

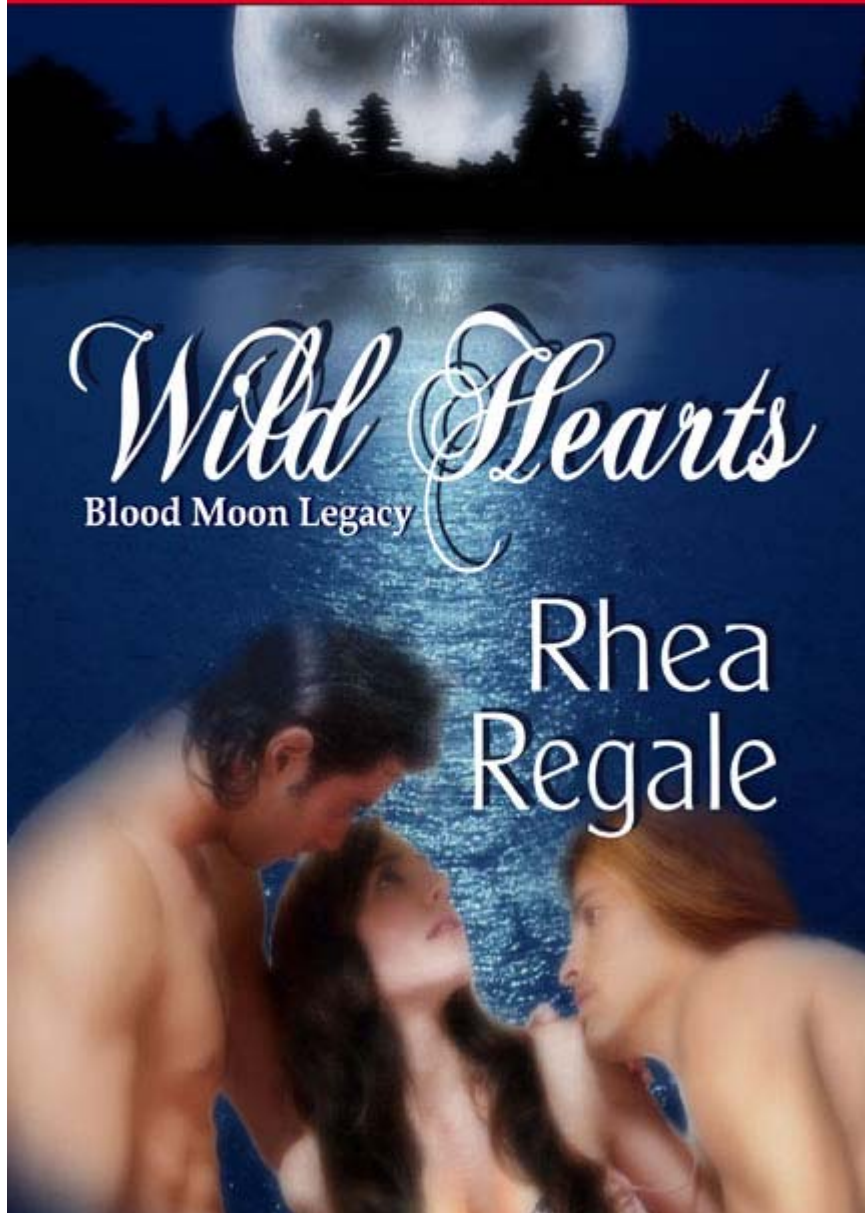
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Wild Hearts

Blood Moon Legacy

Rhea
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WILD HEARTS

Blood Moon Legacy 1

Rhea Regale

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Letter from Rhea Regale
Regarding Ebook Piracy

Dear Readers,

There is nothing I enjoy more than creating a story that can whisk you away. Sharing my characters and worlds with you gives me some of the greatest pleasure. Putting a smile on your face, and a sigh of happiness on your lips, is what I strive to provide for you, my readers.

Unfortunately, as many of you know, the ever-growing problem with ebook piracy takes a tremendous toll on writers. Please spread the word that pirating ebooks is illegal, it's theft, and will eventually destroy everything we've worked so hard to provide for you.

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Without the loyal support and following of you, my readers, there would be no stories to share. Writing is my livelihood, and it's a means to support my family. I look forward to continue writing for your enjoyment.

With deep gratitude,

Rhea Regale

DEDICATION

To my dear husband. You are truly the love of my life, the legs I stand on, and the inspiration to follow my dreams.

WILD HEARTS

Blood Moon Legacy 1

RHEA REGALE

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Prologue

The white wolf is revered in the were community, a sign from the spirits of prosperity and good times to come. She is an alpha female who gives hope to her fellow wolves and reigns control over all. As with any admired creature comes those who wish to watch her fall from grace.

Twenty-five years ago, a group of rebel wolves slipped into the quaint town of Hood River and slaughtered all residing white wolves, leaving the local packs in panic and dishevelment.

No one heard the single cry of an infant being pulled from her dead mother's womb. Beneath a red moon and the cold cloak of night, a man carted a newborn far away from the carnage, praying to the spirits she may live to carry on the legacy of her bloodline.

And so began the legend of the Blood Moon Legacy.

Chapter One

Winter arrived in the mountains, and it did not come alone.

Coal Demmering sat back on his haunches, nose tipped to the sky. The scent of crisp air, wood, and wildlife assaulted him like a sensual toxin. He loved the early winter nights when the trees swayed naked and the sky dazzled with millions of stars. He loved the moon hung high and bright at any stage and the reflection of its glamorous glow across the lake's crystalline surface.

The winter always brought a deep desire to mate. The upcoming full moon stoked his carnal needs, as it did any male wolf who sought a companion.

Until this night, he had sought futile grounds. Fucking women, both human and wolf, became a boring pastime. As old as he was, he needed something different. Something new and spicy.

Dead leaves and twigs cracked and crunched behind him. He sniffed the air, catching the familiar scent of his best friend far before the gray wolf settled beside him. One large green eye observed him, reading his thoughts as best as the man could.

Keeping the telepathic link severed, Coal turned back to the small cabin just beyond the forest break. The half-moon spilled white light over the quaint home, drenching it in warmth despite its abandonment.

Not for long, he thought.

He heard the methodical crunch of tires in the distance rolling up the long driveway. Rubber popped pebbles and stones into the forest, ricocheting off ground and trees. Blinding rays from headlights created a dizzying strobe effect through the dense trees and brush,

casting shadows against shadows. Coal pressed to his paws and stretched out his hind legs. His ears perked up, as did a more primal part of his anatomy. His friend stepped back, lowering close to the ground as the whitewash coasted over them. Coal kept still, his thick black coat surely blending with the night.

The car rolled to a stop at the foot of the cabin's porch stairs.

The scent of woman untangled from the unpleasant odor of car exhaust, hot metal, gas, and rubber. It was a very familiar scent of rustic wilderness and untamed blood.

Coal connected the telepathic link with Jacy.

"Do you smell her?" he asked. Jacy tipped his snout toward the cabin. His black nostrils flared.

"Wolf? Fucking crazy. I smell wolf, and I smell a good fuck."

"Hey, she's Old Man Smith's granddaughter. The one everyone believed dead. Show a bit of respect for his kin."

"She's wolf at heart, Coal. She'll be a bitch in bed. You'll see."

Coal growled a deep rumble low in his throat. His hackles rose, his pointed ears lying flat against his head.

"Don't you go after her, Jacy. Before Old Man's death, he confided in me the bloodline extended to this woman. She's unfamiliar with her history. She may not even know she's a wolf."

Jacy's snout lowered as the car's engine cut off. Coal lowered himself to the ground and crept forward, keeping his ears pricked for any threat. He wanted to get a good look at this creature. Her scent enticed the deepest part of his spirit, awakened a slumbering craving. He had to heed his own warning to Jacy. As thick as he grew in wolf form, he couldn't jump the woman.

At least not tonight.

The lock clicked, and the car door swung open. Coal swallowed as one long leg appeared, bare except for an ankle-strap black pump and a skirt that bunched high up a creamy thigh. Jacy purred at his side, taking short, deep sniffs of the air.

"God, she smells sweet. The forest must be turning her on."

Coal looked at his friend. He smiled, bearing white teeth. The woman did smell fantastic. So much so, he almost transformed to quell the throb in his cock. The wild wreaked havoc with the wolf side. If she did indeed carry the white wolf blood, the upcoming full moon definitely toyed with her body. Hell, instinct wouldn't be the only thing toying with her.

The woman pulled herself out of the car using the door. Jacy buckled. Coal froze.

"Who would've guessed Old Man Smith could create a child who could create that?"

Coal silently agreed with his friend. Staring at the curvy backside of the woman brought every carnal thought to the surface. Dark, thick waves cascaded down her back, glistening beneath the opulent moonlight. Her body narrowed at the waist and curved to create one luscious mound of ass. Long, slender legs, delicately defined by feminine muscle, extended from beneath the hiked skirt.

She turned her face to the moon. The light cast the articulate molding of her profile in different degrees of light and shadow. Beautiful. Sexy. Entirely wild.

Coal swatted his snout with a thick paw. The wolf in him demanded he take her without prelude. The man in him demanded he wait. Tonight was not the night.

"Hope there're no creepy critters inside, Gramps. You know I hate 'em."

Jacy laughed inside Coal's mind. Coal shook his head. Her voice purred out words with a sharp edge. What he'd do to feel her sucking his cock while purring her thoughts.

Unable to control the heat in his wolf body, Coal prepared to transform.

A fur-raising crack echoed through the night. Jacy growled, shifting beside him. Coal searched the area for the alien scent that wafted along the cool night breeze.

"Fuck. They know too."

Jacy's declaration sparked new worry in his gut. Their primary reason for scouting the area was to ensure the woman's safety, not discover a fuck friend. And here they stood, enamored and coiling with desire while hunters approached across the way.

"Go around the car and keep her safe from that side. I'll handle the one coming up the hill."

Jacy bounded off, keeping to the trees for cover. Coal slinked along the edge of the clearing, his attention shifting between the woman and the hidden threat. He could smell her fear and worry like acid. His fur bristled, his upper jowl pulled back in warning.

Just then, he caught the reflective flash of eyes.

Two pairs trained on the woman. She slammed the car door shut, her gaze shooting from the cabin to the looming trees, to her purse, and to the lake.

The wolves emerged, eyes glowing and teeth bared, glistening with saliva. Coal leaped into the clearing, landing in front of the woman. Nails on metal stung his ears, and Jacy landed at his side. Together, they advanced the trespassing wolves. Behind them, the woman gasped for breath, her mind churning her fears.

Coal glanced at Jacy.

"You hear her? Do you think..."

"Try it," Jacy pressed and stepped away from Coal to broaden their territory. The other wolves backed up. One paused and leaned back just before he lunged. Coal leaped forward, crashing his heavy body into the attacking wolf's, bringing them both tumbling to the ground. Dull pain sliced through his shoulder as the enemy grappled sharp nails against his flesh. He snarled, swatting the assailant's snout until the coppery scent of blood filled his nostrils and triggered his underlying hunger. He stomped one big paw on the wolf's face before burying his deadly teeth into his neck.

"Granddaughter of Jacob Smith, go inside and lock your doors. We are here to protect you." Coal sent the message to the woman, hoping his assumptions proved true. If he could determine her

thoughts, a line might be established.

Jacy arced over him, colliding in a crushing thump with the other wolf. Coal's contender thrashed beneath him, growling and yelping. A door slammed in the distance.

Never once releasing his throat, Coal climbed on top of the massive wolf, pinning him down and revealing a fatal shot to the underside of his neck. He pulled his teeth from the thick flesh and buried them back in the enemy's throat. Blood gushed into his mouth as he opened vital arteries. A howl pierced the night, deafening him. The wolf fought to push him off. Coal's deep, rumbling growl preceded a sharp jerk, tearing the wolf's throat beyond repair. He backed off the animal, licking his own snout clean, while the enemy pressed to his paws and stumbled off to the trees. Jacy's boy pulled out from beneath his friend, bounding after his dying comrade.

Coal snorted, trotting back to the trees, Jacy in tow. Once in the protection of darkness, he transformed into his human shape. Jacy emerged a moment later, a malicious smile on his face. Coal snickered, his gaze lowering to the erect evidence of his friend's excitement.

"It seems we're not the only ones who want that woman," Coal said. He combed a hand through his mussed hair and cast a glance toward the cabin. Yellow light filled every window on this side of the place. The woman's silhouetted movements crossed through each patch of light on the ground.

Jacy stretched his arms over his head and then folded them over his chest. "She's a white wolf?"

"According to Old Man Smith, she was thrown into hiding after her birth. He was the only living relative to keep contact with her, and that was limited to a letter once a year."

"The legacy is true then."

"We'll find out soon enough." Coal's gaze drifted to the trees behind the cabin. Death raised its rancid stench into the crisp air. His enemy had died. "Although, I think this night is proof enough the

legacy is true. Why else would members of the Dark Moon pack come here?"

* * * *

Shyla Smith paced the cold living room of the small cabin. Goose bumps covered her from shoulder to ankle. Shivers of fright raked along her spine. Her eyes darted around the room, gauging the safety of such a structure against a small pack of determined wolves.

Dear God, why did she come out here?

Because Gramps asked you to come out and take care of his home.

Shyla paused and shook her head at the wear and tear of the wooden planks beneath her brutal pumps. She answered the silent request of her grandfather's last letter to tend to his belongings once he was gone. Even though she had met the man only once in her twenty-six years, she couldn't deny him this request. He filled her with history of her ancestry, though never mentioned her real parents other than once. Through written words, he created a bond with her that extended far beyond daily hugs and kisses. She felt as if he linked with her soul, hooked a seldom seen area in a person's being, and she loved him tremendously for it.

She grieved his death and, for the first time, hated that city life prevented her from making his funeral.

She wanted to see him one last time.

Moving to one of the rickety glass windows, Shyla peered out into the night. Her welcoming committee had not been the most hospitable, having her second-guessing her choice to spend time out in the wilderness. She harbored a terrible aversion to anything with more than four legs and smaller than a Chihuahua pup, right down to the horrific spider building a web against the corner of the sill. She shuddered, lifting her gaze to the clear black sky. The soft moonlight did something to her. It warmed her, soothed her spirit, and calmed

her frazzled nerves. Growing up in a plague of artificial lights and never-ending noises, the quiet and beauty of this wooded territory was a tranquil escape.

Maybe I can learn to love this.

Still, her unusual experience with the wolves only minutes ago stuck with her, as did the loud voice demanding her to go inside. Did wolves outright attack humans? Is that normal behavior for wild animals? Why did two seem to be consciously protecting her while two consciously stalked her? Why did that voice sound so real?

For wild wolves, they left a lasting impression of more humane creatures than not. Now, that was absurd. Gramps may have indulged in his beliefs of wolf men or groups of people throughout the small town that lived with wild blood in their veins. He may have shared stories about the revered white wolf and the massacre that destroyed all of them due to jealousy.

“People do not turn into wolves, Shyla,” she muttered to herself, her breath fogging the cold glass.

“*What if they do?*” the tiny black shadow slithering deep within her spirit whispered. “*What if you do?*”

“Nonsense. I’m a city girl. I’d have to love romping around naked in the woods to be considered a likely candidate for werewolfhood.”

A sharp bang on the front door jolted her. She reeled away from the window with a gasp, wide eyes locked on the simple wooden door. A softer knock followed. She pulled her coat tight around her, slinking deeper into the cabin.

“Miss Smith?”

Shyla swallowed. Who in the world would know her name? Hell, who would’ve known she was coming out here?

The heavily rich voice of the man inquiring from the porch caressed her shaken nerves. Despite her better judgment to play deaf, she moved to the door and slowly eased it open.

Oh God. Shyla stared through the mesh screen door at the sinfully gorgeous man standing on her grandfather’s porch. That damn

shadow inside her mind snapped, “*Mine!*” as she forced herself to rein in a rush of heat that crashed through her body.

The man, surely a head taller than herself, offered an arched brow. Although the lighting was poor, she managed to make out his articulately chiseled features, from the hints of Native American blood in his strong jaw and cheeks to immaculately molded lips and sharp nose. His dark brows served to enhance the exotic tilt of equally dark eyes.

“Miss Smith, you look as if I’ve frightened you. Is everything okay?” the man asked.

Shyla absorbed the richness of his voice, responding with something that sounded like a purr from her throat. *What is wrong with me?*

“And you are?”

“Coal Demmering. I was a friend of Jacob’s. He told me you’d be coming out. Asked to keep an eye on you.”

“Oh?” *You can keep an eye on me all you want.* “He never mentioned you.”

“I’m not surprised. He aimed to keep any association with Hood River separate from you for your safety.”

Her safety?

Coal lifted his chin and unfolded his arms from his chest. He slid his hands into his pockets. “I’m sure your trip out here was taxing. You look tired. Is there anything I can do for you to help settle you in?”

“Uh, no. I think I’ll manage just fine.” Shyla looked him over quickly. His choice of black attire sure fit his name. “Coal.”

A hint of a grin tugged the corner of his mouth. Even the dirty mesh screen couldn’t distort this man enough to keep fantastical thoughts of him naked from her mind.

“Well, if you insist you’re okay, I’ll let you get some rest. Jacy and I look forward to spending tomorrow with you. Are you familiar with the town at all?”

“Gramps sent me a map a year ago. I live in New York. I think I’ll fair well.” Shyla offered a small smile, warmth touching her face.

“We can pick you up around ten, grab a bite to eat, and show you around. I wouldn’t suggest taking to the area solo. There’s been...well, some unusual occurrences lately.” Coal took a step back, casting a glance toward the lake. The soft rays of white moonlight merely defined the hard cuts of his face. As he turned back to her, she could’ve sworn she saw the moonlight reflect off his dark eyes. She blinked. “Have you unpacked your car?”

“Not yet. I’ll do it in the morning.”

“I’ll bring your stuff up to the door and leave my cell number for you, should you need anything during the night.”

Shyla inhaled sharply. She knew better than to take his concern for anything more than that, concern. Somehow, though, she detected a subtle double entendre in his comment. The growing grin on his mouth didn’t help her think otherwise.

Maybe this wasn’t such a bad idea after all. If Gramps left this man in charge of her safety—why her safety would be of such concern was beyond her—then she could live with the creepy crawlies for a week. Hell, maybe she’d even take to the wicked side her thoughts rolled through at the moment. Coal appeared every inch a seductive creature who might teach her a thing or two about bed play. Her pathetic love life needed a bit of sprucing up. Why not indulge while she tended to more personal agendas?

Coal’s gaze snapped to hers. He stared at her for a long moment. Then, Shyla watched him turn toward where she parked her car.

“Darling, you may wish to censor your thoughts. I can hear them,” he said, stepping off the porch and nearly blending with the night.

Shyla froze. What the hell was he talking about? He could hear her thoughts? No one, unless telepathy could be believed, heard another person’s thoughts. Surely, this man...

Shyla rubbed her cheeks, trying to rid herself of the hot flush that colored them. Her lower belly curled and itched. Damn, this trip just

might prove to be more than organizing Gramps's things, especially if Coal consumed her waking hours.

Chapter Two

Laela watched Timothy open the door, stretching her naked body along Josef. He lowered his head and left a trail of arousing nips along the back of her neck as she splayed her hand over the solid planes of his chest. The heady scent of sex and sweat hung like a dense cloud in the small one-room cottage. She playfully combed her nails over the dark, crisp hair around his nipple, but her attention focused on the door. She waited a full minute before someone stepped through.

Her nostrils flared as the acrid scent of blood assaulted her. Her eyes widened as Cory, one of the two wolves she sent out to Jacob's cabin, dropped onto the floor at the side of her bed. She pressed to her hands and knees and gracefully climbed over Josef even as he sat up. Hopping to her feet, she gazed upon her wounded pup. Blood stained his slashed arms and face. Blood caked his light brown hair. Vicious gouges created by wolf fangs punctured the side of his neck.

Laela nudged him with her toe. He moaned. She looked up at Timothy.

"Get Rian to clean him up and dress his wounds. I need him alive." She looked down at Cory. "Where's Brier?"

"D-Dead," Cory gasped.

"How?" Brier? Dead? That couldn't be. He was one of her strongest wolves. Little could bring him down. "Surely he's not dead."

"D-Dead. Th-Throat opened."

Laela knelt beside her injured cohort and leaned close to his bloodied head, inhaling the mix of scents on him. Brier's masculine

scent was most pronounced beneath the sheet of blood, but another subtle flavor tinged the back of her nostrils. She leaned closer, her nose an inch from the bleeding wound at Cory's neck. She flicked her tongue out, lapped a small spot of blood, and then leaned back.

"So I see," she murmured.

Heavy footsteps pounded up to the porch. Rian stepped through the door. His honey-hued eyes dropped to Cory, his lips pulling tight. Ice hardened the expression on his handsome face.

She smiled at him. "They think they can kill one of my best wolves for the sake of keeping that abomination alive. Jacy should know better than to raise a challenge against me."

"Jacy did this?" Rian asked. He lowered himself to the floor and caught Laela's gaze. Wild anger lit behind his eyes. "And Coal?"

"Those two lapdogs don't do anything apart. If Cory speaks truth and Brier is dead, I can assure you Coal was responsible. He's the only wolf I know who could bring Brier down." Fury brought a twitch to her mouth. Those two men belonged to *her*, not to that puny white. But if they wanted to play savior to a helpless creature, she'd let them suffer the anguish of loss. Maybe then they'd come around. She climbed to her feet and waved at Cory. "Get him out of here. Take care of his wounds. Come back to me when he's awake."

Rian nodded, scooping the fallen man into his arms and leaving the small cottage. She shooed Timothy and Josef out the door as well, slamming it shut in their faces.

She needed to be alone.

Two years ago, she intercepted a letter from Jacob Smith to one Shyla Smith in New York. Reluctant to leave her home, she sought the address from the label, but the insanity of the metropolitan area forced her back into her calm world. The clash of noises and sirens deafened her. The putrid smells of rot and smog made her sick. The fast-paced life made her dizzy.

Regardless of her failed outcome to track down a possible descendant of Jacob Smith, she sent out a fair warning to the other

packs. There was a good chance a white wolf survived the slayings from over two decades ago.

And if one survived, chances are more did too.

Laela flexed her fisted hands and stepped up to a full-length mirror, the only mirror in her small abode. She held her own frosty gaze. For twenty-five years, she ruled over these packs. She was the alpha female. The only person ever to hold authority over her had been Jacob, and his current residence lay six feet under. No one threatened her now, and she'd be damned to let a city girl and two rebel pack mates try to yank her wild empire out from beneath her feet.

If Shyla Smith did indeed continue the white wolf line, all of her hard work would be wasted. All of her fawning males would vie for Shyla's attention.

Laela would become a nothing, a no one.

"So you think you can come up here to the mountains and reclaim what is ours? Your mother died because of it, child. So did your aunts. We reclaimed our place among the wild, a place taken from us when the first white wolf was born. You will not succeed. Your fate is marked by death, just like the rest of them."

Yes, Shyla Smith came to Hood River to put Jacob's things in order. She may never have known about her heritage before her trip, but she would understand it completely before the full moon in two days.

Another blood moon called.

"Let the legacy live again."

* * * *

At precisely ten o'clock, Shyla heard a knock on the front door.

Drinking the last of her morning joe, heart thudding against her chest, she grabbed her wool shawl and went to greet Coal.

She came up short of barreling through the flimsy screen door and

into a new stranger.

“Ah, you’re expecting the brooder. I’m his more lighthearted counterpart, Jacy Roddery. Nice to meet you. I see you’re ready?”

Shyla narrowed her gaze on this new beauty standing on her Gramps’s front porch. Apparently her grandfather didn’t come up short on the handsome associates list.

Jacy, roughly about the same judged height as Coal, definitely appeared more playful than his friend. His smile, a flashy display of incredible white teeth and a mischievous curl at the left corner of his mouth, melted her heart and stole her breath. Dark blond hair brushed over his smooth forehead, a stark comparison to the dark sunglasses hiding his eyes, eyes that, she knew by the heated trail, scoured her from head to toe.

“Um, yes. Coal mentioned you last night.” Shyla grabbed her purse off the small table against the wall and pulled the door closed behind her. Jacy closed the screen door softly and held a hand out for her. She shook it. “Nice to meet you.” Her gaze coasted over the small open yard. A sleek black Mercedes idled behind her rental car, the polished chrome trim reflecting the early morning sunlight. The driver’s side door opened, and Coal stepped out of the car like some dark, forbidden god. Dressed in all black except for his darker than dark blue jeans, he definitely deserved the fluttering of her heart. She hadn’t noticed his hair last night. He had it pulled half back, and it fell in a thick cape to his elbows. “So he’s here too. Maybe I should ask why my grandfather thought I needed two bodyguards?”

“It’s a complicated matter. We’ll go over everything with you at breakfast.” Jacy took a sharp breath. “Did you eat already?”

“No, but I don’t function well without coffee, so I had a cup.” Shyla turned to Jacy and smiled. The sun’s golden rays played off the natural highlights in his hair and hinted to a bronze hue in his skin. The man made her mouth dry and her blood heat to the point of embarrassment. She dipped her head and turned a shoulder to Jacy, hiding her flushed face. “After breakfast, I’d like to stop somewhere

to get another blanket or two. The heat didn't kick in until a few hours ago. I don't know how well it's working."

"You might not have a need for blankets, doll. The heat'll be working just fine tonight."

"Can you check it out for me?" Shyla asked, pulling the shawl around her shoulders and stepping off the porch. Her attention drew upon Coal, and she stumbled. Jacy steadied her out.

Gramps, why did you leave me with these two? God, I can barely breathe around them.

"Thanks. Gotta get used to the rough terrain."

He chuckled. "It'll become very, very familiar in a matter of hours."

He ushered her toward the car, keeping one large hand on her lower back. The cold morning breeze wafted through the tall spruce trees, carrying along Jacy's woodsy cologne. She had an underlying urge to nestle against him, close her eyes, and dream. When she looked over at Coal, the urge turned into a need.

Coal pushed off the side of the Benz and walked up to them. The determination in his otherwise severe expression squeezed at her chest and made her knees weak. She followed him with her gaze, the forest around her blurring, until he stood in front of her. He combed his fingers through her hair, tipped her face up, and closed his mouth over hers.

Shyla moaned into his mouth, accepting the fever of his breath and the sure strokes of his tongue just as eagerly as her body pressed into the solidity of his. Jacy stepped up behind her, and his fingers pulled aside her hair. His lips brushed over her neck, sending a wave of pleasurable chills through her. She arched into Coal. He grabbed one side of her waist, holding her to him. Jacy's hand slid from her back to her rear and squeezed her flesh.

Shyla gasped, sensation after sinful sensation threatening to overcome her. Coal's kiss ended, and Jacy nipped the base of her neck before she was left standing sandwiched between both men.

Propriety lost the battle. This felt too damn good and too damn right.

These two men aroused her and made her weak and dizzy with pleasure. Two men, whom she barely knew, evoked alien desires inside her spirit.

“We can nestle all you want, sweetheart. After we discuss more pertinent topics dealing with who you really are and just why your life is in danger,” Coal purred. The back of his knuckles caressed her cheek. Her head fell back on Jacy’s shoulder, and she closed her eyes. Jacy took the open invitation to her throat and drew his tongue along her throbbing jugular. “And why the idea of two men is appealing to an otherwise proper young woman.”

* * * *

“Oh, no you don’t. She’s mine first.”

Jacy pulled back his lip in a silent snarl, snaking an arm around Shyla’s waist and pinning her back to his front.

Coal traced his lips with his tongue before a satisfied grin teased his mouth. *“Let her choose. Maybe if you’re lucky, she’ll ask you to join us. Her mouth is delicious.”* Coal’s brows lifted quickly, and he turned back to the awaiting car. “Come on, sweetheart. We’ve got a lot in store for you today.” To Jacy, he telepathically warned, *“You don’t want to evoke a challenge with me this early. Your ass’ll lose miserably.”*

Jacy swallowed back the urge to growl. Shyla lifted her head from his shoulder and looked up at him. Her dark waves framed her delicate face. She had all the signs of Jacob Smith as the foundation to her appearance, but a beautiful femininity overrode the worn, wide features of her grandfather. Her stormy gray eyes, misted with lust, locked with his. He couldn’t help but smile at the rosy color in her cheeks, the moist pink lips that parted slightly, and the rush of breaths from her lungs.

“How does it feel to be here less than a day and already have two men arguing over you?” he murmured, listening to the rapid beat of her heart. He lifted a hand to her face and stroked the cool, smooth flesh of her cheek, waves of hair tangling in his fingers. He could barely wait to see what she would look like in bed. “Aw, babe, I’m loving the way you look at me.”

“I—I, uh,” Shyla whispered.

She blinked several times, drawing her bottom lip between her teeth and dropping her gaze to the ground. She scuffed a rock, glanced up at Coal, who waited on the brink of impatience by the car, then stepped away from Jacy. He entwined his fingers between hers, unwilling to give up the warmth of her body and the reaction she provoked within his wolf’s blood. The potent scent of her arousal teased every fiber of his being, taunted him to strip her naked and claim her, but Coal had made a valid point.

Shyla Smith was a targeted woman, and she had no idea why.

“Course it’s a valid point. It’s about fucking time you agreed,” Coal snapped. Jacy smiled at his friend as he led Shyla to the Benz. Coal opened the back door for her. Despite Jacob’s assurances that the spirits appointed them both as Shyla’s mates, he couldn’t help the tinge of jealousy that crept up every time her attention lingered on his friend. Claiming this perceived white wolf hung in the balance. He wanted to be her first, but Coal had a way with women and claiming their favor.

Jacy held Shyla’s hand as she climbed into the backseat. Once she settled and pulled her hand away, he leaned in and made his own lasting impression in the terms of a kiss. He might not have the dark look of Coal, but he knew how to tease a woman to the peak of pleasure.

Fucking hell, she did taste incredible!

He kissed her with leisurely strokes, drinking in the lingering flavor of strong coffee and sweetener. Her lips formed perfectly against his, her tongue meeting his in an intimate dance. Desire

pooled in his cock, making him hard and needy for this woman.

“Damn, Jacy. Will you quit it? We’ve got things to do. Earning her trust is one of ’em.”

With a groan, Jacy ended his kiss and straightened out of the car. Shyla didn’t meet his gaze, but rather dabbed her bottom lip with the back of her finger. He didn’t miss the shy grin that touched her mouth behind her hand just before he closed the door.

“I wasn’t about to let her simmer with your taste on her mouth. Can’t have that,” Jacy said. He winked behind the dark lens of his sunglasses, knowing Coal caught his antic. “It’s about time the roles are reversed. Me first.”

“Whatever. You know damned well I don’t get first dibs half the time. Get in the car and shut up, got it?” Coal chuckled as he slid behind the wheel.

Jacy laughed as he rounded the back of the car and settled in the passenger seat. He shot Shyla a smile.

“You cozy back there or you need some company?”

“I’m just fine, thank you,” she replied, sidestepping his gaze for the scenery outside the window. “Where’re we going today?”

“You hungry?” he asked.

“I think it would be a great idea to fill my belly with good food before you deliver whatever you’ll deliver to me.” She rummaged through her purse, pulled out a pair of sunglasses, and slipped them on her nose. “I’m hoping you’ll let me see the town a bit.”

“I think we can do that, right, Coal?”

“I can think of some very scenic things to do.”

Chapter Three

Shyla rode the waves of pure heaven as she meandered down the sidewalk, stopping to glance in store windows every few feet. This town of Hood River might be rustic and simple, but the breeze blew crisp and clean, the sunshine spread wings that made the cold manageable, and everywhere she turned resonated in quaintness. As where New York might be densely populated and bustling all day long with little elbow room, this place enveloped her in a cozy welcome regardless how few and far between strollers might be.

She didn't want to think about the time when she'd have to leave.

Hell, she even made peace with the spiders, especially gazing upon their shimmering webs tinged with melting morning frost. They tucked away in practically each window corner, lying in wait for a meal.

Most of all, she didn't want to leave the two men who followed close behind her. They said little as she drank in the small town, but she never once felt their eyes leave her back. They observed her as close as humanly possible. The heat of their gazes kept her body on moderate alert, suspended in a limbo of desires and curiosities. Having been unsuccessful in the dating world back home, this imminent attention stoked craving in her libido she'd never considered before.

Shyla cupped the side of her face and peered into another window blankly. Coal stepped up to her left, the heat of his body and the weight of his strength conforming around her. He embraced her without laying a single finger on her. Instinctively, she licked her lips. His kiss lingered from almost an hour ago, the masculine flavor of his

mouth bringing a bout of warmth to her core. Jacy's kiss remained imprinted in her memory as well, and when his fingers curled in her hair, she nearly dropped out of emotional overload.

Jacy guided her into his solid chest. She looked up at Coal. His lips tightened as his hidden eyes caressed her. Shyla could detect the subtle tension flowing between the men, but their camaraderie always outweighed whatever underlying issues they might have.

In the course of an hour, that much she understood.

Everything else, well, there was way too much going on for her to decipher, starting with her own body.

"You must like the town thus far. We haven't made it to breakfast yet," Jacy said against her ear.

His breath stirred those pleasurable chills that spiraled downward until they pooled in her womb. Couldn't she make it more than ten minutes around these guys without wanting to strip naked and deliver herself into their care?

She barely knew them, and yet, she felt as if she'd known them all her life.

Shyla rubbed her eyes with the heels of her palms, trying to clear her mind of the muddled thoughts. Jacy was right. She needed to eat.

"This place welcomes me. Sounds funny, huh?" Shyla murmured, tucking a strand of hair behind her ear. Jacy caught the tip of her finger between his teeth, his tongue flicking the pad. Forcing aside the alluring idea of forgetting the day and tucking herself in Gramps's cabin with these two, she cleared her throat and stepped away from Jacy. "I think we should do breakfast before lunchtime rolls around." She lifted her hand for Coal. A dark grin stretched over his mouth, and he slipped his fingers between hers. Not exactly what she went for, but hell it worked. "What're you grinning about?"

"I warned you last night to censor your thoughts. You might just end up back at the cabin far earlier than expected," Coal teased. Shyla's heels anchored to the sidewalk after her first step ahead. Jacy walked into her, and Coal chuckled. "You still don't believe me,

huh?”

“You’re telling me you can read my thoughts. How’s that possible?” Shyla inquired, narrowing her eyes on Coal.

“Like this, sweetheart.”

She gasped at the voice invading her mind. Coal’s voice, nonetheless, and he didn’t even move his lips!

Coal led her next to him, gracing her forehead with a light kiss.

“Let’s get you out of the cold. You’re shivering.”

Shyla’s molten hot blood couldn’t register the wintry mountain air that managed to chill her until Coal mentioned it. She constricted the wool shawl around her shoulders and leaned into the inviting heat emanating from Coal’s body. Jacy didn’t miss a step in coming up on her other side and completing an unseen circuit between the three of them. Summertime heat poured through her, back and forth from man to man.

“I’ll say it out loud since you’ll hear it anyhow, but I would’ve never believed to be standing here, between two of...*you*, and not wondering about my sanity,” Shyla said. Both men looked down at her, one with a smile and one with an arched brow, eyeing her like succulent candy.

Silence ensued, wreaking havoc with her waking body as they led her around the corner of an old brick building. A passing couple gave them wide berth as they passed. Jacy snickered, tossing a glance over his shoulder. Shyla followed his gaze and caught the uncertain look the couple cast in their direction.

“You two have a rep I should know about?” Shyla asked. Coal’s fingers tightened around hers as he paused outside a diner.

“There are two different kinds of people in Hood River, darling. Those who reside and those who own. We’re part of the latter,” Jacy said.

“And I suppose there’s a subgroup of the latter that includes cockiness.”

Coal laughed, pushing open the glass door, the little brass bell

chiming their arrival. The smell of grease, bacon, and breads came at her on a wave of warm air, smacking her in the face. Her stomach rumbled and her mouth salivated with the prospect of eating. When was the last time she ate? Before she left the airport back home? Had it really been over a day?

“Hey, Len,” Coal called.

Shyla did a quick scan of the small eatery, ending on a tall, white-haired man standing behind the counter on the opposite side of the building. The man smiled and waved, finishing with a paying customer. He wiped his hands on a soiled apron and rounded the counter, approaching them with long, sure strides.

Shyla couldn't shake the feeling of being watched. Several pairs of eyes came to rest on her, observing, peeling away layers of curiosity with their gazes. A feral air hovered. The patrons in this place were far different than patrons in the city. The shadow of her spirit whispered it to her. She stood amid a crowd of eerily silent, probing guests. Glancing around, she crashed with gaze after gaze, reading astonishment and awe from each person. She stole the spotlight, and she held every person's attention, some with food halfway to their mouths, some stirring drinks mindlessly.

All who sized her up did so in a primal manner.

She clamped shut the whispering of her spirit and tried to brush off the unusual circumstances of the diner. She hadn't realized she pressed herself into the protective wall of Coal's body until his fingers left hers and his arm draped over her shoulders. Jacy sidled closer, his own sturdy form blocking a good chunk of her from prying eyes. She was thankful to both men at that moment.

Len stepped up to them, his blue eyes lowering to her. She managed a small smile, pushing aside her discomfort in the presence of a group of fawning strangers.

“Ah, you're Jacob's long-lost kin. I can clearly see him in you. Shyla, right?” Len asked, holding out a hand. She accepted the welcoming handshake and then rested her head on Coal's chest. A

glint passed through the older man's eyes. His nostrils flared, and his smile faltered. "A white?"

"We haven't gotten that far with her yet," Jacy said, though his voice deepened, and his simple remark came out on a wave of warning. He lifted his sunglasses from his face, folded them, and slid them into his jacket pocket.

Shyla couldn't withhold a small gasp. Jacy smirked. The greenest eyes she'd ever seen glittered at her, indulging in the playful nature she had come to know in Jacy. His eyes resembled what glowing green grass with flecks of gold from sunbeams might look like. They were gorgeous eyes that prowled over her in one slow, tantalizing journey that came to linger on her breasts. She blushed beneath his drinking gaze, her breasts filling and becoming heavy beneath the wool shawl. Moisture seeped from her core, and she shifted, trying her damndest to make the growing itch subside.

The smile grew on Jacy's kissable mouth, as if to say, *I know you're wet and wanting me. Sugar, I'll give you what you want.*

Jacy dipped his head, and his lips brushed her ear. "Nope. I really said it."

"You said...that? Oh, how crass!" Shyla snapped, taking a deep breath. The calming scent of spice and clean outdoors filled her spirit, but she still managed to swat aside the sexually laden euphoria crushing down on her. She wasted enough time pining over intimate fantasies involving these two...gods. She was the missing sweet cream from the cookie, now sandwiched between dark and light halves. Together, they might make a delectable treat.

She rolled her eyes and groaned. *Head outta the gutter, Shyla. You have a week to get your grandfather's estate in order. One week until you'll never see these guys again.*

"You okay?" Coal asked.

Shyla snorted, pressing herself from his chest and forcing a space of a foot between the charged Jacy and herself.

"Fine. Why don't we sit and eat, hmm?" She pulled out a chair

from the closest table and plopped down, avoiding the curious onlookers. Coal exchanged a tight look with Jacy before they sat on either side of her. Len grabbed some menus and placed them on the table.

“Coffee, dear? Juice?” he asked. His kind smile returned, lacking any prior uncertainty.

His comment about a white something still toyed in the back of her mind. She nodded, trying another shot at being cordial. “Coffee, thanks.”

“Boys?”

“Good, thanks,” Coal said. Jacy nodded, sliding a menu in front of her. He lounged back, kicking one booted foot onto the seat across from him. Coal leaned forward, his hands folded over the table. Shyla reached for his sunglasses. She pulled them from his face and placed them on the tabletop. Fathomless black eyes gauged her, observing her more like a human than an animal. She couldn’t say as much about Jacy, even if his outright crude remark did make her hot.

Jacy and Coal were two magnificent creations of God sitting with her. They were good-spirited men, that much she surmised, two opposites that filled gaps in her whole.

“Why does it look like some of the patrons are sniffing the air?” Shyla asked.

“Eh, they’re jealous. They’ll get over it,” Jacy assured. “I don’t like ‘em lookin’ at you like that.” Jacy motioned to a man at a far table. “Conroy, your jaw’s shattered to pieces on the floor. Put it back together, will ya?”

“Why do their actions concern you? Why do *I* concern you?”

“Welcome to Hood River. The wilderness gets to us,” Jacy said. He tapped his heel on the wooden floor and chuckled. “Not everyone is like us. What did Jacob tell you about your family?”

“Nothing much,” Shyla lied. Oh, he told her plenty after she confided to him about the adoption papers. He told her more than she was willing to believe, but he always made things sound so real. All

of his letters told about spirits and wolves and the merging of two into one.

In one particular letter, he explained a Blood Moon Legacy and the extermination of the white wolves. White wolves were revered as living spiritual guides and pack leaders. As not to anger the spirits, packs obeyed the white wolf of their territory, laying trust and love in the creature. Over twenty years ago, a horrifying massacre took place. The living white wolves were slain on the night of a full moon. That same night, the white moon turned red with their shed blood.

The white wolf was believed to be extinct.

Shyla looked over at Coal. Damn, she must've drifted off in thought. Both men trained narrowed eyes on her.

"Nothing, eh?" Jacy inquired. "Did he tell you about your mother?"

"My mother died shortly after I was born," Shyla confided. She knew the Native American stories from Gramps, but he never told her anything about her parents aside from her mother's unfortunate death and her father's murder. She twisted the end of her scarf and sighed. "Gramps never mentioned her otherwise. I know nothing about my biological parents."

"Did Jacob tell you anything about *his* mother?" Coal asked.

Shyla shook her head.

"What about himself?"

"You most likely know more about him than I do. You know about the letter-per-year rule." Shyla propped her head on her hand, leaning over the table. She focused on the dark beauty sitting to her right. His complexion held a touch of bronze she associated with a splash of Native American heritage. Christ, it looked good on him. His choice of black attire, from leather jacket to shirt to boots, made her mouth salivate, as well as other parts of her body moist. "Tell me about him."

"Your grandfather was a wonderful man. It's unfortunate you never had the opportunity to spend time with him, but your life is

worth far more than the estrangement between your kin,” Coal said. His deep voice softened. He lifted a hand to her cheek and caressed aside stray strands of hair. “Your mother was murdered the morning of your birth. You were cut from her womb and immediately taken into hiding. Your adoptive parents had been arranged on a moment’s notice. If I recall correctly, your adoptive father was a distant relative of your grandfather. That’s how he’s kept in touch without raising suspicion.”

Shyla’s heart shuddered. Her mother murdered? With her still inside?

“Why? Who would kill a pregnant woman?” she asked quietly. Her brow knitted. “How did I survive?”

“Your grandfather killed the wolf who killed your mother before she had the opportunity to kill you as well,” Jacy said. “See, that’s why we asked if Jacob told you about your kin.”

“He never wrote about my family. He wrote about legends.”

“And the white wolf,” Coal said.

Shyla’s eyes widened. She straightened up in her chair.

Coal nodded once, moistening his lips. “Ah, yes. He did write about the legacy, but apparently didn’t write the reason you were forced into hiding.” He leaned over the table a bit more. “He never wrote about your wolf’s blood, did he? He never told you the reason your mother was killed was because she came from white wolf’s blood.”

A chill, one that didn’t evoke pleasure, plinked down her spine. She shook her head, squeezing her eyes shut. She did *not* just hear that. This man, as down-to-earth sinful as he seemed, did not speak of wolves and the blood in her veins in the same sentence. Oh no.

She tilted her head and pinned Coal with a narrow gaze.

“You’re kidding. You’re not gonna try and convince me my mother was a—a wolf. I don’t believe in that stuff,” she said, lowering her voice to a mere whisper. She cast a short glance to a table of attentive men, all eyeing her.

Coal didn't laugh, didn't smile, or show any signs he joked. The chill froze.

"You really believe that. You believe in folklore. Of you both, I thought you were more grounded than Jacy here. I'm sure he wouldn't indulge in tales and legends. My grandfather died of old age. My mother died of complications due to childbirth, and I was already out of her womb."

"Nope, sugar. The wolf who mutilated your mother was consort to a female alpha named Laela. She drew in her followers and formed an enviable pack of her own. You see, she wanted the men who belonged to the white wolves. She wanted to be on top of the local packs, the ringleader. Because your mother and your aunts were considered the rare exception to the pack leader status—remember, alpha males run the packs, not females—she saw them as a threat and decided to send her loyal fuck friends to kill them. No one thought the children survived. In fact, we're not even sure your cousins survived. Jacob only just told us about you a month before he died," Jacy explained. He spoke with a nonchalance and carefree air. Shyla could do nothing more than stare at him in disbelief as he casually checked his nails.

Len slid her cup of coffee onto the table. The strong aroma did little to reel her back.

"Can't you boys be a little less direct? Look at the poor creature. She's beside herself," the older man said. His strong hand clamped down on her shoulder and squeezed it reassuringly.

Jacy sat straight in his chair, eyes locked with Len.

Coal growled deep in his throat.

Len's hand lifted from her.

Shyla exchanged glances between her two bodyguards. When she turned to Len, his hands were raised in surrender and he stepped back.

"Down, boys. No challenge. I have my mate. I'm not taking yours. Just...take it easy on the sweet thing." He chuckled and shook his head, hands dropping to his sides. The ferocious electrical current that had sparked to life slowly fizzled out. Jacy settled back in his

chair. Coal pinched his forehead between his thumb and forefinger.

Shyla scooted her chair back to better see both men at her table.

Maybe her lost kin cream analogy wasn't so far off track.

"Mate?" she asked.

"Wow, you say it like it's a bad thing," Jacy snorted.

"Maybe I did."

"Maybe you should get used to the fact that you have two men who'll nuzzle you night and day."

"Stop with the crude remarks."

"Jacy, shut the fuck up, and keep your cock in check," Coal snapped. Shyla blinked at him. His dark eyes held the vaguest hint of frost blue slithering through them. His hand dropped from his forehead and he sighed. "Sorry, Shyla."

"Wait. So you're telling me you two are mates? Like, you and him...?"

"Like, no," Jacy mimicked. "Like, he and I are not lovers. We're *your* lovers."

Shyla whipped her hand out and smacked him on the arm. He snarled, a real lip-pulled-back-teeth-bared snarl, the playful glitter in his eyes blinding.

Coal took her hand. "Don't provoke him. He's nothing more than a pup in an adult's hide. You're arousal isn't helping matters. We can both smell you," Coal said.

"You...you can *smell* me?" Oh God, how embarrassing. All this time she thought these men dressed her in affection for the sake of enjoying it. Well, they enjoyed it because of her pheromones and a hope of...what? Fucking her?

The image of herself being invaded by both men did little to tamp her growing attraction to them. In fact, heat moistened her panties, and her heart performed a strange little dance.

"Listen to the voice in your spirit. The true you, not the city-girl you. I've noticed your adaption to Hood River from last night until now. You're comfortable here. You feel at peace in the forest, in the

wild. It's your suppressed nature, your true self, trying desperately to lock down and come out. This is your home. This is where you belong. Your grandfather told Jacy and myself that we were chosen as your mates. Whether you want to accept it now or not is up to you, but you'll never find the comfort and solace you've only begun to experience with us anywhere else."

Coal offered a small smile, and it softened his features to such a degree Shyla's confusion and discord stepped into the backseat. The stifling air that suffocated her moments ago began to lift. She never once broke her gaze with Coal. His spirit called to hers, soothing her anxiety while petting the slinking shadow in her mind.

"Shyla, sweetheart, your life is in danger. It'll always be in danger because you aren't a normal woman. You're a white. A revered white wolf." His knuckles lifted to her cheek, and he stroked her with a tenderness only he possessed for her. "It would've been only a matter of time before they tracked you down in New York. Here, you have us. You have packs willing to sacrifice lives of their members to keep you safe. This is your haven, your playground. All you need to do is see that what we're saying is true. You're a were, half human, half wolf. Every patron in this diner is a were."

"Well that explains the sniffing of the air." She swallowed, recalling a similar motion from both men. "And you?"

"*Everyone*," Jacy reiterated. He dropped his foot to the floor and angled himself to her with a smile. "How's it feel to know you can let go of all your proper inhibitions and just *be*?"

"I'm not an animal," Shyla said. She fisted a hand.

"None of us are *animals*. We're weres. There's quite a difference. We have the capacity to think and understand and be moral. We *are* human. We're civil. We're wolf too. It's a nice change of scenery at times."

"I can't believe I'm still sitting here listening to this and not running out the door screaming." She dropped her head into her hands and groaned. "This is crazy."

“What’s crazy is that you’re still wearing clothes while smelling like sugar, sugar.” Jacy chuckled.

She didn’t say a word as her cheeks burned and slick wetness stroked the apex of her thighs. God, she wanted these men as if she *was* an animal. She wanted them in every imaginable way, fucking, loving, licking, sucking. She wanted it all.

“So *not* civil,” she muttered.

“You know, bro, she might just put your sorry ass in place,” Coal said.

“I’ll tell you what might put *her* cute ass in place.”

Shyla squealed, pressing her face into her arms and locking her hands behind her head. Her face burned near scalding. Just the thought of having Jacy put anything near her ass made her squirm in her seat, and not in a bad way.

“Coal, cool her off. She’s making me hot,” Jacy said.

His voice echoed through the thundering rush of blood in her ears. Her mind didn’t register his words. She shifted, her jeans teasing the itch in her pussy, and she moaned. Her hands trembled, her body ached, and she immediately recognized the whispering shadow rearing in her spirit.

Shyla tilted her head and crashed gazes with Coal. His hand still lingered on her arm as dark thoughts permeated the windows of his eyes. She wanted nothing more than to fuck him in his chair, anything to sate the powerful hunger erupting through her body. Otherwise, she might just vomit.

“Coal,” Jacy warned again.

“Give her room and bite your fucking tongue,” Coal said. He combed his fingers into her hair and lifted her head. His dark eyes pierced her, straight through to her soul. A hint of a smile tipped his mouth. “You’re fine. It’s natural when you can smell your mates.”

“B—but I don’t smell anything other than c—coffee, food, and your cologne,” she moaned.

His hand cupped her face. His firm skin induced a satisfying

fullness in her, and she released a breath.

A purr filled her ears.

“Aw, how cute. She’s adorable when she nuzzles,” Jacy said.

Shyla closed her eyes and focused on breathing. Small spasms wracked through her, and she worked to stop them.

“You smell more than that. You’re reacting to us just as we’re reacting to you,” Coal cooed.

Shyla let out a sharp laugh on a breath. “I don’t see you making idiots out of yourselves.”

“Jacy’s been racking up idiot points.”

“And you?”

“Oh, I’m suffering.”

“He’s one to inflict pain on himself. Trust me, the man’s hard as a rock right now,” Jacy said. Shyla shivered when he licked her from the base of her neck straight up to her ear. “Fuck, woman. You’re outta control.”

“Shyla, relax, sweetheart. Breathe and relax. Ignore Jac—”

Coal’s hand stiffened against her cheek, and frost bit the charged air around them. Shyla peeled open her eyes and observed Coal and Jacy through a haze. Both men sat ramrod straight in their chairs. Coal tilted his head and inhaled sharply. Dazed, she looked around the diner and noticed a similar unease tense every patron.

“Shit,” Jacy grunted.

The brass bell jingled a split moment before the door crashed into the window, shattering both panes of glass.

A huge man filled the doorway, glowing golden eyes shooting around until they landed on her. He pulled back his lip in a feral sneer, white teeth glistening with saliva.

“Rian,” Coal growled.

Shyla could barely follow him. The table shoved into her ribs, and the painful screech of the chair on the floor came only after she noticed Coal diving through the air, barreling toward the massive stranger.

Before her eyes, she watched what her mind fought to deny.

Black melted over Coal's skin. His body contorted and twisted unnaturally. Shreds of clothing dropped from the changing form arcing through the air. Black fur bristled and extended, covering every inch of what once was a man.

His face narrowed and elongated into a snout with fatal white fangs. Fingers molded into paws, and arms drew in to form front legs. Hips narrowed and legs crooked like those of a dog. A tail emerged.

A huge black wolf crashed into the unwelcome patron who had already begun a similar transition. Within seconds, two wolves thrashed across the floor, knocking tables aside while Shyla sat in complete shock, watching what should have been two humans battle it out in the dining room.

Chapter Four

Jacy bounded off his chair and lunged across the room. The threatening growls and barks from the wolves echoed above the clashing of furniture. His fellow wolf buddies looked on in horror as two of the strongest wolves in Hood River took to each other in a frenzy of snapping teeth and fur.

Coal locked down on Rian's throat and whipped him across the diner. The larger wolf grunted as he slammed into the wall, leaving a smear of crimson blood against the wood planks. The acrid odor stung Jacy's nostrils and made him salivate with the primitive thoughts of a kill close at hand.

Jacy began to transform when a piercing shatter erupted behind him.

Shyla screamed.

He spun around to see another man grab her in a bear hug and rip her out of her seat.

He looked at Coal.

"Get her! Don't worry about me, you idiot. Get Shyla!"

Jacy nodded, glancing at Rian as he stumbled to his legs. His friend would be fine.

He bolted after the second man, who rushed out toward the back door. Banking on his wolf speed in leaps and bounds while remaining in human form, he caught up to the man halfway across the back parking lot. He swung an arm around his neck, bringing him to a sliding halt. Shyla shrieked as the stop pitched her body forward. She slammed into the gravel ground and slid to a stop, curls of dust rising around her. Jacy ignored the twisted expression on her face and the

pain her mind screamed to him. He heaved Rian's accomplice to the ground. The man's head bounce on the uneven gravel. Jacy crouched down beside him, bearing his sharpened wolf's teeth despite still being in his human body.

"Who sent you? That measly little bitch Laela? Pathetic, worthless shits that you are," Jacy snarled. His fingers thickened, his joints popping and the bones in his hand reforming to those of his wolf. Razor-sharp nails extended out of the tips, and he raked them across the man's face, leaving deep, gushing wounds. The man growled, but the dazed look in his eyes from the impact of his skull on gravel assured Jacy he would be no challenge. "You aren't getting your paws on our mate. You got that? You would've been better off staying at home with your whore today."

Feeling for Shyla's thoughts, latching on to the telepathic link and making sure she wasn't watching, Jacy ripped open the man's throat where he lay. He climbed to his feet and rushed to Shyla's side, his paw changing back into a hand and his teeth retracting. He brushed aside her mussed hair and kissed her forehead. She grimaced.

"Where does it hurt?" he asked.

"Elbows. Back." Shyla lifted her palms, scraped and bloody. Jacy shook his head. "Hands." She tried to crane her neck to see past him, but he barred her view from the dead man. "What happened to the guy?"

"You don't need to worry yourself about him. Let's get you inside, and we'll take care of those wounds."

Jacy scooped her into the cradle of his arms, hesitating for a moment as he held his woman for the first time. A sense of pride washed over him, and he bit back a smile. He needed to clean her wounds and give Coal a hand.

As he stepped through the back door, a pained yelp filled the diner. He stilled. Shyla looked up at him, worry etched into her face. The heavy thudding of her heart sped up as her breaths ceased. All signs of concern and anxiety he detected in her he felt himself.

Glass crunched under weight. Commotion erupted, whispered talk and questions.

Jacy shook out of his paralysis and rushed into the dining room. The place had been destroyed in a matter of minutes. Tables and chairs were strewn everywhere. Two fan blades hung by splinters from the fixtures in the ceiling. Another of the large storefront windows had been shattered. Blood stained the walls, the floors, and the glass.

Brethren of local packs converged to the center of the room.

“*Bro, you okay?*” Jacy asked. He received a bemoaned grunt in response. “*Hey, man. Don’t fuck with me. I got Shyla. She’s okay.*”

He was met by silence.

Len burst out of a side door with a blanket.

“Move out, people. Show’s over. Get moving, folks,” he instructed, shoving his way into the crowd. Several curious onlookers backed away, eyes shooting toward Jacy and Shyla.

He edged forward, trying to turn Shyla away in case...

In case what? Coal lay dead on the floor?

“Fuck,” he spat. Shyla twisted in his arms until she clamored to her feet. She rushed forward, pushing the remaining patrons aside, Jacy right behind her.

The blanket spread over Coal’s naked body, covering him from the chest down. It didn’t shield anyone from the viciously torn skin on his shoulder and arm. Blood smeared over his bare skin and the floor beneath him.

Shyla dropped to her knees at his side. Jacy lowered to his haunches and tried to speak with Coal again.

“*Hey, bro. Don’t you go messing with our woman’s heart now. She needs you here. Where’s Rian? Did you kill the bastard? ’Cause I’ll do it myself for mauling you.*”

Coal’s thickly lashed eyes fluttered. Whether Jacy’s threat or Shyla’s caress against his cheek stirred him back to consciousness remained to be seen.

Coal lived and needed immediate care.

"I'll help you get him to the car," Len said. Jacy nodded, guiding Shyla away from Coal. She made one feeble attempt to defy him but decided to stand down as Jacy hoisted his friend by the shoulders and Len grabbed his legs. Coal growled, pain twisting his features.

"Sh-Shoulder, you ass," he hissed. Jacy snickered humorlessly.

"Just a warning if you decided to slip off into blackness." Jacy shuffled backward, leading Coal's massive body onto the sidewalk. He cast a concerned glance toward Shyla. Although he and Coal understood the significance of their birthrights, the tears shimmering in her eyes still caught him off guard. She followed behind Len to keep out of the way with her folded hands pressed to her mouth.

"He'll be fine. You've got a strong boy on your hands," Jacy assured, readjusting his grip on Coal as they approached the Benz. They'd parked outside Len's place with the intention of eating breakfast before window shopping. Good thing, because he didn't want to haul his naked buddy through the streets of town looking like this. "Sugar, I have a spare set of keys in my pocket. Grab them and open the door for us."

Shyla nodded, coming up to his side. She didn't hesitate to dig her hand into the pocket of his jeans. He held his breath as she rummaged around loose change and his wallet, barely brushing his hip but reigniting his hunger for her within a moment's time. He sighed inwardly. Once they cared for Coal's wounds and settled him in for rest, Jacy planned to follow that hunger straight to bed, with Shyla.

She finally withdrew the keys. The car beeped, and she pulled the back door open.

"Let me slide in first," Len said. Jacy nodded, turning Coal's suspended body around. Len slipped into the backseat of the car without as much as a stumble. Jacy fed Coal to the older man's guiding hands until his friend was tucked safely in the seat. Len climbed out the opposite side, brushed blood from his hands, and hipped the car door shut. Jacy looked at him over the roof. "Get 'im

home, and make sure you wash that wound out completely. He might need a stitch or two until he heals.”

“He should be better in no time,” Jacy said, his attention lowering to his worried mate. He leaned over and graced her mouth with a small kiss. “Promise. He’ll be fine. He’s had worse and survived.” Back at Len, he asked, “What happened to Rian?”

“Took off, but not without some severe damage.” Len nodded to the sidewalk. “Look at the blood trail he left. Coal got ’im good. I’d be surprised if you see him out and about anytime soon.” He rounded the back of the Benz and sighed as he assessed his storefront. “What about your man?”

“Roadkill out back.”

“Mm. You make the mess, I clean it up. I’ll be cleaning this up for a while. Damn,” he groaned.

Jacy looked away from Len and gathered Shyla in his arms. She sank into him in a big step toward acceptance. Her fingers splayed over his chest as she fought back tears. Her concern touched him deeply and would surely touch Coal.

“Well, better get back home, Jacy. Keep our white outta danger, and get that man in order so you can help me fix my place. I’m gonna head to Kimble’s and get myself one of his twelve-gauge shotguns. Let’s see what Rian’ll do when he comes face to face with a barrel loaded with silver.”

“Coal and I’ll track him when he’s better. It’ll be good to find out if Laela’s behind this and where she’s been hiding all this time.”

* * * *

Laela screamed and pulled at her hair.

Two men carried Rian out of the cottage, leaving a smeared trail of blood over the wooden floor planks. The smell of hovering death, raunchy and rotten, made her sick to her stomach. It permeated the heady scent produced from hours of sex like a dagger through her

heart.

Tears stung her eyes, but she blinked them away. Breaths came in short gasps through her clenched teeth. Blood pounded in her ears. Her chest ached from the fierce knocking of her heart.

This wasn't supposed to happen!

Rian was one of her best men, one of the strongest, most loyal wolves in the pack. How could he be leaning against the door into the spirit realm?

He would not die at the hands of a rebel wolf and his friend.

Not over that fucking white abomination!

"Timothy, I want you and Josef to go over to Jacob's. Watch that place tonight. Come back to me in the morning with what you've seen," Laela said, her voice laced with venom. She turned to the pair of men still lying in their mussed bed. "Whatever you do, don't let yourself be found. If you must leave the vicinity to prevent detection and return later, do it. You'll tell me if Coal is dead. You'll also tell me everything about that bitch." She snarled. "And I mean bitch."

"Who'll stay here with you?" Timothy asked, climbing out of the bed. She waved him off, turning her back to her naked and hard bedmates.

"I'll be just fine. I have to prepare for tomorrow." She grabbed a robe from the single chair in the cottage and tugged it on. "Go. Now."

As the two men transformed into wolves, Laela contemplated her options for Smith's long-lost kin.

First, she needed to eat something raw and bloody.

She needed something fresh.

She needed to kill.

Chapter Five

Shyla returned to the back bedroom with a fresh basin of warm water and clean washcloths. Coal turned his head on the white pillow, a stark contrast against his dark hair, and followed her with his gaze until she settled on the edge of the bed. Despite having tended his wounds most of the day, she still found her mouth dry when her eyes landed on his immaculate body.

This time proved no different. She scoured over the hard cuts and deep lines of his chest and abs. The prominent veins bulging over his thick, corded biceps and forearms intrigued her. She imagined a nice body beneath all his black attire, but never something so sumptuous and decadent.

She peeled her gaze away and wrung out a clean cloth.

Coal caught her wrist as she began to dab at his vicious wound. Blood welled over the torn ridges of skin from his forceful movement.

“Put your arm down and relax. Every time you move, you prevent the blood from clotting and the wound from beginning to heal,” she scolded quietly.

“I’m healing. You just don’t see it. Within the next couple hours, things might be in good shape.”

Coal brought her fingers to his mouth and brushed his lips over her damp knuckles. Shyla held back a shiver of pleasure. The last thing she should be concerned about was bedding the man already bedridden. Hot moisture seeped from her core. She crossed her legs and squeezed, willing her arousal to cease and dry.

“After everything you saw a little while ago, do you believe us?” he asked.

Shyla sighed, easing her hand out of his grip. She dropped the cloth into the basin and wiped her hand on her jeans.

"I don't have any other option. There's nothing that can logically explain what happened to you and that guy. You changed right before my eyes." She scratched her hair and shrugged. "Shouldn't I be in hysterics right now? Screaming for animal control or begging someone to take me to the closest psych ward?" She lifted her gaze to his. "Why am I upset because you're hurt and I somehow feel responsible for your injuries, putting the unnatural occurrences aside?"

"This is natural, Shyla. This is part of who you are. And don't you dare feel responsible for what happened at the diner. Never be sorry for who you are and what you are. Otherwise, Jacy and I wouldn't be here."

"To protect me," she said.

"Sweetheart, we're here to do more than protect you." Coal's voice dropped in timbre, and a flicker of mischief touched his eyes beneath the surfacing pain. "White wolves have always been appointed two mates for a couple reasons. Well, perceived reasons. You see, the white wolf gene is so rare that, when it comes to the surface, those who still follow traditional beliefs think it's a sign from the spirits of good things to come. White wolves are revered and honored. Each white is spiritually appointed her mates for the purpose of protection and strengthening pack bonds and liaisons. Jacy and I are practically brothers, but we were both born into separate packs."

Shyla mulled over his complex explanation. She reached up to his hair and combed her fingers through the silky length of it, keeping it back from his face. His eyes closed. He turned his head in to her palm and kissed her tender flesh. The wetness in her crotch intensified as the deafening thumping of her heart increased in rhythm.

"You're practically a stranger to me. Why would you risk your life for me when you aren't sure I'm what you think I am?"

"You are. There's a certain scent that differs in a white. A

sweeter, more reassuring smell. You calm the beasts around you without batting an eye or speaking a word. It's your presence, your spirit, that speaks to the wolves." While nuzzling against her palm, he lifted his hand to her head. She allowed him to lead her down to him. She held her breath when he turned his dark gaze to her, so close and hypnotic. "My life is nothing without you. If you died because I failed to protect you, I would cease to live."

"But Jacy—"

"Can't challenge a creature like Rian. That wolf is my equal. He would've torn Jacy to shreds, and he well knows it."

"So he let you go after him yourself to end up having your arm torn to shreds?"

"I told him to go after you. He shouldn't worry a blink about me, sweetheart, when your life's in peril."

The logs in the small fireplace popped and crackled through the ensuing silence. Shyla shamelessly traced the fine contours of his face, the strong jaw barely bristling with the hints of a beard. The outpouring of perfection in his face made her heart flutter and her eyes sting with tears. This man would've—and very well could've—died for her. His unspoken loyalty hooked her and fastened a large portion of her spirit to him.

Such a tragic loss Coal could have been. Control, knowledge, and beauty melted down into the steel form of a man—no, wolf—who vied for her without openly admitting to it.

The bottomless black of his eyes softened, siphoning the warm orange light of the fire as its glow danced over the small room. They filled with something she couldn't quite figure out, but it drew her in, almost making her forget about the vicious wound on his shoulder.

"I—I should really wrap—"

"No." His fingers tunneled to the back of her head and pulled her the short distance to his mouth. His kiss teased her, closed lips brushing over hers. Sensuality and sexual prowess poured out of him, making her light-headed. Her arms fought to brace her weight above

him.

The moment his tongue slid into her mouth, she collapsed with a moan. Coal sucked in a sharp breath.

“Oh, God,” she gasped, scrambling off him. Fresh blood streamed up and out of his wound from her having agitated it. She grappled for the sopping cloth from the basin. “I’m so sorry. I didn’t mean to.”

Coal chuckled despite the pained crease in his forehead. “I’ll take a hundred of those pangs for a single kiss from you. Trust me, other things are hurting more than that scratch right now.”

Shyla caught her eyes drifting down his hard body until it landed on the quilt properly covering him from waist to toe.

Where she imagined his penis might be, the blanket tented toward the ceiling. Heat washed over her face and through her body, pooling in her crotch.

She cleared her throat and turned away, rigorously blotting the thin trails of blood from his shoulder and arm. She kept her face lowered, eyes trained on her work, and her veil of thick hair between their gazes.

He burned piercing holes through her head.

“You’re not in the least bit interested?” he asked.

Shyla suppressed a shiver of excitement.

“I’m beyond interested. I want.”

The sudden release of Coal’s breath ruffled her hair. She glanced at him through the separated strands. Her dabbing sputtered to a stop.

“Take. Take anything you want.” Coal’s voice filled her mind like a dark satin sheet, cool and hot at the same time. So deep it rippled in the shadowed sea of her thoughts and a surge of lust blinded her. *“I told you we’re here for you. Two males for you. Get used to the idea. We’re not going anywhere, love.”*

“How’s your shoulder?” she asked, trying to lighten the suddenly thick air in the room. Her voice rolled out just as thick and sexually charged as his.

“If I didn’t suffer such a traumatic injury to my shoulder, I doubt

you'd be pushing your curiosity off to the side."

"You're conceited." Her heart skipped and her fingers trembled as they wrung the cloth over her lap. "I'm here for a week, and I'm going home. I have no place out here. I have my apartment, my job, my *life* all waiting for me in New York. Whatever goes on here cannot keep me here. I barely knew my grandfather aside from the stories he used to write me." Damn if she could lie any more. She wanted to stay here. She wanted a reason to love this place, not to go running home with regret filling her spirit.

She wanted to love Coal and Jacy. She wanted to love the fantastical ideas of wolves and packs and all the legends that enriched this quaint little town.

"There's no connection to this place. You'll have to find your white wolf somewhere else because I'm not her."

Shyla pressed to her feet and dropped the cloth in the basin. She had to put distance between Coal and herself. His intensity melted her. It whispered unrealistic promises to her. He backed those whispers in voice.

The bed creaked behind her a moment before Coal's arm slid around her waist and pulled her down beside him. She averted her gaze anywhere but down until he pinched her chin in a tender grip and held her head steady, their eyes meeting.

"Normally I wouldn't care if I sat naked or clothed in front of anyone. Rest assured, I'm covered for your sake." He combed her hair behind her ear and offered a small grin. "Regardless what comes out of your mouth, remember I can hear your thoughts."

"You're invading my privacy," she said.

"I'd be invading your privacy if I had to dig into your mind, but you constantly speak your thoughts without realizing it. Something that can be dangerous if you're in the vicinity of a predator." His hand dropped and covered hers, folding his strong fingers around her own. She leaned forward and rested her forehead on his solid shoulder with a sigh. He petted her back. "Don't be afraid of us. Don't discount us

because we're not your typical city boys. You'll be cared for in the best ways."

He pressed a kiss to her hair.

She closed her eyes, fatigue sweeping over her.

"You need to lie back and stop moving your shoulder. Give it a chance to heal or I'll put a stitch in it, and I can't even sew a button onto a shirt."

"As long as you promise me you'll go rest yourself and not worry about New York or whether Jacy and I plan to up and leave."

She nodded once, sitting back. Coal kissed her forehead then her mouth before sidling toward the center of the bed and lying back. Her blood stirred in her gut, teasing her crotch. She folded her arms, her fingers biting into her sweater. She wanted to curl up to Coal's side and fall asleep. The full form of his solid body lured her with assurance. He would never let harm come to her.

His gaze lifted to her and flickered, his acknowledgement of hearing her thoughts.

"Jacy'll be back any minute with clean clothes for you. Get some sleep, okay?" she asked.

One corner of Coal's mouth lifted before his eyes closed. The firelight cast shadows over his impeccable face, his long, dark lashes coming to rest over his cheeks.

Shyla stared at him for a long moment, knowing damn well he would not go to sleep until she left. She couldn't help herself. Staring at him reminded her of a fallen angel, some dark beauty who lived in solitude. She thought about climbing into the bed and curling around him, but stifled the idea. She needed a good night's rest, and sleeping in the same bed as Coal Demmering would definitely not fill that order properly.

But, the tantalizing images that plagued her mind as she left the room filled an entirely different order.

* * * *

Jacy dropped the pile of fresh clothes on the evidence of Coal's desire. He snickered when his friend growled and cringed.

"You bastard," Coal said through gritting teeth.

"Just making sure you're incapacitated completely because I intend to take her first." He nodded to Coal's shoulder. "It's a shame you have that wound. Wouldn't it be fun to see just how far we could push her limits? Two of us with her? Guess it'll have to wait until you're better. In the meantime, I'll let you imagine what I'll be doing to her."

"Shut up," Coal snapped.

Jacy's satisfaction only increased by the sound of his friend's growing aggravation. For beginners, he knew Coal seldom held any emotion toward women, and as hard as he hid behind his cool exterior, Shyla had snagged an unsnaggable creature. Jacy fell long before Coal did, or so he thought. Either way, both he and Coal had taken flight over the cliff for the woman he sensed sleeping in the other bedroom.

The victory lay in that he would claim their mate before Coal. That was enough, to taunt his friend and relish this seldom experienced outcome.

He folded his arms over his chest, his smile surely beaming down on his injured friend. Coal's eyes narrowed. His nostrils flared.

Pissed didn't describe the look.

Enraged? Perhaps that was a better choice of words.

"You want me to send you images of what she looks like naked? I'll happily supply you with a prelude," Jacy teased. Coal snorted and looked away. "Hey, just messing with you. Well, for the most part. How's your arm?"

"Better. Any word on Rian?" Coal asked, blatantly changing the subject with a grunt.

"Nope. Maybe he never made it home. Tomorrow we'll bring Shyla back to town. Len offered to watch her while we follow the

blood trail. I stopped back at the diner to help him get rid of the kill I left in his back lot. Bro, you and Rian left one helluva mess. We boarded up the windows so the average tourist wouldn't look inside and see the bloodbath left in your path."

"We have to find Laela. I'll help him fix the place after she's confined. Shyla is our priority, renovations second."

"I already assured him we'll be back to help. In the meantime, I lent him some funds to cover costs while his place is outta commission." Jacy glanced over his shoulder. Shyla made a soft noise from the other room, seductive and alluring. The hunger he fought since last night rushed back to him, drowning out almost everything other than his growing cock.

Coal must've heard it too. When he turned back to his friend, his gaze was pinned on the doorway.

Clearing his throat, he added, "The local packs are bringing all their members together after Shyla's coming out today. Laela won't stand a chance against a hundred determined wolves. Rumor has it they're planning to patrol the borders around Hood River. If Laela, or any of her crew, decide to plan an attack, they'll be sorely disappointed to find their intentions futile." Jacy dropped his arms and adjusted the awkward bulge straining against his jeans. Damn, it hurt! Coal sneered at his open action. It only made him chuckle. "You feeling okay? I mean, if I didn't know any better, I'd say you're jealous of me."

"I'm not jealous, Jacy. She belongs to us both. I'll have my turn."

"You're jealous."

"Shut your fucking mouth."

"Ooh, you sure Rian doesn't have rabies? This behavior is unlike you. Maybe I should grab the town vet to give you a quick exam while I'm preoccupying myself—"

The pillow smacked him right in the face with such force he stumbled back a step. Laughing, he pulled the downy object away and dropped it next to Coal. His friend growled, a threatening rumble that

reverberated deep in his ears.

“Did you notice she smells sweeter today than last night? You know what that means, right?” Jacy asked. He jumped back when Coal swiped at him. A new line of blood formed down the front of his chest from his wound.

“Don’t challenge me right now, bro. I’m warning you. If you’re gonna go to her, go before I incapacitate *you*.”

“You couldn’t do anything even if you wanted to,” Jacy said, ignoring the sudden bristling of his hairs. His gaze skimmed over Coal in a silent assessment.

“Don’t be so sure. Like I said, Shyla’s safety is our first concern. I’m practically helpless to *protect* her with this injury. Keep that in mind while you’re fucking her.”

Jacy backed out of the room as Coal settled back in the bed and slung an arm over his eyes. He closed the door behind him and paused in the short hallway. His friend’s behavior concerned him. He might be a surly bastard with a reputation that preceded him as being dangerous and deadly, but this was different.

Coal cared more than ever before. Shyla had whittled away at the concrete barrier around his dearest friend and the new discovery must be scaring the shit out of Coal. He flat-out admitted he could take the woman if he wanted, but chose to heal in order to protect her.

It was a submissive move completely unlike the alpha ass he’d known all his life.

Jacy ruffled his hair and shrugged. If the roles were reversed, he would probably do the same.

Coal’s choice made it better for him.

With a smile creeping up on his mouth, he found the bathroom and turned on the water faucet. After a cleansing shower, nothing would restrain him.

Chapter Six

Shyla cupped her breasts, a haze lingering in her mind. Her blood sizzled, and her skin tingled. She squeezed gently in hopes of relieving some pent-up pressure caused by the unnaturally sensual men who surrounded her all day. The picture of Coal and Jacy made her whimper. Heat rushed to the apex of her thighs, and she rocked her hips against the air. Hot juice drenched her panties. She slid her hand down her belly, into the flimsy fabric, and found her swollen clit. She stroked the sensitive bundle of nerves while pinching her pert nipple between fingers, then slid a finger deep inside her slick hole, rocking her hips against her hand.

“Sugar, don’t go taking all the fun out of it.”

Shyla froze. Her clit pulsed as she reached the brink of pleasure. Her skin flushed, molten lava singeing her insides. She slowly peeled back her eyelids.

Jacy braced his arms on the edge of the bed and leaned close to her face. Her breath hitched, and moisture poured over her probing finger. Only a towel covered the man worth staring at. Lean muscles corded his thick arms, cuts defined as he leaned on them. The solid planes of his pecs created a deep valley between them, trailing down to the ridges of his washboard stomach. From this angle, the towel around his waist hung forward, but a pronounced bulge in the dark fabric teased her with the prospect of his arousal.

She sucked in a breath. Oh God, he was aroused! She could smell him, like an animal scented its mate, pure masculinity and earthiness and wild heat.

Shyla swallowed. Jacy lifted his large hand to her face and tipped

her chin before slanting his mouth over hers. Every muscle in her body turned to putty as his tongue swept through her, filling the cavern of her mouth with deep strokes. His kiss fed her breath and drank from her soul. His hand left a trail of goose bumps in its wake as he traveled from her face to her breasts. His fingers slid beneath the flimsy satin of her bra and cupped her heavy mound. She arched into his rough hand, into the skillful kneading of his fingers. She shamelessly stroked her clit again, the sensations this man produced in her overwhelming.

Jacy pulled back, his gaze drifting down to her pussy.

“Get your hand out of there, sugar. I’ll take care of you,” he said. His voice rolled like liquid metal, thick and brimming with the promise of pleasure. He circled her wrist and drew her hand away from her wetness, lifting her moist fingers to his mouth. Shyla watched him suck on her dewy appendages, carnal delight flashing in his piercing green eyes. “You taste as good as you smell. Don’t you dare touch yourself again unless I say so. Your pussy is for me.”

“And if I say no?” Shyla asked. Her tongue weighed down her words, and her question came as a seductive purr.

Jacy’s hand traversed her belly, following the same path as his hungry gaze. “I doubt you’ll say no.” His head dipped, and his tongue flicked her pearled nipple. She bucked, spears of pleasure exploding around her breast, strumming cords straight down to her core. With her lack of experience in bed play, she never imagined the excruciating delight that could come from a man’s mouth teasing her nipple.

She pressed her breast into his mouth, and he took more of her in. Each hungry, succulent suck made her pussy weep. Arousal ignited the already throbbing itch in her clit, stroked her vaginal canal, and coiled deep in the pit of her gut. She lowered her hand to ease the building pressure.

Jacy grabbed her wrist and pinned it to the bed. He lifted his head and arched one sinful brow over his lust-laden eye.

Shyla gasped for breath, her gaze scouring Jacy's beautiful body for what she needed, what she wanted more than anything. A primal desire, a feral wildness, claimed her mind, stoking the shadow in the depths of her soul to life. All inhibitions fled her in those precious moments. She wanted Jacy to fuck her like crazy, fuck her until she could no longer feel anything other than pleasure.

"You know, Coal isn't the only one who can read thoughts," he rumbled.

Shyla lifted her leg and ripped the towel from his waist with her toes...and stared at the intimidating size of his thick cock. Dark blond hairs nestled around the base of his jutting arousal while the tip of his shaft glistened with pre-cum.

"Sweetness, I'll fuck you until you're mindless with pleasure. Trust me. I've been waiting for you."

Her mouth watered. She wanted to taste him. She wanted to drink his salty goodness and relish the idea *she* produced this desire in a man like Jacy. It didn't matter she barely knew him. He wrapped her in security she had never known. The playfulness in him acted as a colorful barrier, locking her inside an imaginative world where she existed only with the two most breathtaking men.

Her heart fluttered irregularly, and her stomach fought butterflies. She sat up, her eyes never leaving the wonders of a man so well endowed. She reached out and touched the top of his cock. It twitched beneath her fingers. His flesh might have burned her if fire wasn't already raging within her body. The velvety softness of something so massive, so hard enticed her. The wild whisper in her soul prodded her to drop and take him into her mouth. His intense gaze challenged her to do otherwise.

Wrapping her hand around his cock, she pulled his hips to her. A low, guttural growl rose in his throat. The sound caressed her desire and a growing instinctual wickedness.

"What is it about you that makes me want to do things I would've considered taboo?" she wondered aloud. She drew her thumb over the

tip of his wide cock, massaging the pre-cum over his head.

“Your wild heart, Shyla. Your wolf nature is coming out. Abandon everything you learned growing up in the city. This is your home, right here with Coal and myself.” Jacy’s hands cupped her face and turned her to gaze up at him. “You’ll never want to leave us after tonight. If not solely for birthrights, you’ll fall in love with us as quickly as we’re falling for you.”

Despite her doubt in his words, she reveled in the fantastical ideas of falling in love with two men who would love her in return. What would it be like to wake up every morning to find two men beside her? And those two men being Jacy and Coal?

Shyla dipped her head. Jacy’s potent scent—salt and summer heat—burned into her memory, her nose. His was a scent she would never forget. She flicked out her tongue, tasting the salty pre-cum from the tip of his cock, and shivered with delight. Damn, he tasted heavenly. She slid her tongue over the smooth, moist skin of his head. His fingers tightened in her hair, forcing her mouth to take more of his thickness until he shoved his cock to the back of her throat.

The rough motion made her moan.

“Woman, that feels good. Your hot mouth is liquid pleasure beyond imagining. I can’t wait to pound into you,” Jacy said.

Shyla drew her mouth back, sucking on his length until she came to his tip with a sharp smack of her lips. Her hand followed her mouth, riding up his cock.

“Do you like the way I taste? How I feel in your mouth?”

“Mmm-hmm,” she breathed.

Jacy’s hands dropped to her breasts. He ruthlessly tore open her bra and pinched her nipples. Pleasure and pain ripped through her, and she cried out, fingers reaching for his lean hips and digging into his skin. She threw her head back, arching her breasts into his hands as he rolled her nipples between his calloused fingers.

“That feels good, doesn’t it?”

“Yes.”

Jacy's wicked chuckle caused warm chills to ride her spine. She edged her rear to the lip of the bed, where his leg leaned, and rubbed her aching clit against him.

"No you don't," he growled. His leg moved away.

Shyla whimpered, the heat in her body boiling, threatening to drive her crazy. She acted like an animal, begging to be filled by a stranger, one of two sinfully gorgeous strangers who worked his way into her soul.

"Scoot back on the bed."

His hand tugged her nipples before dropping to her waist. He lifted her off the edge of the bed and tossed her, without strain, into the center. She moved up until her back pressed against the headboard. Jacy climbed onto the bed, his eyes locked on her. Starvation pulsed behind his gaze. Desperation curled in the air around him.

"Damn, you're beautiful," she said.

The corner of Jacy's mouth curled as he stalked up to her on his hands and knees. His cock pointed straight to her, his sac swaying with each advancing step. His muscles rippled like she imagined a wolf's would beneath thick fur. Power and strength strained in each calculated movement.

He grabbed her thighs and tugged her onto her back, pressing open her legs. His head dipped, and his tongue drew over the soaked material of her panties. He nipped the area just above her clit, and she whimpered. Too enthralled by the erotic sight of Jacy's head between her legs, she fought the urge to close her eyes and drown in the sensations of mounting bliss.

When his mouth clamped over her clit and sucked, she cried out.

"You like that, do you?" he murmured, the deep richness of his voice drifting up to her ears. His fingers curled around the top of her panties and ruthlessly tore into them. Sitting back on his heels, he pulled the remnants of the ruined item off her, casting it aside. His eyes flashed and he licked his lips as he stared at her exposed center.

The corner of his mouth twitched as he shifted closer. Both of his hands slid along the inside of her thighs, keeping her legs spread wide. His thumbs flicked over her core once, twice, then stroked her intimate lips. He rubbed and caressed the folds and around her clit but never directly touched that single, most inflamed area.

“Pink and swollen. Do you have any idea how wet you are? How aroused?” he coaxed.

Shyla pressed into his hand, but he moved with her. One of his thumbs circled her opening. She moaned, sparks striking the outer bands of her vision.

“Do you know how bad I want to slide inside you?”

Shyla bit down on her bottom lip as Jacy slid one finger deep inside her. A seductive smile pulled back his lips.

“Just.” His finger slid out. “Like.” Two fingers pressed against her. “That.” His fingers plunged in.

Tremors racked through her. The sparks became bursts, sliding across her vision. She gasped for breath as heat and tingles crashed over her. She moved her wetness over his thumb, bringing her brimming climax to the surface.

She screamed.

Her vision failed. Her breaths turned to yipping pants. Intense pleasure convulsed through her, leaving her heart punching her chest. She writhed beneath his quickening probe, his vigorous stroking of her clit.

“Stop. Oh no. Keep going. No. Get inside me. God, you feel good!”

A moment later, his hand left her. She barely peeled open her eyes when his thick cock filled her in one long thrust. She squirmed to accept his size, her sheath forced to stretch almost painfully tight around his invasion. He leaned over her, slipped his arms beneath her and pulled her against him, straddling her over his strong legs and allowing him deeper penetration.

“No kidding, sugar. You’re hot and wet and fucking tight as hell.”

You feel like nothing I've ever experienced."

Shyla lowered her mouth and kissed him with her rising hunger leading each stroke of her tongue. She tunneled her fingers up through his hair and curled, tugging at his scalp the same instant he crushed her down tighter on his cock. She sucked in a breath and pulled harder at his hair. He lifted her hips and brought her back down on his staff with roughness to equal her increasing tug.

A tangle of scents filled the room, sweet musk mixed with perfume and shampoo. Wild desire danced with proper etiquette.

Jacy chuckled, guiding her hips in a rhythm that bordered on desperation.

"Woman, you'll soon find out we don't play by the rules of proper etiquette. We play wild," he breathed into her mouth.

Jacy dropped her back on the mattress, hovered over her, and drove his cock deep inside her. His kisses surpassed her demands, and he drank from her mouth the passion and heat she milked from his sex. His tongue probed her, his hands pinning her own to the pillows next to her head. Each thrust coiled the explosive pleasure in her lower belly until he created incredible heat and steady friction.

The starbursts of release came hard and fast this time, merciless in their conquest. Fire spilled into her womb with powerful spurts. Jacy's panting howls of release entwined with her own piercing cries. Contraction after contraction, sensation after toe-curling sensation seized her muscles and her mind until, at last, she lay weak and motionless on the bed. Jacy nuzzled his face in the side of her neck, his tongue flicking out in small licks, his teeth scraping lightly over her skin.

"Give me a couple minutes, and I'll show you the wild side of bed play," he whispered against her ear. The tip of his tongue circled the inner contours of her earlobe, and she whimpered. The prospect of experiencing more orgasms, more pleasure intrigued her like nothing else could.

Tonight, she didn't give a damn about etiquette or propriety.

She wanted to be raw and unabashed. She wanted to *feel* sex, not just take part in it.

She wanted to play wild, and Jacy seemed the perfect partner to show her just how intense wild could turn.

* * * *

He was intoxicated, drunk on the finest brandy and craving more. That's how he felt.

His thoughts remained heavily saturated with the cloudy desire still burning in his veins. Blood ebbed toward his cock once again, on the verge of raising his momentarily sated passion. Hours of sheer delight had passed, and he was far from done.

Jacy drew small circles against her flesh with his tongue while he listened to the fervent thud of her heart and felt the rapid pulse in her neck. Each shallow breath she expelled assured him of her wonder in their mating. Her fingers tangled in his hair, her short nails scraping his scalp. Heat curled down his spine and pooled in his cock. He still had much to show her, waves of pleasure and bliss to deliver, and plenty of his seed to implant deep inside her.

He pressed back on his hands as he lowered his mouth to the rise and fall of her supple breasts. Without touching her in any other way, he curled his tongue around her nipple and elicited a breath from her. She bowed into him, the slope of her breast spreading.

His teeth scraped her areola, and she gasped. Her musky scent lifted to his nostrils. He chuckled quietly. Damn. He loved her smell, her taste.

He loved her.

He licked the valley between her breasts before mounting her other nipple and taking her tender flesh into his mouth. He sucked until her nipple peaked. Her fingers brushed over his cock, sending currents of need straight through him. His balls grew heavy.

Her light touch tickled his sensitive skin until he hardened to the

extreme of before. Fresh moisture squeezed from the tip of his head, and the burning want and instinctual desire to fuck snaked back into his body.

He pulled back from her breast, sucking her nipple until she mewled and he released it.

“Turn over,” he said. Her glazed gaze dropped to his dick, and a deep blush came over her face.

“I can’t believe you’re ready—”

“Turn over, and you’ll have my readiness inside you.” He leaned back on his heels and grabbed his cock, stroking his length as she watched. Having her full attention on him as he fisted himself made the primitive wolf in him grumble from deep in his throat. “Turn.”

Shyla began to roll over, a bit too slow for his liking. He grabbed the ripe cheek of her ass and helped her along with one calculated flip, grabbing her hips and pulling her lush rump into the air.

He palmed the smooth skin of her rear before giving her a gentle squeeze. She leaned back into him, displaying her entire nether region to him. Her vaginal lips were moist with her juices and swollen from his hours of pounding into her.

His gaze lifted to the puckered back hole, still virgin territory to him. Lifting a thumb and tracing the tight opening to judge her reaction, he straightened up on his knees. His adorable little white shifted forward, away from his testing appendage.

“Not yet?” he coaxed. Shyla began to press onto his hand. He drove his thick cock into her pussy, knocking her back down. “Then I’ll just have to return to what you’re comfortable with.”

“Damn, I can’t believe how good you feel,” she moaned into the pillow. He pulled out to the tip of his shaft and thrust back inside her. She cooed her pleasure with each deep stroke.

A creak from the other room drew his attention. Maintaining a steady rhythm of pull and thrust, he looked over his shoulder.

Coal blended into the shadows of the small living room, except for his reflective eyes observing the carnal mating between Jacy and

Shyla. Jacy smiled victoriously, reaching forward to pull Shyla into his chest. He never broke eye contact with Coal as he displayed their woman for him to see while being fucked.

Jacy slid his fingers between the folds of her pussy and mercilessly stroked her until she cried out, dropping her head back on his shoulder and clenching down on his erection. He groped her breast, making sure Coal saw everything he experienced before his friend.

“Keep touching me. Keep doing that,” she pleaded. Her hands dropped to his hips and she rocked into him. “Yes. Like that. Oh my God!”

“You love it, don’t you, sugar? You love my dick inside your pussy. Say it.”

“I love your dick in my pussy.”

Jacy caught the flare of anger in Coal’s dark gaze and smirked. He licked his vivacious mate from shoulder to ear. Her head lifted from his shoulder, and she dropped forward on her hands. He rammed into her over and over until he released his seed and collapsed on the bed, pulling her into him. Gracing her face with light kisses, he watched in the distance as the glow of Coal’s eyes extinguished. A moment later, the side door creaked open and eased shut.

Shyla tried to sit up, but Jacy held her down. No way in hell would he let her go to Coal tonight. She was his for the pleasing.

“Is Coal up?” she asked. Concern swept away her lusty veil.

“He’s probably just stepping outside. He enjoys fresh air most of the time. He’ll be fine.”

Jacy smiled triumphantly into Shyla’s hair.

He was the claimant of their shared woman, their mate.

Chapter Seven

Shyla slipped out of the bed, pulling the heavy wool blanket around her naked body as she walked over to the window. She spotted Coal standing at the edge of the forest, gazing down at the lake. The gentle ripples of the water shimmered beneath the brilliant white moonlight, the same light that filtered through the trees, casting Coal in a gray glow that ignited the sexual hunger she believed Jacy had quenched. Her breasts grew heavy, her nipples peaking as they rubbed against the abraded fabric.

Visible strokes of airy white steam rose from his skin, most likely feverish in the wintry night. She couldn't help but stare at him, immense and brooding and delectable. Leaning against a tree with his arms crossed over a naked chest, he became an exquisite painting of shades. Every inch of toned and corded muscle created a scale of grays. Each immaculate dip and chisel showed.

Glancing back to the bed where Jacy slept, splayed over the blankets, she couldn't begin to imagine what she did to deserve these two. Although not nearly as solid and bulky as Coal, Jacy's toned frame made her mouth just as dry and her core just as wet as the dark beauty outside, her black wolf.

Keeping as quiet as possible, Shyla opened the rickety old door and slid into the night with nothing but the blanket. She brushed aside the thought of stepping on bugs. All she wanted was to get to Coal, her battle-bruised guardian.

He looked back and caught her eye across the distance stretched between them. Shyla paused, watching him roll off the tree and make way toward her. She moved up to the picnic table and waited.

The minute he came within reach, Shyla stepped into his arms. She closed her eyes and drank in the heat of his large, solid body. She breathed him into her soul, realizing the hardest part of coming to Hood River would be when she had to leave.

That day would shred her heart.

“Where’s Jacy?” he asked, his voice quiet and calm, meant solely for her ears.

“Inside. Sleeping.” She nestled closer to him, the shadowy whisperer in her spirit leading her to her mate. “How’s your shoulder?”

“Better. You play doctor very well.”

“You scared me,” she confessed, ignoring his attempt to be lighthearted about his horrific injuries. They may have practically healed, but the stark reminder of the attack less than twenty-four hours ago left her cold inside. She hadn’t realized just how much these men meant to her, how naturally they filled the emptiness she desperately sought to plug back home. Coal’s injuries provoked an instinctual move to nurture and coddle him until well.

Jacy’s kiss provoked her valiantly suppressed sexual hunger until he had her in bed.

“I never meant to scare you, love.”

“Don’t do it again.”

“I’ll do my best. I’m not one to go down lightly,” Coal assured, petting her mussed hair.

A soft breeze whistled through the towering trees, branches swaying and creating a beautiful mosaic of shades over the ground. The night soothed every worry she had only a few hours ago. Standing in Coal’s arms secured her mind and her heart.

“Are you cold?” she whispered.

“The cold doesn’t bother me. You?”

“Not while I’m standing against you.” The corner of her mouth twitched in a quick grin as her toes caressed the top of his bare right foot. “I also have a blanket. You have nothing but a pair of jeans.”

“We’re wolves. This is natural for us.”

“You were watching earlier.” The image of Coal’s reflective eyes from the dark corner of the living room sent an erotic chill through her. He had watched from the shadows while Jacy fucked her, never speaking, never coming forward. Then, he had left the house.

“Yes.” He graced the top of her head with a lingering kiss, and she pressed closer to him. Through the blanket, she felt the firm bulge of his cock in his jeans and sighed.

“What were you thinking?”

“The lucky bastard got you first, but he has little control over his libido.” He shrugged against her cheek, his arms tightening around her. “Can’t blame him. You’re an incredible, beautiful woman, and whether you wish to believe or not, we all belong together.”

“I’ve been here for two days. I’ve only just met you and Jacy, and yet...I feel like I’ve known you forever. You seem to understand me better than my family back home.” Shyla nuzzled her cheek against the firm contours of his chest, inhaling the prominent scent of soap and the more subtle scent of wild air against his skin. Her wolf senses rushed to the forefront and enhanced everything in mere moments. She heard the furious rush of his blood just below his calm exterior. A deep breath lent weight to her suspicion of his fierce, predatory arousal. Her flesh tingled with liquid fire in every place she came in contact with him.

“Your family back home doesn’t know this about you, love. Your home is not New York. It’s here where you are stripped of those city confines. This is where you belong. The woods, the wilderness. Free. We are free here.” Coal’s knuckles slid down her cheek in a tender motion only he could provide for her. “*You* are free here. With us.”

“Coal?” She lifted her chin until she gazed into the consuming darkness of his eyes. Her heart fluttered. “Have you ever wondered about the possibilities surrounding us? I understand the spirits appointed you and Jacy as my mates, but you have to know how hard it is for me to change all my beliefs to accept this judgment. Two days

is all, though. Can a woman who never knew anything about who she truly is find herself equally in love with two men in two days?"

Coal's mouth tipped skyward in a soft smile. Nothing severe or hard touched his expression tonight. Not even the moonlight sharpened his features.

"Is it so hard to believe when two men love the same woman just as equally?" he countered, lowering his voice. His thumb brushed her bottom lip as his fingers sifted back into her hair. She purred at the gentle touch, her eyelids growing heavy.

"Do you love me? You and Jacy always seem to be mentally battling wits."

"Shyla, sweetheart, you have two alpha male wolves vying for you. Jacy and I have an incredible friendship, a bond time secured, and a great understanding of our place with you. There will always be the competitiveness in our bickers, but as long as your affections are equal, I won't be forced to render him useless." He dipped his head and sucked in a sharp breath. "I smell him all over you. I smell him *in* you. But, I smell *you*. Your heat and hunger."

He sniffed again. A flicker of light reflected off the smooth onyx surface of his eyes. Shyla smiled, working to seduce him with the slow curl of her lips and a teasing trace by her tongue. She spread her arms, opening the blanket that kept her naked body from his sight. Hell, her body craved the man—the wolf—standing in front of her like some formidable god sent specifically to her.

"Damn, woman."

Shyla released the blanket, and it dropped, draping over the seat of the picnic table. She tugged at Coal's belt, worked open his jeans, and slid them down his legs. Her eyes landed on the jutting object of her desire, leaving her mouth dry and making moisture weep from her already wet pussy. She trailed her hands along the solid cords of muscle that created his masculine legs, pausing on the insides of his thighs.

"You're huge," she murmured. "God, the both of you..." She

leaned in and stroked the long, thick cock inches from her mouth. The wolf in her smelled heat, salt and sex, woods and spice. She smelled the alpha male, and images of what his cock would do to her flooded her mind.

“I’ll fit just perfect, love. You’ll soon feel it.”

“I want to feel you.” She flicked her tongue over the wide head of his dick and shivered with the pleasant taste of his seeping moisture. Curling a hand around his sac, she weighed the velvety package in her palm before gently massaging his balls. She drew the tip of his cock into her mouth, sucking him, stroking the sensitive underside of his head until he quivered.

“That mouth of yours’ll get you in trouble,” Coal said. His voice deepened to a carnal rumble, and Shyla moaned. She licked him, relishing his hot skin and the swollen mass that could easily put men to shame. His hands cupped her head, fingers curling in her hair. “Do you like the way I taste?”

“Mmm,” she moaned, drawing his cock deep into her mouth. Her pussy itched, her clit throbbed, and she dropped forward to her knees. She lowered a hand to her wet, intimate folds and began to stroke herself while sucking his cock.

“No you don’t.”

Shyla gasped as Coal pulled her to her toes. He spun her around and pinned her back to his front. One big hand kneaded her breast, the rough pads of his fingers lashing over her sensitive nipple, creating vibrations of pleasure that strung with her pussy. She whimpered, her head falling back, her rear pressing into his hips. He slid his large cock between her cheeks, the head of his penis teasing her wet center. His unoccupied hand slid south and separated her slick inner lips. His thick fingers circled her opening, his thumb assaulting her clit.

“Coal, oh, God. I need you. Now.”

Not want. *Need*. He tugged her nipple to a peak, and she bucked into him, gasping and rubbing her aching clit against his thumb.

Then, he plunged two fingers deep into her womb, and she cried

out.

“Aw, fuck. You’re still so tight,” he growled against her ear.

Shyla pressed down into his hand, fucking his fingers as the searing pleasure she sought rolled into the pit of her body.

“More, Coal. Faster,” she gasped. She arched her breast into his hand, silently begging him to pinch and squeeze to induce the pleasure-pain she so enjoyed. His hot breath tickled her cheek, and she turned her face toward him.

His mouth conquered hers, his tongue sweeping deep and thorough, rocking her mind. She reached back and sank her hand into the luxurious silk of his mane, meeting his fervent kisses with her own, gyrating her hips over his hand. His knee hooked beneath hers, lifting her leg and spreading her wide.

“You’re soaking wet, love,” he breathed, sliding his dick through her ass crack. His seduction assaulted every sense she possessed, leaving her to spiral deeper into carefree ecstasy and lose herself in him.

“I’m wet for you.”

“I know. Tell me how you like my fingers inside your body.” He pressed his hips into hers, tilting them. He thrust his fingers deeper, and she fought to remain standing. As they drew out, he directly stroked an area inside her that...that...

“Feels...ohhhh.”

The world shattered. She rode the powerful waves of her orgasm, clinging to Coal for support. Her heart raced. Her pussy clenched and contracted around his probing fingers. He tugged her ear with his teeth, tracing her lobe with his hot tongue, the sensation mind-numbing as she slid down from her intense peak.

Coal chuckled quietly, nipping the side of her throat. He drew his fingers from her heat, his hand from her pussy, and grabbed her hips. The trail of wetness grew cold against the wintry air, but her body remained fiery with insatiable need.

“That’s only the beginning,” he promised.

* * * *

Coal coiled every seeping ounce of his control. His cock stretched his already thinned skin. His balls tightened. His gut knotted.

Her delicious, intoxicating scent would trigger him, and he'd burst before ever reaching her slick, silken sex.

He'd waited long enough for her. Two days, a month, a lifetime. He was through waiting.

"You're mine tonight."

The intimate stroke of his claim within her mind made her moan. He rubbed his dick between her lovely ass cheeks, trying his damndest to prolong this pleasure and experience every succulent inch of her before spilling his seed.

The wolf in him barked demands to take. Fuck, and fuck hard. Make her submit to his alpha male and pound deep. Claim her, wild and rough.

The human begged to be gentle. Love her. Show her tenderness. Stretch her tight sheath gently and simply enjoy her.

After tonight, Shyla Smith would become Shyla Roddery-Demmering, and their fates would be sealed.

Coal turned her to him and slid his cock between her legs. The lava flow of her juices coated him, and he shivered with expectant pleasure. She glided her wet pussy over him, teasing the tiny bit of control he managed to grasp hold of.

"You're beautiful beneath the moonlight," he whispered.

He snaked one arm around her narrow waist and held her pinned flush to him. He stilled her hips in an effort to keep from exploding. He imprinted every detail of her face in his memory, from heavy-hooded eyes brimming with shameless desire to lush pink lips, swollen from his hungry kisses. A light blush colored her defined cheeks beneath stray strands of midnight waves.

She looked and smelled and tasted all like a sex-primed woman,

his sex-primed woman. The wolf in her paced restlessly just below the surface. The reflective flash in her stormy gray eyes came and went but never left.

Cupping her face, her hair bunching above his hands, he covered her mouth with his and rolled his tongue inside her sweet, warm cavern. She was receptive, meeting each full stroke of his tongue with her own, eager to drink lust and passion from him. She kissed him with no reserve, her supple breasts pressed to his ribs, her pert nipples scraping his ultrasensitive skin. A deep growl rumbled through the base of his throat, invoking a mew from his precious little wolf.

Coal slid his hands down the smooth contour of her back. He curved over the succulent globes of her ass, squeezed, and lifted her off her feet. She tore her mouth from his and arched her chest into his face, locking her ankles at the back of his waist. He dropped his mouth to her waiting breast, drew her flesh between his teeth and rolled her nipple around with his tongue. Her moans filled his ears. The musky scent of her sex invaded his nose and infiltrated every sensory organ in his body as her moisture cooled his skin just above his thrumming cock.

He bridged the distance between her breasts with leisurely kisses, using these small moments of tenderness to tamp his burning hunger and fully gain control of his wolf. He circled the base of her fleshy mound with brief sucking kisses, pleased by her reaction. Her fingers tightened in his hair, and she creamed some more, rocking her hips against his.

“Coal, please. I want you inside me. I need you inside me,” she whined thickly.

Coal groaned. The sultry tone of her voice snapped one of his carefully gathered cords of control.

He took her breast in his mouth, teasing her pearled nipple, allowing her to buck in search of enough friction to make her come. His teeth scraped her skin, and she muffled a cry.

His legs weakened as blood filled his overextended dick. He

moved her to the picnic table, continuing to toy with her heavy breast as he grabbed the wool blanket from the bench and carelessly tossed it on the table.

Lifting his head from her lush flesh, the lingering taste of salt and sweetness dancing on his tongue, he grabbed her chin and lowered her face to his.

“You want me inside you? Do you think you can handle me?” he growled. Oh, he was losing the battle with the wild creature clawing against the inside of his spirit. He flicked his tongue out and licked her upper lip. Her eyes closed with a passion-charged sigh.

“Give me all of you.”

The raw heat of his burning hunger brought a primal sound to his lips. He lowered her ass to the blanket, but courtesy ended there. He shoved her toward the center of the table, snagged her ankles, and dropped her onto her back. Her eyes shot open, a wild look weaving through her euphoric gaze that clenched down around his heart.

He cast her a dark smile, cruising his hands up the creamy flesh of her legs. His eyes dropped to her glistening pussy, and he licked his lips, moisture seeping from the head of his cock. He wanted. He needed.

He took.

His mouth clamped down on her pussy, and she bowed skyward, crying out as he laved her clit with his tongue and opened her strained gates to bliss. A shiver of delight coursed through him as her nectar filled his mouth and his body. Christ, nothing tasted better than her.

Coal traced the folds of her labia, tremors riding through his woman. He slid one hand to his cock and stroked himself once, twice. He squeezed the base of his dick while he teased her convulsing opening with his tongue before probing deep into her sex.

Cream lathered his tongue. Her fingers tunneled into his hair, fisting and pulling, holding him against her core as he drank. No woman ever enraptured him like Shyla. She may be his mate, may be Jacy’s mate, but he never expected to truly love her.

Now, he would not let her leave. She belonged with him, whether it be talking, shopping, tonguing, or fucking. This was her home, and he was one of her men.

Claim her. Don't wait.

Coal listened.

He hopped onto the table, grabbed her hips, and drew them to his. Sitting back on his legs, he pressed the weeping head of his cock into the extremely tight opening of her sex, lifting his gaze to judge just how hard he could thrust by the look on her face.

Sexual shadows and mist filled her watching eyes. She bit down on her bottom lip, nostrils flared, ankles locking at his back.

Coal groaned as she forcefully impaled herself on his cock, rocking his vision and stopping his heart. Her whimpers drove the natural beast in him, the hot, silken sheath of her sex squeezing him with each met thrust. She was lava hot and slick, tight to the point he might have figured her to be a virgin.

"You have all of me, love." He leaned over her, kissing the rapid pulse of her neck. He slid his cock out and pushed deep inside again, his balls slapping her ass and a tremor of white heat teasing him. "You're hot and wet, and Christ, you feel incredible when you clamp down on my cock."

"I've never..." Shyla's forehead creased, and she bit back down on her lip. Coal kissed her closed eyelids, the tip of her nose, her chin.

"Never what, sweetheart?" He rocked slowly, absorbing her delight. "Felt this way before?"

"Been so...filled. You're touching places inside me I...I...You feel so good."

Coal's lips tipped in a shadowed grin. The woman stroked his ego and his cock with forbidden pleasure. Her hands splayed over the planes of his chest. Her fingers cruised between the valley of his pecs, glided over his abs and rounded his hips. He hooked an arm under her knee, drawing her sinfully long leg over his shoulder and pounding even deeper. So deep he swore he couldn't go any farther, the head of

his cock hitting an untouchable place in a woman. Her depth matched his length, and he snarled with satisfaction.

They were a perfect fit, and she was his perfect woman.

Brushing the outskirts of her mind, seeking her thoughts and finding nothing comprehensible aside of the pleasure he delivered to her, the alpha wolf reared his dominant head.

“Did Jacy feel this good? Did he fill you as completely as I do? Did he fuck you and make you feel like nothing but a mass of charged nerves and bliss?” His questions came out demanding and thick with desire to hear her answers.

“No.” She angled her hips and drew him inside her hot canal. “Oh, oh. Yes. Right there. Right...Coal!”

Coal bristled as the silken muscles around his cock squeezed down. He kept his pace, rocking into her as her song of climax echoed into the night. The delightful pressure around his cock threatened release. Fuck, he wanted to come and spurt his liquid fire into her womb.

She was primed, heated, and fucking heaven on earth.

Shyla’s fingers lifted to his shoulders, and she pressed him over. Coal obliged, pulling her on top of him and guiding her weak, trembling body into a slow rhythm until she completely recovered.

“Sexy Shyla. You’re drowning every one of my senses in lust and awe.”

Coal licked his lips as his woman straightened up, gliding her hips against his. Her gaze locked on his, dark with heated passion. He slid his hands up her flat belly until he cupped her breasts.

A glint crossed her eyes, and he arched a brow. He dropped his elbows to the table and pressed up, watching the night-vision glaze coat her eyes. The white wolf she locked deep inside her rose to the surface.

Her strokes quickened. Coal lifted a hand to her neck and cupped her warm flesh. Her pulse raced beneath his palm, his own thundering heart matching hers. The desperate friction of her body against his

cock made his balls tense as his brewing climax bubbled forward.

“Love, let me guide your wolf forth. Let me come inside you in your true form. It’ll be pleasure you’ll never forget.”

“It won’t hurt?” she asked. Her hips slowed, and he bit back a growl of protest, thrusting deep inside her. She whimpered, gripping his shoulders.

“How do I feel?”

“Sinful. Incredible. I never want you to leave.”

Coal smiled. Her confession reared the wild wolf inside him and made him determined to claim her as a wolf.

He eased her off his staff and rolled off the table. He grabbed her by the hips and picked her up with ease to reposition her. With her kneeling on the blanketed bench, her body splayed over the tabletop he spread her knees with one of his, snaked his arm around her waist, and impaled her from behind. He slid his fingers between her slick cleft and stroked her swollen clit. He stretched out over her, entangling his free hand with hers. He found her mouth and kissed her, his tongue mimicking each throttling probe of his cock.

“Feel me, sweetheart. Keep feeling me inside you as you disconnect your spirit from human form,” he rumbled. Shit, if he had any hopes of bringing this idea to light, her first shift would have to be quick. His mounting lava wasn’t going to stay barred much longer.

“Oh, God, Coal. I—I don’t know...ohhhh,” she whimpered, her gasping breaths robbing him of air as he kissed the cries of pleasure from her delicious mouth. His scalding release traveled upward as she contracted around him.

“That’s right, love. Come all you want, but listen to my voice. Reach inside your spirit, that separate part of your mind. A shadow of a creature. A living entity inside your body. Listen to the call...Ahhh, don’t squeeze me like that. I’ll burst now.” Coal drew out of her hot pussy and slid his tip over her clit to ease the pain in his groin until she changed. She pressed her rear into his hips, seeking him to fill her. “I’ll climb right back up once you’re in a fur coat.”

“Help me change. Now. I need you!”

“Your spirit. The call of the wolf. Do not restrain it. Let it come out. Woman, relax your muscles. I’ll change with you. Follow my wolf’s lead.”

He pressed his chin against her shoulder, closed his eyes, and instantly connected with her on a telepathic link. Keeping her enraptured in the promise of more pleasure with the teasing of his cock against her heat, he began to guide her.

“The shadow, Shyla. I sense it. Open yourself to that shadow, and let it consume you. Do not fight it,” he urged. His own bones began to shift and change, joints popping and contorting. He issued the sensations across their link, allowing her to feel his changes and ignite her own for the first time.

Her body took to his silent command, and he heard the first sound of bone contracting, like twigs bending but not breaking. Fur grew out of his skin, dark and thick. He fed the image to her shadow, increasing his strokes on her clit and relaxing her mind enough to accept this newest instruction. She gasped as her arms began to alter and reshape. Pure white fur extended, a dazzling coat beneath the silver moon.

Coal opened his eyes as the scent of Shyla, sex and wolf, increased. Able to focus on the finer details of the woman transforming beneath him with his night-vision eyes and wolf-attuned senses, he allowed his body to completely change. Paws replaced his hands, a snout replaced his nose, and a wolf replaced a man. Casting the final transition in a mental picture, Shyla Smith followed his lead.

The internal satisfaction could not be measured. Coal hooked his paws on the shoulders of the breathtaking white beneath him—his claim—and pulled her off the table. She tried to spin around, but he gently grabbed the back of her neck between his powerful jaws, the silky white fur tickling his gums and his nostrils.

“Settle, love. You did wonderful.”

Shyla twisted to face him and yipped. He growled, still hanging

on to her scruff. She craned her head and tried to snap at his neck, stumbling on her new legs until she plopped to the ground.

Coal pounced, climbing onto her back and pinning her shoulders to the ground. He shifted his lower body against her viciously swatting tail until he impaled her, holding himself deep inside until her entire body convulsed and her hind legs buckled. She dropped to her belly, whimpers and short howls drifting into the night.

“How does it feel now? Having your dominant male over and inside you like this?”

The contours of her inner canal differed, and he had to pound rougher inside her to gain the same pressure-bending pleasure he had before. His fervent fucking, however, brought her wave after wave of sexual bliss. Her submission was his physical proof.

Her lack of verbal response, as well as the tiny noises she made, was vocal proof.

Coal grunted. Liquid fire sped through his cock and exploded inside her womb. He panted, his vision shattering and his body shaking, as the intensity of his climax gripped him and threatened to drag him into a black void of pure, unimaginable ecstasy.

He collapsed on top of his white wolf, his lovely were, and licked the side of her snout. Her long pink tongue lapped back once, lacking any strength.

“Coal?”

“Yes?”

“I—I love having you in control. I...”

“You what, sweetheart?”

Shyla shifted her trembling wolf form onto her side and looked at him. He licked her silvery white snout again, coaxing calm into her while he fought to ease the spasms in his muscles.

“Help me change back. I feel awkward, and I want you to hold me.”

He nuzzled the side of his face against her soft fur, relishing the thickness of her coat and the heady scent of the wilderness mixed

with their union. He wanted to curl around her and sleep beneath the night sky, the bright moon, and the dazzling stars. He wanted to protect her while she adjusted to this new form, her other half.

However, he understood her unease.

“Of course.” He nudged her head with his nose and sidled against her, wedging one long front leg beneath her neck. *“Changing back should be easier than changing into wolf form. Your human counterpart is more natural to you and will challenge this part of your spirit until it becomes accustomed to it. All you must do is pull back the shadow’s veil and lock on to the comfort of your spirit. Go ahead. You’ll find the transformation surprisingly simple.”*

Coal allowed his own body to transform beside Shyla, his spirit leading the way for hers to retake her human form. As the last of their fur retracted and their bones popped and settled back into place, he pulled her into his body and nipped her bottom lip. Her eyelids drew heavily over her clouded eyes, and she sighed against his mouth.

“Wow. So that’s what it feels like to be a wolf. It’s so strange, and yet it felt so natural,” she murmured.

“It’ll become more natural with time. Jacy and I will never allow you to lose your way until you’re comfortable enough to transform on your own.”

She tipped her head and caught his gaze. “Why did you suggest turning into wolves?”

Coal smiled, flicking a rock from beneath his arm.

“Love, you’re in heat, and I want my seed in you.”

Shyla froze. Every muscle pressed against him tensed. She lifted her head off his chest and looked down at him, a mixture of surprise and uncertainty fighting to gain control of her expression.

He shook his head, gracing her mouth with an airy kiss.

“It’s only natural for you to have both our seeds in your womb. After all, sweetheart, we’re both your mates. The three of us. One little happy pack.”

* * * *

Padding through patches of shimmering moonlight brought the hunter out in her.

Laela maneuvered through the forest, each drop of her paws carefully calculated as not to make noise. With the early winter upon Hood River, dead leaves and twigs covering the forest floor proved to be an early giveaway for even an experienced predator.

The cold night breeze shifted directions, and with it came a new scent. She stilled, the thick fur along her spine bristling. Her nostrils flared, inhaling the scent and etching it into her memory. There were two different, yet distinct scents, neither of which was familiar to her. She knew every wolf in the vicinity, and the invasion of these unknowns disturbed her.

Well, she'd have to remind any trespassers just who controlled the packs of Hood River.

Resuming her stalking advance, this time knowing which direction to follow, she slinked around tree trunks and scraggly brush. The scents intensified as she drew closer.

At a small break in the trees, she caught the subtle waver of scenery. Craning her neck around the wide tree that hid her, she pinpointed the source of one scent. A large gray-and-white wolf weaved through the trees, ears pricked skyward. With the breeze carrying her scent away from this invader, he had little clue she watched him only a few yards away.

As the first wolf paused, a second wolf appeared from the dark, shadowed forest a few yards behind his partner. She wanted to snarl at them and warn them away but fought the natural urge to reveal this as her territory. Somehow, though, she knew these two were males and would not run off.

No. They were here for a reason. They were here to protect that damn white.

Instead, she lay in wait until she had the opportunity to attack

without having to fend off both massive males at the same time.

At last, the second wolf padded back into the forest. The gray-and-white curled around a tree and retraced his steps, coming closer to her.

He paused, tipping his nose to the sky. Laela crept closer on her belly, her eyes locked on her target.

The wolf's ears flattened against his head and his lips pulled back.

Laela lunged, tackling the gray-and-white just as he let out a short, threatening yip. She sank her sharp teeth into his throat, ripping through flesh until blood spurt against the roof of her mouth. The male beneath her kicked at her belly, trying desperately to knock her away. He howled and yelped, each movement causing irreversible damage to his throat.

What began as a warning with hopes of discovering who these trespassers were quickly turned into a fatal attack. Laela growled in frustration, exerting more pressure in her bite to finish off this were before his partner returned.

The vicious kicking slowed, as did the wolf's resistance. Laela tugged one last time, tearing his throat wide open and leaving him to bleed.

The reckoning force of a cargo train barreled into her. She flew through the air and landed hard on her side. Her back smacked into the rugged base of a tree.

There was no time to assess her pain.

She flipped onto her feet and met the second attack with equal strength and intent. The wolf snapped his glistening teeth at her, scraping the side of her snout as they crashed to the ground and rolled. Laela latched her teeth onto his nose. She used the weak attack to climb on top and dig the sharp nails of her back paw into the wolf's prized package. His pained howl echoed through the night, leaving his neck vulnerable to her attack. She released his nose and mercilessly tore into his throat.

The second wolf ceased to move beneath her as death consumed

him. Laela sauntered backward, licking her jowls of blood. She snorted.

“You took two of my men. I’ve taken two of yours. You want to play this game, we’ll play until the death. Let this be a lesson, Coal. Jacy. You will not take over my land. Your white will die just as her mother and aunts did.”

“I will bring blood back to the full moon, and you will suffer each scream she makes while I do so.”

Leaving the threat to linger over the dead wolves, she turned and made her way into the forest. Catching the delicious scent of a deer and her adrenaline still running on high, she smiled inwardly.

Tonight brought the beginning of bloodshed.

Chapter Eight

Heat surrounded her, entwined with the soothing scents of woods, spice, and flesh. Shyla moaned as a tingling sensation pooled between her legs. Still foggy with sleep, it took a moment to realize the tingling grew with the gentle, rhythmic strokes of fingers.

Pressure mounted, and one of those teasing fingers slid inside her. She tipped her hips into the hand, reveling in the way her body responded, extra sensitive and tender. Every nerve splayed out, accepting the slightest touch with overexcited receptiveness.

She lifted her leg and curled it around the lean hips in front of her. Another set of fingers slid along her rear and turned down to her sex. These fingers didn't try to invade her vagina. Instead, they pulled back into her rear and teased her nether opening.

Her body blazed with erotic desire. A hand slinked around her front and began teasing the nipple of her right breast until it pearly. She pressed her head back until it hit an unyielding barrier. Liquid lava touched the hollow of her neck and drew a slow, tantalizing path along her throat that ended at her chin. The probing finger in her sex glided in and out, building a mountainous peak within her. The finger teasing her rear opening slid along her wet pussy, tracing around the invasion until they came together over her clit.

She shuddered. Sensations overwhelmed her, tingling, itching, and coiling. Pleasure swirled in her body and mind, waiting, waiting. Climax lapped around her spirit, drinking from the stimulation and growing with each swallow. Fingers and tongues teased her, two solid bodies holding her in a delightful prison as they did what they would.

She was their playground, and she didn't mind at all.

Fingers retraced their trek around the probing appendage and returned to her rear. Using the natural moisture of her arousal, one finger slowly forced its way into that forbidden section. She gasped, the stretching of her skin sparking an unusual pain as pleasure assaulted her a mere inch away. The dueling sensations left her in a state of mindlessness.

She peeled back her eyelids and met the blacker than black eyes of Coal, whose head was propped up on his hand. She pressed her rear into the gentle finger, trying to accept one probe while holding on to the other.

“Good morning, love,” Coal said, his voice thick and rich, pouring over her like warm, sticky caramel.

Feverish breath tickled her ear. She looked back and met Jacy’s piercing green gaze.

“How’re you feeling?” he asked.

Shyla bit down on her bottom lip as the pleasure-pain coils snapped, releasing her into the embracing arms of climax. She sat her hips down, forcing both fingers deeper into her body as the shuddering intensity of release blinded her.

Somewhere in the distant realm of her comprehending mind, she heard Jacy chuckle. “Must be good.”

“Sweetheart,” Coal rasped. Shyla whimpered as his mouth closed over hers and his tongue swept over hers. She dug her hand into his hair, pulling him closer until their kiss turned into a fierce dance of tongues, teeth scraping against teeth. Jacy’s mouth singed a possessive path along her neck, shoulder, and down her back. Coal’s finger pulled out of her core, and the thick head of his shaft replaced it. Jacy’s fingers splayed over her rear, kneading the fleshy mounds. His teeth nipped one cheek, then the other. He grabbed her, lifted her hips as Coal shifted beneath her, and settled her weeping sheath around his cock.

Coal growled, thrusting his hips upward. Shyla’s elbows buckled, and she fell over his chest. His hands whipped up, pinning her to him

as Jacy guided her hips to stroke his cock.

“Sugar,” Jacy purred.

Shyla bucked the instant she felt a painful pressure trying to pierce her rear.

“Christ, woman. Relax. I’ve lubed to make it easier.”

“Relax, love. Let him inside you.”

Coal’s soothing voice inside her mind made her rear muscles loosen. Slowly, inch by incredible inch, her body stretched and formed around Jacy’s invasion. His thickness made her wince until she felt his hips against hers. He stayed pressed inside her back hole, allowing her time to adjust to him. His hands coursed around her waist, the tip of his finger reaching her clit. She moaned into Coal’s mouth, rocking her hips into his.

Both men filled her at the same time. Coal nipped her bottom lip before invading her mouth with searing kisses. She whimpered with each slight movement, the fiery itch in her lower gut being strummed from both men’s subtle motions. The rough pad of Jacy’s finger teased her pulsing clit as he drew out of her, pulling her farther down Coal’s dick. As he pressed back inside her, the pain subsided, and a new pleasure filled its spot.

Each tantalizingly slow pull and push of Jacy’s dick in her ass was met by the sumptuous tension created with Coal’s dick in her pussy. Her entire lower region was under the assault of constant stimulation, turning her to putty melting between two incredible lovers.

Jacy wrapped an arm around her shoulder, tearing her away from the delicious heat of Coal’s intense kiss and filling her mouth with his tongue. He growled against her as she sat back on his cock.

“Fuck, woman,” he breathed.

Shyla tore away from his kiss the instant Coal’s dick left her aching sheath. He shifted to his knees, grabbed her chin in a gentle grip, and crushed his mouth to hers.

“My mouth.” Coal’s claim reverberated through her mind. Jacy lifted her rear off his lap, off his cock, while Coal fed her his lust-

laced toxin through his kiss. She could drink from him for years and never tire of the expert ways his tongue traced and teased her mouth.

She had little time to react before she felt both men's dicks drive deep inside her body. She catapulted straight into euphoria, screaming out in delight. Two sets of hands guided her trembling body, wave after wave of blinding pleasure searing her mind to anything but the sensations of bliss and fullness. The synchronized thrusts held her suspended in stimulation overload.

Her hair was tugged, pulling her head back with little effort. Jacy conquered her mouth, grunting with each calculated thrust into her rear, filling her until her mounted pleasure seeped over the crest of sexual bliss. Coal's mouth took to her exposed neck, laving and kissing straight up to her chin, reclaiming her from Jacy as the friction created from the thrusting of his cock exploded behind the wall of pleasure.

Lava-hot liquid filled her. Jacy howled with his spurt of climax in her rear channel. Coal groaned into her mouth as his seed filled her womb. Her men supported her between their solid bodies as she rode each overwhelming wave of ecstasy until, at last, she somehow managed to grasp the frayed ends of her being.

Coal leaned back, his arms wrapping around her and pulling her down with him. Jacy followed behind her, still lodged deep inside her nether hole. She twisted enough to look back at him, trying her damndest to focus her quaking vision. A thin sheen of sweat covered them all, intensifying the arousing aroma of sexual musk.

She allowed two men to fuck her simultaneously, and she enjoyed it like nothing else in the world. Had it been any two other than Coal and Jacy, she knew she would've felt dirty and used.

Lying here, between these two men, couldn't be any more *right*.

"Am I hurting you?" Jacy asked.

Shyla managed a shaky smile at the thick tone of his voice. Coal's knuckle caressed her cheek, drawing her attention away from Jacy.

"No. You're not hurting me anymore," she murmured. "That was

amazing.”

“*You* were amazing,” Coal corrected, tracing her bottom lip with his pointer finger. She nipped him, earning her a smoldering grin.

“*We* were amazing,” she said.

“Every day for the rest of our lives can be amazing,” Jacy whispered against her ear.

Shyla closed her eyes, absorbing the warmth of his breath and the feel of both men’s bodies. Fatigue crept up from the depths of her spirit. She wanted to sleep, curled between her wolves. She wanted never to leave, but reality had a way of ruining even the greatest of moments.

She had to get Gramps’s things in order and return to her life in New York, leaving these men behind.

Hell, she’d enjoy each minute being with them in the meantime.

* * * *

“I’ll make some coffee,” Coal said, receiving a tiresome sigh along the telepathic link he kept open to Shyla. He allowed Jacy to take her in his arms and curl her against him as he climbed out of the bed and into his jeans.

He needed to distance himself from the single most disturbing thought that had ever hit him.

She would leave. Despite their mating, she intended to leave.

The thought of Shyla not filling his arms while she haunted his mind left a bitter pulse in his heart. Didn’t she say she loved him? How could she leave if she did? How could she leave two men who loved her when she herself loved them in return?

Coal shuffled through the cabinets in the kitchen until he came across the coffee filters Jacob Smith kept stocked. In life, the man had been an avid coffee consumer, so Coal had no difficulty locating an airtight container filled with coffee grinds. Preparing a pot to brew, he heard the distant crunching of tires over the gravel driveway.

"It's Len."

Coal lifted his gaze to the window as his friend's voice touched his mind. At least the man had enough common sense to warn him of his approach during these tenuous times.

"Jacy, Len's coming up the drive. Might wanna get some clothes on," Coal warned.

"Tell the man to come back in an hour or so," Jacy called from the bedroom.

Coal snorted as he started the pot of coffee and returned to the bedroom. He leaned against the doorframe, his gaze fixed on the beautiful, sex-sated woman lying on her belly, head propped up on fists. She cast him a timid smile, her cheeks turning a light pink. He found a grin easy to muster even as his mind tortured him with images of her gone.

"Hell no. She's not leaving. No fucking way."

Jacy folded his hands beneath his head and looked up at him with glowing green eyes. "Why's he coming here? I told him yesterday we'd be in touch."

Coal shrugged a shoulder. "We'll find out when he gets to the door." He nodded to Shyla. "Please, love. Put some clothes on. You're way too tempting naked."

"I'll put some clothes on after I take a shower. How's that?" she purred, the blush on her cheeks deepening. Her stormy gray eyes darkened and trained on him as she slid off the bed. Coal's body ignited with lustful fire, singeing his veins and shocking his heart into overdrive. She stepped up to him, lifted on her toes, and graced his craving mouth with a soft, gentle kiss. He brushed his fingers over her cheek and into her hair, forcing himself to tamp down the rolling desires she brought to life in him.

Coal tugged her lower lip before leaning back. Just beyond the porch, he heard the tires of Len's car come to a stop. The engine shut off, tinks echoing in the air.

"Get in the shower. Len's here, and I'm not about to let him see

you like this,” Coal said in a quiet rumble. Shyla smiled, her lids hooding her eyes as she stepped around him, her arm dragging across his belly as she headed toward the bathroom. He turned his attention to his raring-to-go friend.

“That woman kisses you like you’re chocolate and sin. She indulges, and you indulge right back,” Jacy said. He chuckled, bending a knee to the ceiling.

Coal folded his arms over his chest and rested a shoulder against the doorframe. The door to the bathroom clicked shut behind him.

“She thinks she’s leaving us when she’s done here,” Coal said. The raw frustration that etched his voice surprised him and earned him a rightful—and rather annoying—arched brow from Jacy. “Little does she know she’s not.”

“That’s ridiculous. She won’t leave, especially after last night,” Jacy assured with a white-toothed smile. He pushed himself upright and scooted off the bed, stretching his arms over his head. “Damn, Coal. In all the years I’ve known you, the last thing I ever expected to see in you was uncertainty. Hey, if you just saw the way she kissed you, you’d agree there’s no way she’s leaving. She’s completely enamored by us.”

“Keep telling yourself that.” The car door outside slammed shut, and footsteps crunched over the drive.

Jacy clapped his healed shoulder and nodded toward the bathroom.

“You keep yourself company. I’m gonna check on Shyla and see if she needs any help.”

Footsteps climbed the stairs to the porch as Jacy followed Shyla’s path to the bathroom. Coal gathered his composure, shoving the disturbing thoughts from Shyla into the dark corner of his mind.

He’d worry about that when the time came. Right now, there were more dire things at hand.

Finding Laela and Rian were two of them.

Coal opened the front door before Len knocked, inviting the man

inside just as Jacy closed the bathroom door behind him. The vague smell of steam and soap escaped in those few moments, teasing his nostrils and his cock. He forced himself to face Len. The disgruntled air that followed his old friend quickly dissolved his desires and stoked his wolf until the predator in him paced with unease.

“Coffee?” Coal asked.

“I’ll definitely be needing it. Brought chow,” Len said, holding up a large paper bag. “Has your white accepted she’s a wolf yet?”

Coal repressed the urge to display his emotion behind a simple smile as he led Len into the kitchen. The man dropped the bag of breakfast foods on the small kitchen table and took a seat, keeping his attention anywhere but on the bathroom door.

“I think she’s coming around.” He grabbed four mugs from a cabinet and filled two with the freshly brewed coffee. Wiping the smile from his face as he turned to Len, he added, “She can’t dispute what she saw happen in front of her.”

“I’d say.” Len’s brows lifted as he nodded toward the bathroom door without looking. “Your boy there needs to learn to control himself. Be more like you.”

“That wouldn’t make for a good friendship. Two of me?”

“Brooding bastard. True, true. The town can only handle one Coal Demmering, and that’s stretching it.” His eyes narrowed on Coal. “Although, not sure if I sense much brooding in you today.”

Coal turned a chair around and straddled the seat, then placed the mugs on the table. He folded his arms over the top of the chair. Len shrugged and unloaded the Styrofoam containers from the paper bag. The mouthwatering aromas of bacon, eggs, and steak filled the kitchen but did little to cast aside the resounding unsettlement.

“What’s bothering you? Seems like you’ve got your tail in a bunch,” Coal said, reaching over to the closest container. He flicked open the lid, grabbed a sausage link, and took a bite. The savory, salty meat made his stomach rumble. “Wife up your ass again?”

“You disappoint me. You’ve got the positions backward.” Len

chuckled despite the growing uncertainty flashing in his eyes. “Two wolves were slain last night about three miles from here. They’re part of the Jenson pack. Came in to lend us a hand keeping Smith’s granddaughter safe. A half dozen pack members went on a wild goose chase trying to follow the scent but only came to the lake, where it disappeared.”

Coal paused, teeth half tearing into another bite of sausage. He stared at Len as the man rapped his fingers on the top of an unopened box.

He severed the piece of meat, chewed, and swallowed, dropping the remainder in the box. Quenching his ravage hunger would have to wait.

“Did anyone recognize the scent?” Coal asked.

“No. Not a one.”

“Did they move down the lakefront and try to pick up the scent again? If it’s a wolf, it wouldn’t stay in the water long.”

“They said they couldn’t find anything.”

“That’s fucking impossible, Len. How can they lose a scent?”

“We’re wolves, which means we come with wolf-like abilities. Even wolves can lose scent trails if other scents overpower the one being traced.”

Coal arched a brow. He *never* lost a scent trail. But it was pointless for him to try to follow a scent after so many other wolves compromised the area. Besides, he and Jacy had another trail to follow once his friend finished fucking in the shower.

“Did you pick up the strange scent outside?” Len asked. He pushed the container away and looked at Coal. His blue eyes coated with deadly ice.

Reluctantly, Coal shook his head once.

“Really? Actually, there were two different scents, aside from yours and Shyla’s.” Len snickered. “I would’ve never suspected that woman to be the outdoors type.”

“Leave it, old man,” Coal growled, shoving back from the chair.

Anger welled in his spirit, the wolf mewling to come out. The screen door cracked against the side of the cabin from the force he threw it open with. He jumped off the porch and stormed into the middle of the clearing.

Suppressing the restless side of him, he stood stone still, nose tipped toward the bleak, cloudy morning. The cold air lent a crispness that made it easier to distinguish the hundreds of different scents surrounding him. Immediately, he could smell the lingering musk from his mating with Shyla, and it made his cock hard. He couldn't seem to get enough of her.

Pushing the obvious aside, he turned his head as a coaxing breeze filtered through the trees, bringing with it two entwined scents. Two scents he knew very little of, but knew well enough to realize just what might have occurred because he was too enamored by Shyla to detect it.

"Son of a bitch," he spat. His fingers began to contort as his desire to transform and hunt the fools who tread this land mounted. He turned to the cabin and ran back inside, barely keeping the wolf contained.

Len looked up.

"I'm going to see if I can find them. When those two are done, bring them over to my place and tell them to stay there. If I'm not back by sundown, get her away from here. You understand?" Coal barked, stripping off his jeans. His body accepted the familiar transformation as his wolf came to the forefront. In a few blinks, he bounded back outside.

"Don't let anything happen to our woman, Jacy. It'll be your throat I tear open otherwise," he warned his friend just as he came upon the strong start of the enemies' scent.

Chapter Nine

Jacy massaged shampoo into Shyla's thick mane of hair, lathering the dense white foam until it practically consumed her dark strands. The hot water sprayed over his shoulders and down her back, glistening like tiny diamonds against her smooth flesh. Unlike his friend, he knew Shyla wouldn't leave them. This was a sight he'd get to experience as much as he wanted, and hell would freeze before he got sick of it.

"Mmm, that feels good. You do this often?" Shyla murmured, leaning her head into his hands.

He chuckled, fingers working into her scalp. He watched goose bumps rise over her arms despite the heat of the water and the steam produced by it.

"I save these specialties for you. Figured after our active night, a little massage might be in the cards. You sore?" He pressed a light kiss to the soapy underside of her jaw. He slid his fingers out of her hair and down to her shoulders where he gently kneaded the tight muscles surrounding her neck.

"Keep doing what you're doing, and the soreness will disappear." Shyla's body swayed with his deep, massaging strokes, narrow streams of white foam creeping down her back from her hair. "Have you and Coal shared other women?"

Jacy paused, her curiosity washing away his smile.

"It depends on the term. We've shared women. Separately."

Jacy snaked his arms around her waist and pulled her into his body. He might have an overactive sex drive, but times like this outweighed the desires stirring in his gut. Shyla's slender, solid form

molded to him so perfectly, as if she were made for him. Her head leaned back on his shoulder, the spray of water working the shampoo from her hair. She looked up at him, a small smile on her swollen lips. Jacy graced her with a chaste kiss. He nuzzled his cheek to hers.

"You both don't seem the type to be short of women at your sexual disposal," she murmured.

"Maybe not, but none of it matters anymore."

"Just because I'm a white wolf, you're open to settle with one woman?"

"You being a white has a little to do with things. It brought us together."

"Coal said both of you were appointed as my mates. How can two alpha males submit to one another and share a single woman?"

"Sugar, we're perfectly capable of sharing. You experienced that just a short time ago," Jacy reminded. He inhaled the sweet scent of rose soap from her skin and closed his eyes. "Although, I'll admit Coal's been hogging your mouth."

"I think that's fair considering how long you hogged me last night," she said, her voice dipping. A sultry chuckle rumbled through her throat and made the blood pool in his cock. He kissed the soapy side of her neck.

"And I'll continue to hog you as much as I can—"

"Don't let anything happen to our woman, Jacy. It'll be your throat I tear open otherwise."

Jacy lifted his head from the alluring temptation of her neck and loosened his arms from her waist. He stepped out of the shower and grabbed a towel.

"Jacy? Where're you going?" Shyla asked, poking her head from behind the shower curtain.

"*What the hell are you rambling about now?*" he asked, following the telepathic link that flared to life. He dried in haste and tucked the towel around his waist.

"Doll, finish up, and meet me in the kitchen." His gaze drifted

over her once more. He licked his lips. “With some clothes on or a towel in the least.”

He slid out of the bathroom and followed the delicious aromas of breakfast foods and coffee into the kitchen. Len climbed to his feet from his place at the table. Jacy scanned the living room through the doorway behind Len, noting the peek of jeans hanging over a sofa pillow. When he didn’t see Coal, he leaned back into the living room.

“He’s gone,” Len said, answering the curiosity building in Jacy’s mind.

He turned to the man and quirked a brow. “Don’t tell me he can’t handle being around—”

“He’s following a scent trail left by two trespassing wolves last night. He left instructions for me to bring you and the white to his place,” Len said, his words backed by a fierce determination that reflected in the blues of his eyes.

Jacy bristled.

“Where’s Shyla?”

“Finishing up in the shower.” He barely connected with his friend before asking, “*Coal, what the fuck is going on?*”

“*Don’t you concern yourself with me. Keep Shyla safe until I get back. Don’t try to be a stubborn ass either.*”

Jacy detected the carnal air in the telepathic response. Coal was a wolf. He knew better than to distract his closest friend while tracing enemy trails.

“I’ll get her together, and we’ll leave right away,” Jacy said. Once Shyla was tucked safely in Coal’s home, he’d go after his friend.

No way in hell would he let Coal face the dangers alone.

* * * *

Shyla dragged her feet up to the front door of the extensive ranch-style home. Frustrated with Jacy’s vague explanation behind the urgency to leave, and awestricken by the immaculate condition of this

new place, Shyla barely had time to react before Jacy resorted to picking her up and dropping her back to her feet once she cleared the front door.

“Will you tell me what’s going on now?” Shyla growled, adjusting the shawl around her shoulders. As much as she wanted to drink in the extremely contemporary décor and the clean-cut severity of the home, she kept her gaze trained on Jacy.

“Smith’s place isn’t safe. That’s what’s going on.”

“Where’s Coal?”

“Tracking two wolves that hunkered down outside your grandfather’s place last night.”

Shyla blinked. She swallowed. There had been two wolves hanging outside Gramps’s place? Had they watched her and Coal?

“Why are we here? Whose house is this?” she asked, the sharp edge in her voice melting away.

“Coal’s.”

Jacy ushered her deeper into the house as she observed Coal’s home. Spotless white walls and light pinewood floors flowed into each room. Sharp abstract paintings in black, gray, and red were hung with incredible precision. Cold metal sculptures stood tall as the hallway opened into a large, airy living room. Stark white carpeting filled this room, along with a black leather sofa, glass coffee table, and a large flat-screen television mounted to the wall. A white-brick fireplace opened just below the television.

“Wow. Not even my place is this clean,” Shyla said. She took a step on the carpet. Immediately, she pulled her shoe back and slid out of them. Jacy laughed. “Somehow, this place fits Coal perfectly.”

“Simple and yet complex. That’s my boy.” Jacy held no regards for the pristine carpeting and trekked across the room to one of the floor-to-ceiling windows that lined one full wall. He lifted the wooden slat of the blind and peeked out. “Coal wants you here. His home is impenetrable. He has every security precaution and alarm system known to man.”

“A bit paranoid?”

“No. It’s our business. We’re in security. Home security, personal bodyguard, those things. We’ve gotta make a living beyond the wild, sweetheart.” Jacy dropped the slat and turned to her. “He keeps the fridge and pantry stocked. He’s got every cable channel available.” Jacy pointed down a dark extension beyond the extremely contemporary kitchen with stainless steel appliances and black marble countertops. “Bedrooms and bathrooms are down there. If you feel the need to take a nap, make yourself comfortable. In fact, make yourself at home.”

“And you?” Shyla stepped over to one of the tall sculptures. There was nothing definitive about it other than that it looked like a scraggly steel tree with flat strips for branches.

“I’m going with Coal. You’re not to leave this place for any reason.”

Shyla looked back at him. He slid his cell phone from his jacket and handed it to her. She lifted a brow.

“Coal’s programmed on two. Len, three. If you can’t get in touch with either of them for any reason, you can call the numbers programmed up to eight. Everyone knows you’re here, and they’ll come right away.”

Shyla tucked the phone in her jean pocket. Her gaze followed Jacy as he stepped up to her and pulled her into the hot cavern of his body. She wrapped her arms around his waist and closed her eyes, inhaling the woody scent of his skin.

“I’m gonna lock you inside, Shyla. Don’t try to open any of the doors or windows. Everything is wired. You’ll be safe until we return.”

“How long will you be gone?”

“As long as it takes to find those who watched the house last night. They might lead us to Laela. She’s your greatest threat right now, and we’ve been trying to locate her for a few months, to no avail.”

Jacy leaned back, and Shyla tipped her face up to his. He kissed her, his hot mouth feeding her comfort as her legs weakened and the never-ending burn of desire licked at her lower belly. Her heart thudded against her chest. She didn't want to be left alone.

Shyla ended the kiss. "Does Coal always run after danger without stopping to plan out a strategy?"

"Coal's aggressive, but don't mistake that for being careless. He plans as he goes. He doesn't take shit from anyone, especially now that you're involved." He shrugged, tucking a lock of hair behind her ear, and smiled. "He's the best at what he does. He's a fearless hunter. I'm his balance. He needs someone to pull the reins when he dives headfirst into fire." He must have sensed her worry and added, "He'll be fine. We'll all be just fine."

Shyla stepped away from the hallway, allowing Jacy to pass. She watched him, admiring his confident walk, not to mention the way his jeans formed to his muscled legs and perfect rear. His dark blond hair brushed the collar of his jacket, the dim lighting reflecting off the glossy strands. At the door, he looked back, sunglasses in hand, and smiled. The sharp contours of his beautiful face held no doubt or fear. His green eyes glinted with a dark, wild hunger.

Shyla moistened her lips. His feral wolf side switched on her sexual lust with little to hold it back. Her eyes lowered from his to the open top of his shirt, then snapped back up to his gaze. He laughed.

"All you want in a few hours. Promise." He stepped out of the house and called back, "Don't open anything."

The door closed, and a series of clicks and beeps followed. Alone in a house that emanated masculine perfection and brought a yearning for Coal and Jacy, she rubbed her arms and headed down the adjacent hallway. Curiosity pulled her to the bedrooms. She wanted to see where Coal slept. She wanted to learn more about the brooding man who made her heart sputter and her mind roll, why he consumed her, even more than Jacy.

The first door opened to a guest room, simply furnished and

decorated. The second door opened to a lavish bathroom with black area rugs and accessories on gleaming white surfaces. The third door led into another world.

This had to be Coal's bedroom. With a California king-sized bed situated against the center of the far wall as the centerpiece, the room pulsed sexual prowess and masculinity. The walls were the same stark white. Cold metal sculptures adorned the wall around a black marble fireplace across from the foot of the bed. White taper candles filled the marble mantle. A black leather wingback chair was angled toward the fireplace with a round glass table beside it.

Shyla shrugged her shawl off her shoulders and moved over to the fireplace. She flipped a switch partially hidden by the sculpture. Smokeless flames burst to life next to her, sending her reeling back on a shriek. With her hand pressed to her chest to calm her pounding heart, she drew in a deep breath, settling her nerves.

"Coal, you're one hell of a multidimensional masterpiece, aren't you?" she asked the empty room. Sure her legs wouldn't collapse beneath her, she moved to the bed and ran a hand over the cool black satin comforter. Dark red needlework created a sharp, jagged design along the hem that matched the black curtains pulled closed over the windows. It reminded her of tribal art.

Shyla leaned over the bed, and her hands sank into the heavenly mattress. She climbed into the bed and stretched out over the comforter, nuzzling her face into the ultra soft fabric. Coal's spicy scent filled her lungs, her body, and her mind, making her ache. She closed her eyes with a moan, her arms and legs slowly gliding over the satin. Images of Coal making love to her stirred in her mind.

"God, what have you two done to me?" she whispered aloud. *I can't imagine being without you.*

A purr tickled the base of her throat, and she smiled. Maybe she'd have one more night with them before she left.

Memories would be her saving grace back home.

Chapter Ten

Coal's ears perked up. He stilled, the only motion coming from his ruffling black fur against the breeze's gentle breath.

Crack.

The dead twig snapped from behind him. He sniffed the air, trying to detect what approached, but the breeze kept the scent at bay. Lowering himself to his belly and moving below the brush line, he turned away from the trail and began to slink toward the sound.

The breeze shifted.

The enemy's foul odor assaulted his nostrils a split second before the bushes a few feet away parted and a wolf lunged at him.

With a threatening growl, Coal leaped from beneath the white and tan, spun, and pounced down on his back. White teeth snapped up at him, one sharp fang catching the side of his snout. Coal barked, deep and low in his throat, swatting a large paw at the wolf's face. The move might have been human, but it stunned the fool long enough for Coal to pin him to the ground, his dark body covering the lighter one.

"*Who sent you last night?*" he demanded. The white and tan struggled beneath him, small yelps escaping his throat as he fought. Coal pulled back his jowls in a snarl, showing off his razor-sharp teeth in the gloomy afternoon. "*I have no need for you if you won't cooperate. One more chance. Who sent you? Laela?*"

"She wants the white."

"She won't get the white."

"She won't stop."

"By force, I think she will." Coal sank his teeth into the tan and white's throat. The wolf howled, thrashing against Coal and the

ground until his struggle slowed and finally ceased. Coal snorted, climbing off the wolf. Licking the blood from his snout, he returned to the scent trail.

He didn't manage a yard before he heard the steady, padded approach of another animal. Preparing for a second attack, he lunged back on his haunches and waited.

"Coal, don't you fucking jump me. Oh, shit. What the hell did you do to him?"

Jacy rounded a tree and stood before him, gray fur rustling in the strengthening breeze. Immediately, Coal suppressed his wolf, and his animal body reshaped and molded into his human form.

"What the fuck are you doing here? I told you to stay with her," Coal snapped, smacking Jacy's shoulder.

Jacy took a swipe at his hand.

"Don't, you idiot. You're in for a fucking hell ride should anything happen to her."

The gray sat back. He watched his friend's body contort and conform to the human shape he was familiar with. Naked, just as he, Jacy brushed back hair from his eyes and arched a brow.

"You really think I would leave her without making sure she's safe? Christ, Coal. Your house is the next best thing to a high-security federal prison, minus the barbed wire and uniforms. I'm not about to let you take on however many renegade wolves solo." Jacy leaned in toward him, green eyes ablaze. "Both of us will return to her, as long as we do this together. Don't go frightening our little pet again, got it?"

Despite his bristling reaction to Jacy's response, Coal calmed the anger that ripped through him. His home was safe. Who was he to deny Jacy some bloodshed?

"Laela wants Shyla. That's all I got from that one," Coal said.

"Tell us something new. You know who he was?"

"No. I'm not standing around to find out either. There's another. Shouldn't be too far ahead." Coal submitted to his wild wolf. His

bones reformed, his joints popped, and his fur grew.

“*Behind—*” Jacy never finished the warning. His reshaping body flew past him.

Coal didn’t have time to react. The force of the blow at his back sent him sprawling to the ground. He rolled onto his back, willing the change to finish. He heard the whoosh of air in his mind as Jacy’s body smacked into a tree.

Coal drew all four paws into his body and thrust outward, shoving the wolf off him only to have a second leap on top of him. Growling a threat, the second wolf hesitated, but the first wolf attacked.

Teeth bore into his shoulder. He barked, lifting his hind legs into the tender underbelly of the first wolf. He arched his paws and ripped his nails down flesh. The wolf howled and hopped back. The second wolf began to slink away. Coal flipped over onto his paws and stole a quick look in Jacy’s direction.

Three wolves had descended upon him, all viciously snapping deadly white fangs at any exposed area on his friend.

The first wolf leaped at Coal, hooked paws on his shoulders, and dug nails into his muscles. Coal shot his head around and caught the tip of his snout between his teeth. Mewls scraped along his eardrums as he clamped down harder, drawing blood that streamed over his tongue and to the back of his throat. Raw, primal instinct conquered his mind as the second wolf came at him again.

Battling five blood-hungry, death-hunting wolves, the only thing that could save them was instinct.

Coal snapped a command at Jacy just before he cut the only remaining thread holding him to his wolf.

* * * *

Her lovers filled her dreams, but she woke alone.

Shyla sighed, stretching her arms over her head before rubbing her eyes.

The bed shifted beside her. Half expecting to have one of her two men roll on top of her and make love to her, she peeled back her eyelids with a sultry smile.

“Hello, Shyla. We finally meet after all these years.”

Shyla shot upright and scrambled to the edge of the bed. The woman grabbed her arm and yanked her back, a dark smile on her mouth. Her eyes, frost blue and nearly translucent, sparked with a basic predator triumph. Her wild blonde hair caped her to the waist. She wore nothing but a sheer pair of panties.

Shyla tried to twist her arm away as she slid her feet to the floor. Stretched over the mattress, she gained leverage and yanked her arm.

“No. I don’t think so.”

The woman latched on farther up her arm. Shyla’s body tumbled back onto the bed, knocking into the woman. She hissed, shoving Shyla off her.

“Who are you?” Shyla demanded. Her mind worked in overdrive, trying to devise an escape. Whoever this bitch was definitely had the upper hand with strength.

“I’m the deliverer of your birthright, child. Your *other* birthright.” The woman chuckled. She pulled something from beneath a pile of black clothing and held it up for Shyla to see.

A short silver knife reflected the illumination from the fire like hellish glass. Her blood ran cold.

“Don’t run. I’m a perfect shot,” the woman warned, her cruel smile still toying with the corners of her mouth.

“Who are you? How’d you get in here?” Shyla asked, buying time. The knife just lowered her chances of an unscathed escape. If the woman was a perfect shot, Shyla would be an easy target starting out so close.

“My name is Laela, and I’m the leader of the Dark Moon pack, and all the packs around here. I don’t appreciate you coming and stirring things up. See, first off, the two men who’ve been fucking you like a common whore belong to me. That’s all you are to them, a

common little fuck whore.” Laela scoured a frigid gaze over Shyla. The woman raked ice down her front. “Second, we don’t like white wolves here. They’re marked for slaughter. Have you heard of the Blood Moon Legacy?”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about, all this white wolf shit,” Shyla spat. Maybe playing ignorance would help her cause.

Laela scowled. She slid to the edge of the bed and climbed off, brandishing her knife as a stark reminder of who had control. Shyla cast a glance toward the bedroom door and quickly dismissed the obvious means of escape. Laela paced between her and the door.

“How’d you get in? This place is on lockdown,” Shyla repeated. Laela paused and cast her a subfreezing glance. Shyla stood her ground, sitting on her knees and leaning forward on her fists.

“They may think they’re smart when, in fact, they’re idiots. Your two alphas have a nose worth envying. I know where Coal lives. It’s not a secret. Everyone knows, especially the women he brings back here.”

Laela’s cruel grin melted into a cold smile. Her eyes flickered with frost as Shyla’s heart skipped and her stomach rolled. She didn’t like the idea of Coal bringing women here, in this house, in this room.

Her fingers curled into the satin comforter. The shadow in her mind expanded and teased, whispering for release. It was the very shadow that brought a wolf to life in the place of a human.

“Jacy left some clothes at Jacob’s cabin. I used them to cloak my scent and slipped into the house behind you. Both of you fools had no idea.” Laela tipped her nose up and inhaled deeply. “The mixture of Jacy and Coal is strong enough to mask a hundred wolves.” She laughed, further freezing blood in Shyla’s veins. “A hundred wolves couldn’t keep you safe from me. I helped kill your mother. I’ll kill you. This is my area, my packs, and my wilderness. My territory.” The knife glinted. “I don’t tolerate trespassers and man thieves.”

Shyla tucked away the bitterness that erupted in her mind. She wasn’t going to let Laela chisel away her protective barriers by

tossing a line at her regarding a mother she never knew.

The shadow grew until it scraped the walls of her mind. The wolf twisted and turned, wanting to come out. Her fingers flexed and splayed, her body leaning heavily on her hands. Joints in her hands began to ache and change.

Trying her damndest to suppress the alien creature threatening to consume her, she halted the subtle beginnings of change. However, her bones didn't return to normal.

"Where are they now?" she growled.

Laela shrugged, then laughed. "Do you really think I'd be here if I didn't make sure those two were as good as insect food? I have my loyal pack on them as we speak. Coal and Jacy might be admirable and fearless creatures, but not even they can withhold the strength of six wolves. Don't expect them to come to your rescue."

Shyla's heart raced as adrenaline spurted through her body. She followed Laela as the woman paced the room, the silver knife turning over in her hand, catching the glow of firelight and reflecting the orange against the stark white walls. Shyla sat back on her heels and paused as the woman crossed over to the bedroom door. She had forgotten about the cell phone in her pocket, now digging into her hip. With Laela's back to her, she dug it out and stuffed it between her legs.

"I wanted to kill you in front of them. I wanted them to watch each cut I make on your pretty little face." Laela kicked the bedroom door closed, turned, and tipped the edge of the knife to accentuate her point. "Each jab into your pretty little chest. Just like I did with your mother. I stabbed her over and over. I listened as blood filled her lungs. I watched her spirit light her eyes in fear before I extinguished it."

Shyla's shoulders stiffened. She stared at Laela as the creature spun in circles, her hair spreading out around her, exposing her naked body to the room. She lifted her face to the ceiling and laughed. Shyla took the brief opportunity to reach her fingers between her thighs,

press the number three on the cell phone keypad, and dial Len. She closed her legs over the phone to silence any noises that might draw attention from the crazed woman twirling like a carefree child.

Only this child wielded a deadly knife and even deadlier intentions.

"I never knew my mom. Your attempts to frighten me with her murder do little," Shyla said, muffling the connecting of the call and Len's husky "Yeah." She separated her legs just a tad, enough for the man to hear the conversation and hopefully get the hint she was in trouble. "You killed her, but I still lived. I was hidden from everything and everyone. I grew up knowing nothing about my family, my culture, or these absurd legacies you keep mentioning. I'm not a wolf. Get that through your head."

"Oh, Shyla."

Laela stopped spinning and focused that icy blue stare on her. She lifted a blonde brow, and a mischievous grin tugged the corners of her mouth. Shyla shifted back on the bed, the cell phone sliding easily over the satin comforter. She had to hide the phone and get away from here.

"My men told me you shifted into a wolf while Coal claimed you last night. He's good in bed, isn't he? That man's incredible. And Jacy. I've had them, and I hoped to continue to enjoy their bed play. But you had to go and ruin it. You ruined everything."

"I doubt you've had them in bed. They would've said so."

Although that she couldn't be so sure of. She barely knew the two men who vowed to keep her safe. The wolf inside her body churned the spark of doubt in her gut. Had they intentionally brought her here to set her up? Were they part of this plot with Laela to dispense of another white wolf? After all, Coal coaxed her into changing in the middle of the woods, where anyone could have seen, and Jacy brought her to this house, where only he and Coal had access.

Oh my God.

Shyla tried to swallow the swelling knot in her throat. Laela

stalked over to the bed and swiped the silver blade across her arm before she could react. Heat seared the open wound, pain clawing into her mind and making her stomach roil. Clamping a hand over the gash and fighting the sting of tears in her eyes, she threw herself backward as Laela came in for another shot.

“What is...?”

Shyla rolled off the bed. When she glanced up at Laela, the woman’s gaze was locked on the cell phone poking out from beneath the clothing. Shit, she hadn’t pushed it completely under!

“You conniving little bitch,” the woman growled, grabbing the cell phone and heaving it into a wall. Shyla gasped when it slammed into the plaster, plastic shattering and paint chipping from the force of impact. Her ears rang with the resounding smack and adrenaline-induced rush of blood.

Laela leaped onto the bed. Shyla bolted toward the door, knocking over the chair and glass table on her way. The evil creature behind her barked. Shyla pressed forward without a glance back, heart racing, blood pumping, stomach knotting until it entwined a new pain with the throbbing effects of her cut.

Her blood-slick hand slid off the door handle as she tried to slam it closed behind her. She stumbled into the wall, leaving a bright red smear on the pristine white. Grimacing with the relentless stabbing of pain in her arm, she lunged forward, pressing her legs to move through the house until she reached the door.

Then what would she do?

The bedroom door crashed into the wall. She cast a glance over her shoulder. Laela bounded down the hallway, eyes flashing and lips pulled back from fanged teeth. The shadow in her spirit roared to life, slashing through the barriers of her human strength until fur spiked out over every inch of her body and every bone beneath her skin reconfigured into the form of a wolf.

Fear pierced her in a split second. She had been in wolf form only once before and had little control over the awkward, alien body. Now,

her gaze tunneled on the woman diving through the air toward her, she had no chance to adjust to this new creature before the more experienced one would mutilate her.

Laela's transformation occurred just as she landed feet from Shyla. Nails scraped over the wooden floor. Shyla padded backward, her hind legs buckling and landing her on her hip. The other wolf snarled and leaped on top of her, wrestling her to the floor. Panic surged through her. She couldn't adjust to this body and had no advantage point against Laela. She thrashed madly beneath her enemy, swiping paws at the tan snout each time Laela made an attempt to bite into her.

"Foolish little white. Fighting against the wolf will only bring your death that much sooner."

Shyla yelped as teeth grazed over her front leg. She lifted her hind legs and hooked them beneath Laela's head, thrusting upward. Laela's massive wolf body flung to the side, teeth tearing open the skin on her arm. A new stream of bright red stained her white coat and dripped onto the floor.

Shyla flipped to her four paws and jumped onto the counter. She looked down at Laela as the wolf regained her composure. The woman might have intended her snide remark as a threat, but she gave Shyla a valuable piece of information in her time of need. Give in to the wolf.

She leaped off the counter and into the living room. Laela growled as she rounded the counter and barreled toward her. The massive female slammed into her side. The force of the assault rolled both of them over until they crashed into the metal frame of a window. Shyla scrambled to gain her footing, forcing the logical human side of her to submit to the more primal beast.

Her paws anchored to the rug, and she came out on top. Her wolf snapped teeth at the enemy beneath her. *Hunt, fight, kill. Dispose of the danger. Protect yourself.*

The wolf squirmed and threw Shyla off balance. The wood-slatted

blinds tore off the window in a shrieking rumble. Laela escaped the blanket of wood, but Shyla became tangled in their unyielding net. She fought against the encasement around her large body as her wolf's confusion echoed in her spirit.

"How pathetic, you measly little white. You bring shame to our kind," Laela sneered in her mind. Shyla's back paw became wrapped in the blind string, snaring her in this death trap. She looked at Laela, who appeared to be smiling.

The wolf sat back.

Then she lunged.

A piercing shatter filled the dense air, making her cringe and her sensitive ears ring. Objects sprinkled over her, plinking off the wooden slats and burrowing in her thick fur. A smear of black caught her attention, followed by the loud mewl of an injured wolf.

Shyla maneuvered enough to get her head out from beneath the blinds. Her heart seized, and her breath caught in her throat.

"Coal!"

Her immense black wolf rolled with Laela's tan, entangled in a brutal mass of fur. Teeth snapped, growls reverberated, and paws swiped, but never once did Coal buckle. His silence was frightening, the air about him lethal.

Something pulled at the string around her hind leg. She whipped her head around and snapped.

"Easy, dear. I'm getting you out."

A tiny noise escaped her mouth. She couldn't speak words as she watched Len work the string from around her leg. He stood where the window once barred the outside from inside. As he pulled the last loop of string free, she bucked to her feet, but Len grabbed her around the shoulders and held her back.

"Don't. He's wild, and he'll harm you without intending to do so. Come with me. Coal'll be fine."

Shyla looked back at Coal and Laela. Coal plunged his head down and buried his teeth into Laela's throat. The sound that escaped her

stabbed ice into her heart. Cold seeped through her body as death spread through her enemy's. Len tugged back on her gently, easing her through the shattered window.

"Where's Jacy"?

"He's handling the wolves in the forest," Len answered.

Shyla turned her head up to him.

The man smiled, lifting her off her paws until they were away from any broken glass.

"You can hear me too?"

Len chuckled and nodded. "There are a few things we'll have to teach you about telepathy. You're on a general link. Anyone listening within range can hear you." He led her quickly along the deck and down the stairs at the side of the house.

"I want to change back. Help me change back."

"Wait until we get to the cabin. You'll need clothing."

"Oh." If she wasn't a wolf, she would have blushed profusely. *"You got here fast."*

"I'm never far away, Shyla. There is always someone nearby, especially with you in the area. Coal and Jacy would never allow anyone to harm you." Len's eyes lowered to her stained coat, and a sigh escaped him.

Shyla smiled, but it felt more like a sneer on her oblong mouth.

"I'll stitch up the wound made by the silver. The other should heal within a short time."

Chapter Eleven

Jacy angled himself in front of Coal's wolf and crossed his arms over his chest. His gaze lowered to the desecrated animal lying in a pool of blood and patches of fur.

"Bro, you didn't need to go that far."

Coal growled, a dangerous rumble from deep in his throat. His jowls trembled as they pulled back, baring sharp fangs still stained with the blood of his kill. Pointed ears pressed flat against his head, and black eyes glimmered with frost blue. His friend pressed back, preparing to attack.

"Damn it, Coal. Don't make me get the Taser. It's never a pretty sight when you come through." Jacy shook his head. "Surely you wouldn't want Shyla to see you like this. She's waiting for us back at Smith's place. Len brought her there."

Coal's persistent growl stopped. His jowls settled over his teeth, but he didn't straighten out of his attack stance.

"Shyla? Our mate? Remember her?" Jacy groaned, combing a hand through his hair. He stepped closer to Coal. "I can't stand it when you give yourself completely to the wolf. It's a chore to get you back."

Coal's ears lifted and pricked upward.

"Yeah, Shyla Smith. Our white wolf. The one we both love and whose mouth you keep hogging. I'll tell you this much, Coal Demmering. That mouth will be mine. I'll kiss her until you're boiling with jealousy and about to combust—"

Jacy absorbed the brunt of Coal's body as his friend dove into him, knocking him into the wall. He laughed, watching Coal

transform into his human self.

“Well, that wasn’t hard,” he said, trying to tamp down his laughter. Coal stared at him, fingers bunched in Jacy’s jacket, until a smile slowly crept over his mouth. Jacy laughed harder, and Coal’s chuckle soon melted with his. “Man, you’re so wrapped. All I have to do is mention her name, and your attention is grabbed.”

“So it is.” Coal stepped back, and Jacy straightened off the wall, easing his laughter.

He wiped a tear from his eye and smoothed out his jacket. With a short nod to the dead wolf, he said, “What’re we doing with her?”

“Getting her out of my house. We’ll drop her in the woods on our way to Smith’s.”

Jacy watched his friend assess the damages done to his home. “We’ll be cleaning this place up, along with Len’s.”

“Shyla’s hurt?” Coal asked, turning to Jacy.

He nodded once and stepped around his friend. “Laela cut her arm with a silver dagger and left some teeth marks on her forearm. Len’s gonna stitch her up and tend to her wounds.”

Jacy pressed his lips together and trekked down to the bedroom. Coal followed at his heels. They both paused outside Coal’s bedroom, eyes lingering on the large smear of blood over the wall. Jacy glanced over at Coal. His friend’s mouth was pulled tight, and his jaw twitched.

“Len assured me she’s fine,” Jacy said. Coal growled and shook his head, raking his fingers through his hair. Jacy grabbed his arm and forced Coal to look at him. “Hey, it could’ve been worse.”

“It shouldn’t have been *this*,” Coal snapped, waving a hand at the blood. “We promised her safety, and look what happened.”

“Coal, get clothes on, and let’s go. We’ve got a lot to do, and Shyla’s surely waiting for us.”

* * * *

Shyla was hurt.

The smell of her blood, sweet and pungent, burned into his memory as Jacy drove them to Smith's cabin. Coal could barely sit still in the passenger seat, itching to reach Shyla and see just how bad her wounds were.

Damn, he'd never forgive himself for this.

Despite Jacy's calm exterior, his friend battled with his own uncertainty and guilt. After dumping Laela's body in the woods, a tenuous silence hovered between them. They both focused on Shyla and her well-being.

Jacy guided the Mercedes along the dirt driveway. Coal wrapped his fingers around the door handle. As soon as the cabin came into view, he threw open the door and jumped out of the moving car. Jacy jammed on the brakes as he sprinted to the cabin and burst through the rickety screen door.

Two sets of eyes shot up to him from the sofa.

Coal's heart thudded in his head. Shyla's mouth curled in a shaky smile. Her eyes brimmed with tears, and her face held a red hue.

"Welcome back," Len said, pulling thread through Shyla's skin. She winced. "I'm just about through."

Coal rounded the sofa, sat on the edge of the cushion, and cupped Shyla's damp face in his hands. He kissed her, tasting her mouth and reveling in the relief that she was okay.

"You were supposed to be safe there. I don't know how she got past—"

Shyla pressed a single finger to his lips.

"She snuck in behind Jacy and me. She used his clothing as a cover. You did nothing wrong."

"We left you alone. You shouldn't have been alone."

"And you came to my rescue."

Shyla sucked in a sharp breath and squeezed her eyes shut. Coal's gaze shot to Len.

"Don't tell me you're stitching her without an anesthetic," he said.

Len shrugged, easing the thread through a new hole.

“She didn’t want one.”

“You should’ve given her something regardless.”

“I can handle it, Coal,” Shyla assured. Coal looked at her as Jacy stormed into the house.

“Shyla,” Jacy murmured, closing the space between him and their mate. He knelt down on the floor in front of her. “You’ve been crying.”

“No. Just—ouch—getting sewn up.”

“Done,” Len said, straightening up and placing the needle in a small box on the floor.

Coal lowered his hands from her face and wove his fingers through her unoccupied ones. Jacy held on to her other. Len used a wet cloth to dab away the remaining blood from her arm before wrapping the wound with bandages.

“Baths until the wound heals. Boys, don’t you be adding additional stress to the wound. And do not try to shift until it’s healed either.”

“How long until the stitches can come out?” Shyla asked.

Coal caressed her rosy cheek and placed a soft kiss against her temple. He expected her to lean into him, but she continued to sit straight with her eyes locked on Len. An alien emptiness settled in his chest, and he almost pulled her into his arms to fill that void.

“A few days, at least. We’ll have to see how fast your body can heal against the infectious silver. Whites have been known to hold superior healing capabilities, and I doubt you’d differ from that.”

“Thank you, Len,” Shyla said. A frown threatened the corner of her mouth as she looked down at her arm. Guilt swept through his body, and he turned her face to him. Mist dimmed her eyes, and conflict battled in the air around her. He didn’t like what he sensed, but he refused to pester her regarding it.

“Nothing will happen to you again, Shyla. Nothing,” Coal whispered. He tucked her hair behind her ear. “As long as we’re here,

you'll be the safest person in the world."

"I know," she replied with equal softness. Her eyes lowered. The simplicity of her answer did little to settle the restless turning in his gut.

Len pressed to his feet, and Jacy immediately occupied his seat. He guided Shyla into his chest. Coal stared at him, cursing for not having done so himself. The onslaught of jealousy, regret, and immeasurable love threatened to tear apart his control.

Coal Demmering never lost control, and here he sat, ready to do whatever it took to regain Shyla's trust in them both.

"I'd suggest you three rest. It's been a trying day for everyone, especially our sweet little Shyla," Len said, gathering his suturing kit. He cast a smile in their direction before heading toward the door. "I expect to see you boys at my shop in a day or two. I'm missing my kitchen."

"Of course." Coal looked at Len and nodded. "Thanks for your help."

"Don't be thanking me, Coal. You know you never need to thank me."

The door closed, and Coal turned his attention back to Shyla. She stared at him with a mixture of emotions running so deep in her eyes while tucked in Jacy's arms. He lifted her hand to his mouth and kissed her knuckles, never once breaking their gaze.

"We're even, love. I scared you, and you've done the same to me." The emptiness in his heart grew when she closed her eyes and turned her face into Jacy's arm. He toyed with the right words in his mind until his stomach rolled. *"I love you, Shyla. I don't cope well with the idea of harm befalling you."*

He noticed the breath hitch in her chest. It stopped in midrise. Her forehead creased so slightly he nearly missed it before it smoothed. Her fingers tightened around his.

The unsettlement surrounding her made him bristle. He looked up at Jacy and noticed a similar unease behind his friend's green eyes.

“We should get you in bed so you can rest,” Jacy said to Shyla. He never turned his gaze away from Coal.

“*I am* tired,” she agreed.

Coal eased Shyla off Jacy and scooped her into his arms. She nestled against him with her body, but her spirit remained separate from her, doing little to soothe his mounting anxiety. He carried her into the bedroom and settled her into the bed, careful not to bang her arm, and leaned over to grace her mouth with a soft kiss. She lifted a hand to his face and traced over his cheek with airy fingers. Then she rolled over and closed her eyes.

“If you need anything, we’ll be here.”

Coal hesitated before turning to leave. Whatever resided in the air around her, he couldn’t put his finger on it. Shyla’s mind remained disturbingly quiet, but he associated that with the trauma from the afternoon. Still, her eyes spoke the puzzled weave of expressions her thoughts did not, and he had difficulty trying to decipher the silent conversation.

He crossed through the door and shut it behind him. A sigh touched his mind, bringing him to pause.

“*I’m sorry, Coal.*”

* * * *

Jacy slept, but Coal remained awake, bothered by the three words Shyla had whispered in his mind hours ago. Despite his fatigue, his heart ached and his mind scrambled to piece together why she would be sorry when it was he who continued to battle his guilt. Things could’ve turned out much worse than they had, but they shouldn’t have gotten as bad as they did.

Coal stepped outside. The frigid night air and lashing wind cooled the fever of his skin and helped to suppress a headache that had formed over the foundation of his endless thoughts. He never had headaches. Hell, he never had guilt or overwhelming worry.

He had never loved before.

The screen door rattled in the frame, and the cabin shutters creaked. The trees swayed as the wind howled between their arthritic branches. Clouds painted strokes of dark gray against a black sky, obscuring the luminescent white glow of the full moon. His body yearned to be with Shyla, but he restrained the desires while she recuperated. He and Jacy gave her the space they assumed she wanted. Now, his wolf cried to be with his mate, and he couldn't bring himself to shake the distancing air about her.

But why? Why would she want to distance herself from him? Didn't she love him in return? Didn't she love them both?

A brutal lash of wind whipped across the porch, abrasive and merciless. The screen trembled, and wood smacked. The cabin creaked. He should probably secure everything so the noise wouldn't wake Shyla.

He stepped back inside and moved silently through the house until he reached the back bedroom.

"Jacy, wake your ass up, and help me secure the shutters. There's a storm coming in off the coast, and the wind's picking up."

A strange sound entwined with the wind as Jacy stirred awake. Coal slid into the kitchen, picking up on the unusual purr.

His gut clenched.

"Jacy, up!"

"What the fuck's your problem? You're gonna wake Shyla," Jacy grumbled.

Coal beelined through the cabin until he came to the front bedroom.

The bed lay empty except for a single piece of paper.

Coal grabbed the paper, rushed through the house, and burst through the front door just as the rental car's taillights lit up down the driveway.

"Get my key!" Coal bellowed. He jumped off the porch and sprinted after the car. The faster he ran, the farther the car seemed to

be. Sweat broke out along his hairline. The muscles in his legs began to burn as he pressed his limits. His heartbeat thundered in his head.

“Shyla!”

The brakes were tapped, igniting a bright red light that stung his eyes. Then, tires bit into the dirt and the car sped ahead, leaving him too far behind to catch up.

Coal came to a stop, breathing heavily as the last hint of brake light disappeared. Behind him, the Mercedes sped down the driveway. The headlights elongated his shadow, stretching it out for Shyla’s car.

He looked down at the paper crumpled in his fist and opened the note. He skimmed it quickly, not comprehending the words each letter spelled.

Jacy pulled up alongside him and threw open the passenger door.

“Get in,” he demanded.

Coal slid into the seat and slammed the door closed as Jacy took off after Shyla.

He knew, deep down, they would never catch her. Her distancing had led up to this very moment.

“What’s that in your hand?” Jacy asked.

“She left a note.”

“A note? What does it say?”

Coal balled up the piece of paper and pitched it into the windshield with a growl. Jacy arched a brow at him.

“Read it yourself.”

The words had stabbed into Coal worse than watching her fade into the night. They raked open his heart and poured out its contents. He couldn’t have prepared himself for the emotional toll loving a woman would cause. Fuck, he never thought she’d really leave!

Her note said everything in a matter of sentences.

Coal and Jacy,

You’ve stormed my life in ways I never imagined, and I hold no regrets during our time together. But my life is not here and not with

you. I'm sorry for the injuries you've sustained because of me. I never wished pain upon you. Please, do not try to follow me. I need to do this by myself. I need to be by myself.

Shyla

Chapter Twelve

Leaving Hood River had been tough.

Abandoning Coal and Jacy had been agonizing.

Nothing should have welcomed her home more than the constant hustle and bustle of city life. In all her years living in the metropolitan area, New York City had greeted her with open arms and smothered her in the modern-day rat race. Elbow-to-elbow pedestrians rushed down the sidewalks, restaurants displayed fabulous menus, the constant revving of vehicle engines and screeching of tires all should have made her happy. Gazing upon the skyscrapers that reached into the clouds, looming overhead with their intimidating stature, should have made her sigh with wonder. This was home.

At least it used to be, but not anymore.

Shyla tossed the pencil across her office and dropped her head in her hands with a quivering sigh. Her stomach churned, threatening to purge the small serving of cereal she'd forced herself to eat that morning. Almost two full weeks had passed since her return, and each day drove her closer and closer to a painful death due to separation. Every night she'd go home and curl up in bed, praying tears would allow her eyes rest for one day, only to have it trigger the opening of a floodgate.

This was her choice, her doing. She had brought this on herself. *She* had left them.

Why then, did this separation gut her spirit, mercilessly shred her heart, and leave her body hollow and cold? Why did the pain only intensify with the passing of an hour, a day, a week?

Why did Coal's words haunt her just as the images of those two

men consumed her every thought?

I love you, Shyla.

Her chin trembled, a soft whimper escaping her lips. She curled her fingers in her hair, barely noticing the pain as she pulled at her roots. God, she felt sick with longing.

She dropped her fists to her desk with a sharp thud that resonated up through her arms. She climbed to her feet and moved to her office window to gaze upon the premium view of lower Manhattan, but it failed to comfort her and take her mind off her anguish. Nothing could make her feel better about her decision to return home. The noise, the smell, the glitz and glamour of Broadway and Times Square overwhelmed her senses, hurt her ears, made her skin crawl. The pollution burned her nose, and the shadow of her wolf protested her determination to stay in this place.

“Wolf,” she whispered, her breath fogging the cold windowpane. The lower portion of the city blurred. The shadow paced in her mind. Her body began to react, from the tingling along her skin as fur formed just below the surface, to the swelling of her bones. “No. Not here. Not now.”

You don't belong here. You belong in the wild. You belong with your mates.

Damn her inner voice for anchoring down in her open wounds. Damn her broken heart for waking to Coal and Jacy. Damn the secrets withheld from her up until two weeks ago.

“Damn me for leaving,” she sighed.

* * * *

“What the fuck do you want me to do about it?” Coal barked.

Jacy looked up at his friend and quirked a brow. Their client, obviously stunned, parted his lips. Coal sat back in his chair and folded his arms over his chest, his gaze level with the young man across the desk.

“It’s not our fucking system.”

“Coal, chill out,” Jacy warned. He slammed the filing drawer shut, the unit shaking against the force. He stepped up to the young man and rested a hand on his shoulder, keeping him seated even as he readied to stand. “Pardon my friend. He had a rough night.”

“Bad night. Sure,” the man said.

Coal’s lip turned up in the beginning of a snarl. Jacy shot him a hard glance and watched the snarl disappear.

“Listen, why don’t you bring me your current company’s information, and I’ll see what I can do about smoothing out the operations, okay? If you don’t mind meeting me at Joan’s in town in about an hour?”

The man looked up at him, most likely scrutinizing his sincerity after Coal’s snide remarks. Hell, he understood just where that bitterness spurted from. For almost two weeks, he’d been fighting his own growing doubt that Shyla would return. His heart was no longer light, and the playful nature people knew him by began to fizzle out of him, leaving him empty and on the brink of becoming...well, Coal.

However, this was business, and he had a few choice words to share with his partner.

“An hour,” the client grumbled. He pressed to his feet and left the office.

Jacy sighed inwardly, turning to Coal. The man leaned forward on his elbow, bowing his head over the desktop. He smoothed his hands over his pulled-back hair and folded them under his chin.

“Hey, bro. We’re both hurting, but taking it out on our clientele isn’t good for business,” Jacy said. He rounded the side of the desk and leaned against it, crossing his ankles. Silence met him louder than a storm’s wind through the trees. He looked down at Coal. “She’ll be back. It’s insane to believe she can stay away for much longer. We’re mates, bro. That’s gotta count for something.”

“I appreciate your optimism, but don’t you think it’s time to smarten up?” Coal asked. The pain woven in his otherwise flat tone

infected Jacy's spirit, reflecting the brutal reality he had suppressed since Shyla left.

"I don't have any reasons to doubt she'll return. She will, you'll see. Until then, chasing clients out the door with your fangs bared isn't going to help us here."

"Fuck, Jacy, she's been gone two weeks. Mates or not, right or wrong, she would've been back by now. You believe she can't stay away long. In my book, long is more than a few hours." Coal cocked his head and turned his eyes up to Jacy, his cheek resting on his fists.

Jacy shrugged, forcing a smile in light of Coal's logic.

"You don't believe she's coming back either."

"I'm not giving up, Coal. Not me."

"Neither am I, but I'm facing the stark reality. She ripped out my heart and shredded it as she drove down that driveway."

"Why don't we go get her? Bring her back here?"

"And what? Hold her prisoner? Force her to see what she did was foolish?" Coal groaned. Jacy straightened off his hip as his friend climbed to his feet. "No. I'm not about that, and neither are you."

"Maybe not, but I'm also not about giving up hope."

Coal cast him a feral glance that almost succeeded in hiding the raw anguish in his spirit. His eyes reminded Jacy of a black hole, fathomless, hollow, and cold. As his grieving brother brushed past him and disappeared into the main house, Jacy pinched his forehead.

"Christ, woman, don't prove me wrong. We need you back here. We need you."

* * * *

Shyla cruised her car to a stop alongside the curb and cut the engine. She stared at the building for a long minute. Her stomach twisted and knotted, threatening to reject the pretzels she had snacked on. Now, she couldn't stand having anything in her stomach, and the fluttering of her heart did little to help calm her nerves.

God, two weeks was too long.

Taking a deep breath, Shyla climbed out of the car. Shaky legs carried her tingling body to the door, which stood open. Hammering and the pop of nail guns resounded through the store. The smell of fresh-cut wood teased her nose, making her sneeze.

Enough procrastinating.

Shaking her nerves into place, she stepped through the door and looked around.

The diner had completely transformed in her absence. New wood floors had been laid. The walls were all repainted a seafoam green. New fans and panes of glass replaced the old broken ones.

Shyla swallowed. The memory of the fight still played in her mind as if it happened yesterday. She had never felt so frightened about losing someone as she had about Coal, even if he had been practically a stranger.

Shyla blinked, having drifted off in thought. A woman stared back at her, holding a paint palette and paintbrush, her cheeks and smock smeared with streaks of color.

“Uh, hi,” Shyla said.

The woman lifted a brow.

“I’m Shyla—”

“I know who you are. Everyone knows who you are,” the woman said, rather curtly.

Shyla straightened her shoulders. Of course everyone would know her if Coal and Jacy told them she ran away.

“I was hoping to find—”

“He’s in the back.”

“Thank you,” Shyla said, biting back the urge to scold the woman for being rude. Then again, she had no right to be angry with anyone other than herself. She ran away after the dangers she put them in.

Keeping her chin up, she made her way through the diner. She paused at the back door and peered out.

And there, hoisting huge slabs of wood into a pile next to the

Dumpster, she spotted Jacy.

For a long moment, she watched him work. Despite the icy air, he wore no shirt, leaving his delicious, muscle-corded body bare for her eyes to course. Each hoist flexed the cut muscles in his arms and stomach, making her mouth go dry while the lower regions of her body became moist.

Jacy's back stiffened, and his head snapped around. She knew the instant his gaze connected with hers, even behind the sunglasses. Her body melted, and emotions swelled to outstanding proportions. She had hoped to make it through this without shedding a tear, but the sight of him again made her eyes sting.

"Shyla?" he asked, lowering the piece of wood in his hands to the ground. He straightened up, turning completely toward her, but didn't approach.

"It's me," she said, her voice a degree softer than intended.

"Why the hell did you go?"

"I was confused."

"So you left?"

"Yes."

"That's rather stupid, don't you think?"

Her face flushed beneath his sharp interrogation. She shifted and hugged herself, lowering her eyes from the scalding gaze that threatened to melt away the dark lenses of his sunglasses. There was nothing playful about Jacy at the moment.

"Had we wanted to stop you, we could've. A friend told us you went to the airport. It wasn't a secret," Jacy said.

"And you chose not to," Shyla responded, scuffing the toe of her sneaker on the wood floor.

"That's not what you wanted. You wanted us to leave you alone. So we left you alone."

Jacy's chuckle caught her attention, and she looked up at him. A smile replaced the cold, hard line of his mouth, softening his handsome face.

“I wasn’t worried. I knew you’d come back.” He crossed the open lot, but Shyla ran into him, meeting him halfway.

She jumped into his open arms and squeezed him tightly. She inhaled the familiar scent of woods and masculinity that she knew belonged to one of the two men she adored. His hair slipped between her fingers like silk, a soft mewl escaping her lips.

Jacy laughed. “Two weeks pressed the limit, though. If you hadn’t come back in another day or two, I would’ve dragged you back here myself.”

Shyla smiled, leaning back in his arms. She cupped his face, brushed her thumbs over his lips, pressed her mouth to his. Her kiss was short, and when she pulled away, his hand whipped up to the back of her head, stilling her. His tongue rolled through her mouth, stroking her desires, sweet moisture seeping from her heat. His hands crushed her hips against his. Shyla couldn’t resist touching him, caressing the familiar planes of his bare chest, the cuts and curves of his pecs.

Jacy turned his head slightly, ending the kiss and nuzzling his cheek against hers. “Damn, I’ve missed you.”

“I’ve missed you too. And Coal? Where’s he?” Shyla asked.

“Home. He’s been keeping busy while his heart heals.”

Shyla stepped back and frowned. Jacy shrugged a shoulder, pulling her back into him. Silent degradation threatened to mark her already shamed spirit in light of Coal’s current standing. She pressed her forehead to Jacy’s solid shoulder and sighed.

“I know what you’re thinking. Coal’s a tough bastard. He’s steel on two legs, or four, depending on the day. Even the strongest person has a weakness, and you’ve proven to be his.”

“You’ve taken it well.”

“I told you I knew you’d be back. Coal, on the other hand, didn’t believe me. He was sure you left for good, ripping his heart out as you drove off.”

Shyla closed her eyes and listened to the sturdy thump of Jacy’s

heart, reminding herself she deserved the stark words he delivered to her even if he meant them humorously. She'd hurt both her men, both her mates, but they didn't know just how much she'd hurt herself running away.

If she ripped Coal's heart from his chest and caused Jacy pain equivalent to that, she had shredded her heart and spirit to pieces the moment she stepped on the plane back to New York.

"Will you take me to him?" she asked.

"Of course. Maybe you can lighten up that surly ass enough to stop scaring customers away." His mouth brushed the tender area just below her ear, and she shivered. The gentle scrape of his teeth over her skin made her heart skip. If she didn't need to mend wounds caused by her desperate need for separation, she would have begged him to make love to her right there in the back lot.

Her fingers dug into his shoulders when his hand dipped between her thighs and teased her core through her linen pants.

"Still smell sweet as sin, sugar. Trust me, if I didn't believe Coal would tear my head off for fucking you before bringing you to him, I'd have you on the ground by now. Keep taunting me with those wicked thoughts, and you might just find yourself on your back," Jacy whispered against her ear. He leaned back and tipped the sunglasses up. The bright green eyes that plagued her memories stared back at her with golden licks of desire glinting through them.

Shyla smiled, dropping her hand to the hard bulge in his jeans. She palmed his cock through the rough fabric. His smile faltered, and his eyes shadowed.

"I can't wait."

* * * *

Jacy opened the front door and stepped to the side for her. Shyla hesitated, inhaling the scent of fresh pine and paint. Still, she looked for any visible signs of the attack from two weeks prior amid the

pristine interior.

“Coal had everything replaced and repainted,” Jacy said quietly. He nudged her through the door. “Make his day, doll. I’ll be back in a few.”

Shyla turned to Jacy, but received a closed door in his stead. With an inward sigh, anxiety leaping inside her belly, she slid out of her shoes and moved toward the living room.

The turbulent, dense air she associated with Coal pulsed against her before she reached the open doorway. The beating of her heart kicked into overdrive, a momentary light-headedness threatening to bring her to her knees.

Coal.

She took one final step, bringing her to the white carpet. She scanned the open expanse of living room and came to a halt when she spotted Coal leaning against one of the floor-to-ceiling panes of glass overlooking the thick wooded lands surrounding his home. His back, and all the ripped, chiseled muscles not hidden by his length of black hair, remained to her. The corded thickness in his crossed arms flexed, shadows forming in the rivulets of firm skin with the subtle movement.

Throat clenched shut, stomach churning, lava-hot desire rushing through her, she stared at the very man who embraced her spirit.

“Jacy said he had a surprise for me.”

The deep, resounding timbre of his voice resonated in her ears and strummed the chords of her heart. She bit her bottom lip to keep from moaning, distressed and aroused at the same time. Only a simple pair of black flannel pants covered him, and those rested on the border of indecently low over his hips. She snapped her gaze up as he turned to her.

“You’ve decided to come back. How long before you take off this time?” Coal asked.

Despite his sharp words, an underlying husk caressed her heart. Coal’s slow, calculated approach weakened her at the knees. The

sight of him filled her with love, adoration, regret. Her body trembled under his intense scrutiny, a scouring gaze that scraped along her spirit and inflicted his own suffering unto her.

Her leave had hurt him terribly, and she wanted nothing more than to take that pain away.

Shyla took a small step toward him. He stilled. Damn, he looked mouthwateringly delicious!

He cocked a brow. She flushed.

"I had to take care of things at home," she said, taking another step. "And I know you wouldn't have let me leave if I didn't sneak away. The both of you wouldn't have let me go."

"And? Did you take care of business?"

"I did."

"Answer my initial question. How long until you leave again?"

"I don't want to leave again," Shyla confessed. "I didn't want to leave the first time, but I had to. I-I needed to sort things out and let everything sink in. I needed to make sure I didn't decide to stay only to discover it was the worst mistake of my life."

"You truly believe staying with me would've been a mistake?"

Coal hid his offense behind a feral growl but frost blue whips licked against his dark eyes. His jaw twitched. The muscles in his arms tensed. Shyla shifted beneath his intense glower. She was a white wolf, an alpha female. She wasn't supposed to crumble beneath anyone, and here she stood, tears threatening to pour over the barrier of her lids and shame crashing through her. Heart pounding, mind swirling, she gave in to the single emotion she'd kept at bay.

"I love you, Coal. I love you and Jacy, and I didn't know how to cope with it. I didn't know how to cope with any of this. It's a dream, a fantasy, a legend, and it's all a reality. Our reality. I don't want to be without you, and that's why I returned," she said, barely able to hold on to his accusatory gaze. She would *not* fold. "I'm sorry I left the first time, but you must understand what my short time here did to me. How it affected me. I came here to handle my grandfather's estate

and learned I'm a wolf with two of the most incredible alpha males appointed as my mates and a psychopath woman out to kill—"

Shyla barely caught his sudden motion before his mouth crushed against hers, swallowing her words in a feverish kiss. His hands cupped her face, his fingertips curling in her hair. She drank from his kiss with hunger and delight. Her body lit on fire, her blood, lava rushing through her veins. She wove her arms around his neck and wrapped her legs around his.

Coal grabbed her ass and lifted her feet off the ground, and she locked her legs around his waist. The thick, hard bulge of his cock nestled in her crotch, and she rocked against him. Chills spread through her, slickness coating her panties.

Shyla gasped when her back hit the wall. Coal tore his mouth from hers, a whimper lingering against her lips. His hands splayed over her belly and pressed upward, caressing her front. A moan escaped her throat, and she closed her eyes, absorbing Coal's tender, yet possessive touch.

"Don't you ever leave me again," Coal growled, his voice deepening with heated lust. His fingers pinched her pert nipples tightly, and she bucked into him. She tunneled her fingers into his hair and tightened. "You got that?"

"Trust me. I don't plan on leaving either one of you again," she breathed, peeling open her eyes. When their gazes met, electricity zigzagged through her. "I'm yours, and you're both mine."

A dark grin turned the corner of his mouth. His fingers curled around the front of her shirt. He yanked, sending buttons flying and plinking against the wood floor. "Don't ever mistake that, love."

His hands slid beneath the waist of her pants to slide them off, forcing her feet back to the floor. His fingers slid between the wet folds of her intimate lips, stroking her clit until her knees buckled and she leaned into him for support. Her hands trembled, tugging his pants off his waist as he worked her body to the brink of ecstasy. She folded her fingers around his hot cock, stroking the velvety skin.

“Christ, woman, I’ve missed you.”

He pulled his hand away from her pussy. With one smooth motion, he knocked her hand away from his cock, lifted her hips, and impaled her.

Stars burst against her eyelids, and she cried out in pure joy. Her body thrummed with life, with pleasure, with completion. Coal guided her hips, his thrusts rough and desperate, pounding into her, grinding against her clit.

“You’re incredible and feeling as good as ever,” she purred thickly just as his mouth clamped down over hers. His tongue danced in her mouth, entwining and drinking like a greedy animal in the thralls of exquisite passion.

Don’t you forget it.

Coal’s arms slid around her, and her back left the wall. They moved through the house, the cool air doing little to curb the feverish heat of her skin.

His dick left her.

“Co—”

Her body flew backward, and she landed in the luxurious satin bedding. Coal climbed onto the bed and stalked over to her on his hands and knees. He spread her legs wide with his knees, his hands covering hers by her head. Shyla closed her eyes and arched into him, barely finding enough breath to sustain her.

The bed dipped the same instant Coal filled her once more. She hooked one leg around his waist, meeting each thrust with her own.

God, she loved this man!

“You two are *hot*.”

Shyla opened her eyes to mere slits as pleasure coiled in her heat. Coal sat back on his heels, lifting her hips into his. Her gaze dropped from Jacy’s lust-filled eyes to the evidence of his desire. Pressing up on her side, she dipped her head and took him into her mouth. He scooted closer, a deep rumble filling her ears as she laved the underside of his engorged cock with her tongue, milking the salty pre-

cum from his tip. Her thoughts melted into a colorful mural of senseless images and conquering sensations. She whimpered as Coal's rocking turned into a fierce pounding, Jacy's hands bunched into her hair. He pumped his cock into her mouth as tremors of climax began to unleash throughout her body.

Blinded by euphoric overload, Shyla barely grasped the thick liquid that spurt against the back of her throat or the entwined cries and howls of ecstasy. Spasms racked her body, constricted around her lungs, and sent her reeling into another dimension. She drank each precious drop from Jacy and clamped down on Coal as his fiery seed filled her womb. Her legs became numb and useless. Her arms tingled. Her pussy throbbed with each contraction as she slowly drifted down from the peak of shameless pleasure and back into the arms of the two men she vowed never to leave again.

Coal uncurled her leg from around his waist and settled against her back, the entire length of his hard body pressed flush to hers. Jacy came to rest in front of her, caressing her cheek as he fit himself perfectly against her. A grin touched his lips, but the unabashed love in his eyes melted her heart. Glancing back at Coal, she discovered that same pulsating love reflecting in his eyes, claiming her spirit.

"I love you," she said, reaching back and touching his strong jaw.

He turned his face into her hand and closed his eyes, kissing her palm.

Facing Jacy, she kissed his bottom lip. "I love you too. The both of you."

"You've had our love from the moment we first saw you." Jacy captured her bottom lip between his teeth and tugged gently.

"You will always have our hearts, Shyla Roddery-Demmering," Coal said. "Welcome home, love."

Yes. She smiled, closing her eyes and nestling down between her men. *Home at last.*

THE END

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Growing up, I was always the quiet girl who knew everyone but never quite fit in. I kept busy with dance, cheerleading and numerous other activities. I was an overachiever, a hard worker and very dedicated to anything I pursued.

When I decided that I loved writing enough to follow along the writer's career path, nothing deterred me from reaching my goals. I didn't go to college straight out of high school, but rather focused all my free time and energy into my stories. Negativity could not steer me off the path of my dreams. It only made me more determined to succeed as a writer.

Now, with a loving husband and a son who is sweetly proud of his mommy, I continue to do what I love most: Write from my heart and share my stories with the world.



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