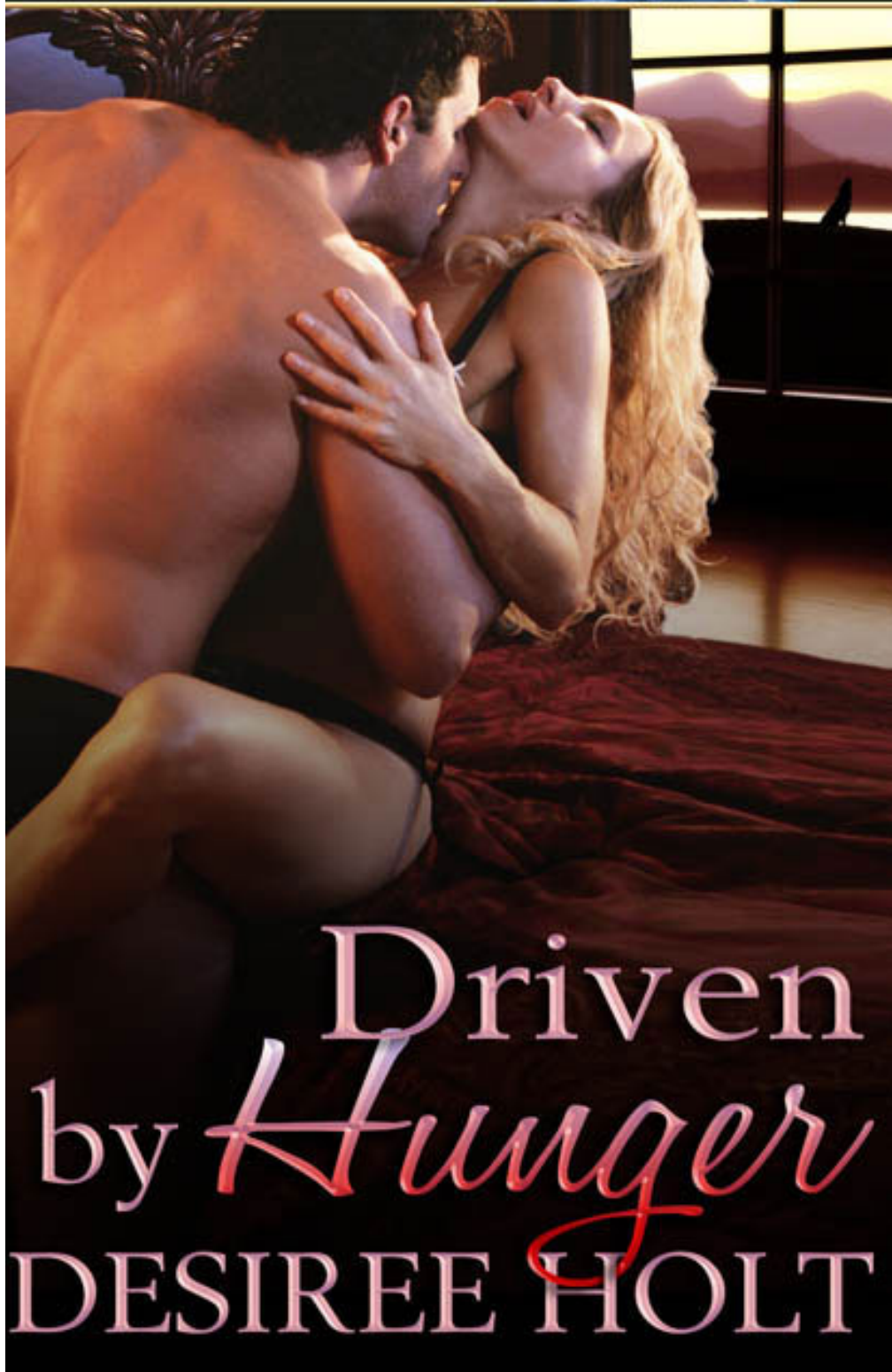


ELLORA'S CAVE TWILIGHT



Driven
by *Hunger*
DESIREE HOLT

Driven by Hunger

Desiree Holt

Hunger drives the wolf. Hunger for food, for domination, for sexual satisfaction, and for revenge when one of their own is harmed. Rand not only satisfies his hunger with Hannah, his new mate, he also teaches her there's no limit to the carnal pleasures they can enjoy. He is both frightened and enraged when Hannah is kidnapped by Rogan Mueller, an insane geneticist who wants the female shifter for his bizarre experiments. Now Rand hungers for revenge.

Derek, alpha of their pack, has been seeking his mate for a long time. Fate delivers Riesa, a psychic who can give him clues to Hannah's whereabouts. With Riesa, Derek feeds his sexual appetite, strengthening his ability to lead his pack on a rescue mission.

Two very hot couples, one very dangerous situation and lust-filled fire that will either save them – or consume them.

An Ellora's Cave Romantica Publication



www.ellorascave.com

Driven by Hunger

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DRIVEN BY HUNGER

Desiree Holt

Dedication

As always, to my beloved late husband, David – my love, my hero, the man who gave me the courage to be myself.

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Walmart: Walmart Stores, Inc.

Chapter One

Derek Sawyer looked at the woman sitting across the table from him. She was already upset, so when he spoke, he chose his words carefully. Being the alpha of their pack held a great responsibility and he'd spent many tense years keeping them together when their families were destroyed and they'd had no place to go but a deserted orange grove. Now trouble was stalking them again but he didn't want to show the frightened woman how edgy he was.

"You know how careful we have to be. We've all talked about it." He fiddled with his coffee mug. "Now that we live in real houses instead of the old orange grove, and many of us have jobs, we have to be extra vigilant."

Hannah Raines lowered her eyes to her tightly clenched hands, tension lining every inch of her body. Her sun-streaked hair fell forward, shielding her delicate face and her unique silvery-blue eyes. When she spoke her voice was so low he had to strain to hear her.

"I know that. I'm sorry." She raised her eyes to Dylan. "But there I was at the convenience store, watching two men hitting a woman and trying to drag her into their car. What was I supposed to do? In human form I would never have been able to help her. Only the wolf saved her."

"How many other people were around?"

"I think only two other cars in the parking lot and one was empty."

Dylan shook his head. "So at least two people saw you besides the men you killed. Right?"

"Yes."

Her answer was so soft he had to strain to hear it. "Did anyone follow you?"

"No, I don't think so. I ran off and hid behind a Dumpster two buildings away. I didn't go back for my car until I was sure everyone had left." She blushed. "I was naked, you know."

Of all the women in their very small pack, Hannah was the shyest. At meetings she was always restrained, keeping in the background. Even her job, working for Alexa Farrell designing websites and brochures, allowed her to keep to the comfort zone of her home. The lust that drove the rest of them didn't seem to be as strong in her. As the alpha, it was his responsibility to see to her welfare and help her realize the full extent of her sexuality. She had not mated yet because of it, but Derek was confident she soon would. In his role of alpha he had taken her to his bed, not to mate, but to teach, and she was both a willing student and an increasingly eager participant.

"Tell me about the car that had someone in it. That's probably our biggest worry. What color was it? Did you get the license plate number?"

She held out her hands, palm up. "Dark blue. Four door. I did see part of the license plate—DG. But that's all. I'm so very sorry, Derek," she repeated, now twisting her hands together. "You'll have to tell the others, won't you?"

He had no choice. Alexa, a shifter married to sheriff's deputy Jesse Farrell, had helped them settle in this group of cottages at the edge of the small town in Palmetto County, Florida. They could live as humans but shift and feel free to roam the woods under cover of darkness. Or in the privacy of their own homes. But now Hannah had exposed not only herself but the rest of them to danger. He would have to call a meeting so everyone would be on guard. He would do his best not to humiliate Hannah but everyone had to be aware of the situation.

He reached out and took both of her hands in his. "They must be prepared."

Derek felt the sizzle of lust that struck him these days whenever he touched Hannah. From a closed blossom she had unfolded to a fully bloomed flower in his bed, even becoming on occasion the aggressor. Perhaps what she needed to prepare her for

the coming meeting was another session with him. Something to take the edge off and give her the feeling of strength their sessions lately seemed to provide.

She didn't move away from his touch. "When are you calling the meeting?"

"Tonight. After everyone's finished dinner."

She tightened her hands beneath his even as she looked away from him. "Maybe I should just leave. It would take the danger away from everyone."

"No!" Derek took a breath and let it out slowly. "No one is leaving. We have stayed together when life tried to force us apart and now we are the foundation for a new pack. We'll handle this, Hannah. I promise you. And no one will blame you for what you did." He shook his head. "It was just rotten luck and bad timing, is all. But the group will stand behind you and protect you."

Hannah looked up at him. "I trust you, Derek. You've been so good to me." She sighed. "I wish..."

But he knew what she wished. That the bond had been there to make them mates. It hadn't, however, although she was quickly learning the art of erotic love. What existed between them was nothing more than pure lust. At least they could enjoy that until he had to let her go.

He looked at his watch. Two hours. Plenty of time for what he had in mind. And he was sure it would take the edge off her anxiety.

* * * * *

Rogan Mueller looked at the man sitting across his desk from him. He was careful to conceal his feelings but excitement roared within him, anxious to burst free. After all these years, all the false alarms, was he finally going to get his hands on the subject he needed?

He smoothed his hands over his straight hair, now more silver than black, before pulling a cigar from his desk drawer and carefully clipping the end. His thick fingers fumbled only slightly as he lit up. Although he carried a lot of bulk, he was also very

tall. What might have been fat in a shorter man was thick muscle in Mueller. He presented an imposing presence wherever he went, a huge man with an impassive face, eyes that bored into people and an attitude of pure arrogance, although when the occasion demanded he could roll out the charm with the best of them.

“Are you sure this time?” he asked. “We’ve had so many false alarms that my patience is running out. My projects are stalled.”

Gary Lisbon was the direct physical opposite of Mueller—whipcord thin, medium height, with undistinguished hair and features. It served his purpose well to be able to blend in wherever he went and allowed him to do the job he’d been doing for so long. Now he nodded at his employer’s question.

“I tell you this time it’s for real. I saw her shift right there in the parking lot of the convenience store.” He stared at Mueller. “What’s the big hurry, anyway? If we don’t capture one now we’ll just keep looking. You’ve got other things going on.”

Mueller slammed his hand down on the desktop. “This particular project has been in the making for ten years. I have a lot of money riding on it and many powerful men waiting for the results.”

Lisbon raised an eyebrow. “What’s so great about breeding a special strain of shifters anyway?”

Mueller snorted. “You’re kidding, right? We can study her blood in my lab and experiment with injecting humans with it, trying to recreate the shifting ability. Adding DNA from other species. And with the added use of the drugs we’ve developed, we can produce a unique and challenging prey for hunters who pay me big bucks for things like this.”

“I don’t know. I still think you’re biting off more than you can chew. You have no idea what will come out of all this.”

A malicious smile crept over Mueller’s face. “Maybe I’ll end up with something even better. Meanwhile, go back to that convenience store and try to pick up traces of

the female. Scout the area. Someone will know where she lives. Or better yet, maybe you'll see her again and be able to follow her."

"All right. I'll give it my best shot. But I still think you're crazy."

* * * * *

Derek undressed Hannah with great care, removing each garment slowly until she stood naked before him. Unlike their first time together she stood proudly, making no effort to shield her nude body. Her dusky nipples were already swollen and pebbled with anticipation, stark against the creamy color of her skin. The curls covering her cunt were the same dark red as her hair, and, experience had taught him, just as soft. His eyes skimmed the line of her shoulders, the slight roundness of her belly, the swell of her hips and the tapering legs. She was a compact package with luscious curves, and again he regretted that the instinct to mate with each other didn't exist between them.

He dropped to his knees in front of her and nudged her legs apart. The backs of his fingers caressed the insides of her thighs, sending a shiver racing across her skin. The scent of her arousal drifted across his nose and he bent his head to lick the curls and the portal they protected.

Hannah's cunt, even after all their sessions, was still tight and gripped his tongue, his fingers and especially his cock like a hot, wet fist. After each session she invaded his dreams, giving rise to a lust that he had yet to completely satisfy. He opened the lips that hid the pink, swollen flesh and traced every exposed inch with his tongue. Hannah trembled in his grip, her hands braced on his shoulders.

As always, just the taste of her nectar excited him, arousing him to an almost painful point. His cock was hard enough to hammer nails, swollen and throbbing with unfulfilled need and his balls tightened in their soft sac. He had to restrain himself from thrusting his tongue fully into the channel of her pussy, but that would come later. Now he was just teasing her to a state of excitement that would give rise to the lust that had burst forth from her.

Derek pulled his head back, stood up and lifted her in his arms, carrying her to the big bed in the center of the room. Some nights three or four of their very small pack would enjoy each other there, and the images that called up excited him even more. He arranged her carefully on the soft sheets, positioning her so her feet were planted firmly on the mattress, knees bent and apart. His eyes feasted on the sight of her cunt, glistening with her juices and those of his mouth. His hand went automatically to his cock, idly stroking it as he raked his gaze over her.

How she'd changed from that very first night when he introduced her to erotic lust. A hint of shyness still remained but the fire in her eyes overrode it.

"Touch yourself," he commanded. "You know what I like to see."

Her small tongue peeped out from between full lips and wet them until they were glistening as her hands stole down her body to her pussy. Two fingers of one hand opened her labia while the forefinger of the other hand circled the tip of her clit in a rhythmic motion. A glazed look came into her eyes as the stimulation of her clit gave rise to more liquid in her pussy. The muscles of her belly contracted, a sure signal that the first flutterings of an orgasm were building inside her.

Derek climbed onto the bed and positioned himself between her legs, one hand on each knee, holding them apart. Her hips hitched as her finger moved faster and the pressure grew in her body. Derek leaned forward and moved the fingers holding her open, pressing the lips even farther apart.

"Finger-fuck yourself," he told her, his own breathing uneven. "Do it."

She lifted her ass slightly from the bed as she slid two fingers inside her slick pussy, timing their in-and-out movement with the stimulation of her clit. Soft moans rolled up from her throat as her hands increased their tempo.

"Take your fingers out," Derek rasped. "Come wide open for me."

Hannah pulled her fingers free but continued to torment her clit until the orgasm broke over her, shaking her body, her hips thrusting up and up. Derek opened the lips

of her cunt as wide as he could, watching the wet flesh spasm and more liquid seep out from that deep channel.

Hannah's moans grew louder now as she sought the fulfillment that only something inside her would bring. But Derek wasn't ready to give her that yet. He loved watching her orgasm like this, until the last flutters died away. Then he bent forward and sucked the juices from her, bringing her another brief climax. She lay back on the pillows, exhausted but still panting with need.

This was one of the things Derek liked best about being a shifter. The level of lust in each of them far exceeded that of humans and spurred them to a variety of acts of satisfaction. He removed his hands and rocked back on his heels.

"Turn over, Hannah, and show me your ass. Have you been wearing the plug?"

"Yes," she hissed as she rolled onto her stomach. "But I took it out today and forgot to put it back in."

"That's very naughty of you." *Smack!* He brought the palm of one hand down on her ass. "Very bad indeed." *Smack!* He spanked the other ass cheek. "Now let's see how well you're doing."

Slowly she pushed herself to her knees, bent forward and used both hands to spread the cheeks of her ass.

Derek used one finger to scoop the liquid from her cunt and rub it into the tight ring of her anus. Then he gently inserted the finger, feeling the tissue give with very little pressure.

"Good girl," he praised. "You *have* been using the plug. Tonight I'm going to fuck you here and give you an orgasm greater than any you've had so far.

Hannah's pussy tingled at the words and a shiver skittered over her spine. She could still remember how timid she'd been the first time Derek took her to bed. Very unshifterlike. But he'd been very patient with her, tender while at the same time lustful, teaching her things she'd only dreamed about. And tonight! Tonight they would break the final boundary. She shivered again.

Derek was kneeling behind her, massaging the lips of her pussy in a way that he knew made her blood heat. Her nipples were as hard as diamonds and her breasts ached, but not as much as her cunt did, or her pulsing clit. And the orgasm, rather than giving her satisfaction, had only left her craving more.

Derek moved behind her and in a moment she felt something cool at her anus.

"Gel." His voice was husky. "To ease the way. The last thing in the world I want to do is hurt you. I want this to be the hottest sex we've ever had."

She didn't know how he could top what had happened so far. Their level of lust had risen with each session they'd had together. She was truly sorry that the invisible link between mates did not exist for the two of them.

Derek massaged the gel into the hot length of her dark tunnel, rubbing it thoroughly into her tissues. The crinkle of foil was followed by the snap of latex. He was sheathing himself as he always did. Then the broad head of his cock was probing her rectum, easing past the ring of muscle in slow increments.

"Breathe," he told her. "In and out. Come on, Hannah. You can do it. Breathe in now."

She drew in a lungful of air and he pushed in a little farther, let it out slowly. His enormous shaft filled every inch of space as it pushed in farther and farther. Just when she was sure she couldn't take any more, he gave one last thrust and seated himself completely, his balls slapping against the cheeks of her ass.

"That's it, Hannah. Good girl. Just keep breathing in and out like that."

His hips rocked in a steady tempo, his rigid cock sliding in and out, igniting her nerve endings and sending jolts of lightning through her. Every pulsebeat thrummed, her heartbeat raced, as he took her higher and higher to a plane she'd never reached before.

"Chafe your clit," he ordered in a rough voice. "Do it, Hannah. Balance yourself and do it now."

Head down, she braced herself with one hand while using the other to chafe her clit, her motion increasing in speed as Derek increased his. The climax was growing within her, building and building, spreading its heat through every part of her. His cock seemed to fill every space inside her, driving her higher and higher. Icy heat flashed through her, chilling and burning her at the same time. Lost in a fog of desire, she could no longer think, no longer do anything except thrust her hips back at Derek to meet his motion and rub herself faster and faster.

Derek's fingers dug into her hips with almost bruising intensity as he pushed harder and harder into her hole. Every muscle in her body was tightening as the climax grew and grew.

"Pinch your clit, Hannah. Hard."

When she did the wave inside her crested.

"Now, Hannah," Derek shouted and took them both over the edge.

Hannah shook with ferocity of the orgasm, falling into a black space, fireworks exploding against her closed eyelids. She shuddered and shuddered as Derek emptied himself into her, the heat of his cum searing her through the latex barrier.

Weak and spent, she collapsed forward, Derek following her, catching his weight on his forearms. She wasn't sure if the thundering heartbeat shaking her was hers or Derek's, pounding against her back. The only sound in the room was their breathing as they drew in great ragged gulps of air.

Derek's lips brushed against her shoulder and his tongue licked the edge of her ear.

"You did well, Hannah." His voice was raw and ragged.

"You too," she breathed, her lips curving in a smile.

"We would make a great pair if we were meant to mate with each other," he told her.

"I know," she sighed. "But I've learned since I was very young that the connection is either there or it isn't. That we'll know in an instant if someone is our mate and if it isn't there you can't force it."

Derek nodded. "Very true. That includes mating with humans too, you know. Look at Alexa and Jesse. Liane and Charlie. And others in our group."

"I just hope I find my own mate soon. Sometimes I think..." She stopped and bit her lip.

Derek raised an eyebrow. "Think what, Hannah?"

She shook her head. "Nothing. Just maybe wishful thinking. But I want to thank you very much for helping me reach a point where I'm ready to come out of my shadow. Ready to mate with someone."

"I think the pleasure is mine." His eyes darkened with lust.

She grinned. "And I definitely think I'm ready to face the others tonight."

He chuckled in her ear. "If not I'd be willing to work on this again."

Hannah, laughed, a low, thready sound as she tried desperately to gather herself. "Sacrificing your body, are you?"

"Any time." He pulled out of her and rolled to the side. "However, I think we'd better think about getting ready. I expect this to be an intense meeting."

And once again Hannah was plunged into the anxiety of her situation, one she had caused herself.

Chapter Two

The pack was gathered in Derek's living room, his house being the largest. There were twelve in all, eight shifters and their human mates, on the couch, in chairs and sprawled on the floor. The atmosphere might have been casual but the attitude was one of high alert. When the alpha called a meeting it was for something important. Maybe dangerous.

Rand Molina, Derek's second-in-command, leaned against the wall, arms folded, body tense. Derek had given him no indication of the subject of tonight's gathering and he was irritated for a number of reasons. They'd been very lucky to have a place to live at last, he and the other survivors of a slaughter of his former village. Most of them had found jobs, saving money until they could open a business of their own, maybe search for other orphan shifters. The humans who some of the pack had mated with were of great help and very supportive. He'd hate to find out it was all about to fall apart.

Besides that, he bitterly resented Derek's role in Hannah Raines' life. A shy, sweet little red wolf, with little experience who Rand wanted for his own. He had been cautious about approaching her, aware that she was unusually inexperienced for a shifter. But before he could make his move, Derek had moved in as the alpha and assumed the role of trainer. It pissed him off even more, because he knew that Derek didn't want to mate with her. He'd been matter-of-fact about the lack of mating attraction between them.

But Rand had felt it every time he'd been near Hannah, and he was sure she felt it too. Why had he been such a fool and waited so long? Why hadn't he objected when Derek took her for training?

Because no one argues with the alpha, no matter how fair-minded he is.

Rand looked over at Hannah now, sitting on the couch, with Derek standing close to her, bending down to speak with her quietly. The rosy flush on her face was a good indication that they'd had a "training session" not long before this meeting. Jealousy flared through him and his cock hardened. He changed position to conceal the evidence. That was all he needed, for everyone to see that he had an erection. He had to hope the combination of scents in the room would be enough to conceal the scent of his arousal.

He'd made up his mind on the way over here. After the meeting he would speak to Derek, tell him how he felt. And then approach Hannah. It was long past time for him to do so. His lust for her had been unsatisfied for too long.

As he slanted his gaze to her again, he noticed something else, a strain on her face that wasn't usually there and a tension in her body. What the hell was going on? Had Derek asked something of her that she didn't want to do? If he had, alpha or not Rand would take him on.

Before he could dwell on it any further, Derek straightened and raised his hand.

"Could I have everyone's attention please? Thank you. I'm sorry to get you all out of your homes after dinner but we have something in the nature of an emergency to consider."

Emergency? Rand frowned. What kind of emergency now, just when they were all getting settled? As he listened to Derek explain what had happened with Hannah at the convenience store, his gut tightened. Forget about the fact that the rest of the pack could be endangered. Hannah herself was at grave risk and that was all he cared about.

He narrowed his eyes at Hannah, scrunched now into a corner of the couch, tensed as if waiting for retribution from the group for what she had done. He couldn't stand it anymore. He pushed himself off from the wall, maneuvered himself into a place on the couch next to Hannah. He casually draped his arm across her shoulder and gave her a reassuring squeeze.

"So that's what we need to do," Derek finished. "We need to be hyperaware ourselves, especially when any of us are out beyond our little enclave here. At work, shopping, whatever. Check to see if anyone's following you. If anyone's loitering around where you are. If we see strangers in the cul-de-sac. And Hannah is not to be left alone for one moment."

"I'll take responsibility for Hannah."

The words were out of Rand's mouth before he realized he was saying them. He hadn't planned to stake his claim this way but he didn't want the kind of situation Derek was setting up. And did the alpha plan to keep her in his own house most of the time? Not if Rand had anything to do with it.

Derek turned to him. "I don't think it's your choice. Besides, as the alpha I determine whose care she'll be under."

"Maybe you just want to save her for yourself," Rand sneered.

"Stop it. Stop right now." Hannah jumped up from the couch, tears running down her face. "I will not be talked about as if I'm not here, or as if I were a possession to be argued over." Swiping at her wet cheeks, she looked around the room. "This was my mistake and I will not endanger anyone else. The best thing for me to do is to leave."

She was through the front door and out of the house before anyone could stop her. Rand raced after her, shoving Derek away from him as he ran after Hannah. She was standing on the porch, arms wrapped around herself, the streetlight reflecting on her tears. He pulled her against his body, his arms tight around her, and stroked her back.

"Hush." He deliberately pitched his voice low. "You did the right thing. Any of us would have. It was just dumb luck that a stranger happened to be there. We'll make it right, though. You have my word. And no one blames you for this, I promise you."

The front door slammed open and Derek walked up to them. "I told you I'd take care of her," he told Rand in a tight voice.

"And I told *you* I was taking responsibility for her." He tilted Hannah's face up so he could see her eyes. "I want you, Hannah. As my mate. I feel the tug. I didn't want to have to tell you this way, but I can't let you stay with Derek."

Derek turned his gaze to her. "And you, Hannah? What do you want?"

She wet her lips nervously. "I-I want Rand."

The alpha looked at the other man again. "Why have you never spoken to me of her? Why wait all this time?"

"I wasn't sure she would want me and I didn't want to claim her and force her to a mating." His eyes raked Hannah's face. "You're sure this is what you want?"

The look on her face was a mixture of anxiety and pleasure. Did she want him? Did she feel the mating tug as he did? He held his breath as she looked from Derek back to him, wondering what she would say.

"I thank you for everything, Derek." Her voice trembled as much as her body did. "But I believe I am meant to be with Rand. He's the one I was thinking about when we...talked...earlier. You've brought me so far, but now he's the one to take me the rest of the way. For the rest of my life."

For a long moment Derek said nothing, his face stoic. Then he nodded.

"Fine. I give you my permission as alpha. But be sure to keep her safe or I'll be after your ass."

"No problem." Keeping his arm around Hannah, he walked her toward the steps. "I think we'll be leaving now. Tomorrow you and I can go over the rest of the details."

* * * * *

Hannah stood in the middle of Rand's house and looked around. This was the first time she'd been inside. She knew all the cottages had the same basic floor plan, but each person had decorated in his or her own style. Rand's was very minimalistic, the furniture and the carpeting in basic earth tones, the furniture definitely masculine in design. But on the walls he'd hung prints of landscapes with vivid splashes of color.

Rand did a walk-through checking all the locks, then came back to where she was standing. He cupped her face with his hands and studied it as if memorizing every detail. She could see the banked fires of lust flickering in his dark silver eyes.

"I want to be sure you're okay with all this, Hannah. I didn't mean to spring it on you so abruptly."

Her cheeks burned where his hands touched them, the warmth spreading through her body. She wasn't good at expressing her feelings or emotions so she needed to choose the right words.

"I have always wanted you," she told him. "Even when we were still living in the grove. But I was so young when we all came here and totally without experience."

"I would have helped you." His voice was firm yet soft. "You didn't need to go to Derek to teach you the ways of mating. You could have come to me instead."

She wet her lips, her mouth suddenly dry. "I was afraid you would turn me away. You were so strong and powerful and others lusted for you. You should thank Derek, not be angry with him. If he hadn't drawn me out of my shell I might still be afraid to make my feelings known. Even now, I worried..."

Her voice trailed off.

"Worried that I would reject you?" He brushed his lips against hers. "Never, my little wolf. I, too, worried that the age difference would be a problem. That you would think me too old for you."

"Ten years is not so much now," she smiled. "We are both older."

"You know that lust drives our pack, but what I feel for you goes far beyond that. My cock only stands at such painful attention for the wolf I claim as my mate." He dusted her face with light kisses that were like feathers on her skin.

"I feel it too," she whispered.

He lifted his head and studied her face. "We didn't get any of your things from the house you share with Sascha. Are you all right with getting them tomorrow?"

"Of course." She smiled up at him. "But let me call her and tell her I'm okay. We just walked out of Derek's and I don't know what he said to the group. She could be frantic with worry and I'd hate for that to happen."

"I'm sure he's told them you're with me and you're safe. But go ahead and call. You'll feel better."

By the time she finished speaking to her housemate, Rand had returned to the living room with a bottle of wine and two glasses. He set the glasses down on the coffee table, filled them and handed one to Hannah.

"To us." He touched his glass to hers, his eyes filled with heat.

"To us," she echoed.

The wine was mellow on her tongue and its warmth flooded through her veins. After all the times she'd hungered for him, all the times she wrestled with the feeling she now knew as lust, all the time she'd been so sure Rand would have no interest in her, she couldn't believe that now she was actually in his home and about to be fucked by him. More than that, the mating signal between them was so strong she wondered how she'd ever missed it. Had he known and just been waiting all this time?

She was grateful to Derek for training her and bringing her out of her shell. Now she had to hope that what she'd learned was enough to please Rand and not make him regret his choice.

His fingers trailed down her arm and he linked them with hers.

"Come with me, Hannah. Let me love you. Let me show you how good I know we'll be together."

He led her down a short hall to a large bedroom, furnished as sparsely but strikingly as the rest of the house. An oversized king bed sat against one wall on a platform, a chocolate brown and navy quilt covering it. Above it hung another of the vivid landscapes. The rest of the furniture consisted of a nightstand and wide dresser in golden oak and a comfortable-looking chair upholstered in navy leather.

"You didn't bother with a lot of furniture," she commented, twisting her wineglass in her hand as she took everything in.

"We have the most important piece," he smiled, nodding toward the bed, and touched his glass to hers again.

Hannah watched him over the rim of glass as she sipped her wine. His eyes were like silver laser beams boring into hers. Emotion had deepened the lines on his rugged face and she could almost see the tension vibrating from his body. He reached a hand out to gently cup one cheek.

"Don't be afraid, little wolf. I will guard you and protect you with my life. You will be safe with me." He studied her expression. "I look forward to making you mine."

He took the wine goblet from her hand and set it on the nightstand, along with his. Hannah stood rooted to the spot, trembling with anxiety and anticipation. Rand kissed her again, a kiss that began lightly but deepened as it continued. His tongue traced the outline of her mouth then he licked her lips gently. As his mouth pressed harder his tongue pushed against the closed seam of her lips until she opened for him. He swept inside in a predatory thrust, licking every surface he could touch. His fingers tangled in her hair, holding her head in place as he fed from her like the hungry wolf that he was.

Hannah couldn't breathe. Her clothes felt too tight. Her *skin* felt too tight. Scorching heat consumed her, making her breasts tingle, her nipples harden almost painfully. Her cunt was wet and swollen. She wanted his cock inside her *now*!

"Easy, little wolf," he said as she moaned into his mouth. "We have plenty of time. I want to enjoy every moment before we are finally and completely joined."

His hands moved slowly from her head to her blouse, unbuttoning each of the tiny buttons with maddening slowness. He moved his lips over every inch of her flesh as he exposed it little by little, licking the upper swell of her breasts and the hollow of her throat where her pulse beat frantically. She clutched his arms to steady herself against the shards of heat blazing through her body.

When the last button was released he pulled the blouse from her slacks and slid his warm hands up and down her back. His lips closed over one hard nipple through the fabric of her bra, the sensation more erotic than if he'd been touching bare flesh. She arched into the caress of his mouth, moaning low in her throat. It brought her body into more intimate contact with Rand's and she could feel the outline of his hard, thick cock pressing into the soft flesh of her belly.

She didn't even notice when her bra disappeared but suddenly the air was cool on her skin and his mouth was tasting her without the barrier of any material. Her cunt throbbed with need, her liquid dampening the crotch of her thong. She squeezed her thighs together to still the pulsebeat deep inside her but it was useless. The more he touched her, the hotter she became. Her blood raced in her veins and her heartbeat accelerated. She wanted him to do all the things with her that Derek had, and more.

Hannah was so caught up in the touch of his mouth and the lick of his tongue she barely noticed him unfastening her slacks and pushing them down her legs along with her thong. Rand bent down to lift her feet from the pool of fabric at her ankles and slip off her shoes. As he straightened he licked his way up the inside of her thighs, drawing circles with the tip of his tongue. When he reached her cunt he pressed her lips open and lapped at her clit with the flat of his tongue. Hannah had to grab on to his shoulders to support herself. Her entire body shivered as he teased at her, his tongue a wicked thing torturing her hot flesh.

"You have too many clothes on," she mumbled, amazed that she could even get the words out.

"So I do." His voice was husky.

With a last lick at the seam of her pussy, he rose and stripped off his clothes in a matter of seconds. Even enveloped in an erotic fog as she was, Hannah widened her eyes at her first sight of his nude body. Broad shoulders framed a hard, flat chest that tapered to a narrow waist and lean hips. His arms and thighs were muscular, his chest covered in a thick pelt of fine hair. But what drew her attention the most was the

swollen cock protruding from the nest of dark curls, the head rounded and purple, and below it the heavy sac of his testicles that rested against his thighs.

Her mouth watered to taste it. She wondered if the skin would be as soft as Derek's, covering the hard rod beneath it. It looked even larger. If that were possible.

While she was still staring, mesmerized, Rand lifted her in his arms and placed her gently on the bed, drawing her thighs apart and bending her knees. Then he knelt between her thighs and simply stared at her cunt. She trembled at the intensity of his gaze, the way it literally ate her up. Almost with a mind of its own one of her hands stole down to that place, feeling how wet and swollen she was. When she touched her clit with the tip of one finger it was so sensitized she jumped at the contact.

"Yes," he said in a hoarse voice. "Do that. Finger yourself for me."

Derek had urged her to do this many times, but something had always held her back from giving herself completely. With Rand it seemed the last barriers were falling. This might be their first night together but already she knew she would do anything for him, anything that gave him pleasure. But this gave *her* pleasure too. She stroked herself, her fingers quickly coated with her honey, allowing her to slide two of them inside her pussy.

"God," Rand breathed, "watching you makes me even harder, if that's possible. All that gorgeous wet pink flesh, that swollen clit, your fingers disappeared into your cunt. Jesus, Hannah. You're every man's wet dream come to life. Keep fucking yourself. That's it."

As she moved her fingers in and out of her body faster and faster, Rand touched the nub of her clit with one fingertip and set up a rhythmic movement that intensified the spasms already building deep inside her. Pressing her heels into the mattress, she clamped her inner muscles around her fingers and rode them, hips jerking, muscles flexing. The faster her fingers moved, the harder Rand's finger teased her clit.

At the moment her climax broke over her, he yanked her hand away and spread the lips of her pussy as far apart as he could.

"That's it, little wolf. Come wide open for me. Oh, yeah. Let me see those muscles move."

Hannah gritted her teeth to keep from screaming at the loss of penetration, her fists clenched tightly at her sides. She tried to squeeze her thighs together but Rand would have none of it.

"No, Hannah. I want to see it all."

He held her that way until the last spasm faded away. Then he bent forward and placed an open-mouthed kiss on her pussy, sucking at her juices and lapping away the last drops. When he lifted his head his mouth was wet and glistening. Very slowly, his gaze lasering her, he ran his tongue over his lips in a movement so sensual the ribbon of need deep inside her began tightening again.

"I want you inside me," she pleaded, reaching for him. His low laugh was almost a growl. "Not yet, little wolf. I have big plans for us."

As he moved up her body his mouth traced a pattern from just above her pubic curls to her navel, where he paused to trace the whorls of skin with his tongue. Then up, up to the valley between her breasts. By the time he cupped one breast in his warm palm and flicked his tongue over her rigid nipple she was again a quivering mass of need.

She gripped his shoulders with her hands, nails digging into the firm skin as Rand proceeded to torment each nipple with his lips, his tongue and his teeth. He sucked and nipped with just the lightest of pressure, not enough to give her satisfaction but definitely enough to have her screaming for more.

Hannah threw her legs around his thighs and tried to urge him upward, to finally penetrate her with his cock. This was lust beyond anything she'd experienced with Derek and she wanted Rand's cock inside her more than she wanted her next breath. But he was too strong and too determined to have his own way.

"Not yet, little wolf." His voice was a rumble and vibrated against her skin. "I haven't nearly begun to take my pleasure."

He lifted her legs over his broad shoulders, plunged two fingers inside her cunt to scoop out some of her moisture and pressed one of those fingers against the tight muscle of her anus.

Hannah jerked in reaction. She had only just begun anal sex with Derek and it was all still new to her. She'd expected Rand to wait a night or two but it seemed he wanted everything all at once.

"No," he said, his eyes locked on hers. "I'm not going to fuck you there tonight. But I have to feel how tight you are. How ready." He turned his head to lick the inside of one thigh. "I have a butt plug that's just been waiting for you."

His words were a soft caress. As he spoke he pushed one finger until he breached the tight hole and penetrated her dark tunnel.

Hannah's entire body convulsed at the sensation, the internal muscles of her pussy vibrating with desire. Rand continued to squeeze and manipulate her breasts while his finger moved slowly in and out of her ass. Sensations of heat and ice skittered over her and she moaned with pleasure. Her hips moved as she tried to push down on the penetration.

"Rand," she gasped. "I need you. Now."

Slipping his finger from her hot muscles, he lowered her legs and reached into the nightstand drawer. He ripped open a packet with a moistened cloth to wipe his hands, then opened a condom and rolled it on while Hannah watched, awestruck at the sight of his erection. Could she take it all? Derek had been big but not like this.

"Don't worry," he told her. "We'll go slowly. You'll be able to take all of me."

Bending her knees again, he spread her legs wide and pressed the head of his cock against the opening of her vagina. Hannah tensed for a moment, but she was loose and wet from her previous orgasm and the additional stimulation. Bracing himself on her knees, Rand pushed forward slowly, his cock pressing against her vaginal walls. Inch by inch he entered her until she felt every bit of him filling her.

"Take a deep breath, little wolf," Rand said, "and hang on tight."

His hips began a smooth rhythm, forward and back, forward and back, in and out, in and out. Hannah began to move with him, heat surging through her as he fucked her with slow, steady strokes. His eyes again held hers, fire dancing in them, his tanned face taut with concentration. She felt the slap, slap of his testicles against the cheeks of her ass as he thrust harder and harder.

Then he moved one hand to her clit and rotated his thumb in a circular motion. Her breathing hitched, the muscles of her body tightened and her climax rolled up from deep within her. Rand bent forward, capturing her mouth in a deep, heated kiss, tongue sweeping inside. Hannah pressed her own small tongue against his, dueling with it, welcoming its wet flame.

Rand increased his speed as his body tightened with his own approaching release. Hannah felt the muscles of his ass bunch beneath her hands where she gripped him and wrapped her legs around him, locking her ankles against the small of his back.

Rand moved his thumb faster and faster, thrusting his hips harder and harder. He tore his mouth from hers, pulling his head back as a low growl rolled up from his throat. Hannah could tell he was hanging on to his control by a thread and gave herself up to the demands of her body. As her orgasm rolled through her with the seismic effect of an earthquake she felt Rand answer with his own. Together they crested and fell, shuddering and shaking with the force of the explosion. His cock pulsed inside her where her cunt muscles grabbed him and milked him through the thin latex sheath.

The spasms seemed endless but at last Rand collapsed on her, careful to keep most of his weight on his forearms. Hannah wasn't sure whose heart pounded harder, hers or Rand's, and the heavy rasp of their breathing broke the sudden stillness in the room.

Rand shuddered against her, then raised himself enough to brush her hair back from her face and place soft kisses on her cheeks and forehead.

"You are beyond my wildest dreams," he told her.

"That goes for me too." She lowered her eyes, suddenly shy.

"Hey, hey, hey." He cupped her chin and tilted her face up. "None of that. We are going to be completely open with each other. We are mates, Hannah. And just as soon as we get this little problem taken care of, we will have a proper ceremony and mate as wolves."

One tear leaked from her eye. "This 'little problem' is all my doing. I've brought trouble to everyone, and danger."

"I won't let you say that." His voice was firm. "It could have happened to any of us. You were helping someone in jeopardy."

"But..."

He touched one finger to her lips. "Hush. That's enough. Tomorrow Derek and I will meet and decide where to go from here. But I promise to take care of you and keep you safe. Always."

"I'm so glad you spoke up for me tonight."

"Me too, little wolf." He slid his now semi-soft cock from her tight clasp, rolled off the bed and reached out a hand to her. "Come. We need to shower, then get some sleep. I have a feeling tomorrow is going to be a long day."

Dawn was just spreading the first fingers of light when Hannah felt Rand's warm hand caressing her naked hip.

"Mmm," she murmured, shifting her body slightly.

"No, hold still," he told her. "I've waited so long for you, I wonder if I'll ever get enough of you."

"I hope not," she teased, still only partially awake.

"I want to mate with you in the woods."

Hannah thrilled at Rand's words. She knew that a mating was not complete until the couple had mated in their wolf form.

"I want that too."

His hand slipped down to the cleft of her buttocks. "Did Derek fuck you here?"

She tensed at his words. What was the right answer? Yes? No? She tried to think frantically of how to answer him.

"It's all right," he soothed. "Just relax. You were so tight when I slid my finger inside you before. I don't want to hurt you, that's all."

Hannah buried her face in the pillow. "Yes." The pillow muffled her voice. "He taught me that pleasure."

"Obviously not too often, or you wouldn't be so tight." Rand kissed the back of her neck, then licked it with his tongue. "Not to worry. Tonight I'm going to bring out that plug I told you about and we'll start working on those inner muscles of yours. Would you like that?"

Heat flooded through her, her liquid soaking her pussy and her breasts aching for his touch. That insistent pulse deep in her cunt increased from a flutter to a steady tempo.

"Yes." She still wasn't bold enough to express herself in a firm voice. "Yes, I would."

"But meanwhile my cock wants to feel you around it. Right now. Let's see how ready you are for me."

His hand slid from her hip down her thigh and then between her legs. He pulled one leg over his, resting it on his thigh, as he explored the folds of her cunt. The moment he touched her, her pussy began to spasm. She had to grit her teeth to maintain her control. How was it that this man could bring her to orgasm almost with a single touch?

"It's all right." His mouth was close to her ear, his breath a warm breeze. "Let yourself go."

He slipped one finger into her drenched pussy and immediately her inner muscles clenched around him. Her body stiffened and shook with a teasingly light orgasm, one that passed quickly but left her wanting more. Needing more.

Rand pulled her leg even farther back, opening her wide, and continued to tease her cunt with his clever fingers.

"I love the feel of your clit," he said in a low, husky voice. "Such soft tissue that gets hard and swollen when I touch it. I can pinch the tip and liquid seeps from your delicious cunt."

His words were so erotic they were almost more stimulating than what he was doing to her. Hannah moaned and rocked her hips.

"You like that, do you? I like making you feel like this." His fingers sought her clit, pinching the tip of it as he talked, then rubbing the length of her slit.

She wanted him inside her. She knew he had to be ready. She could feel the hardness of his cock against her thigh and the tiny bead of moisture that dropped onto her skin. What was he waiting for? Again she tried to urge him with her hips, pressing back against him, trying to rub herself against his erection. But still he held back, driving her higher on the plane of need but never giving her what she wanted.

"Oh, please," she cried. "I need you inside me."

He nipped her earlobe then soothed it with his tongue. "Tell me you're mine," he whispered roughly.

"I am," she moaned. "I'm yours."

"Mine," he repeated, trailing his tongue down the side of her neck while his fingers continued alternately sliding in and out of her cunt and rubbing her clit. "All mine. Forever."

"Forever," she agreed. Yes! She wanted to be his forever. But right now...

The shifting of his body and movement behind her told her he was rolling on a condom. Then his fingers brushed the curve of her buttocks as he wrapped them

around his shaft and prodded the entrance to her pussy. The head pressed against her slick flesh and then he rolled his hips and drove into her with one plundering stroke.

“Yesss!” she cried, pressing her hips back to take him even deeper.

Rand moved his hand to press against her stomach, holding her in place, and bit down lightly on her shoulder. Hannah clenched her inner muscles around him, loving the feel of him stretching her pussy walls and filling her completely. In a moment he began to move slowly, thrusting and retreating, thrusting and retreating. With every movement he hit that sweet spot that ignited more flames inside her and intensified every pulsebeat in her body. His balls slapped against the back of her thighs as he drove in and out of her, and his tongue flicked the skin between his teeth in cadence with his strokes.

The orgasm built low in her belly, a tightly wound coil that released and released, springing up through her body and sending those all-important messages to her pussy. Hannah tried to hold on to it as long as she could. Make it last.

Rand slid his mouth across her shoulder to her neck, then back up to her ear. “God, your cunt is like a wet fist gripping my cock. This is so much more than just fucking, Hannah. This is *us*, making love together. Joining our bodies. Becoming one. You are *mine!*”

With the last word he drove harder and took her over the edge and the climax rolled up through her with a mind of its own, the explosion unstoppable as it racked her with shudders. Inside her spasming vagina Rand’s cock flexed and pulsed, his cum spurting into the thin latex sheath. His hand continued to hold her in place as they jerked and quaked together. Ragged breathing split the air and Hannah could feel his heart thumping hard against her back.

She had no idea how long they lay there, locked together in the aftermath of the orgasm, tiny quivers racing through her now and then. At last he withdrew, very slowly, the hand on her tummy moving in warm circles.

“Be right back,” he murmured.

She heard him in the bathroom, soft sounds in the night, then he was back in bed spooning her against him. One large warm hand cupped a breast and his breath was a soft breeze against her skin.

“Go to sleep, Hannah. You’re mine now. I’ll keep you safe.”

She closed her eyes and fell into black velvet warmth.

Chapter Three

Gary Lisbon sat in a deep leather chair across from his boss. The study was on the top floor of Rogan Mueller's huge home, the living quarters reached by a separate elevator from the enclosed foyer. The floor immediately below them housed living quarters for the staff that stayed on the premises, and the first floor contained the labs, places that Lisbon shuddered to think about. He knew what went on there in an abstract way, but he refused to allow himself to think of it as reality.

Mueller had a highly developed brain and a personality that bordered on the egomaniacal. His work in genetic mutations could be called either horrific or far-thinking, depending on whose point of view one took. Lisbon refused to let himself dwell on the realities of the years of experiments in search of new breeds and perfect human-animal combinations. The man paid extremely well and that was all he cared about.

All the years he had worked for Mueller had ingrained a single fact in his head—the man never gave up and never lost. Anyone who thwarted him soon found himself dead or wishing he was. Lisbon was relieved that his evening's work had proved fruitful and produced results. Too bad a few people had to suffer for it but as far as he was concerned, those were the breaks.

"You have found her," Mueller said, watching him.

Lisbon nodded. "Her name and where she lives."

"Should I ask how you accomplished this?"

"I didn't think details were important to you. Only results."

An icy smile twisted Mueller's lips. "Accurate as usual. So what information do you have for me?"

Lisbon set his drink on a small table next to him and pulled a thin leather folder from his inside jacket pocket. Carefully he flipped open his notes.

"They recognized her from the description I gave them. Her name is Hannah Raines. She shops frequently at the convenience store, both for merchandise and gas. The people who run the store know her as well as she allows anyone to know her."

Mueller raised an eyebrow. "They gave you this information easily?"

Lisbon snorted. "You should know better than that. But again, the details are unnecessary." He glanced at his notes again. "They told me they're pretty sure she lives at the edge of town in some houses she and a bunch of friends seem to own. They gave me her name and I checked directory listing but she's not there. Either she doesn't have a phone or it's in someone else's name."

"A husband?" Mueller asked. "Or a boyfriend? That could present a problem."

"I don't think so. I was told she has some friends and they all live close together. I also asked them if they'd ever seen a wolf in the neighborhood and they looked at me as if I was crazy."

"That means she doesn't shift where anyone can see her. You were lucky an emergency situation allowed you to catch her out."

"I'm wondering if the 'friends' she lives with are also shifters," Lisbon mused.

He saw the flame of excitement in his employer's eyes.

"Possibly. I can check it out."

Mueller rubbed his hands together. "A pack. Even a small one. My god, Lisbon, what a find. So were you able to locate her?"

"I drove around the neighborhood," Lisbon went on, "looking for a likely cluster of houses."

"And?"

"There's a cluster of cottages just at the edge of town that seemed to fit the information I had, and there's where a little luck came in." He shifted his weight. "As I

was pulling away from the cul-de-sac the door to one of the houses opened and there she was on the porch. Talking to two men."

"See?" Mueller said. "A problem. Maybe a double problem."

"I don't think so. She left with one of them, went to a house two doors down." Lisbon shrugged. "The boys can take him easily, if need be. But I've got eyes on her. There's a hill behind the cul-de-sac and Joey's watching the houses. I'll check in with him first thing in the morning. As soon as we get a handle on her routine we can decide the best time and place to pick her up."

"Don't wait too long," Mueller told him. "I'm anxious to get started. This has been a long time coming."

"You've tried other experiments," Lisbon pointed out. "They haven't been too successful. What makes you think this one will be?"

He knew he was the only one of Rogan Mueller's employees who dared to question the man this way.

Mueller fixed his dark eyes on him. "I've refined our techniques. Harvesting the female eggs, separating them and implanting each with a different subspecies' DNA has become more accurate. But since the last disaster we've only had animals to crossbreed. I need shifter eggs to crossbreed with human and pure wolf DNA."

"You still think you can create shapeshifters in a petri dish?" Lisbon had always been skeptical of the bizarre experiment. Most of the time he kept his skepticism to himself, however.

"I *know* I can do it," Mueller corrected him. "I just need a shifter female. Get me this woman."

"There may be consequences," Lisbon reminded him.

"Pah!" Mueller waved his cigar at him. "You'll take care of it, whatever happens. You always do."

Yes, he did. That's what he was paid an obscene amount of money to do. He sighed and pushed himself out of the chair.

"I'll check in with my guys and see what's going on."

"Do this soon, Gary. I'm impatient to begin."

So what else is new?

* * * * *

Riesa Marlowe awoke with a start. She was covered with a thin sheen of perspiration, her heart was galloping and her hands trembled. She hated these damn dreams. They always spelled trouble. For her as well as for others. How many times she'd railed against this so-called gift. More like a curse, she thought.

Forcing herself out of bed, she stumbled to the bathroom for a drink of water. The dreams always made her very thirsty. Refilling the bathroom glass again, she carried it back to the bedroom, sat down on the bed with pillows stacked behind her back, and tried to remember the important components of the newest nightmare.

A woman, thick dark red hair flowing behind her, mouth open in a silent scream. Two men, dark and vicious-looking, carrying her up a hill. The picture shifted and she was in the dark. Now she *was* the woman, bound and shivering, in a small dark place. She could smell her own fear.

The picture changed once more. Now she was in a small room with only a strange-looking table. A tall, heavysset man with soulless eyes stood beside her. His lips were moving but she couldn't hear him.

Then it was gone. All of it.

Carefully she set the glass down on the nightstand. She had no idea if this had already happened or was about to. Or even where. She only knew that someone was in tremendous danger.

With a hand that still trembled, she lifted her television remote and turned it on to a twenty-four-hour news channel. Maybe there would be a report that gave her some kind of clue.

* * * * *

Hannah stretched like a lazy cat. Or wolf! Her body ached pleasantly, a memory of the lust—and more—she and Rand had shared during a long and erotic night. Never in her life had she expected to share something this wonderful. And with a man she had wanted for so very long.

She reached beside her to find his warm, muscular body but encountered only empty space. Her eyes flew wide as she took in the place where Rand had slept beside her. Where had he gone? Then she spotted the note on his pillow.

Good morning, little wolf

I have gone to Derek's to meet with him and Jesse. I'll be back shortly. Do not under any circumstances go anywhere without me. And remember, you are my mate. My life. I will keep you safe.

Rand

Meeting? With Jesse? Then she remembered that one of the activities of the protection agency Rand and Derek had formed was to assist the sheriff with specific cases. As shapeshifters they could often go where humans could not. Additionally, their acute senses could track even the most elusive criminal. Jesse had worked that out and they'd gotten a number of referrals because of it. Now they were obviously going to ask Jesse to help him with this...problem. She hoped they could find the man before he decided to come after her. That was the one fear they all shared—that humans would capture them and try to reproduce their breed. Or other things more terrible to contemplate.

Hannah read the message twice more before she pressed it to her nose, inhaling the faint scent he had left on the paper. Then, clasping the paper to her breast, she rolled

over to his spot and immersed herself in the scent he'd left on the sheets. Already her body was craving him again, her nipples hardening and liquid drenching her still swollen pussy. She lay there smiling, recreating every moment of the previous night.

When she caught sight of a clock beside the bed she sat upright, startled. Nine o'clock? Was that possible? Why hadn't he wakened her? Lord! She had work to do for Alexis. Two websites due and the basics for a new brochure. She knew Rand meant to move all her things into his house, but she had no idea how long he'd be. She needed her computer and some fresh clothes. Certainly when Rand had said not to go anywhere he didn't mean just next door to where she'd been living. Hannah had no idea how long he'd be gone, but she could be out and back before he finished his meeting.

She dressed quickly in her clothes from the night before and hurried into the kitchen. A coffeemaker sat cold and silent on the counter. Hannah rummaged in cupboards until she found coffee and filters, set everything up and pressed the On button. By the time she got back, she'd have a full pot of coffee to get her through her projects.

Fishing her own house key from her purse, she slipped out the back door, leaving it unlocked. Surely no one would break in during the short time she'd be away. She was so lost in thought about her new situation that her wolf senses were dormant and she didn't notice the two men move silently up behind her until hands touched her. She opened her mouth to scream but one of the men slapped a piece of duct tape over it. And no matter how she struggled she couldn't free herself from the iron grip holding her as they dragged into the trees.

"Cover her," one of the men said in a guttural tone.

"But I wanted to see more of her," the other one laughed softly. "Let's hope the boss lets us have our fun before he begins work on her."

At the words a cold fist closed around Hannah's heart. Fun? Work on her? But then in seconds a needle pricked her arm. A large cloth bag enveloped her body as she faded into unconsciousness.

* * * * *

The meeting lasted longer than Rand expected and he was beginning to get antsy. But Jesse had been determined to brainstorm about people in the area who might possibly be interested in Hannah. Who wanted her for less than honest purposes. Because Rand and Derek were unfamiliar with most of the people in the area—living as a wolf didn't give you many social contacts, he thought with irony—they needed Jesse's bank of knowledge. And he needed them to give him every scrap of detail, however small, Hannah had been able to tell them.

Now Rand was getting impatient and uneasy. He hadn't expected to leave Hannah for this long and he had an itchy feeling at the back of his neck.

"Are we almost done?" he asked, draining the last of his coffee.

"I'd say so." Jesse flipped his little notebook closed, rose from the couch and stuck the notebook in the back pocket of his jeans. "I'll run what little information we've got through the databases and see what comes up. Then Charlie and I will brainstorm about possibilities in...oh, let's say a hundred-mile radius. How about Charlie and I come back tonight, but we'll bring the wives too. I'm sure they'll have some input."

Charlie, like Jesse, was married to a shifter and could give them a different perspective on things. Maybe even share information the others might not have.

"Sounds good," Derek told him.

The men shook hands all around, then Rand walked Jesse to his car.

"I want to get back and check on Hannah," he told the deputy. "Suddenly I have a bad feeling I can't get rid of."

"Oh?" Jesse stuck his keys back in his pocket. "Come on, then. I'll go check with you. If she's all right I can give her a hug. Hannah's special to all of us."

Because she's so shy, Rand thought. Alexa had accidentally discovered her graphics talent and everyone had been very grateful when she'd hired Hannah to work for her. There was something very extra special about Hannah and Rand's chest swelled with pride at the fact that she was his mate.

He unlocked the front door, pushed it open and called, "Hannah? Are you up yet?"

"If she wasn't she sure would be now," Jesse pointed out.

Rand led the way through the living room and peeked into the kitchen before heading down the short hallway. He stopped in the doorway to his room, frozen. He took in the empty bed, the absence of Hannah's clothes that had landed in a heap on the floor last night and his gut tightened.

"She's gone, damn it." His hands clenched into fists. "I told her to stay here. Why didn't she just do it?"

"Maybe she went next door to get some things," Jesse suggested. "Let's go check before we borrow trouble."

"I told her to stay put." Rand was trying to believe that's all it was.

"I'm sure she thought just going back to get some stuff wouldn't be a problem."

"It is if that asshole located her and is prowling around here." He banged a fist against the wall. "Shit! How could she do something so crazy with things the way they are right now?"

"Rand," Jesse began.

"I promised her I'd keep her safe. I probably should have chained her to the bed." He slammed out the back door, heading toward Sascha's, but stopped when his wolf eyes spotted something on the ground. "Damn it. She left the door unlocked. How the hell could she do that? And look." He pointed. "Someone's been here, heavy enough to bend the blades of grass." He crouched down, passing his hand over the faint marks.

"How the hell do you even see that?" Jesse was shaking his head. "I wish my senses were as sharp as yours. Of course, that's one of the reasons you and Derek consult for the sheriff."

"Two men." Rand stood up, anger ripped through his entire body. "A struggle. They got her just as she came off the back porch."

"They must have taped her mouth," Jesse said, "or you know she'd have screamed the neighborhood down."

"That better be all they did." Rand could barely control his rage. "Let's check with Sascha, just to be sure."

But Sascha, who was just leaving for work, had not seen Hannah or heard from her since the phone call from Rand's the previous night.

"Do you think those people got her?" she asked, her eyes wide and frightened.

"If they did they'll regret it when I get through with them." He turned to Jesse. "I've got to do something."

"Let's check all our options first," Jesse counseled. "Right now we don't even know who we're dealing with and where they might have taken her. I need to call Charlie and get him started on this."

Derek had seen them from his kitchen window and now stood beside them.

"What's up?" he asked Rand.

"She's gone."

In words that felt like icicles falling from his mouth, he gave Derek the bare details.

"They had to be waiting for her somewhere," Derek said. "Let's see what we can find."

Rand led the way through the trees, he and Derek spotting the bent grass and disturbed leaves that marked the path of the two men.

"They carried her," he spat out. "At least one of them did. His footsteps are heavier going back."

The hill behind the houses was also thick with trees, giving the shifters welcome covering for their runs. But now it was a menacing environment that had provided shelter for two men bent on god only knew what.

Rand climbed the hill with long-legged strides, until he reached the dirt road that circled the peak.

"Up here," he called back. "They had a car waiting for them. These big oaks concealed them."

He banged his fist against one of the trees hard enough to break the skin. Derek grabbed him by the arm.

"I know how you feel. Hannah is very special. But that isn't going to help anything. We need to get some concrete information and make a plan."

"They could be killing her or something worse while we make plans." Rand swallowed the bitter taste in his mouth. Surely fate wouldn't be so cruel to snatch Hannah away from him just when they'd connected with each other.

"Let's get back to my house and get organized."

He led the way back to his house, ushering everyone into his kitchen. Rand paced while Derek started the coffee and Jesse pulled out his cell phone. He wanted to close his hands around someone's neck but there wasn't anyone appropriate available and at the moment it wouldn't do him any good, anyway. How the hell were they going to find her? And could they do it in time?

Jesse snapped his cell shut. "I gave Charlie the info on the car and he's going to see what he can do with it. He'll also pull a list of the people in the area we might think of targeting. He's sending a tech out to cast the footprints and tire tracks. I'm going up on the hill to make sure no one messes with the prints up there."

Derek handed Rand a cup of coffee. "Here. Drink this and settle down. You won't be any good to Hannah if you go off half-cocked."

"I know that. Except —"

"Except you want to protect your mate. Fine. We'll do that."

"When I get her back, I'm going to paddle her ass for leaving the house, even if it was only to go next door."

"Sounds like that might be fun." Derek patted his friend on the shoulder. "Just trying to lighten the atmosphere. We'll find her. Let me round up the others so they'll all be here when Charlie calls with the information."

* * * * *

Riesa brewed herself another cup of herbal tea and sat with it at her kitchen table. She'd tried going back to sleep after the terrible visions, but the woman's fear had permeated her body so thoroughly that she could find no peace. Then, close to dawn, another one hit her.

This time she saw a wolf, standing by a palmetto bush. His expression was at once mournful and full of rage. His lips were partially pulled back in a snarl but she could swear there were tears in his eyes. He paced back and forth by the palmetto, turning frequently as if he could see her. As if he were sending her a message.

A blue light suffused the palmetto bush, pulsing and spearing its rays in the atmosphere. The wolf looked at it then back to her. Now there was an almost pleading expression on his face. But what was he asking? What did he want her to do?

Houses wavered behind him, more like cottages, but suddenly a huge home shimmered in through the haze. Set on a hill, its aura was shrouded in black.

She rubbed her temples with her fingertips and then took a long sip of the tea. When the cup was empty she brewed a fresh one and pulled a notebook from the kitchen drawer. Long ago when she was still a child her grandmother had given this to her, smoothing her hand over the soft green cover.

"When you are troubled, child," the old woman had said, "you will find your answers here."

Riesa had used the book many times to interpret her dreams. The problem was, using the old methods to analyze them gave her a headache that was almost unbearable in its pain. Still, it had led her to answers when others needed her. Maybe now she could help this woman whose fear still infused her.

Sipping her tea, she flipped through the pages of the notebook until she found the one she wanted. Closing her eyes, she took a deep breath and followed the instructions written there. A vision shimmered behind her closed eyelids, shadowy forms morphing into distinct shapes. A mournful howl filled the air and a white-hot pain stabbed at her head.

Riesa gritted her teeth until the vision took definite shape, then opened her eyes and clutched her head. She was gasping for breath, her forehead beaded with sweat. It took her several minutes to get her rapid heartbeat under control and when she did she felt weak and shaken. When she could manage it, she went to the cupboard and took out a bottle of aspirin, popping two in her mouth and washing them down with the rest of her tea.

She had to leave at once, the moment she felt together enough to drive. The vision had at last given her a general location, fortunately not far from here, and a name. She could pinpoint the exact address by doing a quick search on the internet. If she left right away she could be there in an hour.

She just hoped whoever answered the door when she rang the bell didn't think she was completely crazy. She'd had that battle too many times. But however they reacted, she had to find a way to save this woman.

* * * * *

Derek leaned back in the kitchen chair and threw down the pencil he'd been writing with. Beside him he could feel Rand vibrating with a high level of anger. Sitting on him while they waited for information had been a monumental job. The man was half out of his mind with worry.

Across from him Jesse Farrell and his partner, Charlie Aquino, reviewed their own notes. The two sheriff's deputies had arrived more than an hour ago bringing a file folder with computer printouts and a forensic team who made casts of the tire treads and the footprints and took them back to their lab.

"Okay." Jesse looked around the table at everyone. "We have damn little to go on, but Charlie ran the partial plate for this county and the two bordering it. We've got more than three hundred vehicles to check."

"Jesus." Rand forked his fingers through his hair. "That will take us forever. Hannah could be...god knows what by the time we find the right place to look."

"Not necessarily," Charlie put in. "We can be damn sure it's not a kidnapping for ransom. Whoever saw Hannah shift has other, darker things in mind." He tapped a sheet of paper in front of him. "This is a list of everyone in the three counties that's powerful enough to pull this off. Kidnap Hannah and make her disappear."

Rand pushed himself away from the table and stood up. "That's still going to take time that we may not have. I want to do something *now*."

Derek looked at his friend. "What would you suggest we do? We can't just go running around without some idea of where we're running to."

"I know, I know." He continued to pace nervously.

Derek eyed him watchfully as he turned back to Jesse and Charlie. Just as he reached for the list of names the doorbell rang.

"I'll get it." Rand started toward the front of the house.

"No." Derek put a restraining hand on his arm. "I'll take care of it."

"But it might be about Hannah."

"All the more reason for someone with a level head to see who it is."

But as soon as he opened the door all rational thought fled and every bit of blood left his head and flowed straight to his groin. The woman standing on his porch made his cock harden and his pulse pound. Rich golden curls flowed thickly to her shoulders,

framing a porcelain face with violet eyes, unexpectedly black lashes and a mouth shaped like a perfect bow. A blouse of some soft fabric draped easily over breasts that were lush and full and jeans clung to generous curves like a second skin.

For a long moment he couldn't breathe. All he wanted to do was strip off her clothes, drag her to the floor and fuck her senseless. But what shocked him more was the strong pull of electricity between them.

Mate!

No, that couldn't be possible. Could it? His acute ability to scent things told him she wasn't a shifter. Did that mean the gods had sent him a human to mate with? Maybe that was why he had never felt the pull toward Hannah, much as he'd wanted to. *This* was what he'd unconsciously been waiting for.

"Hello?"

Her voice shook him out of his trance. It was low and melodious, the kind of voice that reached inside him all the way down to his balls. But right now, he realized, it was also tense with what he could only identify as fear. Fear? Of what? Who was she and why was she at his door? And just why *was* she here?

"I'm sorry. Can I help you with something?"

"I actually think *I* can help *you*." She gestured toward the interior. "Are you Derek Sawyer?"

Derek nodded. "And you are?"

"My name is Riesa Marlowe. I know this will sound crazy to you but I have some information to give you that's very important." She took a deep breath and let it out slowly. "May I come in?"

"We're a little busy right now."

But can you come back later? Shit, Sawyer, get your act together. You have serious business to take care of.

"Yes." She wet her lips again, the tiny tip of her pink tongue rubbing over the satin flesh. "I may be able to help you."

"Miss Marlowe, maybe it would be better if you just told me why you're here? We're in a...difficult situation at the moment."

"I know. That's what I want to talk to you about."

Rand, who'd been standing in the kitchen doorway, was in front of her immediately, his hands gripping her arms with such brutal intensity she cried out.

"Do you know what happened to Hannah?" he demanded. "Do you know the people who took her? If you know where she is, you'd better tell me right now."

Derek put a hand on his friend's shoulder. "Rand, you're frightening her. Let's hear what she has to say. It may not have anything to do with Hannah."

He could see Rand controlling himself with great effort as he stepped away from their visitor. Derek knew he should demand to know why she was really there. Where she'd come from. What she wanted. But if somehow she knew anything about Hannah...

He moved aside and she stepped into the house.

"May I have a drink of water please?"

"Of course. Why don't you come into the kitchen where everyone else is?"

"Everyone else?" He saw a flash of panic in her eyes.

Derek put his hand under her elbow.

"Come on. I'll get you some water. Then you'd better tell us what brought you to my house."

But Riesa stopped when she saw Jesse and Charlie in the doorway. "I'm interrupting something."

"Not at all." Derek guided her into the kitchen and introduced the others. They all stared at him as he pulled out a chair at the table for Riesa, ran a glass of water for her

from the tap and set it in front of her. He waited as patiently as he could until she finished drinking. "Now, Miss Marlowe. I think you need to tell me why you're here."

Jesse moved closer, his eyes scanning her face. "I think I know the answer to that. I've read about her in the paper." He studied her face. "You're the psychic who's worked with the Tampa Police Department before."

"Psychic?" Rand was in her face immediately. "You see things?"

Derek saw Riesa's face turn pale and her hands holding the half-empty glass trembled. "Rand, let's give her a chance to talk. She's walked into a houseful of strangers so whatever she has to say has to be pretty important."

Rand took one step backward but his presence still loomed over the scene.

Derek sat down next to Riesa and took one of her small hands in his, trying to reassure her. He caught his breath as a shock of electricity ran through him again. Riesa's eyes widened, an indication that she felt it too. He waited for her to pull away but instead she curled her fingers into his palm. When she looked at him he saw the same banked fire in her eyes he was sure was reflected in his own.

Holy shit!

Here they were in the middle of a major crisis and all he could seem to think of was fucking his brains out with this woman and making her his. He gritted his teeth and tried to focus.

"Okay, Miss Marlowe..."

"Call me Riesa, please."

"Riesa. What did you come here to tell us?"

Derek watched her struggle at first to communicate her dreams, watching everyone in the room with a wary look on her face. He could imagine how many people had treated her not just skeptically but rudely, banishing her information as crackpot or even worse. But shifters believed in things paranormal. After all, they were hardly part of the so-called normal world.

As simply as possible she told them about her dreams, then about the process she used to interpret them. They listened intently, no one interrupting her until she finished her explanation.

Rand was the first to speak. "Hannah Raines was kidnapped from behind her home this morning, right next door. This better not be some kind of hoax you're pulling to try to get money from us."

"Hold on, Rand." Derek deliberately pitched his voice low and even. "Jesse says she's worked with police before. Let him check her out before jumping to any conclusions."

"If she knows where Hannah is and isn't telling us, she'll be sorry she showed up here." Rand was clenching and unclenching his fists. "Jesse, you better get on this right away because I have a feeling we're going to run out of time real quick."

Chapter Four

Hannah concentrated on breathing slowly, trying not to panic, as the car sped along the roads. The sack they'd put her in was made of cloth, not plastic, so she at least didn't have to worry about suffocating. Having spent much of her life hiding in dark places the black, narrow confines of the trunk didn't frighten her as much as it might someone else. But whatever they'd injected her with had worn off, leaving her nauseated and the rocking motion of the car wasn't helping any. She forced herself to breathe through her nose, knowing if she gave in to the urge to vomit she could choke herself and die in this car.

It was important not to let fear overtake her but it was a battle she was rapidly losing. Whatever these men wanted with her it wasn't good. She'd heard many tales of people who captured shifters and tried to crossbreed them not only with humans but also with other animals to produce new strains.

The thought of being someone's lab rat terrified her. If that's what this was about, she'd need to keep all her wits about her to get out of this. Silently she prayed that Rand would manage to find her.

Rand!

Oh, god, they'd just found each other, promising to mate as wolves. She'd waited so long for him to notice her, to want her, to realize they were meant to be together. She couldn't lose that now.

The car turned and she felt it tilt as if they were climbing. The change in angle sent her rolling against the lid, the metal inside the door cutting through the cloth into her skin. She shifted as best she could, bracing her feet to push her away from the trunk lid, until the car leveled out and finally came to a stop.

Doors slammed, she heard the voices of the two men, then the trunk lid was opened and hands pulled her roughly out onto a driveway. She nearly stumbled, her legs numb from being bent at an angle for so long but they propped her upright while the sack was jerked over her head.

Hannah blinked at the sudden brightness of the sunlight, trying to see where she was. A wave of dizziness swept over her, vestiges of the drug still in her system. Two sets of steps led up through meticulous landscaping to the largest house she'd ever seen. The men grabbed her by her arms and half dragged, half carried her up the stairs to a massive wooden door that stood open. A tall, heavysset man stood in front of it, obviously waiting.

"Don't manhandle the property," he told the two men. "Damaged goods don't help me very much."

The hands gripping her eased slightly.

Goods? Property?

Hannah looked up at the man looming over her. She felt the power radiating from him but not in a good way. His dark, hooded eyes were soulless. Evil! The word seared her brain. Even as she tried to battle the fear rising up inside her.

"Well, Miss Raines." His voice sounded like gravel on concrete. "I can't tell you how happy I am to see you. Come in, come in."

As if she had a choice!

Prodded by the two men, she entered the house and found herself in an enormous two-story foyer. With a small show of defiance she yanked her arms from the fingers gripping them and forced herself to stand straight, hoping she didn't pass out.

"Why am I here?" she demanded. "What do you want with me?"

"Ah, spirit." His smile was grotesque. "Good. So much the better."

"Who are you, anyway?"

He shrugged. "It won't hurt to introduce myself. You'll never be able to tell anyone, and you should certainly know the man who holds your destiny in his hands. My name is Rogan Mueller."

Ohmigod!

Mueller's name was legendary among shifters. He and his horrendous experiments in an effort to create a breed of super shifters were the stuff of nightmares. Even as a child, before her original pack was decimated, she'd heard terrible stories about him. Somehow with the passage of time she'd forgotten not only that he'd moved to Florida but also that his new estate wasn't that far from where she and the others had found sanctuary of sorts in the deserted orange grove. With the cottages Alexa had found for them, they'd all thought they could breathe freely at last.

Then she'd stupidly shifted where someone could see her, obviously one of Mueller's men. Hannah was trembling inside but she was determined not to let it show. "Well, Rogan Mueller, I demand you release me and let me go home. You can't just kidnap me and think you'll get away with it."

"Oh, but I just did." The ugly smile widened, creasing the fleshy skin of his face. "I have plans for you, Hannah, Plans I've had to wait too long to act on. And you will be the star of them." He looked at the two men behind her. "Please show our...guest...to the room I've prepared."

The fear grew inside her until it was bigger than she was. Bile rose in her throat, sickening her. This man was insane and was about to make her an unwilling participant in his craziness.

"Let me go," she cried again. "People will come looking for me."

"Only if they know where to look." He waved his hand. "Take her to the room. And shut her up."

The room. Those words had an ominous ring to them that made Hannah even sicker. She refused to walk so the men dragged her along the hall to an elevator. She was still screaming when the elevator doors closed and one of them men pricked her

arm as he'd done when they took her. In seconds everything faded and she slumped against the hands holding her.

* * * * *

Riesa sat in a chair in the living room, drinking a cup of tea and watching the turmoil around her. Derek and Rand had called everyone in their small pack and all of them—male and female alike—were now gathered in Derek's living room. They had willingly left work to help in the search for Hannah. Jesse and Charlie, the sheriff's deputies, were in the kitchen working their contacts by phone and poring over the reports being emailed to their cell phones on the search for the vehicle and lab results on the tire tracks.

Jesse had talked at length with someone from the Tampa Police Department and reported that yes, Riesa had helped them on many cases where standard investigation hadn't worked. That put her front and center with everyone, especially Rand, a dark, intense man whose anxiety for his mate had him ready to explode.

Derek had taken charge of things, the calm in the middle of the storm, and shielded her from the questions everyone threw at her as well as Rand's demand that she give them more details of her dream. She knew Jesse had a sketch artist on the way to transfer the image of the huge house Riesa had seen in her dream from her mind to paper. And Jesse and Charlie were accessing property records from three counties, trying to see what properties might fall in that obvious price range.

Riesa was nervous with all the new people milling around her. From force of habit she worked to make herself as invisible as possible. She did much better one-on-one, but working with the Tampa PD she'd learned to tolerate crowds better.

Every few minutes Derek would glance over at her. Despite the blazing fire in his gaze it reassured her. Gave her a sense of security. Something the chemistry exploding unexpectedly between them did not. Riesa had never been attracted so instantly or so

powerfully to a man. Every time he looked over, her nipples tightened and her pussy throbbed.

Was it because he was a shifter? She wondered what sex with him would be like. Strangely the thought itself didn't frighten her. Paranormal was a part of her life. What did panic her was the powerful strength of the attraction. She didn't dare let him touch her again. She was sure the sparks between them were so strong they might be visible to those around them.

She'd studied shifters after her first encounter with one and she did know they had incredible sex drives. That lust was as much a part of their makeup as a fierce sense of protectiveness. They took care of their own. It was obviously that Derek was the pack alpha. Did her unexpected connection with him mean that he saw her as one of *his* own?

No, she couldn't even think about that now. She needed every bit of her strength to help them find Hannah.

She was staring into her teacup as if she might find answers there when she felt a light touch on her shoulder and looked up to see Jesse standing beside her with a pixie-like redhead.

"Riesa, this is Patty." His voice was very gentle. "She's our sketch artist. If I can get you to sit with her in a quiet place, she'll try to reproduce the house in your dream."

"Hello." Patty smiled. "Let's find a place to do this."

Jesse looked around, frowning at the crowd of people who seemed to spill over everywhere.

Derek broke away from the group he was with and came over to them. "Problem?"

Jesse shrugged. "I guess. We need a quiet place for this and there doesn't seem to be one."

"They can use my bedroom. It's got a desk in it."

"That should work," Patty told them.

His bedroom? She was going to get a glimpse of his bedroom? Riesa tried not to show her curiosity as Derek led them down the short hallway.

The room was as masculine as he was, with a massive bed covered with a quilt in earth tones. Riesa couldn't help imagining herself on that bed with Derek, ignoring the inappropriateness of her lustful thoughts in the middle of a crisis. A large dresser and a desk sat by the window and in one corner was a wide leather armchair. Derek shoved it over by the desk as if it weighed nothing and indicated Riesa should sit there.

"It's very comfortable," he told her. "You can relax better here. I'll send someone with more tea, and check on you myself in a little while."

He studied her for a moment, the same fire she'd seen before glittering in his eyes. Then he raised one hand, caressed each of her cheeks with his fingers and smiled at her.

"You'll be fine. Relax. Everything will turn out all right."

"I want to find Hannah." She was beginning to feel desperate. Too much time was passing.

"You will. We will. Now work with Patty and see what you and she can get down on paper."

Riesa settled herself in the armchair and began to describe the image she'd seen. It took several minutes to get it right, but Patty was both talented at her job and very patient. Finally Riesa nodded.

"That's it. I'm sure of it." She sat back in the chair. "Do you know of any place near here that looks like that?"

Patty studied the sketch. "Maybe. But I'd rather show it to Jesse and Charlie and see if they can identify it."

When she left the room with the sketch, Riesa tilted her head back and closed her eyes. She was exhausted from the dreams, the drive here, being surrounded by a crowd of people and then trying to dredge up images from her brain. Now her head was

beginning to ache, the usual residual effect of seeing the images and interpreting thing. She wondered if anyone had some aspirin here.

"You need to lie down."

The deep voice startled her and she opened her eyes. She hadn't heard the door open or Derek enter until he was standing right in front of her.

"I'll be all right," she told him. "I just need a couple of aspirin."

He reached out and gently drew her from the chair. "Aspirin first, but then rest. Don't argue."

He turned back the quilt on the bed, sat her down and bent down to tug off her shoes. Then lifted her so she was lying on the cool sheets, plumping pillows behind her head.

"This really isn't necessary," she protested, but the bed felt so comfortable. A bolt of heat stabbed through her as she realized Derek slept on these sheets. That they held his scent.

"Can you sit up?" he asked, holding out a glass of water in one hand and two white tablets in the other.

"Yes, of course." She tossed the pills into her mouth and drank almost the entire glass of water. "I can't lie down here in your bed, Derek."

He pulled the quilt over her, then sat down beside her. "I don't know why not. It's a very nice bed."

"That's not the point." She tried to sit up again but he pushed her gently back against the pillows. "Every minute we waste Hannah is in greater danger. And..." She bit her lower lip.

"And what?"

"It doesn't seem appropriate for me to sleep in your bed."

He cupped her chin in his hand. "First of all, we're not wasting any time. Jesse and Charlie are pulling in information to help us identify which house this is and where it's

located. When we find it, the others and I will...do what we have to do to get inside and save Hannah."

"I know you are shapeshifters, Derek. I told you that. It's why I saw the wolf in my dreams." She clutched at his wrist with both hands. "But the man who has her is evil. I have a very sick feeling about this."

He relaxed slightly at her words. "I promise I'll come get you when we need you. And there's no reason why you shouldn't be in my bed."

When she looked at him she saw the fire in his eyes had leaped to life and was blazing. Amber lights sparked in the dark brown irises and his chiseled face was taut with...passion? Was that what she saw? She had felt the immediate connection between them and she was sure he had too. So what did it mean?

Before she could say anything more, Derek leaned forward and brushed his mouth against hers. A soft touch, nothing more. But then his tongue came out and licked her lips. Need bloomed inside her, stronger than she'd ever felt before. Her breasts felt full, her nipples hard, and the pulse in her cunt beat insistently.

Without even thinking she opened her mouth and his tongue swept inside, licking her inner surfaces. She touched her own small one to his, caught in a familiar dance but now with unfamiliar steps. His male essence was the most powerful she'd ever felt. When one hand brushed across her breasts she couldn't help the moan that rushed from deep in her throat.

She squeezed her legs together at the thought of his cock sliding into her, his mouth on her nipples, his fingers playing with her clit. The tempo of her breathing changed and the pulse beat even more furiously.

Then, as if both struck by the same thought at the same time, they pulled away from each other. She stared into his dark eyes, trying to catch her breath.

"We can't..." she began.

"This isn't..." he started.

She gave a short, breathless laugh. "This isn't the time."

"No, it isn't. I should have more control of myself." He shook his head. "But from the minute I opened the door to you..." His voice trailed off.

"I know," she whispered. "I feel it too."

"Let's find Hannah. Then we can explore this further." He rose and pulled the covers up to her chin. "Rest, Riesa. I promise to wake you the minute we know anything."

* * * * *

Someone had made a fresh pot of coffee and Derek refilled his mug from it before joining Jesse and Charlie at the kitchen table. Jesse was just disconnecting from a call.

"Okay, I think we've got something." He shuffled his notes in front of him. "But we're going to need everyone's help."

"Just point us in the right direction," Derek told him.

"Point *me*." Rand was suddenly beside them. "I have to be the one to get her out of wherever she is."

"We'll all do it," Charlie said. "The last thing we need right now is for someone to be a hot dog and go charging off alone."

"It has to be me," Rand insisted. "I promised to keep her safe and I didn't. I should have covered all my bases but I never..." He stopped and swallowed hard, visibly working to bring himself under control. He looked at Derek. "I have to do this."

"And you will. But in a sensible manner that won't endanger Hannah any further." He gestured to an empty seat. "Sit down and listen while Jesse and Charlie go over everything and then I'll brief the others."

Rand dropped reluctantly into the chair but Derek could almost feel the anger and rage vibrating from his body. And the impatience to be doing something. Lust took many forms in their kind—sex was only one of them. Vengeance and retribution could be just as powerful. He would have to be sure Rand wasn't so driven by the lust for

vengeance that he would act impatiently. Do something that harmed their chances of finding Hannah.

"All right," Jesse began. "We managed to narrow it down to three possible sites, all within a hundred-mile radius of here. We worked on the theory that if the guy who saw Hannah shift in town was back the next day, his base couldn't be far away. These are all pieces of property owned by someone of enormous wealth, someone who stays out of the limelight but who has appeared on both state and national radar before."

"For what?" Rand demanded.

Charlie waved a hand in the air. "Various things. But now we can narrow it even more. The two most likely suspects masterminding this are Frederick Dangler and Rogan Mueller. Both men have dark blue SUVs registered to them with license plates starting with DG. Both of them have game preserves on their estates and the word is they experiment with both animals and humans. Which would explain why a shifter would be such a prize to them."

"Jesus." Rand blew out a breath.

"Right." Jesse took up the narration. "Exactly. Whichever one of them it is, Charlie and I are pretty sure they might be trying to capture shifters to experiment with their blood, their DNA, whatever. Maybe even harvest the eggs from a female and try crossbreeding."

Derek was watching Rand while the deputies were talking. He saw the man's face turn pale and the muscles tighten even more. Rand was riding close to the edge, which meant Derek would have to keep a tight leash on him. Easier said than done.

"What kinds of experiments?" Rand finally got the question out.

"We don't know the exact nature," Jesse told him. "Both of these men are very secretive. But from what I've dug up I'd say they might be trying to alter them genetically, make them faster and more dangerous prey, then charge millions for people to come there and hunt them."

"But shifters are..." Rand began, then stopped. "Never mind. If he knows about them he doesn't care about their humanity. Jesse, we have to get Hannah out there and stop this man, whichever one he is."

"How can we figure out which place it is?" Derek wanted to know. "It's not as if we have a lot of time. God knows what they could be doing to her now."

"We're going to take care of that with some aerial shots. But then we need to get inside. I'm guessing these are heavily guarded compounds. So that's where everyone else comes in." He looked at his watch. "Alexa should be here shortly. She really wants to help."

"And Liane is on her way too," Charlie told them, referring to his wife. She had been a shifter disconnected from everyone, living by herself, until Alexa reached out to her.

"What is it you want us to do, exactly?" Derek asked.

"Exactly?" Jesse's lips turned up in a small grin. "How high can you jump?"

* * * * *

Hannah forced her eyes open, then almost wished she hadn't. Everything around her was fuzzy, her head pounded and she had an overwhelming urge to throw up. She closed her lids, inhaled a deep breath, let it out and opened her eyes again. Better, but not much. She forced herself to lie absolutely still for a few more seconds, then tried once more. She had to know where she was.

This time things weren't quite so fuzzy, the room wasn't spinning and the violent nausea had subsided a little. Moving slowly and carefully, she forced herself into a sitting position and took in her surroundings.

She was lying—well, sitting—on a huge four-poster bed in a bedroom she'd never seen before. Pale blue walls were decorated with a variety of pictures that she somehow had the feeling were more than just Walmart prints. A dresser with a mirror stood

against one wall. Hannah managed to get to her feet and make her way slowly on the thick carpeting. What she saw in the mirror startled her.

Her eyes were wide and dilated, probably part of the reason she couldn't see so well. Beneath them were dark smudges, as if she hadn't slept in a long time. Her face was drawn, the skin so pale she wondered if she'd somehow lost most of her blood. Her stomach was still doing flip-flops but with an effort of will she was keeping it under control.

She spotted a door in the wall to the left and tried to open it.

Locked!

Not a good sign.

She pounded on it with her fists, trying not to panic.

"Hello? Anyone out there? Can you hear me? Hello?"

But after five minutes she gave up and looked around the room again. Where was she? There were no windows in the room, so she couldn't see outside. Couldn't use any point of reference to get her bearings. Okay, how had she gotten here? To this strange bedroom in whatever place she was?

Then it came crashing back with gut-wrenching intensity. She remembered the two men outside Rand's house. The pinprick of the hypodermic needle. The sack she'd been stuffed into. The long, bumpy car ride. And finally the enormous estate and the huge, ugly man who had greeted her. They'd found her, the man who'd seen her at the convenience store and whoever he worked for. Not only had she been idiotic enough to shift in public, she'd also deliberately disobeyed Rand's instruction to stay inside and wait for him. After all, what could happen in just a few minutes?

Unfortunately she'd found out the hard way. Now, after a second dose of whatever they were giving her, she was a prisoner in this place, wondering what kind of plans these people had for her. She'd heard horror stories about what happened to shifters who were captured. She wasn't sure if she wanted to remember them or ignore them.

Rand!

Just the thought of him made her body shiver with the memory of the things they'd done. Her panties dampened and her nipples became almost painfully hard. He wanted her as his mate. The connection was there. She felt it and so did he. He'd told her that.

Mine! he'd said, and she felt as if she'd come home. Rand would find her. Maybe she could reach out to him mentally. Somehow. Send him a message. She knew shifters had extraordinary psychic powers but those were usually connected to their acute senses. Of course, it couldn't hurt to try.

She lay back down on the bed and closed her eyes, trying to make herself as calm as possible. But before she could try to focus her mind, she heard a key in the lock, the door opened, and the ugly man—Mueller, he'd said his name was—entered followed by two other men she'd never seen before. One of them carried a lab kit with him.

Hannah curled her hands into fists and dug her nails into her palms, trying to beat back the fear that swept through her. Whatever Mueller had in mind for her, it wasn't going to be anything good.

"Ah, Miss Raines." His voice was just as abrasive as she remembered from her arrival. "I'm glad to see you're awake."

"What am I doing here? I demand that you let me out of here. I want to go home."

Mueller chuckled, a sound that made her think of gargoyles. "Still spirited, I see. Good, good. So much the better."

"Why am I here? What do you want with me?"

"You are going to be my star," he told her. "The diamond in my crown." He motioned for the two men to move forward. "I will provide for you, take care of all your needs. My chef will prepare your meals. The bathroom is through that door." He pointed toward one wall.

"I want you to let me go." She tried not to show how terrified she was.

Mueller ignored her, simply gesturing to the man behind him. "George is going to draw some blood from you. A simple procedure if you do not fight him. Once we have the results of those tests we will proceed from there."

"For what?" she cried, the fear building inside her. "What are you going to do with me?"

He chuckled again. "Why, Miss Raines, I'm going to make you a star in my private preserve."

Hannah struggled as George attempted to wrap an elastic band around her arm to draw the blood. But the other man was at the bed instantly, holding her down with his big hands.

"I don't want to hit you, Miss Raines," he said in a flat voice, "but since we can't give you any more of the drug that's what I'm going to do if you don't stay quiet and cooperate."

Tears gathered in Hannah's eyes and rolled down her cheeks as she forced herself to lie quietly.

Oh, Rand. Wherever you are, please hurry.

Chapter Five

Riesa came awake to someone sitting on the edge of the bed and gently shaking her shoulder.

"Wake up, sleepyhead." Derek's warm voice.

"I'm awake." She sat up quickly, brushing her long hair back from her face. "Did you find out anything? Do you know who has Hannah?"

He stroked her cheek, his fingers warm and gentle. "Yes, thanks to you. At least we've narrowed it down to two places."

"But...that's not good enough, is it?" Anxiety clutched at her. The inner signals she'd learned to listen to were telling her there was a great urgency here.

"We have a plan," he told her. "We've zeroed in on the two most likely possibilities. Charlie's still trying to get a match on the tire tracks we found. They're the kind that are pretty standard on SUVs and both men have them in their fleet. Until then we have to assume it could be either one. There are enough of us to divide into two groups so Jesse will take one, Charlie the other. They'll be our communications team."

Again she tried to get out of bed and again Derek gently held her in place. "You don't need to get up yet. We can't move until dark."

Quickly he outlined the plan they'd come up with.

"I want to go with you," she insisted. "Please. Don't leave me here by myself. I won't rest until I see that Hannah's safe."

"I won't be able to protect you. It's not safe."

"I'll stay with Jesse or Charlie. I promise. Please, Derek. I have to go."

He stared at her for a long moment, his dark eyes smoldering, the amber highlights dancing like tiny flames. "All right. But you stay strictly in the vehicle, understood?"

She nodded. "Understood. And thank you. I'm desperate to see her safely back home."

"I know that." He cupped her chin in his warm hand, his gaze still holding hers.

Riesa held her breath as he bent his head toward her. Then his mouth was touching hers, his lips smooth as silk. That's all it was, just a brush, but again need rushed through her as if he'd lit a torch inside her. The situation they were in dictated that she break away but there was no way she could do that. Not just her dreams had brought her to Derek Sawyer's door, but an invisible thread that bound them as strongly as if made of steel.

When he raised his head she wanted to scream, *No! Don't stop! Come back!*

But Derek didn't seem to be in a rush to move away. He still held her chin in the palm of his hand and the look in his eyes said getting up was the last thing on his mind.

"This is very fast, Riesa." His voice was intense, riveting. "Before this morning I didn't even know you existed. Now I'm not sure I can let you walk away."

"I know," she whispered. "I feel the same way."

"We have some time before dark. The others have gone back to their homes to prepare and will gather here again when it's time. We're alone, Riesa, and I want to fuck you more than I've ever wanted anything in my life. I want to join with you. Feel my cock inside you."

"But..."

"I need this, Riesa. I don't know what will happen tonight and I need the strength I know you can give me. I want you, now."

She let out a slow breath. "All right. I want this too."

"Let me," he said, when she began to tug her blouse over her head.

His fingers grasped the edges of the fabric, drew it up slowly, revealing her breasts heavy in the delicate lace and satin she wore. The fire in his irises flared even hotter as he took in every inch of her breasts. Tossing the blouse to the side, he bent his head and

through the flimsy fabric drew first one then the other nipple into his mouth. The wet heat shot through her like a thunderbolt, electrifying her body. She threaded her fingers through his thick hair, letting the strands fall against her like heavy silk.

His hands traveled up her side, caressing her ribs until he reached her breasts and cupped her with a strong, sure touch. When he lifted his mouth he pinched each nipple between thumb and forefinger, then scraped a fingernail across the pointed surfaces. Moisture flooded her already damp panties and she arched into his touch.

She barely noticed when his hands reached around to unfasten the hooks of her bra but in the next minute she felt cool air on her naked breasts and her throbbing nipples. Derek cupped her flesh and kissed first one nipple, then the other. With each touch of his mouth, each flick of his tongue, heat arched straight from her nipples to her pussy, flooding her with a degree of lust she'd never felt before.

"Beautiful," he whispered. "Such beautiful breasts. I could spend all night just licking them, nibbling on them and sucking them into my mouth."

Riesa caught her breath. His words sent shivers skittering along her spine and she clutched his head tighter.

His hands moved along her body, incredibly gentle but at the same time demanding. He tossed back the covers and in a fluid motion dispensed with her skirt and her panties. As he pushed the fabric away his fingers did a feathery tap dance on her skin along her thighs and calves. She wondered if it was possible for legs to be considered an erogenous zone.

With her clothing out of the way, he eased her back onto the pillows and moved up to kneel between her legs. Bending her knees to expose her more completely to him, he blew gently on her drenched pussy. Her inner muscles quivered in response. His fingers tenderly opened her outer lips and he blew a warm stream of breath again, this time directly into her hungry vagina.

Oh, god! Why was he taking so long? She'd been ready for him the minute he opened the door.

As if sensing her hunger, Derek chuckled softly.

"I want to take my time. Enjoy this. You're much more than a quick fuck, Riesa, despite the fact that we just met." He raised his eyes to hers. "You feel it too, don't you?"

"Yes." She could barely speak. His fingers were doing wicked things to her wet flesh and her swollen clit. "Yes, I did. I do."

He licked the length of her slit, one long, slow glide, then repeated the motion. And again. Until Riesa wanted to scream. She pressed her thighs against his head, trying to hold him in position. Her hips lifted to him, trying to increase the pressure but Derek wanted only to tease and torment. The slow strokes were measured in tempo and drew a line from her clit almost to her anus and back up again.

Riesa was squirming, little mewling sounds climbing up from her throat. One lean finger slid into her waiting cunt then withdrew, rubbing down, down until it reached her puckered hole. The tip of it pressed against her. Then a little more. Then farther until it was past the tight ring of muscle and into that hot, dark tunnel.

She wrapped her legs around his neck and pulled her buttocks up from the mattress. More, she wanted to tell him. Deeper. Harder. But she was already beyond words and Derek still had his clothes on.

As the finger began to move inside her, he plunged his tongue into her cunt, keeping the rhythm of tongue and finger in cadence, coaxing her into a dark whirlpool of carnal heat. The muscles low in her belly tightened, signaling the gathering of her body for release.

"More! Faster!" she cried silently.

But Derek was relentless. Now she truly understood what it meant to be "taken" by someone.

One of his hands pressed against the top of her mound, his thumb brushing her clit. The other continued its plunder of her ass. And his tongue worked wicked magic inside her.

Now! Now! Now!

And then she was there, shuddering all over, spasms rocketing through her as the orgasm roared through her in waves. She poured into his mouth like an overflowing vessel, his tongue lapping up every bit of her juices, his finger never stopping its predatory foray into her rectum.

When the climax finally spun itself out she lay back, panting and sweaty, feeling as if her entire body had been turned inside out. Her muscles felt like spent elastic, her bones liquid. When she opened her eyes Derek was leaning over her and grinning at her.

"You're a treasure," he told her. "A hot one."

He brushed his lips against hers and she could taste her own essence.

Her hands slid over his shoulder, feeling the powerful muscles beneath the soft material of his t-shirt. She reached down and yanked the fabric from the waistband of his jeans, desperate to feel his skin beneath her fingers.

"You want me as naked as you are, don't you?" he murmured against her lips.

"Yes. Now. Please."

He swept his tongue over her lips before rising to his knees and ripping his shirt over his head. His chest rippled with hard muscles and dark hair dusted it like a fine pelt. Riesa reached up and rubbed her fingertips over his nipples, drawing a long, hissing breath from him. He circled her wrists with his fingers and drew them down.

"Let me get the rest of me uncovered."

He swung lithely off the bed with all the grace of a jungle animal, shucked his pants and boxers and was back at once looming over her.

"There's so much I want to do to you." His voice was low and husky. "Do with you. But we have limited time and I have to be inside you before I lose my mind." His dark eyes fixed her with a penetrating stare. "But when this is over, don't think you'll be leaving here any time soon."

He reached into the drawer of the nightstand, drew out a condom, deftly ripped it from the foil package and rolled it onto his thick, swollen cock. Placing his hands beneath Riesa's thighs, he lifted them so her legs were draped over his shoulders. He positioned himself at the entrance to her swollen and very wet cunt and with one roll of his hips seated himself deep inside her.

"Jesus," he breathed. "You're so damn tight. I don't want to hurt you."

"You won't, you won't," she assured him, frantic with the need to keep him inside her.

He braced himself on both hands, locked his gaze onto hers and began to move in hard, steady strokes. In and out. In and out. Fire bloomed inside her, spreading everywhere. She locked her ankles behind his neck and moved in rhythm with him. His cock swelled even more inside her pussy, stretching and filling her until she felt him in every inch of her body.

They moved together as if they'd done this forever, riding the same wave of erotic pleasure. Despite the climax that had nearly wrung her out, a second climax was building rapidly, pushed by the insistent throbbing of the pulse in her womb and the clenching of her vaginal muscles.

"Look at me," Derek commanded.

Riesa opened her eyes and found his staring intently at her.

"Keep your eyes open," he commanded "Don't close them or look away. Look into my soul, Riesa. See my need for you there."

The orgasm hit them at the same time, grabbing them and tossing them into a whirlpool of sensation. Shaking them. Whipping them with its frenzy. The spasms went on and on as Derek's cock pulsed inside her and her muscles gripped him like a fist. She lost all sense of where she was, of anything except this man who took her to a plane of pleasure higher than one she'd ever reached before. She never wanted it to end, this burst after burst of incredible sensation. Her body belonged to him. She did not question it.

At last he reached for her ankles and eased her legs back onto the bed. He collapsed forward, catching himself on his forearms as he drew in huge ragged breaths. Riesa was sure her heart would pound itself out of her chest.

When their breathing had returned to something resembling normal Derek slid carefully from her body, rolled from the bed and strode into the bathroom. Riesa heard the sound of water running, then he was back sliding in beside her, pulling her into his arms so her head was nestled on his shoulder.

"More," he told her. "I want much more. I want to fuck you until you're senseless. Until you admit that no other man can ever satisfy you the way I do. Until you don't want any other man."

She could have told him that now but she just wanted to cuddle in the warmth of his arms, inhale his scent and revel in what had just happened.

"We should get dressed," she reminded him. "I feel guilty having so much pleasure when we don't even know what's happening to Hannah."

"We can't do anything until dark," he reminded her. "And Hannah is very special to me. Getting her back is my first priority. But I needed this too. Riesa. *We* needed it. So we can move ahead tonight with this bond between us. It will give us strength."

Riesa frowned, a knot forming in her stomach. "Hannah's special to you?"

He bent over her and smoothed his hand over her face. "As a person, not as a lover. Or a mate. We have a connection but not a bond. Not what you and I have." He kissed her, just a light touch of mouth to mouth. "I've been waiting for you. I just didn't know it until you showed up at my door."

The knot unraveled and she breathed more easily. "All right."

"We have one more thing to get out of the way," he said, rolling from the bed again. "Then we should shower and dress."

"What is it?" She frowned, puzzled.

"This."

He stood next to the bed, eyes closed. Riesa felt a shifting in the air and then suddenly a large wolf stood beside the bed. His pelt was a rich cinnamon color with gray and black shading along the back and tail. He looked at her with Derek's eyes, now more amber than dark brown, moved his snout to her leg and licked the skin with his rough tongue.

Riesa felt no fear. She reached out a hand to run her fingers through the thick hair on his head.

"Magnificent," she said, her voice filled with wonderment. "Absolutely glorious."

He licked her leg again then backed away, the air shifted and Derek was back in all his naked beauty.

"You didn't freak," he commented.

"Why should I? We each have our special abilities. Mine is of the mind, yours of the body."

His mouth curved in a slow, heated smile. "All the more reason we belong together. That's why you were sent here, Riesa. Not just to save Hannah but to mate with me." He held out a hand to her. "Come. Let's shower and dress. We have work to do."

* * * * *

They were all gathered in Derek's living room again—the pack, Jesse, Charlie and Riesa. It was after six o'clock, full dark on this February night, although being Florida the weather was still warm. Rand was grateful for both the darkness and the weather. It would increase their chances of a stealthy approach and success in their mission.

He had been on edge all afternoon, waiting for information, waiting for time to pass, waiting for it all to come together. Trying not to think of what Hannah might be going through. He'd used up a good deal of the time surfing the internet for information on Rogan Mueller and Frederick Dangler. Nothing that he found was good. Both men kept well out of the limelight, burying their activities in a multitude of shell

corporations. Both had made their initial fortunes in pharmaceuticals and both had reputations for being completely cold-blooded and ruthless.

Rand's blood ran cold as he read the articles, his mind conjuring all manner of horrific things being done to Hannah. *His* Hannah. By the time everyone had returned he was ready to rip someone's head off.

"Okay, everyone listen up." Charlie was standing in the doorway to the kitchen, his little notebook in one hand, the other hand raised for attention. "We finally got information on the tire tracks but it won't help us unless we find the actual vehicle. However, we got the people in the weather helicopter to do us a favor. They owed me one. Now we've got aerial shots of both the Dangler and Mueller properties."

"And?" Rand's patience had long ago run out.

"It's definitely Mueller. I've got the photos right here. If we can crowd around the dining room table I'll lay it all out for everyone. Then we'll get going."

* * * * *

About an hour after the lab tech had drawn her blood, another man arrived in Hannah's room carrying a tray with food on it. He looked to be in his thirties, his muscular body dressed in a polo shirt and jeans. He gave her an impersonal smile as he set the tray down on the desk.

"I'm not eating anything you give me," she insisted. "It's bad enough you all are keeping me here. I can't take a chance on drugged food."

"I assure you the food is fine," the man told her. "Would you like to watch me taste it?"

"No. I don't care. Anyway, you could be choosing where and how you take your samples." She dredged up what strength she had left, crossed her arms over her chest and lifted her chin defiantly. "Just take the tray away."

"Mr. Mueller will be very upset if you don't eat," he pointed out.

"You tell Mr. Mueller for me he can go straight to hell. If you're going to kill me, go ahead and do it. Otherwise get out of my room."

Hannah was surprising even herself. She'd never been one to be aggressive or outgoing. But Derek had led her out of the shadows and Rand claiming her as his mate had given her personality a new edge to it.

The man lifted his hands and held them up, palms outward. "Okay. Eat or not. It's your funeral. But I'm leaving the tray here and I'll report your refusal to the boss."

He closed the door quietly behind him and locked it from the other side.

Hannah had been battling a cold fear ever since they'd taken her blood. She had no idea what Mueller was up to, but she knew it couldn't be anything good. Many people dismissed shapeshifters as nothing more than the stuff of legends. Others wanted to take them apart to see what made them tick and crossbreed them with other species. She had a sick feeling that Rogan Mueller fell into the latter category.

Rand! Where are you? I need you.

She'd been aware since childhood she had some limited psychic ability but she'd never developed it. And she'd been too shy to ask anyone about it. But now maybe it could be the one thing that would help her, if she could make it work. Leaning back against the pillows on the bed, she closed her eyes and summoned up everything she'd seen about this place. Then she called up a picture of Rand and tried to meld the two.

Before she could tell whether she'd been successful, the door opened again and Rogan Mueller walked into the room. Just looking at him made her skin crawl. His lips were twisted in a smile that was more grotesque than anything, and his eyes were still as cold and fathomless as before.

"Well, Hannah, I see you are rejecting our amenities here." He gestured toward the tray. "It's important for you to eat. To keep up your strength. To stay healthy."

"I'm already healthy." She slid across the bed, farther away from him. "I'm not interested in your so-called amenities. What is it you want with me?"

"You'll see very soon. In the meantime I urge you to eat. I'd hate to have to force-feed you through a tube. It wouldn't help matters any."

"Matters?" she tried to keep the desperation out of her voice. "What matters?"

"Just eat. I'll be back in one hour. I assure you this is much more pleasant than the alternatives."

He turned and was gone, locking the door.

Hannah pulled up her knees and rested her forehead on them, beating back the terrible dread creeping over her and squeezing her eyelids shut against the tears that threatened to spill out. Crying wouldn't do her any good. And maybe she should eat the food. She agreed she needed to keep up her strength but for her own personal agenda, not Mueller's. She wouldn't be able to fight back when she needed to if she was too weak.

Rubbing her eyes with the heels of her hand, she eased herself off the bed and walked over to the desk where the tray sat.

Rand! Hurry! I need you. I'm so afraid.

* * * * *

Rand was just listening to the last of Jesse's briefing when a sharp pain stabbed his head. He pressed his fingers to his temples and swallowed hard, trying to ease the throbbing that exploded so suddenly. What the hell? He never got headaches. Not even today's stress and tension would have brought one on, so what was happening to him?

Rand! Hurry! I'm afraid.

Was that Hannah's voice piercing his brain? He'd heard of other shifters who connected psychically with their mates once they'd bonded. Even though he and Hannah had not mated in wolf form would this still work? Was that what was happening?

He tried to expand his mind, but before he could actually reach her the voice was gone. The connection dissolved into the air. Had he just imagined it?

"Rand?"

Derek's voice broke his concentration.

"Yes?" He mentally shook himself. "Are we ready?"

Jesse nodded. "Everyone's here."

Alexa Farrell and Liane Aquino stood next to their husbands. Rand hadn't seen them arrive but he was very glad for their presence. They could use all the help they could get. Besides, both women were more familiar with that section of Florida than anyone else in the pack.

"So we're heading for Mueller's."

"Right now. You all studied the outside security system plans?"

There was a murmuring of voices.

Rand didn't know how he'd done it, nor was he sure he wanted to know, but Jesse had managed to get diagrams of the locations of the sensors on the security system.

"Alexa and Liane brought the panel vans with no windows," Jesse went on, "so let's load up. I've already got the address programmed into the GPS." He looked at the faces of the crowd, studying each one in turn. "This is going to be very dangerous. You all have to know that."

"We live in danger, Jesse," one of the men spoke up. "Hannah is one of us. We can't turn our backs on her not matter what."

"Then let's do it. Just remember once you're out of the van and over the wall there isn't a lot I can do to help you or back you up."

"Understood," Derek said. "We're all agreed on this."

"Let's get moving," Rand prompted, barely able to hang on to his control.

As they were loading into the vans, Rand pulled Riesa aside.

"I have to ask you something." At the look of anxiety in her eyes he hurriedly said, "No, not anything bad. I completely believe you and how you came to be here. That's what I want to know about."

"Rand, I can't explain it," she began.

He shook his head. "Not that. I swear when we were inside I heard Hannah's voice in my head."

Her expression lightened then became thoughtful. "That's possible, even if you haven't communicated that way before. I've studied a lot about shifters and I know you all have built-in psychic abilities of one kind or another."

"What I want to know," he told her, "is if you can reach out to someone instead of just waiting to have the images in your dreams. Have you ever done that?"

"Rarely. It depends on the circumstance. Did you want me to try to contact Hannah?"

"If you can. Tell her we're on our way."

She gave him a tiny smile. "I don't promise anything but I'll do my best."

"Thank you. That's all I can ask." He gave her hand a quick squeeze before climbing into the van.

The panel doors were closed on both vehicles, the drivers rolled up the tinted windows, and Rand saw Jesse pick up a comm unit.

"Ready to roll, Charlie," he said in a low voice.

Silently the two vehicles moved out of the cul-de-sac and headed toward the highway.

* * * * *

Mueller stood before her, holding out what looked like a fancy hospital gown.

"I want you to shower," he told. "Clean every part of your body carefully. It's very important. You'll find everything you need in the shower. Don't make me subject you to inspection to make sure you followed my orders."

"Inspection?" She could hardly get the word out. Inside she was shaking so badly she was thankful she was sitting down. Cold fear spread through her body.

Mueller nodded, then looked at his watch. "You have one hour. We have some further tests to perform and I want to get started as quickly as possible. I've lost enough time as it is."

He tossed the gown at Hannah and she clutched it to her body.

"What...what kind of...tests?"

"Valuable ones." With no further explanation he turned and left the room, once again locking her in.

Oh, god, what is he going to do to me? I'd rather kill myself than subject myself to whatever he has in mind.

Fat tears rolled down her cheeks as she huddled on the bed.

Hannah?

She jerked her head up. Was that a woman's voice? But where was it coming from? She looked frantically around the room. Was this another one of Mueller's tricks?

Hannah, I'm here. In your head.

Hannah shook her head. Surely she was hallucinating. She might be able to communicate with Rand because of their bond, but a stranger?

My name is Riesa. I dreamed about your capture. I'm with Derek...and Rand. We're coming for you.

Coming for her? Really? Her heartbeat stuttered with hope.

You probably can't answer me. We don't have that connection. But I need you to memorize everything you see and keep those images in your head.

But her head hurt unbelievably. Every word of each message pounded into her like a sharp spike. She clutched at her temples, trying to ease the pressure.

I know it hurts. Just do your best. A pause. Rand is right here and says he loves you.

He loved her? Hannah knew they were destined mates but to have love also? A gift to cherish. For him she could stay strong. Or give it her best shot. Forcing her eyes open, she took in every inch of the room again, trying to send telepathic pictures. Was it

possible that Rand and Derek and the others could get here in time, before Mueller performed whatever horrific tests he had in mind?

She had no watch so she had no idea what time it was. The lack of windows made it impossible to tell if it was day or night outside. Okay. She'd take her shower, using every bit of time allotted to her. Then she'd do her best to drag her feet at whatever came next. She just didn't want them to drug her again. She'd need all her wits about her to get through this and help Rand find her.

Chapter Six

The vans sped through the night, Jesse and Charlie pushing every speed limit. When they reached the appropriate exit from the interstate they flew down the exit ramp and turned onto the two-lane highway that intersected with it. Everyone was silent as Jesse and Charlie followed the directions from the GPS along the twists and turns of the road, climbing up and down the few hills that dotted Central Florida.

"Five minutes out," Jesse told his passengers and picked up his comm unit to talk to Charlie.

Rand stirred restlessly. Riesa had relayed through the comm unit she had connected with Hannah and was trying to read the pictures in her mind. The images were wavering, she told him but she got bits and pieces.

"They had her in a large bedroom with no windows," she related. "Then two men took her up in an elevator to a really weird-looking type of laboratory."

"What are they doing to her?" Rand asked, holding the unit close to his mouth. A murderous rage was building inside him. He couldn't wait to let his wolf loose and rip someone's throat out.

"Right now she's lying on something that looks like a hospital bed. One of the men who brought her there—a huge man, incredible ugly—is talking to two others. Rand, she's very frightened."

"I know, I know. Try to send her a message that we're almost there."

A moment later her voice came back, very tense. "I tried but I've lost the connection. I don't know what's happening anymore."

Rand pounded his fist on his knee. The erotic lust he now felt almost nonstop for Hannah had turned to a murderous one, driving him to punish the men who'd taken her. "Jesse, how much longer?"

"One minute... No, we're there."

They rounded a curve in the hill and there it was, at the top of a steep driveway, a mammoth stone monstrosity that was a testament to the man's huge fortune and very bad taste. A gated stone wall eight feet high circled the property, its top layered with rolls of concertina barbed wire.

"Shit." Jesse spoke into the community. "You getting a look at this, Charlie? Uh-huh. Uh-huh. Okay." He turned to look at his passengers. "The wall, with the wire, is barely under ten feet. If you don't clear it you could rip yourselves to shreds."

"If we don't go over it," Rand told him, "Mueller could perform experiments on Hannah that could not only kill her but probably the rest of us if he got hold of us."

"Charlie got the same answer. Okay, we're moving up the road. Everyone get ready."

Mindful of the fact that there would be cameras posted in an estate so heavily guarded and protected, they moved the vans away from the entrance to the estate and parked them in a small copse of very old magnolia trees. Parking so they were well out of sight of the house, they concealed the vans behind the thickest of the trees. Panel doors slid open noiselessly and the men and women stepped out onto the ground. With a total lack of self-consciousness they each removed their clothing, folding it into piles and placing the piles in the vans.

"Ready?" Derek asked, looking at each person in turn.

Everyone nodded.

"Remember to time your attacks on the guards. According to Jesse's information, they should be making their rounds any minute now in this area. Be ready."

The air stirred and shimmered as everyone shifted from human to wolf form. Most of them had the cinnamon pelt of the red wolf, but both Alexa and Liane were silver-gray. Riesa had climbed out of the lead van and was watching them with open-mouthed amazement.

Rand wondered if Derek had warned her or not, then realized he must have because she showed no fear at all. He watched Derek walk up to her and rub his head against her. She ran her fingers down his head and neck before holding out her hand for him to lick.

Come on! Rand tried to signal his friend. *We're losing time.*

We need to wait for the guards, Derek reminded him.

Jesse and Charlie were down in a crouched position, listening for movement behind the wall, but the wolves, with their acute sense of hearing, heard the rumble of the supercharged golf cart first. Everyone lay down, waiting until the vehicle had passed. Derek rose and signaled them and they moved forward.

Spreading out in a long line, they each gathered their strength, made a running leap at the wall and soared over it, each of them clearing it by at least six inches. Rand watched Derek looking at each wolf who landed and knew he was counting heads. Satisfied that everyone had made it safely, he loped forward, leading them up the hill toward the side of the house.

As prearranged, three of the pack broke off to seek the guards and put them out of commission. The rest of them gathered with Derek and Rand, picked their way carefully up the slope of the lawn and hurled themselves through the glass of the patio doors. Rand had worried the house might have bulletproof glass, but apparently Mueller was arrogant enough to believe his security system was enough.

The moment they broke through the interior alarms went off and two men with guns came running into the room. Two of the pack made short work of them, leaping on them and crushing their necks with powerful jaws. The pack did not believe in killing indiscriminately but people like this were considered lower than vermin.

They spread out, looking for others on that floor, found only one and took care of him. Then they soundlessly padded up the stairs to the second floor. Every door was open and led into rooms currently empty. Derek led them up the next flight. When they

reached the top they heard someone—probably Mueller—screaming, “What’s going on? What the hell is happening? Will someone give me a fucking answer?”

Alarm bells were ringing everywhere but the wolves plodded ahead, following the sound of the voice.

“Where the fuck is everyone?” Mueller screamed. “Where the fuck are the guards? George, see what the hell is going on out there. And lock the goddamn door behind you. Get me a gun.”

The moment the door opened even a small amount, the wolves leaped, throwing their combined weight against it. It flew open wider, knocking down the man who’d been opening it. Mueller was on the floor, staring at them, scrabbling backward using his elbows as levers.

“Don’t shoot them!” he hollered. “Don’t fucking shoot them. I need to capture them.”

The room appeared to be a state-of-the-art laboratory. Rand cast his eyes around and saw Hannah, stark naked, strapped to a hospital bed against one wall. The rage that welled up in him was uncontrollable. Before Derek could stop him he leaped for Mueller and clamped his jaws on the man’s throat. Blood spurted in a heavy spray. Mueller gave one gurgling death rattle and died, his eyes wide with fear.

More guards rushed into the room, guns out, but at the sight of the body on the floor and the pack of wolves in the lab, they turned and ran down the stairs. In moments the slamming of the front door echoed through the house.

Rand shifted into human form and went at once to Hannah, releasing her bonds and lifting her into his arms.

“Little wolf.” He buried his face in her neck. “I thought I’d lost you.”

She wound her arms around his neck. “I knew you’d come for me. Riesa sent me a message that you love me.”

He raised his head, eyes still suspiciously damp. "I do. I know we've only been together since yesterday but I've known you forever. And I've been waiting for you all my life."

Derek had moved to his side and now growled at him. Rand knew what that meant. Get the hell out of there. Lifting Hannah in his arms, he raced down two flights of stairs, the pack close on his heels. They started down the driveway but apparently the fleeing men had closed the gate after themselves.

"Can you shift and jump?" he asked Hannah. "We have to clear a fence. We don't have the time to search for the code for the gate."

"I can do it if you're with me," she told him.

He gave her a brief but hard kiss, then set her on her feet. In seconds they had both shifted again and followed the others down the lawn. Rand was worried that Hannah might not have the strength for the jump but she went soaring in the air right next to him, landing on all fours in the roadway.

"Come on," Jesse shouted. "We need to clear out of here so I can call the sheriff."

Not even stopping to shift, they piled into the vans. Jesse and Charlie slammed the panel doors and in seconds they were screeching down the road.

* * * * *

Jesse snapped his cell phone shut and clipped it back into the holster on his belt. Everyone watched him carefully, Rand and Derek most of all. They knew the deputy had just finished a conversation with his boss who'd dispatched teams to clean up the mess at Rogan Mueller's.

"Well?" Derek asked at last.

"Funny thing." His mouth turned up at one corner. "Sheriff says he doesn't know how they got in there but he thinks the same pack of wolves who attacked the gang that nearly killed Charlie and me a few months ago is the same one who attacked Mueller and his men."

Everyone remembered all too clearly when Jesse and Charlie, members of the sheriff's gang task force, would have been killed by the gang they were trying to neutralize if Alexa hadn't found the pack living in an abandoned orange grove and convinced them to help her. Their living arrangements were her payback for that.

Derek chuckled. "Imagine that. Did he have any explanation?"

"Seems they found a huge unlicensed game preserve about two miles away from the house. Lots of illegally imported animals and a lot of them looked as if they'd been genetically altered. And not in a good way."

"That's what Mueller wanted me for." It was the first time Hannah had said much of anything since they returned to Derek's. "He explained to me in very arrogant terms how he was going to harvest my eggs, cross them with sperm from animals like jaguars and pumas, then implant them back in my body with genetic enhancements."

Alexa had a horrified look on her face. "And they expected you to actually give birth to those monstrosities?"

"In my wolf form." She shivered. "The man was crazy."

Rand clasped her hand tighter, he hadn't let go of her since they'd returned from Mueller's.

"The sheriff's confiscated all the records in the house," Jesse went on. "He's been in contact with the feds who are getting warrants for all the businesses we found information on, especially the pharmaceuticals company."

The two deputies brought everyone up to date on other important details, then both rose.

"You guys need to get some rest and we need to get out of your hair," Jesse said.

Everyone else stood and shook hands with them.

"Thanks again," Derek said, ushering the men and their wives to the front door.

"Hey, we've got an interest in this too," Charlie pointed out and hugged his wife close to him.

Rand and Hannah were the last to leave.

"Thank you," she told Derek, hugging him around the waist. "I thought for sure my life was over."

He smiled down at her. "I think Rand would have torn *my* throat out if I hadn't made this happen. You're an intrinsic part of this pack, Hannah. We don't abandon our own."

She gave him another quick squeeze before Rand reached for her and tugged her back to him.

"We'd love to stay and chat," he said, "but we have more important things to do."

Hannah blushed as Derek grinned knowingly, then laughed as Rand pulled her out the door.

When he'd locked the door he turned to Riesa, taking both of her hands in his.

"The choice now is yours," he told her. "We can have this last night together or you can stay and we can build a life together. I want you, Riesa. And for more than just a few hours."

"Oh, Derek, I want you too."

"I know you have a life elsewhere..."

"Nothing I can't rearrange," she assured him. "I don't want to leave you. Ever."

He swung her up in his arms. "Then let's go and celebrate."

* * * * *

Rand turned on the shower and undressed Hannah while the water heated. He kissed every inch of skin as he exposed it, as if his mouth could wash away the touch of Rogan Mueller and his men. She trembled beneath his touch and once again he cursed the men who tried to take her from him.

"I promise I'll never do anything risky again," she told him in a soft voice. "I'm a lot smarter than I was two days ago."

"It's all right, little wolf. I trust you to do the smart thing. I think this has been a good lesson to all of us, that danger lurks everywhere out there and we always have to be vigilant."

He'd brought jeans and a t-shirt for her to Mueller's. Now he lifted the shirt over her head, growling low in his throat as she raised her arms, arching her breasts upward to him. He bent his head and captured one rosy nipple in his mouth, sucking hard on it and nipping it lightly with his teeth. Hannah pushed harder against him and he flicked his tongue against the taut nipple. Her fingers slid into his hair, massaging his scalp and holding his head close to her.

When he was satisfied he'd given the one nipple the proper treatment he turned to the other and repeated the process. Still holding the nipple in his mouth, his hands moved down her rib cage to the snap on the waistband of her jeans, opening it and lowering the zipper. Releasing her nipple, he shoved her jeans down her slim legs. They pooled at her feet and she quickly stepped out of them. His fingers traced a path back up her legs before tangling gently in the curls on her pubic mound.

Now that the lust he'd repressed for her all these years had been let out of the box he couldn't get enough of her. He wanted to taste and touch every inch of her. His cock was so hard he could pound nails with it and his balls ached with a fierce pain. But tonight they would mate as wolves and then they would be bound together forever. He had to restrain himself at the same time he made sure she was properly readied and prepared.

He quickly shucked his own clothes and tossed them aside. Picking her up, he carried her into the shower, stood her on the corner bench and parted her legs.

"I have to taste you." He barely recognized his own voice. "I have to feel my tongue inside you. Grab my shoulders, Hannah, Hold on tight."

He knelt beneath the stream of water, opened the lips of her cunt and stroked the pink swollen flesh with his tongue. God, just the barest taste of her honey and he was

ready to come. He wanted to fuck her with his mouth, his fingers, his cock. To fill every opening of her body.

But he had to curb his impatience. Despite the long day and evening they'd had he knew better than to rush this. For her first mating as a wolf, Hannah had to be fully aroused and able to take his cock, which in that form would be even larger and harder.

He lapped at her steadily, hands on her hips holding her in place. She gripped his shoulders, balancing herself, tiny little cries slipping from her throat. Her hips moved back and forth as she urged him to move his tongue harder and faster.

Oh, god, she tasted like pure heaven. Better than the finest wine he'd ever had. How had he managed to keep himself from her all this time?

When the movement of her hips became more insistent he slid two fingers inside her, thrusting them in and out in a steady rhythm. Her cries grew louder and inside her tight little pussy the muscles quivered and flexed. But when he felt the first signs of her orgasm he withdrew, wringing a cry of protest from her.

Pouring shower gel into his hands, he worked up a lather and spread it lovingly over her body, massaging it into her shoulders and arms, the hollow at her throat where her pulse now beat harder, her breasts and nipples, taking particular care to lightly pinch the hard peaks. His hands moved over her stomach, down her thighs and legs, then up the inside of her thighs.

"Oh, please, Rand," she begged. "I want you inside me. I want to come with you."

"Soon enough, little wolf. Be patient."

"Noooo," she wailed. "I need you now."

He ignored her pleas, instead turning her around and soaping her back and legs, and finally her buttocks. He parted the round cheeks and stared at the tight brown hole winking at him. Last night he'd felt it. Now the sight of it almost made him come where he knelt. He'd fucked many females in his life, but none had ever turned him on the way Hannah did. He knew he had to be inside her soon or lose it altogether, but he gritted his teeth and called on every bit of his self-control.

Lathering his hand, he slipped a finger into her rectum and let her adjust to it. Wriggling to test her receptiveness, he added a second finger and scissored them back and forth.

"Oh, god," she cried, and braced herself against the tile walls.

In seconds she was shivering and shaking as her orgasm crashed around her. Using his other hand, Rand pushed three fingers into her cunt and fucked her in cadence with the rhythm in her ass. She rocked back and forth, impaling herself first on one hand, then the other. Rand bit down on his lip so hard he drew blood, but he was determined to save himself for the forest.

He didn't wait for her to stop shuddering, instead withdrawing both hands while the climax still gripped her and hastily cleaning himself. He'd intended to draw the shower out even longer but it was apparent they were both about to crash over a precipice of pleasure.

"Why did you do that?" she asked as he dried her off.

He took one of her small hands and placed it on his cock. Her fingers barely fit around it.

"This is why. And it will be even bigger when I shift. I don't want to hurt you."

She looked down at his powerful erection and her eyes widened.

"Don't worry," he chuckled. "You'll be able to take it."

She looked at it doubtfully but didn't protest when he threw the towels on the floor and led her back into the bedroom. He opened the sliding doors that led to the back deck and the trees beyond.

"Are you ready, little wolf?"

"Yes." She swallowed, a slight edge of nervousness coloring her expression.

"I tell you again, it will be all right. I love you, Hannah. I am going to make you mine forever."

He pulled her into his arms and took her mouth in a predatory kiss. His tongue swept inside, tasting every inch of her, as he'd tasted her pussy. He was drunk now on her many addictive flavors. He wasn't sure life was long enough for him satisfy his need to taste every bit of her.

He lifted his head and stared into her eyes. "Are you all right to shift now?"

Her lips curved in a smile. "For this I'll always be all right." She shivered again. "You'll teach me, right?"

"Always." He caressed her cheek with his fingertips.

Then he nodded, she drew a breath with him and in moments they were side by side in wolf form. Her coat was lighter than his and when he pressed his snout against her shoulder he realized it was softer. Why had he never noticed this before? What an ass he had been to waste all this time.

He nudged her outside and moved in front of her, looked back once over his shoulder and took off across the tiny lawn. He heard the sound of her running behind him and a feeling of exhilaration raced through his veins. It was well past midnight and the sky visible through the canopy of leaves was black velvet. A soft breeze caressed his snout and his heart raced with anticipation.

When he'd found a suitable spot he stopped and turned. Hannah pulled up next to him, eyes bright with lust and desire. He circled her, nipping lightly at her, his lips curling in his wolfish smile when she yipped and danced. He paused to rub his snout against hers, then moved around in back of her, sniffing at her deliciously scented cunt. He tormented both of them by licking her again and again until he knew if he didn't have her now he'd or explode.

Rising on his hind legs, he carefully mounted her, his enormous cock sliding into her pussy slick with her juices and with wanting. She shook with the force of the penetration and a low growl rumbled from her. But then he bit down on her shoulder and fucked her in a strong, steady rhythm. As aroused as they both were their orgasms built rapidly, then burst over them both at the same time.

Rand held her in place as his cock pulsed inside her again and again, her swollen cunt gripping him like a vise until she'd wrung every last drop from him. When he finally pulled away from her he rolled her over onto her back and again rubbed his snout against hers. His eyes sent her a message that he hoped she get. Then he began to shift, and thank god, she shifted with him.

They lay naked on the ground, wrapped in each other's arms. Rand cuddled her closed to him, stroking her hair. He didn't ever remember feeling this complete in his life.

He stroked her hair and looked down at her face.

"Mine." He felt such a strong sense of possession.

She smiled at him and nodded. "Yours."

* * * * *

Derek had no idea what to expect when he carried Riesa into his bedroom. What little time they'd had together hadn't been nearly enough to learn about each other. He knew as the alpha he was aggressive in both activities and in sex but he could also restrain himself when necessary. That was the responsibility of the alpha in every pack.

So how should he behave with Riesa? She was a human, not a shifter. Alexa and Liane had successfully mated with humans and he'd never heard of any problems, although he knew the females of the pack were just as driven by lust. With Hannah what he'd felt was pure lust, the thing that drove them all. But for those who mated, the lust was tempered by emotion. The last thing he wanted was to frighten Riesa into changing her mind and running away from him. He set her on her feet, trying to decide the best way to proceed to give her the maximum satisfaction, but she took things out of his hands. So to speak.

While he was standing there, his hands resting lightly on her shoulders, she tugged on his t-shirt until he bent so she could pull it over his head. As her fingers worked

numbly on the button and zipper of his jeans, he realized she was taking the decision out of his hands.

Good. He could follow her lead.

Slowly she pushed his jeans and boxers down his legs and she knelt before him, kissing his navel, the tender skin beneath it, the crease where hip and thigh joined. He lifted his feet to kick away his jeans, wishing she were naked too. But he got the feeling this was her show. He was afraid even to breathe, worried he might distract her.

Her delicate hands stroked his thighs while her tongue licked its way across his groin, drawing a low growl from him. When she wrapped her fingers around his cock he nearly lost it. He was so hard he hurt and his balls were drawn up tight with the need for release. When she slipped one hand between his thighs and cupped his balls he had to grip her shoulders to support himself. He wanted to toss her onto the mattress and fuck the life out of her but he called on every bit of strength to restrain himself.

Her small tongue peeped out of her mouth and brushed against the head of his shaft, catching the drop of liquid spilling from the slit. Then she probed the slit with the tip of her tongue and heat consumed him, burning through his veins.

"You're killing me," he moaned, trying not to press his fingers too hard into her shoulders. Her skin was so creamy and soft he was afraid he'd bruise it.

She dipped her head and lowered her mouth over his erection, sliding her lips all the way to the root.

Don't stop! God, don't stop.

But she pulled back, leaving his cock slick and wet. And then she did an amazing thing. She pulled her blouse over her head, tossed it aside with her bra, nestled his wet cock in the valley between her breasts and squeezed those breasts together around it.

Oh, god. Oh, Jesus. Oh, shit. Stop. Don't stop.

She rocked gently back and forth, fucking his cock with those absolutely luscious breasts. Every time she rocked forward she swept her tongue across the head of his

cock, one feathery stroke. Derek closed his eyes and let the carnal feeling wash over him.

His balls tightened even more, the muscles in his back tingled and he knew his release was close. So close.

No. Not like this. Not yet.

Pulling away from her, he lifted her to her feet, stripped off the rest of her clothing and placed her on the bed.

"I can't wait," he panted. "I have to have you. Later – much later – we can play but if I'm not inside you in ten seconds I might die of a heart attack."

But first he took time to test her readiness, a predatory smile curving his lips when he found her wet and swollen. It took only seconds for him to take out a condom, open the packet and roll the latex onto his throbbing cock. He knelt between Riesa's thighs, placed his hand beneath her ass to lift her to him, and plunged inside with one swift stroke.

"Yes!" she cried, pushing her hips at him. "Yes, yes, yes."

The slick walls of her pussy gripped him, milking him as he thrust in and out. He moved one hand to her clit, massaging it in tempo with his strokes, loving the flush of heat that suffused her face and the carnal light that bloomed in her eyes.

On and on he drove her, teasing her clit, murmuring erotic words to her until he felt the first quivers of her climax and knew he could let go himself.

The explosion was so powerful it rocked him, shook him as if Thor's thunderbolt had come down from the sky and pierced him. Beneath him Riesa shook with equally powerful spasms, her cunt so tight around him he was sure he could feel every nerve ending through the thin sheath.

When it ended he was spent, and Riesa collapsed in his arms, breathing hard, a fine sheen of perspiration covering her skin. When he could catch his breath he showered her face with kisses, licking her lips and her eyelids. Finally he brushed the hair away

from her face and stared into her eyes, a deeper peace than he'd ever felt consuming him.

"Mine," he stated.

She smiled and nodded. "Yours."

About the Author

I always wonder what readers really want to know when I write one of these things. Getting to this point in my career has been an interesting journey. I've managed rock and roll bands and organized concerts. Been the only female on the sports staff of a university newspaper. Immersed myself in Nashville peddling a country singer. Lived in five different states. Married two very interesting but totally different men.

I think I must have lived in Texas in another life, because the minute I set foot on Texas soil I knew I was home. Living in Texas Hill Country gives me inspiration for more stories than I'll probably ever be able to tell, what with all the sexy cowboys who surround me and the gorgeous scenery that provides a great setting.

Each day is a new adventure for me, as my characters come to life on the pages of my current work in progress. I'm absolutely compulsive about it when I'm writing and thank all the gods and goddesses that I have such a terrific husband who encourages my writing and puts up with my obsession. As a multi-published author, I love to hear from my readers. Their input keeps my mind fresh and always hunting for new ideas.

Desiree welcomes comments from readers. You can find her website and email address on her [author bio page](#) at www.ellorascave.com.

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