



Weakspot

by

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Dedication

To my husband Jimmy, my daughter Courtney and my editor Tracey. I couldn't have done it without you!

Prologue

As seven-year-old Lorelei swirled around the frozen pond with her brother, she felt their father approach. She reached up and squeezed the charm hanging around her neck. Her papa would know she was excited but he wouldn't know why.

"Here he comes, Renaud," she giggled to her brother excitedly. "Hide in front of me!"

Renaud picked his smaller sister up and skated a figure eight with her in his arms. He released her and she flowed gracefully away from him laughing.

"You're too short, silly. I'll just try to hunch down and skate." He was as excited as she was in his own understated way.

Lorelei knew that, even though she'd worn her bulkiest coat, Renaud would be hard-pressed to stay unnoticed near her. She was slim and delicate with gold-colored hair. Renaud had black hair, and at seven years old, he was already developing a bulkier and more muscular shape.

Lorelei waved at her papa just before she cleared the tree line. Quickly, she spun away so that her back was to him. When she heard him approach the bank, she placed her hands on Renaud's shoulders so that, as he rose, the two executed an elegant turn that brought Lorelei in front of him. They glided gracefully to the bank of the pond.

Lorelei saw tears form in her father's eyes and felt her brother's hesitation.

"It's okay Renaud. Its happy tears!" She put her hand in his and he held on tight as together, they surged forward into the big man's arms.

"You have my eyes," the man rumbled emotionally. "My son, my son"

Her father reached over and placed a finger on Lorelei's glowing medallion. "I have one for you, as well, Renaud," he said, pulling a chain and medallion from around his neck and dropping it over the boy's head.

Red light flashed around the boy and he stood rigid, wrapped in his father's arms. The light faded and Renaud shook his head, hard.

Renaud touched his charm and compared it to his sister's. His had a short-winged dancer with a wolf's head. It held a ruby in its open jaws. Lorelei's was a delicate dancer with graceful wings. It perched on a yellow stone of fine amber.

The man pulled his medallion out and let the brother and sister touch it, telling them, "Now we can all feel each other. Someday, when you two grow up, Lorelei's mate will wear this one."

His was the graceful and masculine shape of a male dancer with an eagle's head and short wings. It held a sapphire in its muscular arms.

"Shall we find a quiet bench, Papa?" Lorelei asked. She was beginning to shiver.

"In for a penny, in for a pound, Lorelei," her papa boomed. "We will go and be warm as we talk."

Climbing into his limousine, the man ordered his driver to acquire some hot chocolate and to close the dividing window.

"I told you, Papa," breathed Lorelei as the car began to move. "I knew he'd come

in time.”

“May I call you Papa, too?” asked Renaud, gazing at the large man.

“Of course, my son,” his father choked out. He seemed so proud to be with his children. “Only, don’t speak of me except to your sister, Renaud.”

Renaud smiled wryly, a smile that was unusual for a seven year old. “Papa,” he said, trying it out. He beamed. “Today is the first time I’ve ever spoken out loud. My sister is the only person besides you to hear my voice.”

“You know you must talk to others, Renaud?” the man asked the boy. “I know you don’t like living apart, but it is best for now. With the medallions, you will always feel your sister’s presence so you won’t be alone anymore.”

“I must always wear this, Papa?” asked Renaud.

“Yes, son,” his father answered him.

“All the charms were blessed years ago and passed through my family. If you wear it, it will help you be strong and remain unhurt. The medallions help us feel what the other is feeling. There are five generations of our family’s blood on each charm, including each of yours,” he explained.

“You will be able to help your sister and she can help you as long as you wear it. Someday, when my medallion will be passed to Lorelei’s mate, you will add a drop of his blood to yours then.”

“Since my mother hears people’s thoughts, I can, too, right?” asked Lorelei.

“That’s why I can make you and Renaud hear what I say in my head sometimes, huh?” Lorelei liked that those she loved best knew what she was thinking.

“Papa, Rory and me would be happier if we could live with you. Why can’t we?”

Lorelei knew that Renaud didn’t want to be away from them. He’d finally found his sister and his father and he felt good.

This seemed difficult for the man. “Renaud, Lorelei, I know you want to be together but there are some bad people who might hurt you just because you are my children,” he tried to explain.

“You must stay with your mothers now and do your best so that you can both grow strong.”

Lorelei considered this. “You mean we won’t grow strong if we’re together?”

“While you are small, it’s best to live apart. You will learn all the things your bodies and minds can do. Lorelei, all your life you will get hurt easily and you must be careful. Renaud, you will be too strong and difficult to injure but your emotions will be few. The older you get, the more you will need to help each other.”

The man was trying to keep it simple for them. Lorelei could tell that he wanted them to understand but he didn’t want to scare them.

“If you were together, the bad people would notice you. When you are older, that’s when you will need to be closer to each other. Your life began at the same time and will end at the same time.”

They didn’t like it, but Lorelei and Renaud would do as their father asked.

When dusk fell that night, their Papa escorted them back to the frozen pond so they could return to their mothers. He held them both in his arms, promising to see them at least once a year. They would never be alone again. His love would always guide them.

Chapter One

Everyone has a weak spot. Ballerina Lorelei Eliza Allemande's personal weakness was coffee-mocha flavored milkshakes on hot summer days. She had resigned herself to life without them as long as she was buried in the mosquito infested Louisiana swamp, until now. Just today, the local burger chain had begun to advertise a special. A quick phone call assured her that a nearby fast-food restaurant did indeed have her favorite shake and a drive-thru to go with it. It must be destiny.

The air conditioning in her little car was iffy at best – after two hundred thousand miles of hard labor she would forgive these signs of age. It should be a quick, short trip, anyway. She wouldn't even get out of the car.

She pulled on a pink crop t-shirt emblazoned with the likeness of a little girl duck with red hair. It was too hot out there for a bra. Besides, she was pretty small on top. Nobody would ever know.

In the interests of remaining cool, Lorelei donned a short, wrap-around skirt that tied on the side. It hung barely two inches below the line of her very high hipped, thin panties.

Hey, was summertime in Southern Louisiana. It was hot!

She grabbed a pair of slip-on toe shoes and off she went.

Lorelei was in a great mood. She could not believe her luck! She loved her new home. She lived only a few miles from her brother for the first time ever! And now she'd be enjoying her beloved frozen nectar in minutes.

Lorelei Allemande had an enormous Coffee Mocha shake and was easing out of the drive-thru when her good lucky streak ended.

* * * *

Sheriff Dekon Warrick Martine had every intention that the damn fool who was making his bad day worse share in his misery.

His mood was so foul that the werewolf in him was taking over and he could barely speak in complete sentences. He knew his blue-black hair had become shaggy and his teeth were growing slightly elongated. He'd damaged the door to his SUV getting in and the steering wheel would have to be replaced again.

He'd gone inside the Burger Bin to speak with the manager of the town's most popular fast-food place. It seemed that a group of rowdy teens had been loitering there and causing trouble.

Lawrence Brunet, his nephew Renaud's human uncle, had been inside. That was what had caused his mood to spiral downward. The man had stopped the Sheriff to complain about their nephew's childhood friend moving into town. According to Lawrence, she was influencing the boy in all kinds of deviant ways.

He was leaving the parking lot and heading for the main thoroughfare when a car from the drive-thru plowed into his front fender. He hit the lights and signaled to the idiot to follow him around back.

He didn't like to do his business in public if quiet places were available. Besides,

this imbecile would feel the brunt of his bad mood today and he wanted room and privacy for that.

Lorelei saw the Sheriff place his hat on his head and remove his sunglasses. He got out of the SUV and sauntered to her car's window.

He wore the standard issue khaki uniform with stripes down the legs. The cotton-polyester fabric blend was stretched tight in the early heat. His thighs were as well muscled as his torso and the uniform clung to him like a second skin.

"Aft'noon, ma'am," the officer said casually. His midnight blue eyes were anything but causal.

"Sir," she squeaked. Under other circumstances, Lorelei would have enjoyed looking at this sexy policeman. Right now, she wished she could stare at him from afar.

The Sheriff adjusted his body to block the afternoon sun and turned his head away from her. For just a moment, Lorelei admired his trim hips, flat stomach, and broad muscular chest taking up the space in her car's window.

When he looked down at her again, she could see anger flickering in his dark blue eyes. His wrath was almost palpable. She held herself rigid to keep from flinching.

"Seems you were a mite distracted back there, little lady. Wanna tell me about it?" he challenged in a hard voice.

No, not really.

"Umm. I'm sorry, sir. I just – I'm sorry, it's" She took a deep breath. "This is my fault entirely," she told him resolutely.

No doubt her insurance agent back in Connecticut had felt a ripple in the force when she said that. Now if she could just keep her chin from wobbling.

Lorelei ran a finger over the delicate chain around her neck and pulled out her amber medallion. It began to glow softly. She was incredibly nervous, not quite afraid, but definitely apprehensive. Any strong emotion caused her charm to glow.

"Ma'am, you're awful agitated for a little fender bender. Now why that is?" he asked in his deep, molasses and gravel voice. "Perchance you have been enjoying a libation down the road, no?"

"No! No, sir, I promise. I only got a milk shake! See? You can taste it!" she tried to be as up-front as she could.

They always told you to cooperate with the police, right?

"Sir," she tried again, "you—I mean this—just makes me nervous." Her voice was high. She was on the verge. She squeezed her eyes shut and took a deep breath.

Opening them again, she looked up at him, trying to appear as guiltless as possible. He turned his face into the bright sunlight again. She was sure he was trying to control his ire.

"Little lady, I need your license and registration and you're gonna have to get down," he ordered in a growl.

She handed him the documents he'd asked for but gave him a quizzical frown.

"Get down, sir?" she croaked. She'd bet he didn't mean break-dance.

"Get down, *petit*. Step out of the car," he explained sternly.

That's what she was afraid he'd meant.

"You can wait 'til I run your license," he told her.

Thank Heaven! A reprieve.

Lorelei tugged on her little skirt and tried to control her breathing. If she didn't

get a grip, she'd have her brother thinking she was in trouble. She just knew that the Sheriff would give her a break after he found out what a law-abiding citizen she really was.

As it happened, he was in no way influenced by her lack of a criminal past.

"Step out of the car, please, miss!" the Sheriff ordered in a growl.

"Oh sir," she croaked, her voice cracking. He leaned in closer. "I can't get out. I just can't!"

His eyes narrowed. "Explain yourself, *Mademoiselle*!" His sharp command brooked no argument.

Miserably, she told him, "I'm not dressed."

His brows met sharply in the center of his forehead. "Mademoiselle, I am not amused!" he gritted. "Your body appears covered, at least mostly, anyway. I don't have the day to play with you. I don't know about where you're from, but here in Louisiana, arguing with the law is considered impeding an investigation and non-cooperation. If you were covered enough to flaunt yourself in the neighborhood saloon you are covered enough for an arrest!" His voice sounded very growly now.

"Ohhh noo! No arrest!" she protested, opening the car door. "Sir, I assure you, I" She was taking deep breaths now to avoid panic.

Nothing like this had ever happened to her before.

"I don't even know where there is a bar around here." She was scared and upset and trying mightily to keep control.

"Face the vehicle and assume the position!" he barked.

When she did, he leaned against her and used a leg to spread hers wide apart.

She was afraid she'd fall.

He took both her hands and raised them above her head, placing them on the roof of the car. Her cropped tee barely covered her breasts in that position. She felt very bare, indeed.

The car she was leaning on was scorching. The man pressed behind her was equally scorching. She was frightened, sure, but she found his nearness and his husky male scent a little arousing. Both the situation and the arousal were new to her.

She was shaking like a wet kitten. She had to try to calm down. Near her ear, his sandpaper and maple syrup voice spoke just above a whisper.

"I'm gonna have to pat you for drugs or weapons, *chère*. It's the rules in these situations, hmmm?"

"Okay," she responded breathlessly, grateful that he was explaining things to her. Then she felt his big hands moving down her arms, across her shoulders, and down her back.

Why hadn't she worn a bra? Why!

When she felt his large hands on her abdomen, Lorelei began to tremble. When his hands moved up and slowly covered her small but naked breasts she was sure she would fall. Her nipples hardened against his palms instantly, and her knees turned to jelly.

It took far too long for him to move his hands away, though it was only seconds. When his fingers brushed her taut nipples, she was humiliated to feel hot cream gush between her legs. Her body jerked and he pressed his thigh against her rear end. She made a little strangled noise. This just can't be happening!

“Shhh, s’okay, *petit chère*. It’s almost over.” This he growled hoarsely into her ear.

“Why won’t the earth open up and just swallow me?” she whispered. She hated being such a big baby but she couldn’t help it. She *was* a big baby.

“Just wait. It will in a second,” he chuckled. She gasped in helpless outrage.

With that, his calloused hands moved up her legs. Those legs began to shake. One hand cupped the mound of her sex and the other skimmed her bottom.

His fingertips lightly probed the elastic at her inner thighs. She jerked in surprise and his fingers slipped under the elastic, sliding over the moist lips of her sex. Those fingers tugged at her dewy labia as he removed his hand from her panties. She felt a flood of gathering moisture as his calloused skin caressed her there.

“Oh, no,” she moaned. “Please stop. Oh please ...” Lorelei was overwhelmed. No man had ever touched her there. This man was a complete stranger.

How could she be so aroused by a stranger? How? Was something wrong with her?

“S’all right, *ma petit*,” he cooed. “It’s all over.” He eased her away from the hot car and let her stand against him for a minute.

He turned her and put both arms around her. “Don’t be embarrassed, *chère*,” he soothed, “Lot of folks don’t wear much this time of year. It’s hot, hot this summer.”

She leaned on him for a minute. She was still trembling. He rubbed her back. One tear trickled down her cheek and he caught it with his thumb. She was so humiliated.

“In a minute, *chère*, I’m gonna lean down and I want you to breathe in my face, yeah? You can do that?” His rumbling voice vibrated through his chest. She straightened up.

“Yes, sir, I’ll do that,” she whispered. After everything else, she’d have spit-shined his shoes with her hair if that would make this episode of hell end.

He leaned down near her face. He was at least a foot taller than her 5’ 1”. She exhaled and he breathed in deeply. He straightened, turned his head and closed his eyes. She hoped the milkshake hadn’t soured on her breath.

“Seems like you passed your Breathalyzer, *chère*.” He winked at her, teasing her about her milkshake obsession. “Perhaps you should be more careful with that little passion of yours, yeah?”

“Oh sir, I’ll never have another one, I promise!” she was nearly giddy.

“*Mais non*, don’t go givin’ up your pleasure. Just wait till you get home, *sil vous plait*,” he advised her. “*Chère*, it seems we’ve crossed enough grass together to call one another by name, no? I’m Dekon Warrick Martine. Most folks call me Sheriff War or just War.”

Her face went scarlet. “Oh, no! I couldn’t!”

She had just run into his car, been felt up by him in the name of the law, and nearly come all over him while he was just trying to do his job. She wasn’t going to be able to chat with him in the grocery store.

Please, God, just kill me now!

“I’m Lorelei Allemande. Rory is short for Lorelei.” She had to force herself to speak. She knew her voice was a little squeaky. Was he trying not to laugh at her? His inky blue eyes were sparkling.

"I believe I'll call you Lorelei when I don't call you *mon petit*, or *mon chère*," he said with a sinful wink.

She guessed he could call her his little darlin' if he wanted. In her short twenty-one years of life, he was the only man to have put his hands on her breasts or between her legs. And little was a good description of her breasts as far as that went. Right now, she'd go along with nearly anything he said he was going to do. She just needed one tiny favor.

"Sir? Um, Sheriff War? Can you please, would you ...? Oh shoot." She stumbled through asking him.

"What's wrong, *chère*?" She knew he thought she had a bee in her bonnet about something. He leaned against his SUV, watching her intently.

"Does anyone have to know that you had to frisk me?" Storm clouds gathered on his face.

"For why you ask?" he rumbled. There was a hard edge to his voice now.

Uh oh. What had she said? She just didn't know how to interact with men. Had she bruised his ego? Men were said to have terribly sensitive egos. That wouldn't be so bad if they weren't big and scary like this one.

She hung her head and mumbled, "My students will tease me unmercifully anyway for hitting your car. Everybody'll know somehow." She took a deep breath and plunged on. "I just didn't want them to tease me about you being—about a man" She took another deep breath and turned her bowed head away from him, "I didn't want the guys to tease me about you touching me," she said in a rush.

She expelled her breath and kept her head down. She was sure she was permanently scarlet. She'd have to wear pink leotards from now on. She peeked up quickly. At first his brow furrowed, then real anger dawned on his face.

"You don't care if 'the guys' know you wrecked my truck by driving recklessly but you don't want them to hear I touched you?" War growled, an angry eyebrow arched but she didn't see it. Lorelei kept her head down. She didn't want to see that angry look again.

He placed a finger under her chin and raised her still-scarlet face. She saw his arched eyebrow and closed her eyes. "I don't want to encourage any of them," she got out, finally.

One side of his mouth kicked up in a half smile. He didn't want to encourage any of 'em either. He made a mental note to find out who 'the guys' were. He slid an arm around her back and pulled her into him. Her flaming face was hidden against his chest.

"Okay, I'll promise, *chère*. Our secret." He smiled at her sigh of relief.

He hoped she wouldn't mind that he was touching her again. She might as well get used to it. He decided he'd do it any chance he got.

He inhaled deeply, enjoying her light, intriguing scent. It was no longer laced with fear and, though she wasn't as aroused as before, she still smelled slightly aroused. Good.

Reluctantly, War released her and stepped back. He walked over to her car and inspected the dent in the front left fender.

After a few minutes of feeling under the bumper and checking the left front tire, War was satisfied with its safety. He moved to the little car and opened the car door for her.

“Seems like it be just fine, *chère*,” he said.

She settled herself in the driver’s seat. In an oddly intimate gesture, he closed the car door and leaned into the window.

“I’ll have to come over and drop off the accident report in a day or so. This the correct address?”

“Yes, sir,” she stammered.

“Don’t make me arrest you for failure to comply, *chère*.” He gave her one more wicked wink and tapped the roof of the car.

“Sheriff War, sir.” She grinned in obvious relief, wrinkled her nose at him and started to drive away. He chuckled and got into his own damaged vehicle.

War was surprised to see his nephew, Renaud, edge his little truck in behind the battle-weary car. It looked very much as if the boy was following Lorelei Allemande. He trailed the small convoy back to Main Street and noticed that Renaud and Mlle. Allemande both parked behind a building there.

War sat in his truck a minute mulling over the last hour.

Lorelei Allemande, what a surprise. A beautiful, welcome surprise.

He wouldn’t lie to himself. Her scent had been driving him insane. He just wanted to inhale her into his lungs. He found her delicate features beautiful to look at, and her innocence was even more of a turn-on for him.

She was as delicate as a porcelain doll. Her eyes were an intriguing green. She had a cap of short, dark gold hair. As fragile as she looked, he wondered how she didn’t break just going from one place to the next.

So fine.

War had had to steel himself to keep from giving in. That little Yankee needed to take driving—and paying attention—and dealing with the police much more seriously. She had plowed into him, not even watching where she was going. She could have hurt someone. He’d believed it was his duty to put a scare into her.

He had tried to go by the book but patting her down had been incredibly erotic. He hadn’t meant to touch her so intimately. If she hadn’t jumped in surprise, it wouldn’t have happened. Her cotton panties had been damp and her inner lips had moistened his fingers with her juices.

He had been quite aroused. Hell, he was in pain he was so hard. He knew he was suffering. But the torture was exquisite. When he’d held her against him, he hadn’t been able to resist sucking her cream from his fingers.

He definitely wanted another taste of that. And no bra, *Mon Dieu*!

Chapter Two

Lorelei sprinted up the stairs and into her studio. She was so happy to be back in her little home. She rushed into the bathroom of her personal quarters and jerked off the embarrassing outfit she'd worn to get that ill-fated milk shake. Her breasts were still tingling from the Sheriff's hands. She dashed to the shower.

"What happened, Rory?" Renaud shouted, running up the stairs after her.

She didn't want to be aroused by the Sheriff's touch. It was a shame she had to crash her car into someone to have a sexual-type experience with a hot guy. She was disgusted with herself. What would her brother think if he knew?

"Wait!" she called to him, stepping under the hot spray.

Renaud opened the door of the bathroom a crack and spoke through it, "You okay, Boo?"

"It was just a traffic thing, Ren. I'm okay!" she called back to him.

"You sure?" he demanded.

When she made an affirmative noise, Renaud shouted, "Be back in a while, okay? I gotta go talk to Uncle Law!"

At her reassurance, he left.

* * * *

The Sheriff raised his hand to knock at his cousins' door. As is usual in Louisiana, he'd come around to the side door like family instead of straight up to the front like company.

The door was open to the screen and he could hear raised voices inside. This surprised him because the raised voice he heard first was that of his nephew, Renaud. Renaud had lived with War's cousin and her husband since the boy's mother had died nine years prior.

Renaud was twenty-one and had recently finished college. Like his uncle, Dekon Warrick Martine—whom everybody called War—he was tall, well muscled, black-haired, and drop-dead sexy—according to the women of the Parish. War had darker, inky blue eyes while Renaud had eyes that were a lighter royal blue. War's face was more angular than Renaud's, who had a much more square jaw.

Renaud was also very War couldn't think of the word. Not reserved, not even quiet, really, maybe aloof or detached were better ways to describe him.

Renaud was always respectful and never raised his voice. There wasn't much that stirred his passion. Really only one thing got young Renaud excited—dance. Specifically, War's young, virile nephew enjoyed ballet.

War reserved judgment but had seldom heard of men doing ballet. He wasn't worried either way about Renaud's sexuality.

For starters, what a man did with his 'family jewels' was his business as long as he didn't hurt anyone with it.

Second, War had learned, after years in the army and in police work, there are many things a young man could do worse than choose to partner with men instead of

women.

Third, werewolves just didn't come that way. Both War and his nephew Renaud were werewolves.

Typically, werewolves mated with a life partner and they mated to have young. Sure they copulated for pleasure sometimes, but they preferred sex with their mates.

Sex was always a release, although not as much of a pleasure without one's mate. Lupines didn't partner with a mate who couldn't give them young. As night follows day, they had no control over that. Their mates were predestined and when they found them they knew pretty quickly.

As War considered whether he should enter the house or not, he winced at some of what he was hearing. Lawrence Brunet was the brother to Renaud's late father and had married War's cousin, Alana. Lawrence was not lupine. Neither, it seemed, was Lawrence as confident in Renaud's masculinity as War or as the boy himself.

"I won't allow it, BOY!" bellowed Lawrence. "No boy I raise is going to be flitting around on his tippy-toes doing pirouettes! You'll have a man's career or you'll get the hell out of my house!"

A sobbing woman's voice tried to intervene. Though she was a werewolf herself, Alana Brunet did not use her extra strength or abilities against her husband.

War heard Renaud reply in a controlled voice, "Thank you for the years of shelter. Your task is done. I will ask Uncle War if he has a room for me, or I will turn to Mademoiselle Allemande."

So that's why he knew that name. Lorelei Allemande was Renaud's longtime friend. Since moving into town, she was now the dance teacher. What a coincidence.

Renaud turned and strode to the door, nearly colliding with his uncle. "Can I stay with you, Uncle War?"

"Or leave you at the mercy of Mademoiselle Allemande?" demanded War. He didn't think so. If anyone was going to be moving in with the little dance teacher, it would be him.

"Take this key, use your room. We'll talk later." War handed his nephew his house key. He had a spare in the truck.

Renaud reached into his shirt and touched the chain around his neck. He pulled his medallion out with a finger.

Was it putting off light? No, just reflecting, War decided.

"Thanks, Uncle. I'll be there in an hour or so. I'm going to see Rory first." With that, Renaud strode up the stairs and the sounds of slamming drawers resounded throughout the house. While War tried to placate his upset cousin and irate cousin-in-law, he could hear Renaud drive away.

After a few minutes of fruitless reassurances, War slipped back into his Parish police SUV and followed his nephew's path back to town. Since his office was almost directly diagonal from the ballerina's studio, the Sheriff knew he could sit at his desk on the second floor of the police station and see some of what took place across the street.

The area the young lady had rented for her dance studio was large and open with enormous windows overlooking the street. If she kept her lights on, he'd see something of their activities. If she turned them off, he'd be up there before you could say Jambalaya!

War was already in place when he saw Renaud pull up in his little pickup truck

and sprint through the recessed door between two shops.

As War watched, he saw his nephew appear in the second floor room and place two fingers in his mouth. He heard the muted sound of a shrill whistle through his open window.

A tiny figure clothed in a gray leotard and leggings shot out from behind a stack of boxes and into Renaud's arms. After what War deemed too many minutes, Renaud dropped the girl and began disrobing. War was stunned. The boy never voluntarily touched people.

Please don't let them have sex right now!

He expelled a sigh when he found his nephew was wearing a dark tee shirt and leggings under his clothes. That must be why it had taken him a little longer to get to town. He'd had to stop and change clothes.

War kept his eyes trained on the two as the little figure in gray walked over and dimmed the lights somewhat. The view was still unobstructed but not quite as clear. Given that he was at least fifty yards away and at a bit of an angle, the view had been less than sharp to begin with.

Renaud walked to his discarded clothes and pulled out a disk, which he then placed in a CD player nearby. The strains of music could be heard as War watched the couple meet in the center of the room and begin to move. He heard the music start to play.

Renaud and Lorelei moved like dried fall leaves caught in an easy whirlwind. They came together and separated with a fluidity that amazed him.

Wow! If this was ballet, it had really changed. Who was he kidding? War had hardly ever paid attention to ballet. Like most people of his acquaintance, he envisioned pink leotards, tights, and tutus in his mind's eye when he thought of ballet. This was more like modern dance with ballet moves.

As he heard the music reach its crescendo, the two bodies were almost a blur—in slow motion—if that was possible. They kept perfect time with the music but were doing impossible things with gravity and their bodies. They moved in seamless harmony with each other as if they'd performed to this particular song before. He guessed they had, but their dance seemed so spontaneous.

The music and the dancers wound down and finally stilled. War began to speculate about the pair's relationship when he realized that the ballerina's windows must be open. He could hear their conversation clearly from across the street. Lupines have exceptional hearing and for that, he was often grateful. Tonight, he was especially so.

"T'was a balm for my soul, Rory. I am exceedingly glad to be here." Renaud said.

"Was it very difficult, Ren? How bad was it?" asked the light feminine voice of the girl. War felt his body harden at that husky sound.

Mon Dieu! Had he been without female companionship that long?

He leaned back in his chair, still listening. The two sat back to back, leaning against each other sharing a bottle of water.

"I should have left that house long ago, Rory. I'm staying with my Uncle War. He would have let me stay anyway, but I was pissed. I said I'd come stay with you if he didn't let me stay with him."

The girl laughed. The musical sound increased War's hard-on. "In for a penny,

in for a pound, huh Ren?”

Nobody called his nephew that, War thought.

“Not much I’m sure of in this life, Peeshwank,” he said. “I know I can count on you, though.”

“I’m sure you just called me a mean name. That means ‘runt’ doesn’t it? I’d smack you if I had the energy. I sentence you to helping me finish unpacking—tomorrow,” she said with a smile in her voice.

War could hear the smile. She must’ve known that Renaud would help anyway.

“I’ll be here around two, after my shift at the mill. Tonight I’ll call some of the class and we’ll pick up this mess for you, no?”

“It doesn’t sound like such a big job when you say it that way. Damn shame you’re you and all. I’m finding the whole Cajun thing is killer sexy.” She said this easily as if Renaud wouldn’t care.

“Boo, if you mean that for true, I got this Oncle He’s single and all the ladies say he’s tres, tres beaux. Got a good job. He’s a lawman around here. He’s the one I’m staying with.”

Merci di Dieu—Thank God he wasn’t eating right then. He would have choked. War decided that maybe he wouldn’t need to kill his nephew over this woman. Still, she and Renaud were the same age. He was so close with her that he called her ‘Boo’, a familiar term of endearment for their people.

But the hint of scent on the air—her scent—was beginning to draw War’s attention. He forced himself to listen to what she said next and ignore the scent tickling his nostrils.

“I find that celibacy builds character, Ren, and mine has a ways to go. Besides, I’m sure my imagination is way more exciting than reality.” War found himself growling at his desk across the street.

“I dunno, Boo, the filles flock to Oncle War like bees to roses. And that imagination of yours can’t do much without sumptin’ to go on,” Renaud teased.

“I’m glad your uncle won’t want for feminine companionship, Ren. I met him today.” She blushed and dipped her head. War could see it clear across the street. “But, you know I couldn’t go out with him even if he wanted me to. I’d have to just use him and lose him, wouldn’t I?”

“Aw Boo, shit! I’m sorry, it’s not like I ain’t in the same place, though, huh? We’re a sad pair, yeah?”

War was mightily riled and a bit confused now.

They stood up together in one fluid movement. She turned and laid her hands on his forearms.

“Don’t worry, Ren. We’re gonna have some very buff character, aren’t we?”

“Strongest characters in the world!” he agreed.

The two said their goodnights and Renaud left after pressing an affectionate kiss to the little dancer’s forehead. War gazed speculatively at the little lady as she straightened what she could in the big studio and then moved to her private rooms.

Chapter Three

War had known that Renaud had a relationship with a famous ballerina. He didn't know much about her, really. His sister and Lorelei's mother had been at college together. She'd told him something about their kids being joined by a legacy but nobody seemed to know much about it.

He struggled to remember what he could about the girl, her mother, and the alleged legacy. He would dig out old letters from his sister as soon as he got home.

When Renaud was a child and even after the boy's mother died, War had still been in the Army. He was part of Delta Force attached to the 82nd Airborne Division at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. After he got through basic, hiding his lupine urges was not as necessary. Those traits had served him well during his ten-year military career.

After his sister had died nine years ago, he'd realized he didn't know his family anymore. If he'd been home, she might have given him custody and let him raise the boy.

War left the military at the end of that enlistment and joined the police force in his home parish of Xavier. That had been nearly seven years ago. He was thirty-five now and Sheriff. Usually Xavier Parish was a quiet area with a slow, old fashioned pace to it, but he found plenty to keep his attention.

War had been aware that Renaud had problems as a small child. The boy didn't speak at all until some time around the age of seven. At that time, he chose to speak to one Lorelei Allemande. He hadn't realized until he'd gone back to the office and her driver's license today that Lorelei must've been seven years old then, too. She was, even then, a professional dancer.

Renaud would not utter one word or really interact with anyone until his mother had brought him to Connecticut where Lorelei and her mother lived.

His mother had apologized for him, saying, "Don't be angry if he won't talk. He doesn't talk to anybody."

The story went that Lorelei had responded, "He'll talk when he has something to say. C'mon, Renaud, let's go ice-skating! You'll love it!" she held out her hand and the boy had taken it with a grin.

By the end of the visit, he was behaving as if he'd never been silent. He was reserved as always, but he spoke, he acted normally and he interacted with the people around him.

Renaud's mother had added a codicil to her Last Will and Testament that the boy would spend summers with the girl and never be denied access to her when he expressed a desire to see her.

Lorelei, whose own mother had died when she was thirteen, came to Xavier Parish each year and taught ballet to any child who wanted it, and still spent hours on end with Renaud. They had both attended some kind of ballet camp with famous dancers from the time the boy was five until he turned sixteen.

Throughout that time, Lorelei visited or had Renaud join her a week at a time as

she toured the world with the ballet company. During all of those years, War had never met Lorelei. The military had been the biggest culprit, but his cousins had intervened as well. That didn't explain why he hadn't remembered her name. Renaud never talked much about anything, and the Brunets tried hard to ignore her. Still, War berated himself, he should have paid closer attention.

Alana, Renaud's aunt and foster mother, had met Lorelei but took no opportunity to cultivate her or get to know her. She resented the stipulations imposed by the will and was jealous of Lorelei. While Renaud's father had seemed like a good man for a human, Lawrence just aggravated War. Alana wasn't much better.

For all those reasons, Lorelei was an unknown quantity to him. Warrick Martine was not a fan of unknown quantities. Those days were over now, though. This year, Lorelei had moved to Xavier Parish to help Renaud get ready for the professional ballet.

* * *

War returned home that evening to find his nephew unpacking his belongings. He leaned against the doorjamb to Renaud's room.

"Knew you'd need this room for more than just weekends eventually. Sorry it came about this way. You just getting here?" War opened the conversation.

"Hey, Uncle War. Yeah, I just went into town to see Rory—Mademoiselle Allemande. She said she met you today?" Renaud glanced at his uncle inquiringly.

War chuckled. "She didn't tell you how we met?" He knew she hadn't, but he asked anyway. "Want a beer?"

Renaud was very curious now. "No, she didn't say. Yeah, sure, a beer. What happened?" Renaud followed his uncle to the kitchen.

"She was coming out of the Burger Bin drive thru with one of those new milkshakes they got there. The chocolate and coffee ones?"

Renaud interrupted with a loud groan.

"Aww no! She didn't!" he groaned. "She has no control at all when it comes to those things," he said, chuckling. "That what happened to your truck?"

"Yup." War took a long swallow of his beer. With werewolf metabolism the alcohol had no effect on them, but they enjoyed the icy cold, carbonated beverage.

"She seemed okay tonight. You write her a ticket or something?" Both men took their beer out to the porch to stare at the crescent moon hanging just above the water.

"I gave her a hard time. Threatened to arrest her." War looked guiltily over at his nephew. "I accused her of being drunk. I gave her such a hard time that I felt too bad to give her a ticket," he confessed. "I didn't know it was her, ya know."

War still felt pretty bad.

He was nothing but a mean ole bastard. He was going to hell, no doubt!

Renaud was staring hard at him and had said nothing after his confession, only reaching into his shirt to touch his medallion.

"I just thought she was some reckless Yankee woman, for true!" He glanced over at his nephew again and caught him grinning.

"She made you feel real bad, huh?" Renaud was clearly trying not to laugh. "Kinda like kickin a puppy, yeah?"

"Yeah," grumbled War. "Just like kickin a sweet, soft, precious little puppy."

His nephew burst into laughter, spraying a mouthful of beer all over. The two men both began laughing and threw an arm over the other's shoulder.

They went in to have another beer and the conversation turned to Renaud's argument with his foster parents and then on to other topics.

In bed that night, War considered that, for tonight alone, and for this time he would have with Renaud, he owed his thanks to Lorelei Allemande.

Chapter Four

Lorelei hesitated in the door of the café. It was six o'clock in the morning, the day after her traffic stop. She was supposed to meet Renaud for breakfast.

She didn't know if she should seat herself or what she should do. These neighborhood diners never had signs that said 'Please Wait To Be Seated' or 'Seat Yourself'. After yesterday, she was painfully aware of her Yankee status. The Sheriff hadn't said anything much, really, but she felt it.

Renaud wasn't there yet and he'd just let her know he was running late. She looked around nervously. The last thing she needed was to offend the locals by breaking some kind of rule.

Her medallion gave her all kinds of information about Renaud's feelings, his whereabouts, even his safety. She just wished it would tell her how to live in his world as comfortably as he always seemed to be in hers. She wasn't really shy. She just didn't have any basis for how to interact in her new town.

Looking around, Lorelei saw men, women, and families chatting with each other and with people at other tables. While she'd always lived in major cities and had grown up within the confines of the ballet company, it had been a lonely life.

If all the dancers from the ballet troupe had been sitting in this restaurant, none of them would have spoken to anyone not at the same table, and maybe not even those who were. The competition among dancers was fierce and it didn't engender close friendships.

With her innate grace and dancing ability, coupled with the medallion's gift of making her extra nimble, Lorelei hadn't needed to compete. She had always been a star and would be still had she stayed. These things made her a great dancer, but effectively squashed any possibility of becoming friends with other dancers.

Since there weren't any stools open at the breakfast counter, Lorelei decided that she'd wait outside for her brother. Reaching for the door, her progress was halted by a hand at her back.

War decided that his morning was definitely looking up. His mouth turned up in a pleased smile. He got up from his seat and approached the little dancer.

"Mornin', *chère*," he rumbled, sliding a hand to the small of her back.

He smoothly guided her to his table and seated her. He ordered her a cup of coffee while she fidgeted in her seat.

"I'll just bet you didn't come to have breakfast with me, *chère*," he teased. Amusement gleamed in his eyes.

"I was meeting Renaud this morning." She looked up at him through her lashes. "He's running late."

"You and Renaud are pretty close, yeah?" His gaze was watchful on her face.

"We've been friends all our lives," she answered. "Since we were kids." She looked down, and then looked at him again. "We were kids together."

"So you're just friends with Renaud, huh, *chère*?" he looked at her intently.

“He’s not your ... *amour*?”

Renaud dropped into the seat next to her. He nudged her with his elbow and she nudged him.

“Ewwwwwww!” they both said at the same time.

“Gross,” Lorelei exclaimed, laughing.

“Too short, Oncle. I like a biiiig, tall woman.” Renaud laughed, taking a sip from her coffee. “Too pale, too. I could deal with short if she had a little color in her!”

She elbowed him again. He took another drink of her coffee and put it down in front of himself.

“You just don’t like having to reach all the high up stuff for me. You’re lazy. Get your own coffee. The Sheriff got this cup for me!” She wrinkled her nose at him, reaching to take her coffee back. “While you’re at it, get your own short, dark haired girl to drink it with!”

“Peeshwank—little runt!” Renaud called her and gave her another nudge.

The waitress brought his coffee and War noticed that Renaud prepared it in the same unusual way that Lorelei had. They each added a dash of salt and half a package of instant coffee.

Given that the coffee in Louisiana was laced with chicory and pretty strong anyway, he found that noteworthy.

“What kind of trouble are you two planning for today?” War asked them.

“No time for bad behavior today, Oncle.” Renaud sighed. “Too much to do. Better keep an eye on Rory, though. She’s one baad customer.”

“You’re not planning to start trouble are you, *chère*?” War winked at her. “I’d hate to have to frisk you for weapons or contraband.”

“Um, no, Sir. I mean, no Sheriff.” She elbowed Renaud painfully in the ribs. He grunted. “Here’s your troublemaker.”

“I don’t know, *petit*” War speculated, fighting a smile, “I could cite you right now for failure to comply. I believe this is your” He pretended to count to himself, “... second or third offence—maybe fourth. Could be I ought to take you into custody.”

Renaud turned to the waitress and ordered breakfast for himself and Lorelei. He appeared not to pay any attention to her conversation with his uncle.

“How about that, *chère*? How about I take you into my custody?” he asked in a lower voice. “You think you might like that?” He winked at her again.

“Um, I, um, maybe?” she stammered, trying to flirt. War laughed out loud.

“You give that some thought, *chère*, hmmm?”

War stood and Renaud stood with him. He tapped his nephew’s cheek and kissed his forehead. Renaud dropped into the seat his uncle had vacated.

Turning, War leaned down, and taking Lorelei completely by surprise, he cupped her head in one hand and kissed her lingeringly on the lips. She looked after him, stunned.

“Ya’ll have a good day, now,” he said. With a smug smile, he turned and walked away.

“He kissed me,” she murmured, stunned.

As he made his way to the door, War heard Renaud speak to Lorelei.

“Boo, I think my Oncle is sweet on you,” he teased her.

“You don’t think he was just being nice?” War heard her ask Renaud, sounding a

little breathless.

“Rory, I promise he ain’t that nice to everybody,” his nephew said, laughing.
War grinned to himself as he walked out the door.

Chapter Five

The crowd at the barbeque continued to grow and everyone was having a great time—everyone except Sheriff War. He was locked in an endless conversation with one of Xavier Parish's more prominent citizens. He was sure the fake smile he wore was carved into his face when her scent hit him.

She was here. He looked around.

Where? Where is she?

War excused himself from the garrulous citizen and tried to find her, casually, of course.

He located her surrounded by teens, after five minutes of careful search. She was breathtaking. She wore a strapless little dress in moss green the exact color of her eyes.

The dress was tight and clingy, hugging her feminine curves lovingly and it didn't quite reach her knees. Over it she wore some kind of sheer, gauzy little jacket.

War was torn between loving it and wishing he was the only man to see her in it. She wore no stockings on this warm evening, only a dainty pair of sandals.

He was struggling mightily to contain the possessive beast that had moved into his body. Just looking at her fired a clawing hunger within him that he had to fight to control. His body was tense and hard. If he approached her in this frame of mind, he'd ravish her on the spot.

His nephew came over to him and they exchanged small talk as they headed toward the buffet tables. War accompanied the young man as Renaud assembled two plates of food. One plate was rounded with rare burgers and rare steak, almost exactly like War's plate, the other dish that Renaud held contained only salads. Looking pointedly at it, War arched a questioning brow.

Renaud chuckled. "Rory don't eat meat," he explained.

"You're serious?" breathed War, disbelieving. That just couldn't be right! "She don't eat meat? For true?"

Renaud laughed again, shaking his head. It was unbelievable to a lupine that anyone could live without eating meat.

"We're nearly opposites. Just one more reason we get along so well. More for me!" He grinned at his uncle.

War shook his head, amazed as he watched Renaud carry the salad plate over to Lorelei. She was busy talking to some of the parents of her students. She and Renaud joined a rowdy group at a nearby table.

After a minute, War started moving in their direction but, as usual, he was waylaid about ten times. She was gone before he was free again half an hour later.

When he spotted her next, she was near an open door playing with a kitten. He saw Renaud bearing down purposefully on her. He continued toward them, focused on what they said to each other, hoping to get a better understanding of their relationship.

When Renaud walked up, the kitten bristled, hissed at him and ran away.

"Damn it, Ren! You like doing that, don't you?"

Renaud grinned at her, unabashed. War progressed toward them as he listened to their conversation. People tried to intercept him but he just nodded and moved on.

"Yeah, I do," he said, laughing. "Come on in, Boo," he said to her, his voice low, gentle. "You're almost out the door." Renaud reached out a hand to her. "There's strangers around, hmmm?"

Strangers? War wondered what that meant, confused. So what if she was at the door?

"Huh? I'm just" Lorelei looked around. "I didn't realize" She felt somewhat deflated, turning to move further into the room and taking the hand he offered.

Renaud didn't want her near an open door alone and she understood why. It was bad enough that she felt like a gerbil among the field mice. She didn't need to make herself an easy target for the people trying to capture her brother and herself.

"Wanna dance?" Renaud asked.

He gave her hand a tug. She peered up at him, still feeling a little stupid. What kind of a simpleton played with a kitten at a party? The kind who had nearly wandered unprotected into danger, as if she were a toddler chasing a butterfly.

Sheriff War walked up just then and said, "Course she don't wanna dance with you, boy! She dances with you all the time. Go play with your friends! I'll look after the little lady for you. C'mon, *petit*."

Lorelei couldn't believe the sexy Sheriff wanted to dance with her. He made her insides jump. Because of the threat she and Renaud faced, Lorelei couldn't have a real relationship with him. She could think of no reason not to dance with him, though.

He grabbed her hand and pulled her onto the dance floor. She saw Renaud shaking his head and turning toward a group of young people.

Before she could catch her breath, War was leading her into a boisterous two-step that left everyone slightly winded at the end.

The band graciously struck up a romantic ballad afterward and War pulled her into his strong arms. She put one hand on his thick shoulder and rested the other at his trim waist. The Sheriff ran a hand down her back, pressing her smaller, much thinner body into his hard muscular one. He hummed along with the melody until she began to relax and let her head settle upon his chest. It was wonderful.

"Well, aren't you the cutest little thing?" Lorelei heard as she felt a rough hand grasp her shoulder, squeeze tightly, and pull hard. She stumbled backward and out of the Sheriff's arms.

She didn't think the woman really meant that she was truly 'the cutest little thing'. Her medallion flashed yellow, automatically alerting Renaud that she'd been injured and was more than a little upset. She stroked the glowing amber stone at her neck.

Rubbing her shoulder, a confused Lorelei looked at the woman now holding the Sheriff's bulky arm pressed against her body. This woman wasn't one of them, why did she want to cause her pain? Lorelei was disoriented. Pain always made her mind feel fuzzy for a few minutes. She knew that any injury to her was twice what other people felt, but she had no way to judge. All she knew was that she hurt. Where was her brother?

"Introduce me to your little friend, War," his new companion purred. War looked down at the woman clutching him with amusement.

"Natalie, this is Lorelei Allemande. Lorelei" War began the introductions but he got no further. To his surprise, Renaud walked up—stalked up, in fact.

Renaud offered the two a tight smile and nodded at Natalie. War saw that his nephew's blue eyes were blazing. He could smell the anger pouring off of him. Renaud was adjusting his collar.

"Nice to meet you, Natalie, see you later, Sheriff," he whispered closely into Lorelei's ear. She parroted the words to the couple standing in front of her.

War couldn't believe the boorish way Renaud was behaving. He didn't understand why Lorelei suddenly acted as if she couldn't think straight. His eyes narrowed as Renaud guided her away. He decided to follow the pair. Disentangling himself from Natalie, War stalked after his nephew and the girl.

Placing a hand at her back, Renaud had ushered Lorelei from the large grouping and into a well-lit alcove. Once there, he moved the gauzy jacket from her shoulder and began swearing profusely. Neither saw War walk up from the other direction.

"That bitch made bruises on both sides, Boo." Renaud looked at her face. "How bad does it hurt?" Lorelei gasped in pain but said nothing. Her eyes were squeezed shut. "Just breathe through it, Rory. It only hurts this bad because it took you by surprise."

"What's this?" demanded War. "*Merde!*" he exclaimed catching sight of the deep bruises on both sides of her shoulder. "From Natalie?"

"Damn straight! Bitch was pissed you were dancing with Rory," Renaud growled, swearing. "I'll just take her home, Oncle. You do a piss-poor job looking after her!" Before War could react to the unexpected blunt criticism, Lorelei spoke up.

"Ren, please." Her eyes were moist with pain. "Don't yell at your uncle. He didn't know."

"He let someone hurt you, Boo," Renaud said furiously. War could tell there was a lot more he wanted to say.

"Ren, my jacket, okay? People will see. It'll heal. Calm down, please?" Ignoring her plea, Renaud laid a hand on her cheek.

"Rory, let me get some ice, huh? If I don't you won't be able to move your shoulder in the morning."

"Okay, Ren."

He gave his uncle a hard look and walked away, presumably to find the ice. To War, Lorelei said, "He'll be a mess until I let him do something about it." She smiled weakly. War's brow furrowed.

"I've never seen him act like that." He gently touched the growing purple bruises on her shoulder. "I think he's right, though. How'd he know you were hurt? I didn't see him come up," War mused aloud.

"He's very stealthy," Lorelei said, wincing in pain as War probed. He looked hard at her. Was she being a smartass? "I'm always getting hurt and Renaud's known me a long time. He's a brother to me. He looks after me." She said this on an indrawn breath. He continued to touch the deep purple and pink bruises on her shoulder.

"Stop poking her, Oncle!" Renaud snapped, placing a napkin filled with crushed ice against the worst of the bruises.

War was taken aback. Where was his aloof nephew? Who was this young man?

After a minute or two of Renaud's ministrations, Lorelei spoke softly to him. He had stepped back, but was unwilling to move away from her.

“Renaud, I think it’s much better now.” She gave him a sweet smile. He smiled back, his face turning red.

“I did it again, huh?” He ducked his head, embarrassed. “I overreacted, didn’t I?”

“Yeah, you did, just a little.” She chuckled at him.

War silently stepped closer.

Lorelei gave Renaud a little hug. “And I love you for it,” she told him, kissing his chin. “Why don’t you go visit with some of your friends? I’ll find a seat and listen to the music, okay?” she encouraged him. He looked divided.

War couldn’t believe this. Renaud had never shown the slightest interest in anyone’s well-being or safety before. The young man usually even disregarded his own comfort.

“I swear I’ll do a better job of protecting the lady from predatory females, son,” War assured him. “Maybe she’ll come for a little walk outside?”

Renaud inspected his uncle’s face as if searching for a flaw.

War chuckled. “I’ll treat her like spun glass. Now go on!”

Chapter Six

Renaud looked from one to the other. He pulled on the chain around his neck and let go. "Don't go near the door alone, Boo," he said very, very softly. She nodded almost imperceptibly. Renaud slowly moved away.

"Walk with me, *chère*?" War rumbled, guiding her through the door. "Tell me why Renaud was so worried about you being near the door all alone, *chère*," he said.

He had led her out away from the building. Their forms could be seen but they were partially hidden by trees and shrubbery.

"Why he didn't want me out the door by myself?" she repeated, obviously playing for time. He stepped in front of her and looked down at her face.

"*Oui, chère*. By yourself. Out the door. Hmmm?" He couldn't help himself. He moved his hands up and down her delicate body. One hand pressed against the small of her back, moving her against him. He softly kissed her bruised shoulder. His other wayward hand kept straying to the hem of her dress. It was as if his hand had a mind of its own.

"Maybe Renaud doesn't want me to fall in a bog?" she ventured. She sounded a little breathless.

"Sugar Baby, I don't want you to fall in any bog neither. Just there ain't no bogs in Louisiana." He leaned down and licked the sensitive place behind her ear. When that caused an indrawn breath he licked the outside shell over her ear. "Plenty of swamp though," he conceded, nibbling on her neck.

"Ohh, maybe you shouldn't do that." She sighed. He could smell her growing arousal.

"Mmmm, what if I do this, then?" he growled, covering her lips with his. He moved his wandering hand up her thigh at exactly that same time until it found the warm spot between her legs. Her gasp allowed his tongue to pillage her mouth at will.

He slipped his finger under the elastic at her inner thigh and stroked her dripping labia. She began to make little mewling sounds as he moved another finger under the edge of her panties and inserted one inside her. She was wet with arousal and clearly had little experience with it.

He rubbed his erection against her thigh and kissed her hungrily. One of his questing fingers moved in and out of her and he brought his other hand around to rub her clit. She was so small and thin he could hold her against him and still reach under her.

"Come for me, baby," he whispered urgently against her mouth. "Please make me feel good and come for me."

It wasn't long before she began to shake and her hot channel began to clench around his finger. His mouth stole her cries and he held her close as her slender body jerked. Slowly, he eased his fingers out from her center and away from her clit. He put them in his mouth.

"You taste so beautiful, *mon chère*," he rumbled. "Soon I will put my mouth on you and drink as your juice flows onto my tongue." She hid her face against his chest in

embarrassment.

"Don't hide from me, *mon amour*. I must see you and know how you feel." He turned her face to his. "You shouldn't feel embarrassed by what we do in passion. You are *tres, tres belle* to me."

She looked up at him. "I've never even kissed a man—or a boy—on the lips before," she confessed. "I can't help feeling self-conscious."

"Oh, *mon chère*, you don't know what you give me," he groaned. He was definitely king of the world. He could have come just from what she'd told him. His! She was his, and his alone!

When he'd led her outside, War had not intended to touch her as he had. Driven purely by instinct, he had needed to imprint himself on her somehow. He supposed that it was a good thing that he hadn't thrown her down and taken her in the bushes.

He tilted her face up and held her head in one hand. He began to kiss her brow, her cheeks, her eyes, finally, her mouth.

"Promise me, *chère*," he growled, "Promise you'll let no one else touch you. PROMISE!"

"I promise," she whispered. He straightened her dress.

"We should go in. I just want to take you home with me. Guess we should go back." Both were silent as they returned to the gathering. Soon after that, Renaud took her home. War left right after they did.

Lorelei was completely taken aback by her interlude with the Sheriff. As he escorted her back to the gathering, her mind was abuzz. Promising to let no one else touch her had seemed superfluous. He had been the first man to ever touch her and there didn't seem to be a line forming behind him.

She knew about sex, of course. She read about it, sometimes. She'd read scientific studies, romantic tales, erotic stories, even things that had been classified as pornographic.

The truth was, she'd even touched herself where the Sheriff had touched her. That had never felt like he'd just made her feel.

Throughout her isolated life, she'd wished she could date and spend time with a man. Like most young women, she had wanted romance. The problem was, when she did have time for it, something catastrophic usually came up.

Nowadays, at twenty-one years old, she couldn't really afford to think about romance. The same people who had held her father hostage for most of his life were hunting her and her brother. Their goal was to breed Lorelei and her brother with each other and with other people.

Sex just hadn't intrigued her as much after she began to understand the reality of her situation. Of course, Sheriff Dekon Warrik Martine cast a different light on things altogether.

She hoped he didn't think she was easy. On the other hand, maybe that would be for the best, too. How she wished she could talk to her brother about this one

* * * *

Renaud had been dancing with Zierra, his on again-off again almost-girlfriend, when his medallion had flashed and zapped him. He knew that meant that his sister had been hurt somehow.

He enjoyed holding Zierra in his arms, as much as he ever enjoyed anything, and

especially when she was quiet. Zierra being quiet was a rare thing indeed, he thought with a sigh. In fact, he knew he was about to get an earful.

When Lorelei needed him, he dropped whatever he was doing and went to her. She did the same for him. Dancing with Zierra was nice enough but if Lorelei was hurt, he didn't have time to be nice.

Academically, Renaud could understand how upsetting it must be for a woman to be abandoned in the middle of a dance. Zierra was pretty spoiled, though. It wouldn't hurt her to have her ego bruised a little. He didn't want Zierra thinking that she was more important to him than she was, either.

He knew that he appeared emotionless to most people. Being near his sister allowed him to feel and show more emotion than he usually could. Still, he'd tried to explain to Zierra that he didn't feel love and hate and excitement and anger in the same way as most people did.

He'd told her that he cared about her and was attracted to her, but he wasn't prepared to promise more than he had to give. He cared enough about her not to drag her into the danger and uncertainty that he lived in.

"Well," Zierra said sarcastically, "did the little Yankee get what she needed from you?"

Renaud looked down at the girl, unmoved. He decided to take her words at face value.

"Yes, she got what she needed from me. Now she's out enjoying the air with my *Oncle* War." With satisfaction, he saw her face mottle in anger. He turned to walk away.

"Renaud Brunet, we are not finished discussing this!" Her voice was louder now.

"Perhaps you are not finished, but I'm plenty sure I am," he said evenly. "I will say this one last time. Listen carefully."

Zierra's eyes narrowed and she opened her mouth to speak. Renaud held up a hand.

"Lorelei Allemande and I are not romantically involved and never will be. She is, however, very important to me, and if I think she needs me, I will be there. No matter what, I will be there." He spoke slowly and looked her in the eye.

"What about me, Renaud?" she challenged him. "What if I need you? Am I not as important as she is?"

He stared into her eyes unblinking for over a minute before answering her. Judging by her expression, she'd begun to dread what he might say next.

"I have told you that I care for you somewhat, but I will not lick at your heels and beg for your attentions like a pup. Find someone else if that's what you need." He continued to stare into her eyes. "Sometimes, it's not about you, Zierra. There are other people on this planet."

He turned and walked out the door. The last thing he wanted to do was become angry with her. While he knew that he wasn't in love with her, she made him mad in a way that nobody else ever had. She stirred his emotions. It was worse when Lorelei was around.

He'd taken a few more steps when someone grabbed him.

"Damn it, Renaud!" It was Zierra.

He felt his beast rise within him and he pushed her roughly against a nearby tree. She opened her mouth to protest and he covered her lips with his, roughly.

His kiss was hard, angry and passionate. He bit her lower lip and nipped at her tongue. As his tongue mated aggressively with hers, he pinned her between the hard tree trunk and his hard body.

He thrust his raging erection into her soft abdomen. As he continued to ravage her mouth, Renaud rolled his hips again and again against her mound. He could smell her arousal and knew he was causing friction that was building an ache in her.

She moaned and arched her hips against him, torturing him, begging for more. His hands cupped and kneaded her buttocks as he rubbed his denim-covered rod against her. He knew that, with her hips arched as they were, he was rubbing her clit through the thin material of her silk panties and cotton skirt.

She began to gasp into his mouth, clutching him tighter. He absorbed the shout of her climax. When he felt some of the tension leave her, he lifted his head, transferred her arms to the trunk of the tree and walked away from her.

He saw his uncle and Lorelei approaching him. She was ready to go home as was Renaud. The drive back to town was unusually quiet.

Chapter Seven

A few days after the barbeque, Lorelei was strolling leisurely through the aisles of Xavier Parish's larger department store. She was reaching for the bargain bleach when, in her mind, she heard her papa's voice.

"Run, Lorelei!"

As she clutched the bleach to her chest and began to turn, she felt hands grab her roughly.

Instinctively, she bounced up and then down, wrenching herself away at the same time. As she did so she tried to open the bleach bottle. Damn those vacuum seals on the openings!

Pain burst in her cheek as her attacker hit her hard with the back of his hand. He hit her again on the same cheek causing her to stumble and cut her leg on a shelf corner. She was finally able to poke a hole through the vacuum-sealed plastic stretched over the top of the bleach and she squeezed a stream of the burning liquid into her attacker's face.

By the way he was screaming and sputtering when he dropped her, she thought she might have gotten both his eyes and his mouth. She hoped spitefully that he had an open sore as she heard him banging into shelves as he ran away.

Lorelei just had time to mourn the loss of her favorite blouse—now bleach splattered—before a fellow shopper helped her up, chattering a mile a minute.

Lorelei squeezed her flashing medallion, trying to keep her wits together. Her face felt like something live was trying to eat its way out. If only this woman would shut up, maybe she could think. Mercifully, the woman handed her some kind of cleaning wipe that she could use to wash some of the bleach from her skin.

"I saw the whole thing, honey! Here's a baby wipe, clean that smelly bleach off. It's gonna burn your skin. You're such a pale little thing. I called the police myself! I just can't believe it! Was he trying to rape you right here or take your purse? Are you okay? Say somethin' honey! Oh Sheriff, thank God you're here, I think her brain may have been addled by the attack!"

The Sheriff held up a hand. The chattering stopped. Thank Heaven for the cavalry! On the heels of that thought came another one. How am I going to handle him until Renaud gets here?

Lorelei was glad that Renaud never had to feel pain like she did. His medallion protected him from pain and injury. Those things were doubled for her. It was always a struggle for her to think straight when she was injured because it hurt twice as much. Her medallion amplified everything—sadness, love, hurt, pain, fear, joy. Lucky for her, she could often avoid injury if she knew she was under attack.

"*Merci, Madam!*" the Sheriff cut in sharply, halting the woman's jabbering. "Please give your statement to the officer over there." He pointed. The effusive citizen scurried over to the other officer who was questioning onlookers. War lifted Lorelei and carried her to a chair in the shoe department a few aisles over.

His eyes were so angry. She knew he wasn't mad at her, though. Lorelei gave

herself up to the comfort of his strong arms. She snuggled against his broad chest and enjoyed the safety she found there.

“What happened, *chère*?” he asked gently in his rumbling molasses voice. “Did you see who hit you?”

What? What did he ask? OH

“No! Not really, I didn’t actually see him. He was behind me. It all happened too fast,” she denied.

She was incapable of lying but she could avoid answering questions he hadn’t actually asked. He hadn’t asked if she knew who had hit her or if she might know. Thank you, Jesus.

She continued to rest in his lap with her head against his chest. She’d been unsure about how she should behave around him since the party, but she wasn’t worried about that now.

Her response was a little hasty, War thought. She knows more than she’s telling me.

“The man came up behind me. He seemed really strong.” She seemed to be trying to give him something to go on, but nothing at the same time.

“*Chère*, it was most clever of you to douse him with that bleach. What made you think of that?” Maybe he could make her reveal what she was hiding. Somehow he just knew she was hiding something.

“I’ve gotten bleach in my eye before.” She winced as she smiled. A large bruise was blooming on her cheek.

“They taught us at school to use what’s at hand if anybody ever attacked us. We learned to defend ourselves at least a little.” She tried again to smile. She winced with every word. It was obvious she hurt.

War swore in Cajun and settled her in a chair. He strode away to find an ice pack.

There ought to be one somewhere in this damn store.

When he returned to her, Renaud had her by the upper arms and the two were whispering frantically to each other. War pulled out his notebook.

“It was one of them! Papa told me to run!” she said frantically to Renaud before she began speaking rapidly in a foreign language.

He wondered what language that was, writing it down as best he could. He noticed Renaud’s teeth lengthening.

“Papa?” Renaud asked, then, “There will be more. We must be careful!” he answered, and then began speaking in the same language.

War found their use of a strange language very frustrating and very curious. He didn’t hear everything they said to each other and he didn’t understand any of it but he knew he’d heard Renaud say, “Papa”.

“Hey boy,” he addressed his nephew. “How’d you know about this?” War growled at the younger man.

He also pointed at his own mouth. He was behind Lorelei so she wouldn’t see. Renaud turned away. When he turned back, his teeth had returned to normal.

“News travels fast in a small town, *Oncle*,” Renaud replied smoothly.

His hand stole up to his throat. War saw the red charm reflect the light. Renaud watched closely as War tipped Lorelei’s face and gently placed the ice pack on it. The young man’s face tensed at her wince of pain.

"I'll drive her home when you're done," he told his uncle.

War said nothing for a minute. He turned to Renaud. "Go get her another shirt while I finish taking her statement." Renaud did as ordered.

He pulled the ice pack away and gently turned her face to his. "You gonna tell me anything new?" he asked, concentrating hard on her face. She shook her head from side to side. His hand cupped her jaw. His thumb smoothed a feather light caress over her bruised cheek.

"Someday you gonna trust me, *chère*," he murmured softly.

He lowered his mouth to her parted lips and kissed her. It was a gentle, loving, lingering kiss that still had them both groaning when they broke apart.

"You better go with Renaud. I'll drop by tomorrow, yeah?" he kissed her forehead. "You be okay, *chère*?"

She nodded.

As War watched Renaud and Lorelei leave, he had the nagging feeling that he was missing something.

Chapter Eight

At home, Lorelei wanted nothing more than some quiet peace. She slipped into an oversized tee shirt emblazoned with her favorite duck and pulled on a baggy pair of shorts.

She looked around her apartment and sighed. She loved her little home. It was the only real home she'd ever had. She'd been dancing with the NYC Ballet and going from place to place since she was five years old.

The dance studio was separated from her living quarters by a short hallway. The living area was coming together nicely even though she'd only been there a few weeks.

The main part of the room was open, with the kitchen and living room areas on the same level and the bedroom area raised by a one-foot step up. She had a curtain drawn across the bedroom area for privacy but there were no other walls.

In the front corner of the room was her favorite part of this new home. It was a corner window that had glass on either side. It might have been a shop display window at one time, she thought. She had immediately made a wide, wedge shaped bench and covered it with cushions and pillows.

She could lie in the window and watch all the activities below without ever being seen. It was like being invisible in a bubble.

Lorelei stretched out on her bench and rolled toward the window. She couldn't tell much about the building across the street but she could watch the people coming and going from the bank and the shops below. She could even see a bit of the waterfront if she stretched.

She glanced at the building that faced her. The nearest window was directly across from her. A dark screen covered it so she couldn't see in. She didn't mind that. She didn't care to see in. She directed her gaze back to the pedestrians below.

Absently, she thought about the events of the day. One thing she'd begun to like more and more about living in a small town in the south was shopping. The selection wasn't as large but she could shop leisurely and the other shoppers were not usually rude.

She'd been enjoying the experience when she'd heard her papa's voice. She wondered how it was that she could still hear him. He'd been dead for many years. She only knew that it must have something to do with the medallions. She still heard his warnings when she or Renaud were about to be threatened. Renaud never did.

Another thing that worried her was the Sheriff. She was finding herself more and more attracted to Warrik Martine. He made her feel beautiful, special, and sexy. The problem was, she knew he was a smart man.

Of course, she didn't want to be attracted to a stupid man. The dilemma she faced was that loving his touch and feeling safe in his arms could put herself, her brother, and maybe even him in serious jeopardy. She knew it was both his nature and his job to solve mysteries and to be suspicious.

While she admired that in him, it was a threat to her and her brother. In his zeal to find the truth, he could give the wrong people information and even help them get to

Lorelei and Renaud. If he got in the way, she knew from past experience that he'd be killed.

She had to keep her distance from him. Somehow, she just had to. Maybe if she just kept telling herself that, she'd manage it, somehow. It would help if she knew when she might next cross his path. Otherwise, it wasn't her fault, was it? She began to yawn.

War glanced up from the report he was working on and looked out the window. At first, he didn't see what was outside. He was trying to find the words to articulate what he was thinking.

After a second, War realized he was staring at his sweet little *chère*. How had he not noticed that window before? He knew she couldn't see him since his window screen was so dark. There were no lights behind him and he was a couple of feet from the screen.

He stared hard at her as she stretched in the window. What was that on her shirt? Could that be a purple duck wearing a cape? Before he could puzzle that one out, she reached out and grabbed a pillow and wrapped her arms around it.

She looked drowsy. Of course she was tired after the day she'd had. The bruise on her cheek was a stark reminder of her attack.

War gave up trying to work and stretched his long legs, propping his feet on the windowsill. She was so dainty.

Her scent had wrapped around him, even overpowering the bleach. Her beautiful, warm scent had found its way inside of him, making him feel he'd finally come home. He wanted to grab it and keep it for himself.

He continued to watch as she lifted a shapely leg and draped it over a pillow next to the glass. A big yawn later and she tucked a little fist under her chin and began to doze. He couldn't stifle the smile playing about his mouth as he watched her.

Officer Beaudine spoke to the Sheriff a couple of times before he walked around beside his desk. The Sheriff was watching something good out the window. Beaudine walked over to take a look.

"She a good looker, ain't she? I hear she's a dancer, too. A limber woman like that be one fine *foutre*, eh boss?"

War began to snarl. How dare the fool call his woman a fine fuck? He dropped his feet from the window ledge and advanced on the officer, growling and snarling like an angry dog.

"Oh My God! Boss, I'm sure sorry. I'm sorry, Boss! NO siree, I didn't know you was partial to her! BOSS!!" the last word was a scream because War had the man by the neck. "Boss!"

War struggled to beat back his beast. He was a whisker away from ripping this man's esophagus out. One by one, War removed his fingers from the man's throat. When he stepped away, the officer dropped to his knees.

"Never look at that woman again. Never go near her. Stay away from my window," he snarled gutturally at the hapless officer.

"Sure, Boss," gasped Beaudine. There were just too many beautiful women Sheriff War didn't care a thing about. Any man would be a damn fool to sniff around the one woman it looked like he did care about. Beaudine wasn't a damn fool and he liked breathing.

"Go. I'll be down there in a minute!" War turned from the officer and listened as

the poor man ran down the stairs.

He walked over to his window again. Lorelei shifted in her sleep and turned away from the window. He guessed he had a major possessive streak, after all. With a rueful smile, War turned and walked down the stairs.

Chapter Nine

The next morning, when the Sheriff stopped in to check on Lorelei, she was teaching a class of pre-school aged children. She gave the little girls and boys a break and they all rushed to their mommies for approval and praise.

Everyone tried to speak to Sheriff War, but he gracefully excused himself, citing important business with the dance teacher. The attack she had suffered was common knowledge so the mothers nodded, letting the Sheriff lead Lorelei away.

War took her elbow and guided her to her apartment and inside. He closed the door firmly and turned to her, tipping her chin and staring into her green eyes.

"How are you, *chère*?" he rumbled, stroking her face lightly, carefully running his fingers over her colorful bruise.

"I'm okay, Warrick," she answered, feeling a little shy.

He enfolded her in his muscular arms and buried his face in her neck, tracing her racing pulse with his tongue. He nibbled his way up to the base of her jaw, teasing her lips open with his tongue triumphantly.

He ran his tongue over her teeth, tugged at her lower lip and swept her mouth again with his tongue. Her head was reeling. She was clutching at his shoulders just to remain standing. He pulled back and nuzzled her uninjured cheek.

She opened her mouth to tell him that she shouldn't do this with him. He cut her off with another knee-weakening kiss.

"*Chère*, you don't know what you do to me" he groaned. "I gotta go outta town for a couple days." He lapped at her throat under her chin. "Can I call you and tell you goodnight?" He looked at her, waiting.

"Of course you can." She didn't seem to be in charge of her tongue. "I can't believe you'd want to." Where had that come from? She'd had every intention of putting distance between them.

"Oh *Chère*! You don't know. I wanna do a whole lot more than talk on the phone with you. I'll take what I can get, though." He kissed her eyes and the tip of her nose.

"It'll be late. You don't mind if I wake you?" he asked again.

Wow! He really wanted to call her? He really liked her?

Still self-conscious, she said, "Please call me, Warrick. I'd like you to wake me." He planted a hard, intense kiss on her open mouth.

With a devilish grin he said, "You'd better splash water on your face, *petit*. Looks like you been kissin' somebody!" He tipped her a wink, laughing at her pink face.

How she hated her fair skin and her propensity to blush!

"Oh, I almost forgot, here's the report for yesterday. Not enough information to do much." He gave her a hard look. "Maybe if I put you over my knee and spanked your bare little bottom, I'll get something to put in it?"

She looked at him, shocked. "You wouldn't do that, would you, Warrick?" she breathed. She didn't know whether to be aroused or afraid. I'll take afraid for a hundred, please Alex

"It sounds like fun, no?" he took her mouth in another hard, passionate kiss that left her reeling.

"I'll bring the car accident report when I get back. Don't go kissin' anybody else while I'm gone, you hear?" he growled.

"Of course not." She was completely flustered.

He opened the door and announced, "I'll have that report for you in a couple days, *Mademoiselle*."

* * * *

The rest of the day alternately flew or inched along at a snail's pace. Lorelei's mind was on the Sheriff more than anything or anyone else. The only time she could concentrate was when she was dancing.

She really had intended to discourage the Sheriff's attentions. It would be best for everybody if she did, she knew. The problem was that he was so assertive. She, obviously, was not assertive at all. He just steam-rolled right over all of her good intentions.

Well, that wasn't strictly true, was it? She didn't really want to discourage him if she was honest with herself. Just the opposite, she wanted him to like her as much as she liked him, which was too much, if the truth were told. It was confusing and conflicting and she really wasn't sure what to do.

Because of her state of mind, she pushed all of her afternoon students very hard. Everyone was happy to leave her alone that evening, even Renaud. She had a hard time settling down, and finally fell asleep on her couch watching an infomercial.

She'd placed the phone on the coffee table in front of her and nearly jumped out of her skin when it rang. She snatched it up on the second ring.

"*Bonjour, mon petit chère*, are you well tonight?" came his deep, sultry drawl. It sent shivers of awareness up and down her spine.

"Hi Warrick. I'm well this evening. You must be very tired," she responded in a sleepy husk.

"Mmmmmm, *chère*. I am most tired. I needed your voice to soothe me to sleep so I could rest. Tell me you miss me *chère*, hmm?"

"I miss you, Warrick." She hoped he'd really believe her.

She didn't know why he missed her but she wanted him to know she did miss him. It was funny that she felt so close to him, so in need of a man she barely knew and hardly ever saw. But those kisses today, she'd never been kissed like that before, and didn't want to be by anyone else.

It was as if there was a void in her world when she knew there was no chance of seeing him. She was wrapped in her sleepy limbo and didn't want to fight her attraction to this man right now.

"You believe me, don't you Warrick?"

"If you say it, I believe it, *chère*," he reassured her. "Are you tucked in bed?"

"I fell asleep on the couch." She hesitated before adding, "waiting for you."

"Oh *chère*, I wish I could carry you to our bed tonight. Let me walk with you while you crawl into bed, hmm?" His molasses and sandpaper voice was even deeper and sexier when he was tired, she thought.

She crossed the room and climbed into her bed. "Okay, Warrick, I'm in bed," she told him dutifully. She heard him sigh deeply.

"I wanna be there with you. I wanna touch you like I did at the party," he growled in frustration.

Lorelei felt her face burn. She hoped he couldn't hear her squirm in embarrassment.

"Truth, *chère*, you liked how I touched you, yeah?" he insisted on hearing it from her. "Tell me, *chère*, I need the words."

"Yes, Warrick, I guess I did like it," she confessed reluctantly.

"*Chère*, will you help me touch you now?" his deep voice was so seductive.

"I don't understand, Warrick," she whispered, uncertain.

"I know you don't, *petit*. I want to tell you the way I'd like to touch you. Will you make your hands be my hands? Put your hands where I say and feel me with you, hmmm *chère*?"

"Do you really want me to do that, Warrick? Put my hands on myself and talk to you on the phone?" she expelled a breath. "You must think I'm such a child. This is all so new to me."

"*Chère*, I think you're the beautiful woman that I want in my arms and in my bed and everywhere else, too. It excites me that you don't know the ways of other men."

She was getting excited, too. All of her good intentions were melting away.

"Warrick? Is your ...? Does your body ...?"

"Oh, *Chère*, you make me hard just thinking about you," he growled. His words made her feel powerful. "Take your shirt off for me, Sugar Baby. I want to feel your perfect breasts." The deep timbre of his voice vibrated down the phone line.

"They're so small," she mumbled, doing as he told her.

"Mmmmm, I love 'em," he rumbled. "Rest the phone by your ear so you can put both hands on your breasts for me. I want you to move your hands in circles and squeeze 'em till they're hard," he directed her huskily.

She sucked in a breath, following his directions. "Oh Warrick." She didn't know what else to say.

"That feel good, Baby?"

"Yes, it feels good. If I think it's you touching me this way, it feels good." She blamed the late hour and her tired mind for her candor.

"I like to make you feel good," he rumbled. After a moment, he said, "*Chère*, take your panties off for me. I'll take my shorts off. I want to touch you and I want to think you're touching me. Will you do that with me, *petit*?"

"Okay" she answered him breathlessly. This man kept bringing her into unknown territory. She knew he heard the sounds of fabric rustling and wondered if what he imagined made him even more excited. Had he removed his under shorts?

"Take both hands, *chère*, and slowly move them down over your ribs and down your flat tummy." She knew he listened to her ragged breathing as she complied. "I'm holding myself, *petit*. You make me so big, just thinking about you. Imagining your hands on me here."

"Ohh." She said, picturing what he'd look like, full and hard, surrounded by blue-black curls. She'd felt his rigid length against her at the party and knew he was large.

"Move your fingers through those little curls. Feel where you're wet? Take your fingers and spread that cream all over." Lorelei could hear his voice catch on the words.

“Find that place, your clit, where I touched you the other night.”

She couldn't help but gasp. This feeling was like a wave coming over her.

“Take your other hand and squeeze your breasts, then put one of your fingers inside you while you rub your clit. Keep rubbing it harder, *chère*. I'm rubbing myself thinking of your soft hands.” She imagined his hands moving over his own hard body, squeezing, pumping.

“Press harder, *chère*”

“Warrick!” her voice was high pitched. “I can't, I don't ... Warrick!”

“Aw Baby, that's right,” he groaned. “Come Baby, come on. Feel good for me.” Her high-pitched mewls seemed to trigger his own release and he groaned her name loudly. “Lorelei, *amour*!”

She was breathing deeply and trying to come down from her orgasm. “That was an orgasm, wasn't it?” she asked War.

“Mmmm, oh Baby, you're gonna kill me. Yes, Sugar, that was an orgasm.” He couldn't seem to help but chuckle at her a little. “Sugar, I can't believe you're so innocent. I want you all for myself.”

“There isn't anybody else, Warrick. Only you.” She was feeling very sleepy. Maybe she shouldn't have told him that.

“Not even Renaud?” Why did he still wonder about Renaud?

“Oh no!” she choked. “There's nothing like this between me and Renaud. He's a brother to me.”

“I'm sorry, *chère*. I guess I really already knew that. It's late now. Will you get enough sleep?” he asked, sounding a little embarrassed. Maybe he wished he hadn't mentioned Renaud.

“I'll be okay, Warrick. I hope you get enough sleep, too.” She was half-asleep already.

“*Bonne nuit, mon coeur*. Dream of me,” he whispered in her ear.

“Good night, Warrick.” She hesitated for a minute, and then whispered so low he almost didn't hear her, “Will you dream of me, too?”

“I always dream of you, *mon petit amour*, since I first saw you. I'll call tomorrow night. Bye, *chère*,” he murmured. When she responded, he put down the phone.

War knew beyond any doubt that he was falling in love with his little ballerina. He understood better than many how lack of sleep could intensify things.

Still, her saying that she missed him and asking if he'd dream of her, those were big breakthroughs for his reserved and timid little woman. And the orgasm they'd just shared. *Mon Dieu*! Soon, he would make her completely his. Was this woman ... could this woman be his mate?

He'd have to fight his lupine urges to dominate and control with this lady. He had to remind himself that she was human and so small. She was so innocent. He couldn't believe that no man had tried to get closer to her. He realized that she was reserved and kept her distance from most men.

He'd have to be a bit careful with her. That didn't mean he didn't think she was strong. She had plenty of strength in her. He also knew that their partnership would be sweeter if he made sure she was equal—well almost equal—he was a man and a werewolf, he was alpha, damn it!

He also knew there were things going on with Lorelei and Renaud that he wasn't

being informed about. He'd meant what he said. If she said something, he did believe it. The problem wasn't in what she said. The problem was what she didn't say. The same held true for his nephew. He'd watch, listen, and pay attention so he could get to the bottom of things.

When War called Lorelei the next night, she was in bed asleep. He loved hearing her sleepy voice in his ear. He couldn't wait until he could crawl into that bed with her. If he wasn't so tired himself, he would have talked sexy to her and got her to touch herself again. It was a sign of just how beat he was that he couldn't even stay awake long enough to do that.

He told her he'd be home sometime the next morning but would have to go straight to work. He insisted that he'd drop in on her during the afternoon near the end of his shift. She was so sleepy, he didn't know how much she'd remember.

Chapter Ten

When the Sheriff pulled his truck in behind the ballet school, he noticed several familiar cars parked there. His nephew's truck was there, of course. He noticed his sixteen-year-old cousin Maria's car. Next to that he saw Alec Fountain's car. Alec was lupine, too. He was Maria's boyfriend and Renaud's best buddy. Looking around, he was surprised to see that Zierra's car was there, too.

Zierra was the young lupine trying to snag Renaud. War had been positive she'd succeeded but now he wasn't so sure. Zierra was very spoiled and she had definite ideas about what her boyfriend should do with his life. Mainly, she seemed to think her man should do exactly what she wanted him to do. If that was the case, War thought, she should take a wide walk right past his strong-minded nephew.

He entered the back hallway of the building and took the stairs two at a time and found himself on a landing with two doors. One door would take him downstairs to the sidewalk in front of the building. The other door was the ballet school.

He was amazed at how excited he was to be here. He knew he'd be holding Lorelei in his arms very soon. This felt stronger than the first infatuation he'd had as a teen. It was as if he'd never made love to a woman before.

War entered the ballet school and followed the chattering voices. There was a room to the left with cushioned bleachers and a window to look out onto the main studio.

Music could be heard and he could see several tiny bodies swaying back and forth along with the one body he'd been looking for all his life. That thought was hovering on the edge of his mind.

He'd looked for her all his life. He took a deep breath and admitted it. Lorelei was his mate.

Calls of '*Oncle War!*' or '*Sheriff War!*' came from several young people as they crowded around him. He grinned at all the young people and did his best to fit in, although none seemed to need his input.

Finally he told them that, of course, he'd come to watch them today. He'd recently run into Mademoiselle Allemande in town, 'literally' he winked at Renaud. She had informed him they'd all be performing today so he should come and watch. Now, here he was, at their service. Needless to say, they were quite excited.

He watched as the younger students spilled into the anteroom. Several of the teens made their way into the larger room, undressing as they went. The little magpies that had just finished their lessons were very excited to have such an important audience.

One little girl, Maria's little sister, Anna, was thrilled to stay with her *oncle* and watch the big kids. Importantly, she explained what the older kids were doing.

Several teens who were not dance students were there to watch as well. Zierra was one of them. She was flirting with two other boys but her eyes constantly strayed to Renaud.

Anna explained that this was 'free dance' day. Everyone would warm up and then someone would pick a song and those who wanted to would dance to it. Sometimes

Mademoiselle Rory would join in and sometimes she danced away after a minute.

Sometimes, Anna whispered this into his ear, if everyone was lucky, Mademoiselle Rory and Renaud would dance together. Still whispering, Anna told *Oncle War* that she hoped they would today because Zierra was trying to hurt Renaud's feelings. The little girl had such a soft heart.

War held her on his lap and watched as the music started and three couples danced to the center of the room. The white-clad figure of Lorelei joined them and music filled the air.

Those kids were amazing. War watched as they floated by and listened as, for no reason he could discern, they catcalled each other. They stopped when an angry Lorelei glided away from the group.

He was damned impressed, that's for sure. Not only was he impressed with the kids. He was impressed with Lorelei. She floated effortlessly around the room, guiding and correcting her students. When she moved to correct a stance or step, she made it look like it was part of the dance.

When some of the kids called out insults over one thing or another, Anna explained that someone had missed a step or failed a jump. He couldn't tell that anyone had made a wrong move. Zierra had practically turned her back to the room.

Soon the music stopped and Alec and Maria entered the small anteroom. They had bottles of water and were sweating profusely. Two other people came in behind them clutching water and towels.

Finally, Alec said, "We wanted to get in here so we could watch this."

War wondered what they were so eager to watch.

One of the other boys got a stunned look on his face and said, "No way!" War was even more confused now.

"Get out your wallets, kids," Alec said gleefully and pulled his out. Alec turned to War. "Watch Renaud. My money's on him."

Zierra sniffed disgustedly but stared fixedly through the large window into the studio. "Here he goes, ya'll!" someone called out and War moved to the front for a clearer view. Anna leaned on his shoulder.

Renaud could be seen engrossed in conversation with Lorelei. "Watch, he's gonna hit the wall, he just cain't help it." This was offered from someone whose money was apparently not on Renaud. War watched closely.

Suddenly, there was an audible groan from Renaud's backers as the young man placed both hands on Lorelei's shoulders. Then the crowd began to count, "five, four, three, two, one—ohhhh!"

Lorelei seemed to expand. She was shaking a finger at Renaud and obviously giving him a harsh dressing down. Her brow was furrowed and she was not letting up. Renaud had put his hands on her.

So, even his nephew was one of 'the guys'.

War grinned. A red stain crept up Renaud's skin into his hairline. Zierra was smug.

"*Mais non, mon amis!*" but no, my friends, called Alec. As he spoke, Renaud dropped to one knee and extended a hand, palm up, toward Lorelei. She took a deep breath, stomped her foot, and turned her head away. She turned back to look at Renaud. Renaud bowed his head exposing his neck to her. War was stunned.

“Absolutely fuckin’ masterful,” murmured Alec. Maria nudged him and looked pointedly at Anna. Lorelei lifted a dainty foot and placed it on his shoulder and shoved. Renaud grabbed the foot and both toppled end over end, gracefully gaining their feet. They were laughing. She walked away from him and Renaud came toward the watching group.

He entered the crowded room and said to Alec, “Hand me that CD, *ami*, and could you get Mademoiselle Rory and I some water for after.”

Three of the boys present groaned, “No Way!”

“I saw her yelling at you!”

“She was pissed as hell!! You touched her, you bastard.”

They were very upset with Renaud.

Renaud looked at the three boys, then he looked over to Zierra. He locked eyes with her and said, “Yeah, she was yellin’ at me. She was sure pissed, yeah?”

He looked at Zierra for a long moment. Enunciating each word carefully, he said, “She’s God - Damn - Beautiful when she’s mad, ain’t she?” His eyes bored into hers. He turned to leave.

War stood up and several of the boys gathered around Renaud.

War stalked up to him, parting the small crowd. “What you playin’ at boy?”

“Not a damn thing, *Oncle*,” Renaud said. “I’m gonna have a beautiful woman drape herself all over me. I’m gonna teach another beautiful woman that I cain’t be led around like a dog on a leash. Life is good. Excuse me.”

War watched his nephew walk to the center of the room and begin stretching. Zierra trained her gaze on Renaud and never looked away. Anna was so excited that she couldn’t sit still.

War fixed his eyes on the couple in the center as the lights dimmed to a single spotlight trained on them. He’d never watched his nephew dance before a few nights ago. The opening chords of a song began to play.

The two dancers were pressed body-to-body—toe-to-toe, hip-to-hip, and torso against torso. When the music began, they raised their arms in unison. Slowly, they laced fingers over their heads. Somehow they were turning in circles in opposite directions and hadn’t let go.

They stopped turning and began swaying together as one. Slowly, one at a time, they separated their fingers.

Renaud gracefully leaped away from Lorelei, spinning and turning across the room. Lorelei leaped after him dragging her hands lightly across his shoulders and chest as she revolved around him. She pressed her front to his back and began to sway with him.

Suddenly, she began to turn, moving away from Renaud. She began a jump and he met her in midair. With both hands, he grabbed her by the waist and lifted her without losing momentum.

The two completed a revolution with Renaud ending flat on his feet. He held Lorelei facing him with her body above his. She raised her arms over her head as Renaud began to lower her so that her petite and feminine body slid down against his muscled and masculine one. Her arms were around his neck when her feet finally touched the floor.

She lifted her hands and placed them on each side of his face then swirled, nimbly

bounding away again.

From opposite sides of the room, the two moved toward each other, first with small jumps, then finally, they met in mid-air in the center of the room in a hurdle-like jump. They each looped one arm around the other's waist and turned, landing on toes that allowed them to revolve together in the perfect ballerina stance.

They continued to chase one another around the floor with fluid grace. He chased her and she leaped away. She turned to pursue him and he bounded agilely out of her reach. Their bodies stroked one another intimately throughout the dance.

As the song ended, the pair pressed together with their bodies locked. Renaud bent his head to hers and she flowed backward till she was bent nearly double. As the lights dimmed, it was impossible to tell if they were kissing or not.

Most of those people who'd watched from the anteroom spilled out onto the floor immediately and swarmed the two. War didn't move. He was awed by the intensity and beauty of their dance. As he turned his head, he saw that Zierra hadn't moved either. He looked at her and arched an eyebrow.

Zierra's chin wobbled and she shrugged her shoulders and looked away. He held out an arm and she scooted over and nestled against him, crying softly. After a moment, he handed her a tissue from a nearby box. She wiped her eyes and blew her nose. He took a deep breath and looked at the group.

In the center of the excited throng sat Renaud and Lorelei. Neither of them spoke. Leaning against one another, they sipped their water and allowed the chatter to flow around them. Sometimes one smiled, sometimes one nodded but, War noticed, neither had much to say to the crowd. They were separate from their surroundings.

Their dance had been maddeningly intimate. Under any other circumstances, War knew he would want to rip his nephew's limbs off his body. He wasn't sure he didn't want to do that anyway.

He knew the two were not romantically involved. He'd known that before he asked Lorelei. They were bonded in some way, sure. That legacy was vague enough that he couldn't tell what the two of them were to each other. Too bad if it meant they were supposed to end up together. This woman was his!

Whoa! Reign it in boy, War told himself.

He turned to Zierra. He waited till she turned to him. "You see that sweet li'l thing next to Renaud?" he asked her. She frowned and looked at him again. He grabbed her head and turned it.

"You see that beautiful, tiny, little lady propped up against the man you once told me you love?" When she didn't respond, he gave her a rough shake and gritted, "Do you see her?" Finally Zierra responded with a nod.

"That's the one I want. She's mine. She just don't know it yet. Mayhap I'll need to compromise a time or two. I don't know shit about dancin if it ain't some kinda swing or two-step or one step. But I'll meet her in the middle somewhere. She'll learn about what I care about. I want that woman. I'm willing to work for her."

He strode from the room. A minute later, Zierra followed him. He reached into the middle of the crowd and plucked Lorelei away from Renaud, tucking her against his side.

"Ya miss me, Sugar Baby?" he asked in his deepest, most intimate voice. Lorelei was clearly surprised. Renaud neatly stepped around Zierra and positioned himself in

front of the couple.

“*Oncle War?* I didn’t know you knew Rory all that well?” inquired Renaud. His voice was protective and angry. He reached out to her.

“Maybe you don’t know everything, hmm? Besides, I think you got your own troubles, boy,” War snapped, nodding at Zierra. She had begun to unbutton her blouse.

When Renaud turned to look at her, she told him, “We will talk or I’ll strip naked right here in front of this whole room.”

Lorelei was dazed. Renaud was clearly divided. Before Renaud could work up an answer, War told them all, “You gonna strip off, little girl, do it outside. Every one of you, OUT!”

Thank God that Maria had already taken little Anna home.

To his incredible satisfaction, all the young people filed out. When the room was empty, War turned back to Lorelei. She looked at him unblinking for a minute. Then she shook her head.

“Sheriff Martine, did you come to give me the report?” she asked him quietly. As she spoke, she began to wander away from him. His eyes narrowed as he moved toward her.

“I came to see you, *chère*,” he answered. “I just brought the report with me.” He continued to advance on her.

She chuckled and twirled away. “How funny that I’ve lived outside the law all this time, and since I moved here, I’ve had countless run-ins with the local sheriff.”

He thought she might be trying to keep things light between them. He expected that she still felt incredibly self-conscious about the barbeque and the late-night phone calls. Too bad. He didn’t want things light between them. He wanted things heavy, very heavy.

War reached out and snatched her in mid-twirl. As her body met his he crossed an arm behind her and clasped her hip. With his other hand he buried his fingers in her hair and held her head in his palm.

Lowering his head to hers, he told her, “You cain’t avoid the long arm of the law, *chère*.”

He bent and brushed his lips across hers. He traced the seam of her lips with the tip of his tongue. She uttered a soft, passionate sound.

Tenderly he took her lower lip between his teeth. His tongue slid into her mouth and caressed hers with long, gentle strokes. His hand cupped her head, caressing her scalp.

Without breaking off the kiss, he swung her into his arms and carried her down the short hallway to her apartment. He put her on her feet inside the door and began kissing her face.

As he continued to kiss her mouth with increased pressure, his hands moved to her shoulders. In one move, he pulled the leotard down her arms on both sides and exposed her small breasts.

She uttered a cry of protest and he pushed the leotard completely off of her arms. He pulled his own shirt open and dropped it to the floor.

His chest was broad and muscled and furred with black hair that tapered to his belt buckle and disappeared. Lorelei crossed her arms over her small bosom and stared at him, wide-eyed.

“Uh, uh, uh, *chère*. How you gonna hide such a beautiful sight from me?” He rumbled, taking her wrists in his hands and placing them on his tanned and hairy chest. “Mmmmm. I jus gotta have me a taste, *petit*. I’m a starvin’ man and only you can sate me.”

He lowered his mouth to one breast and took a nipple into his mouth, sucking harder and harder. He nipped at it and then lathed it with his expert tongue to bring it to a hard peak. Then, kissing a path from one breast to the other, he repeated the attention to her neglected breast.

As he suckled at her breasts, War unbuckled his belt and unzipped his pants. Locking eyes with her, he took one of her hands and placed it on his enormous erection. She rubbed his cock through his boxers, and while she didn’t move her hand away, she raised her huge eyes to his face, questioning.

“What is it, *chère*?” he knew something was wrong. Was he moving too fast?

“I don’t know what to do,” she whispered, her face flaming. “I’ve never ... I haven’t even seen” She looked like a deer caught in headlights.

His indigo eyes softened and caught fire. His woman would never know another man besides him. He was to be her only one. He would teach her about love and only him. He felt like throwing his head back and howling in triumph. She hadn’t tried to stop him. She just didn’t know what to do.

He lowered his shorts, holding his hand over hers and placing it on his cock. He wrapped her fingers around it under his and moved them up and down.

“Just touch me, *chère*. I just need your touch,” he said as he lowered his mouth to hers again. He reached into her leotard and tights, under her very thin panties and cupped her round little bottom.

“Mine,” he moaned into her mouth. “All mine!”

He squeezed her and released rhythmically as he edged his fingers closer to her moist center.

He groaned at the way she was moving her hand on his rigid length. She squeezed her small hand and moved up and down, trailing her fingers lightly over the tip.

Timidly, she reached down with her other hand, combing through the mass of black hair at his genitals and slid her fingers under his balls, causing him to groan louder. When she jerked her hand away he caught it.

“Don’t stop, *chère*. I have never felt anything so *bon* as your fingers touching me that way.”

Her lips curved in a smile as old as The Garden of Eden and she moved her fingers back to cup him again. He was wrestling mightily for control when his police radio went off. Going still, War cursed under his breath in his native language as he listened to the call. He was off duty and had been—but this was a serious call.

“Oh, *chère*, I don’t want to go,” he moaned. He gave each of her nipples a sucking kiss and covered her mouth with his, kissing her deeply. He growled and groaned again as he donned his shirt and zipped his pants, tucking in his shirttails. His radio repeated the call, sounding even more insistent than before. Another quick kiss and he was gone.

Chapter Eleven

Hours later, War sat at his desk wrapping up his report. The call had been a convenience store hold up and the damn fool had taken a shot at him. That had really pissed him off.

He had been on the brink of making love for the first time with his mate—holy shit—his mate!

Either way, that slimy little loser had a lot to answer for. War had damn near killed the man. Now he had to write it up.

Once finished, War stared speculatively across the street. He could see quite a bit through Lorelei's corner window, but he couldn't tell what she was doing.

He was pretty sure she was up. She had opened the glass panel at the top of her corner window that allowed airflow. He could hear little noises now and then.

Finally, he couldn't fight it any more. He needed her. He needed to be inside of her right now. Sooner if it could be arranged. He wouldn't let his werewolf out but he needed—needed—to mate with his woman.

He let himself in at the bottom of her stairs and locked the door after. He would have to see about that lock soon. He let himself into the studio door and locked that, too.

As he moved into Lorelei's apartment, he scraped one shoe off and then the other, barely slowing down. His socks followed in the same fashion. Thirty seconds later, he stood in front of her as her head came through the top of her large tee shirt.

When she let out an 'Oh' of surprise, he moved his lips over hers and kissed her deeply. He stroked her tongue with his own, enjoying the feel of her soft mouth under his.

Of their own accord, her arms moved up his chest to his shoulders. He unbuttoned his uniform shirt while he drank from her pliant lips. He urged her backward until her thighs bumped the edge of the bed.

War fastened his intent blue gaze on her green eyes and reached for her arms. Taking her hands, he moved them to his heavy belt and unfastened it. Still holding her hands, he guided them to the button and zipper on his pants. He held her hands in his, watching her face as, together, they pushed his pants and boxers off of his hips. Naked, he wrapped his arms around her and guided her on to the bed.

Still dressed in her nightshirt, Lorelei sat on his lap with his arms around her. Neither said a word but carefully watched the other's eyes. He must certainly know how nervous she was.

She'd told him that she had never been with a man. But she wanted him. She wanted this, too. She shouldn't, she knew she shouldn't, but this was the man she wanted. If she was ever captured, she'd imagine that every man they forced on her was this man.

He lowered his mouth to hers again and began to nibble at her lips. He nipped her lower lip, then her upper lip, and then smoothed his tongue across them.

With a growl, he plunged his tongue into her mouth and moved it hungrily over hers. He explored every inch of her mouth as she clung to him, overwhelmed.

He rolled and pressed her shoulders against the bed, never breaking their kiss. He tugged at the hem of her large tee shirt and pulled it up so that he could find her naked breasts with his hands.

Pulling the large shirt over her head, he lowered his mouth to her nipple. He swirled his tongue all around it and sucked her entire small breast into his mouth.

Lorelei had never felt anything like this. She moaned and called out his name, repeating, "Please Warrick, please!"

"Please what, *chère*?" he demanded.

"I don't know!" she cried. He was causing feelings in her that she hadn't known existed. He moved his mouth to her other breast and sucked it in completely. One of his large hands covered her other breast while his free hand moved down her ribs to her flat tummy and rested on her hip.

As she tossed and turned, his hand moved to trace the elastic at her hip and thigh. He moved his fingers lightly over her panties, teasing her sex. She could feel her body sending hot moisture down between her legs.

Slowly he began to trail his tongue down the path his hand had traveled. He licked and kissed over her ribs, around her belly button and down. Suddenly he froze.

He gripped her narrow hips in his large hands and stared at her flat abdomen. After several long seconds, he arched an eyebrow and looked up at her. He looked down again and back up at her. She was taking deep breaths when she realized what had garnered his attention. She was already pink with arousal but now she was rosy with embarrassment.

He stared at the likeness of a narrow-eyed duck wearing a purple double-breasted coat, purple cape, purple mask and purple fedora that was drawn on her panties. He traced the outline of the duck with his finger. She had risen to her elbows to look at him. With his eyebrow still wickedly arched, his lips began to twitch. He moved his tracing finger to a point just below the duck and above her mons. He began to move his finger back and forth over the words printed there.

"Let's get—Dangerous?" he read and asked at the same time, still fighting to control his smile.

She expelled a deep sigh and dropped to her back against the mattress. "Whenever there's trouble you call DW."

He lowered his laughing face to her abdomen and slowly began to ease the panties down over her hips.

"Those are truly words for you to live by, *chère*," he said, chuckling as he kissed the parts of her tummy and hips newly uncovered. "We gonna talk more about that later. Much later."

He drew the panties off of her hips and down her legs. His lips and tongue followed their sinful path. He separated the tangle of burnished curls between her legs and began tracing her labia with his tongue. He tasted her, drawing his tongue along her outer lips until her juices flowed into his mouth.

She whimpered and bucked her hips beneath him. He drew her clit into his mouth, sucking on the engorged nub, making her cry out. Parting her legs wider, he lowered his mouth and slid his tongue down her cleft. She clutched his hair and cried out his name, tossing her head on the pillow. He inserted one finger into her tight passage and she experienced her second ever in-person orgasm.

Slowly he eased himself back up her body, still keeping his finger moving inside of her. He kissed her mouth over and over while he replaced his finger with the head of his cock. Lorelei whimpered, unsure of this new, fuller feeling and knowing there would be pain.

“Shhh, Baby, it’s all right. It may hurt for a second but I’ll make it feel *tres, tres bon*,” he soothed. “Trust me, *chère*. I’ll take care of you.”

He began to rub her sensitive nub while moving the head of his cock in and out of her passage just a little deeper each time, until she was moaning. Her body was creaming and she writhed under him.

All at once, he thrust into her, a long, deep stroke that left him gasping for breath. A growl rumbled from him while a scream ripped through her. He caught it with his mouth. A few tears of pain dripped out of her eyes and he kissed them away as he began to pump slowly in and out of her.

Lorelei thought she would die of the pain when he plunged into her. She could barely catch her breath. Then he started to move and she knew she would die. She wouldn’t die of pain, though, the pleasure was killing her.

She was inundated with new sensations he was making her feel. She moved her hands up and down his back and wrapped her legs around his thighs, trying to bring him closer.

“Warrick,” she gasped. “I like this. I like it, Warrick. Keep—keep doing this.” She could barely speak but she wanted him to know. He didn’t hold back his deep growl. He snarled and closed his teeth lightly over the muscle between neck and shoulder. He licked and nipped her skin as her sheath closed itself around him and squeezed him tightly.

She dug her heels into his rear, trying to press him deeper inside her. She bit at his shoulder and tried to move with him. As her vaginal muscles began to clench he continued to thrust into her.

Her shuddering climax triggered his. Her screams and his roars combined as he crushed her to him and pounded his semen into her. She melted against him with her face buried against his neck and her nails gripping his shoulders.

“Lorelei, Sugar! *Chère*! Are you okay?” She opened one eye and closed it again. She expelled a deep breath. She opened both eyes.

“Was that normal?” she asked.

He chuckled at her.

“I only know it was exquisite,” he breathed. “You have given me a priceless gift, *chère*. I treasure the gift and the giver.”

She was touched by his words, suddenly feeling very emotional. Try as she might, she couldn’t hold back the few stray tears that escaped. War licked the tears from her eyes and snuggled her against him. Almost immediately, he was asleep. Lorelei lay awake for long hours. She dropped off to sleep just before sunup.

Chapter Twelve

Renaud stood looking at the beautiful lupine sitting near him. He wasn't sure what he was going to do about her, but she was turning into a real problem. He sighed heavily.

When he'd left the dance school, he'd avoided Zierra, driving into the woods near his uncle's house. Parking his truck at the end of a dirt track, he'd walked back into the woods on foot. When he returned to his truck, Zierra had been waiting there for him.

She'd brought a bottle of wine, a picnic lunch, and a blanket. Saying little, he'd listened to her chatter for a while. He ate some of the food she brought since it took the edge off of listening to her never-ending narration.

He was sighing now because she had begun to talk about their relationship. Renaud had to put a stop to that right now.

"Zierra, we are not a couple. You are not my mate and we do not have a future. So quit planning it," he growled.

"You don't have to be so m-mean," she sniffed. "You know I'm in love with you."

"I know you're in love with you, Zierra." He rolled his eyes. "You only want me because I don't fall all over you. Maybe, if you ever grow up, you could grow into my mate, but I doubt it. That's not mean. That's honest."

Renaud had decided not to pull any more punches with Zierra. There were things he admired about her and he did care for her. No way did he want to wake up next to her for the rest of his life, though. He didn't want to think about how long the rest of his life might or might not be.

He was leaning against the side of his truck, having finished eating. Zierra had been sitting on the tailgate but now she was walking toward him.

He looked her over thoroughly. She was wearing a tight, stretchy skirt, a cotton top that was tied at the waist and held closed by maybe one button between her breasts. She wore no stockings and her bare feet were encased in stiletto sandals.

As she pressed her body against his, his cock leapt to attention.

"Renaud, be nice to me. I really want to be with you," she whispered into his neck. She ran her lacquered nails up and down his cotton covered back. He pushed her away from him.

"If you want me to fuck you, little girl, you're going about it the right way. If you want anything else, put your ass in that car and leave now," he snarled at her.

"Renaud, please ...," she whispered again, looking into his face.

He kept his hands rigidly at his sides and glared at her. Watching her closely, he saw her chest rise and fall as she took a deep breath. Evidently she'd come to some kind of decision.

As Renaud kept his steady gaze fixed on her, Zierra unbuttoned the single button between her breasts. She untied the knot at the waist and shrugged the blouse from her shoulders. Since she wasn't wearing a bra, her generous breasts bounced free. Looping

both thumbs in the waist of her skirt, she began to ease it down when Renaud stopped her.

He grabbed both wrists and held her still. Leaning forward from the waist, he moved his nose in between her breasts and inhaled deeply. Satisfied, he let go of her wrists and straightened.

Zierra stood pouting for a minute. Renaud was sure that she was mad because he'd checked to be sure that she wasn't in heat. Too bad—she wasn't going to trap him into fathering her pups. He had enough to deal with.

Apparently, Zierra decided to take what she could get. She lowered the skirt past her hips and stepped out of it. She wasn't wearing panties either. She walked up to Renaud and placed her hand on his erection, rubbing him.

"Do you want me, Renaud?" she purred.

"How do you want it, Zierra? Bent over the bed of my truck or on your knees in the dirt?"

He still didn't intend to pull any punches. If she was going to come on to him acting like a lupine whore, he wasn't going to dress it up. He was hard and hungry and he needed to fuck. Clearly, so did she.

"Both," she purred.

Good, no more games. Renaud tugged her to the side of the truck and turned her to face it with her back to him.

"Both it is," he growled. "Hold on and don't let go."

He stepped up behind her and ran his hand up her thighs, cupping her bare bottom. He pulled her a few steps away from the truck and made sure her arms were braced on the tall side of the bed. He slid his hand between her legs and found her wet.

Quickly, he jerked his zipper down and pushed his jeans and shorts off his hips. He brought his knob to her opening and stroked her with it once.

"This what you want?" he rumbled, voice harsh.

"Yes! Oh yes, Renaud," she groaned.

With no further preliminaries, Renaud plunged his aching cock into her waiting sheath. He buried himself to the hilt and began to thrust. Zierra began to moan, loudly.

"You like that? You like me to use you this way?"

"Yes, yes, yes!" she gasped.

Renaud continued to thrust savagely into her, reaching around to rub her clit. She screamed and began to shatter, moaning and gasping her climax. Renaud snarled a warning at her when she would have dropped to the ground.

After a few more powerful thrusts, he emptied himself into her. He supported her a moment and then stepped away.

She turned as he reached for his boxers and jeans. "Wait!" she cried out.

"What?" he paused.

"You're still hard," she observed, coyly.

"So?" he still hadn't pulled his clothes back up.

"Renaud? Would you ...?" She took a deep breath.

Renaud arched a brow at her. He wasn't going to make it easy.

"I want to do it again," she finally answered him.

"Do what again?" he looked fixedly at her. She reached out and touched his still rigid erection.

“Make”

He began to pull his pants up.

“I mean, fuck. I want to ... I want you to fuck me again, Renaud.”

He stood unmoving. “Since you asked so nicely” He gave her a cold half smile.

“Would you take your clothes off, Renaud?” she asked. He shrugged.

Crossing his arms at his waist, he pulled his t-shirt over his head. He was surprised at Zierra’s indrawn breath. He kicked off his shoes and stepped out of his jeans and shorts.

Zierra stepped up to him and began running her hands over his muscular shoulders, chest, back, abdomen, and even his hips and thighs. He couldn’t deny that it felt good. Finally, he stopped her. He was hard enough.

He turned her away from him and pushed her to her knees in the dirt. She leaned forward and he nudged her legs apart, lapping at her wet pussy. He edged his larger body over hers and entered her again from behind.

She clenched around him, coming instantly. He began to plunge into her repeatedly, harder and harder. She was moaning with every thrust, her feminine muscles clenching continuously.

Relentlessly, he continued to pump, pinning her down by biting into her shoulder. Finally, holding her hips steady, he began to plunge, piston-like into her until, with one more powerful lunge, he came.

If he hadn’t been holding her with his jaw, she would have pitched face-first into the dirt. He helped her up, ignored her pleas for more, dressed her, and cleaned her hands and knees.

He opened the door of her car and waited for her to get into it.

“Renaud, can we still be friends?” she asked him, standing near the door to her car.

“You think we were friends, Zierra?” he asked her. At her nod, he said, “If you stick to the truth, the facts, then we can be some kind of friends. You keep going off on power trips or fantasies. I don’t need a friend—or a fuck—like that.”

“Okay, Renaud,” she cooed, smiling at him. She seemed very young somehow. “I’ll try hard not to be that way with you. Maybe we could do this again sometime?” She got in behind the wheel of her car.

He couldn’t help but smile a little. “This or something like it,” he allowed as he closed her car door and watched her drive away.

Renaud shook his head. Zierra would fall back into her old ways in less than a week. It didn’t matter. It had no impact on how he felt about her. Still, she was enthusiastic about sex and it had relieved some of his stress.

He got home right after his uncle did. He heard him climb into bed, while he climbed into the shower.

Chapter Thirteen

As Lorelei came out of the shower the next morning, she heard War's lazy Cajun drawl wishing her a good morning and thanking her for a beautiful night on the answering machine.

She smiled. Maybe things could work out, after all. Her father had suggested that she would have a mate who would wear his medallion. War was strong, smart, and resourceful. She badly wanted to trust him.

Yes, twenty-one years old was very young. Still, she'd been on the run most of those years. She'd seen both her parents die and had comforted her brother as he'd dealt with the death of three parents.

She faced the certain knowledge that she'd be caught and caged as would her brother. She'd have to endure unspeakable torture and worse, she'd have to endure it for him, too. Because of the medallions, he would only experience the pain and agony by seeing her live through it.

She would be unable to hide her pain from him. He'd know what she was feeling every second. If she died, he'd die shortly after that. He couldn't be killed unless she was. That wasn't the result of wearing the medallions. It was the result of genetic engineering. If either of them took off their medallion, they'd lose contact with the other. That was what their father had told them.

According to him, their only hope of escaping the men who hunted them lay in Lorelei's mate. The man that fell in love with her, and she with him, would be strong, just, and loving. That man would wear Ivan's medallion and he'd know how to help them.

Lorelei was beginning to think that War was that man. She knew she was falling for him. He was a Sheriff, so he must be somewhat just, in her opinion. He certainly was strong and muscular. He was related to Renaud so they had some DNA in common, too. That couldn't hurt, right?

She had plenty of faith in herself about a lot of things. She knew she was smart and capable. She didn't feel great about her judge of character, though. Her only friend and confidant throughout her life had been her brother. She'd had absolutely no one else to confide in.

When Lorelei considered that, she realized she'd solved her own dilemma. She'd tell Renaud what she thought and how she felt about War. At the very least, his insights would help. After all, what she did involved him, too.

She decided to drive out to a specialty book and movie store she'd heard about in nearby Alabama. She could get a book about Papa and some tapes of his movies and performances. Then she could tell Warrick about him. Maybe he really was the one.

Lorelei hurried to her car. Once she began driving, she was lost in her own happy world, humming along with the radio. She wasn't thinking of anything specific. She was feeling good about things for a change.

She had been driving for about half an hour when she heard her Papa's voice

again.

“Get away, Lorelei!” he said.

She looked in her mirror and realized that she was being followed. She closed her hand on her medallion and began to take random turns. She needed her brother. She was alone and in trouble.

* * * *

War hung up the phone in his kitchen and turned to find his nephew making his way down the stairs. The younger man was hopping on one foot and putting a shoe on the other. His shirt was open and his medallion flashed red as it bounced on his chest.

“Where you off to, son?” War had just checked on him less than five minutes prior and he’d been fast asleep. He had every reason to believe that Zierra had worn Renaud out the same way that Lorelei had put him to sleep the night before.

Renaud grabbed his truck keys as he headed for the door. “Going to get Rory,” he mumbled. “She needs me.” And then he was gone.

War yelled, “Wait a minute! I was on the phone trying to call her! She didn’t call.” It was too late. Renaud was gone. War knew that neither Lorelei nor Renaud used a cell phone. Frustration and suspicion was growing by leaps and bounds.

* * * *

Renaud found her an hour later. They met in Gulf Breezes, Alabama, where she had gotten out of her car on a city street. This wasn’t the first time she’d been followed by one of her father’s old captors. This wasn’t even the first time one of them had gotten close enough to speak to her.

When she knew that Renaud wasn’t far, Lorelei ran into a large store, her assailant chasing her. The man shouted vile things to her in his own language about how they’d watch as she was impregnated. He shouted to her that they would fertilize her eggs with her father’s sperm and then they’d dissect the mutant baby that resulted.

They knew that Lorelei was soft and loving. If she were rattled enough, they’d have her. She screamed that the man had a gun. In anger, he fired that gun at her. During the ensuing melee, Renaud came for her and the man was arrested.

Authorities on the scene thought that Renaud had been shot but there was no evidence of it. He cited a nosebleed earlier in the day to explain blood on his shirt. He said he’d grabbed the shirt on the way out the door and hadn’t even noticed the hole in it. He gave them a youthful, nonchalant shrug, daring them to challenge him.

Lorelei had been in no shape to return to Xavier Parish that day. Renaud got a room for them locally. He called his uncle to let him know that he’d be away overnight. He didn’t mention Lorelei. He didn’t think about caller ID.

They had nothing to hide and had been honest with War—if not clear about being brother and sister, at least they had been clear about not having a sexual relationship. He couldn’t tell his uncle about the attack. It just wasn’t safe. They’d tell him when they got home.

They filed charges, saying the man had been stalking Lorelei. Given that the stranger was not a United States citizen, even though he had travel visas, things did not look good for him. The next morning, the authorities allowed Renaud and Lorelei to leave. Renaud took his sister to a beach not far from Gulf Breezes where they spent a quiet day.

Conversation wasn’t necessary and neither spoke a word the entire day. Renaud

bought Rory a floppy hat so she wouldn't burn. He insisted she wear some crazy colored sunscreen. Her nose turned slightly pink, but she came away mostly unscathed. They enjoyed a peaceful day of companionship and camaraderie with no pressure to bear.

They had both managed to forget about any worries for most of the day. It was nine o'clock at night before Renaud dropped Lorelei off by her recessed door. She grabbed her floppy hat and gave him a tight hug. He touched his forehead to hers and kissed her on the side of her mouth. Neither had spoken a word to anyone since leaving Gulf Breezes that morning.

Chapter Fourteen

Lorelei was up the stairs at her door when Renaud drove off. When War spoke, it took her by surprise.

“Ev’nin, *chère*.” He didn’t sound warm or sexy. He sounded a little angry.

“Hi Warrick,” she said carefully, her self protection on full alert.

“Have a good day out?” he asked, falsely casual.

“Today was nice,” she answered, her voice shaking. He was truly angry. She bet he thought she was avoiding him.

“Wanna tell me why you ducked me yesterday and today, *petit*?”

Yep, he thought I was avoiding him.

“You regretin’ our couplin’ the other night?”

Well, that was pretty direct.

“No Warrick,” she breathed, “No, of course not. Something happened. I couldn’t get here, I” She wished he would quit advancing on her. All she could do was back up toward the door.

She had turned to put the apartment key in the lock when his hand settled over hers, his front pressed against her back. He looped an arm around her waist and pushed the door open with his free hand. Before she knew it, they were in her apartment facing each other. He was way past mad.

“That right, *chère*? Something happened?” He jerked her against his hard body. “What happened all day and all night with Renaud?” He thrust his swollen groin hard into her abdomen. “Same thing what happened with me the other night?”

Lorelei gasped. “You know that’s not true, Warrick. You know it.” She closed her eyes and shook her head in denial.

“What I know, Sugar? Huh?” He gave her a hard shake. “You tell me right now what I know.”

He turned and pinned her roughly against the door. His eyes seemed to glow like the night sky in the moonlit room. His lips came down roughly on hers. He devoured her mouth as the relentless kiss went on. His hot tongue gave no quarter as he plundered her sensitive mouth. Her nipples hardened against his chest.

She couldn’t think and she couldn’t get her hand to her amulet.

His beast was running this show. He wanted her so bad. She was HIS! How dare she spend the night with some other man?

It didn’t matter that she and Renaud had known each other for more than a decade. It didn’t matter that they’d spent countless nights together before she’d ever met him. It didn’t even matter that he’d taken her virginity only two nights prior.

He crushed her between his hard body and the door as he grabbed both her wrists in his hands.

“You shouldn’t try to play with grown men, little girl. Now look what you went and done.” He rolled his hips, bringing his hard erection against her. He yanked her arms above her head and transferred both wrists to one of his big hands.

Lorelei's eyes were large and round in her face. His eyes glittering blue points at her as he held her gaze.

"Wearin' a bra today, Sugar? I don't believe I've ever seen you wear one."

With his free hand, War reached up and grabbed the neck of her thin cotton blouse. With one tug the sleeveless shell separated at the shoulders as he ripped it off of her. Her medallion and chain came off with it. When he saw that she was wearing a bra, he ripped that off, too.

"You won't need that, anyhow, *petit*," he growled.

"Please ... Warrick, what are you doing?" she pleaded.

"Why *chère*, I'm doing just what I did night before last. Don't you remember? You told me 'I like that Warrick. I like it'." He lowered his mouth to her ear. "I'm just doin' what you said you like." His voice was low and rough. He didn't know how he could still speak. He could clearly hear the angry dog snarling in his mind.

He hooked a finger at the waist of her shorts and tugged. They unsnapped and unzipped and he guided them down her hips.

"No cartoons?" he asked, glancing down at her white panties. Before she could even think of answering, he fastened his mouth on one of her breasts and sucked hard, then nibbled at her nipple.

When she cried out, he lathed it with his tongue and demanded, "You like dat *chère*? Better tell me if you do!" he nipped again and she moaned. "Tell me *chère*!" he insisted. "Won't kiss your other pretty breast if you don't tell me you like it. Now do you like it?" he ground out.

She groaned and cried out, "Yes, Yes, I like it!"

"Good girl!" he growled, transferring his attentions to her other breast.

His thigh was between her legs now, supporting her. He unsnapped his jeans and pulled out his large erection. He rubbed it on her tummy.

"Lookie there what you went and done, Sugar," he said lazily. He held his large cock in his hand and squeezed it, moving his hand up and down on it casually. "You gonna help me out with this, *chère*? You ain't too tired from Renaud, no?"

War snatched her up and turned her, moving a few steps forward. He set her on her feet facing the high, rolled arm of her couch.

With one tug, she was bent over and he was moving her panties down over her hips. He began placing heated kisses on her spine, licking and kissing until he reached the cleft at the top of her rear.

"Warrick, don't be angry. Please. Not like this," she sobbed. He ignored her.

He put a large palm on each rounded cheek and pulled them apart. He licked her from the tiny rosette buried between her cheeks all the way to her clit. He did this again and again until she was moaning her climax.

"Like that, sugar?" When she didn't answer, he growled, "Tell me, *chère*, DID YOU LIKE THAT?" There was violence in his guttural voice.

"I did. I liked it, Warrick," she got out.

"Good girl." He began rubbing his cock against the wet lips of her sex. He continued to massage the tiny opening between her cheeks with one finger.

"Look at me, Lorelei," he ordered, his voice velvet gravel. She looked over her shoulder into his eyes. "Watch me. Watch me take you." He sounded completely bestial now.

She watched as he grabbed her hips and thrust into her wet center. He groaned and she cried out, her juices gushing over him. She threw her hands in front to support herself. He gripped her with one arm around her middle and pumped himself into her.

He couldn't get deep enough. Her scent was killing him. The little cries and mewling noises she was making were driving him out of his mind. His beast was barely staying under the surface.

"Do you like this, baby? Tell me!" he demanded, growling gutturally, his teeth lengthening.

"I-I-yes!" she groaned. "Yes, Warrick."

"You're mine! Nobody's but mine! You got that? SAY IT!" He snarled the words at her. His claws were showing on his hands. She didn't notice. "Look at me and say it!"

"Yours, Warrick, only yours," she promised him, looking back over her shoulder.

He thrust his rigid cock violently into the silky, hot heat he craved. He pounded into her over and over.

Finally, he came with a roar. "MINE!" he bellowed. His jaw clamped on the muscle between her shoulder and neck. He didn't notice the taste of blood on his tongue.

His semen poured into her in hot spurts, her orgasm following his, clenching and unclenching on his cock as he emptied himself into her. His teeth remained buried in her flesh.

They stayed locked together for a minute or two until he released her shoulder from his extended canines after long minutes. He slowly eased himself off and out of her. She slipped to the floor, sobbing. His anger seeped away. What had he just done? He touched her shoulder.

"Lorelei ..."

She shook her head and scooted away.

He tucked his genitals back into his jeans and zipped them. He looked at her longingly and saw the marks from his teeth and the blood dripping down her back. His seed trickled out of her onto the floor.

He turned and walked out the door. She didn't move until the outer door closed. He heard her scramble to her feet and he heard the door lock. As he listened, he heard the bathroom door open and close. The shower came on. He walked around his building and got in his truck.

Chapter Fifteen

Dekon Warrick Martine was the very definition of 'ugly, mean, and nasty'. Most people who saw the Sheriff coming these days went in the other direction. He didn't know what was going on with Renaud right then.

He saw his nephew with Zierra a time or two the first few days after his last visit to Lorelei, but not at all after that. He knew he'd been wrong to spout that filth to Lorelei about Renaud.

He'd been hurt that she didn't answer his calls. He'd been angry that she chose to spend the day and night with Renaud. He should have gone to her and talked to her. Instead, he'd whipped himself into a frenzy about things he knew weren't true. He really was a mean old bastard. Make that a stupid old bastard

Lorelei had had her telephone disconnected the morning after War's last visit. She had also put a note on the door saying classes were cancelled for the next week. War heard Renaud tell a few people that the ballet school would be closed for a time. He'd wondered about that, but he kept his distance.

Ten days later, War sat in his office and watched her dance. She looked like the perfect little ballerina. He wanted her so much. He knew he'd behaved badly. He just didn't know what he should do to fix things with her. Still, he was who he was. He'd just have to move forward. He leaned back in his chair and propped his feet on the windowsill.

As he watched his mate twirl daintily, he thought about what he'd done. He'd more or less broken into her house and taken her virginity. She hadn't been unwilling, but he'd known she was an innocent. When she'd needed time to mull that over, he'd accused her of sleeping with her best friend of fourteen years who was his nephew.

He reminded himself that he'd made these wild accusations two days after he'd taken her virginity. Then he forced her into animal sex and bit her, leaving his mark on her because he was in a jealous rage. He was pretty sure Hallmark didn't make a card for that.

Lorelei spent several days either huddled in her bed or showering. When Renaud pressed her about her odd behavior, she told him that she was still upset about the incident in Gulf Breezes.

She knew that he wasn't fooled. He trusted her to have good reasons not to confide in him. He was right, she did have very good reasons.

Warrik Martine was her brother's uncle. She didn't want to color his relationship with the other man. Renaud didn't love very many people and she knew that War was one of the few.

The truth was, Lorelei was in love with War. She knew it and she hated herself for it. She wished she could hate him, too. Sometimes she did but, mostly, she mourned the loss of her hopes.

In love with him or not, Lorelei didn't trust him. He was dangerous and he'd hurt her. If he hurt her once, he'd do it again. She knew she'd never love anyone else.

That realization just made her angry. Now she had to accept that her judgment was poor and the only man she would ever love—would ever have the opportunity to love very likely—didn't trust her and didn't believe what she told him.

Her pride was hurt, her heart was broken, and her future looked more than a little bleak. Lorelei didn't like herself very much right then.

* * * *

War didn't have much opportunity to spend time with Renaud in the days after his 'separation' from Lorelei, but they did cross paths.

One afternoon, he was sitting at his desk looking across at Lorelei's building when he saw her run out the door. He saw the sun reflect off of her necklace.

Lorelei running out the door would have caught his attention anyway, but he got an unofficial call at the same time. Apparently Renaud was involved in an altercation that seemed about to escalate. War hurried out to his SUV.

When he pulled into the lot of the Burger Bin, he saw his nephew, dangling another young man by the throat. The young man swung a knife at Renaud and War was sure he had connected at least once. He knew he saw blood on his nephew's torso.

Before War could even get out of his vehicle, the young werewolf flung his opponent away. Renaud turned and walked to Lorelei's little car and got in. She drove off.

When War saw him later, he asked Renaud about the incident. Renaud downplayed the whole thing and wouldn't talk about it. Since there was no official complaint and War could find no injury on his nephew, he was forced to let it go.

* * * *

Over the next month, War saw Lorelei only from a distance. He saw her when she passed him in traffic a few times. Once he walked into the grocery store and her scent was heavy in the air.

He looked around until he saw her in the checkout line. When he looked at her, she didn't look away, but her eyes were unreadable. She fingered the shining amulet at her throat. When she left the store, Renaud was waiting in the parking lot.

Another time he was outside the Post Office when she came out. He tipped his hat to her and she nodded. He wasn't sure if he should take these exchanges as positive or negative. She didn't ignore him, and she didn't run screaming. That had to count for something.

War decided he should just bide his time. He'd try to turn up where she went and win her back. That should work, right? She was skittish but he'd work this out. He was damn stubborn. He knew she was weak to his lovemaking. He'd get her back.

Chapter Sixteen

War was getting ready for work late one morning about a month after Lorelei and Renaud had spent that night away together. When his home phone rang, he was very surprised to find himself talking to a brother officer from Gulf Breezes, Alabama.

The man began talking to War as if the Sheriff had some knowledge about an incident involving his nephew and Lorelei Allemande. After they spoke for a few minutes, both officers agreed that War should take a drive over and view the tapes of the incident.

As the two men watched the store tape and listened, the Alabama officer gave War the rundown on what had taken place. He let War read the reports. The officers had been very thorough.

The store tape showed Lorelei dashing into the building with the other man after her. It showed and played the man shouting at Lorelei in a foreign language. She began to look more and more upset and ill.

The officers decided to first watch and then roll the tape back for translation. After a few moments, there was a yellow flash and then Lorelei began screaming that the man had a gun. The intruder fired his gun at her, but she was able to get away. It was clear he was not trying to kill her.

That flash! War knew that flash was important. He stared fixedly at the screen.

"Keep watching, though, man," said the Alabama officer. "That boy comes outta nowhere, don't he? Look at that!"

Renaud rushed the foreign man, wrestling him to the floor and knocking the gun away. But it sure looked like Renaud had been shot in the chest. War swore he saw the younger man stumble backward from the impact. He agreed that it looked like fresh blood on Renaud's shirt.

Renaud snatched Lorelei and placed himself between her and the rest of the room. The police poured in right behind him.

"We took their statements, which are pretty direct, if sparse." The man gave War a 'know what I mean?' kind of wink.

"We also recorded what they said to each other at the scene. Course, we got what was on the store tape, but the little lady was damn near hysterical. Even though she wasn't really injured, she was pretty upset. Turned out the asshole started chasin her 'round 10 o'clock that mornin. Keep in mind, this event took place after two p.m. She musta had a cell or sumpin cuz she let that boy know right where to find her. She was actually going somewheres else altogether. She tried to keep the guy movin till she could get to a big 'nuf place to lure him in."

He seemed to admire Lorelei for that. He mentioned that there were bullet holes in one fender of her car. The rear windshield had been shattered and a bullet lodged in the back seat.

They talked about that for a minute then the other officer told War, "Seems the guy has a thing for her cause she's a famous dancer and can talk his language. Been

stalkin' her I guess. He's one sick puppy, though. Watch here, see where she's turnin' kinda green?"

War nodded, he felt kinda green himself. "He's telling her a bunch o guys gonna watch while some mighty stud 'impregnates' her. But look at this, man. I thought she'd pass out there. The bastard told her they were gonna impregnate her with her father's sperm and then make her watch 'em do experiments on the mutant baby."

The other officer shuddered. War definitely felt sick. But the other man had more to share.

"Now look at that kid. Fresh blood all over him and a hole in his shirt. No bullet, no injury though." The Alabama officer shook his head.

"Okay, here's where she and the kid are talking that language. Turns out, its Czech. She says something about her Papa warning her. Now, she's tellin' him what the asshole said, but then, see here, this is where she really loses it."

He rewound the tape so War wouldn't miss a thing. "She's tellin' the boy she was headin' up to 'Lizabeth to a dancer-type store there. She wanted to tell Warrick—guess that's you, huh?"

Officer 'Einstein' gave War another wink. "She wanted to get you somethin'—some kind o present or somethin' to do with her Papa. The boy's telling her it has to wait. Now this I found odd, though."

Only this? War wondered.

"The kid keeps telling her, 'In for a penny, in for a pound.' But it's like he's saying they can't afford the penny so they damn sure can't pay the pound. At first he wouldn't—but finally he did let the doc there give her a shot. You can see she's a mess. Got 'em a room at the Bed 'n Breakfast overnight. Ol' Doc knocked her out. That bastard's gonna be deported. We prob'ly don't need 'em to testify."

War let the officer know that the same guy had been a suspect in an earlier attack on Lorelei. He thanked the man and, after much backslapping, he headed back to Xavier Parish.

She'd tried to tell him something had happened. He'd been in fine form by then, though. He wouldn't hear a word from her. No doubt about it, he was a real bastard.

* * * *

On the way back home, War thought about that flash. He'd seen that flash before.

He remembered the barbeque. When Natalie had bruised Lorelei's shoulder, her medallion had flashed. In seconds, Renaud had appeared.

War thought about the attack on Lorelei at the department store. When Renaud had shown up, his medallion had been glowing.

The morning after he'd made love to Lorelei, he'd gone home. While he was trying to call Lorelei, Renaud had come hopping down the stairs. She'd been in trouble since ten that morning. War recalled that his nephew's medallion had been flashing red then, too.

Just two weeks ago, when she'd run out of her building, there had been a flash of yellow. Unaccountably, Lorelei had turned up where Renaud was involved in that fight.

A couple of days ago, he'd surprised her at the grocery store and her necklace had glowed yellow. She must have been frightened. He recalled that Renaud had driven up right after that.

Now War thought about the number of times he'd seen the flash or glow at

Lorelei's throat. He considered all the times he'd seen Renaud's amulet glow. He realized that the charms glowed any time either of them had intense fear or pain or, in Renaud's case, anger.

He didn't fully understand it, but War knew he was on to something. Lorelei and Renaud had been friends since they were seven years old. They were the same age. Their mothers had been friends.

When he'd run Lorelei's information for the police reports, he'd noticed that she and Renaud shared a birthday. It had to mean something.

War loved his nephew but he felt a bit of distance growing between himself and Renaud. He knew he was in love with Lorelei. He had to find a way to repair these important relationships in his life.

He found his perfect opportunity to campaign for Lorelei's affections late in the summer. The Duck Festival was starting the next week and he knew she'd be there. He was counting on her affinity for ducks. Of course, War would be there, too. He'd be there out of uniform since he had plenty of men to work it. He'd visit with the good citizens of Xavier Parish wearing jeans. He'd sneak up on her.

Chapter Seventeen

Renaud had forced her to come. Lorelei was perfectly content to stay home. She had kept her own counsel regarding her relationship with War. Renaud knew she'd tell him what she needed him to know when the time was right.

Still, Renaud insisted that his sister needed to relax and she needed to get out of her little apartment. Obviously, something had happened, but she'd kept it to herself. It didn't matter. He loved her and he worried about her.

But he also had his own hands full with Zierra. Ever since he'd used her body so roughly, she wouldn't leave him alone. He found it very hard to refuse the use of her willing body, but he managed it. He tried not to think about how much easier it had been to tolerate her company when he'd been buried in her to the hilt.

Lorelei had insisted on driving herself to the Duck Festival. She wanted to leave when she was ready. She didn't want to wait for him. She got tired early these days. Renaud guessed she was a little depressed.

* * * *

War spotted his prey around seven that evening near the Tilt-a-Whirl. She was walking along looking at the booths. He ambled along behind her, keeping her in his sights.

He didn't crowd her. He knew the right moment would come along. In the meantime, he was having a very hard time controlling his beast with all the men trying to talk to Lorelei.

Didn't she know how sexy she was?

War watched from behind a jewelry booth as an older woman stopped to talk to Lorelei. She had noticed the necklace Lorelei was wearing. The woman asked her where it had been made.

Apparently the lady was a visitor to the area and thought the medallion was local Cajun art. Lorelei artlessly told the woman that it was from her father's homeland and only her brother had one similar. She extended the amulet hanging around her neck so the woman could admire it. The woman gushed a little longer and then turned back to the local jewelry.

War puzzled over this for a moment. Lorelei had a brother? That seemed like important information. Renaud had never mentioned that.

HOLY SHIT! RENAUD IS HER BROTHER? Is that possible? How could it be possible?

War was stunned. The implications of that idea were greater than he could consider right then. They had a whole life he knew nothing about. Why would they keep such a thing a secret? He had to consider this possibility carefully. Now was not the time to examine this new discovery. He pushed it to the back of his mind as Lorelei moved on.

Lorelei had chosen her favorite pair of old blue jeans. They had a hole on the back of her right thigh and were missing the better part of her left knee. She wore a short

tee shirt with her favorite duck stitched on its white background.

It WAS a duck festival, right?

She felt like she looked good. Lorelei took a deep breath. She loved the smell of a carnival. She looked over at the rides but looked away. She really didn't want to go on any rides alone.

As she turned to go to the cotton candy booth, Lorelei was surprised by two arms landing on either side of her shoulders. She stopped short and ducked. The two men who'd accosted her stumbled forward.

"Whoa there, little lady, I'd almost think you weren't gonna be neighborly tonight!" said the guy she mentally nicknamed Thing One. "We was havin' us a good natured little argument back there and we just had to ask you a question pretty lady!" That was Thing Two.

Lorelei tried not to look at his teeth, YUK. They both smelled a little ripe to her.

The men had propelled her to the side of one of the game booths at the center of the Midway, so although she didn't feel trapped, she didn't want to stick around either. Maybe if she answered the question, they'd go away.

"Okay, ask," she said. "If it's an ugly question, I won't answer."

Thing One leered at her. "You sure are a purty little thing, ain't ya?"

"Was that your question?" Lorelei asked, waving her hand in front of her face.

Thing One could really use a breath mint.

Thing Two laughed as if he'd never heard anything so funny.

"We wuz wondering 'bout that red mark there on your neck, honey."

Lorelei jerked away when the man tried to touch it.

"We wanted to know if that red mark is a birthmark or a love bite. That's what we wanna know."

Thing One had apparently gotten with the program.

Lorelei sucked in a deep breath. "It's a bite," she said grudgingly. "Not a birthmark. Is that all? Have a good night, guys."

Thing Two wasn't finished. "Now honey, I wanna know, is it a love bite?" His eyebrows wiggled up and down and he was closing in on her.

Suddenly, from out of nowhere, War was there.

"Damn straight it's a love bite!" he snarled at the two surprised men. He'd finally gotten around the crowd but that effort had added to his frustration. "The man that made that bite is one jealous bastard, too. I suggest you assholes get gone!"

And that was the end of Thing One and Thing Two thought Lorelei swallowing a hysterical giggle.

Now she was alone with him. It didn't matter that they were in the middle of the Midway at the Duck Festival. Lorelei felt panicky. She felt as frightened as she had that first time she met him—more frightened now that she knew what he was capable of. He wouldn't do anything in public, though. Would he?

* * * *

War could smell her fear. He could tell it wasn't a life and death fear, but he knew she was afraid. He felt lower than whale shit. She was just standing there. At least she didn't try to get away.

Time to roll the dice.

"*Chère?*" He wanted to reach out and touch her more than he could remember

wanting anything in a long time. She looked at him.

“It was a love bite, *Chère*.” His voice was gruff.

She turned away from him. It took him a minute to realize that she was taking big gulps of air. She wasn’t crying or anything but she might be trying hard not to.

Merdi! Now what should I do?

He moved up behind her and put his hands on her shoulders. He carefully turned her toward him.

Once again, her face was buried in his chest, right where he wanted it. He put his arms around her and held her. He whispered softly into her hair words that he knew she didn’t understand. He rubbed her back.

He put his face in her hair and took a deep breath.

Mon Dieu, how I’ve missed her scent.

War then did what he’d been dying to do since the minute he saw her at the Tilt-a-Whirl. It was almost the end for his chances with Lorelei. He stroked the back of her thigh through the hole in her jeans. She jerked as if he’d pinched her.

Looking in her eyes, he saw an injured and frightened animal looking back at him. Now he smelled that life and death fear. She clutched the charm at her throat. He saw a yellow flash.

War realized the enormity of what he’d done that night a month ago. He’d crushed a butterfly in his fist. She had trusted him. In return, he’d practically raped her.

She had given him access to parts of her that nobody else had ever gotten anywhere near. She had trusted him with something she’d kept buried for most of her life. She trusted him with her sexuality. And she had trusted him to care about how she felt.

She only trusted one other person in the whole world and—shit—there he was.

“Boo, you okay?” Renaud had come tearing up between some rides. He showed some signs that his beast was beginning to emerge. He had slowed down when he saw his uncle. He touched the glowing red medallion at his throat, stopping about ten feet away.

“Boo?” Renaud was obviously confused, but there was no mystery about why he was there. Lorelei was afraid. When Lorelei was hurt or afraid, when Lorelei was threatened, Renaud was there.

The young man stopped, but War knew in that moment that Renaud would charge full speed ahead if Lorelei gave him any sign that she needed him. War also knew that his nephew would fight until either he or War was dead. If Lorelei needed him, Renaud would not stop.

War spoke softly to Lorelei.

“Tell him its okay, *chère*.” He stepped a foot closer. “Tell him I’m going to buy you some cotton candy and win you a stuffed duck.”

War looked intently at her. He tried to convey with his eyes that she would be safe with him. He tried to tell her that he would earn her trust again. She closed her eyes.

Renaud stood without moving for a moment. Then he spoke.

“I can drive you home, Boo,” he said. And just like that was gone. He hadn’t even looked at his uncle again. War filed that in the back of his brain to be considered later, too. That little area was filling up fast.

War expelled the breath he hadn't realized he was holding. She was going to give him a chance again. He swore he wouldn't blow it this time.

"Lorelei? *Chère*? Let's go get some cotton candy, yeah?"

She nodded and he lightly touched her arm. She jerked, but didn't move too far away. He badly wanted to take her hand and was praying for that crowd to show up again. It didn't let him down. After letting her get jostled one time he moved close to her side and a little behind her.

"You want cotton candy or fries, *chère*?" he asked. "There's a tent over here where we can sit a minute. Sound good?" She nodded.

He escorted her in and took every opportunity to pull her close to him. The place was crowded. He didn't want someone to cut in front of them. He had to protect her from getting shoved or nudged, didn't he? She bruised so easily. Soon she began to accept his touch as long as he kept it impersonal.

He had a beer and she had a soda. They ordered a large fries smothered in catsup to share. He wanted her next to him, but just for now, he could live with her sitting across from him.

He liked to look at her face, anyway. The need to touch her was painful though he knew he could wait. He was sure she'd get catsup on her face or something.

"How you like the Duck Festival, *Chère*? Not many ducks, huh?" he winked at her and gave her a devilish smile.

Shyly, she told him, "I haven't seen a single duck yet." There it was! Catsup was smeared on her left dimple.

"For true? Not a single duck?" he reached over and lightly wiped the catsup with his thumb. He sucked his thumb clean and asked, "You haven't even seen your friend there?" He pointed at her shirt.

"I haven't seen him at all. But he is a Canvasback, even though his last name is Mallard. Maybe this isn't his neck of the woods?"

She was trying to make a joke. That was a good sign. She had been waving a French fry around while she was talking.

War grabbed her hand and took a bite from the fry. He stopped short of putting his mouth on her fingers.

"You were makin' me mighty hungry with that fry, Sugar." He tried to look innocent and failed. He decided that watching her put things in her mouth was punishment all by itself.

"What would you rather do, *Chère*, let me win you a stuffed duck or go ride the Ferris Wheel?"

The look on her face was intriguing. Her innocent pleasure in the moment was greater than her fear. He fought back the moisture gathering in his eyes.

"I've never been on a Ferris Wheel before," she said, "but I don't have a stuffed duck, either."

He threw back his head and laughed. He was so glad to be with her again.

"We have a lot to do, then, don't we?" His eyes sparkled with laughter. "We'd better get busy!"

True to his word, War won her a stuffed duck.

"It does look a little like Drake Mallard," she assured him. "See, it's white and has on a vest."

She must still care a little or she wouldn't spare my feelings about the duck, right?

She held her duck in one arm as they headed for the Ferris Wheel line. War frowned ferociously at anyone, friend or foe, who tried to speak to him.

Lorelei moved in front of War in the slow moving line. Next to her, a little boy dropped a toy that he'd been playing with. Lorelei squatted down to pick it up and then bent over to hand it to the child. She straightened up and bent over again to hear something the boy was saying.

War couldn't hold back his groan. "Oh, *Chère*! Please come and stand in front of me," he pleaded, fighting to control his baser urges.

Between her delectable derriere, and that edible thigh hanging out, this hard-on was going to take over the carnival.

She looked at him in confusion.

"At least, *Petit*, let me hold your duck," he begged piteously.

She handed him the duck and he tried to casually hold it in front of his lap. She was blushing a little as she looked at him. He could feel himself blushing, too.

He leaned over and whispered in her ear, "As much as it pains me, *Chère*, I must beg you not to bend over any more."

War crossed one arm in front of her neck and shoulder and pulled her close. He was careful not to fit her against his erection even though he longed to do so. He was grateful that she allowed even this much familiarity.

Chapter Eighteen

"It doesn't ever go fast, then?" Lorelei was looking over the edge of the ride as the ground fell away.

As she leaned over to look out of their Ferris Wheel chair, her shirt tugged away from her neck and shoulder. At first he noticed the delicate chain around her neck and then War got a very good look at the bite he'd made on her shoulder.

He winced. His teeth had pierced the muscle. No damned wonder she'd closed the school for a week.

Dieu! I'm a bigger bastard than I thought.

"Warrick?" She looked back over her shoulder at him, questioningly.

He was hit with the image of her looking back at him when he'd plunged into her that night.

"You're mine! SAY IT!" He'd snarled the words at her. "Look at me and say it!"

"Yours, Warrick, only yours," she'd told him as she had looked over her shoulder at him, frightened, hurt, who knows what else.

He grabbed the iron bars outside of their little car and gripped them until his knuckles were white.

"I'm sorry, *Chère*." He cleared his throat. "I was wool-gatherin'. Ask me again?" She repeated her question.

"No, *Chère*, this is as fast as it gets. Do you wish it would go faster?"

She scooted back into the seat and looked out over the carnival.

"No, I like it just like this. I only want to go fast if I can stop when I get scared or tired." She gave him an innocent smile.

"That why you don't ride the roller coaster, *Chère*? You don't trust the guy running it to stop when you've had enough?" His inky blue gaze was watchful on her face. "You cain't trust him, huh?"

War knew that Lorelei could tell they weren't really talking about carnival rides anymore.

"Can I put my arm around you, *Petit*? I promise not to hold you too tight." She nodded uneasily at him. He curved his warm arm around her.

"The guy running the roller coaster doesn't care if I've had enough or not." She looked up at the starry sky. "Maybe he's happy if I like the ride. Maybe he likes it if I'm scared." She took a deep breath and looked up at War. "Maybe he likes it best that he's the one in control of the whole ride. I just have to go along with what he wants. He's in charge."

My little dancer could do a roller coaster analogy with the best of 'em.

War winced and searched her eyes closely. She wasn't angry. He knew she was still afraid. He knew she was still very hurt. Was it possible he saw hope in those green eyes?

"Maybe he needs some corrective trainin'?" His eyebrow shot up in a question.

Would she play along?

Mon Dieu, how can I convince her that this roller coaster operator is eager to be retrained?

“Corrective training?” She looked at him.

War let out a sigh. YES!

Oui, Chère. I heard the roller coaster operator had been fired. But the poor bastard wants his job back bad, bad.” He stared at her intently. “Maybe if he got some special instruction to help him with his—weaknesses?” War suggested.

The car lurched and she clutched at his arm, throwing her other arm out in front of her. He put both arms around her, lightly.

“That roller coaster imbecile really wants to learn better, *Chère*.” He placed one finger under her chin and tilted it up towards him.

They both understood that he was the hardheaded roller coaster guy.

“Do you think ...?” she choked, he could tell this was difficult for her.

“Do you think he can do that job, really? Maybe it’s just not in his nature. Maybe he needs a different job altogether?” she finally asked him.

Merdi!

War was just realizing how badly, truly, thoroughly he’d screwed things up. He’d sat smugly in his office thinking, ‘oh well, I am how I am’ and ‘I’ll get her back, no problem’.

He had a feeling he’d caused a great deal of devastation and it wasn’t going to be completely better for a while. Maybe never. If he could just get her back, maybe they’d be stronger. He knew he’d already learned some important lessons.

“Well, *Petit*.” His throat was sticking together. “He thinks this is the only job he can be happy with. He’s desperate to learn how to do it right. You think they’ll hire him back?”

Lorelei was silent for long minutes. She looked out at the colorful lights of the carnival rides against the dark backdrop of the night sky. She was his. She wanted to be with him as long as she could. It might not be much longer now.

A clean break might have hurt less but it would be the difference between breaking an arm or a leg. They both hurt like hell. Sometimes they didn’t heal right.

She kept her head tilted back and away from War when she answered him.

“I heard he’s a great employee most of the time. They might give him part-time.”

She closed her eyes. She felt his palm on her cheek. A single tear coursed over his fingers. He delicately followed the trail back up with his tongue. He kissed her gently on the forehead. She hated feeling so emotional, but somehow she managed not to cry.

“He’ll be so grateful for this second chance, *Chère*,” he whispered. His lips skimmed hers in a soft, silky touch. He moved his lips down her chin and up the curve of her jaw. He felt the ride swing down. They would be getting off next.

When the bar swung open, War stepped out and reached around for Lorelei. She grabbed her duck as he lifted her from the Ferris Wheel car. He took her hand as they moved away from the rides. They walked in silence for a few minutes.

Lorelei tugged at his hand. War leaned down to hear what she had to say.

“I think I want to go home now.”

He considered her for a long moment. “You want I should drive you home,

Petit?” he asked.

“No Warrick, I have my car here. Would you walk me to it?”

Will he get mad?

“Of course, *Chère*.” He squeezed her hand. “I don’t want you walking out here alone. ‘Sides, this gives me a chance to stroll in the moonlight with you.”

She rewarded him with an angelic smile. As disappointed as he was that she wanted to leave, he couldn’t help but smile back. Something good had happened here tonight and he realized it was damn well more than he deserved.

When they arrived at her car, she let him take the key and unlock the door. He didn’t open it right away. He turned to her and reached out a hand to her.

“May I have a kiss goodnight, *s’il vous plait*?” He asked her so nicely for a goodnight kiss, would she refuse?

Lorelei stepped forward and placed her hands on his chest. He looked down at her. She stretched to her tiptoes and placed her lips on his, smoothing them across his. Closing his arms around her, he opened his mouth and placed a gentle kiss on her mouth.

“Will you come out with me tomorrow, *Chère*?” War asked her. “It’d be nice to have a cheering section for the Skeet Shoot Competition.” The shocked look on her face took him aback.

“You want me to watch you kill something?” she gasped. “Is a Skeet a duck?”

He crushed her to him, rumbling laughter against her body.

“*Non, non, mon petit chère!* A Skeet is only a round clay tile. No ducks will die at my hands, I assure you!” his indigo eyes twinkled down at her.

She waved a hand in front of her face, looking away. He was sure she was fighting a blush. She mumbled something he couldn’t hear.

“*Que?*” he asked her.

“Um, do you want me to meet you here?” she asked him. He knew that wasn’t what she’d said a moment ago, but he’d let it slide.

“I won’t be mad if you prefer it, *Chère*,” he said diplomatically. “It’d make me happy, happy to pick you up like a real date, though.”

She flushed. “Okay, Warrick, I’d like that, too.”

She sounded unsure about her decision. But she was taking a chance on him even though it made her nervous. He knew then how strong she was and that he loved her so much.

He opened the car door, closing it when she’d seated herself and then leaned into the window.

“There’s a dance after, *Chère*, hmmm? But most folks just wear jeans,” he said. “I’ll be along about four-thirty to get you, yeah?”

“Okay. I’ll be ready.” She smiled up at him. He didn’t move for a minute. Then he bent down and kissed her nose.

“Thank you, Lorelei,” he said gruffly. He tapped the roof of her car and stepped back. She wrinkled her nose at him and drove off. This really was a second chance. He’d make sure he didn’t squander it.

* * * *

War walked back through the carnival to the makeshift police headquarters set up there. It was on the far side of the carnival, opposite to where Lorelei had parked her car.

He was almost there when he caught his nephew’s scent. He’d been checking for

it all night. He wanted to make sure Renaud wasn't 'keeping an eye' on Lorelei—or on him.

Making sure to keep down wind so he wouldn't be noticed, War listened in on Renaud's conversation with Alec. They talked about the Festival for a few minutes. Finally Alec asked the question War had hoped for.

"Hey, what time you leavin' to take Mademoiselle Rory home?"

Renaud said nothing for a minute. Then he answered Alec. "She doesn't need a ride. She took her own car home."

"I thought you said she'd need a ride?" Alec asked. War listened closely.

"I said she might need a ride. She left about ten minutes ago," Renaud said.

Now how'd he know that? Must be more to those medallions than I thought.

"What was up earlier? I thought there was a fire." Alec turned questioning eyes on his friend.

"I just thought I heard her yell, ya know? That Yankee voice kinda stands out. She gets hurt easy. She was okay, I guess. My *Oncle* War was with her."

War knew there was a major back-story here. He wondered if he'd ever get to the bottom of it.

Alec nodded. He knew Renaud wasn't going to say any more than he wanted to say and there was no sense wasting his breath. War heard Renaud tell Alec that he was leaving.

He went on his way to the temporary police headquarters, mulling over the events of the evening.

When he arrived home later, War found Renaud's truck in the driveway. He grabbed himself and his nephew a beer and went out on the back porch.

Renaud was stretched out on the wide railing that surrounded most of the porch. War handed him a beer. His nephew nodded and popped it open.

"You stop off to see Lorelei on the way in?" War tried to sound casual.

"Naw, she's probably asleep. She's been pretty tired lately." Renaud glanced over at him and took a long pull on his beer. "She seemed kinda het-up before."

"Guess so," War agreed carefully.

Here it comes.

He realized now that Renaud had been waiting for him.

"She's been in a state for about a month, *Oncle*. I didn't know it was you who put her there." Renaud didn't pull any punches.

War was surprised that Lorelei hadn't told him what went on between them. Why hadn't she? The two were so close. He guessed his nephew hadn't been the one to treat that bite. How did the boy not see it and know what it was?

"I acted badly, I guess. Shit, I know I acted badly. I said some pretty stupid things, too. I wouldn't let her tell me what happened in Alabama." War decided he might as well come clean.

"What'd ya say, *Oncle*?" Renaud's voice was low. War forced himself to answer.

Damn this was hard.

"I accused her of" War took a healthy swig of the beer. "I was jealous. I said she'd had sex"

Deau this is *tres, tres* hard. Honesty sucks.

"I told her I thought she was having sexual relations with you."

Renaud stared at his uncle unblinking. He reached into his shirt and wrapped his hand around the medallion at his throat.

War read hurt, sorrow, and anger in the boy's face. It was as if Renaud had presented his uncle with his most prized possession and War had pissed all over it. Upon reflection, War decided that was an accurate assessment of what he'd done.

"I cain't be around you right now," Renaud choked out.

"Son, I'm sorry. I know I was wrong," War tried.

As he spoke, Renaud shimmered, changed into a large black wolf, and bounded away.

War heaved a deep sigh. He knew Lorelei hadn't told Renaud because it would have caused him pain and damaged the boy's relationship with his good for nothin', bastard uncle.

He poured out what remained of his and his nephew's beer and tossed the cans in the recycle bin.

An hour later, War lay in his bed hoping for sleep. He heard the mournful howl of a lone wolf in the distance and he knew it was Renaud.

Chapter Nineteen

The next ten days were a study in control for War. He'd picked Lorelei up as planned on Friday for the Skeet Shoot Competition. Out of respect for the August heat, she wore light clothing. She was just so beautiful, and somehow, so refined. Even in her torn jeans the night before she'd looked elegant to him. He wanted to hide her away.

He'd convinced her to go with him every single day of the long festival. He hoped the proximity would convince her that he truly was trying to do better. He wanted her to know that he valued this second chance.

He hoped so much that she'd learn to trust him again. He didn't bring up his recent revelations. He realized that he, too, had a lot to learn about trust.

The worst moment for him had been when some fool had tried to teach her to shoot while War had been taking care of competition paperwork. That asshole had put his arms around Lorelei and was trying to make her hold the gun. War snarled at him and he got the message.

MINE!

He knew he needed to keep his territorial urges to himself around Lorelei for now, but he'd be damned if he'd extend that courtesy to any fool that dared to touch her.

He wanted to rip the collars off all her shirts so the world could see his brand. He wasn't proud about how he put it there, but damn it, now that it was there, it needed to serve a purpose.

He'd chased off the fool and his gun and put his arms around Lorelei. He knew her reaction to being grabbed and held rigid had probably been made worse by what he'd done. She tried to act like it hadn't bothered her but he felt her trembling against him.

"Don't worry, *chère*, nobody's gonna touch you anymore," he promised her.

"I don't like it, Warrik," she confessed in a quiet voice. "I don't want you to pick a fight, but I really don't want to shoot guns and have strange men put their arms around me."

"I won't get in any fights, *chère*, don't worry," he promised her. "But I'll make sure nobody puts hands on you, okay?"

Anybody who didn't get the message from the possessive look on his face just wasn't paying attention. He gave Lorelei as much space as he could stand and didn't do anything overt to keep men away from her.

Anytime another man reached for her, though, the fool found his arm in a vice. More than once, War introduced himself to strange men by crushing the other guy's hand in a brutal handshake.

He introduced himself as Sheriff Warrick Martine. After that he'd introduce Lorelei as "my *chère*, Lorelei"—no last name. He hoped he could get a ring on her finger soon. That would keep a lot of the stray dogs from sniffin' around his woman.

War had won the Men's Competition and donated his prize to a local charity. By five o'clock the last evening of the festival they were pulling in to Main Street near Lorelei's studio and apartment.

They'd had lunch together at the carnival twice that week and Lorelei seemed much more comfortable with him.

"Would you like to come up and watch a movie, Warrick?" she asked as he made the turn. "I thought I'd have an early night and I know you work in the morning." She was pressed against the passenger door and said this with her head turned away. He knew she was giving him a chance and he would not pass up any opportunity for more time in her company.

"Sugar, I'd love that. Wanna stop and rent a movie?" She agreed and he turned his truck down another road to go to the video rental store. He didn't let go of her hand after he'd helped her down.

Heads turned and many people in the store greeted him. A few of the women looked at her speculatively. One or two of the ladies who spoke to War touched him possessively and looked at Lorelei angrily. He wished he knew what she was thinking as she looked placidly back at each woman in turn.

"What you in the mood for, Sugar?" War inquired, steering her away from one of his especially catty admirers.

"I like old movies a lot," she said. "What about you?"

"I'm game," he winked. "How about *The Contessa*? Ms. Gardner is a sweet little piece, yeah?" he was teasing her.

"I've always thought Bogart was dead sexy."

He growled low. He couldn't help it. "Good thing that bastard's dead" he spat. She covered her smiling mouth and turned away.

Snacks were next on the agenda and he grabbed a bottle of red wine, some cheese and some cubed sirloin at the store. He figured he'd cook the meat rare and hopefully she wouldn't be disgusted by it.

They both hit the bathroom when they arrived. He used the one in the studio and she used the apartment bathroom. He cooked his meat and she poured the wine and prepared the cheese.

In minutes, the two were settled at opposite ends of the couch snacking and watching the movie. She knew he noticed that she'd gotten a new couch. This one was wide with thin, low arms.

By the time the movie ended, she was cuddled against him in spoon fashion dabbing at her tears. She always cried at movies. Usually, there was no one around to see.

"What's wrong, *Chère*?" he rumbled. She sat up and leaned against his chest. "You didn't like the ending?" he asked, concerned.

"You mean you did?" she gasped. "She really loved him. She wanted to give him the things he couldn't have."

"She gave herself to another man, *Chère*," he pointed out patiently. "No man who loves his woman could stand that for any reason. A man likes to know he can satisfy his mate, *Chère*." He was watching her through heavy lidded eyes.

"Don't you think a woman likes to know she can satisfy her man?" Lorelei asked carefully, reaching for her wineglass.

"S'pose so." His gaze tracked her movements lazily.

In for a penny, in for a pound she thought. "Could you stand to be satisfied without trying to satisfy your partner?" she asked. She knew her voice was shaky.

“You got sumpin’ on your mind, *Chère*?” his lids still seemed heavy but she knew he was alert. She took a sip of wine. It was only her second glass. She wasn’t a heavy drinker, but she’d been extra careful, anyway. The movie had lasted just over two hours. She was in no danger of being inebriated.

She’d been cradling his erection against her *derrière* for over an hour and she wanted to do something about it. Always in the past, he’d decided how he wanted his pleasure and he’d decided about hers, too. She wanted to put him in her mouth, but she was nervous.

She cleared her throat and turned to look into those sexy midnight eyes.

“I do have something in mind. But only if you can let me without” She hesitated. His brow shot up. “Can you let me touch you without you touching me?” she blurted.

War blinked slowly. “If that’s your pleasure, *Chère*, I can do that.” He hoped to hell he could, anyway.

What does she have in mind?

“Put your hands behind your head, Warrick, please.”

She was still shy, but she seemed determined to do this. He complied.

She leaned over and kissed him on the mouth. She traced the seam of his lips with her tongue and when he opened his mouth, she hesitantly eased her tongue into it.

Tasting his tongue, she moved hers back and forth over his teeth. He was struggling to keep his hands behind his head when she moved down to suck on his chin. She daintily skipped her tongue down his throat to the collar of his shirt. Finally, she stopped and took a sip of wine.

War breathed a sigh of relief. He was afraid his erection was going to put a hole in his jeans. His relief was short lived. She began tugging at his shirt.

When he moved his arms to remove it she told him, “Ah, ah, ah. Just lift your back and shoulders for a second.” He complied.

She eased the shirt over his torso and head. When she got the shirt to his wrists, she wrapped it around them and made a knot. He arched his dark eyebrow at her and gave her a lopsided grin but said nothing.

He didn’t have any breath to speak with right after that. She leaned down again and began exploring his arms and chest with her hands and tongue. He was moaning and muttering in several languages.

As she lightly raked her delicate nails over his abdomen, she smiled at him. He recognized that Garden of Eden smile and groaned.

“What you doing to me, *Chère*? *Pitié*, I beg you!” this came out in a croak. She gave him her ‘Eve’ smile and trailed her fingers to the button on his jeans. She worked it free and slowly moved the zipper down.

“I feel powerful,” she said in a low, sexy voice. “I like it.” He groaned again.

She tugged at his jeans and shorts till they were below his knees. Then she pulled them off with his socks. She apparently didn’t want him to feel self-conscious with his socks on. His eyes were boring into her and his erection was enormous.

“Don’t worry,” she soothed, “I’ll make it feel *tres, tres bon*.” He moaned aloud.

She kissed his thighs and his legs. She appeared to enjoy watching his cock move and jerk the closer she got to it. She played with his balls, cupping and lightly squeezing and massaging them.

She licked his rod from base to tip, first one side then the other. She dipped her tongue into to the small slit on top, sucking at it to get the clear liquid there. She wrapped her fingers around the base and squeezed, moving them up and down as she sucked as much of his erection as she could into her mouth.

She sucked lightly as she moved her mouth and then pumped her hand up and down as she sucked on the tip. She continued massaging his balls, occasionally sucking them into her mouth before turning back to his hard staff and sucking and licking on his thick cock. She treated it as if it was a privilege to taste him this way. He couldn't help it. He had to touch her.

"Please, *mon amour*, may I touch you? Just your hair, *Je promets*-I promise!" She looked at his face over the top of his penis and he thought he'd come right then.

"Okay," she whispered huskily, breathing warm breath on his rigid staff. He groaned and touched her hair with his bound hands. He just needed to feel her. He didn't try to hold her head.

She moved her mouth to the tip and sucked a little, running her tongue across the sensitive bundle of nerves near the cap.

"Warrick, I want you to make love to my mouth. I want you to come inside my mouth." She hesitated and then told him, "I want to taste you."

He groaned loudly.

"Please, Warrick?" she looked at him.

He nodded jerkily.

She knew he'd be her only one. She knew that. She opened her mouth a little wider and moved so that he was in almost all the way. She thought his cock was probably longer than her head was.

He began rocking his hips as she closed her lips around him. She sucked lightly and grazed him gently with her teeth as he pushed in and out.

Finally, his body jerked and he went rigid. He came with a shout and a drawn out groan as she sucked his come from his cock and swallowed it, massaging his balls to help him expel every drop.

She slowly removed her mouth from him. She tugged a small throw over his genitals so he wouldn't get cold, then she leaned over and kissed his lips. She turned and took a drink of her wine. He freed his hands and moved to sit up behind her. He gently pulled her into his arms. He kissed her temple.

"That was most amazin', Chère." His voice still sounded weak and shaky. Then, after a second, he held her away from him and glared at her. "Truth, *mon petit*, where'd a bashful little thing like you learn to do that?" he demanded.

She blushed, but determinedly kept on, "I wanted to try it on you." Her blush went deeper still. "I read this book last week."

She cut her eyes at him shyly and started to hang her head. He caught her chin and looked in her eyes, that evil eyebrow cocked.

"I practiced." At his narrowed glare, she went on, "I practiced with a big cucumber."

He stared at her. "When did you practice, *mon petit chère*?"

She had to be fuchsia by now, she thought. Her face actually felt hot. It never occurred to her that he would ask about this. He had stumbled on one of her worst flaws-if he asked a direct question, she was incapable of ignoring it. She had to answer,

completely and honestly.

“Yesterday and last night,” she whispered.

“*Bon Dieu!*” He sat naked on her couch cuddling her and rubbing her back.

“*Chère*, do you still have that cucumber?” he asked her, a little breathless himself, now.

She was sure he could barely hear her since she covered her face with her hands.

“I ate half. It’s on a plate in the ‘fridge.”

“May I see the remains of this vegetable?” he asked.

She peaked up at him. “Um, sure.”

He disengaged himself from her and stood up. As he walked away, she felt a rush of arousal. It had to be against the law to look that good. His muscles rippled in his buttocks and thighs as he moved. His back muscles rippled as he moved his arms.

He walked to her refrigerator and opened the door. He pulled out a dish containing a nine-inch section of cucumber that had to be over two inches across.

“You ate half this?” he asked her. She nodded.

“So you thought my *bibitte* was ...” He measured with his hands and held them up to show a foot and a half in length. “... this long? And this thick?” She nodded again.

His erection had begun to replenish itself. He compared it to the leftover cucumber and his face took on a devilish grin. He returned the cucumber to storage and strode across the room to her.

Scooping her up, he sat back down on the couch with her. She couldn’t ignore his renewed erection. He must notice her deep embarrassment. He chuckled as he held her.

“Sugar, you make both my heads swell,” he said, chortling. He tilted her head back and licked behind her ear, moving on to kiss each of her burning cheeks.

Chapter Twenty

One of his hands had slipped beneath her shirt to her ribs. He eased it up an inch or so but didn't go up any further. He wanted to touch her. He needed to make love with her. But, painful as it would be, he'd get dressed and leave right now if that was what she wanted.

He arched an eyebrow and looked at her. "*Sil vous plait?*"

She must know what he was asking. His polite inquiry meant, did she want to make love with him? He held his breath. After a lengthy pause she looked up at him.

"Warrick? I want to make love with you again." She hitched a deep breath. "I'm afraid. I made you so mad before. I don't know what to do."

He nuzzled her cheek and whispered, "I know Sugar Baby. I acted so badly. Will you let me make it go away?" She nodded.

He nibbled at the sides of her mouth and then sunk his tongue into her mouth for a sweet, intense kiss and slid his hand the two inches that would take it to her soft breast. She was wearing a bra this time, too. He lifted her away so he could remove her shirt and the bra beneath it. Thanks to her earlier attentions, he could take things a little slower this time.

He laid her down on the couch and removed her socks, and then her shorts and panties together. His mouth moved on her breasts ceaselessly, teasing each breast with his hot tongue and suckling on each tender nipple until both were sensitive and hard.

He moved his hand across her abdomen and ran his fingers through the curls covering her sex. They looked like beaten gold, he thought as he lightly touched the pink flesh poking out. She eased her legs apart slightly so that he could rub her sensitive nub. It wasn't long before she began to squirm.

He could tell that she'd been resisting arousal. She truly had been afraid. He knew he wouldn't make it all go away tonight but he hoped he could give her better things to think of when she thought of being naked with him.

He moved a finger around her labia and inserted it gently inside her. She gasped as he kissed her mouth and began to move his finger in and out, rhythmically. When she was mewling with pleasure, he eased down her body. She stiffened but he kept kissing her breasts and ribs, nibbling his way down.

When she began to relax again, he inserted another finger into her hot, wet passage. Pulling her outer lips apart and began to lick at her clit and all around the two plunging fingers.

Placing both hands on her knees, he spread her legs wider and began to suck hungrily on her opening, plunging his tongue in as far as he could and still rubbing her clit. He loved the taste of her sweet honey. When he felt her pussy convulse around his pillaging tongue, he moved up her body and began to kiss her mouth.

Looming over her, he rubbed the tip of his cock against her wet center and she moaned. He lowered himself into her smoothly.

"Oh Warrick," she groaned.

"I missed you so bad, baby," he rasped, moving in and out with slow steady strokes.

She wrapped her legs around him and he began to move a little faster as she clutched him and begged, "Yes please. More please, Warrick!"

"Anything you want, *mon amour doux*," he groaned into her neck, licking her and nuzzling. She really was his sweet love.

She began to tighten around him and he plunged harder and faster. They both exploded at the same time, shouting and moaning. He felt the fine tremors shaking her for long seconds afterward.

After a few minutes, he slipped from her body, rolling to the side against the back of the couch. He pulled her into him so that her head rested on his shoulder, stroking her cheek.

"Thank you, *Chère*," he whispered into her hair. "I don't deserve you."

She kissed his chest and said nothing. She ran her fingers through his chest hair until they both dozed off.

When War woke up a few hours later, Lorelei was still sleeping. He propped himself up on an elbow and watched her for a few minutes.

She was so delicate, he thought, and so beautiful. He inhaled deeply. He couldn't get enough of her scent. He loved when she was aroused, but he loved her scent no matter what.

While he watched her she turned her head and opened her eyes.

"You have to go, don't you?" she asked.

"Maybe I should, *Chère*," he agreed reluctantly. "Maybe one day I won't have to." Her eyes darkened at this but she didn't respond.

"Would you like some coffee to get home with?" she asked him.

"No, *Chère*. I'd like a kiss, *sil vous plait*."

She leaned up to him and he kissed her deeply. When they broke apart, he asked her, "*Chère*, will you trust me to give you space tomorrow and not get ugly anymore?"

"I'll trust you, Warrick. Will you trust me?"

"I promise, *Chère*."

He hugged her close and kissed her forehead. He got up and started to dress. He gave her a sweet, lingering kiss on the mouth, and then he was gone.

* * * *

It was killing War, but a promise was a promise. He felt that the way he behaved today might be just as important as the way he'd behaved the last time they'd made love, the only other time they'd made love.

He'd gone home the night before and found Renaud asleep on the couch. The TV was on to a Televangelist promising the sleeping Renaud everlasting life.

War flicked the TV off and his nephew woke up. The two men looked at each other without speaking. Renaud ran a hand through his hair and reached into his collar and pulled out the chain and amulet that he always wore. He wrapped his fist around it.

"You okay, son?" War asked him.

"Mostly," answered Renaud. He stood up.

War stuck out his hand with a lifted brow, silently asking for forgiveness. After a moment, Renaud grasped his hand. War tugged and the men embraced quickly and stepped apart. They nodded at one another and went up to bed.

That morning, Renaud went off to his job at the lumber mill and War went into town to keep the Parish safe for its citizens. He resisted the urge to leave a note on Lorelei's door—just barely. At least his men weren't afraid to speak to him any more. He hoped Lorelei wouldn't be afraid, either.

Right before two o'clock, Lorelei had to run to the store down the block. She had students coming in at two-thirty so she had to hurry. She was out of wood cleaner and she had to take care of that or it would be hard to move on that wooden floor.

Besides, the idea of students getting dirt on their tights from her floor was abhorrent to her. She'd pay the ninety-seven dollars and fifty cents at the convenience store around the corner.

She paid for her floor wax/floor cleaner and was reading the bottle on the way out of the store when she ran into a solid object. This solid object, however, had two strong arms, which immediately wrapped around her. She had been so engrossed in reading the bottle that she hadn't seen War on his way in the door. He'd seen her and evidently couldn't resist stepping in front of her.

"*Bonjour, mon chère,*" he purred into her ear. She shook her head to clear it and looked up at him. She couldn't control the smile that bloomed on her face.

Last night had been so amazing. *How could someone so wonderful and sexy and handsome want me?*

"Good afternoon, Warrick," she said shyly. There went her face again. He was sure to think she had a disorder. She couldn't help but turn her face into his chest. His chuckle rumbled through her. He had moved them from in front of the door.

"What engrosses you so?" he asked her, reaching down to take her purchase for a closer look. Then he threw back his head and laughed out loud, drawing even more stares than he already had.

The local Sheriff embracing the dance teacher was always good for a second look and his belly laugh made sure of it. Her face flushed and, with difficulty, she resisted hiding it in his muscular chest. She was sure everybody was staring at her. He drew her flaming face toward him with a finger under her chin.

"I'll return your favorite reading for a small fee," he said with a devilish grin. He lowered his head and placed his lips on hers. She let out a tiny sound and he deepened the kiss with a growl. His tongue stroked hers until her knees almost gave way. He groaned.

He pulled back a fraction and spoke into her lips, "I think I should buy you a second bottle, *Chère*, you've overpaid."

Lorelei took a step back and nearly stumbled. She just couldn't think straight around him.

How is it he doesn't think I'm a complete imbecile?

With a crooked grin, he reached out and steadied her.

"Okay?" he asked. She nodded and, giving him a quick smile, she scurried from the store.

He chuckled and shook his head as he poured his coffee. He felt better than he had in so long. This accidental meeting had reassured him more than he would've imagined. She wasn't running from him.

She not only let him touch her in public, she'd kissed him and smiled at him. It was the smile that sealed it for him. He'd known she would kiss him back if he began

kissing her.

That beautiful smile had been purely spontaneous. She'd been glad to see him. To War, it was as if the sun was shining through the clouds.

Chapter Twenty One

Lorelei didn't have time to clean and wax the floor after her collision with War. She got the spray cleaner out and sprayed the dust mop and did her best. She had to warn all the little dancers to be careful. She decided to clean the floor when everyone went home.

After she was done with the floor, she ran into the apartment and took a shower. It had been a hot and sticky day and she had been busy every minute. It was a wonder that War didn't comment on her ripe smell, she mused to herself.

It was nearly eight o'clock when she moved to the sink and absently began washing dishes left from the night before. She was moving on autopilot because her mind was on everything else from that night.

Suddenly, her scalp began to tingle and she felt goose bumps crawl up her arms. Suddenly, she heard her Papa's voice again.

"Danger, Lorelei," he whispered in her head.

She looked around and nothing seemed wrong. She clasped her medallion, finding it warm to the touch. After a moment, the feeling went away. She decided that it was cooling off outside, nothing more, no danger.

She rubbed her arms and turned back to her kitchen counter. After a few minutes, she shook herself and picked up another dish.

War had almost decided to go over to see Lorelei when he saw his nephew's truck pull up to the front of the building.

The young man stepped onto the curb and stopped. Did he bend down to pick something up? He saw Renaud raise his hand to knock and then test the doorknob.

The scent of fear hit War in one solid wave. What was so Renaud afraid of? He saw Renaud jerk open the door into the studio and sprint to the apartment. He heard the door slam open.

Next, War heard something he knew he'd never heard before. Renaud didn't just raise his voice or shout, he bellowed.

"RORY!" he roared.

She dropped the glass she'd been holding and whirled around. It shattered, of course, and now the smell of anger mingled with the fear.

"GODDAMN IT TO FUCKING HELL, RORY! I could have fucked you three times on a boat in open water halfway to Budapest by now. Why the fuck are the doors unlocked? Has the Louisiana heat made you so fucking stupid you can't even use your common sense? Why don't I just fuck you now and give the baby to the nearest Slav who looks like they give a shit? Then I'll kill us both and be done with the whole fucking thing!"

Waves of anger washed over War. He wanted to go pound the hell out of his nephew, but some part of his brain told him to pay attention. What he was seeing and hearing was important.

Renaud was bellowing like a gelded bull. War realized he had never heard

language like that come out of his nephew's mouth either, come to think of it.

He was at his window now but couldn't see all that was happening across the street. He could hear every breath clearly, though.

Lorelei strangled a sob and Renaud rushed to her. He scooped her into his arms and carried her to the corner window. While War was glad he could see them, he had a real problem with his nephew carrying his woman around like that.

"Goddamn sonofabitch, Boo. I'm sorry." Not much of an apology as far as War was concerned. Still he continued to listen closely. "Boo, this was outside your door," Renaud said, apparently giving her something.

Lorelei took what he handed her and gasped. He could see her chest was heaving but she shed no tears. She was shaking her head in denial. Renaud smoothed her hair and clutched her tightly.

"Do you know what I went through in Nice, Rory? Nothing has ever hurt me worse than seeing you in that hospital bed covered in tubes and wires. And the year before last in Venice? Three broken ribs, Rory, you had three broken ribs and a punctured lung. If they get you, they get us both, Boo. You know that."

Renaud kicked his shoes off and swung his feet up onto the cushions. War had an even better view of both of them now. He was frantically taking notes as his nephew talked.

"If they want The Legacy, Rory, let's make 'em steal it," he implored her. "Please let's don't just give it to 'em."

Lorelei sat up and scrubbed her eyes with the backs of her hands. War caught his breath. No doubt, he loved that woman. He released his breath slowly and leaned on the windowsill with his clipboard in front of him.

"I'm so sorry, Renaud. I risked us both because I was distracted and thoughtless. When they tried to take you that first time, I nearly went out of my mind." She reached over and stroked his cheek. "I did go out of my mind the next time. I let them all know that if they didn't get us both they'd have nothing more than a dead body on their hands."

They leaned together and touched foreheads. Then Renaud spoke again.

"What's up with you and *Oncle War*?" he asked.

With his lupine vision, War thought he could see Lorelei's blush. He was anxious to hear her answer.

"That's what had me distracted and thoughtless, I guess. What's up with you and that little Lolita?" she countered. Renaud laughed.

"*Touché*. Her name's Zierra, by the way," he told her. "She's what had me so sure I'd let you get taken 'cuz I wasn't paying attention."

"That's her? She's beautiful, Renaud," Lorelei responded reverently. After a few minutes, she looked hard at Renaud. "We can't do this, can we?" she asked him.

"No, I guess we really cain't. I don't wanna get anyone hurt. Not even her. Whaddaya wanna do, Boo?" He took her hand.

War felt the ice run in his veins when she answered. "I wanna run like hell, Reni—far and fast. I want it to end." She reached over and took his other hand. "I can't do this to him, Ren. You can't do it to her."

"My *Oncle*, he was elite forces in the army." Renaud took a deep breath and added, "Think he could help, Boo? Think he'd believe us?"

Lorelei considered the question long enough to make War squirm.

Then she replied, “Oh Ren, I wish he could. I so wish he could help us. But what happens when they realize ...?” Her voice cracked. “... when they realize I’ve made love with him? Or what happens if I got pregnant?”

War was amazed and confused when he sensed the gripping fear and desperation in both Renaud and Lorelei. He saw silver streaks on both sets of cheeks when Renaud put his arms around Lorelei and gathered her against him.

“I guess its’ the same thing that’d happen if I mated with someone and got her pregnant. We have to leave tomorrow, don’t we?” War saw Lorelei nod. “I wish we’d never been born,” Renaud moaned.

It took War a minute to realize that the two were shaking with sobs. He ran both hands through his hair.

HE DIDN’T UNDERSTAND! What was going on? He stared at the couple in their window seat for a few minutes. He knew Renaud had meant it when he wished neither he nor the tiny dancer had ever been born. It seemed that she agreed with him.

He couldn’t believe it, but Lorelei had just told Renaud that she’d had sex with him. No, she had told Renaud that she’d made love with him. Apparently, Renaud was also afraid to embark on an intimate relationship. For some reason they both felt that something bad would happen if they pursued anything lasting.

Standing at that window, his fists tangled in his hair, Dekon Warrick Martine had a true epiphany. That was his family over there clinging together like two storm-tossed kittens. There they were being battered, and it looked to War, being beaten. They needed him, but they loved him—or in Lorelei’s case, wanted to—and they were afraid for him. Of what? Why?

For some reason they thought they could protect him by shouldering their burden alone. For over a decade, the two of them had learned to count on each other and no one else. He hadn’t been there when they needed him. He hadn’t even known they needed anyone.

Now he knew. His mate and his nephew—the son of his heart—were being threatened and were in pain and they needed him. It was time for him to be a man. Not a military man, not a policeman, a family man. It was time to be there for his family. He reached over and closed the window.

Chapter Twenty Two

“Beaudine!” War didn’t even move from his chair. “BEAUDINE!” he shouted again.

“Right here, Boss,” came the out-of-breath voice of Officer Beaudine. He’d hit the ground running when he heard his boss call him. “Whatcha need?” Beaudine was careful this time. He saw War staring out the window and he did not intend to put his life at risk again.

“What’s going on tonight?” the Sheriff asked.

“Nothing going on tonight, boss. It’s slow so far.”

“I need you to do something for me tonight.”

“Name it, I’m your man!” Officer Beaudine was eager to redeem himself.

“I need you to go across the street and put yourself in that doorway yonder. Go take a piss right now and get a big cup of coffee. Don’t let anyone in or out. Do not fall asleep.”

War didn’t see the young officer’s face fall. He was staring fixedly across the street. Officer Beaudine had thought he could earn back some respect and here Sheriff War was just giving him crap work to get him out of his hair. That’s what Beaudine was thinking as he stood in front of War’s desk.

He turned to go and couldn’t help but look through the window. He saw his boss’s nephew in that other window and he was sitting all cuddled up with the little ballerina. Had there been any noise at all on the street or in the building, he might have missed the boss’s next words.

“That’s my family up there, Philipe. Somebody’s after ‘em. I’m countin’ on ya, man.” War’s voice was a choked whisper.

Beaudine sneaked a look at War’s face. He looked back at the couple in the window. He looked again at his boss. Damn, the man had tears in his eyes. This was not crap work.

He cleared his throat. “Boss, you can count on me. I’d lay down my life for you and yours. Same as you done for me time and again. I’m on it.” Beaudine turned and walked away. He figured he’d start with taking that piss his boss had ordered.

* * * *

War reached for his Rolodex to start calling old contacts. Someone would know someone who could track down this legacy. Someone would know what had happened in Nice. Someone would know about who had tried to take Renaud. Somewhere, someone would know about Lorelei’s three broken ribs and punctured lung in Venice the year before last

Damn! Lorelei had had three broken ribs and a punctured lung?

He ached for her and he ached for Renaud having to suffer those fears for her with nobody to turn to. The boy’s pain knifed through him. He knew Renaud felt he’d truly be alone if Lorelei Allemande was taken from his life. For a minute, he deep-down hated Alana and Lawrence Brunet. He felt pretty ashamed of himself, too.

Before he started looking for answers, he decided that his first impulse had been the right one. Security should be primary. The fact that Lorelei had been injured twice—three times if you counted what had happened at the store a few months ago, well, that just let him know this was a serious operation. A serious operation called for serious men.

War checked his watch. It was only nine o'clock? He had thought it was the middle of the night. He called his second in command from his old army unit.

"What the fuck do you want?"

"Get your ass to Louisiana is what I want," War growled back. "Call the next man down. I need ya all."

"Yessir, on my way. Shut up, Dorothy!"

"Fitz?"

"Yessir?"

"Don't call me Dorothy."

"Uhhh, Yessir." This last 'yessir' held a smile. War hung up.

* * * *

With that done, War moved to the next item on his list. What is this damned legacy and who could he trust to help him get to the bottom of it?

He thought for a minute. He had taken some of his sister's letters from home a couple of weeks ago. He thought he'd see if he could work any of this out in his spare time. Now he didn't have any time left to spare. But he had looked over the letters.

A couple of the letters had mentioned Lorelei's mother, Ariel. In fact, the earlier letters mentioned her in a very negative way. He went to the bottom of the stack.

Yep -- pure venom.

It seemed that his sister Bella had been after the same man as Ariel. The man they both sought was a famous ballet dancer from the USSR.

War booted up his computer and opened a search engine.

If you want to know about something, just go to the Internet. Anything you ever want to know is there, right?

Apparently so, if you weed through some of the garbage, War found.

The dancer, Ivan Rychtar, was dead now. From what he could tell, the man had died violently. The details were sketchy. When War entered the man's name and the name of the college his sister had attended, he found the dancer had been friends with a tenured professor still on staff there. War got the man out of bed.

After some huffing and puffing, the professor finally began to take War seriously. At first the Sheriff thought it was his status as a police officer. That belief was dispelled quickly.

The professor remembered his sister and Lorelei's mother. In fact, the man obsessed about them. Specifically, he obsessed about Renaud and Lorelei. He chartered a jet and arrived shortly after midnight. He gave War the entire story, with pictures.

* * * *

The co-eds had met the Russian dancer through this professor during their third year of college. Both women had been drawn to Ivan. Ivan, it seemed, was attracted to both of them. Although he had earned a reputation as a womanizer, the vast array of movie starlets and models were to become a smokescreen for Ariel and Bella.

The two women weren't at all that close in college, as it turned out. They just

happened to fall in love with the same man. And that man just happened to fall in love with each of them. Lorelei and Renaud were conceived during the spring semester of their mothers' forth year at college.

Ariel moved to Connecticut not far from where Ivan trained. She had her baby there. Renaud was born in Virginia.

War remembered that Bella had been working in Washington, D.C. after college. She'd married Lawrence's brother Louis, whom she'd dated in Washington. They'd moved back to Louisiana when Renaud was born. The professor cleared that one up and a few other things with it.

The truth was that Louis Brunet was homosexual, but not openly so. His brother, Lawrence, must have suspected. Louis had been at college with Bella and had been having an affair with a male dancer for years.

He'd known about Bella and the famous dancer and was ready to go home when they found out she was pregnant. Louis did the chivalrous thing, which happened to be helpful in hiding his homosexuality.

Lorelei and Renaud were born on the same day in the same hour. Lorelei was older by twenty-two minutes.

Ivan continued to see both women as well as paying for their care and upkeep. He would have liked to see his children but judged it unsafe. This caused the old professor to break down. War gave the man time to pull himself together and took a phone call.

* * * *

Ivan Rychtar had been a product of genetic engineering. Before the Second World War, the Rychtar family had been chosen for "refining" and "perfecting" by their country's government. Each generation's DNA had been altered in an effort to produce a man perfect for use as a weapon. Now, Ivan's children were considered commodities.

The government who had created him had been obsessive. Ivan's children were armaments. If they could breed, they would produce very useful children. Think of the beautiful and stealthy spies that could be made from these children, the professor pointed out. And if they were bred with each other the results would be incredible.

I think I'm gonna be sick.

There were people out there who wanted to kidnap his nephew and his woman, essentially, and make them have sex so that they'd produce a child. These monsters wanted to guarantee the superior gene combination that would come from Lorelei. According to the professor, they would breed Lorelei with Renaud and then some other superb specimen and then they'd harvest her remaining eggs.

War had to go outside. He wanted to vomit and then kill someone. He walked out to the-now empty street in front of his building. He took great gulping gasps of air.

* * * *

When War returned, he learned why Lorelei and Renaud felt they couldn't have close personal relationships. Ariel had been killed in an effort to get to Lorelei. Both Bella and Louis had been killed in an effort to get to Renaud. Thankfully, those deaths had been quick, cold, and clean.

The deaths were blamed on an auto accident, a mugging, and a nasty fall, respectively. The people who wanted the children didn't want to be noticed. They simply wanted to clear the way and get the children.

The first overt attempt on Renaud happened soon after his mother's death. The boy had been joining Lorelei in New York. When he got off of the airplane an attempt had been made to take him. The children, then thirteen, had gotten away.

The professor had seen it on the news and told Rychtar what had happened. Ivan Rychtar searched the streets of New York until he found his children. He sent them home.

The professor felt the three needed each other. His old friend was lonely for his children. Ivan wouldn't go to them so the professor brought them to Ivan. He sent them both a note signing it from Ivan and arranged all the travel.

Ivan was angry with him but so happy to be with Lorelei and Renaud. He had one day and one night with them before the people who wanted them came.

The men when they came told Lorelei and Renaud that they would spare their only living parent if the children came quietly. Their father told them that he loved them more than his own life. Then he proved it. He told them to run and never look back. They did look back once.

Using the genetic engineering that made him, Ivan gracefully killed six of the ten men who'd come to kidnap his children. Two of the remaining men would never walk or talk again. The children, fifteen years old by then, got away. War, eventually did go out and vomit in the street when his interview with the professor ended.

Chapter Twenty Three

At two-thirty in the morning, War approached the recessed doorway that led to Lorelei's studio and apartment. It was time for him to take over. He tested the knob and allowed himself a wry grin when he found it wasn't locked. For all his bluster, Renaud hadn't locked the doors either.

War let Officer Beaudine know that relief would be along in a few hours. The young officer assured his boss that he was still fresh and fine. After what he'd seen so far that night, Philippe Beaudine had plenty to occupy his mind.

War and the officer with him, Officer Williams, made their way up the stairs and through the studio. Officer Williams looked around curiously but said nothing. He remained in the doorway of the apartment when War walked inside.

Lorelei and Renaud were still in the corner window but at opposite ends now. He was stretched out with his long legs on the edge of the bench and she was curled against the window with Renaud's legs between her and the open room. War reached over him and lifted Lorelei into his arms. Renaud struggled to sit up reaching for her.

"Hush, boy," said War. "It's only me. Get up. Go with Williams. He'll take you home." War carried Lorelei to her bed and placed her in it, pulling the duvet over her.

"What're you doing with Rory, Oncle? What's going on?" Renaud was still half asleep and trying to figure out how to react. War was at least assured that the young man didn't see him as a threat. He knew Renaud would have gone on the offensive immediately if he'd felt threatened at all.

In his untrained state, Renaud could have transformed into his beast if he'd smelled evil intent in the air. War would have to spend some time with him correcting that possible lapse in his education.

"I'm putting her to bed, son. Go home and get some sleep. I'll look after her now," he told him. "Come on back here when you wake up." He said this almost harshly.

Renaud needed to know he had no choice in this. He needed to be forced to meet his own needs. He was a good man. But he was a good young man. It was long past time for a grown up man to step in. He moved to his nephew and put his arm over his shoulder. He still stood a few inches taller than Renaud.

"You've done a good job, son. The cavalry has finally come. Get some rest. We'll talk later. Williams'll bring ya." War gave his nephew a quick one-armed hug and pushed him through the door. "Lock the doors!" he admonished.

War watched Renaud's truck drive away with Williams at the wheel. He moved back to Lorelei's bed and pulled the duvet back. He moved his fingers over her shoulders to check for a bra. He grinned to himself at the thought that he was frisking her for a different type of contraband this time. Once again, she was braless. He shook his head and tried to ignore the tightening in his groin. He pulled her socks off and gently removed her shorts.

He began removing his uniform shirt while searching for a thermostat. His lupine body temperature was naturally high so he lowered the air conditioning. It might take her

a while to get used to his body heat, but she would in time, he'd make sure of it.

Mission accomplished, he moved back to the bed and removed his shoes, socks, pants and belt, storing his service revolver in one of his shoes on the floor by the bed. His hearing was such that he'd be able to grab it if necessary before anyone could get through the downstairs door.

With a sigh, War slid between the sheets and reached to pull Lorelei close to him. Chuckling, he smoothed down her large shirt so he could admire the group of cartoon ducks printed there. There were two child ducks, a boy and a girl. There was a scholarly-looking father duck and what looked to be a rakish and daring pilot-duck.

He wrapped his arms around her tightly, inhaling her scent on a sigh of contentment. Kissing her forehead he closed his eyes. As he began to doze he mused that he had never thought to find a mate and here she was in his arms. Sheriff Dekon Warrick Martine fell asleep counting his blessings.

* * * *

Ballerina Lorelei Eliza Allemande woke up completely confused. She was snug in bed, she knew that much. She was very snug in bed, in fact. Her face was buried in a warm and familiar masculine chest, with one of her legs caught between two muscular thighs, and one of her arms was draped over a tight, manly waist. A very healthy erection pressed at the apex of her thighs.

Instinctively, Lorelei knew that she was in bed with War. She didn't know how she'd gotten from the window seat to her bed but she knew it was Warrick Martine that she was plastered up against.

She shouldn't be in bed with him, especially when she knew that she was going to have to leave him. Lorelei needed to get out of there before he woke up. She ought to go find her brother. Damn the man, she couldn't think clearly when she was so close to his body.

Gingerly, Lorelei rolled over, trying to act as if she was still asleep.

Sleeping people roll over sometimes, right?

She'd put some much needed distance between herself and that erection and that would be a good start. Lorelei nonchalantly stretched out on her stomach, flopping her arm toward the edge of the mattress.

Almost there

She gasped as a strong arm curled around her waist and hauled her back against the warm body she'd been edging away from.

Uh oh, there's that erection I was trying to outrun.

War smiled to himself. She was so transparent. And she was so damned cute. Someday he might spank that cute little round ass, but today, he just needed it to cuddle his erection. At least until he could put his erection where he really wanted it to go.

War leisurely rolled his hips against her and mumbled into her neck.

"Mmmm, chère, I want you." He licked her neck and moved his hands on her body. One went north and the other went south. "You feel so good in my arms."

His hands edged under her large tee shirt and found her breasts. He squeezed and kneaded them until her breathing became thick and heavy. He pushed the shirt up and over her head kissing along her shoulders and spine. One of his hands eased down to her soft tummy and under the elastic at her waist.

He moved both hands down and pushed her panties to her knees. "Stay like that,

baby,” he growled, “it makes me so excited.” With one hand he reached up to massage her breasts again. His other hand smoothed over her lower cheeks and found its way between her legs.

He began to explore her silky wetness with his fingers and she writhed against him. His engorged cock nudged her and War moved so that it snuggled just below her warm pussy.

“Want I should touch us both, chère?” he rumbled. Unable to speak, she nodded. “How ‘bout we take turns, mmmm?” he asked pulling her hand to the head of his cock and her moist lips. He held her hand and rubbed them both as he kissed and nuzzled her neck.

“Warrick,” she breathed. “Warrick?” she choked out, her voice rising.

He chuckled sinfully. “You ready to make love with me now, chère?” Her moans were enough of an answer for him.

Easing her shins against his and angling up, he pushed her shoulders forward a little. He pulled back and slowly eased into her from behind, still massaging her little clit. He took his time, enjoying the feel of his heavy cock sheathing itself in her warmth one inch at a time. She was so small but so right for him.

He leisurely began to pump into her. He set a steady rhythm – not too fast, not too slow. He pulled her to his chest with the arm under her, anchoring her against him. She threw her head back on his shoulder.

His other hand continued to rub her throbbing nub as he heard her cry out her climax. He thrust harder and deeper but not faster as his body took over and her pussy clenched around him.

His balls tightened and he felt his cock become even larger inside of her. He couldn’t hold back a muted, growling roar as he shot his seed into her. It seemed like hours instead of minutes that passed, as he spent himself inside of her.

Eyes shut tight, he held her unmoving for long minutes. He lapped her shoulder and licked behind her very tasty ear.

“Bonjour, chère,” he murmured into her ear, his voice gravelly and thick. She said nothing, just hugged his arms tighter to her body.

Finally, Lorelei spoke.

“What time is it?” she asked.

His body shook and rumbled like an earthquake.

“What I’m gonna do with the likes of you, mon petit?” he laughed. “I believe it’s about ten or so. Guess we should get outta the bed, yeah?”

“Yes!” she breathed huskily slipping under his arms and scooting from the bed.

She ran for the bathroom and locked the door, giggling. He guessed she was embarrassed. He sat up and put his feet on the floor, chuckling. She never failed to surprise him.

Chapter Twenty Four

War moved around the efficient little apartment. Really, it wasn't all that little. It was quite spacious. He cleaned up the broken glass in the kitchen and made a pot of coffee.

Those tasks completed, he found his cell phone and called Williams. After that, he pulled some eggs from the refrigerator and cracked one into his mouth. He went back for a block of yellow cheese and started cracking eggs for an omelet.

As he was puttering, he found a plastic replica of the purple clothed duck sitting on a toy three-wheeler. Unable to resist, he put the little machine on the floor and pulled it back to watch it propel itself across the kitchen. As the toy rolled, the figure's mouth moved and it said,

"I am the terror that flaps in the night"

He was gasping for breath and laughing when Lorelei found him a few minutes later.

Once again her face went scarlet. He must think that was her regular skin color, she decided. She was grateful that she had dressed in gold leotard and leggings today. She hoped that the yellow color would neutralize the twenty-four hour blush she wore when he was around.

"I see you've found one of my toys," she said and laughed. "I'll finish making breakfast and you can shower."

As he gained his feet and grabbed her for a kiss, she told him, "I don't want to hear a single word about my shower curtain ... or my towels," she admonished firmly. "I never thought anyone would see my bathroom," she grumbled.

"Maybe you should give me a hint, chère?" he chuckled at her.

"No," she gritted, "just go." He went. She crossed her arms on the counter and buried her face in them, waiting.

She wasn't disappointed. His booming laugh shook the glasses in the cupboard. She heaved a deep sigh and turned her burning face to the food assembled on the counter.

War could not believe it. The shower curtain was filled with the purple-caped duck in various poses and with different sayings printed under him. He had to sit down and read a few of them gasping with laughter:

"I am the onions that stink in your eyes"

"I am the grade curve that gives you an 'F'"

"I am the fast food that comes back to haunt you"

Those were some of his favorites.

The towels were embroidered with the little ducks. Life with this woman would truly be full.

* * * *

Breakfast was on the table when he came out of the shower. War didn't say a thing but his blue eyes were twinkling just the same.

He'd brought some clothes with him to change into and was wearing old,

comfortable jeans and a chest-hugging tee shirt of dark gray. Lips twitching, he sat at the table opposite her.

“When there’s trouble, you call DW?” he asked, arching that dangerous eyebrow.

“Ah, Ah, Ah!” she responded. “Eat!”

“Chère, do you know my full name?” he asked her, picking up his fork.

Puzzled, she said, “Sure, Warrick Martine.”

“Chère, my first name is Dekon. Warrick is my middle name.” He let this sink in. She wrinkled her brow at him. “My team in the Army, many you will meet today, in fact, they don’t call me War. They don’t call me Deke or Dekon, either. What you suppose they call me, mon couer?”

“I can’t talk to you now, I’m eating,” she said, obviously not sure she really wanted to hear it.

She refused to look at him. He was laughing openly at her now. He decided to give her a little break.

“This looks wonderful, Chère. You even made sausage? Renaud said you didn’t eat meat, huh?” She beamed at him.

“I don’t eat meat. I have veggie sausage for me, but I keep some real dead animal flesh around for Renaud,” she said smugly. Then she mumbled, “I guess you’re the other carnivore in my life now. I may have to get more meat.”

“I’m the main carnivore in your life now, Petit,” he growled. “I’ll bring you some meat to keep for me.”

* * * *

They cleared away the dishes and War moved to look out the window. A colorful square on the floor by the window seat caught his attention.

It was a picture of Renaud dressed in hip-hugging swim trunks looking sternly at an exasperated Lorelei. In one hand he held a tube of acid-green goo and in the other, he held an enormous beach hat. They didn’t seem to realize they were being photographed. The picture had clearly been taken by someone in the water.

“When was this taken, Chère?” he held out the picture. Her face paled. She grabbed her medallion. It began to glow through her hand.

“It was taken a month or so ago the day you—the day we—Renaud and I went to the beach that day,” she said dully. “Where is Renaud? Please call him.” She began to tremble slightly. He stared hard at her.

“What is it, Lorelei? You must tell me.” He was demanding now. She looked at him.

“Renaud wants to come here. Where is he? Please, please call him. Please, Warrick, let him come here,” she pleaded.

War was frustrated, but he decided to be patient. He could smell her fear now. He radioed his officer and asked that Renaud come to the studio.

Lorelei moved over to the window seat and sat down. She got up immediately looking around as if she’d lost something. Then she headed for the studio door.

“Lorelei?” War stopped her before she reached the door. He moved to her and put his arms around her. “Chère, I’m here, okay?” She pressed herself close and squeezed him tight.

“You’ll learn you can trust me with everything, Chère. Just try, mmm?” she nodded. “You don’t got classes today, huh?” he asked her.

“No, no classes today,” she assured him. “I’m gonna dance for a bit,” she said. “It relaxes me.”

He followed her into the room and went down the stairs for a minute. She put on what War thought of as “real” ballet music and began stretching.

When he returned, he grabbed his cell phone and dialed, leaning on the wall so he could watch her dance.

He looked at the picture in his hand again. Lorelei was wearing a sleeveless cotton top. Her right shoulder was turned just slightly toward him. He realized what he was seeing, and not seeing. There was no angry red bite on her shoulder. That picture had been taken the day he’d showed his ass so badly.

Even while he was getting all worked up about an innocent day at the beach, Lorelei and Renaud were being stalked like animals. From the clarity of the picture and the angle of the water, he’d say they were being stalked by real pros.

Chapter Twenty Five

War had sent Beaudine home while Lorelei was in the shower. While he was on the phone checking of his men, Williams and Renaud showed up. Renaud immediately pulled Lorelei into his arms and held her for a minute.

The two began to talk in Czech again. War wondered what it was that they were discussing so intently. He'd find out soon. They really didn't have many secrets left. Still, he'd give them a chance to come clean with him.

First, though, he'd let them settle down. He knew that meant they'd dance a while. That was fine. It would give his men time to show up. He'd put them into the anteroom where they wouldn't be seen.

He spoke with Williams for a minute. "How'd it go?" War asked.

"Tough at first, and tougher this morning," Williams mumbled wryly. "I about had to knock him in the head to make him go to bed. This morning he didn't wanna eat. I told him we wouldn't come till he did. I think he made a conscious decision not to kill me. I think he about changed his mind when that thing he wears started shining red."

"Good man, Kurt," War praised him. "In about twenty minutes, some big, ugly somnabitches are gonna start showing up. If they ain't as big, mean, and ugly as me, shoot 'em. You'll know who they are."

Williams laughed and went down the stairs. It wasn't long before War's old unit began filing in. Soon he had ten men in the anteroom.

The men stared, completely amazed as they watched the slight, golden figure of Lorelei twist and turn and float all over the floor while the dark, muscular figure of Renaud bounded and spun across the floor after her.

He caught her and tossed her into the air and followed her up, catching her in mid air as well. She leaped off his shoulders or back spiraling through the air and doing impossible flips. She was practically flying.

Renaud would launch himself up and meet her there, never missing a beat as the two moved in unison. There was no way this could be learned or rehearsed. By the time the two were wearing down, ten hulking Special Forces warriors sat with their mouths hanging open in awe.

Renaud and Lorelei moved urgently to the music. War had seen them dance a few times, but this was definitely all out.

They were obviously beating themselves up. They were also speaking to each other in the best way they knew how. He knew the songs playing were not an accident.

As he watched them, War saw beyond the amazing acrobatics and body punishing moves. He could feel the pain they were expressing. This self-abuse was their way of letting it out. Reflecting on what he'd learned last night, he thought their father would understand, and even participate. He wished he could've seen the three of them dance together.

After the final song, the two dancers sank to the floor. War had placed a small fan near the wall to keep Renaud from hearing or scenting the men nearby. He brought

two bottles of water and sat in the middle of the floor with them.

"Feel better?" he asked them.

They both nodded. He spread his legs and drew Lorelei between them so that she rested against his chest. He waited a few minutes to speak.

"I guess you two know I love you, right?" he said gruffly, kissing Lorelei's neck. They both seemed to jump a little, but Lorelei drew War's arms around her more tightly. At the same time, Renaud and Lorelei mumbled together, "I guess so, yeah."

"You know you got trouble," he stated. He dropped the picture on the floor in front of them and asked, "Why's this upset you?" he didn't care which one answered. He needed both of them to trust him.

Renaud locked eyes with Lorelei. She took a deep breath and said, "I told you that was taken at the beach last month. It was a spontaneous trip. We had no idea where we were going until we got out of the car. It was taken in a private moment at a private place."

"That begs a few questions, chère," growled War. "Who's gonna tell me about it?"

"In for a penny," Lorelei told Renaud.

"In for a pound," Renaud replied with a sigh, "I know, Boo. Tebe Amor jemu?" Do you love him?

"Ano," yes, she said simply. War wrinkled his brow at them.

"Anybody gonna tell me what that was all about?" War demanded, growling again.

Lorelei pulled his big hand to her mouth and kissed it. Renaud apparently decided to take the initiative.

"It's something our father used to say. He was Slavic, or Czech, or both, I guess."

War didn't have to feign surprise. He hadn't expected either of them to admit blood ties right away. Renaud gave him a wry grin.

When he spoke again, his voice cracked, "Papa used to say 'In for a penny, In for a pound' whenever we wanted to take a chance." Lorelei reached out to him and he scooted closer.

"Papa would say that to remind us to think first also, Ren," she said. "We had the same father, he was a dancer. Our mothers lied about us to everyone. They had to."

War quirked a brow and looked at each in turn. He didn't mind getting the condensed version for now. But he needed them to come all the way clean.

"Papa was a genetics experiment. He was beautiful." This came from Renaud.

"He was beautiful. And he was terrible." Lorelei choked back tears. "He was so contained and directed. He was so good. Then they gave him no choice."

"Our mothers were killed. Louis was killed. See, Uncle, it follows that if Papa was a lab experiment, we were the field test. The guys at the lab want their rats back," Renaud said bitterly. "They want to see if rats bred in the wild can breed in captivity. They want to see if the genes are improved."

War looked at both of them, blinking. "Lemme see if I got any of this, k?" Brother and sister nodded.

"You two have the same father, yeah?" More nods.

"Defector, no?" Again they nodded. "Have to be Ivan Rychtar, yeah?" Two misty-eyed nods.

War hoped he was the only one to hear the collective gasp from the ante-room. “They tinkered with his natural genetics to make him more talented?” nodding again.

“Okay so then, when you two were born, you inherited the enhanced genes coupled with your mothers’ abilities like an extra boost?” The two looked at each other.

Lorelei spoke up. “Mostly, that’s right, Warrick. But everything Papa could do, we could do better. Everything we can do, our babies will do even better. They may even be able to almost fly. But that’s not the worst part.” She breathed deep.

Renaud addressed his uncle. “The worst part, Uncle, is that we, Rory and me, we’re gene farms. It was enough that we had Papa’s valuable genes. We both have our mother’s extra things, though. You know mine, and Rory, she’s got a sense that’s worse.”

Renaud wrinkled his brow in thought. “She’s careful but we think they know. It makes our genes extra valuable. They want us bad. Rory couldn’t hurt anyone but with her sense, she’s worth millions to these people. I’m damn near indestructible and untouchable any more. That’s worth a lot, too. A helluva lot.”

“They want us to breed. They think our baby would be the perfect weapon.” Lorelei said without inflection. “If they get one of us, they’ll get both of us. We need each other to live. They know that. I’m the weakest target.” She turned to look at War. “That’s why Renaud got mad when I was too close to the door at that party.”

War wrapped both arms around her. He buried his face in her hair. He’d wanted honesty. He got it in spades.

“Tell me about this sense, baby,” War asked quietly.

“I can tell when big things will happen. I can say if any kind of big disaster is coming. I know if there will be earthquakes, storms, air crashes, stock crashes.” She sighed, “Anything that’s going to affect a large number of people, I know ahead of time. Weeks, usually. I know if a war will happen or if a big business will succeed. And I can talk to Renaud in my head and he can hear me.”

She hung her head as if ashamed. She was shaking. War knew what that meant. She thought she was going to make him mad.

“Chère, you think I’d hold that against you?” He leaned back and turned her face to his. “Do you?”

“Maybe,” she whispered.

Lemme show you something, Chère.”

“Wait, Uncle!” Renaud cried out. It was too late. His uncle’s body seemed to wobble and then it became a very large black wolf. Lorelei stared for a minute. Then her face crumpled. She stood up and began to move toward the door to her apartment.

War was devastated. He thought she’d accept him and here she was running from him. He changed back into human form and made to leave the room.

Renaud called out, “Stop!” He changed into a slightly smaller black wolf and ran after Lorelei. He butted her with his head and blocked her from the door. He was speaking to her the whole time. It had to be surreal to the men in the anteroom to hear the young man’s voice coming from the animal.

“Boo, no! Wait! Uncle War’s not like me! He won’t be that way! He knows stuff we don’t know. Boo! C’mon. It’ll be all right. I swear it!” the Renaud-wolf pleaded.

“Get away from me, you mangy mutt!” Lorelei yelled, shoving him. “Just leave

me alone, Fido. Before I kick you!" She gave his tail a mighty yank and ran into the apartment sobbing.

Renaud changed back and pulled his clothes back on. His uncle was still angry and very hurt. Renaud knew he needed to explain quickly.

"Don't go, Oncle. This is my fault. It's not about you being Lupine, not really."

War glowered at his nephew. "I can't imagine what you have to say that could make this better, boy!" he snarled.

Renaud dropped to the floor. Both men still had evidence of their beast. Both had elongated teeth showing, shaggy hair, and partial claws on their hands. The younger man looked up at his uncle.

"Rory knew I was a werewolf my whole life. When I started changing, I didn't know what was going on. She and I figured it out together."

"It's a world of difference having one for a brother and having sex with one, now isn't it?" War continued to snarl.

"LISTEN TO ME!" Renaud bellowed. That got War's attention. "From the time she was twelve, she had to accept that, most likely, she'd be having sex with a werewolf and her brother at the same time. She was more afraid of the 'normal' studs we thought they were gonna force on her. It's not what you think."

"Well why don't you tell me what it is then, boy? I'm getting damned tired of this whole thing!" War barked back.

On a deep sigh, Renaud began, "You know you were mean to your sister sometimes, right?"

"What the fuck's that got to do with anything?" War snapped nastily.

"Rory always wanted a kitten. Her whole life, she's always gone off following kittens. When I started changing, I learned I could scare away those damned cats without making a sound. Rory thinks you're gonna do it, too. I always said I couldn't help it. That's part of why she's so upset. It's part of her dream to have a kitten."

War was calming down a little. His men were riveted.

"S'pose you tell me the rest of why she looks like her world has just ended, hmmm?" Wanting a kitten was well and good, but he knew his nephew was holding something back.

"This gets a little more complicated, Oncle. And it's kinda personal." Of course Renaud had known that they had an audience.

"Just spill it, son."

War was on the edge. He could understand how Lorelei would want a kitten but she wasn't irrational. He knew he wasn't going to like part two.

"I had to be careful about changing. Papa always worried they'd try to dissect me, or something, if anyone found out. She was worried about if they did force us to—you know—have sex. We learned that lupines have shorter pregnancies and we didn't know what the babies look like when they're born. Maybe they looked like puppies. One time they told us that" Renaud stumbled over his words now. He was visibly upset.

"Go on, son. I need to know." War was focused intently on his nephew.

"Those assholes, they always told her they'd kill her baby if it didn't seem normal. They said they'd kill it while she carried it. They told her if they caught her and she was pregnant, they'd abort it. We found out that lupines almost always impregnate

their mates right away.” Renaud leaned his head back to take some deep breaths. “They said they’d kill the father in front of her if she was pregnant so she’d know he was dead and she wouldn’t pine for him. Then she’d get pregnant easier by a stranger.”

Renaud rubbed his face. He looked his uncle in the eyes.

“Before, when you asked us to tell you what was going on, I asked Rory, ‘Tebe Amor jemu?’ It means, ‘do you love him?’ She said ‘Ano’. That means yes.”

“Now, she’s in there thinking that she’s probably pregnant and someone is either going to turn her baby into a science experiment or rip it out of her belly right after they cut my heart out in front of her. Is that an accurate assessment?” War inquired politely.

“Um, yeah, except for—even if you do slay all the dragons and kill all the bad guys, she’ll never get to have a kitty all her own. Don’t forget that.” Renaud must have had absolute faith in his uncle’s love for him right then.

Renaud’s faith was well deserved. If not for the love he had for his nephew, War would have braided his intestines.

Chapter Twenty Six

“All right guys! Come on out!” War called. Ten large, muscular, mean-looking men filed into the room.

“Ziggy! Front n’ center!”

“Yessir, Major!”

“We’re not in the Army any more, Zig. You don’t have to call me that. Here’s your mission. Take this good for nuthin’ and find a sweet little kitty. Any time a cat hisses at him or runs away, you slap him upside the head. That’s an order, Zig.”

“Yessir, Major!”

“Dismissed!”

“C’mon, Fido.” Ziggy and Renaud left together.

War doled out orders to the rest of his men sending two two-man teams out to try to find the people who were a threat to his family. Four men went back to his house for rest and the remaining man went down to guard the door.

With everybody dispatched, War had his own mission to accomplish. He needed to go in and look after Lorelei. He was more than a little disgusted with himself. He kept asking her to trust him and once again he’d immediately thought the worst of her.

Truthfully, War thought, she had a right to be mad at him. He’d known he was a werewolf. He knew all about what happened when someone mated with one. Lorelei only had her worst fears and some sketchy information from the Internet. Well, she had her brother, too. That probably made things worse instead of better.

He found the door to the apartment locked. He could have pounded on it until Lorelei answered, but he felt he’d put her through enough. As a cop, he could pretty much break into anything. He wondered if that was a trait their child would inherit. That is, if they ever had a child.

Damn, I’d better get in there.

He quietly made his way into the apartment. Lorelei wasn’t in the bathroom, the kitchen, or the window seat. He didn’t see her on the couch or in the bed.

That pretty much covers the entire place.

He carefully and quietly made his way into the room keeping to the outside edges. Looking around, he tried to locate her visually and by scent. He didn’t know what he was looking for but he’d know when he found it.

Yep! There she was, behind the dresser.

How did she manage that?

Secure in her hiding place, War didn’t think she’d notice him. He was making a concentrated effort to be extra quiet.

When he got to the dresser, he dropped to the floor and slowly reached for her. He stopped a few feet from her and got on his hands and knees.

“Lorelei?” he called softly. She didn’t move in any way.

Shit, this is worse than I thought.

“Sugar?” he continued moving her way. She tried to squeeze further behind the

dresser. “Chére, please. Come talk to me, hmmm?” If anything, she seemed to make herself smaller. “Lorelei, I can make it better, truly.”

She looked at him with desolate eyes that made his soul ache. He picked up the dresser and moved it. Then he got on the floor with her and tugged her balled up little body into his arms.

“Chére, listen to me.” He gave her a little shake. “Are you listening?” She turned her head so he knew that she was.

“First, Chére, you aren’t pregnant. You have to be in heat when we make love. It’s the same as when you ovulate. Okay?” She gave a jerky nod.

“Second, lupine babies look the same when they’re born as any other people babies, ok?”

Another little nod. He felt her body relax a little in his arms.

“Most important, Chére, I won’t let anyone take you from me. You trusted me enough to make love with me. You trusted me enough to tell me your secrets. Trust me to keep you safe.” He turned her to look at him.

“Chére, can you try to believe I’ll keep you safe? Just try a little, hmmm?”

War held his breath waiting for some kind of sign. Would she be able to put her faith in him after he’d lied by omission?

Lorelei looked at him with troubled eyes. He could see that she wanted to believe him.

She wanted to let him worry so she could stop worrying for a while.

Is that the right thing to do? What if something happens to him? Can I live with myself if he got hurt?

It was so hard to let go. It was so hard to let someone else take charge for a change. Maybe if she let him take the worry and take charge just for a little while, she and Renaud could rest and figure out what to do. She’d be honest with him about that. She really didn’t know any other way.

“Warrick?” she looked at him through troubled green eyes.

“Yes, chére?” he smiled at her, his deep voice stroking over her taut nerves.

“I don’t know how long Can I just trust you a few hours or a day at a time? I don’t know what we have to do yet.” She felt she’d said that badly, but she hoped he understood.

“Chére, as long as you try, it’s good, hmmm?”

She hoped he understood that she was only trusting him temporarily. When the time came, she was not going to let him fight her battles. She loved him. She’d talk to Renaud. If her brother agreed, they’d figure out how War fit into all this.

* * * *

As the men started returning from the tasks War had given them, he’d introduced them to Lorelei. She was reserved, as always. Renaud was okay with them one at a time but didn’t like having all of them around at once. He liked Ziggy just fine and the two of them had done well on their kitten mission.

Lorelei was over the moon about her new kitten. She’d named the orange and white kitten Goslyn after the little girl duck in her favorite cartoon. Renaud declared himself a reformed kitten molester and War was quick to tell him how proud he was of him.

Lorelei was so attentive when the kitten scratched him that the sexy Sheriff was

only too glad to play with the hateful little ball of fur. He found it odd that Renaud had been, according to Ziggy, very insistent that the kitten be very physical.

When everyone had returned to Lorelei's studio, War suggested that they move the entire circus to his home outside of town. After much debate, it was agreed that, should the "bad guys" attack, they didn't want to involve innocent bystanders.

A day had since passed with the entire entourage had settled into War's four-story house out away from town. It was bordered on two sides by trees and bayou, one side was open farmland and the other was cleared land until it reached the road with the gulf on the other side of that. The old house was a mile from its nearest neighbor.

Many large old homes in Louisiana have a vacant or sparse first floor so that the water, when it rises, will do little damage. This was true of War's home.

Rory and Renaud thought the sparse area would be a good dance studio for them, but War and his men disagreed. They felt the brother and sister would be too vulnerable there. Instead, they cleared the fourth floor for them.

The truth was that War suspected something. He didn't know what yet, but they were up to something. They'd spent their entire lives outrunning the people who were after them. They'd watched every person they'd ever loved be killed by these people. They'd gone so far as to plan leaving here to protect War and Zierra.

Now, when a trap was being laid and the final showdown was at hand, Lorelei and Renaud were content to let someone else handle it? War didn't buy it for a minute.

* * * *

Renaud was walking through the woods on a patrol with Ziggy. He liked the other man okay. They got along fine. Ziggy didn't feel like he had to fill every quiet minute with chatter.

The woods were peaceful this day, but Renaud smelled Zierra before he heard her. Apparently, Ziggy heard her, too. He glanced over as the former soldier slid behind a tree.

Renaud was livid. He'd told Zierra to leave him the hell alone. He'd told her he didn't care about her, he no longer respected her, and he didn't want to be with her in any way. What does it take with this girl?

Renaud had stopped trying to spare her feelings. He was still trying to save her life, though.

"Renaud, I found you." Zierra panted breathlessly.

"I made it crystal clear that I didn't want to be found, Zierra!" snarled Renaud. He shook his head in disgust. "Don't you have any pride at all?"

"It's just" Was she blushing? Renaud looked at her narrowly.

"What, Zierra? What has turned you from a haughty, snotty, self-centered pain in the ass to a pathetic, haughty, snotty, self-centered pain in the ass?"

"It's you, Renaud. You're such an asshole but you're so hot." Renaud just stared at her.

"I don't get it," he said finally. He could hear Ziggy snickering behind the nearby tree.

"Renaud, when you" his eyes narrowed again. "When you fucked me, you did it like you were just trying to shut me up. You didn't even care."

"That's exactly right, Zierra. I did it so you'd leave me alone. It was nothing to me. You were acting like a whore and I treated you like one." He still glared hard at her.

"It was the best I've ever had, ever. And even after you came, you didn't go down. I bet you could have kept going for hours"

Rolling his eyes, Renaud let out a deep sigh. Why is this happening?

"Zierra, my buddy Ziggy is right behind that tree over there. This turns out to be a very bad time for me." He made the mistake of turning his head toward Ziggy.

Before he knew what was going on Zierra had his pants open and had her hand wrapped around him. Obviously not listening to him, she'd dropped to the ground and put him in her mouth, sucking lustily.

Her dress had been held together by one button and she'd divested herself of that the second he'd looked over his shoulder. Now, when he tried to push her off of him, she made sure his hand landed on her breast.

"Damn, Zierra!" he growled. "You don't care who sees what, do you?"

Not letting go of his sex, she turned and braced herself on a tree beside them.

"I'll stay away for a week, Renaud. I promise. Only, please"

He took her hips in his hands. "You make one sound and I'm gone," he growled.

She nodded frantically. The tree she'd chosen was facing Ziggy. Renaud knew that he could see every move and would also be able to see Zierra's face clearly.

Renaud lifted her hips and plunged into her to the hilt. She didn't moan or groan but he could hear the strangled sounds she made while trying to remain silent. He pounded into her like a jackhammer.

From the first thrust, she had been throwing herself back on to him. She'd climaxed nearly immediately and kept coming, squeezing him tight. His goal was to get this over with quickly. He didn't care what she was after. Her knees buckled and he followed her to the ground.

When he would have pulled out, she looked over at him mouthing the word "please" and clinging to the arm he was bracing himself with. He continued to piston into her until, with one final thrust, he came.

Renaud waited a minute and then got up. Zipping his pants, he leaned down and tossed her dress to her.

"Tell Ziggy bye-bye," he said to her. She looked over at the other man who arched a brow at her and waved.

Without another word, Renaud and Ziggy turned and walked back into the woods.

After a while, Ziggy spoke. "That happen often?" he asked.

"More often than I'd like," Renaud snarled an answer.

"You're my hero, Fido," Ziggy breathed. Renaud looked at him with narrowed, glittering blue eyes. "Can I tell the others about this?"

"I'd rather you keep your mouth shut." Renaud still wasn't sure if Ziggy was joking or not.

"I'm serious, man. That was ... I don't know what that was." Ziggy emitted a low whistle, shaking his head. "That woman looked like she had--I don't know--found life's answers or something. Ecstasy, that's what"

Renaud cut him off. "Ziggy, enough, it's not funny, man," he growled menacingly.

"Hell, no, it ain't funny! You really are my hero; I swear it. I'm gonna just hang out with you and see what rubs off."

Renaud knew his brow was still furrowed when they reached the house. He kept

glancing at Ziggy during the walk home, expecting to find the other man laughing at him. Instead, Ziggy had an expression of awe on his face every time he looked at Renaud.

Chapter Twenty Seven

War had that nagging feeling again. Only this time it was nagging like a fishwife. Something's happening, something's going to happen, or I'm missing something.

"You got everything wired, Fitz?" War was talking to his second. He'd always think of the man as his second in command. He had ordered him to discreetly put microphones and cameras in throughout the top floor and, on a hunch, the roof as well.

"You bet, D.W.," Fitz responded. "Wasn't easy doin' that roof, I wanna tell ya that. And that boy of yours can hear a pin drop. Had to get some of the guys to take him out on recon so we could do it. Got cameras everywhere."

"Good man," War praised him. "What about the translator?"

"Now, that's one cool gadget," Fitz enthused. "They start talking that gobbledygook and we won't miss a syllable."

It wasn't long before War's foresight was rewarded. He had told Lorelei that he was going to meet with the guys. They needed to talk about what they'd found out with regard to the foreigners in the area. She and Renaud said they'd like to just go dance.

War radioed the men on the perimeter not to do anything until they got a signal. The five men inside the house moved to a large TV monitor to see what, if anything, Renaud and Lorelei were up to.

For a little while, it really did seem they were just going to dance. Suddenly some things occurred to War all at once. He flipped the feed switch from the dance room to "off" and a new picture filled the screen.

Lorelei had almost outwitted them. She and Renaud had anticipated a camera and microphones in that room and managed to loop a video feed to make it look as if they were still dancing.

It had almost worked. It would have succeeded except that War had noticed that they'd done the same thing twice. That never happened when they danced together.

The cameras caught Lorelei jumping out the fourth-floor window and flipping herself up to the roof. Right after her, Renaud executed a similar maneuver. He wasn't as light and nimble as she was so it was a little dicey for a second. The five men released their collective breath and settled to listen.

They watched as Lorelei and Renaud joined hands and sat facing each other at the very top of the roof.

"Didja get the last drop of blood, Boo?" Renaud asked his sister. "Stroke of genius about the cat, huh?"

"It's not fair you're both the brains and the brawn, Ren," Lorelei chuckled. "But I do love my kitty." The men were surprised.

"I couldn't keep getting him to cut himself shaving, ya know? Here's the medallion. I put his blood on mine and Papa's, and you got the last drop before, right? For you?" Renaud held something silver and blue from his hand.

"Ren, you have to put it on him. Yeah, I got the blood. But you have to get him to wear it. He doesn't trust me."

Renaud's face registered shock, as did his uncle's in the room several floors below. They had to be talking about him. War realized that the extent to which he was a bastard apparently knew no bounds.

"You gotta be kiddin', Boo. He loves you. You know that. He'd do it for you if you asked him, c'mon." In a lower voice, Renaud asked her, "Boo, doncha think he's the one?"

"Of course he's the one, Ren. I love him. He's my lover. He's the one Papa meant, I'm sure of it."

"Then why, Boo?" Renaud was definitely confused. "How can you say he doesn't trust you?"

War wondered that, himself. He didn't know exactly what they were talking about, but he had to side with Renaud on this one.

"Ren, how many times has he asked you if you and I had sex? Hmm?" War winced. "Then there's that Alabama thing. Look, we can't take a chance about whether he'd do it for me or not, now can we?" Renaud expelled a deep sigh.

"You're right. I know you're right. This is our only chance. So what do I do? Ask him to put it on and if he refuses, knock him down and put it on him?" War didn't think his nephew could do that. He was bigger than Renaud after all.

"Ren, you can't be killed, you can't be injured. You got the extra strong thing going on. Until he puts it on, you are stronger than he is. Make him wear it." She paused, taking a deep breath. "If he won't, you know what to do. Besides, I'm lighter and more nimble. Plus, my color is so light they'll see me easy. I can stay high until one thing or the other happens."

"Boo, you gotta stay up. You cain't let 'em git you."

"I know, Ren."

Lorelei heard the warning in her head. Her Papa's voice, "They're here, Lorelei."

They looked at each other for a long moment. The people watching the feed saw a red and a yellow flash. "Danger. Papa said they're here, Ren. It's time."

"Boo, what if he won't wear it?" At her steady look he said, "I just need you to say it out loud so I know we agree. Say it."

"Find me and kill me, Ren. I don't want to get caught." War listened to her response and felt like he'd been hit with a brick.

"I'll die pretty quick after, right?" He put his palms on either side of her face. "I'll die quick, huh?"

"Yeah, Ren, pretty quick. Twenty-two minutes after." She put her hands on his waist. "Ren?" He nodded. "Take as many as ya can out with ya, kay?" Her brother lowered his mouth to hers and kissed her hard.

"It's time." She said. He picked her up and hurled her at the top of a nearby tree. She was gone.

* * * *

Renaud moved to the nearest window, flipped his body inside and propelled himself to the staircase and hurtled down. He nearly collided with his uncle on the next landing.

"Tell me, boy!" War growled.

Renaud pulled his father's medallion from his pocket and handed it to him.

"You gonna make me wear this?" War demanded.

His nephew snarled back, “You gonna put it on or I’m gonna kill you and put it around your dead neck and drag you with me.”

War took the medallion from Renaud. “I was gonna wear it, son. I just wondered what you’d say.”

He dropped the chain over his head. Blue fire shot from the medallion and wrapped itself around him. He shook his head, hard.

Suddenly War felt incredibly strong. So many things were clear to him. It was as if a cloak of clarity had fallen on him. He felt a little buzz on his chest and touched Renaud. The buzz stopped. Then, like a tug on his mind, he felt Lorelei. The blue stone in his medallion began to flash as did the red stone in Renaud’s.

“She needs us, Uncle” Renaud told him urgently. War turned to his men.

“Come in behind us and mop up, you’re takin’ prisoners, we’re not.” He turned to Fitz.

“Fitz, call Ft. Rucker special ops. Call the C.O. and get some big guns down here. If any foreign nationals are left alive, they can deal with ‘em.” The medallion at his neck zapped. Renaud’s did the same.

“Let’s go, son.” The outline of the two men became indistinct and two large black wolves wearing glowing pendants took their place. The animals shot into the swampy and wooded area behind the house.

* * * *

Lorelei flipped and bounced through the trees. She ran beside a car driving along the usually deserted road for a minute. The car moved to the shoulder and men began to pile out of it and Lorelei bounced up and grabbed the low branch of a nearby tree.

She felt a hand on her foot as she shot upward. She’d gotten away! Or had she?

“NETS!” The word reverberated in Renaud’s mind.

“NETS!” War heard.

Lorelei concentrated on getting away. She saw herself flipping over the edge of a net and swinging to safety. She forced herself to think of nothing but following her mental image out of the trap unfolding around her.

At the last second, she surged through the closing mouth of the net her would-be captors shot at her. She knew it wouldn’t be the last one but she was still free.

“Lorelei! Chère!” she heard in her mind.

It couldn’t be—could it?

“Warrick?” her mind asked as her body flipped through the trees trying to stay safe.

“Yes, mon petit amour, I’m here”

“Warrick, I love you, Warrick.”

“Tell me in person, Petit. Lorelei?”

“Yes, Warrick?”

“Lorelei, if you let another man put his hands on you, I will spank your bare little bottom.”

“Warrick?” she gasped. “Are you serious?”

“Oui Chère, I am completely serious,” he told her. “You think about your little naked bottom stretched across my lap and me spanking you with my open hand.”

He waited a minute. She was very grateful that Renaud couldn’t hear their mental conversation.

“If you let any other man near you, mon amour doux, I will pull your panties down and spank your naked bottom until you cannot possibly sit.”

“Warrick,” he heard her mind breathe. “I don’t want you to do that. I don’t want you to hurt me.”

There she was, standing high up in a tree surrounded by the men who’d been chasing her. The nets kept flying but they couldn’t reach her.

He barked and growled to Renaud who saw her poised so high above the ground.

“Oncle, she is very agile and nimble but, if she gets hurt ...”

“Don’t think of that, boy!” he growled. “Start taking them down. Don’t kill if you don’t have to. Just remember that our entire pack dies if she does. I can’t live without her and you won’t.”

The two werewolves separated and each rounded the tree from a different direction. Both animals attacked at the same time that all hell broke loose.

War knew he’d killed the man whose throat was between his teeth. When the missile from the rocket launcher had hit the tree that Lorelei was standing in, he had just reacted. There was a dead man next to Renaud, too.

Renaud, like War, was looking up at the top of the tree. Seemingly in slow motion, the upper half of the tree swept down, away from the two werewolves and their enemies.

Caught in its falling branches, Lorelei fell with the tree. She could be seen crawling up through the limbs as the tree crashed to earth. Time accelerated again as a light in War’s mind seemed to wink out.

“NO!” bellowed Renaud running toward his sister, transforming as he went. The tree bounced up again and down, falling on top of Renaud. Undaunted, he continued fighting toward his sister.

From behind him, a net shot forward and he was caught. Renaud ripped through the net, struggling to get to Lorelei. He closed his hand over hers and fell, impaling himself on a broken tree branch.

War grabbed the man with the net by the neck and flung him away. He heard the man scream and then a ‘thunk’ sound, and the screaming stopped.

War transformed as he made his way through the tree branches toward his nephew and his mate. The place in his brain where he’d heard Renaud now sounded like a low hum. Nothing came from Lorelei. He was inconsolable.

As he neared his family, War saw a man bending over them. He didn’t try to control the beast within him as he reached for the next man he would kill. His teeth were elongated and his claws extending. He was in half-human, half-were form and his pain knew no bounds.

“NO!” the man screamed, but War ignored him. “Look at me!” he screamed at War.

A flash of green light hit War between the eyes and burned his chest where the medallion hung. War dropped the other man. He wrapped his hand around the amulet meaning to rip it off and fling it away. The shorter man reached up and put his hand over War’s.

“No” he said again. “I can save them. I can.” He spoke with a heavy accent.

War felt himself begin to change still more, finally back into a human. He looked at the foreigner as the man turned back to Lorelei and Renaud. This foreign man looked

back at him with Lorelei's eyes. The shape of his solid chin and strong forehead reminded him of Renaud's.

"Come! Help me!" he ordered War. He began pulling packets of supplies from his clothes.

Still naked, War stepped forward and pulled Renaud from the branch. He laid the young man in a clear spot of ground next to Lorelei. He wanted to howl in pain as he gazed upon their broken bodies.

The golden man who had Lorelei's eyes and Renaud's chin was oblivious to War's pain and all the activity going on around him. War refused to move away from him even as he donned the clothes that Fitz brought.

All around them, a team of soldiers from Fort Rucker, Alabama were busy securing the area while War's old unit helped.

War was desolate. He didn't know how this foreigner thought he could save Lorelei and Renaud. Had it been twenty-two minutes? He was sure it had. He couldn't bring himself to move or to think.

When a medic joined the golden man and began following his orders, War still didn't move. He didn't respond to the officer that walked up and began to speak to him.

Was that another hum?

His medallion began to glow. He felt and heard two, now. Two.

Two!

He moved a step closer to the man bending over his family. The medallion at that man's neck began to glow green. He grinned at War.

"They live," he said triumphantly, clutching his amulet. "They live!"

Chapter Twenty Eight

Hours later, an exhausted but elated Dekon Warrick Martine sat in a closed wing of Lyster Army Hospital at Ft Rucker, Alabama. It had been decided that Renaud and Lorelei should be transported there so that fewer questions would be asked while they recovered.

They'd been saved and stabilized on the scene by War's new best friend, Havel Rychtar. Now, while both men sat drinking coffee within touching distance of the brother and sister, Havel told War his story.

Havel Rychtar was Ivan's younger brother. He'd been known as Havel Cermak all of his life. That had been his mother's husband's name.

Ivan and Havel's father had been given a last request before "The State" ended his life. That request had been to spend a few hours with Ivan's mother. Nobody knew they'd made it a conjugal visit.

All his life, Havel's mother had told him about his brother and how it must be secret. Havel had met Ivan during a school trip to the ballet one year. Ivan met with all the children who wanted to speak to him.

Ivan had known who Havel was instantly and had given him his talisman then. But first he'd given him a nasty paper cut.

The brothers managed to keep in touch after Ivan's escape from their country. He'd managed to smuggle information about the children but could only send Lorelei's blood.

Havel studied and became a doctor and a scientist. He was determined to help his brother and his brother's children. Because of this, he'd managed to insinuate himself into the research facility that sought to capture Lorelei and Renaud. It had been his voice that Lorelei had heard thinking it was her papa warning her.

Havel found a sweet irony in the fact that all of Ivan's glorious genes had been right under their noses for decades.

Epilogue

War gently placed his golden little wife in the center of their large bed. Carefully, he eased himself down beside her and pulled her into his arms. Six months had passed since the day she had “died” and been saved by her uncle. They had been married this very morning.

“I won’t break, Warrick. You don’t have to be so careful,” Lorelei told her new husband.

“Chère, do you remember the first time I met you?” he asked her gently. He reached down to ease her shoes from her feet.

“Of course!” she squealed, turning bright pink. “I could never forget that!”

“I thought then that you were so delicate that you couldn’t possibly move from room to room without breaking.” He began unzipping her dress and kissing her neck as he spoke.

“Warrick,” she said breathlessly. This man stole her breath, her mental faculties; he took everything from her when he was near. What he gave her in return, however, was immeasurable.

“Warrick, you know better now, don’t you?” she breathed. He was lowering the bodice of her dress.

“Since then, Chère, I tried to pretend you were not breakable and so I have caused you injury time and again,” he told her, licking between her breasts.

He pulled the full-skirted dress from under her hips. She lay before him in a delicate antique-white, satin and lace teddy that had him groaning on his knees in front of her.

“Oh Warrick,” she wailed, “I would be terribly unhappy if you didn’t think you could be yourself when we’re together like this.” She was so upset she thought she might cry.

War pulled her to his chest. Understanding had dawned on his handsome face.

He began to chuckle at her. She gave him her best glare.

“Chère, don’t worry. I am most eager to show you all the ways there are to make love. You will feel every bit of my passion.” He kissed her lingeringly. “I wanna save your body for taking my seed and having my pups. You’re gonna need to rest up in between! Just allow me to spoil you and pamper you the rest of the time, hmmm?” He gave her a devilish grin.

“You’re not going to give me a hard time about having kids?” she asked him suspiciously.

“How soon would you like to have kids, Chère?” he asked her, licking her shoulder.

“Soon, Warrick. I have a weak” she gasped. He was teasing the thighs of her teddy. “I have a weak spot for children.”

With evil intent, he lowered the straps on her teddy. She reached for the waist of his tuxedo pants.

When she leaned up, he grabbed the bra of the teddy between his teeth and, with a snap of his head it ripped off of her.

He pulled his dress shirt in two taking it off and kicked out of his pants. His boxers went the way of his shirt and he fell ravening upon her.

He sucked one of her breasts into his mouth and rolled the other nipple between his thumb and forefinger. He pulled back to nip and nibble at that breast and then its mate. Back and forth he transferred his attentions all the while his free hand trailed down her body.

Soon he placed her hands on her breasts and squeezed.

“Don’t stop, Chère,” he ordered.

He kissed his way down her body and lifted her bottom in his hands. He began suckling upon her little nub and then plunged his tongue into her slit. One of his hands slid toward the cleft in her bottom, allowing a finger to tease the tiny puckered opening of her backside.

Lorelei screamed as her climax hit her all at once. “Warrick! Oh, my, Warrick!” she cried out.

“Right here, Sugar Baby,” he rumbled, rising over her and sliding his cock into her still clenching pussy.

She was on sensual overload now and she wrapped herself around him. “More, Warrick! Harder, MORE!” she shouted. He plunged.

“Mine!” He growled. Then he pulled back and stopped. She gasped.

“Warrick!” she cried on a moan.

“Mine,” he growled gutturally.

She slapped his haunch. “Warrick!” she growled back as best she could.

“Mine” he repeated menacingly. His eyes were glowing blue. “Mine,” he growled again.

“Yes, Warrick. Always, only yours,” she breathed her agreement.

He licked her from her jaw to her bellybutton. Then he pulled out, flipped her over and mounted her from behind. Weaving his fingers through hers, he closed his teeth over the bite marks he’d made more than half a year before.

He plunged into her from behind and stopped. Both Mr. and Mrs. Martine groaned long and loud. He began to move—slowly at first and then driving into her.

His hips began thrusting harder and faster until she was screaming his name.

“YES, WARRICK! WARRICK, YES!” she cried out as her body tightened around his still plunging cock.

He thrust deeply once more and then once again after that.

“MINE! LORELEI, MINE!” he roared, collapsing on top of her.

After several minutes, he rolled to his side, gathering her against him. He licked her shoulder for a minute and then he turned her to face him. He lowered his head and licked between her breasts.

Propping himself on one elbow, he looked down at her.

“The day I met you I was in such a foul mood,” he grinned at her. “Today, because of a milkshake and a fender bender,” he licked her left breast, “I am the happiest husband ...” he licked her right breast, “... and soon to be daddy ...” he leaned down and kissed her mouth, “... in the whole world.”

He took her mouth in a lingering, devastating kiss. “Guess what my weak spot

is?”

The End