



PLAYING
WOLF

BOOK TWO OF THE PHOENIX PROPHECY

MINA CARTER

Playing Wolf

The Phoenix Prophecy

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Blurb

Twin wolves Ryder and Jayce share everything. Their job, their cars, their women. There's many a woman happy to spend a night or weekend of passion with a couple of handsome bad-boy bounty hunters. But there's one woman they won't touch ... the woman who sets them on fire like no other.

When Caitlin crashes through the doors of Honey's bar she sets off a chain reaction that has the twins facing their mother's death, their long lost father and their deepest desires.

Life will never be the same again, if they survive.

Prologue

The Phoenix rose from the flames, the scent of charred feathers stinging Ancelin's nose. Darkness held him tightly, the only light coming from the eerie wavering form of the Phoenix and the fire. He tried to move his limbs. Nothing. Awareness flooded his brain as the light from the Phoenix grew brighter.

"I'm dreaming," he said.

"Of course," the Phoenix replied, although its beak never moved.

"This is a prophecy." Ancelin's heart thundered.

In all the years he had been mated to Nix, her phoenix-driven prophecies had never touched him. Every night he slept beside her and knew she dreamed of the destinies of others. Yet, not once had she dreamed of him. Tonight, the world as he knew it shifted on its axis as her phoenix—her soul—came to him as he slept.

"You have no need of explanations, Ancelin," the Phoenix told him. "You know what I tell you shall come to pass."

Ancelin might be a demi-god, but the power of the Phoenix was beyond his control. "Just tell me and get it over with," he gritted out arrogantly, unwilling to admit fear crept into his heart.

The Phoenix's flames burned hotter, the image glowing brighter. "Your transgressions shall be the vehicle of your end, Ancelin. The pain you have caused others will turn on you. The trinity will break you, and you shall be no more. Your fate is at hand."

Ancelin swallowed hard. If he had been able to feel his limbs, he knew they would be trembling. A phoenix prophecy could never be reversed. It always came to be.

The Phoenix's voice grew cold and disdainful. "Three and three have you used for your own ends. Three times have you broken your vows. Your life force shall be the payment for your transgressions, and three hands will bring about your death. With your passing, new lives will be wrought for those whose lives you've torn. With your blood, the circle shall be mended. It has already been decreed."

With a start, Ancelin awoke, gasping for air. Beside him, the flame-haired form of his mate lay still as marble, barely breathing. Anger flooded him, and he wondered if he could break the prophecy by killing her as she slept.

Her eyelids flickered. "You have not the ability to snuff the Phoenix's flames, Ancelin," she murmured, her turquoise eyes boring into his as she sat up in their bed.

Rising to his feet, Ancelin yanked the silk sheet and wrapped it around his hips. He glared at his mate left sitting on the wide mattress, her naked skin glowing in the moonlight. "That's what you think. And even if I couldn't kill you, that does not mean I cannot change the prophecy by snuffing out the lives of those who seek to end mine," he snarled.

"I did not dream that on purpose, my lord." His mate's words were cool, but respectful.

He stormed towards the bathroom, fury riding his heels. "You did, Nix. You knew I was unfaithful, and this is your punishment."

She shook her head, the red-gold curls tumbling around her shoulders. "Ancelin, you

know I have no control over the dreams, over the Phoenix...”

“Fuck you. I always knew you were a cold-hearted bitch. Why do you think I sought comfort from others,” Ancelin sneered. He went into the bathroom and slammed the door.

*

Left alone, Nix rose from the bed. The moonlight gilded her perfect form as she crossed the room to an *escritoire*. From a small drawer, she withdrew a hand mirror with a gilded frame shaped like a phoenix.

She brushed her fingers over the glass and a vision appeared in the oval. A young man with dark hair and argent eyes stared at the ocean, watching the movement of the waves. Nix touched the mirror where his arm was, and he flinched. There on his skin appeared a phoenix mark. He blinked in shock and stared at the tattoo-like artwork that swirled over his bicep.

Nix swept her palm over the mirror, and the vision changed. This time, two men, obviously twins, one dark and one light, materialized on the glass. They stood in the forest gazing at the moon. Nix’s fingertip touched the mirror, over the right side of one’s chest, then over the left side of the other. Both flinched as black tribal lines, the mark of the phoenix, wrote themselves onto their skin.

Again, Nix’s palm passed over the mirror. She closed her eyes for a moment, a spasm of pain crossing her beautiful features. Opening her eyes, she gazed at the image of a man with hair as fair as the moonlight, his eyes glittering like jet. He stood beside a fire, his face turned towards her. Her fingertip pressed the glass gently, as if she actually touched the side of his throat. Unlike his brothers, shock did not show on his face. Instead, his eyes seemed to bore into hers.

She passed her hand over the mirror, and it darkened. Putting it away, she returned to the bed she had shared with Ancelin for the last century. A loveless bed. A loveless mating. Soon the prophecy would come true and she would be free. Ancelin thought he could break it. Nix knew it was possible under certain circumstances, but she was determined it would not happen this time. The Phoenix would win. It almost always did. And this time, if she was to survive, it must.

Chapter One

“Fuck me, I need to get laid.” Jayce flicked a glance up from the cards in his hand and suppressed the exasperated sigh that wanted to escape his lips. Across the table, his partner in crime, Ryder, glared at his bottle of Bud, grumbling.

Jayce shrugged. “You say that every night.”

“So? Doesn't make it any less true. Do you know how long it's been since we saw any action? Th—”

“Three weeks, four days and sixteen hours,” Jayce replied promptly, cutting Ryder off without looking up. He didn't need to look up, he'd heard this every night for three weeks and three days. If there was anything on this planet Ryder liked more than tracking prey it was sex.

“And it's your own fault. If you hadn't pissed Ramona off, she'd still be here and perhaps I'd get some peace from your belly aching and your over-active bloody sex drive.” A groan from the other side of the table told Jayce his remark had hit home.

“Oh God, you *had* to remind me of Ramona didn't you? That woman's got tits to die for and a cunt so tight—”

“Yeah, yeah. What am I? A fucking monk?” Jayce snapped back, feeling the sexual frustration as keenly as Ryder. That was the problem with bonded wolves, both partners felt what the other did. Which could be fantastic—if they were lovers.

Jayce and Ryder weren't. They couldn't be, ever, even if they were that way inclined—and both liked women far too much for that—because they were brothers. Not only brothers, but twins. Twin wolves, a genetic abnormality unheard of before their birth.

“Ugh, sorry bro. Didn't think.” Ryder picked morosely at the label on his bottle and pouted. Jayce shook his head and carried on laying cards out in a game of patience.

Patience. That was a laugh. Jayce had zero patience and he knew it. He was playing to keep his hands occupied as they whiled away the hours waiting for something to happen. Either a bar brawl—always a possibility in Honey's roadside bar and grill—or for a call telling them another job had come in.

As though Ryder was reading his mind, he spoke again. “Wish Sally would call. Now there's a piece of ass I'd take a crack at. Reminds me of Ca—”

“Don't even go there.” Jayce curbed his annoyance, his voice clipped and brooking no argument. He knew full well who Sally looked like and it was a no-go area.

Ryder shut up and fast. Jayce was the more sensible brother, less given to temper and impulse. He used “that” tone to let Ryder know to button it.

Ryder leaned back in his chair, his long fingers turning the neck of his bottle round and round, while Jayce dealt the cards. Jayce looked up. He and Ryder were night and day, something which never failed to amuse him. They had the same face, the same body, but where his hair was golden blond, Ryder's was as dark as the raven's wing. Which made no difference because both kept their heads shaved to the scalp. Necessary in their occupation. Bringing in the bounties on bad-ass paranormals was dangerous business even for a couple of werewolves. Long hair begged for someone to grab a hold of it and use it to introduce a face to a hard surface, not something Jayce found fun.

Other than hair color, nature had made them identical. They both had their mother's green eyes, the same height, the same well-muscled physique. One Jayce knew was more due to good genetics and their werewolf blood than exercise and good nutrition ... unless his brother's long-held dream had come true and alcohol and junk-food were the recommended diet these days.

Life and their own choices made them different. Ryder preferred the biker look, black leather pants and a skinny-rib T-shirt showing off his impressive body to best advantage. It was a good look but Jayce couldn't put up with all that leather. Way too hot. He preferred the casual look. Combat pants and heavy boots, with a tight vest revealing an identical build to his twin. Both sported various tattoos and piercings.

Jayce slapped the last card on the table. Ryder's expression was a combination of discomfort, longing and deep, dark need. "I know what you're thinking and fucking quit it or I'm gonna need a cold shower again. Unless you can convince one of the girls they want an afternoon of sex with two horny wolves."

Jayce snorted, nice boys they weren't. One reason they couldn't think of the woman their handler in the office, Sally, reminded them of. She was nice, sweet, innocent and she deserved better, far better than the Vanir brothers. Didn't stop Jayce's body burning just at the thought of her.

He looked up and considered the crowd in the dingy bar. Crowd was an overstatement, it was too early for anything approaching a crowd.

A few of the regulars were in the booths, communing silently with their pints, and the normal girls were on waitress duty.

Ryder sighed in defeat. "Like that's going to happen."

The waitresses knew the brothers of old. Unless they could get one of them drunk they wouldn't be seeing any action from that quarter.

What they needed was a group of girls on a road-trip prepared to get down and dirty with a couple of bounty hunters. Girls liked the dangerous type, something Jayce knew from experience and was an old hand at capitalizing on.

The door banged open and his head shot up in hope. Perhaps the fates had heard his silent prayer and a horde of fresh-faced college girls just ripe to be corrupted would spill through the doorway.

The signs looked good, the figure silhouetted in the frame was feminine—slender and graceful. Then she stepped into the bar and he got a look at her face.

"Fuck."

*

This was *such* a bad idea.

Caitlin stood for a moment in the dim and grimy bar as she waited for her eyes to adjust from the brightness of the desert sun outside. The men she was looking for had to be here, their scent—a unique musk she'd been tracking for days—lay heavy on the air. If they weren't then she'd missed them by mere minutes.

Squinting, she turned in a half circle and tried to make her stubborn eyes focus quicker. If only she hadn't forgotten her glasses in her haste to leave she wouldn't be in this predicament. When the opportunity had come though, all she'd had time to do was grab a travel pack of clothes and her paws had hit dirt. She hadn't stopped running since, trying to find the Vanir brothers.

Her vision cleared and she peered short-sightedly into the booths. Interested

looks met her gaze, ranging from polite inquiry right down to lascivious leers. None yielded the men she was looking for so she moved on, her footsteps ringing on the dusty floor. Her eyes flitted across the room, swept across the bar and beyond into the back.

Cat stilled. There they were, sitting around a small table, but neither looked happy to see her. Biting her lip she headed towards them. A shiver ran through her as she approached them, both watching her in silence, their eyes hard and unwelcoming.

Swallowing nervously, she stopped next to the table and looked down at them. Neither wolf moved, watching her with unreadable eyes. They'd always watched her, she realized. She liked it, a shiver of something, not fear but something else, running up her spine.

“Jayce, Ryder. How've you been?” She wanted to start polite before she dropped the bombshell.

“What are you doing here Caitlin?” Jayce's expression was tight as he answered.

“I came to find you two.” Great, two ... okay, three ... could play the uncommunicative game.

“So, you found us, now turn around and get your pretty little ass back on out of here. Before your granddaddy comes looking and finds you with us.” Jayce concentrated on his cards, his whole attitude dismissive.

Cat's lips compressed as anger battled with fond memories of the brothers. Ten years older than her, she'd idolized Jayce and Ryder from the moment they'd joined the pack with their mother, both gangly cubs on the edge of puberty. Unlike the others of their age group, they had never brushed off the inquisitive toddler Cat had been. They'd always made sure she was okay and took her back home when she'd toddled after them.

“Got rid of the leading strings a long time ago, Jayce. Not that they did any good in the first place.”

His reply was a contemptuous snort. “Tell me about it. You always were a pain in the ass.”

Cat was nothing if not tenacious though. So much so her grandfather had often joked she was more terrier than wolf. She'd followed the twins so much, they'd stopped taking her back to her family and simply included her in their escapades, the big brothers she'd never had. When they'd hit their teens and gotten a car between them the first ride had gone to Cat. A wistful smile curved her lips. That summer had been the last perfect summer she could remember. In the fall everything had fallen apart and changed Cat's view of the world forever. Jayce had challenged another wolf for his mate, Vanessa. He'd lost, as everyone expected, but it had been the last fight he'd ever lost. From then on the brothers had been hell-raisers, always in trouble with the pack and the human law. Then her grandfather had banished them. They hadn't argued, just walked out of town without a backwards glance, shattering Cat's teenage heart.

Anger coiled in her breast. Here she was trying to do something for them and she got this reaction? Well, screw them. Slamming her hands down on the table she glared at the twins.

“Grow up, Jayce. I've run three nights tracking you two. I'm not being patted on the head and turned back around again until you've heard me out,” she snapped, frustration and anger making her voice tremble before she got it under control.

She'd surprised them, she could see that much from the small start Ryder gave and the way his brother went as still as a statue.

Ryder whistled lowly. "Oh what do we have here, kitty-cat's grown some claws?"

"Shut the fuck up Ryder," Cat and Jayce chorused in unison then glared at each other. Jayce's eyes locked with hers, fury in their green depths. Cat frowned a little, he was angry. What had she done to make him so mad at her?

"You shouldn't swear Caitlin, it's not ladylike." Ryder leaned back in his chair, his eyes intent on her.

Cat glared at him, annoyed at the trite response. "Perhaps I don't want to be a damn lady! Perhaps I'm bloody well sick of being a lady."

Jayce looked at her, his expression unreadable. Danger and tension swirled between them as Cat lifted her chin, refusing to back down. Why should she? She'd come here to help them, not be treated like the kid they remembered her being. She was a full grown woman now. One with her own mind.

"There are two types of women who come into places like this. Ladies and women who aren't ladies." Jayce's voice dropped low and husky, his green eyes as unreadable as his expression. Cat's fury mounted. He'd better not be about to say what she thought he was going to say. "Believe me sweetheart, in here you don't want to be the second type."

Cat set her jaw and jeered. "And why's that? Because I might—shock horror—hear someone swear or see a drunk?"

She was deliberately needling him, an act as sensible as baiting a tiger but she couldn't stop. Even so, she wasn't prepared for the reaction she got.

Jayce exploded into movement, surging to his feet and capturing her wrist in one big hand. Ruthlessly he hauled her up against his hard body, the breath knocked out of her lungs as her breasts were mashed into the brick wall of his chest.

Excitement struck low and deep, making her knees weak. Arousal and awareness surged through her body with each beat of her heart, her nipples tightening in response. His lips were so close and her gaze riveted on them for a second. Sensuously full they should have made him look feminine, made both brothers look feminine, but they didn't. Instead they highlighted the virile masculinity of their other features.

God, is he going to kiss me? I want...no, I need him to.

"No, because women who aren't ladies in here are fair game."

His eyes bored into hers, their green lit with a dark heat that made her go weak in the knees. For years she'd wondered what all that solid muscle would feel like, wondered whether he, if either of them, actually noticed her as a woman.

Now, held against him from breast to thigh, she had her answer as the bulge at his crotch pressed against her soft belly. Oh, he was noticing her as a woman alright.

"Women who aren't ladies in here get fucked. Good and hard. You want that, pretty little kitty-cat?" he taunted, pressing his erection against her. Cat gasped in shock, her hands clamping onto his upper arms to push him away. Something stopped her. He wasn't just big, he was *huge*. The scent of an aroused male wolf swirled about her and made her head swim. Cat bit back the whimper welling in her throat as her wolf—usually a meek and mild creature—rose in response. Oh God yes, she wanted some of that, a rush of liquid heat slipping from between her thighs as her pussy clenched.

"Fuck me, she's getting off on it."

Ryder's surprised whisper behind her reminded her they weren't alone. Cat blinked, breaking the spell between her and Jayce. His lip curled as he pushed her from him with force. She stumbled backwards and ended up on her ass in front of the table, looking up

at him dumbly. His expression was hard and arrogant as he looked down.

“Leave,” he advised, “unless you want to end up flat on your back servicing us both. Because there's no granddaddy here to protect you now kitty-cat.”

*

Jayce felt like a shit, a complete and utter shit, as Caitlin's beautiful golden eyes filled with hurt. A groan welled up and was ruthlessly suppressed. Cat was his secret vice, she always had been.

Six years ago he and Ryder had had to leave the pack because of this woman—or girl as she'd been then—because sooner or later one of them was going to make a move on her and then all hell would have broken loose.

He nodded towards the front of the bar. “There's the door sweetheart, don't let it hit you in the ass on the way out.”

Tears welled, spearing him through the heart. He could cope with everything but her tears. He'd never been able to stand it when Cat cried. Even as a child she'd been able to wind him around her little finger but thankfully she'd been too innocent to realize what she did to him and use it to her advantage.

“Jay...” Ryder started warily. “She found us. Surely...”

“No!” Jayce snapped, knowing what Ryder was going to say and rejecting the idea before it could take root in his head. That way lay madness ... and long hot nights of passion.

Because all he wanted to do was grab Caitlin by the wrist, haul her out to one of the rooms Honey rented out and spend all night balls deep in her softness. He knew once he'd had a taste of her, he'd never be able to let her go.

Caitlin looked from one brother to the other and held her hand out for one of them to help her up. Jayce cut a glance to his brother, a look that said plainly if he did, Jayce would take his hand off at the wrist. She sighed and climbed to her feet, dusting her hands off on the seat of her jeans. Jayce's body tightened savagely. She'd found them...

“But she's a big girl now Jay—” Ryder's tone was mulish but Jayce ignored him. He wanted Cat as well but ... she was pure. Not for the jaded games they played with their women, sharing them, fucking them in a hundred different and dirty ways. She deserved romance which was something neither Vanir brother had an ounce of in their bodies.

With a growl he turned on Ryder, slamming him up against the wall as he vented his anger and frustration on the only viable target in reach. “I said *no*,” he hissed into his brother's face, his own tight with barely controlled need and lust.

Ryder didn't fight back, the air knocked out of his lungs by the powerful blow. Instead his hand curled around Jayce's neck as understanding filled his eyes.

“Hey, you wolves back there. Any of the kinky man-on-man shit and you're barred. Take your bitch and go screw about somewhere else,” Honey yelled from the bar. “I run a clean place here and don't you forget it.”

Jayce laughed as he dropped his hold on Ryder and stepped back. He knew the laugh was bitter, perhaps even a little on the maniacal side but he was past caring. He walked past Caitlin without looking at her. “Sure Honey, if you run a clean joint then I'm the fucking pope. And she's not our bitch.”

“Well, if she isn't then you won't mind if someone else claims her.”

*

Caitlin snapped her head around at the new voice, one full of slick charm and smarm

that raised the hackles on the back of her neck.

Four new arrivals stood just inside the door, one still holding it open for others outside. Tall, and heavily built, they all wore the dusty leathers of bikers. Their eyes were all fixed on her, lust and interest burning within them. Inside, her wolf snarled a low growl of warning, one which spilled over into her human form as she caught the scent.

Were-cats.

Her growl was echoed by both the brothers as Ryder stepped in front of her protectively. "She's taken."

Blond and handsome at the front smiled and revealed canine teeth far too sharp for Cat's liking. A shiver wormed its way down her spine, the cool wash of fear filtering through into her scent. Only a little as she battled to control the emotion, but enough for Ryder to turn his head. Her senses on high alert, she caught the small movement and looked at him.

He winked to reassure her, his eyes full of easy charm, and Caitlin couldn't help breathing a sigh of relief. However much Jayce hadn't wanted her around, she knew they'd give up their last breath protecting her.

"Yeah, what he said," Jayce pitched in. The were-cat's gaze flitted from one to the other, noting the similarities. Then he smiled. It wasn't a nice expression.

"You're Jayce Vanir, aren't you?"

"Yeah, what of it?"

The cat reached inside his jacket and pulled out a snub-nosed handgun. Cat screamed as he pointed it directly at Jayce. "Got a message from your dad."

Chapter Two

“Run!” Ryder bellowed at Cat, shoving her towards the back door as Jayce collapsed, blood pooling in a wide circle on the floor around him. Cat did as she was told as Ryder waded into the fray, shouting his brother's name.

The bar erupted into violence as the big wolf and the locals took on the were-cats. Two more shots rang out. The long mirror behind the bar shattered as she passed. Cat shrieked and ducked, covering her head with one hand as she scooted a few step half on her hands and knees before gaining her feet again.

“Hey! That was my mother’s!” the woman at the bar yelled and ducked out of sight, emerging a second later with a heavy-duty shotgun in her hands. Within seconds the place resembled a war zone.

Jayce’s blood scented the air like exotic incense and Cat stopped by the door Ryder had pushed her towards. She trembled, caught between the instinct to run for safety and her need to do something. She couldn't just leave them and save her own ass, not with Ryder standing over his brother's still form throwing were-cats around like they were toys.

Cat bit her lip, her expression worried. She hoped Jayce was only unconscious, but there was an awful lot of blood on the floor. Too much blood. Moving before she was conscious of making a decision, she dodged back through the crowd, able to avoid the grasping hands with ease to reach the safety of Ryder's side. He turned as she drew level with him, violence in his eyes.

“Get him out of here,” he ordered, turning back to the fight. Cat squeaked as a chair shattered over his shoulder, but the tall wolf barely seemed to notice it, snapping a bark that sounded odd in his human form and lashing out with a vicious right hook.

Doing as she was told didn't come easily to Cat but in this instance she was scared enough to obey without question. Wrinkling her nose, she hooked her hands under Jayce's prone form and hauled him up so she could link her fingers over his broad chest.

“Don't you dare die on me you awkward bastard,” she muttered as she started to pull him backwards.

It was like dragging a lump of granite. She'd known Jayce was solid but even being plastered over him less than ten minutes ago hadn't given her a real appreciation for how heavy all that muscle could be.

“Christ Jayce, you need to go on a diet,” she grumbled, setting her heels and dragging him another couple of feet.

“Well hello, what do we have here?”

Cat looked up. Standing over her, his leather jacket gone with his shirt ripped and bloody, was the blond were-cat, a leer on his lips.

“You really are a pretty little thing, aren't you? I didn't think when we took this job we'd get a bonus like you as well.”

Cat snarled at him, baring her teeth. All fire on the surface, she hoped he didn't realize her knees were practically knocking together. “One step closer and I'll—”

He laughed. “You'll what? Nip my ankles?”

A shadow rose behind him. Cat flinched as the butt of a shotgun flashed, the sound

of a meaty crunch audible as it connected with the back of the were-cat's head. He went down like a marionette with its strings cut. The woman from behind the bar looked down at the fallen figure impassively, then delivered a savage kick to his stomach.

“That's for my mom's mirror. Filthy cats, given half the chance I'd take a spade to the bloody lot of 'em. Always yowling and fucking outside. It's disgusting,” she complained, kneeling next to Jayce and checking his pulse.

Cat offered a small smile. “After that I'm really hoping you're a dog person,” she indicated the shotgun and the fallen cat.

“Yeah, dogs are cool. Wolves are okay too,” she replied, amusement in her grey eyes. “Hey, Blake ... get yer good-for-nothing ass over here!”

Her bellow had a tall, slender man on the other side of the room look up sharply. Fighting two cats, he hit them with the nearest thing at hand, using the top of a table like a huge club.

“Fore!” he yelled before dropping it on the unconscious forms, strolling over to the fallen wolf and his companions as though he had all the time in the world.

“How's he look, Honey?” Ryder dropped to his knees next to Cat, worry etched into his handsome face. Cat glanced around, belatedly realizing all the cats were unconscious or moaning in their own private worlds of pain.

Good. Served them right. All she was concerned about was Jayce. She looked back at him as worry twisted in her gut. There was so much blood. Way too much. It pooled thickly under his body and the heady scent of wolf blood and approaching death rolled around the bar. Inside, Cat's wolf threw back its head and howled mournfully.

The bartender pulled the blood-stained vest away and studied what lay beneath. “He's gut-shot. We need to get him conscious and shifted. That should clear most of it up. Get him out of danger anyway.”

“Hate to break it to you guys but this lot called for backup. I'm seeing bikes on the road and ten to one they ain't the local Hells Angels,” Blake said, moving to the window to look out, urgency in his voice.

Cat's heart thudded in her chest as the fight or flight instinct fired through her veins. They needed to get out of here before more were-cats arrived. With Jayce injured there was no way they'd make it out alive.

“We're gone. Honey, hold them as long as you can would ya, sweetheart?” Ryder hoisted his brother in his arms and stood as though Jayce weighed nothing. “Cat, get the door, we'll head out the back.”

“You got it,” the tall woman replied, her attitude businesslike. “Blake get out front and stall them while I get the wardens on the line.” She frowned, turning back to the pair with a question in her eyes. “What did he mean, he had a message from your dad?”

Cat paused and looked up at Ryder curiously. In all the time she'd known the twins and their mother they'd never once spoken of their father. It was almost as if it had been a taboo subject.

A muscle jumped in Ryder's jaw. “That's something I'd like to know as well.”

* * * *

Cat strode ahead of the taller werewolf and his burden as they headed out the back door of the bar. Hopelessness swept over her as she stared at the barren terrain. The bar and motel were in the ass-end of beyond, nothing about for miles. There was nowhere to

hide, and with Jayce injured they needed somewhere to hole up so he could heal.

“Shit, what do we do?” she asked Ryder, panic clogging her throat. Perhaps they could hide in one of the rooms ... no, that wouldn't work. Were-cats had an excellent sense of smell, easily the equal of any wolf. With Jayce bleeding they'd be found within minutes.

Ryder carried on walking, past Cat and around the back of the motel where he laid his brother on the ground and turned to her. “Change,” he ordered as he started to undress.

“W-what?” Cat didn't bother to hide the surprise that filled her. “What here? Now? It's not even night ... or a full moon.” Her speech faltered as he dropped the T-shirt to the ground and her eyes riveted to the expanse of muscled male chest on view.

Oh my, he has a nipple ring. Heat hit Cat broad-side and she put a hand out to the wall to keep her balance, dragging her eyes up from his tattooed and pierced torso.

“Change,” he repeated, his green eyes uncompromising. Then he sighed, his expression softening. “Cat honey, we need to move and fast. Which means we need Jay on his feet and not bleeding. So we need to get Jay to change. The only thing that'll do that at the moment is ... oh fucking hell, he's gonna kill me.” Ryder broke off, running a hand over his shaven head in frustration.

“What? What's the only thing that'll make him change?” Cat demanded, reaching for Ryder's arm as he made to turn away. It was like grabbing a brick wall, full of solid muscle.

He looked at her hand, her pale slender fingers in direct contrast to the tanned brawn of his forearm. The heat in his eyes when he looked up made her gasp and take a step backwards.

“Pussy,” he bit out. “Hot, wet pussy. A female wolf ... the instinct to mate. It's the only thing that'll bring him around in time.”

Cat's eyes widened, and her cheeks burned. He wanted her...

“What do I need to do?” she finally managed, her heart pounding as several images flashed through her brain, each more erotic than the last, and imprinted themselves on the back of her eyelids.

“Take your clothes off.”

Cat closed her eyes, embarrassment washing over her. She understood the need. If Jayce changed then it would force his body to heal. “Turn around then.”

Ryder barked a laugh. Cat winced at the harsh tone.

“You've gotta be fucking kidding me? A woman who looks like you getting naked and you want me to turn around? Sorry sweetheart, I want front row seats at this one.” He folded his arms and watched her with interest.

Cat compressed her lips into a thin line. He wanted to play hard-ball did he? She could do that. It was just like an art study class. She'd posed naked before, no big deal, she'd pretend she was in a room full of artists rather than in front of one of her childhood crushes. Besides, her eyes dropped to the bulge in the front of his pants, he'd have problems with this game of chicken before she did.

Yeah, just like art class. Sure.

Her fingers trembled as she reached for the hem of her T-shirt. She pulled it up and over her head in one smooth movement and dropped it to the floor at her feet. “So all I have to do is get naked right?” She unsnapped the buttons on her jeans, her cheeks

burning. She couldn't believe she was doing this. Not in front of Ryder. *Especially* not in front of Ryder.

Her gaze flicked to Jayce, still bleeding out on the floor. Determination straightened her spine. What was getting naked, even dancing around in the buff, if it saved Jayce's life?

*

Oh fuck, she was gorgeous. Ryder had had many day-dreams, wet-dreams and fantasies about Cat over the years but none of them matched up to the sheer perfection of the reality.

His breathing caught as she slid the denim down her hips in a move to rival any erotic dancer. She wasn't trying for erotic, he could tell that. There was too much of an air of innocence about her... Ryder doubted she knew the meaning of the word "sultry". Unlike the women he and Jayce were used to spending their lust on.

The life they led meant women like Cat were few and far between. It didn't take long in the places they frequented for even the most innocent to lose that naiveté, no matter how much they tried to hang on to it. Which suited the two wolves just fine. They weren't gentle men, not used to the mushy relationship stuff.

Most of the time Ryder just wanted to fuck and fuck hard.

So why, watching the slender woman in front of him tremble as she slid those jeans off her sinfully long legs, did he want to wrap her in his arms and tell her everything was going to be okay? Why, when he preferred black leather underwear and nipple clamps, was white cotton suddenly the most erotic thing on the planet?

A noise on the other side of the buildings snapped his head around. His eyes narrowed as he listened to the muffled shouts and the roar of engines. The sound of bikes, a lot of bikes, and a truck.

"They're searching ... sounds like Blake's heading them off which gives us a bit of time but we need to move now. They'll be back after they catch him, if they can. Blake's not exactly slow when it comes to hauling his ass outta trouble."

Ryder didn't envy Blake when they did, but he was a shifter too. Quite what flavor Ryder didn't know, no one did, but Blake had a bad enough reputation that no one messed with him. Not even Ryder and Jayce. Hopefully he'd be able to handle a crowd of pissed-off cats.

Ryder shook his head and started to strip his pants and boxers off, he couldn't worry about the other shifter now. He had Cat and Jayce to look after. Besides if they hurt Blake, or worse, the cats would have Honey to answer to and the Amazonian bar owner was not a woman to mess with.

He shoved the leather and cotton over his hips down to his ankles, freeing his already hardened cock. He'd been hard since Cat had first walked through the door, a situation not helped any by her increasing nakedness now but it wasn't anything he was going to apologize for. Not even at the soft gasp which escaped her, one she quickly smothered as she turned away to unclip her bra.

She wasn't above a peek herself then. Ryder smiled as he kicked his boots off, the footwear thudding into the dirt. Dammit, he was going to have to leave them. Clothes could be folded up and secured with a belt to make them easy to carry in wolf form, but custom made, hand-stitched leather boots? His jaw would be aching for days.

White cotton hit the floor, a flash in his peripheral vision, and Ryder prayed for

strength. How the hell he was going to get through this he didn't know, but he had to, for all their sakes. That were-cat had been loaded for wolf, Ryder had smelt the silver in the air after he'd shot Jayce. Worse, he could feel the burning sensation spreading through his brother's body as the silver poisoned his system and held him locked into his human form.

His *dying* human form. A truth Ryder had forbidden Honey to mention in front of Cat with a look and a shake of his head. She was too sheltered to realize what the sharp tang on the air was and, dammit, he wanted to keep her that way.

"Change. Now. He doesn't have much time." Blood still dripped from Jayce's torn abdomen, the thirsty sand below his body absorbing it greedily. "No time for modesty, we need to run noooooowww!"

His last word was stretched out into a moan as Ryder reached for the power of his wolf. The change gathered in a hard knot deep inside and gained critical mass. It bubbled and raced outwards under his skin, the push of fur against the inside a warning the wolf was right under the surface. Ryder let it loose, the change ripping through him at light speed.

Bones popped and cracked under the skin. Skin which boiled and stretched into new configurations to cover the shape beneath. Fur sprouted across the tawny human flesh, covering scars, tattoos and piercings alike. Within seconds the man was gone, replaced by the wolf. Opening his eyes he shook himself, a heavy shudder racking the powerful lupine form and making the thick fur shake.

He was just in time to see Cat finish her own change—the delicately boned, smaller wolf whimpering as she came to her feet in front of him.

Mine. Possessiveness surged through him as he padded around her, the instinct to claim her in this form almost overriding his ability to think. Fuck, she smelt fantastic, her scent calling out to him in a way he couldn't remember another she-wolf ever affecting him. Not even Vanessa, the bitch who had started all his and Jayce's problems in the pack.

Sure, Jayce had been the one with the balls to challenge for her but both would have enjoyed her before the month was out. It was the way they were. The bond was too deep for either to have separate relationships ... which doomed them both.

The kind of woman they wanted as a mate, the mother of their cubs, wasn't the sort of woman who would ever consider taking them on. It wasn't the way wolves were built, they mated with one partner for life, not two. So they limited their relationships to floozies and easy women. Women eager, even begging, to take two horny wolves on in a threesome.

Just fucking. Never loving. And Ryder's heart ached.

His muzzle skimmed over Cat's fur from her tail to up behind her ear. She flinched, skittish on her paws, but held her ground. *Good girl*, Ryder silently approved. She knew better than to run, in any form. He was glad because if she did, no force on earth would stop him chasing her down and claiming her as his own.

Then Jayce would kill him.

If Jayce survived. With a growl Ryder circled again and shouldered Cat towards the still prone form of his brother, prompting her to do her thing. Cat yelped, a sharp sound of surprise, as she was almost knocked off her feet. She shot him a sharp look and padded towards Jayce.

Ryder watched intently, standing to one side with half an ear out for any noise on the road. In all honesty he'd done as much as he could. He'd gotten Jayce out of there, out of harm's way, but now it was up to Cat to tempt him into the change which would save his life.

Guilt coiled in his gut. He should have known the cat was packing heat, should have moved quicker, faster, and stopped Jayce getting shot. A grumble sounded in the back of his throat as he berated himself. Cat shot him an irritated look, taking the noise to mean "get on with it".

Ryder cut the low rumble and watched her. She was graceful in this form as well, and just as beautiful. *Not for us*, the big wolf reminded himself as she stepped around his still human-clad brother, whining and nudging him. Her long pink tongue flicked out and laved the side of his neck, his face, anywhere she could touch him.

Jayce groaned, a faint prickle of power touching the air.

Yes, it was working! Ryder couldn't help taking a couple of steps forwards, hope welling in his chest. He'd known Cat would do it. Her scent, light and delicate, was persuasive and he'd taken a gamble it would pull Jayce back to the land of the living. Considering how they'd felt about her, had always felt about her, it was a safe bet. Ryder shied away from the thought. He couldn't get attached because, as soon as they got to safety, she would be going back to the pack's protection.

Jayce groaned and opened his eyes. "Caitlin?" He blinked as a spasm of pain crossed his face. "Oh fuck..." He tried to roll over, curling his shoulders to get the momentum to turn onto his side, but failed and fell back with a cry. In an instant both Cat and Jayce were there, the smaller female wolf wedging herself in under the injured man's side as Ryder used his broad head to roll Jayce over.

Dammit, change you bastard. He yipped his frustration at his brother. Lying on his side, skin pale and breathing shallow Jayce still understood him, his lips curling in a small smile. Ryder's yips changed to a deep rumble, a warning that if Jayce didn't do something soon Ryder would get annoyed.

"Hey don't blame me man. I got a hot woman in my arms, you'd do the same," he mumbled as Cat crowded against him to lick his face in concern.

Ryder growled again, ignoring the elation that his brother was conscious and speaking, baring his teeth in a silent warning. Jayce just laughed.

"Bully. Okay, okay."

He closed his eyes and sighed. A shudder racked his body as the change rolled over him slowly. Cat leapt away as bones popped and cracked. Sickening wet sounds as flesh flowed and moved into new formations, accompanied by the sound of tearing cloth as Jayce's clothes were destroyed.

Boy would be butt-naked when they got out of here, Ryder thought as his brother completed the change. Clothes could be replaced. Ryder was more interested in why people were out to kill them. Jayce staggered to his feet, his legs a little unsteady.

Ryder winced, he hated to see any sign of weakness in his brother but his experienced eye swept over the wolf form so like his own. They'd both been injured before so he knew what to look out for. Cat though, didn't, brushing against Jayce with a concerned whimper in the back of her throat. Attention Jayce lapped up, holding his right fore-paw up in an almost canine bid for sympathy.

Ryder shook his head. Pathetic, truly pathetic. Bending down, he picked up the

bundle of clothing secured by his belt and turned towards the mountains in the distance. Then he started to run, the two other wolves at his side, heading away from the bar, the were-cats who'd tried to kill them and the disturbing "message" from the father they'd never known.

Chapter Three

The run was a long one which wasn't a problem for Caitlin, she'd run with the pack since she was old enough to change, so she was used to long weekends under the moonlight spent furry and on the paw. Just ... she'd never usually run so long or far without a break.

She ran on one side of Jayce as they headed towards the mountains, in case the injured male faltered. Although what she thought she was going to do if he did she didn't know. Perhaps break his fall as he squashed her? The two brothers were as big in wolf form as they were in their human guises, and far bigger than most wolves she knew. She wouldn't stand a chance.

At first, in the hour after they'd left the diner behind on swift feet, she'd reveled in the exhilaration of just running. She'd missed this, missed running with Jayce and Ryder as they had before they'd left the pack. The world had seemed so magical to her back then. A world seen through the eyes of a young wolf, everything sharp and sparkling in the silver of the moonlight.

Now though, the silver was sleeping with the moon and the late afternoon sun beat down on the three wolves as they loped across the sparse terrain to reach the foothills. The sand under their paws gave way to dirt, and the first scattered and gnarled trees, twisted and scoured by the desert wind, cast a welcome shadow. Her feet dragging with weariness, Cat slowed down as Ryder led them higher into the hills and the forest beyond.

* * * *

"Could do with some clothes you know. These pants itch like fuck." Jayce, sitting on a fallen log in the clearing they'd stopped in, complained as he wriggled his ass, his lip curling as he plucked at the leather pants clinging to him like a second skin. Ryder's leather pants.

"Well, helps if you wear underwear," Ryder replied. Lounging full length on his back with one arm covering his eyes he was as bare-chested as his brother, both of them displaying all that toned male flesh like a sensual photo shoot purely for Cat's benefit.

Gotta love how a shift destroyed clothing, she decided silently. Especially as it meant they only had one set of clothing between the three of them. She'd gotten Ryder's shirt, complete with his scent all over it and the brothers had had to share what was left.

Jayce's lip curled. "I am *not* wearing your boxer shorts. Brotherly love only goes so far you know."

Ryder shrugged and lifted a knee. Cat's attention riveted to the powerful thighs and lean hips, and flirted over the fabric of the boxers at his groin. An area that started to tent as she watched.

Dragging her gaze away, she fussed with her hair as heat flared in her cheeks. Conversation had been minimal since they'd reached the sanctuary of the forest and found this clearing a short while ago. Ryder hadn't been satisfied with the first or even the twentieth stopping place they'd discovered, eliciting growls of complaint from the two

other wolves as he pressed on deeper into the forest. She'd always thought Jayce to be the bossy one but now Ryder had taken command with a vengeance.

Finally he'd allowed them to stop and they'd dropped where they stood, all three wolves stretching out on the forest floor to cool down. The night creeping in helped, the shadows under the trees lengthening until darkness was upon them. Then, one by one, they started to resume their human forms.

Now she was in the middle of nowhere with two half-naked wolves, two half-naked *male* wolves. Butterflies raced around the inside of her stomach like it was a circus wall-of-death. Not just any wolves but ones she'd had a crush on since she was a kid. She ran her hands through her hair and tried to make it lie flat.

There was just one problem about being a wolf. When she changed back there was the mad scramble to get dressed again and her hair always looked like she'd been dragged through a hedge backwards.

Why, she didn't know. Some—hell, most—female wolves looked fantastic before, during and after a change. Like there was some sort of inner sexiness they tapped into that Cat just didn't have.

She was a woman now but still she felt like a gangly teenager who'd not quite grown into her own body. Nibbling her lip, she tried not to peek at Ryder and Jayce. Perhaps it had something to do with the fact she'd not been in heat yet...

* * * *

"It's no good; I need to get some decent clothes. We can't go out in public with this fashion-timeshare thing going on. Not that I'd call your sense of style fashion. Christ, how do you move in these damn things?" Jayce grumbled as he surged to his feet.

Movement, he needed to move, because if he had to sit here a moment longer with Cat's scent hanging in the air like the smell of a banquet, he was going to go stir crazy. There was only so much a man, or wolf, could take.

"Well what do you suggest... This part of the world isn't exactly a fashion mecca is it? Although if you keep running for a couple of hours you might hit some yokel's hovel. I'm sure a plaid shirt and dungarees will suit you down to the ground." Ryder didn't move his arm from over his eyes, feigning a state of relaxation Jayce knew was a show for Cat's benefit. Even if she was too innocent to sense it, Jayce could feel the sexual tension and sheer frustration emanating from Ryder like heat off an oven-baked brick.

"Ha-ha, you're a laugh a minute aren't you? There's gotta be a town about here. I'll double back to that road we crossed on the way in and follow it into the pass. We need supplies and wheels," Jayce announced, nudging his brother with a foot and casting a pointed look at Cat.

Perhaps the reason she wasn't picking up on the heavy sexual tension swirling in the small clearing was because she looked done in. How long had she traveled before she reached them at Honey's? He'd assumed she'd traveled by car but now he wasn't so sure.

"Yeah, pick up some burgers or something as well if you're taking orders. And a couple of bottles of Bud wouldn't go amiss—"

The conversation was conducted over and around the nearly silent Cat, a silence Jayce was ignoring. Women were prone to such things, and Jayce assumed she'd come out of it when she was ready. Most women did if it wasn't too serious, the rest resorted to tears and threats but Cat had never been that sort.

Innocent she had been, yes, but never the sort of frivolous female who had both of them cringing and running for the hills. Unfortunately they usually found out what sort a woman was the morning *after*, which meant they'd done their fair share of early morning escapes.

However, Jayce wasn't prepared for what happened next.

Cat lifted her head slowly, her beautiful face wary and a look of anguish in her eyes. Jayce went still, a malevolent chill running down his spine like icy water.

"You can talk about *beer*?" she asked incredulously. "After someone tried to kill you and your m-mother..."

"Our mother what?" Jayce's voice was like a lead weight in the sudden silence of the clearing. Next to him Ryder rolled to his feet, mirroring Jayce's stance, and both stared at the trembling female wolf sitting on the log in front of them.

She had a leaf in her hair and her cheek was dirty. Jayce waited for her to answer. What she said was going to be bad, he could feel it, but it was like a train crash, once it had started you just couldn't look away.

"What's happened Cat? What about mom?"

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She couldn't do it. Sorrow welled up in Caitlin's chest as she looked at their expectant faces. They didn't know, couldn't suspect the news she'd traveled day and night to bring them and she should have told them sooner. But with the attack and Jayce being injured, she couldn't have expected Ryder to cope with that alone. No, she'd chickened out and decided they both needed to be there and conscious when she told them.

Now she had no excuse. It had taken her nearly half an hour to work up the courage and now she couldn't back down.

"Your mother died a week ago," she said softly, looking down at her hands.

"Wolfsbane. Someone slipped her a massive dose of it."

"*What?*"

Their response was instantaneous, two voices echoing as one, filled with disbelief. Cat bit her lip and looked up, trying hard to school her face.

"Wolfsbane? What sort of sick bastard does that?"

She shook her head, unable to answer. It was a question she'd asked herself over and over again. Unlike her rebel sons, Rosanna was the sweetest, most amiable woman alive. A born wolf with a mother hen complex she'd become the unofficial pack nanny, and nearly every cub had spent time at her home during the school holidays. The fact that someone had wanted to kill her, and in such a painful way, had rocked the pack to its core. Wolfsbane wasn't usually harmful to wolves, but some, like Rosanna, were allergic to it.

"She didn't stand a chance. It wasn't even a full moon..." Jayce murmured, looking up at the cloud-covered sky above them. "If it had been, then she might have been able to shift and..." he broke off, his voice cracking, and swore.

Cat stood and looked from one to the other, not sure what to do. Should she comfort them? But they weren't kids. Prowling around the clearing, their movements jerky with anger and pain, neither of them looked like they wanted comfort, much less from her. The dark expressions on their faces were ones she'd never seen before, and they scared her.

Cat swallowed. Perhaps she should have let someone else come and tell them, or

agreed with her grandfather that the pack would deal with it and leave Rosanna's sons in the dark over their mother's death. After all, they'd left the pack and the pack dealt with its own business, which was the argument some were using. But Cat knew that was more because some people found the Vanir brothers too odd.

Twin wolves were rare, rare enough that some elders said they weren't possible, despite the evidence standing right in front of Cat. Then there was that rumor they'd mastered the change as soon as they'd hit puberty. Even Cat, the daughter of an alpha pair, had taken a couple of months to get used to her new form, but they'd done it within a week.

Odd things like that made people nervous. But not as nervous as Cat as she stood in front of the two brothers and cleared her throat to ask another question burning in the back of her mind. "So, your mother is murdered, and someone tries to kill you within the space of a week, mentioning your father. Doesn't that strike you as odd?"

As she spoke, the clouds above them parted and moonlight filled the clearing until it was as bright as daylight. But unlike normal, the light narrowed like a spotlight on the two men.

"Ouch, what the fu—"

"Bloody hell!"

The twins hissed in pain as each clamped a hand to the side of their chests. Like a switch had been thrown, a cloud drifted over the moon.

"O ... kay, that was weird." Cat padded on bare feet over to the two brothers. "What's the matter, did you get bitten? I knew I should have brought some flea powder," she joked, trying to lighten the mood.

Then they lifted their hands and her mouth dropped open. There, on their rib-cages, was the mark of the phoenix.

* * * *

"I can't stay with her." Ryder argued a few hours later, crashing through the undergrowth and into another clearing away from the one Cat was sleeping in just before Jayce shifted again.

"So, patrol when she wakes up and stay out of scent range." Jayce grunted in reply, pulling at the skin on his bare stomach as he examined the scattered, shallow scabs. It looked more like he'd taken a slide across some asphalt than a gunshot wound.

"Leave them alone and they'll be healed in a week," Ryder ordered automatically. Jayce had a bad habit of picking scabs, one of his less endearing traits. "You do realize she's about to go into heat?"

Jayce closed his eyes and dropped his head back. His lips moved, very much like he was praying. "Yeah, I know. Why do you think I want to put as much distance between me and her as possible?"

"Oh great, and leave me with her?" Ryder blinked in surprise. If anything, he had even less control than his brother. Jayce turned and gave him a hard look.

"This is Cat we're talking about. Not some two-bit whore or floozy looking for a quick fuck. Caitlin. Sweet, innocent and oh-so-we-are-not-touching-her Caitlin." Jayce sighed heavily as he shucked out of Ryder's leather pants.

Pants Ryder instantly decided he was going to throw out. He loved his brother and he'd happily share a woman with him but putting your dick in the same pants as someone

else? That was just sick.

“No, you’re okay. Keep them.” He shook his head as Jayce held them out to him, his eyebrow disappearing up into his shaved hairline.

“Thought these were your favorite pants?”

“They were until they had your cock and balls rubbing about the inside of them.”

Jayce barked a laugh. “Okay, so we can share pussy but not pants? That’s weird man.”

Ryder shrugged. It was and he knew it but there were just some things he wasn’t prepared to do, some lines which couldn’t be crossed. The sanctity of a man’s pants was one of them.

“So what we gonna do? About Caitlin? About mom?”

Jayce rolled his shoulders, easing the heavy muscles across his back as he stepped into the middle of the clearing and shuffled his feet. Recognizing his brother’s pre-change ritual, Ryder stepped back.

“Cat ... I dunno. You figure it out, I need some decent clothes and food before I go stir-fucking crazy. Mom? We find the bastard who killed her and make him pay. In blood,” Jayce said over his shoulder and launched into a run, changing forms mid-air and already in wolf form by the time he disappeared into the darkness.

* * * *

Cat woke suddenly. One moment asleep, the next, her eyes flicked open in sudden awareness. She blinked, not moving a muscle, as she tried to work out what had pulled her so quickly out of sleep. That wasn’t like her. Normally she took her time about waking, unwilling to leave the comfortable area between true sleep and consciousness, but not this time.

She lifted her head, all her wolf’s senses on alert. Hikers perhaps? What hikers were doing out this late at night she didn’t know but stranger things had happened. She looked a sight so she could really do without company. One look at her, scratched up with ripped and bloodstained clothes, and they’d be calling the emergency services.

Sitting up, her movements slow and deliberate, Cat kept her attention on the forest. It wasn’t hikers. When humans were around there was noise, movement as nature avoided them. A subtle movement away from those who considered themselves the “apex” predators, predators with no clue how the rest of nature played them for fools. There was nothing.

Suppressing the shiver which raced the length of her spine, she rose into a crouch, her legs under her. Something was wrong. The whole forest was silent. Silent and dark, with an overlying presence that caught her breath in her lungs.

Someone was watching her.

Not moving, Cat scanned the shadows for the source of danger. Her heart pounded behind her ribcage and she opened her mouth to shout for Ryder or Jayce. Then she closed it again. Jayce was off looking for a town to lift supplies from and she had no clue where Ryder was. Gone off on patrol or something.

Patrolling. What would Ryder patrol? The little clearing they’d staked as an impromptu lair? Why bother? She swore under her breath as the shadows to her left caught her attention. With a nonchalant air she looked away from it, the skin between her shoulder blades crawling as she checked it out again from the corner of her eye. Yes,

there was definitely something in the shadows there. Something big.

Fear quivered through Cat's slender frame as the need to run filled her. But she fought it back, shame rising high in her throat. What was she, a bloody mouse? She was a wolf and proud of it. Wolves didn't run. Ever.

She reached down inside herself, past the physical and right into her soul, seeking the place which smelt like the woods after the rain and felt like silky fur against her skin. Her power welled within her, building in her core until it spilled out from her center and raced across her body. A tiny muscle in her jaw twitched as she deliberately held the change in check, just under her skin. In her head her wolf yipped and yammered, desperate to be free and protect her soft human body within the more dangerous form of the wolf.

"You may as well come out, I can see you over there." She was surprised at how level and commanding her tone seemed. She didn't feel like that inside. Inside she was less dominatrix and more marshmallow. The branches rustled, parting as ... Ryder stepped out...

Chapter Four

A town, to Jayce's surprise, was relatively easy to find once he'd located the road. Running parallel in the cover of the forest it wasn't long before the lights of civilization lit the night sky up ahead. Slowing he trotted to the edge of the trees, parked his furry butt and looked out of the shadows.

He wrinkled his nose at the scene laid out in front of him. Small town America in the ass-end of beyond. Worse, in mountain country. He wouldn't be surprised if half the inhabitants were married to their cousins and played the banjo. This early in the morning most places were shut up. Just the all-night diner was open, a hint of movement through the windows telling him there was someone at home.

Still in wolf form Jayce broke cover and padded around the back, staying in the deeper shadows as much as he could. At this time of the morning he wasn't as bothered about being seen as he would've been in broad daylight. Most people were in bed and if they did happen to look out their windows and see a large wolf skulking about, they tended to dismiss it as an ordinary wolf scavenging for trash.

Food, he needed food, and clothing. Some form of vehicle. Nothing flashy though, he thought as he eyed up the options. He needed something nondescript, something that wouldn't stand out to the cops even if the owner did report it missing.

Clothes were easy to find. Jayce padded into the street past the diner and made his way around the back to peek his wedge-shaped head over into the first backyard. Bingo. In front of him was a clothesline laden with all sorts of fabric goodies. Thank God for people too tired to get their laundry in before night fell. He backed up and launched himself at the top of the fence. A study in lupine elegance. Not. His body slammed into it with a heavy thud and, as it squeaked in wooden protest, he scrambled over the top with more determination than elegance.

Landing heavily he shot a look up at the house, expecting a light to snap on at any minute. He'd made enough noise. Seconds passed and nothing happened. No lights, no curtains twitching.

Owners must sleep at the front.

Jayce breathed a sigh of relief. At least no one had seen that. His usual grace had deserted him thanks to the injury yesterday, and the run hadn't done him any favors. He needed to eat and eat soon. But food meant breaking in someplace unoccupied and paws weren't so good for opening fridges. No, opposable thumbs were the order of the day which meant he needed clothes.

Jayce approached the line, checking out what was on offer. There was enough here to provide a change for both him and Ryder and a couple for Cat. He pulled jeans and shirts from the line, the pegs snapping and pinging off to disappear into the darkness. Quickly he amassed a pile and rolled it into a ball to be carried.

Now, underwear. Women were funny about the stuff. No doubt Cat would like another set. He moved along the line and sat under the lingerie that was pegged out, his eyes widening. He'd never seen so much underwear in one place. Black silk, red satin, a set in innocent white lace which reminded him of Caitl ... then his eyes went from wide to bugging out of his head.

Screw innocent! The white lace panties were crotchless.

Holy hell, what I'd give to see Cat in something like that. Can I get away with taking them and pretend I didn't know what they were? Jayce jittered from paw to paw as he thought. All other considerations aside, the white set were the only ones which hadn't been worn yet, his sensitive nose easily picking up traces of scent on the others, even after washing.

He couldn't ... could he? Much as he had fantasies of Cat in revealing underwear, he knew deep down Cat wasn't the sort of woman who would wear crotchless panties. She was more strawberries and champagne. More slow romantic sex in front of a roaring fire. More virginal white satin, confetti in the hair he'd just removed a delicate tiara from...

Longing slammed into him broadside and stole his breath. Jayce had always considered himself a "wham-bam-thank-you-ma'am" type of guy. Even though he'd fantasized about Cat before, it had *never* taken that particular route. Romance and marriage? With Cat?

All the things he couldn't have. Shaking his head Jayce snapped himself out of it. Like his other daydreams and fantasies, that one was going nowhere and he knew it.

In a rush of decisiveness, he raised up on his haunches to pull the underwear delicately from the line, trying not to tear it with his teeth. Fate though, had other ideas.

The panties came off easily, dropped to the grass to be retrieved, but the bra hung on with the tenacity of a terrier. A low rumble filled Jayce's throat as he shook his head, trying to dislodge the damn thing, his paws backing him up across the lawn. The line bowed, the white lace bra pulled as taut as an arrow until, finally, the clothespin from hell snapped with a loud "ping".

Oh fuck. He didn't get chance for more than a silent curse as the line twanged, the peg disappeared off into the bushes and the whole lot started to come down on his head.

"Ooofff!" Jayce landed on his lupine ass in the middle of the lawn, the bra adorning the top of his head like an elegant hat. And, as if things couldn't get worse, a light snapped on in the back room of the house in front of him and the curtains twitched. Jayce stilled, channeling his inner "garden ornament". *Nothing to see here folks, just a big wolf sculpture some idiot left in your yard...*

"Maud, there's a dog in the back yard wearing your bra on its head. Big bastard as well." The voice of the guy at the window was sleepy, his puzzled expression visible even from where Jayce was sitting.

Just a dream, go back to bed. He ignored the instinctive insult at being referred to as a dog. Couldn't the idiot see he was a damn wolf?

Another voice answered, clearly audible. *Christ, are these people deaf or do they often carry on their conversations in shouts?* "Don't be daft John, dogs don't wear bras. How would they do the clips up with their paws? Come back to bed, you gotta get up early in the morning."

Yeah John, go back to sleep. Jayce held his breath as the guy at the window paused, frowning at him, then disappeared. The breath whooshed out of his lungs in a rush and he flipped the underwear off his head, rolled all the clothes into a ball and picked them up in his mouth. Now to find food.

* * * *

"Ryder?" Cat backed away from the advancing male. The look in his eyes was one

she'd never seen before—hard and feral, focused intently on her. Cat couldn't work out if it scared her or whether the shiver running down her spine was excitement instead.

A dark excitement she had no business feeling. She couldn't help it, she'd always had a thing for the Vanir brothers. Both of them. They were so alike, apart from the fact one was dark and one was blond, hardly a noticeable difference with how short their hair was. However, picking between them might not be a problem. Rumor said they shared *everything*.

Another shiver hit Cat. The thought of having both their attentions did strange things to her insides. Her stomach churned but she didn't feel sick. Warmth spread out from the cradle of her pelvis, softening her body even as every feminine instinct locked onto the man stalking towards her.

Singly they were handsome, together they were devastating. She wanted that, she wanted them ... both of them, to look at her as Ryder was now as he backed her up to the tree—like he wanted to take her right there up against the rough bark. But she didn't just want Ryder. An image of him on one side and Jayce on the other, both of them touching her, their lips on her skin, filled her mind... *Oh God, I am one sick little puppy.*

"Yes?" His voice was as flat and hard as his look as he took another step towards her. His body was taut with tension and his skin rippled like heat rising off the hot sand. Cat recognized it. His change, held just under the skin and only just under control.

"Are you alright?" Cat managed to avoid getting pinned between him and the tree, stepping around it instead, one hand on the trunk as she negotiated the tangled roots backwards.

"No."

"What's the matter, are you hurt?"

The thought hadn't occurred to her before and instantly Cat kicked herself. What if he'd been injured in the bar fight as well?

"Yeah."

He didn't stop moving, following her around the trunk with nothing human in his eyes. Amber leached into the green color and Cat knew she was looking at Ryder's wolf, speaking to the beast within. Swallowing, she kept moving. She'd never heard of anyone but an alpha or a feral do this before ... channel the wolf without changing form. Her body tensed, her instincts torn between the sexual potential of the situation and the fight or flight instinct. The human in her recognized a predator when she saw it and demanded she run but the wolf inside recognized a virile male, a potential mate. The beast zipped and struggled to be free, to slough off the human form and rub herself up against Ryder, to entice him into claiming her.

She didn't know if the Vanir brothers, wolves without a pack, had gone alpha being on their own. The former was the better option because if he was feral she was in a world of trouble, one that ended with her throat ripped out.

"Where? Where are you hurt?" Worry raged with indecision as she slowed down. If he really was hurt that could be the reason she was seeing the wolf in his eyes. But her granddad had always told her to run, and run fast if she ever saw amber in a man's eyes.

He won't be in control sweet-pea, it'll be his wolf. And the wolf don't care about nothing apart from its own needs.

Needs. Oh my God, what sort of needs? She had her own needs. Just thinking about those sent liquid heat surging through her body to pool low in her stomach. Even worse

... she felt the dampness between her thighs at the same time Ryder took a deep breath. His lips curled back as he drew the air over his tongue, tasting it, tasting *her*.

"Here ... I hurt here." He sidestepped abruptly to trap her between the rough bark and his bigger body. His hand dropped to his crotch and cupped the massive erection there.

"Oh."

He was too close. Way too close. So close Cat could feel the heat from his skin burning through her ... his shirt. A loose shirt which was, somehow suddenly too tight and itchy. Locked in Ryder's amber gaze she couldn't move, not even to pull at where her top was stuck to her sticky skin.

Pressing closer, the muscled wall of his chest brushed her breasts. Cat's heart pounded as he leaned in. He was going to kiss her, he had to kiss her. And she needed that more than she needed air to breathe.

"So little wolf, you going to take care of me? Play nursemaid like you did for Jayce?" His voice was a dark temptation, the words whispered bare millimeters from her lips. Cat followed as he moved, pressing her back against the rough bark, as though her lips were connected to his by an invisible cord. Ryder lifted a hand and planted it beside her head, leaving a gap for her to slither out of if she wanted.

Never run from a wolf. They liked to chase.

Cat looked into Ryder's eyes and knew she was caught between a rock and a hard place. He had no intention of letting her go. Running would only inflame the situation, and the arousal pressed against her soft belly, more.

She didn't want to run. In fact she wanted everything he had to give and more. The trouble was, she wasn't really sure what his *everything* was. The women in the pack who'd known them—known them in the biblical sense that was—before they'd left went all dreamy-eyed or hot and bothered whenever the Vanir brothers were brought up. The dark pleasure to be had in their arms was only hinted at, with no details given. So Cat's imagination had run wild. Every fantasy she had revolved around these guys, kept safely under lock and key in her head so people wouldn't realize how deviant she was. Now that door was unlocked and wide open.

She opened her mouth to reply but didn't get the chance. Ryder leaned down and claimed her mouth, blowing away the last of her defenses the instant his lips touched hers.

Cat moaned helplessly, her body welcoming as he pressed her back into the tree. His kiss was hard and ruthless, plundering her lips as he caressed her curves. Down and then up, his hand sliding under her T-shirt. A rumble of surprise vibrated through the solid chest against hers as he remembered she wasn't wearing a bra. She whimpered as his fingers brushed the sensitive skin of her breast. She wanted more, always more.

"Mine." His voice was a dark whisper against her neck as he placed feverish kisses along her tender skin, fire following his lips. His thumb swept the curve at the underside of her breast making Cat gasp in reaction.

"I want to taste you, then I'm gonna fuck you." The crude words whispered against her ear sent an illicit thrill shooting through her. She shouldn't be doing this, Jayce might be back any minute and she knew how he felt about her. *Too nice. Go home and play with your dolls.* She could still feel the roughness of his palm on her cheek the day he and Ryder had left home and that comment had haunted her for years.

“Screw him,” she muttered, if Jayce didn't want her then Ryder sure as hell did and she wasn't saying no.

“Screw who?” Ryder asked between kisses, dragging her leg over his hip and grinding the hardness of his erection right where she ached the most. “Jayce? Forget him, his loss. My gain.”

His hands closed on the hem of her shirt and slowly drew it over her head. His eyes, amber and grey in the silver moonlight, burned with desire. Her hair fluttered in a silken cloud around her, the soft brushes making her bite her lip as she watched his expression. The tips just reached her nipples. Tight buds in the cool night air, aching for his touch. He didn't make her wait long, leaning down to flick his tongue over one.

Cat swore, her head dropping back against the rough bark of the tree trunk as Ryder nibbled and licked her breasts. Tension built in her slender body as anticipation coursed through her. Her nipples ached for him to close his warm mouth over her but he didn't. Nearing desperation she arched her back in invitation, offering more of the soft globe to his roving lips.

He chuckled, reading her intent. “Not yet little wolf. I've waited a long time for this so now I'll make *you* wait.”

As he spoke his strong fingers smoothed down the curve of her hip, angling inwards to tease the line where her thigh met her body. “And, believe me, it'll be worth it.”

He leaned back, holding her at arm's length as he drank in the sight of her. Hot shivers raced over Cat's skin. She stretched, showing off and offering herself to him. The heated look in his eyes drove the tension in her body higher. All she wanted to do was press against him, rub herself against all that toned muscle like a cat and demand he fuck her.

He smiled, a feral look entering his eyes. “You're gorgeous. Better than I ever imagined.”

Cat tilted her head, her feminine curiosity peaked. “Why, you think of me often?”

He moved down her body, leaning in to place a kiss on her shoulder, on the tip of a breast, before sliding to his knees in front of her and pressing his lips against her soft stomach. Cat gasped, the brush of his stubble-covered chin against her skin sent a bolt of lust through her so strong her knees buckled.

“I got you baby,” Ryder murmured, his strong arms holding her and urging her to lean back. A large hand cupped the back of her knee to lift it and loop it over his shoulder. Cat bit her lip, heat washing into her cheeks as she considered the sight she must present. Naked as the day she was born, legs spread with one hooked over a hot guy's shoulder, his lips dangerously close to her pussy.

“HmMMM, yeah. *Much* better than my dreams.”

His first lick across her folds made Cat jump a little in surprise. With his second he swept his tongue from her aching pussy up to her clit, opening her with one long, determined sweep to tease the tiny nub of flesh. Cat's bones melted as the warm wetness of his tongue surrounded her clit. Oh hell, it felt fantastic, far better than she'd imagined. And he was only just getting started. With his third lick he circled the entrance to her pussy, then stabbed as deep as he could, fucking her with his tongue as she cried out and clutched his shoulders.

Her pleas did little to sway him. The soft moans and muttered curses just seemed to urge him on. His large hand supported her knee hooked over his shoulder, holding her

open for his lips and tongue as he ravished her. Cat groaned as her clit ached and her pussy clenched at his attentions. Her hands lifted, seeking and finding purchase around a branch above her as Ryder nibbled and licked, alternating paying attention to her clit with sliding his tongue as deep as he could into her needy pussy.

The small clearing filled with the sounds of sex. Then it all became too much, Cat's body stiffened as the tight knot of pleasure in her loins expanded, her clit and pussy aching in rhythm with it.

“Oh my God, I'm gonna c—”

Ryder drew her clit into the warm cavern of his mouth and flicked the tip of his tongue rapidly back and forth over it. Pleasure exploded in Cat's body. She cried his name, her hips jerking against him as she came hard. Heat surged through her veins in waves that she couldn't stop, didn't want to stop. She'd never had an orgasm so intense, so immediate.

Her head rolled back against the trunk as Ryder dropped her thigh, standing and wiping his mouth in the same movement. Gathering her into his arms he kissed her again. She could taste herself on his lips, an earthy-musky taste which wasn't unpleasant, just different.

“You taste wonderful. See what you do to me?” He pulled her up hard against his erection, still constrained by his boxers. “You make me so hot. You know what I'm gonna do now? Turn around sweetheart.”

Cat shivered and did as she was told, leaning her hands against the trunk as Ryder kicked her feet further apart. If she'd been asked how she'd seen her first time with him, she wouldn't have picked this ... up against a tree in a forest while on the run. As Ryder dipped his knees and ran the thick head of his cock over her pussy lips from behind, she had to admit it was as hot as hell. Far hotter than any of her fantasies had been by a long shot.

He felt her little shiver of pleasure, chuckling softly by her ear. “You like that kitty-cat?” he murmured and pressed his thigh against the inside of hers to open her legs further. Cat didn't have time to answer, all her attention focused on where his cock rubbed against the lips of her pussy. Christ, he was big. She swallowed, suddenly nervous. He wasn't going to fit all that inside her, surely? He'd split her in two.

“It's okay, just breathe.” His voice was a soft murmur of reassurance as his hand snaked around her belly, seeking her clit. “I wouldn't hurt you for the world Cat, you can stake your life on that.”

She bit her lip as his fingers moved against her, clever and sure as he wrung a response from her body she didn't think was possible. Not after such an intense orgasm. But within seconds a moan bubbled over and escaped her lips, a familiar heat setting up low in her belly.

“That's it sweetheart, let it go. Fuck, you're wet and ready for me.” He groaned, his fingers circling and tweaking her clit. Then he fitted himself against her and started to push his way into her hot, wet pussy. Cat swore and bit her lip.

When he stilled and tried to move away, she grabbed his hand and shoved it back down between her legs. “Stop messing around and just fuck me Ryder, okay?”

“Whatever you say baby.” His voice was tight as he pushed his way inside, her body stretching to accommodate his thick shaft.

Cat stilled, every muscle tensed as he slid into her inch by slow inch. She'd never felt

anything so erotic in her life. Every skin cell was hypersensitive to the brush of his hands and the heat of his skin against her bare back. Finally, with a last push of his hips, he was in her all the way, his thighs pressing into hers as he filled her completely.

“Breathe through it baby, it'll be good in a minute.” His lips were soft on her neck as his fingers stroked her clit. Cat held on, waiting for the discomfort to abate. It wasn't pain, not really, just a full feeling she wasn't used to. She'd never had a guy as big as Ryder.

The tight feeling in her stretched pussy wore off and Cat released a sigh of relief. Ryder's fingers worked in slow circles around the tight bud of her clit. She bit her lip again, mangling the lower one as tension built in slow and steady degrees. She needed to move, even impaled on his massive cock she needed to move against him. Tentatively she rolled her hips. The small movement caused a delicious friction that stole her breath.

“Hmmm...” Ryder took her movement as a signal. He pulled out of her almost all the way, until just the head of his cock was still inside her. Cat pouted in disappointment as he pulled out. She wanted him to move, not pull out. It didn't last long, within seconds he surged back, filling her to the hilt.

“Ugh ... you ... oh fuck!” Pulling back he slammed into her again, then again and again, his movements fevered. The clearing filled with new sounds ... of skin against skin, the sound of Ryder's deep groans and her own whimpers of pleasure.

“Yeah, just like that sweetheart, ride it ... I want to feel you come over my cock.”

Cat gasped as Ryder upped the pace. Even with her pussy slick from her earlier release it was still a tight fit, the friction where their bodies joined enough to make her eyes roll back in her head.

She arched her back and drove back against him, impaling herself on his thick cock until she thought she was going to pass out. The hard knot in her loins intensified until she ached with the need to come.

“Oh God yeah, I'm gonna ... ahhhhh!” Cat stiffened, pleasure exploding out from her core. Her pussy clamped hard around Ryder's cock, milking the hardened shaft mercilessly as her orgasm washed over her.

He grunted, arms closing tight round her as he slammed into her one last time then went rigid. His cock, buried deep inside her, pulsed and jerked as he came, his hot seed flooding the neck of her womb. For an instant, Cat prayed it would find fertile ground—

“What the *hell* is going on here?”

Chapter Five

Ryder and Cat jumped apart like they'd been burnt and whirled around. Cat squeaked in surprise as Ryder's hand closed on her arm, shoving her behind his larger body. She peered around his shoulder. Jayce was mere feet away and the expression on his face—shock, hurt and anger—twisted Cat's heartstrings.

"You just couldn't wait, could you?" he demanded, his eyes blazing as he rounded on his brother. "Couldn't wait until we could get her back to her family and find a whore someplace for you to spend your lust on."

Cat's cheeks burned at the words, an awful sick feeling filled her from her toes right up to her throat. Jayce's voice was harsh and angry. Not the voice she remembered from her dreams all these years. Bending down she grabbed her shirt, trying to pull it on as quickly as possible and shield her naked body from the condemning look in Jayce's eyes.

He noticed the movement. "Don't bother sweetheart, I've seen it already. The sight of you and him in mid-fuck is an image I really didn't want but then, I can't exactly bleach my eyeballs can I?" he snapped, a curl to his lips as he gave her a contemptuous look.

Cat swallowed and held the shirt close to her. Left loose it just about covered everything that was important. As long as she didn't do anything energetic.

His look, his tone, made her feel terrible ... as though the pleasure she and Ryder had shared was dirty. At the same time though, she could see the hurt hiding under the anger in Jayce's eyes. Which didn't make sense, he didn't want her but he didn't want Ryder to have her either?

"It wasn't like that..."

She stepped forwards, reaching out. What she and Ryder had shared was wonderful, fantastic. Beautiful. She needed to make him understand.

"Don't." He yanked his arm away from her questing hand. Cat recoiled. "Don't touch me. Don't ever fucking touch me, okay?"

"Come on man, no need for that. She's only trying to help."

"Shut it Ry, I think you've done enough," Jayce snarled, his voice rough-edged and deeper than normal. A sign of his wolf close to the surface. "She's going into heat, you knew that ... you knew she wouldn't refuse you. She wouldn't say no to any man at the moment but you decide to fuck her anyway ... Christ Ry, I knew you didn't have any morals but that's fucking low man!"

"Jay, that's not h—"

"It wasn't like that!" Anger swirled through Cat, winding around the hurt she felt at Jayce's contempt as she cut Ryder off mid-sentence. "I wouldn't just ... go with anyone. It was special."

Jayce barked a harsh laugh, his head dropping back for a moment and twisted mirth on his handsome features. Cat winced at the sound.

"Yeah darling, special. You tell yourself that. Tell yourself anything to avoid the truth of what happened. You gave it up like a bitch in heat to a horny wolf who likes to fuck as many women as he can, as many ways as he can. Any hole's a goal, eh Ryder? What you gonna do, fuck her up the ass as an encore? Oh, that'd be good, let's ruin her innocence in one fell swoop, shall we?"

Cat didn't hear Ryder's angry answer, her heart thundering in her ears as hot tears prickled in the back of her eyes, hurting her throat as she tried not to cry. What had she done to deserve this?

"I'm not a whore." Cat tried to keep her voice from trembling. She hated him, she truly hated him, and loved him at the same time. "I know what I'm doing. The moon madness hasn't affected my judgment—"

"Yeah right darling, you'll give it up to anyone with a cock and you know it."

"Get lost," she snapped. "It wasn't like that and now you're being rude and offensive."

Jayce just watched her, his eyes unreadable. "Sure it was Cat. You need fucking, I can smell it on you. In half an hour you'll need a thick cock up your cunt again. And again, and again, for the next three days. You'll beg and plead to get it and you won't care who takes you."

Ryder opened his mouth but Cat cut him off with a sharp gesture. This was between her and his brother. She looked Jayce square in the eyes.

"Piss off Jayce." She tried to control her body and hoped he didn't realize she was trembling. "You're pissing me off now. If you can't be adult about this, go find a playpen to throw your toys out of."

She'd pushed it too far. She realized that as soon as the words left her mouth and, behind her, Ryder swore lowly.

"Cat, let me handle this," Ryder asked softly, his hand smoothing down her arm but Cat shrugged him off.

"No Ryder, he's being an ass and I've had enough of it!"

On the surface he seemed to be the more dangerous of the two, but she knew them. Jayce was the dangerous one and every bit of that danger was directed right at her in his green-eyed glare.

"Oh, well. If you're pissed off, I'd better give you a reason, shouldn't I?" His words were dangerously quiet and he moved without warning. One minute he stood apart from them, his body tight with anger, and the next he was hauling Cat roughly up against him.

She gasped in protest as his mouth crashed down on hers but he simply used her parted lips to deepen the kiss. A kiss that was ruthless and demanding ... and, God help her, had her hot and needy in seconds.

She whimpered against his lips, at first in denial. She didn't want to be kissed like this, as a punishment instead of an act of love. She wanted his lips soft and loving, not hard and angry. But her wolf and the madness didn't care. He was a virile man and he was aroused, the evidence of that pressing hard against her belly.

Cat's whimpers of denial turned to moans of need as she moved closer to him. Her soft curves fitted perfectly against the solid planes of his body as he folded her in his arms. She moaned as his hand cupped the nape of her neck, holding her head still as he broke from her mouth to kiss along her jaw.

Need swirled through her in a thick haze as her head dropped back, baring the vulnerable length of her throat to his lips. When his hand swept up her side to close over her breast, she mewled and arched her back, offering more to him. She needed more from him. Desperate for his touch she pressed closer, her hands smoothing over his shoulders and down the solid muscles of his chest...

He thrust her away from him with a savage push. Like in the bar, Cat's bare ass hit

the ground hard, knocking the wind out of her in a loud “whoosh”.

*

“Told you you'd be hot for any guy who came along.”

He should have felt triumph that he'd been proven right, but all Jayce felt was empty victory as he looked down at her. Sitting in the dirt, holding the white shirt, her long, tanned legs akimbo in front of her, she looked up at him angrily. The tears in her eyes speared his heart like a pig ready for roasting.

Ignoring it, Jayce cupped his crotch. He was out of order and he hated himself for it, but he just couldn't stop.

“When you've worn lover-boy here out, you come look me up. You want cock, I'll give it to you. I'll fuck you until you come screaming my name and begging me for more.”

Ryder helped her to her feet and their entwined hands sent another stab of jealousy through Jayce. “In your dreams Jayce. You think I'd let you touch me after that little display?”

Jayce shrugged. He didn't care ... he shouldn't care. “Whatever. I'll leave you two lovebirds to it. I'd rather not see you fuck again.”

“Jayce, I think you need to calm down and clear your head.” Ryder's voice was quiet, the concern in it evident. A fact that pissed Jayce off even more. Of course Ryder could afford to be all magnanimous and concerned now, couldn't he? He'd taken the one thing Jayce had ever wanted. Cat.

Caitlin had chosen Ryder.

He looked at them, Cat all wrapped up in his brother's arms, and felt sick. There was no way he could stick around, not now.

“Fuck this,” he spat and turned on his heel. “Have a nice life Cat. Ryder, go to fucking hell,” he snapped and disappeared into the forest.

* * * *

Jayce went wolf as soon as he hit the tree line, not caring that the clothes he'd gathered so carefully in town were destroyed in the change. He ran as hard and as fast as he could to get away from his brother and Cat.

He couldn't run from his memories though. In his mind's eye all he could see was them together, Cat naked and writhing under his brother's muscular form. Ryder's bare ass clenching as he thrust his cock into her willing body. The sounds, the smells—all burned into his memory and tormenting him. So he sought refuge in the wolf, trying to bury his humanity so deep he couldn't remember what he'd seen.

It made no difference. The knowledge was still there. The knowledge that when it came to it, Cat had picked Ryder. She'd chosen his brother over him and that ate away at Jayce like acid.

Finally he slowed, coming to a stop on a rocky outcropping. His head hung low as he stared at the valley below. The dawn was just breaking and the scenery spectacular, something that at any other time Jayce would have sat and watched, absorbing it all and feeling content with his place in the world.

Not this morning. He huffed, the sound ending in the smallest whine as he lay down and rested his head on his paws. His anger had drained away, leaving just sorrow. And a deep well of pain and emptiness where his heart used to be as he closed down the link

between himself and his brother to the merest strand. Perhaps if he ignored the bond which tied them together, the freaky unnatural bond, then it would go away and at last he'd be free. Free to go his own way and find his own mate.

If only it were that easy. There was only one woman he'd ever want to bond with, and she wanted his brother, not him. He closed his eyes, a single tear escaping from under his left eyelid.

In one night he'd lost everything that mattered to him. His mom was dead, his brother lost to him and the woman who had owned his heart for years had chosen someone else.

He surged to his feet, his throat welling with grief as he howled, the sound of his pain echoing over the silent mountains.

* * * *

"Do you think he'll be okay?" Cat's voice was soft, half muffled by Ryder's broad chest as she snuggled up against him. When Jayce had stormed off, Ryder had decided to stick around the clearing for a while. He knew his brother. Jayce was hot-headed at times, prone to dramatics and flaring up over the least little thing.

"Yeah, he does this." He reassured her, dropping a kiss on the top of her head. "He'll be back." *I hope...*

Trouble was, Ryder wasn't sure this time he would be. He'd never seen his twin so mad or the sheer depth of rage over the link they shared before. A link which was all but gone, shut down from Jayce's side. Something he'd always been able to do but Ryder never had. Another sign of their freakishness ... like the control they had over the change.

Again the thought came back to haunt Ryder that the whispers behind their backs were right. There was something not quite right about them. *Twin wolfs ... agents of the devil ... unnatural*, the old timers had always whispered. *Should have been drowned at birth ... evil*.

"I hope so." The strain was evident in her voice. "You don't think that too, do you? That I ... I'd..."

"Have sex with just anyone? No babe, I don't," Ryder said honestly and shifted her in his arms to get into a more comfortable position. He'd recovered a blanket from the truck Jayce had brought back and the pair were sitting wrapped in it, leaning against the trunk he'd taken her against not an hour ago.

"Oh good. Because I wouldn't..." There was a pause and, even with his eyes closed, Ryder knew she was nibbling her lower lip. "I think I love you, you know. I always have."

He smiled softly. Even after the scene with Jayce he was more relaxed than he'd been in years. A good fuck did that for him. No, not a fuck ... what they'd done had been more than fucking but his brain shied away from the conclusion it came to.

"You just think? You don't know?"

Another silence, then finally she spoke. "Well... You and your brother are ... I couldn't decide between you. I ... no, you'll think I'm a freak."

At that Ryder did laugh. "Honey, you're talking to a guy who's been considered a freak of nature since the day he was born. And a twisted son of a bitch now. Believe me, there ain't nothin' you could say that would shock me."

"You sure?"

"Absolutely."

"I want to sleep with you *and* Jayce."

"What?" Ryder went still at the words he'd never thought to hear from Caitlin's lips. Leaning away from her he looked down into her beautiful face. Tonight was taking on a very surreal quality. Not only had he finally gotten the women he'd fantasized about for years. Well, wrong. Technically he'd only fantasized about *kissing* her for years. Just kissing, nothing more, despite what Jayce thought of him and his sexual morals.

"You want to run that by me again?" He started in surprised, dropping his usual "sweetheart" from the end of the sentence in his shock. She couldn't have said what he'd thought she'd said. Surely? "I thought you said you wanted to have sex with both of us."

She met his eyes levelly, a hint of color building in her cheeks. Then she lifted her hand and stroked gentle fingertips down his cheek. "I do."

"Awww, isn't this cute?" A new voice said, shattering the silence and tranquil atmosphere. Ryder swore and shot to his feet, shoving Cat behind him. There in the clearing in front of them stood four were-cats. One he recognized from earlier. Or, at least, he recognized the black eye the cat was sporting courtesy of his own left hook. But the guy in front, the one who was speaking, he'd never seen before. Ryder's lips curled back from his teeth, a warning growl trickling between them.

"You lot just don't learn do you? Well ... if it's another kicking you're looking for, you've come to the right place." He locked eyes with the guy in front who had spoken and seemed to be the one in charge. A silent promise that things were going to go from bad to shitty as soon as Ryder could arrange it.

Cat's hands rested on his back, just lightly and he was glad he'd insisted that they get dressed, jealousy hitting him broadside at the thought of another guy seeing her naked. Ever again.

"Yeah right. You and me dog." The were-cat with the black eye gave a "bring it on" motion with his fingers as he started to step around the guy in front. "Let's finish this now, then I'm screwing your bitch. She looks real sweet."

His friend...leader...owner—Ryder couldn't quite work out the relationship between the cat and the man with them—stopped him with an upraised hand. "Oh no, I don't think you will be..." the stranger replied, a smirk on his lips as he glanced at Cat. Ryder moved to shield her more.

Ryder looked him up and down, assessing him as an opponent. Dark haired and dark eyed he was as tall as Ryder but slender. Ryder drew in a deep breath and rolled the air over his tongue. As he'd thought, not a were-cat but not human, although that went without saying. He was in the company of were-cats. If he had been human they'd have humored him for all of a minute, then used him in a fatal game of cat and mouse.

"...the only person touching her will be me. A hot fuck will make this whole tedious business bearable." The non-cat, non-human's smirk widened to a lustful leer, eliciting an answering snarl from Ryder. His body shivered but he held his control. All he wanted to do was leap across the clearing and tear this guy's throat out. In hot, bloody chunks of meat. He could already feel the heat of the blood on his tongue, taste it in the back of his throat. He didn't care what this guy was, he was going to take him apart if he so much as laid a finger on Cat.

"You want her? Then you have to go through me first," Ryder declared, thumping

his chest.

“Ry...” Cat's voice was soft and wary behind him, her hand tapping his back lightly to get his attention.

The speaker grinned. It wasn't a nice expression, a lecherous look in his eyes as he glanced past Ryder. “Not a problem. You may think you're the big bad ... but I'm the real deal. You think the lady wants an animal when she can have a *god*?”

Ryder laughed. “Oh a god is it? Nice one... I thought I was arrogant but you mate, you take the cake. Don't worry babe,” he dropped his voice and murmured over his shoulder. “I'll sort this out. When I say the word, you run, as fast and as far as you can. Find Jayce.”

“No, Ryder—”

“Just do as you're told Cat,” he snapped, concern for her overriding everything else.

“Trouble in paradise?” The self-proclaimed god asked with a raised eyebrow. An expression which made Ryder frown. It was familiar, too familiar ... like he'd seen it somewhere before.

“Ryder, *look ... look at his face*,” Cat whispered urgently.

Ryder already was, studying his opponent's features. A broad forehead, wide intelligent eyes set over high cheekbones ... lips which curved into a cruel smile but on another...

“Fucking hell...” It was like looking into a mirror, or at his twin. Except he and Jayce had light green eyes instead of dark, their mother's eyes. “Dad?”

“*Never* call me that. You think I want people to know I fucked an animal and sired you? My name is Ancelin and I am a god, you can call me 'my lord' or 'sire' ... well, for the last few minutes you have left of your life that is.”

“Yeah, yeah. I got the god thing already. You really are full of yourself aren't you?” Ryder's brain was moving a mile a minute as he tried to figure a way out of this. He'd always known he and Jayce were different ... the elders of the pack had known too but they'd gone for the downwards option rather than something more heavenly. Considering the look on his newly-found father's face, somewhere between anticipation and lust, Ryder wasn't sure heavenly was the right word.

He reached up and latched a hand into the neck of his shirt, pulling down in a swift and brutal movement to tear it from his body. Ancelin's eyes flicked as Ryder's heavy, muscular torso was revealed. The blonde were-cat with the black eye grinned. Ryder was bigger and heavier than daddy-dear. He had to hope that would be enough to carry the fight.

The power building in the clearing shattered that hope as the air shifted around Ancelin, the god's eyes fixed onto Ryder's torso and the strange tattoo which had appeared last night.

“That bitch, that fucking bitch! She's helping you! She's helping all of you isn't she?” he raged, the swirls and eddies of the air around him in riot. “Where is she? I'll break her fucking neck ... no, I'll strangle her. I want to watch the life drain out of her eyes just like I watched your mother die.”

Ryder's world stopped as pain threatened to engulf him. It was bad enough knowing his mother was gone. Bad enough she'd been murdered and died in pain. But to find out his father was responsible? Rage boiled up within him, threatening to boil over as he looked at his father.

Ancelin shook his head. “Ohh, that hurts does it? Your mommy in pain?” The god sneered, stepping towards Ryder. “Enough, it won't make any difference who helps you or your brothers. Your brother Danyl won't help you, he made a deal to save his worthless mate's life. So you're going to die a slow and horrible death while your bitch watches. Then, when I'm done with her ... I'll give her to the cats to play with.”

The four men around him grinned, the same sick look in their eyes as in Ancelin's. Ryder's heart pounded in his chest as the tension in the clearing mounted. Blood and adrenalin surged through his veins, a potent mixture that galvanized his body.

“One, I have no idea who the fuck Danyl is and...” There was no way they were going to touch Cat, he'd make sure of that. Pausing, Ryder reached down within himself for the power of his wolf, his voice dropping deeper as he carried on speaking. “...like I said, you gotta come through me first. Cat?”

“Yeah?”

“Run.”

Chapter Six

“He'll kill them you know?”

Jayce had been lying on the outcrop as the paleness of the dawn brightened into day. Watching idly as the shadows shortened in the valley below. He hadn't moved for hours, just wallowing in pain and misery.

At the soft feminine voice, he yelped and leapt to his feet. Sitting on the boulder behind him was a woman. Slender and so beautiful it made his heart ache, her turquoise gaze held his.

Stepping back Jayce summoned the change, his human form bursting from the lupine within seconds until he was standing naked in front of her. There was no shame in his expression, just demand as he looked at her.

“Okay lady, three things. Who the hell are you, how did you find me and who's killing who?”

She rose to her feet, her fluid grace tipping him off that she wasn't human. The scent which surrounded him as she approached, of heat mixed with something delicate and floral, told him whatever she was, she didn't spend long in the mortal plains.

“I am the Phoenix.” Her words were simple as she came to a stop in front of him and extended a hand. Her fingertips trailed over his side and Jayce had to remember to breathe as he looked down. The new artwork on his ribcage pulsed red. It wasn't a bird, it was a *Phoenix*.

“What the...?”

“I am Nix, Ancelin's mate and, unless you heed my warning, he will kill your brother and your woman.”

Pain surged within Jayce and he shook his head. “Sorry lady, I think you got the wrong guy. One, I don't know an Ancelin and two, I don't have a woman. She chose Ryder.”

Nix smiled and shook her head. “A woman's heart is a complex thing and choices are not always what they seem. Trust the woman you love ... but first save her from your father. One of your brothers has already met him and that defeat angered him. He's tracking you all down now, determined to head off the prophecy.”

Jayce blinked, trying to take it all in. He didn't question her word, he'd always been able to pick out if people were lying and her voice had the ring of truth about it.

“Okay. This Ancelin is our father ... and he's trying to kill Ryder? Err ... you *do* know what we are right? We're wolves. The big bad. Ryder'll chew him up and spit him out in small pieces. I think it's your mate you need to be worried about.”

“Ancelin is a demi-god.”

“Shit.”

Fear for Cat and Ryder filling him, Jayce started to turn, then stopped and looked over his shoulder. “Two questions.”

Nix inclined her head. “If I can answer, I will.”

“Good. First, brothers? I'm guessing that's in the plural? Not just Ryder?”

“Correct. You have two brothers aside from your twin. Your father doesn't know there are two of you. He thinks your mother bore only one child.”

Jayce grinned. He could use that. "Okay, second. Why are you helping us? You're his mate."

The Phoenix didn't answer for a long moment, her lovely eyes filled with sorrow. "Not by choice, by prophecy. I want..." She stopped and shook her head. "We don't have time. You need to save them. I cannot help you further, he already knows I've interfered. Go. Now."

Without pausing to think Jayce turned on his heel and ran, changing on the run again and heading back to the brother he'd abandoned and the woman who'd rejected him. He didn't care whether they wanted him around or not, they were stuck with him. He just hoped he got there in time.

* * * *

The fight, such as it was, lasted moments but it seemed like hours. Cat looked on in horror, she would run but her legs had forgotten how to move. The were-cats surrounded the two of them, Ancelin with an evil grin on his face as he walked towards his son.

Ryder and Jayce's father. Cat shook her head and blinked as she looked at the self-proclaimed god. The brothers had celestial blood? In her mind things started to slot into place.

Divine parentage would explain the oddities about them. Their ability to control the change for one ... an ability Ryder was displaying even now as he took on three of the were-cats at once.

Power rolled over his skin as he part-shifted, just his hands changing into a half-form. His fingers lengthened, nails turning to razor-sharp talons he used to swipe at the cats as they tried to surround him. It was an ability she'd only ever seen in alphas before and once again she wondered if, without a pack, the brothers had not gone feral as everyone expected but alpha instead.

"Hello beautiful, how about me and you have a party all our own?"

Cat backed up as Ancelin broke away from the main fight, the cats keeping Ryder busy. The big werewolf roared as he moved like lightning, swinging under a vicious punch and raking his claws along an unprotected abdomen. A feline shriek of pain and rage filled the clearing. Ryder didn't waste any time, picking the injured were-cat up bodily and throwing him at another. Cat's eyes grew wide in surprise. She'd known Ryder was strong but just to pick up a man bodily like that was a whole different level.

"Cat, *run!*" he bellowed, sparing a second to cast a glance over his shoulder. His fear for her showed stark on his face but a heavy right hook drew his attention back to the fight.

"Touch me and I'll take your hand off at the wrist," she promised, backing away from Ancelin. She didn't like him. Her hackles rose as he got closer. He was handsome yes, but it was wrong seeing Jayce and Ryder's face on this hard-eyed stranger. *Jayce please*, she silently begged, *we need you*.

"Ohhh feisty little bitch aren't you?"

"You'd better believe it," Cat snapped back, a low growl of warning in her throat. For every step Ancelin took forwards, she took one backwards. She should escape while she could. But how could she leave Ryder? If she did, he was as good as dead.

Ancelin grinned, his eyes full of lust and excitement as he looked her over. Cat felt sick. "I know you want it. I can feel your heat rolling off you. Interesting what a female

wolf will do at certain times of year isn't it?"

"I'd rather die," Cat spat, disgusted. A shudder ran down her spine. Like earlier, with Ryder, she kept stepping around the tree but this time she didn't want to be caught. It wasn't suppressed excitement making her heart pound or her limbs quiver. It was fear.

"That can be arranged." Ancelin's voice dropped flat, his eyes hard as he lost interest in the game. He sighed and as he waved a hand, the air around it shimmered. Cat tried to move back a step but she couldn't. Instinctively she reached for her wolf, only to find the connection to the lupine part of herself blocked off.

Shit. Panic surged through her body and into her heart as she hammered at the wall between them. She'd never been cut off from her wolf before and not being able to reach into that part of herself terrified her. Whimpering she pulled at her feet only to find they were rooted to the spot. "What the hell?"

As she struggled the paralysis got worse, spreading up her legs, freezing her knees and then her thighs. Pinned in place, she flinched as Ancelin stalked around her.

"Nowhere to run sweetheart... Hmm, perhaps I'll kill you while my son watches. He can see the life drain out of your eyes and know it's his fault. Or," he leaned in to whisper in her ear. "How about we stake you out until you're mad with need ... and he can watch you go feral?"

Cat blanched, feeling sick. Of all the things a wolf feared, it was that. A feral wolf was a force of nature, concerned only with feeding and, as its favorite prey was humanity, any wolf pack with a feral in its area would move heaven and earth to hunt it down and destroy it.

A body flew through the air in front of them, hitting the tree trunk with a heavy thud, the breath groaning from the unconscious form as it slid down into a crumpled heap.

"Oh, for fuck's sake. Can't you cats do anything?" Ancelin sighed in annoyance and waved his hand at the group fighting in the middle of the clearing. "I have to do bloody everything around here."

The tsunami of violence resolved itself, Ryder held between two of the were-cats, his head hanging low, and fresh cuts and bruises mottling his skin. Confused, Cat shrieked at him to fight back, but it was as though he was as frozen in place as she was. Paralyzed. Just like she was.

The sickening sound of fists hitting flesh filled the clearing, swiftly followed by the scent of fresh blood on the air. Not just any blood, but blood with the distinctive tangy scent of wolf.

Ryder's blood.

"Please ... don't hurt him," Cat begged, trying to tear her feet from where they were rooted to the ground. Her muscles protested and her bones ached but she ignored the pain to lock eyes with Ancelin. Nothing mattered apart from stopping them from hurting Ryder.

"Please..." she pleaded, desperation threatening to choke her. "I'll do whatever you want, just don't hurt him."

Ancelin laughed, the rich sound echoing around the wooded clearing, bouncing off the trees and back at them. The forest itself was silent, as though it was watching the little scene unfold.

"You just don't get it sweetheart, do you?" he sneered as he left her frozen in place. "Pretty as you are this isn't about you ... oh, I'm sure you're a good fuck and my boy here

is going to be heartbroken when I kill you ... and rest assured I will kill you,” he added, wagging his finger over his shoulder at her as he circled the beaten wolf.

On his knees, his arms locked out at an uncomfortable angle behind him by his captors, Ryder's head hung low.

“...but you really think anyone cares when one bitch buys the farm? Oh, no. This is about something far more important...” The god rolled his shoulder, all puffed up with his own importance. “This is about me.”

He turned and stopped suddenly as Ryder lifted his head. The big wolf might have been down but he wasn't out, a malevolent hatred burning in his green eyes.

“Too damn right this is about you, *dad*. And it's gonna be all about you when I get these cats off me and break your fucking neck,” he promised, his voice low but determined. As though it agreed with him, the odd bird-shaped tattoo on his chest pulsed red for a second, then faded to normal. Ancelin's eyes widened as he dropped back a step and considered his son.

Heart in her throat, Caitlin watched the interplay. She had to figure some way out of this. Had to save Ryder, even if it meant dying herself, because she loved him. Somewhere between the fight in the bar and being threatened by a self-proclaimed god, she'd fallen in love so completely her heart ached with it. Ached because it was full, ached because she was about to die and she'd never gotten the chance to tell Jayce she loved him too.

Ancelin stopped, a frown on his handsome face as his vision snapped back to normal. Whatever normal was for a conceited, self-important, minor deity anyway. “Something is wrong. It's like part of you is missing...” he said, his eyes widening, “...where is the rest of your soul?”

“Right behind you sunshine.”

Cat caught her breath. Like an avenging angel Jayce stood at the edge of the clearing, his arms folded over his broad chest. There was no amusement in his eyes, or his expression, as Ancelin did a double take, glancing from one brother to the other.

“Wha ... you're ... you're—”

*

"The word you're looking for, is 'twins'." Jayce let his gaze flicker from Ancelin to the cat trying to flank him. "Call the cat off or I'll neuter him."

He'd lurked in the shadows before making his presence known, listening to what was going on. Long enough to work it all out.

This was the man who'd killed his mother.

His father.

His eyes connected with Ryder's and the link between them cracked wide open. “*God...*”. Ryder's voice, not just his feelings, fed directly into Jayce's mind. “*Always knew I was special. I'm a god!*”

Jayce's mental voice snorted slightly. “*You're an idiot. Get over yourself, if anything I got the god bit. You hurt?*”

Amusement filled Jayce's mind coming down the link with his brother. “*Hurt? You think I'd let this lot damage me? Purrlease, you wound me.*”

“*You're not stuck like Cat?*”

“*Fuck no, just waiting for you to stop posing so we can finish this. This guy—*”

“*—killed mom. Yeah, I got that bit. Let's do it.*”

The exchange was over in a second and both brothers fixed their attention on Ancelin. The god looked nervous, his dark eyes shooting from Ryder to Jayce.

"Twin wolves ... not possible. It's that bitch Nix ... she put you up to this," he mumbled, taking a step backwards. This time though it was Ancelin being stalked as Jayce backed him up across the clearing.

The tabby were-cat trying to sneak up on the left side snarled and launched himself at Jayce. The wolf moved like lightning, as graceful and elegant as a dancer. Jayce's extended arm caught the were-cat in the throat, a spin bringing his opponent into his arms, hard hands locked on either side of his head. Jayce twisted his shoulders—a quick, savage movement that ended in the crunching of broken bone. Dropping the body at his feet, he carried on.

Out of the corner of his eye Jayce watched as Ryder dealt with his own guards, dragging the men hanging on to his arms upright and slamming them together like an over-enthusiastic toddler with new toys. They dropped like stones to lie groaning at his feet. Ryder stepped over them, his eyes fixed on Ancelin.

The god continued to back up, looking from Ryder back to Jayce with fear in his eyes. He stumbled into Cat, still held fast by the enchantment he'd put on her. She growled and shoved him back towards his sons.

He yelped in surprise as he landed in between Ryder and Jayce. Ryder's merciless face mirrored how Jayce felt as both took an arm.

"Hello *father*—"

"You can't do this! I'm a god do you hear me? A god. Do you know what that *means*?"

Jayce grabbed Ancelin by the front of his shirt and yanked him closer, glaring down into his face as he dangled. He smiled as he realized he and Ryder were both just a hair taller than Ancelin.

"What? The shit we're about to beat out of you will be rainbow-colored?" Jayce snarled, "Because god or no fucking god, father or no father, we *are* going to kill you."

Ancelin paled. Then, without warning, he blinked out of existence. Jayce looked at his empty hands in surprise.

"Bastard! Where'd he go?" Ryder's voice echoed Jayce's surprise.

"He's trans-located..." Jayce spun on a heel, looking for the place Ancelin would reappear. Because he would. He had to. "Fuck it. I hate dealing with deities. He can't have gone far."

Ryder stood still, closing his eyes for a moment and going motionless. Without asking, Jayce knew what he was doing. Searching out their errant father on the astral plane. Something neither of them had ever been able to do before. That wasn't the only thing either, deep within himself Jayce felt different. As though meeting their father for the first time had awoken something inside him.

"No, he's gone. Can't get a trace on him at all." Ryder shook his head and reached for the phone in his pocket. Flipping it open he looked at the display, "Crap, no signal..."

Jayce grinned. "Hey, we're part-god remember?"

"Good point..." Ryder glared at the phone for a minute, then he grunted and dialed. "Yeah, Sal? This is Ry Vanir ... listen, do a search for me on a deity called Ancelin, would ya? If there's a bounty on him, we want it. Yeah, cheers doll. We'll be done soon. We have something to clear up first..."

* * * *

Cat felt like the outsider looking in as the twins turned towards her. Around them the were-cats lay moaning on the ground, no longer a threat. Having both sets of green eyes on her was unsettling. Just the same as she remembered but so, so different. There was a buzz in the air around them. The same buzz she'd felt when Ancelin had touched her except this time her skin wasn't trying to crawl off her bones to get away.

Suddenly she understood what made them different. The whole part-shift deal, the danger that clung to them, the reason the seers in the pack didn't like them, the reason they made alphas nervous.

Because they were alpha wolves and they weren't. In fact they weren't werewolves at all, they were just playing wolf and always had been.

She took a wary step forwards, awe filling her. Awe because they were beautiful, stood there like ... well, like gods, and wariness because of the look on Jayce's face. Hostility and pain radiated from him in waves.

"Is it true? He really is a god?" she asked, reaching them.

"Was. His days are numbered," Jayce said shortly, turning away from her and talking to his brother instead. "I'll take whatever Sal's got lined up for us. Call me when you're done here and you're ready to work again."

The atmosphere went from bad to shitty in a heartbeat. "Com'on bro, no need to be like that—" Ryder tried but Cat cut him off.

Caitlin was a calm woman, most of the time. At the moment though she was riding the razor edge of sexual need, fear and fury. The first she'd been dealing with since she'd realized she was going into heat ... the second, since the cats had attacked them yesterday, but the third was all new and all directed at Jayce.

"You know what? Screw *you*." She hated the wavering edge of tears in her voice. "I didn't have to run my paws off to tell you guys about your mom. I didn't have to walk out on my pack because I thought you'd want to know and I don't have to put up with this shit. You got a problem with me Jayce, then let's have it out here and now."

"I don't have a problem with you, Cat. Enjoy your life."

Jayce turned away without looking at her, his voice defeated. For some reason that made Cat all the angrier and she did something she'd never dreamt of doing in her lifetime.

She shoved him. Hard.

"Look at me Jayce, and tell me what the fucking problem is or do I have to bloody beat it out of you?" She placed her hands on her hips as Jayce stumbled in surprise. He righted himself quickly and turned to look at her. Ryder stepped back, his upraised hand hiding his smile.

"Playing dangerous games babe, you sure you want to go there?" His blond eyebrow arched up towards his shaved hairline. The sentence rolled off his tongue in the smooth-as-silk voice that was Jayce at his most charming, or his most lethal.

Determined not to let him distract her, she ignored it and glared at him. "Totally sure. You obviously have some maggot in your head and I want to know what your problem is."

"You want to know what my problem is?"

"Yeah, what am I? Speaking freaking Martian here? Let me put this in terms even your simplistic male brain can comprehend. What. Is. Your. Deal?"

Cat folded her arms, her weight on one leg as she waited for him to answer. To one side she could see Ryder's shoulders shaking in amusement. She shot him a look, one that said "I'll deal with you later". It only made his broad shoulders shake all the more.

"My problem?" Jayce's voice was quiet but wound so tight if he'd been a spring, he'd have broken under the pressure. "The woman I love chose my God-damn brother before I could get a fucking shot at her. So, yeah, I got a problem. Happy now?"

Cat's heart melted at the misery she could hear under all the anger in his voice and she stepped forwards to grab Jayce's forearm. Jayce tried to shake her off but she held on like glue.

"No, I'm not happy."

He laughed, the sound bitter, and started to remove her hand finger by finger from his solidly muscled arm. "Sorry doll, but from where I'm standing that's kinda hard to believe."

"I didn't choose Ryder."

A dismissive shrug. "You chose him or he chose you, amounts to the same thing—"

"I'm choosing you *both* so will you just shut up and kiss me?" Cat ordered and reached up on her tiptoes to kiss him, hoping desperately he didn't push her away.

Chapter Seven

Hours later Jayce was still reeling in shock as the two men waited for Cat to emerge from the hotel bathroom.

“Christ, how long does it take for a woman to get ready?” He groused from his position lounging against the headboard of the bed. They'd gotten a few weird looks when they'd asked at reception for the wedding suite ... for three. A hard look from Jayce had forestalled any questions and a key had been handed over in short order.

“I think we've had this *conver ... ver ...* oh my God.” Ryder's voice trailed off as the door to the bathroom opened and Cat stepped out.

Jayce stopped breathing.

Cat's hair was still wet from the shower and she had a simple towel wrapped around her, but she was the most seductive thing he'd ever seen. Without thinking, he was on his feet, so close to her he could feel the heat of her skin beating against his. She was running a fever, quite normal for a female fully in heat.

Heat. Just the thought of it poured lava through his veins. His cock went hard in an instant. Every male wolf fantasized about his mate in heat and Jayce was no exception, even if he hadn't already had years of longing backing this up.

“You look beautiful,” he murmured, sincerity coloring his voice. She looked up at him, a light flush riding her cheeks. The mixture of awareness and innocence in her eyes pierced him to the core.

“Yeah? You're just saying that.” Cat bit her lower lip as she reached out to touch him. Her small hands spread over his chest in exploration. Jayce shuddered and closed his eyes. The next instant he gathered her in his arms and dropped her giggling on the bed.

“Just saying that huh?” He eased down beside her, the bed dipping on the other side as Ryder slid in behind her. “What say we show you how beautiful you are?”

*

His first kiss stole Cat's breath, his second her ability to think and his third took her soul. Cat whimpered in the back of her throat and arched against him as Ryder unwrapped the towel from her body with gentle hands.

Pleasure coursed through her as their hands smoothed across her skin. Being with Ryder earlier had been wonderful, amazing, but having both twins here now was the fulfillment of every fantasy she'd ever had. She'd given her heart to these two men, to both of them, and although this wasn't a traditional “pairing” Cat knew deep down she'd been born for them.

“Oh God ... more, please...”

Jayce's mouth blazed a trail down her body to latch onto her nipple, his hands stroking and offering the plumpness of her breast to his lips like a succulent treat. Behind her Ryder nuzzled her neck as his fingers moved down to slide around her waist and lower.

“More we can do.” Gently Jayce pushed her onto her back and parted her legs to trail his fingertips up the sensitive skin along her inner thighs. Cat's body tightened in anticipation as he drew circles upwards towards her sex. Jayce flicked his tongue over her nipple, sucking it into the warm cavern of his mouth. Cat groaned, shivering under his

touch.

“We're both going to take you, you know?” Ryder murmured by her ear, keeping up a running commentary of the things he and Jayce had ever wanted to do to and with her, the erotic details sending her arousal spiking higher.

Jayce trailed kisses across her toned stomach. She sucked a shuddering breath in as he kissed her belly, the blade of her hip and in the crease between her leg and her groin. Cat's pussy clenched hard, her clit aching.

“Stop teasing me and get on with it!”

She arched her back as Ryder cupped her breasts and rolled her nipples between his fingers. Then Jayce's warm breath blew over her folds and she tensed, all her attention focused on the man settling between her legs. He pushed her thighs further apart and stopped. A groan of appreciation rumbled in the back of his throat.

She stiffened as he probed her folds with his tongue, parting them to seek out the treasures within. He licked along her in one slow sweep from her slit to her clit. Her body melted as he nibbled, alternating soft licks with pulling the sensitive nub of flesh into his mouth and suckling until she was nearly out of her mind. Her hands coiled in the sheets, clutching at them as Jayce drove her arousal higher.

Her hips shifted as she got closer to the edge, driven there by the relentless urging of Jayce's clever lips and tongue against her. Liquid heat flooded her channel and he moaned. His tongue drove into her, seeking the source of the heat and setting fireworks off behind Cat's eyelids.

She arched her back more, the restless feeling getting worse, until she couldn't keep still. “Jayce, please... I need you. I need to feel you inside me.”

Jayce moved over her, bracing himself on his arms as his brother pulled back a little. Cat looked at Ryder in concern. He smiled, his green eyes filled with love and desire. “Don't worry sweetheart, I'm right here.”

Cat started to nod but Jayce's hard knee spread her thighs further apart and her attention was hijacked by the feel of his muscular body against hers. She glanced up, caught his eye and was blown away by the intense look in his eyes.

“I've wanted to do this for years,” he admitted. He dipped his hips and ran the head of his cock against her. It slid over the heated flesh of her sex, seeking and finding the slick entrance to her pussy. Cat caught her breath as he pushed into her. He was just as big as Ryder, stretching as his hips drove forwards.

A sound nearer to a purr than a growl rumbled in the back of her throat as her body clenched in need around his cock, welcoming him as she wrapped her arms around his neck. Her fingers stroked the shaved hair at his nape. It was like rich velvet, a sensual delight she reveled in.

“You feel...” Jayce broke off, his eyes closing then opening wide as he slid deeper into Cat's body. Her arousal and recent climax made the penetration easier but she was still gasping for her breath by the time his hips met hers.

“No, *you* feel amazing,” she told him as she brushed her fingertips along his cheekbone, her eyes intent on his. “I love the way you feel inside me. Filling me, I've never felt like this before.”

“Hey!” Ryder complained. Rather than breaking the sensual mood, it only increased it.

“You know what I mean.” A smile curved Cat's lips as she arched her back and Jayce

slipped another half inch deeper. He gasped, his eyes crossing. By her head his fist tightened in the covers.

“Fuck...!”

Cat wriggled as mischief filled her. “Well, that's what I'm hoping.”

She'd meant to tease but found herself catching payback for it. Pleasure, hot and immediate, surged through her as Jayce's cock stroked nerve endings deep inside her. She moved in a subconscious command to do it again and Jayce chuckled.

“Here I was thinking you were innocent, little wolf.” His voice rough, he pulled out of her, almost completely. Then, with just the head of his cock in her he rotated his hips and drove back in. This thrust though was not the slow and gentle slide of his first penetration. No, this time he drove into her with a strength and power that blew her mind.

“Ohhhhh ... no, not innocent.” Cat shot him a sultry look from under her lashes. “Well maybe on the outside. Inside, in here,” she tapped her temple, “I haven't been innocent for years. Not since I figured out the differences between little boy and little girl wolves.”

Jayce's face grew dark as he withdrew and slammed into her again, a fierce and possessive look stamped onto his handsome features. He grabbed her hands, pinned them above her head and stretched out over her, setting up a rhythm that made Cat want to whimper and beg him never to stop.

“The only thoughts you'll be having from now on will be about me ... about us.” Jayce nipped the soft lobe of her ear then moved down her body to catch her nipple between his lips again, letting go of her hands.

“You're jealous? You're kidding me? I-I've been dreaming about you two for years.”

A rumble of appeasement sounded in Jayce's chest, something that might have been an answer but at that moment he chose to twist his hips. Inside her his cock pressed against all sorts of new and interesting places. Cat's eyes rolled back as a soft whimper escaped her lips.

“Tell me,” he demanded, lifting his head and spearing her with a green gaze.

“Tell *us*.”

The bed next them dipped. Cat looked up to meet Ryder's gaze, identical to his brothers. One knee on the bed, he had his cock in his hand, pumping the stiff shaft with slow movements.

Her eyes fixed on it. Thick and hard, the broad head was swollen with a slight purple tint. Ryder grinned as he noticed her interest, pulling his hand back to the base and holding it erect so she could look her fill.

“Touch me.” His order was gruff and full of need.

She reached out and wrapped her fingers around him. They didn't quite touch around the shaft and her pussy clenched in anticipation, tightening on Jayce's cock already buried deep inside her. When he was done, she would be filled by this cock too and the thought made her hot.

“Fuck,” Jayce gasped, his hands pulling the covers under her head tight. “Make her do that again ... she's so tight, nearly shot my load right then.”

“Tell us kitty-cat, what do you dream?” Ryder watched Cat as she was fucked by his brother and her fingers moved along his rigid length in an erotic dance.

Her cheeks flamed with color—part sexual arousal and part embarrassment. Could she really do it ... could she tell them what she'd been dreaming about for years? The

secret desire which embarrassed her as much as it excited her?

“I dream about you ... both of you,” she admitted, her voice soft but gaining in confidence. In for a dime, in for a dollar and all that. “Kissing me, touching me ... us in bed,” she trailed off, unable to meet his eyes but Ryder's hand closed over hers on his cock.

“And? What are we doing in bed? This?” he prompted gently.

“No ... you're both...” Cat paused, her voice drying up as Ryder stopped her hand. At the same moment Jayce stilled as well and she was pinned by two sets of gold-rimmed green eyes. Watching her, waiting in anticipation.

“Go on.” Jayce's voice was husky. “We're both what exactly?”

Her cheeks burned bright and hot. “You're both ... you know ... at the same time,” she admitted in a rush. Desperate to take their attention off her she wriggled her hips to get Jayce to move again. “Don't worry about it, it's perverted.”

“Oh no, we're not going to forget something like a woman wanting ... asking us both to fuck her in a hurry.” Both brothers' eyes gleamed as they looked at each other in silent communication.

Then they moved, Cat squeaking in surprise as Jayce rolled her over on top of him and impaled her on his massive cock in one slick movement. She shivered right down to her toes as the hard knot in her belly spread outwards, filling her with warmth and tension. His large hands spread over her hips, holding her down on his cock as it pulsed and jerked within her.

“You asked to fuck both of us honey—believe me, we don't have *any* problem with that,” Jayce assured her and used a hard hand in the nape of her neck to pull her down for a kiss so hot her toes curled against the white sheets. Behind her the bed shifted again and Ryder's hands smoothed down her back.

“You're gorgeous,” he whispered as his hands swept the cello curve of her waist and hips. “You realize after this we're not going to let you go? We're going to keep you holed up here and chained to the bed?”

The idea sent fire through her body and she moaned. “Per ... haps I don't want to be let go,” she replied as his hands reached her ass, smoothing and shaping the generous curves there.

“Good.” His hands left her skin and she heard the sounds of movement behind her. Cat tried to look over her shoulder to see what he was doing but her questions were answered the next moment as something cold and slick landed in the groove between her ass cheeks and slid downwards.

“Ahhhhh...”

Jayce started to move. Slight movements but enough to stroke the hypersensitive nerve endings in her pussy and his hands stole between them to play with the hard bud of her clit as his brother's fingers rubbed the cold lube in the crack of her backside, working it against the puckered rose of her ass.

Heat swept over her in waves as they played her body. That they were used to this was undeniable. They worked in concert, Jayce building her arousal towards climax but slowing if she got too close, while Ryder worked her ass with gentle touches.

Heat swept over her skin as her clit throbbed. They were really going to do this, they were both going to fuck her. The thought of one cock stretching her pussy while another stretched her ass was almost enough to make her come there and then.

The whimper hiding in the back of her throat broke free as Ryder pressed a long finger into her ass. On automatic she pushed back, the pleasure as his finger slid past the tight muscles of her ass up to the first ... then the second knuckle, threatening to make her pass out. He pushed further, all the way, until Cat felt the most incredible feeling of fullness. And that was just his finger, how was she going to feel when his cock replaced it?

Jayne's hands tightened on her hips. "Hell, she's like a vice. Ry, quit messing about and get your cock inside her quick. I'm not going to last long here."

"Don't need to tell me that twice," Ryder chuckled as he pulled his finger from her. Cat pouted in disappointment at the loss but it was short lived. Jayce's hands slid around and parted the cheeks of her ass, holding her open for his brother and within a heartbeat the broad head of Ryder's cock replaced his finger.

"Breathe sweetheart, this might hurt a little at first. I'll be gentle, I promise," Ryder murmured but Cat shook her head. She needed him in her and now.

"Just do it, fuck me," she ordered, pushing back against his thick cock, her body burning and eager. He groaned as he did what she asked and pressed into her.

Her ass stretched and parted around him, a gasp of pleasure-pain on her lips. Her cunt was already stretched to the limit with Jayce's cock buried to the hilt so Ryder pushing into her ass as well seemed almost impossible.

Jayne's voice murmured in her ear, something soothing, but Cat didn't hear the words. All her attention was focused on what was happening to her body and the intrusion as her ass was penetrated by Ryder's cock.

He swore long and hard as, incredibly, her body accepted him, the lube he'd worked into her and lathered on his erection making the thrust one long, impossibly tight slide of pleasure. Then he was in her to the hilt.

Cat concentrated on breathing as her body adjusted. After long seconds the burning in her ass receded leaving just an overwhelming need to move. "Please," she begged and thankfully they knew what she meant. Jayce reached up and kissed her as Ryder pulled out.

As he thrust back, Jayce lifted her off his cock, only releasing her to sink back down as Ryder retreated again. Cat lost the ability to think, to do anything but hold on for the ride as they moved in concert, fucking her in perfect synchronism.

Their movements got faster, stronger as the tension in Cat's body wound like a spring. Tighter and tighter as each cock thrust and withdrew, her cunt and ass filled and stretched in alternate strokes.

Her climax hit her without warning. Her body went still, all her muscles locked into place and she screamed in pleasure. One moment she was anticipating the feeling as she sank down onto Jayce and the next the world exploded, expanding into sensation so intense she couldn't handle it.

"Gnnnhhh, I'm gonna com—" Ryder didn't complete the sentence before his release hit him. He drove into her, his body locking tight with hers as his cock jerked and filled her ass with his white-hot seed. Jayce was a heartbeat behind, his groan quieter than his brother's bellow as he too stiffened and came, his cock buried deep within Cat's welcoming body.

The room was silent for long moments as the trio collapsed onto the bed, riding out the aftermath of their pleasure. Cat had her eyes closed as her head rested against Jayce's

shoulder. His arms closed around her in a tender embrace as Ryder came to enough to shift his weight off her, sliding from her to lie next to them. Instinctively she reached out a hand to him, twining her fingers around his.

“That, was amazing,” the brother beneath her whispered, his cock slipping from her as he rearranged them more comfortably. His voice was filled with love and admiration. “I’d never have thought you’d agree to fucking us both.”

“Oh, not fucking. Loving,” Cat whispered, “and I intend to love you both as long as I live.”

The End

About the Author:

Mina Carter can be found exploring in the middle of the English countryside with her real-life hero and their young daughter ... the true boss of the family. Constantly seeking new challenges, Mina never tires of learning new skills—counting aromatherapy, corsetry and welding amongst her abilities.

She juggles motherhood, working full time and writing, tossing another ball in the air with her work as a graphic artist and web designer. For her, writing time is the wee hours of the morning or any spare minute that can be begged, bought or conned.

Her first stories were penned at age eleven, when she used a stationery set meant for Christmas “thank you” letters to write stories instead. More recently, she wrote for her own amusement to save on outrageous monthly book bills, and to quell the demands of friends for more and longer stories. Now you’ll find her reading and writing original worlds where the unusual is everyday and romance is a must.

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