad that she didn't ask him what he'd been doing so far away from the lodge in the middle of the woods. He certainly wasn't going to enlighten her, he felt it best to leave that up to her imagination. Faolan was right, they didn't need her to get suspicious.

"I'm just glad you didn't get hurt. I wouldn't want to have to take a pretty little thing like you to the local doctor."

She blushed a little at the compliment. She certainly wasn't used to anyone calling her pretty. Then she thought about his comment about the doctor.

"Why wouldn't you want me to see the doctor?" she asked, a little puzzled.

Ulrich snapped the reins, leading the horses back the way they had come, turning his head and smiling at her.

She couldn't help but notice it was a brilliant smile. He had very sensual lips. His smile made her feel warm through and through. And, as his smile broadened, a dimple in his cheek came into play. She couldn't believe how attractive he was.

"Because the old doc is a real player, and I want a chance at you myself."

Sayuri's heart skipped a beat at that comment. Was he serious? Did men really talk like that? She didn't know whether to take him seriously or not. He seemed so playful, so she just didn't say anything else about it.

She was going to thank him and realized she didn't know his name. "What's your name?" she asked.

"Ulrich."

"My name's Sayuri."

"It's nice to meet you Sayuri."

Sayuri blushed in embarrassment. "I don't know how you could say that it's been nice when you've had to fend off wolves and rescue me from sheer disaster."

"All in a days work," he said, winking at her again.

She smiled at that. He was such a flirt. He probably flirted with every woman he came into contact with. It was just probably second nature for him and not that he specifically was interested in her.

Ulrich drove the sleigh back to where the driver had been thrown and jumped out of the sleigh to check on him. Seeing that he had been hurt, he helped him into the sleigh and then drove them all back to the lodge.

Seeing that they were almost back to the rental building, Sayuri knew it was now or never. She was going to have to take the plunge or she probably wouldn't see him again.

"Ulrich, I'd like to thank you for saving me. Do you want to have dinner later?"

Ulrich was torn. He hadn't gotten the chance to talk things out with Faolan, although it hadn't looked as if they were going to get much said with all the fighting they had been doing. But he had told himself that if Faolan could mark the woman, he could too. He didn't want to be rude and tell her no, but he knew if he said yes, he was going to do his best to seduce his way into her cabin.

Sayuri could see that Ulrich was wavering on what to say.

"You really don't have to if you don't want to. I don't want you to feel obligated or anything. But you'd really be doing me a favor since I came to the resort alone and I won't have company for dinner the whole time I'm here."

His alpha hadn't gotten the chance to tell him to back off. He knew instinctively that was what Faolan would have wanted. But the beast that had been surging inside of him because of this woman wasn't going to take no for an answer any longer.

"I'd love to," he said, grinning at her wolfishly.

## Chapter Five

Sayuri had known when she packed for this trip that she would be trying to seduce the opposite sex. She didn't own much in the way of alluring clothing, and it was so cold, it wasn't like she could wear anything that showed off much. She sighed with resignation as she looked through the contents of her suitcase again, as if a better outfit had appeared since the last time she had gone through it. But a better outfit wasn't forthcoming, and she supposed it didn't really matter at any rate. She felt certain that Ulrich had simply accepted the dinner date because he was polite and hadn't wanted to hurt her feelings. She got dressed and then put on her faux fur coat and went to the main lodge to wait for Ulrich in the dining hall. She was a few minutes early, but she was pleased to see that Ulrich was already waiting for her. Now she wouldn't have to wait in agony to see whether or not he was going to show up. She smiled at him.

He smiled back, a genuine smile that brightened his pale blue eyes.

Maybe he hadn't been as reluctant to come as she'd thought?

"I'm so glad you could make it," she said as she sat down across from him. "I wasn't sure if work would keep you."

"We work in shifts, and I let the other guys know I had something special to do today," he said, wriggling a brow and looking her up and down appreciatively.

Sayuri blushed a little. He was so frank and forward. She just wasn't used to a man acting like that with her. She'd been witness to it but never been the object of such attentions.

She was saved from having to say anything by the waiter. She felt fortunate she didn't have to try to think of how to respond to his comment. She'd probably misinterpreted it and would look like an idiot when she said the wrong thing.

"Good evening, miss. Good evening, sir. Have you decided what you would like to order or do you need more time to make a decision?"

Sayuri hadn't really had time to look at the menu, so she just ordered the first thing she came across.

After Ulrich gave the waiter his order, the man left and disappeared behind a door to the kitchen.



"So, tell me a little bit about yourself," she said, eager to break the ice. "How did you come to work for the lodge?"

Ulrich looked a little uncomfortable for a moment, but the moment was brief. He shrugged his shoulders and ran a hand through his long blond hair. "Well, no one has ever asked me that before."

Sayuri was embarrassed for asking something that must obviously be a sensitive subject.

"I didn't mean to pry. You don't have to tell me. I'm sorry. I don't talk to many people outside of work."

"No, don't be sorry. It's fine. I guess no one has ever been that interested. It just took me off guard.

"I was born in this area, just as Torolf and Faolan were, the other two guys that were in the gym with me this morning. Torolf and I were orphaned when we were very young, so young in fact we could hardly talk and walk. Faolan took us in and did his best to raise us. It was hard since he wasn't much older than us and Torolf and I gave him hell.

"We grew up in a cabin not far from the lodge. One day, while we were all out collecting firewood, we heard a cry for help. I guess it was just instinctive, we all went to help. We saved a woman who had fallen into a snow bank and broken her ankle. When we took her back to this lodge where she was staying on vacation, the owner was very appreciative. After having looked us up and down for a while, we were poor so we didn't look like

much, he asked us if we needed work. We talked it over between us for a few days back at home and decided to take the job he offered as the rescue team for the lodge. We've been doing it for over ten years now.

"But enough about me, tell me about yourself."

Sayuri was touched by Ulrich's story. Obviously Faolan and Torolf were the only family he'd ever known. He hadn't mentioned what had happened to his parents, but being orphaned when he was young, he was a lot like her.

"I guess we have a lot more in common than I would have guessed. I have worked at the same office building for nearly eight years now. I'm a bit of a workaholic. I've been saving up for the rest of my life my whole life. My parents were successful entrepreneurs, but they died in a plane crash on their way to an important business meeting. I don't have any other family. They had money in the bank, but because I didn't know how to run their business I had to sell it and start working when I was really young." She paused for a minute. "I think it's wonderful that you had someone like Faolan, even though he doesn't seem to smile very often like you do. At least he cared enough about you to do his best to try to take care of you and Torolf."

Ulrich laughed a little at her comment. "Yes, he does seem sour to those who don't know him. I guess life has just been hard on him. It hasn't dealt us the best hand. And he was always trying so hard to protect us, to take care of us, it took away his childhood and any chance he had at being carefree. He has always taken himself so seriously, trying to be a man since he

was nothing but a child himself. You see, he was orphaned when he was a child also, which is why he felt compelled to take me and Torolf in."

Sayuri felt the beginnings of a wobble in her chin. She wanted to cry, she wanted to bawl her eyes out. No wonder he looked so angry all the time. He'd had such a hard life. She would never feel bad about what she'd been through again. She couldn't imagine how hard it must have been on him to try to raise two little boys when he himself was so young. She didn't ask how young they had all been, but she didn't need to. Young was young. He'd been forced to grow up before his time. Life just wasn't fair.

They ate dinner and talked a little bit more about themselves, staying away from any more serious conversation. By the time the meal was over, Sayuri felt much more comfortable around Ulrich. It was easy to feel at ease with him, he made it so simple. He was just so likable and friendly. She didn't want the evening to end. She'd been thinking about it since she'd sat down, and now she was going to have to say something or he would just leave and another opportunity to have him this close might not present itself again.

Ulrich walked Sayuri to the door to the dining hall and helped her into her coat.

"Ulrich, would you like to come to my cabin for hot chocolate or," she paused, swallowing back her nervousness, "maybe something a little bit stronger?"

She knew damned well that she didn't want him over for a drink. She wanted to tear his clothes off, but she knew better than to think that she could say something like that and have it come out sultry and inviting. She wasn't used to doing anything so wild, but that was why she had come.

Ulrich had been thinking about fucking her brains out all through dinner and when she invited him for hot chocolate he thought it was a very bad idea to get that close to her bed considering the way his thoughts had been headed. On the other hand, it was late and dark, and he didn't want her to walk out alone.

"I don't know about a drink, but I would love to walk you to your cabin. It's dark and you shouldn't be walking around out here by yourself. We're surrounded by woods, and we have a lot of nature walking around at night."

"Oh." She hadn't thought of that. In that case, she was very glad he'd decided to walk with her.

He walked with her to her cabin, holding her arm in his.

Having him so close was doing all sorts of crazy things to her senses. She was glad he had a tight grip on her arm, she needed it. She was surprised at how just being close to him made her feel weak in the knees, made her feel quivery all over. The only other man who'd ever had that affect on her had been Faolan.

"Thanks for having dinner with me, and thanks for walking me

to my cabin. I had a really wonderful time," she said, leaning close to him as they took the last few steps to her door.

"May I come in?" he asked, all seriousness. He didn't know where that question had come from. He had told himself he was going to walk her home and then leave, that was it. The last thing he needed to do was to go into her place.

"I'd like that very much," she said in all honesty.

They stepped in and shut the door. She took his coat and hung it up next to hers on the coat rack by the front door. It was still a little chilly inside even though she'd left the heat on while she was gone.

Ulrich noticed that she was cold. He stepped closer and rubbed his hands up and down her arms.

"Is that better?"

Her skin erupted in gooseflesh from his touch, but she didn't want him to know it was from him and not the cold. "Yes. Thank you."

"I'll start a fire and have you warm in no time at all."

All Sayuri could think was that she knew something else they could do that would have her hot in a hurry, but she didn't have the balls to mention that. She stood behind him while he tinkered with her fireplace until he had a raging fire going.

He stood up when he had finished and noticed that she was looking at him.

His breath caught in his throat. The firelight was dancing over her skin. She was breathtaking and she had absolutely no idea.

He moved closer to her and tugged at her wrist so that she lost her balance and fell against his hard length.

His voice dropped to a soft caress, mesmerizing, pure magic, "You're driving me to distraction, Sayuri."

His arms came up, pinning her soft slenderness against him, and he lowered his mouth to hers.

The crackle of electricity was in the air all around them. Flames of desire licked over her skin, heating her blood to boiling. His mouth savagely claimed hers, aggressively male, utterly dominating, waylaying all thoughts of resistance. She opened up to him, allowing his probing, his hot sweet assault of her senses.

Through her daze, her hands located the broadness of his shoulders, felt their way up to encircle his neck. Her body was pliable in his arms, she felt weightless, like hot silk.

Ulrich wanted to throw her down on the rug, wanted to rip the offending clothes from her body, wanted to make her his eternally.

He closed his eyes, savoring the feel of her soft body against his, basking in the intensity of his want for her, in his need for her. He held her close, burning for her, not even understanding how he could be consumed by such a maelstrom. With great reluctance, he lifted his head, his beast raging a silent war within. His rough hand caressed the silken skin of her face, traced the fullness of her lower lip.

"I have to go," he said, his voice husky with need.

Sayuri looked at him, crestfallen, "Don't go."

It was all the encouragement he needed.

Gently, he lowered her to the rug in front of the fireplace and then traced a finger softly over her parted lips and down one arm. Her skin was soft, smooth, perfect. Taking one hand in his, he pressed his lips to her fingertips. He moved over each of them leisurely, lingering, lightly raking each tip with his teeth, lathing them with his tongue to soothe them.

She sighed so softly it was almost inaudible and, without realizing it, moved closer to him. The movement brought her breasts against his chest.

His hands ached to hold them. Heated blood rushed to his cock, causing it to swell and harden. It had been some time since he had been with a woman, and they had always been human, but he had never wanted a human woman so much, never wanted so much to feel . . . to taste . . . to thrust his hard cock deep inside. This human woman tempted him as none of

his own kind ever had. He wanted to believe, like Faolan, that it had everything to do with their lack of mating with their own kind, but the deep attraction could not be ignored, could not be denied.

Smoothing his palms over the contours of her delicate collarbone, he moved lower, watching her to gauge her reaction as he experimentally touched her breasts with a feather light touch.

She closed her eyes, reveling in the feel of his hard hands on her body, her nipples becoming hard pouty nubs in response to his ministrations, begging, needing more.

His mouth suddenly went dry at the evidence of her arousal, making it hard for him to swallow. He pinched the tight buds, rolling each between his fingers until she moaned low in her throat and arched her back, thrusting her aching breasts closer to him.

Ulrich growled low in his throat and descended upon her, brushing his lips down the column of her neck. He lathed her flesh with his hot tongue, dipping it into the hollow of her throat.

The bloodlust of the beast was surging through him.

Suddenly, he wrenched away from her, away from temptation, his breathing coming in ragged, harsh bursts.

Before he could move further away, she caught hold of him, gripping his arms tight.



He looked down at the sweet oval of her face. Her eyes were dark with lust. She licked her lips, drawing his heated gaze, maddening him beyond all reason, destroying any thoughts he had of turning back.

He groaned out loud, turning away from her. She had absolutely no idea what she was offering him.

"Ulrich," she said, touching his arm.

He could hear the worry in her voice, but it didn't penetrate any deeper because at just her slightest touch violent flames began coursing along his skin, heating his blood. The lust he felt for her was explosive, heady, but also very, very dangerous. He wasn't in control and there was nothing he could do about it.

He turned back to her and dragged her to him, all too aware of the urgent demands of his body. With a low, intensely animal growl, he lifted her.

He ripped his shirt open with one hand, exposing the heavy muscles of his chest.

His icy blue eyes were fixed on her face, scrutinizing her with a stillness, a watchfulness reminiscent of a predator. He didn't make any attempt to hide his desire for her.

"I will give you one last chance, Sayuri," he said in a hoarse voice, his words harsh even to his own ears, as if they tore painfully at his throat. "I will find the will to let you go if you say it,

but only now, right now."

Everything stopped, even the air seemed to still as he waited for her answer. He held his head up proudly, his body fiercely hard, uncompromisingly male, his eyes ablaze with deep hunger.

Instinctively she knew she could sate his hunger where no other could. And she could not walk away from him, not when she could see that he wanted her, that he needed her.

There was nothing more he could do. He had seen it in her eyes when she had made her decision, had seen it in the soft tremble of her mouth.

"Take your clothes off," he said in a commanding voice.

She moved back, her dark eyes widening.

"The shirt."

Very slowly, almost with reluctance, she pulled her shirt off.

Her tongue touched her lips, moistened the satin veneer.

The answering shock wave in his body was savage, primal. His hands went to the button and fly of his pants. The fabric there was stretched taut, hurting him.

Her exposed skin seemed to shimmer in the firelight. The play of shadows caressed the contours of her figure. The man

inside him inhaled sharply, ragged with need, while the beast in him bellowed for release.

Ulrich threw his shirt on the floor, no longer able to stand the feel of the material against his now super sensitized skin. A sound began deep in his throat. It was animal, feral, a ferocious savage claim. He kicked aside his clothes, exposing his entire body, chiseled muscle and burning need.

Her throat was suddenly dry. It tried to close up as she slid the lacy straps of her bra off of her shoulders, let the material slip to the floor. She thrust her breasts forward invitingly, her nipples having suddenly become hard in the cool air of the room.

He ripped the offensive jeans she'd been wearing from her body with a single tug and tossed them aside.

Her bones were small, delicate, her skin hot satin. The mass of her dark hair came loose from its tie with his marauding fingers, brushing against his skin, sending fiery arrows to pierce his groin. His body raged within, tightened with need. He wanted her so much.

Moving closer, he let his hand close over the nape of her neck in an unbreakable grip, his thumb tilting back her head to lay bare her throat and breasts to him. His hand moved at an agonizingly slow pace, memorizing the swell of her breasts, pausing for a moment to put his mark on her neck so that it pulsed, burned, and then returned to cup the velvet softness of her breasts. He followed each and every line of her rib cage, soothing her fears. His fingers trailed over the flat of her

stomach and the ridges of her hipbones, to rest in the triangle at the juncture of her legs. His hand sparked desperate need, a sensation of near drowning in an oasis of pure feeling.

Ulrich growled something unintelligible deep in his throat.

He was so aggressive, trapping her with his body against the floor, that for a minute she couldn't help but think it was very reminiscent of a wild animal forcing its mate into submission.

It hadn't occurred to Ulrich until that moment just how close to turning he really was. Everything was swirling together until he feared for both of them, the emotion, the passion, the lust.

The light coming from the fire cast a shadow over him making him seem inhuman. He appeared enormous, irrepressible, a dangerous beast as he crouched over her.

"Ulrich," she said softly, reaching out to ease the lines of tension of his contorted features.

He caught and held both her wrists in one hand. Pulling her arms above her head, he held her there.

His gaze moved over her. It was intense, glowing, scorching her skin everywhere his gaze touched.

Sayuri lay still and quiet beneath his unrelenting strength, seeming to sense his implacable resolve, somehow aware of some terrible inner struggle within him. Her dark gaze drifted over the lines etched on his face; his mouth, so sensual and

Intoxicating, his eyes burning with such fierce need.

The touch of her naked, soft body writhing beneath him only aroused him more.

"Sayuri," he said on a groan, his hand sliding up her thigh, finding her heated core.

His deft fingers sought velvet, probed, dominated, elicited a rush of hot liquid. He bent his head to taste of her, to taste her flesh, to savor the texture of her skin, to imbue his senses with the scent of her.

When his hot mouth found her breast, she cried out softly. When his fingers probed deeper into her pussy, ripples of pleasure coursed through her body. Tracing the earlier path of his hands with his tongue, he moved further down her body.

With every stroke of his tongue his body tightened and the beast he kept at bay became stronger. He inhaled deeply of her scent, drawing the very essence of her into his body. He slid his tongue across her slowly, a long caress.

She made to move again, still unsure, but stilled when he lifted his head and pinned her with a look that was pure possession burning in his eyes.

He pushed her knees apart, exposing her pussy to him.

He had waited far too long for a mate, endless mating cycles of hunger and darkness and desolation. He could not be gentle

and considerate when everything in his entire being demanded that she belong to him.

Her body convulsed, and she cried out.

Ulrich moved over her, savoring the feel of her skin, her suppleness, how very small she was. Every detail, no matter how infinitesimal, was burned into his mind's eye, became a part of the savage pleasure in which he was indulging.

He released his hold on her wrists and bent to kiss her mouth, her eyes.

"Belong to me, Sayuri. Belong only to me," he said as he pressed himself hard against her, his body still, corded muscle, unbelievably powerful, shaking with his need for her.

She wasn't sure she understood entirely what he meant. She was so caught up in him nothing was really making sense. But she knew one thing for sure, at the moment, she did belong to him. "I do."

At that, Ulrich caught her hips in his hands.

Her pussy was hot and ready for him as he surged forward and buried himself to the hilt in her tight, fiery sheath. She moaned low in her throat, and he bent his head to seek her mouth. It took all the will he possessed to hold himself still, to allow her body to adjust, to accommodate his. He could feel their heartbeats combined, could hear the blood singing in her veins.

He moved slowly then, carefully at first, studying her reaction by watching her expressive face.

Fire danced all along his skin and roared in his belly. His muscles contracted and flexed, perspiration beading on his skin. He dragged her closer to him, claiming her as his own, burying his cock in her over and over again, intent on sating an insatiable hunger.

He growled his torment and bent his head to the spot over her left breast to devour again the soft velvet skin as he continued to plunge his cock into her. He burned and drove harder still, seeking respite in the only way he could.

She moved, shifting away from him, emitting a breathless almost inarticulate cry, trying hard to voice the rippling pleasure consuming her.

Again he growled, the animal inside of him protesting as he pinned her to the floor.

It went on and on, pain edging pleasure, and he found himself needing more and more. He spilled his seed which only served to trigger a sensual hunger, the beast in him completely aroused.

He traced a path along the side of her throat to find the steady beat of her heart beneath an inviting breast. He stroked a hardened nipple with his tongue before returning to trace the swell of her breast, once, twice. He took her body again,

insatiable in his sexual frenzy, this time hot and fast. The taste of her was sweet and clean and utterly addictive. He craved more and more, his body building power and strength, driving harder and harder, burying himself deeply in her, pushing her toward another shattering release.

Sayuri struggled with herself, unable to recognize Ulrich in the beast whose emotions were nothing but pure sensual hunger and appetite.

His mouth burned and tormented her skin, fueled an endless, spiraling climax.

She could feel herself becoming weak, a strange euphoria taking over her, languid and sexy.

His dark eyes were still glowing with the beast when he lifted his head, her taste in his mouth, on his lips. Gathering her limp body to him, he cradled her in his arms. A burgeoning need possessed him, he needed to feel of her soft skin, needed to hold her.

He then carried her to her bed in the other room. She looked so beautiful, a rare, precious treasure. He couldn't help but think that he should have guarded her against the beast in him.

He had been unable to maintain control in the heat of passion.

He touched her face with fingers that trembled, a light caress, then bent to kiss her delicate mouth.



With ferocity he descended upon her, crushing his mouth against hers. Suckling her lips, he pricked her with his sharp teeth. Her soft mewling protest at the injury mingled with the sweetness of her mouth, fueling the lust consuming his senses, threatening to push him over the edge of control again.

Small noises came from her throat, soft whimpers of pleasure as he thrust the comforter aside and settled his body against her naked flesh.

She rubbed her tight body against him, making him groan against her mouth. Closing her arms around him, she dug her nails into his back, clutching him tightly as he ravished her mouth.

Plunging his tongue inside, he explored her dark crevices, entwining his tongue with hers as she sucked him deeper. The heat of her mouth enveloped him, searing all sanity, banishing all reason. With a mind of their own, his hands moved down her taut stomach. His fingers teased the lips of her pussy, moist with her desire. Discovering the evidence of her arousal was nearly his undoing. He dragged his mouth away, along the line of her jaw to her ear. Tracing the shell of her ear with liquid heat, he plunged his tongue inside as his fingers sought and found her clit.

A loud moan escaped her followed by gasping, as though she could not catch her breath. She spread her legs wide for him, tilting her hips to meet the thrusts of his fingers.

The head of his cock nudged the opening of her pussy, wet

with her juices.

"Please," she pleaded, her voice husky as she wrapped her legs around him.

He went perfectly still, poised above her, tense. He realized he had lost his damned mind. What was he thinking? He couldn't have sex with her again. He needed to stop, to leave. His arms began to shake with the effort it took to control himself, and a cold sweat broke out all over his body. It wouldn't take much to sink into her depths. She was wet and needy for him.

Sayuri arched beneath him, and the head of his cock teased her entrance, jerking with need.

He groaned and slipped infinitesimally inside. As he slowly relinquished his restraint, his arms shook more violently. Her wet heat beckoned, threatened to snap the remainder of his resolve.

"Don't stop. I beg you," she cried in torment, tossing her head back and forth, her eyes squeezed tightly shut.

"You don't know what you're asking," he said through gritted teeth, pained with the force of will it took to maintain control.

"I do," she whispered.

He plunged into her pussy then, setting a quick rhythm, each stroke making her quiver with her impending release.

In moments, sudden all-encompassing bliss shot through them like a current of electricity, enveloping them as the waves of orgasm crashed and consumed them in pleasure.

They both fell limp against the bed, falling asleep almost immediately.

## Chapter Six

When Ulrich first woke up, it took him a minute to figure out where he was. But, all it took was one look at Sayuri laying next to him asleep in bed to clarify things. He ran a hand hard over his face as if he could wipe away the events of the night before, but when he looked again nothing had changed and Sayuri was still laying asleep beside him in the bed, her steady breathing somehow relaxing.

He mentally chastised himself. What in the world had he been thinking? He'd told himself that he didn't need to walk her home, but, on the other hand, he'd convinced himself that he couldn't allow her to walk home alone late at night. It just wasn't

safe in the wilderness. Like the fool he was, he'd gone with her, believing the whole time it was the chivalrous thing to do and that he only had honorable intentions. He had felt certain that he was in full possession of his faculties, that he wouldn't do anything he shouldn't, even though he'd wanted to earlier in the day at the gym when he'd realized that Faolan already had and again at dinner when she'd taken off her coat and smiled at him so invitingly.

His gaze drifted to Sayuri again as she continued to sleep peacefully, completely unaware of his internal struggle. She didn't deserve to be treated the way she'd been treated. She didn't deserve a one night stand, didn't deserve to wake up alone after he had fucked her brains out all night.

But he knew that that was exactly what was going to happen. He didn't have a choice. The sun had already risen, which meant that Faolan and Torolf had already woken up and were in the gym. They would have realized by now that he'd never come home last night. He was going to play hell with his pack mates and his boss if he was late for work.

And more than that, his alpha was going to want to cut his throat if he discovered what he'd done. But, at the moment, he didn't give a damn. She looked so beautiful, lying next to him, deep in sleep. He hated to leave her, especially after everything she'd told him the night before at dinner. She was right, they did have a lot in common, each of them had been abandoned when they were young. He had wished that he could tell her why his parents had left him to the elements, but

he couldn't because they weren't the same, because she was human. And he knew that was also the reason why he had to leave now. He couldn't afford to think of her as someone he could get close to. It just wasn't possible.

He got out of her bed, gingerly so as not to wake her, and made his way through the cabin, collecting his clothes from where he'd thrown them down in front of the fireplace. He quickly stepped into his pants and hastily threw on his shirt, not bothering to button it. As he approached the door, he thought he was making good his exit, after all, he hadn't woken her up.

As he slowly backed out of the front door, he came face to face with Faolan.

"Shit!" he said in a loud whisper. He'd been so caught up with listening for Sayuri stirring in her bed he hadn't paid attention to anything else.

Faolan grabbed Ulrich by the shoulder and pulled him around to face him and Torolf. "Just what the hell do you think you're doing?" Faolan asked in an angry whisper, sounding every bit like an angry parent having caught their child returning from a midnight rendezvous.

Ulrich's brow furrowed with irritation. "This is not the place to discuss this," he said in a harsh whisper, his own temper rising at Faolan's accusatory tone. How could he stand there and question him when he'd gone and done the same damn thing? He knew why Torolf was mad, he was the only one who hadn't gotten the chance to satisfy his beast.

All three of them stalked off into the woods to where they had argued the day before.

When they finally arrived and they were all alone, Faolan confronted Ulrich. "What the hell did you think you're doing?" he asked, dangerous undertones evident in his voice.

"You know damn good and well what I was doing," Ulrich replied gruffly.

"How could you both do this?" Torolf demanded, his face pensive, his body tense with irritation, closing and opening his hands over and over again at his sides, as if he wanted to rip them to pieces.

The comment surprised both Faolan and Ulrich, and they both turned to look at Torolf.

"What do you think you have done? What if she winds up pregnant from all of this? Then what are we going to do?"

Faolan and Ulrich quickly looked at each other, both looking the worse for wear on that comment. They had been so consumed by their own needs that they hadn't thought about the consequences of their actions.

Torolf began to pace in the snow, his anger mounting at their carelessness as he continued. "I think she's going to know something is up when she has pups instead of human babies. If she does become pregnant, she has the right to know what's

going to happen, what we are. The only thing that could make matters worse is if our own people find out or if she was pregnant and had the baby at a human hospital."

Faolan began to pace in agitation as well. "I don't think it's possible that she will become pregnant," he said, running a hand roughly through his hair as if it would help him think. "For one, it's never been proven that our kind and humans can successfully breed. For another, I'm fairly certain I pulled out before I spilled my seed." He stopped pacing for a minute and turned to look at Ulrich. "That just leaves you."

"What?" Ulrich asked.

"Did you spill your seed in her or not?" Faolan said, his voice rising in irritation. "Haven't you been following the conversation?"

Ulrich thought about it for a minute. "I think I pulled out the first time. I'm not sure about every single time, though, really."

The other two men looked at him angrily.

He growled at them in return. "Look, it's not as if I was in my right mind. We're all at each other's throats here because we've been denying our instincts to mate. It goes against who we are to just keep pushing these urges to the wayside year after year."

"I think it would be best if we just stayed away from Sayuri," Faolan said with conviction. He didn't like the idea any more

than his pack mates did, but they really didn't have a choice in the matter. They couldn't afford for the rest of their kind to find out, then they would never have a chance at breeding.

"I think you're right," Ulrich agreed, although internally it pained him to admit it.

"Of course, now that you two have satisfied yourselves, we should definitely stay away from her," Torolf shouted in return.

Blood was pounding in Torolf's ears so loud he couldn't hardly think, let alone listen to Faolan and Ulrich anymore. He was too consumed with his beast. He turned away from his pack mates and left the clearing as fast as he could. He needed time to think, time to be alone, before they found themselves in exactly the same situation they had been in the day before, tearing at each other's throats.

Faolan and Ulrich had already quieted their beast. He grew increasingly pissed as he continued to dwell on what Faolan had said about staying away from the woman.

It was true, she was trouble. She had already tempted two of them to break pack law. If they weren't careful, they would be cast out by the council leaders and become rogues.

He had listened to everything they had had to say, but he knew with his entire being that they were going to make a play for her again at the first opportunity that presented itself. Since this wasn't an actual mating, he didn't figure the pack law of order counted. If it was a mating, and Faolan had claimed her, then



he wouldn't be allowed to touch her until his alpha had impregnated her. Impregnation wasn't the goal here, and Faolan and Ulrich had both claimed that they pulled out and didn't give her their seed. He thought about it for a while and decided that as long as he didn't give her his seed, it would be alright if he spent some time with her as well. He wouldn't have broken the primary pack law, that the alpha always had first rights of impregnating the pack female, but that law didn't apply to her. She was fair game.

\* \* \* \*

Sayuri woke up in bed alone. The distinct feeling of being abandoned crept over her in cold waves of embarrassment and disbelief. She didn't understand, they'd had great sex. She lay in bed, searching her mind for answers. For a long time she didn't understand what went wrong. There weren't any doubts in her mind that he had enjoyed their night as much as she had. If he hadn't enjoyed it surely he wouldn't have acted like an animal possessed, surely they wouldn't have had sex over and over again.

Well, maybe he hadn't enjoyed it quite as much as she had, but he sure as hell didn't have anything to complain about, or at least she hadn't heard him complaining when everything had gone down. But, as she let her bed sheets fall around her and got out of bed, she realized that, even before anything physical had happened with Ulrich, she had anticipated what would eventually come next if on nothing but a subconscious level. She tried to tell herself not to take what he'd done to heart.

She should've known that a man that looked as good as Ulrich did would act this way. She should've known that he wouldn't be the type that hung around the morning after to snuggle. He was undoubtedly a player. He wasn't a one woman kind of man. He probably fucked all the women that came to the resort that he got a chance at. It didn't make her feel better to realize that she probably wasn't the only one that had fallen victim to his charm. It only served to make her feel worse, like a fool for being naïve enough to believe that he had actually wanted her and not just a quick and easy fuck.

Even though she told herself she shouldn't be upset about it, it was hard not to feel that way, especially since he'd been so careful not to wake her up when he left. He must have worked hard to be quiet so that he wouldn't have to talk to her about anything that had happened the night before. Perhaps she'd been putting too much stock into what he'd said at dinner the night before. But she had felt such a connection with him, and, for some idiotic reason, she had been sure that he had felt it too.

She got up and showered away her blues, trying not to think about how wonderful Ulrich had made her feel as she got dressed. Her body began to grow warm as she recalled the way he had touched her, the way he had made her body come to life. Despite all of her efforts to put all of that behind her, though, she was still smarting when she got to the lodge for breakfast. While in the food line, she caught a glimpse of Ulrich and Faolan sitting down and having breakfast together at a table not far from the buffet.

Ulrich had been morosely staring at his food and pushing it around with his fork for a good ten minutes. He wasn't really in the mood for eating, not after what he'd done. His stomach was tied up in knots. He felt just awful inside. And he couldn't begin to imagine what Sayuri was thinking and feeling after waking up alone, without a word from him, nothing. She must hate his guts. She must think he was the lowest man on Earth. After a moment, he noticed that Faolan had stopped talking, he looked up from the food on his plate and turned around to see what he was staring at behind him. His heart leapt into his throat when he spotted Sayuri standing in line, a tray in her hands. He couldn't help but stare as well.

Sayuri glared daggers at Faolan and Ulrich. Bastards. She hadn't done anything to deserve the way they had treated her. She looked away quickly and took her tray of food to a table on the far side of the room, trying her best to pretend the two of them didn't exist, doing her best to snub them. It probably wouldn't do any good though. They probably had forgotten about her completely as soon as she was out of sight. God she was a fool! What had she been thinking! She had obviously underestimated the degree of difficulty a person to person sperm collection would be.

Well, she was sure that Ulrich had come in her at least one of the many times they'd had sex. She should count herself lucky she'd been able to get that. She probably wouldn't have any more pity fucks the whole time she was here. For a minute, she debated leaving with her tail tucked between her legs, and then thoughts of a baby came back to her. No, she wouldn't let what

had happened get in the way of her getting pregnant. Once she was pregnant, she could leave and forget that these men ever existed. She wouldn't have to think about them anymore. She could bear with it a little while longer, for the baby's sake.

She poked at her bacon and eggs on her plate, and her stomach growled uneasily. Although she didn't feel much like eating, she knew better than to think that she could get around the lodge and immerse herself in all kinds of physical activities without refueling, so she grudgingly ate what she could. While she ate, she decided that she had sort of struck out with the skiing and the sleigh ride. She pulled her PDA from her pants pocket and pulled up the activity list she'd entered into it after she'd examined the lodge's pamphlet. She frowned when she realized that much of it was very couple oriented, like the sleigh ride had been. But, finally, she came across ice skating. That should be easy enough. It didn't require a partner. And, she was great at roller skating, well, at least she had been when she was a little girl. It would be like riding a bike. She tried to shake off the memory that she had thought the same thing about skiing. Ice skating was nothing like skiing though. It was definitely more like roller skating.

She felt a renewed sense of confidence as she toted her tray to the exit. Setting it down above the trash bin, she didn't give Faolan and Ulrich a second glance as she left the lodge.

She left the main lodge and headed toward the ice pond, which she had seen the first day from the kiddie slopes just before she'd nearly killed herself. The walk wasn't a long one, but she

was glad for it. It felt great to stretch her legs after her late night rendezvous with Ulrich. She tried not to focus on the interesting places he had left feeling punished.

From a distance, she could see that a lot of fellow guests were already whirling around on the ice. By the time she got to the pond, she noticed a line formed to get skates and walked over and waited in it for a few minutes. Fortunately, she didn't have to wait long before it was her turn.

"And what size shoe do you wear, ma'am?" the lodge employee asked.

"I wear a size six," she told him.

The man went to grab her skates from a rack and then handed them to her.

"No pads?" she asked, looking at the skates in her hand a little skeptically.

"Sorry, we don't have any elbow or knee pads. If you're a little unsure about your skill, hang on to the railing until you get the hang of it," he offered with a smile. "Or we could get one of the employees to ski with you, if you want."

She smiled back at him a little uneasily. "No, that's okay. I can manage myself. But thanks for the advice about the railing. I'll be sure to keep it close by."

"Oh, and one more thing," the man said before she turned

away. "When we tested the ice this morning it checked out to be safe to skate anywhere on the right side of the pond but avoid the other side of the pond that's roped off since there is some thin ice on that side."

There was a light snow falling by the time she got her skates on, but she didn't care. It only served to make it more like the childish endeavor she had been craving.

With her skates all tightly laced up, she stood up from the bench she'd found and held the metal railing that encircled the pond, using it to help her walk until she made it the few feet to the ice. When she got out onto the ice on the skates, though, she discovered ice skating was nothing at all like roller skating.

She was having a really hard time getting the hang of it and mostly clung desperately to the railing until she felt secure enough to skate without its assistance. For a long time she thought she wouldn't be able to get away from the railing but after a while she seemed to be doing a little better and ventured away from her crutch. She was so happy that she was able to maintain an upright position she was positively glowing.

After a few minutes without incident, she relaxed, and became more confident in her ability, infinitesimal though it was. Perhaps this wouldn't be so hard after all. She was suddenly glad that she'd decided to give it a try.

Just about the time she started to really have fun, another skater slammed into her. The other skater hit her so forcefully that she hit the ice hard, sliding under and way past the ropes

that guarded everyone from the thin ice. She didn't want to make a scene, at first, but when she realized that she had gone under the safety ropes and that she was on a patch of thin ice she started yelling.

"Help," she yelled a little frantically, waving her arms above her, trying not to move too much.

But it was too late. Fear rippled down her spine when she heard the first terrifying crack of the ice. She felt the ice giving way, heard the horrifying sound of it breaking up beneath her weight as she tried to inch away. Realizing there was no way she wasn't going to be submerged, she started screaming with everything she had. She felt certain she was going to meet an icy death.

\* \* \* \*

Torolf's ears pricked up when he heard screaming. He instantly recognized that scream from the day before. It was Sayuri! He rushed to her rescue from his place on the kiddie slopes.

From a distance, he could see everyone on the ice pond gathering around the rope that sectioned off the half of the pond that was unsafe. He could also see a figure on the thin ice side laying down. He knew instinctively who it was. Fear gripped him. He wasn't sure if he could make it in time to save her. He pushed his skis harder, his breath coming in short bursts as he pushed himself to the limit. If only he could shift, he could get to her so much faster!

Finally at the pond, it only took him seconds to get out of his skis. "Sayuri, stay still, I'm coming!" he yelled. His heart was beating so fast he thought it would likely burst out of his chest. The only thing he could think was that he had to get to her before anything happened. He had to save her.

Laying flat on his belly, he crawled across the pond until he got to where she was, now half in and half out of the ice.

Sayuri was so glad to hear that someone was coming to save her. She'd thought for a while that no one was going to help her. She'd seen everyone gathering by the ropes, but no one had done anything. She realized when the man coming to her aid got closer that it was Torolf. "Help me," she said in a trembling voice filled with desperation, trying hard to maintain her grip on the slippery ice with her gloved hands.

"Hold on, I've got you," he said. He grabbed her arms and managed to pull her from the water and away from the broken ice before she fell in completely. He pulled her the rest of the way to safety. Thankfully, when they reached the edge of the pond, another employee was standing by with a thermal blanket.

Torolf wrapped Sayuri in the blanket and held on to her tightly, whispering calming words in her ear.

She was shaken. She couldn't believe what had just happened. One minute she'd been doing just fine and the next . . . What could have happened had Torolf not saved her didn't bear thinking about. She shook uncontrollably from fear, from the



cold of the water seeping down into her bones. She was so cold that she couldn't feel her legs anymore.

Through teeth that chattered uncontrollably, she tried to talk to Torolf. "Th-hank y-you," she managed.

Torolf blushed and held her tight against his chest, whispering in her ear, "You don't have to thank me." He didn't know why, but he felt more relief at saving her life than he had anyone else since he'd started rescuing people. The thought of losing her had reached him on a personal level. It was inexplicable. He didn't know her. She was a stranger to him, and yet, like his pack, he was drawn to her. Her scent filled his nostrils as he held her close, the scent of Faolan's mark, the scent of Ulrich's mark. His beast built inside of him, raging against the surface of man until he thought he was going to lose all semblance of control right in front of the crowd that had gathered. He needed to escape. He needed to get away, away from all of the humans, all of them except for Sayuri. He couldn't leave her, especially not after what she'd been through. He leaned back and stood up before reaching down and picking her up, cradling her tightly against his chest. In a soft voice he said, "I'm going to take you to the medic to get checked out."

Sayuri didn't argue. At the moment, she didn't think she could have if she tried, she was so weak and cold, and it was so nice being held against his warm body, feeling safe and secure in his arms. She was surprised at his strength. She'd never had a man carry her for any length of time and certainly not encumbered by snow and with her weighed down by dripping

clothing.

By the time they got to the medical building, her shivers had subsided to slight tremors and all she had in mind was a hot shower.

"Look, Torolf, is it? I'm just fine. I don't need to see the doctor. I don't want to waste their time. I'm not really a big fan of doctors anyway. I just need to get back to my cabin and get a nice long shower. You've done enough, more than enough. You can just let me down and I'll make it to my cabin on my own. Besides, I'm sure you're tired of looking at me. This morning at breakfast I think the lodge manager was hinting about giving me a refund if I left early and didn't die on the premises."

Torolf tried hard not to smile at that comment. He wasn't surprised by what the manager had said. It seemed as if this woman was constantly in trouble. But, despite what she said about feeling fine, he didn't want her to leave. He told himself it was because he wanted to make sure that she was alright. He didn't want to analyze why that was so important at the moment though.

"The hot tubs are not far from here. Why don't I take you there instead?"

Sayuri hadn't been to the tubs yet and the idea of being able to sit back and be completely enveloped in warmth instead of standing in her shower sounded great to her.

"I'd like that," she said but paused after a minute. "But I don't know. Knowing my luck I'd probably fall asleep and drown in the

damn thing."

Torolf tried to stifle a chuckle.

Sayuri looked at him pointedly. "I tell you what. I'll go if you are going to join me," she said, looking at him carefully to gauge his reaction to her bold suggestion, worried it might frighten him away. She had been right about what she had suspected when she'd first seen him in the gym. He was shy. But now that he was close and she had the chance to examine him, she noticed a lot more about him. He was very handsome. His chestnut brown hair had come undone from its place at the nape of his neck and was falling in strands around his classically chiseled chin darkened with five o'clock shadow. She noticed that, like Ulrich, his hair fell just below his shoulders. His eyes, she noticed when he looked down at her, were a dark chocolate. And she wasn't sure if it was just her imagination or not, but she thought she'd seen them smoldering with passion. Or perhaps that was just her accident addled mind that had created that impression? She couldn't be sure, since he wouldn't look at her for more than a few seconds at a time. But that was okay, because it gave her the opportunity to examine him at her leisure and, as she pressed herself against his chest, she realized that she really enjoyed looking at him.

Torolf did laugh this time. "I will go with you to the hot tub but only in case you need me to rescue you again."

Sayuri smiled at his laugh. She liked the sound of it. She had the distinct feeling that he didn't laugh very much and was glad

that she'd gotten to hear it. But her smile soon faded as they reached the hot tub. With dismay she realized that she couldn't get in the tub, she wasn't wearing a swim suit.

"Oh, Torolf, I'm sorry. I just wasn't thinking. I can't get in. I don't have a swim suit with me," she said, disappointment evident in her features.

Torolf blushed and turned away as he looked at the tub, then turned to her and said in a quiet voice, "You can go in in your underwear. I promise I won't tell a soul."

Sayuri gasped at the suggestion. It was so naughty. Why hadn't she thought of it? She smiled reassuringly at him. "That's a great idea. You're going to get in too, right?"

Torolf looked torn for a moment, but then disrobed down to his boxers and got in, putting his back to her so she could get undressed without him watching.

She couldn't help but notice that he was polite enough to give her his back while she took off her clothes. What a gentlemanly thing to do! Qualities like that in a man were rare indeed.

She carefully eased down into the wide spa tub, dispelling the mist-like steam that hovered in the air above the water. The hot water caressed her skin in soothing ripples, easing above her breasts, seeming to erase the ordeals she'd faced from her body and mind. It felt like it had been quite a while since she'd been able to rest her tired, aching body. It was difficult to believe so much had happened since coming to this place, that

her life had been so completely altered in the short time since she had made the decision to come to the resort.

She dipped her head back, soaking her hair in the water, watching it float around her.

Torolf couldn't help but notice that black tendrils of her hair clung to her breasts and arms like vines.

Sayuri noticed that Torolf was being very quiet. When she looked at him, she saw that he was staring at her, his gaze intense, hungry. There was no mistaking the fever in his eyes.

It wasn't right that any man should ever look so desirable, so dangerous . . . so forbidden.

He raked his heated gaze over her, lust dilating his pupils and darkening his eyes as he looked his fill of her near naked body.

She didn't make any move to cover herself. Instead, she felt compelled to remain completely still for a moment, felt her blood begin to pulse with near pain between her legs.

She didn't trust herself to speak. Instead, she moved across the spa tub until her face hovered mere inches from his, closed her eyes, and nudged his nose with the tip of her own, then placed a faint kiss on his lips, his cheek, and finally touched the tip of her tongue to his ear lobe. Sucking the lobe into her mouth, she bit down on it gently, experimentally.

Thoughts of marking the woman for his own immediately

emerged, followed by thoughts of Faolan.

"I should leave."

Torolf got up and turned to go, but she grabbed his arm, half rising from the water herself.

"Please don't go."

"Woman, you don't know what it means if I stay."

## Chapter Seven

He was wrong about that. She knew exactly what it meant, but she could see that he was torn. "Then stay for only a little while."

That was all the invitation he needed. With a growl, he pulled her into the spa and removed her panties, in an instant positioning her beneath him, his erection probing that part of her that wept for his possession.

At the feel of his hard erection trapped against her belly she moaned.

Taking advantage of her open mouth, he kissed her, plunging his tongue inside.

Pure hunger drove her to return the kiss, their mouths devouring each other.

He broke the kiss, leaving her panting as he trailed his lips across her delicate jaw to her ear, taking the lobe between his teeth and pulling on it, moving his tongue over the shell of her ear as he breathed hotly into the crevice, sending waves of delicious heat coursing through her to gather at her weeping core.

Clutching his shoulders tightly, she moaned as he moved lower, down her collarbone to the valley of her breasts.

He seized a nipple gently between his teeth, making her cry out. The sound excited him. He pushed one leg between hers as he enveloped her other breast in one hand and gently massaged it as he tugged and nibbled on the taut peak enclosed in his mouth.

His look was smoldering, questioning, when he met her eyes. He nibbled and kissed his way down the taut line of her stomach, suckling the edges of her navel as he traveled lower. Seconds later, he moved off of her.

Sayuri squirmed in discomfort, curious as to what he was

planning.

Slowly, he circled her thighs with his hands, holding her ass level with the top of the water, and parted her legs, exposing the deep pink of her pussy to him.

As he looked at her then leaned down, a feral growl escaped his throat.

Sayuri was powerless to do anything but watch as his head settled between her thighs. Hot breath fanned the sensitive, secretive skin, and then his lips touched her clit. A powerful jolt of ecstasy racked her body with the intimate contact.

He stroked her clit once with the rough pad of his tongue, and a rush of hot juices saturated her sex. She gasped at the pleasurable sensation and clutched his hair in tight fists, eyes closed, her head falling back as she arched to meet his next touch.

He continued to stroke her clit, suckling on it ravenously, lapping at the juices of her pussy, his hands massaging her ass and thighs.

Each stroke of his tongue pushed her to the edge, made her blood boil and her breath come in gasps. She couldn't think. She couldn't do anything but feel his mouth on her pussy.

He thrust a thick digit inside her, and she cried out, her body bucking against his finger, wanting more. She tossed her head, not knowing how much more of this she could take but unwilling



to ask him to stop.

Then he delved his tongue into her cleft, lapping at her juices, gently rolling her clit between his fingers in smooth circles. All at once something inside of her burst, and she screamed, collapsing back against the side of the spa, panting hard, debilitating waves radiating out from her core, weakening her.

He moved up beside her as she was riding down the high of her orgasm. He cuddled her close, nuzzling the side of her neck.

She was unable to find her voice for a moment, and when she did, her voice was husky. "I have to say . . . that was . . . really amazing," she admitted.

"I'm glad you enjoyed yourself," he said, his voice muffled from her neck.

She felt the hardness of his erection when she shifted to her side. Immediately she knew that he hadn't achieved what she had just been given. She was rocked with guilt at the realization.

She sat up on a spa seat and pushed him back against the side of the tub.

He looked at her in confusion.

"You have given me so much pleasure, the least I can do is return the favor."

He grinned at that and lay back in compliance, casually propping his hands behind his head.

She smiled at the change in his demeanor. She wanted to pleasure him as much as he had pleased her. She began to touch him as he had done her. Flicking her tongue across one small, flat nipple, she was pleased to hear his breathing quicken. When she drew her nails over his chest, lightly scratching, he moaned, causing her own body to tighten in response.

She moved further down his body, trailing her tongue and nails down his stomach until she reached his cock.

His erection, thick and long, jutted forth proudly from a nest of dark hair.

She had never had the chance to really examine a man's penis before and marveled at the shape of him. Looking at his cock made her body ache with renewed desire, made her pussy clench and grow hot once more. Tentatively, she wrapped a hand around the engorged base of his cock, the heat from it nearly scorching her palm.

He moaned at her touch, spreading his legs wide for her as she eased closer.

A tiny bead of liquid shone on the head of his cock. She lapped at it experimentally with her tongue and then began to suck on the helmeted tip, tasting him.

He growled low in his throat in response, moving restlessly beneath her.

She'd never sucked on a man's cock before. She had never really wanted to, had always thought that it wouldn't taste good. But, although his semen tasted a little salty, it wasn't unpleasant as she might have expected. Emboldened by his reaction to her ministrations, she wrapped her lips around the head of his cock again and felt him tense all over like a coiled spring. She sucked him as she would have a popsicle, swirling her tongue over the tiny hole and around the rim.

He bucked against her mouth, sending a surge of power to flow through her like a heady wine. In this position he was helpless against her, relying solely on her mouth. She stroked the thick length of his cock with one hand, reveling in her newly discovered power, sucking him harder and harder as she took him deeper into her mouth. When her teeth accidentally grazed him lightly, he moaned so loud it startled her.

She smiled to herself. He liked a little danger with his sex.

She grazed his cock with her teeth again, gently, and he bucked once more, his cock surging, pulsating.

"Stop . . . now," he ground out through gritted teeth.

She complied but kept her hands on him, kneading and massaging his hard flesh.

"Yes, it feels so good," he said, groaning and shuddering in her

hand, and then his semen burst forth from his cock.

He grabbed her under her arms and pulled her on top him, cradling her close.

"Thank you," he said softly, kissing her eyes shut and then gently brushing his lips against hers.

Suddenly, they heard footsteps and he set her beside him in the tub. Ulrich and Faolan walked up.

Ulrich and Faolan looked really pissed off. Torolf could tell they were even though they were busy pretending they weren't. They stripped off their clothes and joined Sayuri and Torolf in the hot tub.

Heat began to flood Sayuri's cheeks. She didn't think they knew, or saw, what had happened between her and Torolf. If they had seen anything, surely they wouldn't have gotten into the water where they'd just had sex. With a great deal of difficulty, she tried to pretend as if nothing had happened before the other two arrived. But seconds later she spotted something unimaginable. Floating by on the rippling surface of the water was Torolf's semen. Trying to think fast, she splashed at the water, attempting to get it out of the spa tub before the other two men saw it.

All three of the men looked at her a little strangely.

Sayuri reddened and tried to laugh. The laugh sounded very awkward even to her own ears. "I thought I saw a bug."

Torolf looked uncomfortable for a second and then leaned forward, scratching at his back. When he moved her panties floated from behind his back and bobbed along the surface of the water.

Completely and utterly embarrassed now, Sayuri grabbed her panties and quickly pulled them on under the water and climbed out, running back to her cabin as fast as she could.

As soon as she was out of hearing distance, Ulrich glared at Torolf. "And just why wasn't she wearing her panties?" he asked in a demanding voice.

"You know good and damn well why she wasn't wearing them," Torolf spat back.

Ulrich made a move to throttle Torolf, but Faolan held him back.

"So then it's official. We've all had sex with her. Now that we all have it out of our system, we all need to stay the fuck away from her," he said, his tone threatening and feral.

Ulrich and Torolf didn't appear too happy about that.

"You're right. It's dangerous for us to keep sleeping with her," Ulrich admitted.

Torolf hung his head low, "Yes, it is."

"Then it's settled," Faolan said, his words clipped, "We've all sated our beast and can now focus on trying to find a wolven

mate and stop messing around with this human."

"Yes," Ulrich and Torolf said dejectedly in chorus.

\* \* \* \*

Hours later that night, Faolan crept up to Sayuri's cabin in wolf form. He wasn't far from the door when he caught a whiff of wolf. He was all too familiar with that scent. He remained still for a moment, trying to decide if the scent had lingered since Ulrich was there before or if he was in the vicinity.

Within seconds, all of his questions were answered as Ulrich and Torolf converged on the cabin and they all discovered each other.

What the hell are you two doing here? Faolan demanded.

We might ask you the same thing. Ulrich said.

Torolf didn't say anything. Instead he lunged at Ulrich's back and started a fight right outside Sayuri's door.

Sayuri lay in bed, trying to hide under her covers from the shame and embarrassment of being caught by Faolan and Ulrich in the spa with Torolf. It wasn't that she was embarrassed that she'd had sex with him, far be it from that. He was drop dead gorgeous. It was just that she'd never imagined she would do anything like that in her life. She'd slept with two

different men in two days, merely hours apart from each other. And she'd had sex with one of them out in the open, where anyone in the world could have seen them, could have watched them. It didn't bear thinking about.

What in the world had come over her? Her troublesome thoughts were interrupted by a sound outside her door. Is that dogs? She got up out of bed and made her way over to a window in the front room of her cabin. When she looked outside she saw that there were three wolves fighting viciously outside her cabin.

Worried that one of them was going to get itself killed in the fight, she ran over to her door and snatched it open.

The wolves didn't even pause in their fighting when she opened the door. It was as if they didn't hear her at all.

"Hey!" she yelled at the top of her lungs. "Stop that!"

The wolves continued to snarl and bite and tear at each other, drawing blood.

Sayuri was horrified. She had to stop the fight. But with what? The only thing as far as the eye could see was snow.

She reached down and packed some snow into a ball and threw it at the wolves, hitting one smack dab in the middle of its face. Immediately, all three of the wolves stopped fighting and turned to look at her.

Sayuri gasped in surprise, covering her open mouth with one hand. She recognized them as the wolves that had stopped the horses when she had gone on a sleigh ride seconds before they turned and ran, fading into the trees.

Faolan, Ulrich, and Torolf shifted into human form when they met up in the woods not far from Sayuri's cabin.

"Look, we've done enough fighting," Faolan said, looking back and forth from Ulrich to Torolf.

"Let's be reasonable about this. We all know why we came to the cabin. But I'm the alpha and I have first rights."

"Just wait a damn minute," Ulrich and Torolf said almost in unison. They both looked at each other angrily.

"You first," Torolf said through gritted teeth, even though it was clear he wanted to speak his mind.

Ulrich turned back to Faolan. "That law only applies to mating and this isn't a mating. If it isn't a mating, I say Sayuri can decide which one to invite in for the night."

Faolan thought the suggestion over for a minute and then relented.

"Alright. We'll let it be her decision. That way we can't argue about which one makes it into her cabin. But the other two have to graciously accept her decision."



They all set out for Sayuri's cabin again.

Faolan knocked on the door.

Behind him, Torolf and Ulrich started shoving each other out of the way, eager to be one of the first faces she saw.

Finally, Torolf punched Ulrich in the side of the head.

Ulrich returned with a punch to Torolf's stomach.

Sayuri is confused about the knock she heard at the door. Who in the world could be that be? Before she could reach the door, the sounds of a struggle right outside reach her ears.

She opened the door and saw Faolan holding the cuff of Ulrich's and Torolf's shirts.

All three men looked up in unison and smiled wanly at her. An angry Faolan let the two men down abruptly into the snow and walked up to Sayuri.

"Sayuri, there is something we need you to settle for us."

"Yes?" Sayuri asked, completely confused as to why these three men would want to ask her anything.

"You need to tell us which one of us you want to see tonight."

Sayuri was sure her mouth was agape, but she couldn't help it.

She was completely floored. When she'd come to the door to find them arguing, she certainly hadn't expected anything like this. None of them had really seemed that interested in her. Heat flooded her face and butterflies filled her stomach when she realized they must have been fighting over her.

She noticed at that very moment several things about Faolan that she had failed to notice in the first few moments after he had dropped Ulrich and Torolf and leapt into her cabin.

Rage didn't precisely, or at least not completely, describe his countenance. Instead it was equally anger and raging desire.

His whole body was shaking, his breath coming in hard ragged bursts. He was obviously in the grips of conflicting emotions a lot stronger and more chaotic than just anger.

A split second later Ulrich plastered his mouth over hers and totally annihilated all brain function.

There wasn't time for fear to surface above her own desires and dampen them. She felt the pressure of his mouth over hers, felt the heat and desire of his infinitely welcome adhesion take control of her senses with the force of an explosion as his tongue raked over hers possessively, inundating her senses with the heady taste and scent that was only his. Full-blown arousal consumed her at the same instant. Almost immediately her entire body lost all muscle function. If he hadn't been holding her in his arms she would have melted into a puddle at his feet.

Everything inside of her opened fully to him, blossomed into readiness, without a murmur of protest or any coyness.

The ripping sound and pull against her shirt as it was torn, exposing her breasts, penetrated her addled mind only seconds before she felt Ulrich's hand close over one breast, kneading it. With a great deal of effort, she opened her heavy lidded eyes as he broke the kiss to look down at her breasts as he squeezed them, plucking at her nipples until both were standing erect and taut and pulsing with keen sensation.

That was when she remembered that it wasn't just Ulrich in the room with her. Faolan and Torolf stood just to the side of the two of them, their expressions as filled with hunger and intent as Ulrich's.

Faolan slid a narrow-eyed, challenging look at Ulrich and Torolf.

Torolf either didn't notice or didn't care. His gaze was rooted to her exposed breasts. His swallow was audible as he gazed upon them, reaching for her almost like a man moving in his sleep.

A sense of dread came over Sayuri as she watched Torolf's hand come closer, cooling her heated arousal. Images of the three of them fighting over her and ripping each other from limb to limb leapt into her befuddled mind.

Their gazes met for a tense handful of moments. But seconds later, they returned their attentions to her, as if there'd been

some silent agreement that had passed between them.

Faolan stepped closer, his hands slipped upward from her breasts to push the remnants of her shirt from her shoulders and then he slipped his hands down her body to her waist. He turned her so that her back was to Ulrich.

Ulrich's large powerful hands closed over her shoulders, running down over the length of her arms.

Then she felt Torolf undoing her pants and pulling them from her hips so that they settled around her ankles. He stood beside the three of them, his hand settling on one of her buttocks, squeezing the cheek in a massaging motion.

Sayuri's eyes flew wide open as Faolan's hands slipped upward from her waist to cup her breasts. There wasn't adequate enough time for her mind to completely acknowledge what was happening and then panic accordingly.

Ulrich grabbed her by her arms. Lifting them above her head, he then curled them about his neck.

Instinctively, she arched her back at the pull of pressure along her arms and shoulders. When she tried to twist her head around to look behind her to see what Ulrich was doing, Faolan caught her jaw in his steely grip, tipped her head back against Ulrich's shoulder and bent his head to align his mouth with hers.

As the three of them shifted closer, pinning her between their

bodies, chaos inside of her was paramount.

Even as Faolan's mouth laid seige to Sayuri's senses, forcing her mind to focus on the forceful persuasion of his lips and tongue as he assaulted her mouth, the suckling and nipping assault of Torolf's mouth along one arm to the sensitive crook shifted her focus in his direction. And when Faolan moved against her, plastering his rock hard chest and abs along hers and moving his hips to caress her pussy with the hard length of his cock, she felt the heated touch of Ulrich's body all along her back, felt his pulsating cock digging into the cleft of her ass and lifting her harder against Faolan's erection.

Sayuri went into sensory overload from the barrage of her senses from seemingly every direction simultaneously. After only minutes of their sweet assault, she began to get the feeling that she was on fire from the inside out. She was unable to catch her breath, she couldn't keep track of who the hands and mouths moving over her with feverish, trembling need belonged to beyond awareness of the location that lit up with fiery sensation at each caress. She groaned and shook, buffered by their bodies, on fire with both her own heat and theirs.

Torolf nibbled along the side of her neck as his hands slid along her arms and moved to cup and knead her breasts, his fingers plucking and tormenting her sensitive nipples. When he relinquished her breasts and skated his hands down over her stomach, Faolan cast aside the invasion of her mouth and leaned down, holding the sides of her breasts with his hands,

pressing them together so that he could tease first one and then the other with the hungry pull of his mouth and tongue.

She had no idea when they had gotten undressed until she felt their swollen flesh against her instead of cloth covered groins. As she felt all three of them prodding her at once, probing, trying to mount her on their shafts, she was flooded with doubt and dismay. Faolan won the fight by hauling her up and impaling her on his turgid cock. Even as she let out a sharp scream of pleasure, entwining her legs about his waist, however, she felt Ulrich engage her from behind.

Pain conflicted with pleasure for several seconds as he pounded into her, continued to compete for dominance for many moments as they both began to drive into her at a frantic pace, but it only seemed to increase the pleasure.

She held on for all that she was worth, her legs wrapped tightly around Faolan's waist, her arms still holding on to Ulrich's neck behind her, but her body had already begun to shake, had already been on the precipice before they had succeeded in finding their rhythm. As they achieved it and began to strive for their own release, she came with such force that it wrenched harsh cries from her with every intense wave of pleasure that coursed through her, that sent her spiraling toward oblivion.

She went completely slack even as first Faolan and then Ulrich and Torolf, his cock in his hand, uttered harsh groans and came. She would've been hard pressed to say who was doing the most shaking when they all leaned against one another in the wake of their release, having difficulty dragging air into their

lungs. But there was no doubt in her mind that she was the closest to unconscious when they finally slipped their cocks from her body. When her feet touched the cabin floor, her body kept going, her muscles unable to stop its descent. Both Faolan and Ulrich made an attempt to catch her, but she was so slippery from their sweaty bodies having been pressed together that she slipped from their clutches, melting to the floor at their feet.

Faolan gathered Sayuri in his arms and headed to the bedroom. Ulrich and Torolf started to follow. He turned to them and said, "If you want to stay the night, you'll be sleeping in the living room."

Ulrich and Torolf looked disappointed.

"Dibs on couch," Ulrich said suddenly.

Torolf looked even more disgusted. He cursed under his breath and headed back to the living room with Ulrich, making a place for himself on the rug in front of the fireplace.

\* \* \* \*

Later that night, Sayuri was awoken by an ache that seemed to be spreading from the peak of her breast and lower, down to her pussy.

She felt the soft caress of his lips moving over a nipple, and then she felt teeth rake across it, wrenching a groan from her as her nipple became taut beneath his touch.

She whimpered as he latched on to the sensitive peak and tugged hard with his mouth. A throbbing started in her pussy, intensifying with each hard drag of his tongue, each sharp tease of his teeth. She began to moan as he moved down her belly.

Heat seared her flesh in the wake of his kisses. Her blood boiled in her veins, rushed to her pussy, a thrumming pulse pounding in her core.

Faolan cupped her breasts then released them, nuzzling the zenith of her thighs with his nose. His lips teased the top of one leg, nibbling the sensitive skin as he parted her legs with rough palms.

He rubbed his face against her inner thigh, stubble scraping along her skin. She quivered at the contrast between the touch of his soft lips and the feel of his harsh stubble.

Her breath caught in her throat as he began to explore her folds with one thick finger. He caressed her slit up and down, parting her lips like the petals of a flower, moving closer and closer to the opening of her pussy.

"Say that you want me. Tell me that you want me to please you as no other man ever will."

He slid his palms down her arms, down further still, teasing the sides of her breasts. He moved lower, along the sloping curve of her waist. Turning her onto her stomach, he trailed kisses



down the length of her spine, causing her to shiver.

He moved back away from her to caress her hips, skating his teeth along the top of one cheek of her ass as his fingers traced the bottom crease beneath it, bathing the smooth flesh with the pad of his tongue.

She jerked in surprise at the wet heat of his tongue that cooled rapidly as he moved lower.

His hands moved between her thighs, his thumbs rubbing the lips of her pussy.

She shivered in pleasure at the unfamiliar sensation.

"Part your legs for me," he commanded.

"Why?" she asked a little breathlessly, trying to sit up.

"Now," he growled.

A hot flood of pussy juices saturated her cleft at his command, her sex clenching almost painfully at the rush. She leaned forward obediently, laying on her belly as he parted her legs and ran a finger up her wet slit. She grabbed handfuls of linen, bit the knuckles of her hand as he used his nose to nuzzle her nether lips, his hot breath fanning her pussy.

The pleasurable torment was too much for her to bear. She thought surely that she would die from anticipation.

As if having read her mind, he spoke. "I haven't even gotten started," he murmured, the words slightly muffled by her depths. His hot, moist tongue slid into her swollen folds, teasing the entrance to her pussy. He encased her thighs in his arms, rubbing the muscles there from the front as he painted a searing line of fire down to her clit that throbbed with need.

She spread her thighs further apart as he knelt between them, tilting her hips to allow him better access to her pussy.

He grunted his appreciation and probed deeper. The first touch of his rough tongue against her sensitive swollen nub made her pant for breath. He set a quick rhythm as he flicked his tongue back and forth across the lips of her pussy, sliding with ease in her juices. A wave of pleasure emanated from her core. She jerked against the tidal wave. Unable to control herself, she ground her pussy into his face.

He sat back and substituted his fingers for his tongue, rubbing her clit between the stroking digits. He moved over her, cradled his hips against hers, his deft fingers still working her pussy in steady strokes.

"Do you want me?" he asked, his voice husky with need. The head of his cock tormented her pussy lips, sliding back and forth across the entrance but never deeper.

Unable to voice to her need, she nodded her acquiescence. The only thing she knew was that he was taking her to that precipice once more, and she ached to fall over the edge.

He rubbed his turgid shaft up and down her slit, the head of his cock wet with her juices, bringing her to the brink of madness with thorough agony.

"Say it, Sayuri. Say that you want me," he commanded. He halted above her swollen pussy lips, withdrawing his fingers and holding her by the hips.

"I want you," she ground out through gritted teeth, her voice filled with pain, with need. At the moment, she wanted him more than anything she had ever wanted.

At her confirmation, he visibly shuddered, went rigid as he immersed his hard cock deep inside of her with one stroke. She screamed as he filled her entirely, his feral growl intermingling with her voice.

She had never experienced this angle of penetration and it pleased her in a way she had never felt before. She bit her lip as he slowly pulled his cock out, wanting to scream for more, wanting to demand that he pump into her and never stop.

His beast overrode all sense of control, and he withdrew only to sink inside her depths again, faster and faster, until his hips were slapping against her ass. He forced her hips down to meet each thrust, guiding her movement, slamming into her pussy over and over again.

She reveled in pleasure as he ferociously pumped into her slick passage. The beat of her heart deafened her, her nerves on fire with burning need. Her arms strained to support her

upper body, and she arched her back as he bent closer to her, his fingers finding her soaking clit, rubbing it in a maddening circle. She screamed as her climax ripped through her with a quickness that took her breath away, her muscles quivering.

His cock jerked when the walls of her sex began to spasm, and yet he continued to slam into her pussy, delving deeper each time, until he touched her womb. He pumped into her over and over again, forcing the shock waves of her orgasm to reach to greater heights and crash over her. She moaned low in her throat, ecstasy and pain combining until she couldn't take it anymore. She dug her nails into the bed beneath her, her climax consuming every fiber of her being.

He howled as his cock pulsed one final, soul fracturing time, shuddering as his seed spilled into her.

He collapsed against her, his breathing ragged against her neck, pressing delicate kisses along the curve. He pulled his cock out of her and moved beside her, holding her tightly against his length.

She felt strangely bereft when his cock was gone. But she was in no frame of mind to analyze that.

"You are mine now," he whispered against the shell of her ear, kissing her cheek tenderly.

Sayuri was asleep in seconds, completely unaware of Faolan's internal struggle. He wanted her to want him for him, to know him completely. But if she knew what he was, she would leave.

He lay beside her for hours, studying her, and he came to realize that when she left the lodge, she would take with her the very air that he breathed. He closed his eyes tight against the thought. He had feared few things in his life, yet more than anything he was afraid to see himself through her eyes. She would think that he was a beast, an animal. She would feel lied to, betrayed. How could he convince her that he hadn't, when he realized by not telling her what he was, letting her believe he was human, he had lied to her.

He wanted to be with her, to hold her tight. He wanted to convince her to never leave him, to tell her what was in his heart, to tell her that she meant everything to him. How would he find the strength to let her go when she discovered the truth? He realized he didn't have the strength to. He wanted to tell her that she couldn't leave him. If she did, he wouldn't survive.

## Chapter Eight

When the sun came up, Faolan, Ulrich, and Torolf left the cabin.

They headed out into the woods to have a pack meeting.

"You realize that we all got so carried away during the night that we all marked her and bred her, don't you?" Ulrich asked Faolan and Torolf.

Faolan paced in the snow. His thoughts were turbulent. He was the alpha and should have been first to breed. Now he couldn't be sure if he got her pregnant because they had all slept with her. But, the question was, was she even in heat? If they got her pregnant, would she stay with them? It might be their only chance at keeping her.

"We don't know that Sayuri is even in heat. I don't know how to tell with a human woman," Faolan admitted. "But, if she is pregnant, then we're in trouble with the rest of the our people."

"You know good and damn well that our acceptance is already tenuous at best. We're tolerated more than accepted," Ulrich said bitterly.

"Yes, we all realize that, but none of us want to become complete outcasts," Faolan said. "I feel torn about what we've done, but I'm beginning to feel like we might just as well do whatever we want to. We're never going to be completely accepted by our people anyway."

"And we're never going to be completely accepted by Sayuri as long as she doesn't know the full truth about us," Torolf said.

\* \* \* \*

Sayuri woke up thoroughly screwed and dripping. Well, make baby had been on the top of her list. Yuk! As she looked down at herself, she couldn't help but think that she got what she came for, surely she had gotten enough samples.

She stretched languorously on the soft mattress, satiated as a milk fed cat from the night before. But it wasn't long before she started thinking about Faolan, Ulrich, and Torolf, and her sense of peace and contentment disappeared in an instant. They had no idea that she had just been using them to get pregnant. They had no idea that that was her sole purpose in coming to the lodge. What she had done suddenly felt very wrong. They had feelings too. And worse, she had feelings for them. How could she have gotten herself into this mess? And not with just one man but three? Did they even feel anything for her, or had it all just been sex to them? She really couldn't tell.

She could tell from the quiet of the cabin that they were all gone. It looked like none of them were the stay and snuggle types. Maybe that was the last time she was going to see them. She seriously hoped not. Now the thought of returning to work seemed like torture. How could she go back to her old life now that she had experienced life with them? How could she continue like nothing had ever happened when they had changed her perception about everything? It was simple. She couldn't. But, she didn't have a choice. They lived here, and she lived in the city. And, they most likely weren't interested in starting a family anyway. When they had sex, it felt like they were making love, but maybe all of that was just one-sided. Maybe all of that was just what she wanted to see and not how

it really was, because she was so crazy about them.

She got out of bed and headed for the shower. That was the first thing she needed to do. When she was done, she quickly got dressed. The men hadn't come back. She felt like an idiot. Of course they hadn't come back. For one, she wasn't that important, and for two, they had to get up early to go to work. She tried not to feel hurt by their quietly leaving. She needed to focus right now on what had to be done. And she was going to start by purchasing some pregnancy tests. She'd gotten enough semen from all of them to at least make one baby. The thought of getting the tests brightened her up considerably. She couldn't wait to use them.

Throwing on her faux fur coat and heavy boots, she left her cabin and headed for the store in the main lodge. It was breakfast time so most of the other tourists were packed into the lodge dining hall to get something to eat. That was good for her. That meant that the store would be fairly empty. She walked up and down the aisles of the store until she found the medical supplies section. It took her a minute, but she finally found what she was looking for. She was surprised to see that they had quite a few pregnancy tests. She thought about grabbing all of them, but decided to not be so selfish. She really only needed one or two packs. Getting more of them wouldn't change the results. So she grabbed a few and headed to the store counter to pay for them. On her way to the counter, she was so busy reading the back of the package, on when to take the test and how to determine pregnancy, that she wasn't looking where she was going and walked right into someone.



"Oh. I'm sorry . . . ," she began, but the words faded on her lips as she looked up and saw Faolan. She quickly dropped her hands by her sides in an attempt to hide the pregnancy tests. "Good morning," she said, smiling, blushing slightly as she recalled why she was buying the tests.

"Good morning," he said softly. Faolan saw what she had in her hands. He watched as she tried to cover up what she had. There was no denying it. She was buying pregnancy tests! He nearly had a heart attack right there, but somehow he managed to remain calm and collected in front of her. He simply smiled and kept walking, sipping his morning coffee as if he hadn't seen anything.

As he walked away he heard her head to the counter and pay for the tests. He headed out of the lodge to go to work. But what he'd seen was eating him alive. He debated telling the others, but he thought better of it. He didn't know how they would handle such news. He decided that he would just have to sneak into her cabin and check the test results himself. If she took them and they were positive, then he would tell his pack mates. Until then, it was unnecessary to tell them. They would only stress out. They wouldn't be able to concentrate on work, just as he was unable to concentrate now that he'd seen it.

An hour passed, but it felt like an eternity. The thought of the tests were burning in the back of Faolan's mind as he tried to work. Finally, he couldn't stand it any longer. He had to go to her cabin to see what the results were. He was dying to know. He slipped away from Ulrich and Torolf. He was going to have

to be quick so that they wouldn't notice him missing. Once he'd gotten out of site, he shifted into wolf form and headed to Sayuri's cabin. Outside, he sniffed the air, but he could tell that she wasn't inside. She had left, and it was the perfect opportunity to slip inside unnoticed.

He heard the snow crunching not far behind him. He turned to see Ulrich and Torolf in wolf form just inside the tree line.

What are you doing here? Faolan asked.

We were just about to ask you the same thing. She's not in there. I saw her headed the other way. Ulrich said.

I know she's not in here. That's exactly why I'm here. I need to check on something. Wait out here. Faolan said.

He shifted into human form and went into the cabin. It didn't take him long to locate the tests. She had set them on the bathroom counter. Neither one of them had been opened.

"Shit!" he said hotly under his breath. He'd come there for nothing. Now he was going to have to come back, and the suspense was going to kill him. He felt like waiting for her and forcing her to take them when she returned, but he thought better of it. That was no way to handle the situation. Besides, he didn't know if it would be a good thing for her to know that he had seen her buying the tests. But suddenly breeding with her didn't seem so impossible. The reality of his situation struck him hard. What if she was pregnant? She wasn't from here. She would want to go back home. But, he couldn't allow

that, not when she was pregnant with his pup. But what would she say when she found out that he was wolven? He knew exactly what she would do. She would run away in fear. He was completely fucked anyway he looked at it.

He left the cabin and met up with Ulrich and Torolf outside.

"So, are you going to tell us what it was you were doing in there?" Torolf asked.

Faolan ran a hand through his thick hair, frustration evident in his entire being. He needed to share what he had learned earlier that morning, if only to alleviate his own stress. But was it right to say anything when he didn't know anymore than he did? On the other hand, was it right to keep it from them. He knew they would want to know just as much as he did, which meant they would all be trying to sneak into her cabin to find out if she'd used the tests or not. He finally decided he should tell them.

Faolan's brow was furrowed, and he began pacing in the snow.

"When we finished breakfast this morning, I went to the store to get a cup of coffee. Just as I was leaving, I ran into Sayuri. She had something in her hands," he said, pausing, stopping briefly to look at Ulrich and Torolf before pacing again. The distressed looks on their faces did nothing to ease his mind about what he was going to tell them. "She had pregnancy tests."

"Really?" Torolf said eagerly.

"Are you serious?" Ulrich asked.

Faolan looked at his pack mates. He couldn't believe how excited they were. "Don't get your hopes up. She hasn't taken them yet. That's what I was doing here. I went to see the results. I wasn't going to tell you before I knew the answer for myself. But, I guess it's better that you know."

"Why hasn't she taken them yet. I want to know what the answer is right now," Torolf said, crossing his arms in front of him, his face sullen with disappointment.

"She probably hasn't taken them yet because she's not ready to take them yet," Ulrich said. "I've overheard from human women before that they take them only after they had missed their period, which means we're probably going to have to wait a few weeks to find out."

"Damn," Faolan growled. "The waiting is going to get the best of me."

"What are we going to do if she is pregnant?" Torolf asked.

"What we need to do if focus on right now," Faolan said. "We need to convince her to stay here with us."

"Well, how do we do that?" Torolf asked.

"Simple," Ulrich replied, "we make her an offer she can't refuse. We'll show her that we can take care of her and the pups. We should invite her to dinner at the house, cook her a

meal, and then fuck her silly and never let her leave."

"Sounds like a plan," Faolan said. "Ulrich, you find her and invite her to dinner, sometime around seven o'clock, and give her directions to our cabin. Torolf and I will get back to work so that nobody notices that we were gone. After work, we'll all meet up at the cabin and prepare for her arrival."

\* \* \* \*

Sayuri was on cloud nine. They didn't just want sex! Inviting her to dinner at their place meant so much more. She could hardly contain her excitement as she followed Ulrich's hand written directions to the cabin in the woods. She had left early because she was worried that she would get lost trying to find her way to the cabin, and she didn't want to be late to their dinner date. Finally, she saw the cabin in the distance, smoke coming from the chimney. It was a large cabin, much larger than the one she had been staying in since her arrival. And it was much more beautiful. She couldn't believe they lived in such a wonderful home, surrounded on all sides by trees, overlooking a valley of snow covered forest. It was so picturesque, so breathtaking.

It looked so warm! And she was freezing! With any luck she might just thaw out before dinner!

She heard some movement as she approached the cabin from the backside. She figured it was one of the guys, but she stopped in her tracks when she saw what had made the noise. There were three wolves just outside the front of the cabin.

Fortunately for her, they hadn't heard her approach. She started taking small steps backwards, but stopped again. Right in front of her eyes, the wolves morphed, shifted, becoming large, becoming human. There was no mistaking the three men that now stood where the wolves had once been. It was Faolan, Ulrich, and Torolf. She stood in shocked silence for a second, but then her adrenaline and protective instincts took over and she turned and ran back the way she had come.

"Shit!" she mumbled under her breath when she lost a snow boot. But she wasn't going to stop and go back for it. They could be on her heels at this very moment. "Fuck!" she hissed vehemently when she lost grip of the map. But she didn't stop for that either. She wasn't going to stop for anything, not after what she'd just seen.

While she was running, she mentally inventoried everything she had brought with her on the trip, everything that was sitting in her cabin, and decided she could live without it. So, instead of heading back to her cabin and grabbing her suitcase, she ran straight to the parking lot and her car. Fortunately she had her keys on her, that was one habit she wasn't sorry she'd not forgotten. In seconds she was in her car and speeding down the road.

\* \* \* \*

Faolan sensed that something was wrong even before they reached the cabin. Halting in his tracks, he glanced around, searching, testing the faint scent on the air. Sayuri! But the scent was wrong. He realized then what it was-fear!

"She's come and gone," Ulrich said blankly.

"She saw us," Torolf said tightly.

Faolan and Ulrich both glanced at him sharply.

"We would've caught her scent."

Torolf shook his head. "She was downwind of us-or the smoke prevented us from catching her scent. It doesn't matter how it happened. It happened."

"He's right," Faolan growled, dropping the load of wood he was carrying and striding quickly around the house until he spotted her tracks. They halted several yards from the house and changed directions. The footprints leading away from the cabin were running steps. She'd run so fast she'd lost a boot.

"Shit!"

The three of them set off at a run in the hope of catching her before she got back to her cabin but the snow slowed them down and none of them wanted to take the chance of frightening her even more by shifting. They were so intent upon her cabin that they'd almost reached it before they realized there were no fresh tracks leading to it, only away from it.

"She didn't go to her cabin!" Faolan said, halting abruptly. "We lost her tracks."

Ulrich and Torolf changed directions abruptly and raced toward the lodge. The desk clerk stared at them as if they were crazy when they burst into the lodge and looked around.

"Sayuri!" Faolan said to the clerk. "Have you seen her?"

He shook his head. "No. Is she lost?"

"What kind of car is she driving?" Ulrich demanded urgently.

The clerk stared them blankly. "I don't know."

His lips tightening with anger, Faolan pushed his way around the desk and pulled out the log. "Got it!"

"Wait!" the clerk called out. "What's going on?"

Torolf halted as the other two headed out the door. "Tell the boss we have personal business to take care of. We'll be back soon."

"The car's gone," Faolan said grimly when Torolf had joined them.

"What now?"

"She's headed back to the city," Faolan said tightly. "It's a good thing I got her home address while I was at it."

\* \* \* \*

It was positively the happiest day of her life! Sayuri had no idea



why she'd spent most of it squalling like a baby.

Actually, she realized, she'd been miserable ever since she'd left the lodge-Well, after she'd gotten over being scared half to death!

She'd spent half the trip home trying to convince herself she hadn't seen what she thought she had and the other half alternately worrying that they would find her and weeping over the fact that she was probably never going to see them again. It had taken her three whole days to go from questioning her sanity and fearing that they'd manage, somehow, to track her down to pure misery because she knew they wouldn't.

They probably wouldn't even try!

Happily, she managed to turn her mind to her reason for going to the lodge to start with after a few days. The pregnancy test was positive!

She'd had almost as hard a time accepting that as real as she'd had accepting what she'd seen-the men she loved to distraction shifting from wolves to human in the blink of an eye!

She was pregnant, though. She'd not only checked the test several times to make sure the stripes didn't disappear, she'd used two more tests and all of them were positive.

She was going to have a baby! Yeah!

She'd wept for hours, exhausted herself and took a nap, and

then moved around her apartment in a daze, trying to come to grips with her situation. She was pregnant, but the guys were wolves! Or werewolves!

She didn't even believe in werewolves! How could she be pregnant by werewolves? Or 'a' werewolf, she supposed.

Did it matter?

She knew it should have, but all she kept thinking each time she considered it was that she loved them. She wasn't sorry. Whatever happened, however things turned out, she didn't regret a moment of the time she'd invested in the baby and she didn't regret the men she'd chosen.

She was at her kitchen table, swirling a spoon around and around a bowl of ice cream that was turning to milk when she heard a knock on her door. The sound jolted her so badly that she dropped the spoon. It hit the table and then the floor with a clatter, but she was already out of her seat and heading for the door.

She hesitated for a moment when she reached it, realizing why she'd raced to the door-hopefulness that it was them. Chiding herself for being silly, she unlocked the door and pulled it open.

Before Sayuri could even react, Faolan stepped forward and pulled her tightly to his chest, nearly crushing her. He had plastered her arms between them, and she tried to push at the wall of his chest in an attempt to put space between them.

He instinctively tightened his hold on her and buried his face in her hair. "Sayuri, surely you know what we feel for you," he said, his voice husky with emotion, vulnerable.

Sayuri felt deep pain in her heart at his words.

"We didn't want you to go. Please have the courage come back with us. I know you think that we are beasts, but we need you. I need you."

She heard the pain in his voice, felt an answering one in her body. They were wild, and they had swept her away in a maelstrom of passion. Since she'd returned home, all she could think about was the fact that she wanted to see them again, craved their touch, craved their attention. But she had been so scared by what she'd seen. She had thought they were dangerous, really, really dangerous. She knew better than that now. They had done nothing if not prove that they were more human than human. They saved people's lives for a living for God's sake. How could she have thought that they would ever hurt her? She knew they were different, that something existed in them, something part animal, part man. But it didn't matter to her anymore. She loved them, wanted to be with them.

"Faolan," she said, trying to push against the concrete wall of his chest again, trying to look him in the face. Aside from that, she was having a hard time breathing, having trouble thinking because of the feel of the heat of his skin and the urgent demands of her body.

"Don't do this, Sayuri!" Faolan pleaded. "Don't turn us away."

She finally broke loose from the bonds of his arms. "But my home is so far away from yours," she said sullenly.

"The people here can't love you like we do."

Ulrich and Torolf nodded in agreement.

"Don't fear us, Sayuri. I would give my life for you. We would give our lives for you. We are already bound to one another. Can't you feel it?"

His words warmed her blood, fed the ache deep inside that she'd felt ever since she'd left them.

Faolan took her chin in the palm of his hand, tipped her head back so that she couldn't escape his dark, hungry gaze.

Suddenly, it occurred to her what he meant by being bound to him. She remembered the dark evidence of his brand, touched it with her fingertips and realized that Ulrich and Torolf had left their brand as well. They had taken her body as if it belonged to them, ferociously, with an animalistic intensity, and yet something inside of her had responded to the feral hunger and need in them.

He wrapped her hair around a hand, brought a fistful of it up to bury his face in it, breathing in deeply of her scent. His scent still lingered on her and it would remain in her. He felt satisfaction at that realization.

"You bit me," she said, staring at the three of them in disbelief. She touched first her neck, then her breast, and her thigh. A fiery hot ache consumed her at the memory of their untamed passion, of Faolan holding her in his arms, his body wild with need, his mouth working over her body eagerly, hungrily.

Was it wrong that she wanted more, that she wanted a life with them?

Faolan cupped her face in his hands and leaned forward to brush his lips against hers, feather light, enticing. "Come back home with us," he whispered.

"Faolan," she said a little breathlessly, desperate need filling her at his touch. "I want you, I can't even bear the thought of being without you. I've been in misery since I left you.

"I was afraid at first, I admit it. But when I got home and was alone, I realized that I didn't care about what I'd seen. I realized that didn't change who you are, and I love you all for who you are. But, there's also something that I should tell you, something I was keeping secret," she said, pausing. "I came to that resort to get pregnant. I'm sorry, I should have told you."

Faolan, Ulrich, and Torolf looked at each other in surprise.

"It was wrong of me not to tell you."

"Well," Faolan said.

"Well, what?" Sayuri asked.

"Are you?" Ulrich and Torolf chimed in, their faces full of anticipation.

Sayuri's smile was brilliant as she looked at them. She couldn't believe it. They were as eager for a baby as she was. "Yes, I am," she admitted.

Faolan's heart soared at her words. It was more than he could have ever hoped for. He grabbed her by the wrist, pulling on it, unbalancing her so that her body fell flush against his. Ulrich and Torolf embraced her as well.

"We love you, and we need you with us. Come home."

## Epilogue

### Over One Year Later

Faolan encircled Sayuri's slender figure in his arms, pulling her

hard against his solid frame. His body slipped protectively about hers.

She was deep asleep, giving him ample time to examine her at his leisure. His brow furrowed as he noted that there were dark shadows beneath her eyes. She hadn't been getting a lot of sleep since the pups were born, which was exactly why he'd instructed Ulrich and Torolf to give her the day off. He smiled as he thought about all the trouble they'd had handling his young. They'd had even more difficulty in keeping Sayuri in the dark, letting her believe that taking care of the pups was not hard at all.

He propped himself up on one elbow, studying her, her thick black lashes, her delicate skin, the oval of her face. It wasn't just her physical beauty that had claimed his heart, he knew that all too well, it was who she was inside, that part of her that accepted the part of him that was a wild, untamed beast.

A gradual smile softened the hard line of his mouth. He recalled when his people had discovered them together, when they had discovered that Sayuri was human, they had told him that she didn't belong in their world. But he knew better. His world didn't exist without her. And she had given them a piece of her mind. They hadn't bothered them after that.

Her hair spilled across her pillow like a blanket of silk. She had moved the comforter in her sleep, and her thick hair was the only thing concealing her breasts. The sight of her was erotic. Even in her sleep it seemed as if she waited for him, needing him.

Her soft skin, a pale shade of peaches and cream, shown brilliantly in the moonlight coming in through the cabin window.

Faolan slipped one hand over the contour of her leg. Just the feel of her set him on fire inside. He caressed her hips, traced the contour of her waist.

Sayuri stirred, shifted.

He needed her any way he could get her.

She slowly emerged from sleep.

He could tell by her breathing the moment she was fully awake.

Her body was still sore from caring for her new babies, hurting in places she hadn't even been aware she had. But now that she wasn't pregnant anymore, now that she'd had several months of recovery, she'd noticed that she'd been feeling different, more sensitive, more sexual. Faolan's body against hers was like hot steel, immovable. He was aggressive and unbearably sexy, no wonder he was the pack alpha.

She could hear the creaks and rustles of the snow covered trees outside the cabin acutely, the scrape of branches on the window in the living room.

He moved the hair at the nape of her neck away and brushed a feather light kiss on the exposed skin.



With his thumb he stroked the side of her breast, heating her from the inside out, sending a shiver of excitement coursing through her body. She wanted him wild and untamed, wanted him to need her. In his day to day life he was so in control of himself, of his emotions. The realization that she could make him lose all of that control was a powerful feeling.

Faolan lowered his head to a taut nipple calling his name. His tongue stroked it gently. Kissing the rosy peak, he drew it into the moist, hot cavern of his mouth.

Sayuri sighed softly, closing her eyes, reveling in the pleasure his touch elicited. He brought her body to life, made every nerve ending scream for his touch. She felt moldable, pliant under his ministrations.

He lifted his head and moved so that the weight of his body trapped her beneath him. His dark gaze roamed over her possessively. He cupped her chin, rubbing his thumb back and forth across the delicate contour of her lips.

His other hand stroked her belly. He missed the roundness of her stomach when she'd been at the height of her pregnancy. He'd grown fond of caressing it. Seeing her like this now made him eager to make her round with his seed again, but he knew that he'd already made an agreement with Ulrich and Torolf that since his were the first pups born, he wouldn't try to get her pregnant again, at least not right now.

With his knee, he pushed her legs apart. He shifted once more above her.

She couldn't catch her breath as she took in his size and power, his strength and beauty.

He eased his cock into her.

Sayuri gasped in pleasure. She would never grow accustomed to the way he filled her, stretched her, the way he turned her body to liquid heat. Every deep stroke of his cock built a craving for more, had her hands urgently caressing the defined muscles of his back, had her lips moving over his neck, his chest.

Faolan worked at maintaining dominance over his beast, called on the discipline of control that he'd taught himself for years. But her mouth and the feel of her hands on his body were driving him insane. Her pussy was so tight as the walls of her sex gripped him, like kerosene on the flames of his desire. Internally he struggled as the beast in him fought for dominion. Incensed by his animal hunger, his body began moving harder, faster, plunging his cock into her, merging their bodies, their souls.

She moaned in pleasure as he continued to thrust into her depths. Unknowingly, she dug her fingernails into his back as wave after wave of orgasm coursed through her body.

The need in her spurred him on. He gave in to the fire before his beast could consume him. He plunged into her pussy, her tight, hot grip bringing him to the edge. He growled his satisfaction as he pulled out and spilled his seed.

He fell beside her slender body on the bed, momentarily sated.

His hand stroked the length of her hair where it lay against her back. His touch melted her insides right down to her core.

Sayuri closed her eyes, enjoying the feel of him stroking her.

Faolan ran his hand along the nape of her neck, his fingers soothing her skin.

She ran her hands along his shoulders then through his thick dark hair.

"Would you call this love or possession?"

She bent her head to press her lips against the hollow of his sternum, to slip her tongue over skin above his heart.

His body responded with fierce need, his gut clenching tightly.

Sayuri smiled with pleasure at the feel of his hard cock burning against her skin. She no longer had any inhibitions when she lay with him, only a fierce need to burn passionately with him. The tips of her fingers brushed the head of his cock, curling around the weighty thickness of him, sending hunger coursing through him.

She was teasing his beast, but he didn't have the will to stop her, nor did he want to stop her.

He curled her hair around his hands, making two tight fists.

When her mouth trailed over his stomach leaving a path of fire in its wake, he couldn't help but close his eyes. Wherever she touched him, her hot, moist mouth followed. Her mouth was driving him insane. A low, ominous growl escaped him, the beast within him roaring its pleasure, needing animal satisfaction.

She raked her fingernails lightly along the hard column of his thighs, the sensation making his blood boil, desire coiling deep inside of him. His thoughts became a blur, a red haze of need and desire, love and hunger. He longed for her touch, her hands, her soft kisses that transformed him into a perpetual flame.

He took possession of her mouth, their tongues dancing, entwining.

He broke the kiss, his voice husky with desire as he spoke. "Say that you want me."

His lips trailed over the curve of her neck, consumed an aching breast. Every hard pull of his mouth sent an answering rush of liquid heat to her core.

She answered him without hesitation. "I do," she said, although she could barely catch her breath her need was so great. Seeking relief, she pressed herself against him, wrapping a leg around his.

His deft fingers probed the folds of her pussy, stroking,

caressing.

Inside she suffered as she moved in rhythm against his hand. She was desperate for release, consumed by fire, hurting, aching.

Faolan slid her ever so slowly down his taut belly until she was pressed against the head of his cock. The heat of her pussy seared the flesh of his swollen cock, beckoned for his swift possession.

Sayuri slipped her arms around his neck, wrapping her legs around his hips, opening herself up to him. He pushed her body down further, impaling her on the thick length of his shaft so that she encompassed his dick with such a wet, tight sheath that he shuddered, the feeling far beyond mere pleasure.

He felt her nails dig into his shoulders as he pushed his cock deeper, began to pump into her in a long, slow rhythm, his body laying claim to hers with long, deep, penetrating strokes.

He continued to take them to new heights, lapping her nipples with his tongue, cupping her ass possessively with his hands. He pumped harder, deeper, turning them so that he could lay her half across the end of the bed, so that he could drive them closer and closer to the precipice. He felt the walls of her pussy quiver, tighten, pull at his cock, once, twice.

She cried out with pleasure as her orgasm ripped through her, wave after wave until she thought she couldn't handle any more.

He continued to bury his cock in her pussy.

A soft growl of satisfaction rumbled deep in his throat, sending a thrill of excitement coursing through her veins.

He suddenly became aggressive, his hands lifting her hips so that he could force her harder onto his cock. He surged into her relentlessly, filling her, stretching her to her limits.

The fire built higher and higher until she was sure they would both go up in flames.

His lips moved over her skin, devouring her flesh as he plundered her depths. The sensation was unlike anything she had ever experienced before, erotic and burning.

She heard herself screaming his name as the pleasure rocked her, dug her nails into his back to hold on. They exploded together, disintegrating, soaring into oblivion.

Faolan gave a throaty growl as he pulled out, spilling his seed.

Exhausted, drowsy, he studied her face.

He pulled her against him, cradling her in his arms.

His breath was ragged as he lay atop her, nuzzling her neck. "Do you see what happens when you tempt a wolf, woman?"

THE END

Read an excerpt of an upcoming book by Mandy Monroe:

PALE MOON RISING

By

Mandy Monroe

## Chapter One

Bronwyn's breath came in short gasps as she struggled up the castle steps, clenching the wadded layers of dress in her hands tightly. She stopped short at the first window overlooking the courtyard and the front gate. Taking very deep breaths, she tried to regain a measure of normal breath and heartbeat long enough to hear what she could while the rowdy party of men below was still in the courtyard, before their horses galloped past the main gate and into the wooded area of the estate that lay beyond beneath the pale moon rising.

Two servants carrying linens to prepare bedrooms for the unexpected guests startled Bronwyn as they rounded the curve of the stairs.

"I'll feel a might bit safer knowing they have killed the last of those devil cats tonight . . . ."

Bronwyn didn't catch the rest of what the woman was saying. It felt like her heart had gotten lodged into her throat. The last . . .



. The duke had set out with her father to kill the last tiger. Outrage at the injustice of it all surged through her, empowering her limbs, speeding the adrenaline she needed to make it down the stairs faster and out of the main hall of the castle. She threw the castle door wide, not bothering to close it. She couldn't spare a moment. She had to catch up with them. She had to stop them.

The light from the moon made it possible for her to find her pony in the barn quickly enough. She grabbed her saddle and threw it on Beauty, cinching the belt around her belly tight before putting a booted foot in the stirrup and hoisting herself up and onto the pony's back. With a swift kick, they were off. The pony was no match for the fine bred horses that the duke and her father had taken, and the others had a good lead. If she was fortunate, they wouldn't locate the tiger at all. If she was not . . . .

Bronwyn tried not to think about it. She had been horrified when her father had told her today on her tenth birthday that she would some day wed the duke. He had been so full of pride at his announcement that he hadn't seen her total look of horror. She hadn't just been filled with dismay but disgust. She would never have suspected that when the duke had invited them to tour his estate weeks earlier that he was serenading her father, trying to win his fancy for the future investment of her and her dowry. The duke had delighted in taking them through a detailed account of how he had brutally murdered each and every decapitated head in his dining hall. She had been so eaten with sickness at his callousness and arrogant disregard

for life that she had had to excuse herself, running as far away from the terrifying images as she could. And now he was out to add one more to his collection. But not if she could help it.

Her pony whined in complaint as she encouraged it to gallop faster through the glade before the thickening forest.

"Please, ole girl. Tonight we need your speed."

Just before they reached the treeline, Bronwyn heard a strange sound. She pulled the pony to a stop and turned it around, looking around for the source of the noise. It came again, like a baby crying in the night. A chill crept up her spine as she dismounted, letting the reins trail in the grass as her gaze became absorbed in a small copse of trees just outside the main thicket of the forest. Slight movement at the base of the trees caught her attention, and she heard what sounded like animals scuffling. She wasn't sure what drew her, but she couldn't stop herself. Something commanded her to discover what was in those bushes. Fear stabbed into her though. There was no telling what lay in wait, but she moved on still, watching as the moonlight danced over the leaves of the bushes like water. And then, she shrieked as two small orange fur balls rolled out of the bushes and landed on her boots. They hit her boots with a thud, landing perfectly on their backs, looking up at her with wide blue eyes.

Bronwyn had never seen anything more beautiful, more precious, in her life. The tiger had cubs. She didn't have time to think, she just acted on impulse. She grabbed the cubs up in her arms and ran to her pony. Clicking her tongue at the pony

as it danced away a little, smelling the scent of the baby tigers.

"Hush girl. It's alright," Bronwyn assured her.

Opening each flap of her saddlebags, Bronwyn deposited one cub in each bag, laying the flaps over their heads and tying them so they couldn't escape but could still breathe. Hopefully, if nothing else, she could rescue the babies.

A shout rang out through the night just as she had fastened the second bag, it wasn't far, and Bronwyn could just make out the words, "We have her now!"

Fear clutched at Bronwyn's heart. The mother! They were going to kill her! Leaving the pony and the cubs at a safe distance from the hunting party, Bronwyn dashed into the forest. The men were only a stone's throw away, she could see them through the thick ferns of the forest. She could see several men thrusting sticks and fire at the tiger. She hissed and clawed at them, drawing blood on one man's arm that got too close. The man screamed in agony and fell to the ground, gripping his arm and looking at it in total shock and horror. The tiger slapped at his head with her claws extended, sending him to the ground never to get up again. The crowd of men visibly jumped back at that and created just enough room for Bronwyn to dash through their lines. She stood in front of the tiger, her arms outspread, hoping that the tiger wouldn't eat her while she tried to defend it.

"Please! Stop! Don't kill her! You can't!" Bronwyn screamed at the men. "Father . . . ."

Before she could finish, a man dragged her away from in front of the tiger and the duke stepped forward, his blade extended. He briefly looked over at Bronwyn with a feral grin on his face before he slashed the tiger's throat.

Bronwyn screamed in horror, tears filling her eyes and running down her cheeks. "No!"

But it was too late. The duke had delivered the death blow.

Bronwyn ran to the tiger, dropping to her knees before it, cradling its head in her arms. She had failed. She was too late. Tears of anger and sadness coated the tiger's head.

Before the mother was gone, though, she wiggled a little and Bronwyn's embrace, struggling for something, until she finally cut Bronwyn's arm with her teeth, just slightly.

The blood trickled down her arm, unheeded.

And then, the mother tiger was gone. Bronwyn could feel her give up the struggle.

She kept the cubs without detection for a year, just long enough to make sure they would survive on their own. On her eleventh birthday, she snuck out of the castle and, guided by moonlight, took the cubs to an estate away from her own and her neighbor, the duke. She cried when she released them, as she had grown so fond of them, but she knew she couldn't keep them with her forever. And besides, they didn't belong caged

up in the castle. They were wild, and they belonged in the wild. So it was with a sad heart that she said farewell and then returned to her castle, sure she would never see them again, hoping in her heart that they would live out their lives happy and free and away from the evil clutches of the Duke of Craigmores.

## Chapter Two

### Years Later

Demetrius and Lisander Tremaine examined the small village just outside of the Craigmores estate, their polished horses

pawing at the filthy dirt street that accounted for the main road.

"Why, Lisander, I do believe our horses don't approve of the state of our surroundings," Demetrius deduced, a half-smile pulling at his mouth.

Lisander's dark brow furrowed as he stopped examining the village and took in the horses' snobbish behavior.

"You are right, brother, but it is not for them to decide."

In all the years the years integrating into human society and building a name, reputation, and wealth, Lisander had never lost sight of their goal . . . to rescue Bronwyn. Now that the humans would take them seriously, it was finally time to find her, to court her, for one of them to woo and marry her. He eyed his brother warily, wondering if he was having the same thoughts. Demetrius was going to be tough competition. He was still just as enamored with Bronwyn as he was. They had both had their fair share of debutantes and their stonewall mothers try to entangle them in matrimony. They had been called rakes, among many other things, but eventually society had decided that the Tremaine brothers were just not the marrying type. What the rest of the world couldn't know or understand was that their hearts were already taken and had been for many years.

A filthy boy in raggedy clothing broke into Lisander's train of thought. "Can I take your horse, fine sir?" the boy asked quietly, bowing his head respectfully and wringing his hands nervously before the pair.

Dismounting, Lisander didn't glance at the boy as he handed him the reins to his steed, looking at his brother as he flipped back his black coat and delved his forefinger and thumb into a small pocket on the front of his fine vest. "There is only one inn," he said, stating the obvious. Fishing out two gold coins, he turned toward the inn and set a determined pace for it, tossing the coins over his shoulder at the boy.

The boy scrambled to catch the coins with both hands, still grasping the reins that had been thrust at him. "Thank you kindly sire!" he exclaimed.

Lisander scowled at the boy's enthusiasm. It was likely the boy wouldn't keep the money long. If he had any family, they would probably take it from him. And if he had no family, then someone in the village would likely thrash him and take it once they discovered he had it. It left a sour taste in his mouth.

Demetrius led the way into the inn. They discovered as they entered that the front was a bar.

Deciding he needed a pint, more to steady his nerves than to relax his muscles from the long ride, Lisander made his way over to one of the three tables that occupied the bar, sitting on an unsteady looking rotten chair. He eased cautiously into the seat, testing his weight little by little until he was sure that it would indeed hold him.

Demetrius showed no such concern for his own well-being. He flopped onto the chair opposite Lisander with nonchalance. His

chair groaned in protest but held just the same.

Lisander scowled darkly at Demetrius. He had no tact, no common sense. The older by minutes, he had always tried to beat some sense into him, but it was hard when they had had to raise themselves. The world was no place for the young to be alone. And it had been particularly hard on their kind.

"Drought of ale for you fine sirs?" a comely bar wench with missing teeth cooed as she batted her lashes and swayed her hips provocatively in front of Lisander and Demetrius.

Demetrius smiled in amusement at her blatant overture, fishing a gold silver coin out of a small pocket in his tailored suit. "This should cover us," he said, placing the coin in her palm with one hand while he held her wrist in the other, letting his fingers slide off the coin and skim her palm.

The bar wench visibly trembled all over, and her eyes became wide when she looked at the coin he had given her. "Well . . . oh my," she stammered, her cheeks flaming at his attention.

The dark somber thundercloud that was Lisander glared threateningly at Demetrius, but he was pointedly ignored.

Demetrius released the woman, and she teetered for a moment, her legs having become slightly wobbly in her excitement.

Lisander groaned inwardly at the display Demetrius was making. He had always been a terrible flirt. He knew he



couldn't help it, but it still bothered him. And what was worse, was that he just enjoyed flirting, he didn't want anything more. But you couldn't convince the women of that. Of course, Lisander had never given any of the women that had fawned on the two of them scarcely a glance, and they had taken after him as well. He theorized it was the wealth. They were young and wealthy and eligible, that was all it took for society to desire you.

"We have come to visit a friend, Bronwyn of Argyll."

The bar wench looked at Lisander, not nearly as charmed by his sour demeanor. "Come to watch the festivities?"

"What festivities?"

"She's to be married," the wench said, matter-of-factly.

Lisander felt like he had been struck in the gut. It was suddenly hard to breath. Had they taken to long to return? Would she forever belong to another man? He mentally shook himself. The woman had merely said that she was to be married. She wasn't married yet, and, if he had anything to do with it, she wouldn't be marrying anyone but him, even if he had to steal her away.

"Who's the groom?" Demetrius asked, his face now a sickly pall, the news having hit him just as hard.

"The Duke of Craigmores, what owns this village," the wench said, her smile waning. "He's a terrible man, that one. Don't

say as I can understand why her father agreed to marry her to that bastard, but it's said that it was decided a long time ago when she was a little girl. Argyll is titled but poor, and Craigmore is wealthy. Her father is probably just after gold."

Lisander couldn't help but agree with the crass woman. It was very likely the estate was in dire need of money, and what better way to gain a fortune than to sell your daughter? His gut churned angrily that her father could be so cold and unfeeling in arranging her marriage. That had to be the case, why else would he have done it when she was so young. She deserved better. She deserved to be with someone who loved her, who was willing to see to her welfare for the rest of her life. He knew that in human society, these things were not nearly as important as money. It was like a disease, and it took lives wherever it went, taking some lives quickly and leaving others wallowing in misery for the extent of their lives.

"We are much obliged for the news, madam," Demetrius said, nodding his head slightly in thanks.

"Might we purchase a room for the night?" Lisander asked, fishing another coin from his vest pocket.

The wench accepted the money and sashayed over to the counter, going behind it to her resting stool. "Take any room you like."

Lisander and Demetrius got up and headed to find a room. It was still early in the day, but they needed to rest for a moment. They needed to formulate a plan. The information the woman

had given them changed everything. Of course, it had been foolish dreaming to believe that in all the years they had been gone that nothing had changed. The only thing that mattered, though, was Bronwyn. They would just have to devise a new strategy.

Demetrius opened the first door they came to. The room was filled with one bed. They looked at each other and then looked at the small bed. The nights were going to be very long if they had to sleep under each other.

"What say you to visiting Argyll before we rest? I must admit I am anxious to see Bronwyn," Lisander suggested.

"I thought you would never ask."

\* \* \* \*

Bronwyn knew she was avoiding the dress maker, but she couldn't help it. It was juvenile to believe that if the dress was not made then she would not have to get married, but she was still holding out hope.

Since the years that her father had announced her arranged marriage, she had pleaded with him to see reason, to find another, but the duke must have been powerful convincing, because her father had never budged on the subject. He was holding to the marriage, and there was nothing she could do about it.

Nothing except run away. She thought life estranged from her

family estate, cold, hungry, destitute, would be far more appreciated than a life with her betrothed. The man was pure evil, and she detested the way he looked at her, the way he molested her with his eyes. She felt sullied every time she was in his presence and he undressed her with those dark beady eyes.

"Bronwyn," a woman's voice called, desperation evident in her tone.

Bronwyn jumped up and made a dash out of her hiding place in the garden of the courtyard. She heard the woman's footsteps on the cobbled stones at the entrance to the garden.

"Blast!" Bronwyn cursed. There was nowhere to go but out of the estate now, the woman was blocking her way back into the main part of the castle. She made a dash for the castle gate, slipping through a hallway to a small door just beside the main gate. She quickly went through the door and turned to shut it as quietly as possible behind her. When she turned around, she walked into a wall and fell back onto her ass in the grass.

A little dazed and confused from the unexpected fall, Bronwyn held her head for a second to steady her vision. When the stars began to clear, two pairs of boots came into focus. She gasped and when a man knelt down in front of her, stopping only when his face was mere inches from her own, looking down at her with the most beautiful pair of blue eyes, eyes that were disturbingly familiar. Her brain ceased function for a minute while she gazed into their depths.

Lisander extended her a hand and quickly pulled her to her feet where her unsteady legs let her land against his chest. He whispered in her ear, a smile playing about his lips, "May I help you, Bronwyn?"

"Who are you?" she stammered in confusion as she placed her hands on the stone wall of his chest and pushed away.

Lisander had to admit that he was disappointed that she didn't remember him. Of course, there was no recognition when she glanced at Demetrius either. But, then, it had been eight years since she had last seen them, and, after all, she had no idea that the tigers she had taken care of had been were tigers.