

Black Rose

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THE  
*Lupine*  
CONNECTION

RAE MONET

# The Lupine Connection

by

Rae Monet

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to actual persons living or dead, business establishments, events, or locales, is entirely coincidental.

The Lupine Connection

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## **Dedication**

To my editor, Amanda Barnett, who brings life into my writing and let's it reach it's full potential.

## Chapter One

*"Si Vis Pacem, Para Bellum".  
"If you want peace, prepare for war"  
Flavius Vegetius Renatus. Roman Military  
strategist. c. 390. A.D*

Brock Manyon rubbed the space between his eyes, trying to erase the fog clouding his mind like a bad memory. His last mission had been a bitch, and he was still feeling the aftereffects of adrenaline buildup. That combined with lack of sleep, were two married elements always accompanying his job. His most recent gig had required travel by water. Brock hated ships. If he wanted to spend time in the water, he would have become a Navy seal, not a Marine sniper in the STA, surveillance, targeting and acquisitions platoon. A big title for a huge job, one the Marines considered critical to the successful operation of their military. The pressure of having a one hundred percent kill rate and constant callouts was beginning to weigh on him. He could feel the exhaustion sink into every bone of his body.

"Okay, let's review the plan." To make sure Sean was on point and listening, Brock made eye contact with his partner and best friend. Sean needed this time to unwind, and he was going to give it to him.

"Sir, yes, sir." As Sean barked out his loud assent, Brock cringed. Maybe his partner wasn't sober enough for the serious task at hand.

Leaning over the bar, Brock drew a circle around the stick figures on the cocktail napkin. Behind him, the Marine Corps Non-Commissioned

Officers Club at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, was hopping. The clink of glasses, people laughing, and loud music made it difficult to talk, so Brock had to draw out his mission set up. With the dim lighting, he could barely see Sean's expression. The rub of bodies on the dance floor not twenty feet away reminded him of their task. Taking a deep breath, he focused.

"I'll do ingress. You handle egress. I'm going to come around from the south side. You take my six. Keep the communication lines clear. No chatter." As Marine Corps snipers, ingress or approach meant scoping the assignment, setting up the distance for the shoot, assessing the wind and dangers around the kill zone. This was usually Sean's job, since he was the spotter of their two-man team. Egress or exit was handling the escape route and getting the two of them out in one piece. By process of elimination, that role fell to Brock.

"Why are you doing ingress? I always handle ingress. Not fair, dude." Sean picked up the pen and placed an X on Brock's circle.

"Because last time we did this, you had ingress. You about got me killed on the spot." Brock drew another circle.

"There was a good reason for that. You had a problem with initial contact." Sean picked up his beer from the bar and downed a drink.

"That's bullshit," Brock said.

Sean raised a single brow and his mouth quirked up. "Why do we need a plan to handle those women?" He pivoted his bar stool and eyed the target Brock had identified. Brock followed suit.

"Take a look at those two, Sean." Brock gestured. "They are fine. How often do two beautiful, single, women enter our establishment? We have about five minutes to get organized before our fellow soldiers move in. Besides, do you really have to ask me why we need a plan, considering what happened

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last time we tried to ask two women to dance?" Brock sipped his drink as he watched the women. With a little teamwork, he thought, they could prevail.

Sinking back on his stool, he relaxed. This was the best part of the day, hanging with his friend and enjoying a night out. Their job was serious...too serious. When they were out in the field, there was no joking, no fooling around. One-hundred-percent focus on the operation. Sometimes they would spend all day traversing three-hundred-yards, one inch at a time, until they met their objective, the kill. A business neither of them took lightly. Times like this, they could set the job aside and enjoy the moment. It felt good to let go and relieve some of the pressure.

"Shit, you're right." Sean laughed. When he started talking again, he was still chuckling. "Remember that woman you tried to hit on, the visiting defensive tactics instructor from the FBI Academy. She tossed you onto the floor like a sack of flour. She was so mad. Oh man. That was funny."

Brock fingered his lower back, remembering the botched approach like it was yesterday. He rolled his eyes and clapped Sean's shoulder. He loved him like a brother, but when it came to women, Sean didn't have a clue.

"Rock, paper, scissors for approach. Fair?"

Sean took a swig. "Fair."

As they started the process of pounding their fists simultaneously on their hands, their beepers went off, almost at the same time. Both immediately sobered.

"Shit." Brock groaned, glancing at the numbers on the beeper. "Call out."

"That's all right." Sean held up his flat hand. "You were on the edge of losing, anyway. Paper covers rock."

"Thank God we got called out, then," Brock

muttered as he grabbed his jacket and jerked his head toward the exit. "Come on."

Sean slid into his own leather jacket. "Yeah, let's get to work, my friend."

"Ooh-rah."

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The CH-53E Super Stallion was the granddaddy of helicopters, a workhorse whose job never ended. To Brock, it seemed this baby had been retired as many times as reactivated. She was transporting him and Sean from the Naval Air Depot in Cherry Point, NC, to their long-range insertion point in South America. The addition of a third engine gave this aircraft the ability to lift the majority of the Fleet Marine Force's equipment, but to Brock, it just meant doubling up on ear protection because it was so loud and trying not to suck in too much of the oil tainted air the engines created. The Ramp Mounted Weapon System allowed the bird one-hundred eighty degrees of defensive fire from the rear of the aircraft and a modified .50-caliber machine gun was top of the line, facts making Brock sleep better at night. If they came across any trouble, this bird would slap the enemy down like an unwanted insect. They were prepared for anything.

Preparation.

Preparation was the name of the game in his job.

Preparation and patience.

Sean was taking a mid-day snooze, his head lolling back and forth against the copter wall as he slept in the webbed seat. Brock was always amazed his partner could go down in a moment's notice. Brock didn't usually catch any Zs until after the mission was complete, which meant he could be up for forty eight hours straight, sometimes longer. The only factor taking the edge off his sleep deprivation was the occasional forced power nap.

He tried not to think about the mission ahead of



them, but he couldn't help running the job specifics around in his head. Insertion, ingress, kill, egress. He stepped his mind through each task like a drill sergeant would trainees before a Presidential parade.

Muscle memory.

If they got into trouble, Brock would need to rely on muscle memory, action of the body without forethought. That meant going through the details repeatedly until he was daydreaming them.

The bird hit some turbulence and hopped, causing Sean to open one eye. Spotting Brock, he grumbled and settled back into sleep. Brock shook his head. Better he slept now, because he might not have a chance later. Besides, Brock thought as he slumped into his seat, closed his eyes and tried to block out the noise, it was his job to keep Sean safe and he wouldn't let him down. He never had and he never would.

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"LW1, what's your location?"

Brock checked his GPS. The heat of the Brazilian jungle held him in its grasp like a smoldering oven. As he reached for his radio, sweat trickled down his face and dripped onto his hand. They were late for pickup and his ride was getting antsy.

Who wouldn't be in this country?

He didn't like the feel of this exit, something wasn't right. He was getting that itch, the one warning him to be alert. Brock's eyes tracked the intertwined branches and vines making up the seventy-foot canopy above his head. The chatter of the native monkeys and cawing birds seemed serene, almost dreamlike, but Brock knew better. Drug traffickers made a business out of owning this part of the jungle because it was ripe with cocaine and cannabis ingredients. The criminals were armed with top-of-the-line killing equipment and right

now were searching for one thing—them. On this Black Ops mission, Brock had just taken out one of the key players in the game, a cartel leader who recruited children as young as twelve from the Brazilian slums for his drug smuggling activities. Being one of the top Marine Corps snipers wasn't just a job, he thought as he raised a fist to alert Sean to stop. It was a journey to Hell. And right now, that was what the Brazilian jungle, at one-hundred percent humidity and one-hundred and four degrees, felt like.

"I'm approximately two clicks north of rendezvous. Mission complete. On egress."

"LW1, be aware." The voice from the radio speaker sharpened. "Hostiles have been spotted in your area. Repeat, hostiles on your six. We'll hold as long as we can. A new rendezvous might be required if you can't get here."

Brock didn't blink, even though the pilot was telling him and Sean to hurry the hell up or his rescue team was going to bug out and leave them for pickup on another day. If they survived. The army wasn't known for their patience. It was time to step it up.

"Roger that. Acknowledged. Hang as long as you can. On our way."

Brock hand-signaled Sean a warning that hostiles were behind them. Making eye contact, Sean nodded and pivoted, walking backwards as they slashed their way through the tangle of green plants slowing their escape to a crawl. Brock wrapped his rifle over his chest and kept hacking, moving them one foot forward at a time closer to the clearing for pickup. The only thing he wanted to see in his future was the inside of a Blackhawk.

Without warning, the chatter of the jungle ceased. The trees came alive as rebel soldiers crashed through the surrounding greenery, a sea of men in combat fatigues pouring down on them from

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all sides, one after another. The serenity of the jungle was interrupted by the pop, pop, pop of automatic weapons and screams of foreign instructions melting into a constant, unrecognizable yell.

Acting on instinct, Brock shouldered his rifle, voiced a warning to Sean and fired with precision, taking down one man, then another and another. He lost sight of Sean as he concentrated on eliminating as many of the enemy as he could, but still too many to count.

The ambush was happening in slow motion. Adrenaline from the battle caused the typical physical reactions in him, tunnel vision had him losing sight of everything but his target, his heart was pounding so hard he could hear it in his head and his ears rang while his body blocked out all other noise but his measured breathing as he fired. He had no doubt he was fighting for his life, relying on muscle memory to keep him alive.

"Damn," he yelled as a shot grazed his leg, the impact driving him down on one knee. "I'm hit!" he called out to Sean, but received no response.

"Sean!" he yelled again. Was Sean dead? It was a fleeting thought as he shut down the spurt of fear and aimed at an attacker, shot, the man fell. No time for worry. It was kill, kill, kill or be killed.

A roar penetrated his adrenaline-soaked synapses and bounced off the surrounding jungle. The animals, who had gone so quiet before, screamed in response to the strange noise, their answering calls deafening. In his peripheral vision, Brock saw something move, but it wasn't a man.

*Can't be one of the bad guys, doesn't have on green fatigues, it's naked, not a man.*

In the confusion, Brock squinted and tried to focus. He didn't want to shoot Sean by mistake. But it wasn't Sean. What the—

A huge ape-like animal leapt from the leaf—

covered ground. The creature gave an inhuman howl, its mouth opened showing sharp teeth. Although it had stopped, its body still moved, elongating, growing taller, large muscles forming and defining. As it shrieked, its muzzle stretched longer, additional pointed teeth sliding in place, fingers extended, claws poking out through each tip.

Its skin was like elastic, pulling, warping, ears growing to a point, until all body parts settled into place. The howl finished, the jaws snapped shut. Hair popped up, racing along the bare creature's skin like a river of black, until it covered the entire animal. The transformation of the animal was fast and in its final form, it stood taller than Brock, pounding its chest with fists and claws. It looked like a bear, or maybe a wolf, or... shit... Brock didn't know what in the fuck it was, but he sure didn't want to tangle with it.

Shock tore through him. "What the hell?" He'd never seen anything like it, but three armed men were coming at him and he turned to face them. *Later*, he'd deal with this *thing*. If he was alive later. Right now, he didn't have time to question what was going on.

"Shit." Something slammed into Brock from behind. A burning pain spread down his spine to his toes. His legs collapsed, and he fell forward into a puddle of mud. He tried to move, but his muscles wouldn't work. The smell of dirt and moss assaulted him. Turning his head to the side, he sucked in one strained breath after another, trying to tamp down the firestorm exploding in his back.

Unable to focus on the fight around him, Brock could hear men screaming. Blood sprayed on his arm as the creature tore one of the rebels apart piece by piece, then went after another, roaring as it went along. In seconds—or maybe it was minutes—Brock wasn't sure of anything anymore—the action around him went still, bodies littering the ground.

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Brock's vision dimmed. He wished he could get up, even crawl, but he couldn't move. His head pounded in rhythm to his elevating fear as helplessness touched every corner of his brain. He growled. Pushing his hands into the ground, he attempted to thrust his body up. Useless. His muscles wouldn't obey his brain. His arms dropped and he splayed out his hands in front of his head.

"Sean," he squeezed out as his world began to spin.

A shadow fell over his body. He tipped his head up, thought he saw the creature standing over him, but the vision morphed, distorted. Was it the animal or one of the rebels? Unsure and unbelieving, Brock clenched his fist in the dirt and groaned, intending to try to rise up again. No matter who—or what—it was, he wasn't going down without a fight.

The apparition grabbed his arm, twisted until his wrist was exposed and leaned forward. Opening its mouth, the thing bit directly into his wrist. Brock screamed, his body jerked and more pain exploded in his head. He tried to reclaim his wrist without success. He could feel his eyes rolling back.

*Hang on. Fight. Live.*

A female voice came and went, then everything darkened.

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*Pain.* An unexpected pain hit Treva Reed's back, taking her breath away. She closed her eyes and pulled in a sharp intake of air, pausing in her Kata as she searched for her balance. It was no use, agony seared through every limb in her body. Her knees failed and she slowly lowered onto the exercise mat.

"Ms. Reed, are you all right?"

The student she had been teaching, Jeremy, rushed forward, placed his hand on her head and sank on the floor next to her in obvious concern.

Was she feeling all right? She wasn't sure. She raised her hands to the side of her ringing head. A

deep sense of loss permeated her consciousness as she was transported away from her body. She couldn't hear Jeremy anymore, only the sound of the jungle, the screaming of the birds and men. A rush of green foliage came into focus, a wet mist rose up from the ground.

She searched through the confusion until her gaze fell to a man lying in the dirt, bleeding, injured. *He's dying.* She knew this because, somehow, she was connected to this man.

He reached his arm over his head, obviously straining to rise. His hand dropped, flopped open and she could see the inside of his wrist. A mark she recognized, but hadn't seen in a long, long, time was burned into his skin.

*It can't be!*

Blood oozed out of a wound on his back, dripped down the fabric of his uniform and pooled into the dirt. She felt his extreme pain as he fought to live. Treva fisted her hand, wanting to reach out to him, but knowing she couldn't. She needed to tell him to *hang on, fight, live*, but she wasn't there, she was only watching from the outside.

There, but not there.

She tried to send him her thoughts, with no success.

Then the images stopped as fast as they had come, like a speeding freight train screeching to an abrupt halt. The hurt in her body lessened and finally abated. She'd lost him. *Damn.* She gnashed her teeth, trying not to call out in regret.

What had just happened to her?

"Ms. Reed? Ms. Reed?"

She removed her hands from her head and blinked up at her faithful student. The white of his martial arts uniform was crisp and clean. He was a second-degree black belt, but he was young and still in the early stages of his training. Her eyes touched on every corner of her Dojo, trying to get her

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bearings, she was back in her class. Everything was pristine and in order, as it was everyday.

"I'm okay, Jeremy. Let's call this lesson for today. Same time tomorrow."

"Are you sure? Do you want me to go get Angela?"

"No." Treva barked out the word. "No," she said softer this time. "I just lost my breath. You know how that can happen sometimes when we get hit?"

"I'm sorry, Ms. Reed. I tried to pull my punches."

"What have I told you about pulling punches?" Treva shrugged her shoulders and tried to relax her strained muscles.

"Never pull my punches. Always fight with all my spirit."

She inclined her head at his correct response. "Tomorrow. We'll practice kicks."

Jeremy snapped straight up, placed his hands together and bowed.

"Yes, Ms. Reed."

She watched as he jogged off to the locker room. Treva crossed her legs and laid her hands on her knees. She wanted to go back to the man, see what was happening. Maybe she could help him. Trying deep meditation, she took in a soothing breath and concentrated on the man she had seen, focused in on him. *Find me. I will help you. Teach you.* Nothing.

What am I doing?

In all of her years of teaching, nothing like this had ever happened to her before.

## Chapter Two

“Sean!” Screaming his friend’s name, Brock surged straight up in bed. The bare white walls of his bedroom greeted him. Panting, he wiped the sweat from his chest, took in a deep breath, and tried unsuccessfully to steady the erratic pounding of his heart. His aching wrist added to his irritation.

He turned his hand over and traced his fingertips on the perfect circle burning his inner wrist. The doctor said it was a scar, but Brock had his doubts. His dreams told him different. *Fucking nightmares*. Nightmares every time he closed his eyes. The jungle, always the jungle and so much more, that woman, the flashing symbols. *Damned woman!* Then the creature, changing before his eyes, morphing into something so unbelievable his mind was constantly dissecting the moment, replaying it. Running the ambush like a movie, until Brock thought he would die all over, again and again. *Pain*. The burning pain...*Sean, where is Sean?* Snippets of conversation, *Sean didn’t make it*. How could his best friend be dead? Why? What had happened out there?

Throwing off the covers, Brock slipped from the bed and into his wheelchair. He rolled to the desk and grabbed his sketchpad. He was sick of this. It was time to get active. Pencil strokes slashing across the paper, he documented the symbols still fresh in his mind. He drew for nearly thirty minutes before the images faded. After flipping through each page, he leaned his head into his hands, and rubbed his throbbing temples.



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What was happening to him?

He rolled toward the bathroom, his thinking muddled, his brain trying to return from the latest dream. Symbols, death, blood, mountains, the ambush and that woman. Not just any woman, she was a sexual siren who beckoned him with her body and her voice. *Find me. I will teach you. Make me yours.*

Each time this happened, the recollections dulled with daylight, but right now Brock remembered the woman as if she stood directly in front of him. Long black hair, bright green eyes, pale skin. Her body, perfect for sin, and her sultry smile made him want to grin back like a teenager with his first hard on.

Thinking about her started the memories, taking him back to the nightly fantasy—running his hands over her sleek curves, touching her soft breasts. He tasted those aroused nipples, touched them with the tip of his tongue, then outlined and sucked them until his beauty arched against him and moaned, her hands threading in his hair as she cupped his head to her breasts. Her woman's scent wafted over him, pulling at his senses like an exotic rose, the sweetest flower.

Her groans of pleasure drove him, inciting his body to go further, guide them both to that place where only passion ruled, let them escape to their own world. He would take her roughly, his control eroded by his need to have her and she would enjoy it, love him, beg and cry until they both climaxed.

Lust snaked down Brock's body. He dropped his gaze to his crotch and chuckled at his erection. The doctor had told him he was never going to feel anything from the waist down. So much for that.

He shook his head as he turned on the cold water. At least one part of him was still working...and working very well too.

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Brock pressed the tips of his fingers against the bridge of his nose and tried to push back the headache lurking. He flipped to another page of the book he studied. The Aaron public library was quiet, the oak-paneled walls and smell of old books comfortable and familiar. He had come there because the library brought back warm memories of a happy childhood, even as an orphan raised by a busy foster family. His home station was Aaron, Oregon, so after his medical discharge, the military had shipped him back free of charge. Lucky for him, there was a halfway decent VA hospital nearby.

It was also a perfect place to do research. He didn't have any of his household goods out of storage yet, hadn't bothered to buy a computer. Hadn't needed to. The last three months of his life had been focused on his physical recovery—rebuilding his atrophied muscles, learning to function again, managing the pain—not trying to find answers to his bizarre dream state. Now it was time.

At a shuffling noise, he glanced up. Just the person he had been waiting for.

"Hello, Brock. Now, what was it you needed help with?"

Nearly sixty-five years old, Ms. Banning was the quintessential picture of a librarian. A tight bun of gray hair swirled around the top of her head. Her glasses were attached to a gold chain hanging around her neck. She wore a pristine cream sweater and a conservative brown dress. She hadn't changed a bit since his youth. Through the years, she always seemed to be there for him when he most needed it. She'd probably felt sorry for the foster kid shuffled from home to home.

"Thanks for coming over, Ms. B." He flipped through a couple pages of his sketchbook. After days of searching, he wanted answers and kept coming up empty. Symbols were not his area of expertise. Killing people was. If anyone could help him, Ms.

Banning could. She seemed to know everything about everything, a human encyclopedia.

"I'm looking for the origin of these drawings."

Setting her glasses on her nose with military precision, Ms. Banning peered down at his sketches. "Hmmm. Those seemed to be some form of hieroglyphics. Egyptian, from the look of them. I don't recognize those particular ones, but that's sure what they appear to be. Let me grab you a couple books on the subject. See if they will help." Turning, she marched toward the back of the library.

Leaning back in his wheelchair, Brock sighed with relief. He should have known she'd produce immediate answers. Why she wasn't the first person he had sought out was beyond him. He ran his finger over the outline of one of the odd drawings. An animal, perhaps, but he wasn't sure. The image was so hard to decipher with only the few scratches he'd manage to draw.

She was back with two books. Laying them down, she planted herself next to him at the computer station chair. "Let me get you set up to use this computer, so, if you like, you can access the internet."

Brock tried to edge closer and his wheelchair jumped forward, hitting the back of Ms. Banning's leg.

"Sorry," he grumbled and reversed a couple inches. "Still not real good at driving this thing."

Ms. Banning twisted and patted his leg like a grandma would, giving him a sympathetic expression. "That's okay. You're doing fine. Just fine. It's only been three months. Give it time." She swiveled back to the screen as if the incident hadn't occurred.

*Three months*, Brock winced. Most everyone in his small town knew he was partially paralyzed from the waist down from a gunshot wound to the spine and had lost his best friend in a military operation

he said he couldn't remember.

He sighed and leaned back in the chair. What Ms. Banning and the rest didn't know was that his condition was rapidly improving. He predicted he'd be out of the chair within a week, his speedy recovery stunning his doctors. Severed and dead nerves were regenerating and no one knew why. The doctors wanted to send him to the university for more tests, but he'd refused. He didn't want to be anyone's guinea pig.

"Where are your glasses, Brock?"

Brock reached above his head where his glasses usually rested. *Yeah, where are my glasses?* He hadn't even dug them out since he had returned home. It was like he forgot he needed them to read.

"I've got contacts now." The lie came easy.

"Oh. That's good. You're all set here."

He wasn't going to think about why he didn't need glasses anymore. Just like he wasn't going to wonder why the girl's perfume, five tables over and way too far to smell, was almost choking him. "Thanks, Ms. B. I'll take it from here. You have a customer." He inclined his head toward the checkout at the front of the library, where a student was tapping his book against the counter.

"Oh dear. Thank you. If you find any book you want, jot down the author's name and I'll be happy to order it for you."

"Sure. Could you take the chair with you?" He swept his fingers over his legs. "Got my own." Brock angled back.

"Of course." She scooted out and lifted the chair, placing it at the table next to him, her movements as agile as a gymnast's. She always amazed him.

Brock wheeled back to the table and began thumbing through one of the books she had brought him. Three hours later, the headache he had been attempting to alleviate was pounding at his skull like a banshee.

He flipped a page, skimming past more hieroglyphics, reading about the history of the craft, trying to pick-up any clues he could. His mind began to wander, maybe he needed to scan in his sketches, check with a couple experts in the field and e-mail them out, see if anyone recognized the symbols. He was still brainstorming with himself when he turned to the next page. In the margin was a handwritten notation. Intending to tell Ms. B one of her books had been defaced, he stopped when a website caught his attention. *www.Changelingryou.com*. His heart tripped faster.

What is this?

His brain seized onto the website address and wouldn't let go. *There's something there*. The urging was instinctual, a deep down push for him to continue. Pulsing flashes hit him behind his eyes. The symbols...one after another...replayed themselves with a dizzying speed, again and again. The woman's whispers echoed in his ears, leaving them ringing with her seductive call. He stretched his neck and pressed his thumb against his eye at the pointed pain hitting him with each burst of light. He began to perspire, the internal warmth infusing his body making him queasy.

*What the hell?* Punching out a breath to push through his reaction, he rolled over to the computer and typed in the website.

An entire page of small, 1X1 jpgs popped up on the screen, row after row. Taking a minute to slow his heartbeat back to normal, he scrolled down, waiting until they finished loading, the images temporarily pixilated before coming into focus. Nothing looked familiar until...Squinting, he focused on one familiar image. Anticipation elevating, he clicked on it.

A new page came up with the animal symbol he'd been trying to identify in a larger form, then under that image three rows of smaller images. He

recognized one of them. Strange. How was it the symbols he had been desperately searching for, without success, all of a sudden turned up on a website handwritten in the margin of a book titled—he flipped it over—*The History of Ancient Hieroglyphics*? Totally unbelievable. He returned to the website, his fingers slightly twitching on the mouse with his impatience.

He clicked on another familiar image. A separate page popped up, in the same format as before. The image was larger and centered at the top and below were three more rows of smaller symbols.

He felt like he was trying to solve a never ceasing puzzle, one he was desperate to unravel. His mind kept hitting him with the image clips, the woman's voice, until he almost couldn't concentrate on what he was doing, but he knew had to continue. He ran his hand over his brow and mopped at the wetness gathering there. Hoping something he hit might would give him some answers, he clicked on the next recognizable picture, one of the symbols he had drawn from his dream.

"Welcome to the Realm of the Enforcers. You have entered the correct sequence code and have been authorized to continue. Please type your area code here."

He studied the page. It was official looking, swirling high-tech graphics surrounded the wording. This was no cheap job, no home made web page like you might see built by the self-published author with a small marketing budget. If all these physical reactions hadn't been swamping him, he might have blown this off as some sort of joke, but he couldn't. There was too much going on inside him to ignore. He had to open his mind to other possibilities here. He typed in his area code.

"Your Enforcer representative is Dr. Treva Reed. You can find Dr. Reed's schedule on the following bio page."

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Brock rubbed the back of his neck and wondered what in the hell he was getting into here. Could this really just be some crazy cult or something? He clicked on Treva Reed's bio, which linked him to the University.

As the website appeared with a picture on the right side, Brock's hand gripped the arm of the chair. Shock tore through his entire body. He tried to unsuccessfully swallow. He blinked a couple times to ensure he wasn't making up the visage. *Holy Shit. It's her.*

Brock scoured the website, taking in as much information as he could about Dr. Treva Reed and her schedule. She was teaching this month at the University of Oregon, a class on Ancient Culture. Made sense, since the site called her one of the foremost experts in the world on the subject. Next month she was traveling to Cairo, where she would consult on an ancient burial dig.

Brock went back to the page with her picture. Her voice rolled over his memory. *Fight, Live. Come to me. Take me. I'm yours. Let me teach you.* Her skin would be baby soft, the contours of her breast fitting perfectly in his hand. Her spicy and sweet taste would send him over the edge of his well-maintained discipline—turn him into an animal. She'd moan when he took her, groan out his name.

Closing his eyes, Brock tried to will his control back, pulling in one slow inhalation after another. *She's made for your touch.* Placing his hands to his head, he pressed—trying to stop the whispers.

Was he heading toward insanity? He knew one thing for sure, he was going to find Dr. Treva Reed and discover what happened to him in that jungle in Brazil.

Looked like he'd be making a trip to Eugene after all.

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Treva bowed her head to the clapping class. This

collegiate group of students was so easy to impress. They were simply amazed by her innate knowledge of history. She enjoyed teaching and took pleasure in sharing her expertise with the young and inexperienced.

After fielding questions for about twenty minutes, she called an early end to the class. Students filed out until only the silence of the cold University lecture hall welcomed her. Her gaze swept over the room, theater style chair after chair angled up the auditorium floor and focused on one person...the speaker, and today it was her.

She always enjoyed this time of day—her last class, an empty room, no more questions. Quiet and peaceful. Sighing, she gathered her materials. She was so tired, her sleep troubled with repeated snapshots of the vision, the man she couldn't reach, couldn't touch. Was he dead? Rubbing her eyes, she made herself stop. She couldn't think about that right now. To distract herself, she reviewed her evening schedule in her head, papers to read, grades to submit.

"Excuse me, Sir. I told you, Dr. Reed is in session. You'll need to make an appointment with her. You can't just interrupt her like this. Sir. Sir." The high pitched whimper of her class assistant echoed down the hall. Then a smell jarred her. Spicy, male, unique, overwhelmingly arousing and—

"Ms. Reed?" The deep voice matched the smell.

She dropped her books on the desk and immediately jerked her head up, trying to identify the man seeking her out. Despite the fact he clutched what appeared to be a cane in his hand, he was tall and commanding, with the look of a warrior not to be taken lightly. The lines of his face, clean and powerful, his dark hair cut a little longer than military style. She felt his blue stare, penetrating, as if he was trying to see all the way into her soul. Her nerves prickled to life—he seemed so familiar, yet



she couldn't place where she had met him.

"I'm sorry, Dr. Reed. I tried to stop him." She made eye contact with her lanky and clearly frightened first-year student, visibly quaking next to the stranger.

"Thanks. It's fine, Ernie. You may go." He offered a jerky head bob and threw a final, anxious glance at the man. The unwanted visitor gave a fierce, pointed glare toward Ernie. The stare might have even frightened her if she was prone to simple, non-verbal intimidation tactics. But she wasn't.

"Are you sure?" Ernie managed to squeak out.

"Yes. I'm sure. It's okay. Go—"

The man leaned slightly forward and Ernie dashed out before she could conclude her sentence.

"Yes, run along," the unknown visitor commented as he watched Ernie leave before returning his attention to her.

Uneasy, she stepped toward the man, sucking in more of his scent, recognizing it as if he was triggering a deep down longing inside her. So good. Her brain nearly seized in gratification.

*Who is this man?*

"May I help you?" She decided to play it cool. She'd do well to keep her wits about her and not think about how utterly fascinating this stranger was.

"I hope so." He started toward her and she confirmed her original assessment. He did have a cane, but it seemed out of place with the power he exuded. He walked with a limp, a slight drag of his legs. She could see by the tenseness around his eyes and mouth that he was hurting. Her taut muscles relaxed. She was a sucker for someone in pain.

As he took another slow step, the folder he was balancing under his arm fluttered to the floor, spreading an array of drawings across the shiny linoleum. Treva hurried forward, closing the distance between them, and leaned over to pick up

the papers. She collected nearly a dozen before she recognized the ancient symbols drawn on each page. She frowned.

"I'm sorry." He bent down to help her.

She waved him off and picked up the last one. Rising, she clutched the pad in her hand and shoved the loose papers back into the file folder. "It's quite all right." Then she looked straight into his blue eyes and saw the fire smoldering in them.

A mysterious force drew her toward him. She wanted to move into his arms, brush her hands over his cheek and tell him no harm was done, maybe gently kiss him on those full lips and reassure him he was safe with her. Perhaps slide her hands into his hair and clutch his head as he kissed her back, taking the touch of their lips deeper, until—

Treva jerked back into the now. *What the heck am I doing?*

"I'm still new with this and not real agile. Lot harder than a wheelchair." He lifted the cane off the floor, let it drop back down with a tap, then held out his hand. "Brock Manyon."

She stared at his hand a second too long. If she felt this attracted to him—so unlike herself—what would happen if they touched? Then his fingers twitched. And she realized her hesitation might be causing him pain. Oh God, so this is what "damned if you don't and damned if you do," meant.

Taking a deep breath, she reached forward and placed her hand in his. The burn of their touching palms was immediate. Treva gasped and tried to pull her hand away, but his grip tightened and he tugged her into his body, so close his scent wrapped intimately around her like a warm cloak, teasing her, calling to her. His fingers squeezed her hand to the point of pain and then his grip loosened.

"Do we know each other?" She tilted her head and tried to read his reaction. If she so desired, she had the ability to break his grip, but she wanted to

let this play out.

"In a way we do, Ms. Reed. See, what I'd like to know is...why the hell do you keep invading my dreams?" His voice rose with ire. His blue eyes dilated, the pupils turning almost black.

*No! It can't be. He can't be. The man I saw in my vision.* Yet there was no other explanation...and only one way to find out. Treva dropped her gaze to their joined fingers and rotated his hand. She bent her head, reading the inside of his wrist.

She swallowed. It was there. The mark of a human Changeling.

"Who are you?" she whispered as she ran her thumb over the symbol.

He jerked his hand from her touch and stepped back, placing distance between them. "I want to know what those symbols are, Ms. Reed." His tone was rough in his obvious anger. "I want to understand what in the hell is going on, what this mark is on my wrist, and why I'm healing unexpectedly. And I think you're the one who can tell me." Scowling, he lowered his chin and made eye contact with her. The image of a cool professional was now gone. Fury radiated from him like a raging inferno.

Treva straightened her spine. No one talked to her like this.

"I suggest, Mr. Manyon, if you want anything from me, you take it down a notch." She held her ground despite the indignant flare in his eyes. "If you can deal with that, I'll take us somewhere we might talk outside of prying ears." She wasn't about to discuss this in a public forum. "If not, then I recommend you leave."

He paused, his nostrils flared. "By all means. Accept my most sincere apology. Excuse my rude behavior. Please," He pivoted and extended his arm, "lead the way."

Treva glared at his rigid back. His body

language told her he was furious, but she wanted to find out who he was as much as he did her, so she gathered her books and led him out of the building and across campus.

It was, at the most, a ten-minute jaunt, but she didn't tell him, hoping he'd calm down. The University of Oregon had been generous, giving her a guesthouse next to a replicated Victorian just off campus, close enough to walk to her classes. In consideration of Brock's disability, she shortened her steps and walked slowly.

Treva passed the Victorian and led him down a narrow sidewalk to her small cottage, trees encasing it in a park-like setting, the smell of pine soothing. Once inside the front foyer, she pointed to the velvet loveseat. "Please, sit down." He slowly folded his large frame onto the seat, his height—his presence—dwarfing the couch.

"May I get you anything?" She wrung her hands together. What was wrong with her? Why was she nervous? "A drink, some tea, water?"

"No." A muscle throbbed in his cheek. "Can we dispense with the niceties?" Letting out an audible sigh, he splayed his hands in front of him as if to apologize. "Please."

Treva nodded and took a deep breath to compose herself. Sitting in the matching wood chair across from him, she opened the file folders, spreading out one symbol after another on her coffee table.

"Where did you get these?" She asked, looking up.

"Out of here." He tapped an index finger to his head.

Treva glanced down at the papers. Picking them up, she thumbed through them. "I don't understand."

"I drew them. They came to me in my dreams."

So it was true. She didn't know how it happened, but it certainly had.

## The Lupine Connection

“Why don’t you seem surprised by that statement?” he asked.

Treva ran a hand through her hair, trying to buy more time to work through her confusion. How did she tell him without him thinking she was crazy? She took in a deep breath.

“These symbols are said to belong to an ancient people, mystical creatures, older than any one person can document. The story is told, these people had the power to shift and bend nature to their calling. This drawing—” she set one of the symbols on the top “—is the creature they covet, or as they would say, their shift talisman.”

“What is it?” Brock drew his hand over the outline of the distorted drawing.

“A wolf.”

Brock’s gaze jumped up and met her stare. “You’re telling me these symbols are from a race of wolf shapeshifter-type people?”

She swung her hands back and forth, scrunching her nose as she contemplated his reaction. “I guess if you want to make it simple...yes.”

“What are these people called?”

“The easy way to translate their name is Lupine.”

“Lupine.” He said the name as if he was rolling the word around in his head. “And these others?” He pointed to the papers.

“Think of these like Tarot cards if that makes it easier for you. Each has an associated meaning in the Lupine language to an emotion, a state of being, if you will. Sometimes it’s of the past or the future. These symbols are the pathway of a Lupine’s life.”

She pointed to each piece of paper. “Courage,” she ran her finger along to the next. “Bravery.” She kept going. “Fidelity. Death. Pain. Deceit.” She stopped at the intertwined circles and paused. How could she explain?

"What is that one?"

"This one is more complicated." Setting her hands in her lap, she tried to think of the right words to explain the unbelievable.

"How complicated?"

"The meaning is difficult to translate. I guess the best way to say it is bonded-love. This is the symbol for a mated pair. Once a Lupine's true mate is found, their life circles' intertwine." She made a circle with her thumb and forefinger with one hand, then the other. She hooked her fingers together. "They become one life force until they die."

"How do you know so much about these people?"

She spread her hands and leaned back in the chair. "Because it's my job, Mr. Manyon, mystical legends, mysterious creatures, history in every form. I study and teach it."

"I'm not buying it."

Treva stood and walked toward the floor-to-ceiling bookcase taking up the wall of her front room. She stared at the books, not really seeing them. Doubts assailed her.

How much should she reveal? Could she trust this man? Obviously something had happened to him, someone had initiated him to the Change. It was her job to find out who changed Brock and punish them, as well as bring him safely into her world. Besides, the mark of a human Changeling couldn't be disputed. She didn't have a choice, and her connection to him ran deep, so deep she had been with him during his death and rebirth as a Changeling, a fact her dreams wouldn't allow her to ignore. She had to earn his trust and quickly.

She made a key decision and turned to him.

"I know because I am a Lupine."

### Chapter Three

The room fell silent. The only noise Brock heard was his growl of exhaled air. *Holy shit.*

“What the hell kind of game are you playing here, lady?” Using his cane as support, he dropped the drawings into the folder and pushed himself to his feet—ready to leave.

“Mr. Manyon...Brock, please stay. Sit.”

He wanted to get the hell out of there, chalk this visit up to an eccentric, crazy, academia woman who had finally gone off the deep end of her own world. But something compelled him to stay. Like any good soldier following orders of his commanding officer, he lowered himself back on the tiny padded seat she had assigned him.

Why, he wasn't sure. Maybe it was the way she said it or the sincerity in her expression—or maybe it was the dreams and the way he knew her body would take his perfectly. It could also be the way her light blue cashmere sweater clung to her curvy breasts, reminding him of what was hidden underneath. He moistened his lips. If he kept this up, he'd be panting.

Mentally swearing at himself, he pushed the sexual thoughts out of his mind. He couldn't think of that *now*. For now, he just wanted to know what was happening to him. No, he *needed* to know. And if this woman had answers, then he'd stick around and hear her out. Even if what she told him was completely off the grid.

So she wasn't confused where he was coming from, he was calling bullshit on her right from the

beginning. "Ma'am, I'm a military man. I deal in facts, not mystical, magical creatures." He squared his shoulders.

Instead of replying, she stepped to a small wooden cabinet below the north window. She fished a key out of a purple and green leafed plant on top of the cabinet, then unlocked a drawer and withdrew an aged book from the inside. Holding the book as if it were sacred, she moved to the loveseat and sat next to him. She placed the book on the table, then gently turned his wrist over, tracing the raised circle.

A shiver snaked down his previously injured spine. According to the doctors, he wasn't supposed to have any feeling there, but they were wrong because he experienced a tingle all the way to the soles of his feet.

"How did you get this?" she asked.

Brock gritted his teeth. This woman seemed to have an unearthly power over him, not only in his dreams, but also in the flesh. When their palms had touched, he'd thought his body was going to explode from the heat zinging through every pore of his skin as if she had electrified him. Simply put, she turned him on, *big time*. The crazy thing was, these unwanted emotions made him feel tied to her in some primal way, as if he needed to claim her as his own right now.

"I guess you could say I was involved in a military operation gone wrong," he said finally. He could tell her this much. It was open knowledge in Aaron. "I took a couple bullets, lost my partner. This scar was the result of the fight."

"But that's not really what happened, is it?" She drew her finger around the area until every cell in Brock's body stood at attention, including the ones the doctors had ruled down for the count.

Sweat broke out over his skin. He drew his arm out of her grip. She smelled like the woman he



dreamed of, a floral scent he couldn't identify, but he liked it. *Man oh man*, did he like it. He internally nudged himself and tried to get focused.

"What do you mean?" He slapped his defensive mask back into place. He needed information from this woman. He couldn't get soft. She was the only link to his dreams—the key.

"I mean you're lying to me. Aren't you? I can smell it."

"You can—" This was too much. He jumped off the couch and caned toward the bookcases. "Oh. My. God." He turned and pointed at her. She appeared so innocent, sitting there like a Madonna statue, regal and serene, and such a stunner. In person, just like in his dreams, she dazzled him. She was so fucking beautiful, with her long black hair, light green eyes and a body that made a man want to groan out loud. "You're crazy, aren't you? Do the people here know you're spouting this crap?"

That got her going. Her spine straightened, her chin lifted. Better, he thought. He could deal much easier with an angry woman than one distracting him.

"The only person lying in this room is you."

Brock's shoulders tensed up to his ears as he tamped down his fury. "You've been bitten, Brock. From the appearance of that mark, by a full blooded Lupine. The dreams you're having are guiding you through the Change. You are in what we Lupines call the Changeling Phase. Your body is preparing for the time it will make its first shift. At this point, you need the help of a sworn Enforcer. Me. You need my help. Your body will begin to transform, your hearing, taste, vision, even your sense of smell. Physically, you'll have to learn how to deal with your inhuman strength so you don't unintentionally hurt someone."

Brock spread one hand over his face and pressed his thumb and forefinger to his temples. Could some

of those things already be happening to him? Is that why he had this new, insane craving for raw meat and why, all of a sudden, he couldn't stand other people's cologne?

He didn't want to hear this.

"Uh huh." He dropped his hands. "So, you're a Lupine Enforcer. Is that like a wolf cop?"

He was going to play along and see how far she took this charade because he refused to believe this crap. After everything he had been through in the last few months, to deal with this was almost too much.

"In a way." She stacked the drawings on the desk into a neat pile. "An Enforcer follows the life cycle of the Lupine. From birth to death."

"And you were born this way? A Lupine?"

"I was, nearly ninety years ago."

"Ninety—"

Brock tried not to laugh at her claim she was ninety years old. He made a fist, counted to ten and uncurled his fingers.

"Wow." He ran the same hand around the back of his neck and squeezed at the pain centered below his skull. "You look really good for your age." Maybe turning this situation into humor would make it easier for him and her.

"Please. Sit down." She swept her hand towards the cushion next to her.

Calling *himself* crazy for listening to her, Brock rotated his neck to relieve some of the pressure as he resumed his seat.

"What did you do for the military?"

"I was a Marine assigned to the Sniper Corps."

"So you killed people for a living?"

Her statement wasn't accusatory. Civilians had no idea what a sniper actually did, they made assumptions, judgments, most of the time wrong. They acted scared when they met you. But not Treva. Looking at her calm face, he could see she

wasn't the least bit intimidated.

She opened the folder and picked up one of the pieces of paper. "That explains this."

The drawing was the symbol of death, or so she'd explained earlier.

"You're in a lot of pain right now, aren't you?" She now held up the pain symbol drawing. "These symbols map your life. They tell where you've been and where you're going."

"How do you know the Death card isn't in my future?"

She made a guttural sound deep in her throat, the paper fluttering to the floor as if the thought frightened her. He scooped it up and handed it back to her.

Nice to rattle her for a change.

"I'm really not buying any of this shit. You realize that, don't you?"

"Brock." She touched his wrist, then reached up and rested her hand on his heart. It started a rapid drumbeat under her fingers, tap, tap, tap, each hit faster than the one before.

"I think there's a part of you that wants to understand why these unusual things are happening. I can help if you let me. Teach you how to become one with calling the elements, controlling the Change. Your situation is dangerous. Humans aren't well suited for the Process. The Council abolished converting humans long ago, when extinction was no longer a threat to the Lupines. Our people are thriving now."

"Council. Extinction. The Change Process." Brock dropped his head back, his gaze centering on the dark colored, wooden, cross beams separating the tan ceiling into squares. "I can't believe I'm sitting here having this conversation with you." He turned his head and made eye contact with Treva.

She removed her hand from his chest and rested it on his leg.

He swallowed. *She is dead serious about what she's saying.*

"Okay, let's break this down. Process. You're talking about the—" he formed quotes with his fingers "*—process* of turning into a big, hairy, friggin' monster. Right?"

"The Lupine Change is controlled by its master. The most common form is that of a typical wolf, maybe a bit larger. We consider the Change Process beautiful."

Brock rolled his eyes. She wasn't getting it. "A bit bigger, not from what I saw."

"Tell me what you saw."

Rubbing his hands together, Brock tried to take himself back to that day in the jungle, recall the creature he thought he'd seen. He closed his eyes. Images flickered in his mind. So much blood, confusion. Where was Sean? Oh God, he couldn't find Sean... Then his last kill jumped out at him, the bullet he'd placed perfectly in the middle of the Cartel leader's skull spread like a science fiction movie, his body turning red and blue with veins on the outside—

Brock shut down the string of memories—his eyes popped open. He couldn't go there. Not right now. Too much. He stroked his sore leg. He'd lost his best friend and nearly his life in the jungle. Reliving it wasn't going to do him or Sean any good.

Treva's hand sliding on top of his brought him back. He jerked away and got up again, trying to steady himself. Buying time, he reached down and picked up a photograph of her in what appeared to be a martial arts uniform.

"Do you compete? I see here you're a black belt." He tilted the photo so she could see what he had.

"I have several black belts. I used to compete, but when you've been around for ninety years, it's difficult to participate at top levels anymore. It's not fair to the competitors, along with others wondering

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how you've remained so young for so long. Mainly, I help my students learn the art. We're not immortal, Brock, we simply age slower than humans."

Once again, he tried to ignore the ninety-year-and aging-slower comments. He set the photo down with a click. "What discipline do you study?"

"Shaolin Gung Fu mainly, but I know many others."

"Students, so you're a Sensei?"

She scrunched up her nose as she considered her answer, a cute little habit he was starting to recognize and appreciate.

"In a manner of speaking. The Lupine constructed a fighting art form that works best with our abilities. It's what I teach to the Changelings."

He could see he couldn't have a normal conversation with this woman, no matter how hard he tried. "You know what, I'm going to leave you in peace now." He returned to the table and shoved the drawings back into his folder.

This time he meant it. He'd had enough of her weird talk. She touched doubts and fears in him he didn't want to think about or even accept. He needed to escape her and this insane pull forming between them.

"Are you staying in town?"

"Yeah, I'm getting some tests done. I'll be here for a while."

"I'd like for you to take this book with you. It's a somewhat limited history on our people, but it will help. I'm not supposed to give it out—there are rules. Can I trust you to get it back to me?"

Treva stood and held out the book like it was a peace offering. He grasped it and then hefted it under his arm. She walked with him to the front door.

"Swear to me," she said, her voice lowered. "You won't share this with anyone?"

"Yeah, yeah. Lupine rules. I get it. I'll bring it

back personally and won't tell a soul about this conversation. You can completely trust me on that. Work for you? If not, keep the book."

He tried to shove it back into her hands. He didn't really want to take the book, anyway, and he certainly wouldn't be revealing anything she'd said to anyone else for fear they would lock him up.

"No." She pressed her palm out and stopped him. "Take it. Please. Here, have my number." She shoved a card into his hand.

He wanted to ball the square up in his fist. Finally, he tucked it into his pocket. Only then did she give him a solemn smile, worrying her bottom lip with her teeth, half closed eyes. The expression so sensual—his heart pounded, and he clenched his teeth in sexual frustration. He felt his body heat from the inside out.

"Whatever." He replaced the book under his arm as he caned his way out.

"Next week?" She waved from the door.

He lifted a single hand and tried not to take a last look at her, but failed. He had a final picture in his mind of the little woman sending her man off to work, waving from the front of the cottage door. *Great.*

"Sure. Next week." He shook his head as he headed toward his car. What the hell was he doing, promising to see this insane woman again?

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Treva watched Brock walk away from her cottage, her heart at the tip of her throat as she tried to swallow. He was confused. She'd give him time to absorb her words and read the book. This period for a Changeling was the most stressful of their life. The fact he was human made it even more difficult. Some Changelings rebelled, some flourished, she'd seen both sides of the pendulum. But if Brock wouldn't accept her words and let her help him through this time, bring him into the Pack and be one hundred

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percent trustworthy with the Lupine secret, then her path would be set.

As she told him, an Enforcer guided the Lupine through their life cycle. Lupine laws were clear, those who violated the security of the Lupine faced the ultimate sacrifice for the better of the pack.

If she couldn't bring Brock Manyon into her world, she would be forced to execute him.

## Chapter Four

Sleep was over-rated...

Page by page, illustration by illustration, Brock sifted through the worn book Treva had given him. The history of the Lupine Pack was long and involved. His head was spinning at the implications he might be turning into one of those creatures.

To top it off, he couldn't stop thinking about *her*.

It was worse now that he had met her, touched her, taken in her unique scent and seen the sensual play of her lips when she talked. He ran a hand over his jaw, trying to rub out his fatigue. He wasn't resting well. The nightmares plaguing him couldn't be stopped, so he had begun to sleep less and less. He kept seeing Sean, that day in the jungle, then Treva would float in and whisper in his ear, bringing him back to the living.

In his most recent version of the dream, he wasn't searching for the mystery woman who saved him anymore—he had found her. She'd tease him with her body, embrace his mind with hers and finally take him on a heated journey that left him strangely unfulfilled.

It wasn't enough to be with her in his dreams anymore.

He felt like she was embedding herself so deep into his brain, he wondered if he had claw marks there. His skin itched with want, need and an animalistic craving to claim what was his. No matter what he did, he couldn't seem to stop. It was driving him nuts.

The history book she'd given him was only a



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taste of the Lupines. It described the Lupines, showed photos of their changed form, which looked nothing like what he had seen in the jungle. The accounting outlined the Pack structure. The leadership belonged to a man called Rand Charvez. He was reading paragraph upon paragraph about the role of the sworn Enforcers, the Lupine Council of Seven and the Lupine Laws. *Amazing.*

It was insane to consider that outside his normal existence, the only life he'd ever know, a world of shapeshifters had built a secret society and were thriving. It didn't help that the more he read, the more questions he had. Not only about the Lupines, but also about Sean and what had happened in the jungle. Obviously, the creature he had seen had been a Lupine of some sort. But why had its changed form been so different than what Treva and the book described? Had this creature really killed Sean?

It was time for Brock to call some of his contacts and find out what really happened to Sean outside the routine song and dance he was getting from his commanding officer. Brock popped another piece of nearly raw steak into his mouth and puffed out a satisfied breath in sick pleasure. His new dietary needs were bordering on psychotic. He hoped whatever was driving him to eat fucking raw steak healed him when he contracted *E. Coli*. He shook his head at the thought as he picked up the phone.

"General Riker."

"Cam. It's LW1." Brock used his call sign, Lone Wolf One. He thought it was ironic he was already named after the creature he was supposed to shift into. They called the sniper profession a lone man's job and the men of the business usually carried call signs to reflect the craft, as Brock did. Sean's call sign was Lone Wolf Two, another odd fact.

"Hey, Manyon. How are you, buddy?"

"I'm good, in need of information, and I don't

want anyone asking questions about where the request came from.” He hadn’t bothered to preface his request with small talk. Riker was the Commander of the Intelligence Unit, and he came from a long line of military men. If there was information to be had, he’d get it, and he wouldn’t appreciate empty chatter.

“You know what they say about 0200 Intel Officers. Your secret is ours. What do you need? Consider it done.”

“I need to know what really happened to Sean’s body.” There was dead silence on the other end of the line, then a long intake of breath.

“Tell me everything you have,” Cam ordered.

\*\*\*\*\*

Brock pocketed his cell phone. He balanced an armful of groceries as he slammed his car door. Felt good to ditch his cane, felt even better that he didn’t need it anymore. His rapid healing was no longer a surprise. Now he had a pretty good idea why his body was repairing itself faster than the doctors could document...it had to be the Lupine blood in him. He couldn’t dismiss that likelihood. The book had cited reasons for the Lupines natural healing ability, a lot of nonsensical scientific jargon as far as Brock was concerned. His lifetime of military doubt screaming, *just the facts and only the facts*, was hard to turn off.

The call he’d just received from Cam Riker wasn’t encouraging. Cam had been told Sean’s body had been cremated, but Brock didn’t believe it. He and Sean had been practical about where their jobs could take them and had taken steps about final measures if anything happened. Sean’s will and his burial wishes certainly didn’t include cremation. Cam’s words ran through his head. *Someone wants this kept quiet, Brock. My final orders from the top were to stop looking into this.*

*Stop looking into this.*

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What the hell was that supposed to mean? He wasn't stopping. Matter-of-a-fact, Cam's call had only encouraged him to dig deeper.

Entering the hotel room, he set the bag on the counter. Then it hit him like a rush of adrenaline—a foreign smell. Reaching slowly for his gun in the drawer, Brock scanned the contents of his room—the desk, the couch, the second bathroom. He was in a suite, so the bedroom was out of his line of sight. Little items were disturbed, the laptop he had finally broke down and purchased wasn't in the same place he'd set it, the folder holding his drawings no longer set on the desktop and the Lupine history book was gone. Alarm beat through his brain. No normal robber would be interested in a book.

Grasping his 9MM, Brock went on point. Making his way around the kitchen counter, he let the scent of his enemy pull him toward his goal. Soldier mode kicked in, quietly guiding him, step by step until he reached the bedroom closet. Well, he thought, as he stepped back and pointed the gun at the door, not a very subtle place for a professional robber to hide. He reached out and pulled open the door.

A burst of black rushed forward, causing him to drop his gun and dive to the side. He immediately turned and headed in pursuit. The masked individual was running toward the door so fast he became a blur.

Brock had to catch him.

As Brock surged forward, he felt a supernatural strength take over. Before he could even think about what he was doing, he caught and tackled the man, taking him to the ground with an “oomph.” He quickly positioned his arm around the intruder's neck in a well-practiced carotid hold. Bringing his palm to the bicep of his other arm, he set it on the top of the man's head and squeezed. He knew the effects of the hold. Within thirty seconds, if he didn't

release the pressure on the man's artery, the perp would black out. The man's legs scissored as he tried to break the hold. He was incredibly strong and it was taking much longer to knock him out than most men.

"Brock. Stop." The voice wheezing out of the man's throat arrested Brock. He immediately released his hold and flipped the man over. Tearing off the mystery man's black ski mask, he stared in shock.

"Sean. What..." Brock sat back and tried to register what he was seeing. His dead best friend was lying underneath him on the beige carpet of his hotel room. He was one hundred percent alive and massaging what Brock assumed was a highly sore throat.

"Knew I shouldn't have taught you that hold so well."

"You better tell me what the hell is going on here, Sean." Brock lifted off Sean and offered his hand. Sean reached up and allowed Brock to pull all six feet two inches of his solid muscled frame off the floor. Emotions surged through Brock, relief, elation and finally...anger. He clutched at Sean's arm.

"They told me you were dead."

"I know. They did that to protect me. And it was working fine until you couldn't let it rest. Can we sit down?" Sean pointed to the couch. Brock followed him, choosing to sit across from Sean. He still couldn't believe it. Sean was alive and they let him think his best friend was dead. No wonder he had felt uneasy about what had happened. His instincts had been correct.

"Why?" That's all he wanted to know. Why had his superiors tortured him with the news Sean was dead? Why hadn't Sean told him?

"Do you really need to ask why?"

Brock thought about all that had gone on, the strange happenings since that day. "You're the

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Lupine who changed me. It was you who killed all those men." It wasn't a question.

With a frown, Sean nodded. "I didn't have a choice. You would have died. If the Lupines found out I'd changed you without authorization, they would have executed me. It was critical everyone thought I was dead. Including you."

"Why did you come here and chance revealing yourself?" Brock rubbed his hands up and down his thighs, trying to calm his need to blurt out a million questions at once.

"I found out you had Cam looking into my death. I had to know how much you knew." He pointed to the aged book lying on the floor, where their scuffle had landed it. "I can see you've hooked up with a sworn Enforcer."

"Yes. Treva Reed."

"She's a good woman." The side of Sean's mouth lifted.

"She's..." he bit back a laugh at Sean's expression.

"Hot," Sean finished.

"Very." He let go and smiled.

"Having a hard time keeping your hands off her?"

"Oh yeah. Definitely."

He studied Sean. "God, it's good to see you." He tried not to let the relief he felt bubble to the surface, but it wasn't going real well. He could feel the wetness forming in his eyes.

"It's good to see you too." Sean's eyes teared up before they both took deep breaths and got their feelings under control.

"So now what?"

"Now we eat steak?" Sean inclined his head toward the kitchen.

Brock chuckled and confirmed Sean's suspicions. "Yeah, there's plenty of raw meat in there."

"Thank God."

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“How did you find Treva?” Sean cut into the raw steak and plopped it in his mouth. He moaned. Brock shook his head at his friend’s display. He knew exactly how he felt.

“It was kind of crazy.” He related the story to Sean, his dreams of the symbols, the website in the margin of the book and his first contact with Treva. He left out the wet dreams of the woman. That was downright embarrassing to discuss.

“Not so crazy. It had to be another Lupine who led you to Treva, probably wrote that in the margin for you. Your internal senses wouldn’t have let you do anything but follow the lead. We can smell each other, you know. Different.”

“Oh yeah. I’m aware. Wasn’t sure at first what the hell it was but figured it out quick.”

“How much does she know about who changed you?”

Brock set down his fork and relayed his conversation with Treva. “She knows I was in the military. Knows I was on a mission. Not sure, it wouldn’t take too much for her to figure it out. Especially if you have Lupines on the inside.”

“I have people I trust on the inside. If anyone makes an inquiry, I’ll know. They will stick with the story I’ve fed them.”

“So you say, but I was able to call in a favor.”

“Yeah, well you used a secret weapon...Cam. I should have expected you to go right to the top of people who can get information on anyone.”

“I’ll make contact with her. Try to find out what she knows. She said she’d like to see me again.”

“Brock, she’s a sworn Enforcer. She will see you again. It’s her job to guide you into the Pack, otherwise, she could be forced to execute you.”

Brock leaned back in his chair and whistled. “Wow. You guys sure don’t mind killing people at the smallest infraction of your law.”

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Sean reached out, seized his arm and squeezed hard. “The Lupine Laws are the only means of keeping our society in line. Without them, we’d have chaos. It’s hard to control a people whose base nature is a wild wolf.”

He released Brock’s arm.

If Brock didn’t know any better, he’d say his friend was scared shitless. He’d never seen him like this before. As many missions as they’d been on together, Sean had always maintained a core personality of calm and control. This new Sean was running, and fast. *How odd.*

“Don’t underestimate Treva. Underneath that sweet flavored outer coating is the heart of a seriously deadly Lupine, dedicated to the Lupine laws. If you’re trying to pry information from her, be careful. She’s not only pretty—she’s smart. She can kill, Brock, very efficiently.”

“What do you want me to do, Sean? You cut yourself off from your people to save my life. There’s no way I’m letting them sign your death warrant.”

“I knew the risks when I turned you and I accepted them.” Sean’s voice elevated, he started to rise, then sat back down. “Don’t go and screw up my efforts and get yourself killed.”

Brock dropped his head, closed his eyes and tried to get his temper under control. He was going to do whatever he needed to protect Sean. Even if it meant keeping his intentions to himself. *Probably a good idea to switch subjects.* He opened his eyes.

“Why was your changed Lupine form so unfamiliar? I’ve been scouring this book and haven’t seen anything like what you looked like that day.”

With a frown, Sean steeped his fingers under his chin. “There’s a lot about that day I can’t explain. I was in a rage so bad I didn’t even know I’d changed. All I remember is seeing you go down and waking up in a river of blood with dead bodies all around me. I don’t even know what my changed form

looked like. I assumed it was the same as it's always been."

"No way, Dude. It certainly wasn't like anything in this book." Brock grabbed the book off the floor and turned to one of the pages he had marked with a post-it. Centered in the page was a picture of a huge wolf. He imagined the form was close to what Treva had been trying to describe to him. He pointed to the drawing. "You were like five times the size of this."

"No shit."

"No shit. Can you do it? Change, I mean. Right now?"

"Yeah. I can change anytime I command it. Haven't you changed yet?"

"What? No." Brock tried to calm his rapid heartbeat. Even the thought of doing something like that frightened the hell out of him.

"Really? I would have thought you'd finish the Changing Process by now. You feeling any urges?"

"No. Man. Come on." Uncomfortable, Brock tried to shrug him off. He didn't want to talk about it. Denial was his friend right now.

"All right. Let me show you what this is all about." Sean stood and moved to the center of the room. He reached for his shirt.

"I guess it's obvious you have to be naked when you change?" Brock said.

"Unless you want to be running around in shreds. It's a given."

"Yeah. Right." Sure, a given. Stupid him.

Sean shucked off his clothing, then closed his eyes. In a matter of twenty seconds, his body contorted, shifted and bam. Just like that. He was a large, grey wolf. Not the same form Brock had seen in the jungle, but amazing none-the-less. It was like they were in a B-werewolf movie. In that moment, all doubts he had erased.

"Amazing. Brock dropped to his knee and ran his hand over Sean's back—his fur was soft. Sean



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shook, lifted his head and howled. Brock cringed.

“Sean, keep it down.” He could have sworn his partner was grinning with all his pointed teeth.

“This isn’t the same creature I saw you change into in the jungle.” The wolf tilted its head to the side and growled.

“Hey, just the messenger here.”

With a pop and his body contorting, Sean was back to his old self, reaching for his clothes.

“I wonder what that means, this other form I shifted into?”

“How should I know? This is all new to me. I’m certainly not the one to talk to on Lupine shifting abnormalities.

Sean snorted. “No kidding.”

They sat back down at the table to finish their steaks.

“I’m sorry, Brock, for doing this to you.”

“Don’t be. I’m alive. Everything happens for a reason. I should be thanking you.”

Sean’s gaze fell to the table, then back up. “I couldn’t watch you die.”

Brock slapped him on the shoulder. “I know. I know. No worries. Eat your steak, there’s three more in there.”

His friend’s anguish ate at his heart. He’d have done the same thing if he’d been in Sean’s place. They were partners, friends, had relied on each other since they were kids. He understood, and he didn’t resent Sean. But he did feel an innate need to protect him. Sean was the younger brother he had never had—family—and nothing was going to threaten his family.

“I want you to head to my apartment in Aaron. Keep low for a while until we can figure out what to do. You’ll be safe there. I’ll be back by next week. I have a few more tests. Then we’ll regroup.”

“Okay. Sounds good.”

Sean didn’t need to know he had plans. Plans

Rae Monet

including a covert mission to retrieve intelligence from Treva Reed. He had to discover how much the Lupines had learned about Sean. It was time to set a trap for a female wolf, and he had just the right bait.

## Chapter Five

The phone call from Brock Manyon had surprised Treva. When he walked into her Dojo, she experienced a flutter of nervousness and excitement that she couldn't explain. His distinct Lupine smell reached out to her, reminding her how attracted she was to him. She couldn't get him out of her mind. With only one meeting, he had etched himself into her brain waves, into her dreams and certainly into her fantasies. She wasn't sure if she was pleased or tiptoeing on the outskirts of madness knocking to get in.

She went back to grappling with one of her male students. A distinct growl distracted her, causing her to lose the match. She threw a glance over her shoulder toward the door and at Brock. *Had he made that noise?* Leaning against the wall, he appeared cool and collected. She was glad one of them was, because from the minute he had phoned her, she certainly hadn't been. She must have been mistaken about the growl. Shaking her head, she forced her attention back to her class, guiding them through another set of kicks until she was satisfied they had sufficiently progressed.

She bowed at the end of the session—relieved it was finally over. “Class dismissed.” A dozen students bowed back, then headed toward the locker rooms. Some of the young girls giggled as they passed the handsome man in the doorway.

He sauntered toward her. She noticed he no longer carried a cane. He moved like a wolf on the hunt, calculating and focused, as if he was stalking

his prey. She stamped down a shiver. Hugging herself, she rubbed her hands up and down her arms to alleviate the tingling sensation her skin seemed to carry for this man.

"Ms. Reed." He held out his hand. She lifted her hand into his, the warmth of his touch invading her senses. He looked even better than the last time she'd seen him.

"Treva. Please call me Treva."

He dipped his head. "Treva, then. I have your book in my car."

"I'm glad. I'm also glad you called, Brock."

He didn't answer as he slid his hands in the pockets of his slacks. He studied her Dojo and she returned the favor, her stare running over him. He was wearing a black turtleneck, black slacks and a leather jacket. The man exuded sex appeal and he didn't even seem to know it.

"I see you no longer carry your cane."

His blue eyes shifted back to her.

"Yes, I'm healing very well, nearly at one hundred percent."

"Good. Good..." She was at a loss on how to proceed with him. Normally, her Changeling students were younger and more experienced with the way of her people. With Brock, she felt awkward—out of sorts. She was afraid if she moved too fast, she'd scare him off and that was something she didn't want to do.

"You're very talented."

His complement surprised her. "Thank you."

"Are all of your students..." He didn't seem to know how to say what he wanted. Knowing she wasn't the only one off-balance, relieved her.

"Lupine?"

"Yes. Sorry. This is all very new to me."

"That's all right. Yes. All of my students here are Lupine Changelings in one stage or another of the Change Process."

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“And you...” His pauses were becoming incredibly adorable. She saw Brock as a leader among humans. A man used to giving orders, sure of himself and his command. Her world—The Lupines—must have him questioning himself.

“Yes. I teach them. Guide them through the process and ultimately punish them if they don’t follow the rules.”

His eyes widened at her statement, brows lifting. “So, have you ever had to kill a Changeling?”

Dread ate at her gut. Killing a fellow Lupine was one of the worse actions a sworn Enforcer was forced to take.

“I have.” Once. She’d only had to kill a fellow Lupine once, and she didn’t want to talk about what happened.

She clapped her hands together lightly. “Would you like to do some training?”

His expression turned focused. “I have a proposition for you.”

She raised her gaze to his. She could see the intensity lurking there.

“I’m listening.”

“One match. You and me. If you win, I allow you to take on my training as a Changeling, bring me into the fold, no questions, no problems. If you lose, you let me go and don’t report my existence to the Pack.” He crossed his arms. Treva recognized the body language for what it was—a purely defensive stance.

She rocked back on her heels. “Those are steep terms.” She couldn’t tell him, win or lose...*she would* bring him into the Pack. The security of the Lupines demanded it. Besides, she had no intention of giving him a win.

“What’s the point in betting if the bet isn’t interesting?”

Treva would give him that.

“There’s a uniform in the locker room that

should fit you.”

He bowed, winked at her and headed toward the dressing room. The man was cheeky and obviously confident. Easing down to the floor to stretch, Treva smiled when she considered how difficult he would find beating her. She was going to thoroughly enjoy this battle.

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Brock shed his clothes and donned the *Gi* martial arts uniform. Seeing Treva again had shaken him. Her body had flowed into the Lupine martial arts moves like a symphony of sloping lines in motion, muscular, yet curved, and in all the right places. He'd kept fantasizing about throwing her over his shoulder and taking her home, an act that probably would have gotten him into a load of trouble with several of the Lupine males under her supervision. Watching her fight some of those men had caused an intense possessiveness to take hold of him. Before he could stop it, a strange growling noise had emitted from his gut. When her questioning look had fallen on him, he had quickly masked his feelings. Wouldn't be good for her to know how possessive he seemed to be toward her.

Not good at all.

He was going to give her a good fight in this battle he had proposed, but ultimately, his plan was to lose. His mission was clear as if he was planning his next snipe. Gather information from the enemy and that meant getting close to Treva. This seemed like a perfect opportunity. Shutting the locker with his clothes in it, he took a deep breath and turned his focus inward, *gather information, Brock. Don't get distracted.*

When he came out, she was waiting for him. Standing there in the middle of the large exercise mat, she seemed so tiny. Her dark hair was tightly bundled behind her head, her iridescent green eyes stood out from her pale skin. The easy drape of her

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white Gi highlighted her ample curves. He cleared his throat and positioned himself in front of her, trying to get past her alluring draw and concentrate on giving her a good show. She made eye contact with him and slowly bowed with the traditional pre-fight acknowledgement of respect, never breaking their locked gazes. He bowed back.

She struck faster than he expected, taking him down to the mat with a side-kick to the back of his knee. He rolled before he collapsed completely and came up in a crouch while studying her. Maybe he wasn't going to have to pretend to lose after all. She was back in position across from him.

"A Lupine must use the element of surprise and their speed to fool their opponent into a false sense of security. Small is mighty."

He arched a brow. So she realized she had a weakness in her size. Interesting. He stood and bowed his head. "First strike to you."

She gave him a dimpled smile. Oh man, she was so beautiful. How was he going to successfully throw a punch at this woman? She answered the question for him by approaching him again, fists and feet flying. He blocked with his forearm, but she kept coming—he kept blocking. She varied her position, taking him off balance, then went in for another strike, landing a punch to his face, on the side of the nose. He shook off the hit and circled around her, trying to keep her in his line of sight. She was so fast, feigning left, then right, he couldn't keep up...besides, deep down, he didn't want to hurt her. If that was even possible.

She drove him back, hit after hit, another strike to his eye, until he stepped off the boundary circle. She stopped and bowed.

"My point. You're out of bounds."

He rubbed his hand under his nose, only to have it come up bloody. "And first blood to you." He inclined his head.

"If you wanted to give me this fight, then why ask for concessions?"

He shrugged. "I'm not trying to give you the fight—"

"You're uncomfortable with my small size and gender. Having a difficult time fighting a woman? You know, they say the military doesn't want women in combat because it distracts the men too much, which is why we're such a great weapon." She jerked her head and walked backwards into the center of the mat. He followed her.

Brock bristled. She was right. He was having a hard time, not only because she was a woman, but because in his dreams, he had seen that body unclothed. And right now, with only a loosely tied *Gi on*, he was picturing peeling the damn thing off her rather than fighting. He was thinking of lapping at her breasts, then moving lower, as opposed to throwing a punch.

"I guess this won't be as difficult as I thought," she said.

Brock laughed at her attempt to rattle him. She was smart. Most soldiers didn't fight well holding anger, made it hard for them to concentrate and focus. Made them stupid. But he wasn't most soldiers. He had been trained to overcome emotions and kill. She was overconfident now and that was good.

They bowed to each other. Brock let her come. He had already gotten a sense of her technique through watching her, now he was ready to use the knowledge against her. She drove in hard, which was exactly what he was hoping for. Not only would she tire quickly, but she wouldn't see it when he came back at her. *His body* could take the hits.

He gave her three or four strikes before he used her momentum and turned it. Following through on her move, he twirled them back to back, came around the other side and hit her on the back of the



knee with the side of his foot. She fell hard and he used her weight and an arm bar to take her to the mat. He followed her down and locked his forearm on the front of her throat, immobilizing, squeezing her wind pipe to minimize the air flow. She sucked in a strained breath and tried to use her leg. He locked it down with his own in a submission hold she couldn't break. She struggled to arch, but he used his superior weight to pin her down.

Then something happened he didn't expect. The fight was forgotten, all noise in the room ceased, his vision tunneled to her and only her. He leaned forward and slid his cheek along hers, taking in a deep inhalation of her scent. So good. He reveled in the opportunity to have her under him, every inch of her body touching the length of his. His arousal grew hard and heavy against her, his breathing rapidly puffing in and out. He needed to get closer. A grumble came from deep down in his throat and rumbled out.

*You can't hurt her—she's yours.*

What the hell? His brain began murmuring words, reminding him the woman under him was special. *Claim. Keep.*

He felt compelled to follow, like he was in a trance. He couldn't stop himself from taking her lips in a deep kiss. She gasped, opening her mouth to his. He took the opportunity to delve in, tangling their tongues. He released his arm from her throat and buried his hands in her hair. He thrust his lower body against her, showing her his arousal in a purely primitive fashion. The kiss went on, one, two, three...He couldn't stop. Her hands were touching him, running down his back, ratcheting up his excitement.

Nothing had ever felt this perfect, this right—but it wasn't enough.

His hands began to travel, leaving her hair, straying to her neck and then sliding the uniform off

her shoulder. His lips glided off her mouth, kissing the slope of her cheek, burying into the spot where her shoulder and neck met, the naked area he had just exposed. He wanted to bite her there, mark her. He opened his mouth and lightly scored her with his teeth.

Suddenly, he was thrown from her, his body launching and sailing over the mat to come to rest on his back. "Umph." The landing knocked the breath out of him, he gasped as he tried to pull it back.

When he came back into himself, she was standing over him. Her cheeks were rosy, her lips wet. There was blood on the collar of her *Gi*, his blood, he assumed. She looked well-kissed and, obviously, very, very angry. *Beautiful*.

"That was not a move I would have expected from you."

He rose to one elbow and regarded her, thumbing at the blood now pouring from his nose. "The beast in me took over." He knew she would appreciate the irony of his statement.

She walked over, grabbed a towel and what looked like a medical pack and headed back toward him. Dropping down on one knee, she applied the towel to his nose. He winced. She broke the pack, which he figured out was ice.

"That is why you need a teacher."

"Well, considering I'm the one bleeding and on my back, I'd say you won that privilege."

She retrieved the towel, wrapped the ice pack in it and gingerly applied it to his nose.

"You're probably going to have a black eye too." She pressed her finger around his eye as if to test her hypothesis. He clenched his teeth in pain.

"Couldn't think of a more pleasurable way to incur a battle scar."

"Don't do that again when I'm trying to teach you. It's distracting and inappropriate." The

gentleness in her pronouncement and the way she held the ice to his face warmed him and took the sting out of her words.

“Can I do it some other time?”

“Brock, I’m going to be your teacher, not your play toy. I don’t think it’s a good idea to take our relationship beyond that.”

He grabbed her wrist and stopped her ministrations.

“I’d never think of you as a play toy,” he growled out.

Her gaze jumped to his, her surprise evident. “Okay. Well. No, it’s still not a good idea.”

He gently released her wrist.

“We’ll see.”

She gave a “tsk” and helped him sit up.

“You threw me pretty good there. Totally wasn’t expecting it, either.”

“A Lupine’s strength can be harnessed and focused to project ten times that of a regular human.”

“Very effective,” he said as he arched his arm, working out some of the soreness their sparring had brought. She immediately began to massage the area he was rubbing.

“I will teach you that ‘very effective’ technique, along with many others.”

He tucked a strand of fallen hair from her ponytail behind her ear. She looked up at him.

“I look forward to it.” She shook her head, he could see she was trying not to smile, but he saw the start of that dimple in her cheek.

“I look forward to teaching you. Come on. Let’s get you cleaned up.” He let her help him to his feet. He really didn’t need it, but for some reason, it felt good to have her fuss over him.

“I’m fine. Don’t worry about me. Can I take you to dinner tonight?” When he saw she was opening her mouth and likely going to refuse, he raised his

hands up, palms out. "Strictly professional. I have some questions I've tagged in the book. Be nice to get some answers." She shut her mouth. "I know a great Italian place out here. Do wolves like Italian?"

She laughed and shoved him toward the locker room. "Wolves like pretty much anything, especially Italian."

"Great. Pick you up at eight." He didn't wait for an answer, just headed to the locker room to get dressed. His eye and nose where throbbing. She was right. He was going to have a great shiner from that little episode. But he didn't care. He now had a means to pump her for more information about Sean. His plan was working, if he could just control his inner beast.

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Treva mopped Brock's blood from the exercise mat. What in the hell had gotten into her? She was supposed to be teaching him how to harness his Changeling power and instead she ended up making out with him in the middle of her own Dojo. Shame pressed down on her. Getting involved with Brock was dangerous, but she had never had these types of strong feelings toward any man before. Simply put, he overwhelmed her.

That kiss...she slid down on the mat and touched her mouth. That kiss had been powerful. There was a point where she had stopped fighting and began participating. She ran a finger along her bottom lip. His touch was everything she thought it would be. How was she going to mix her desire for Brock with her status as a sworn Enforcer? If the Council found out she was dating a student, her position could be questioned. Objectivity was critical to her job and her success; she had to stand above all other Lupines to enforce their laws. She was fast compromising her objectivity with Brock and leaping her way into places she had no business going. At dinner tonight, she needed to be cool, collected. No

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more sampling the man who was chipping away at her sanity.

*No more.*

## Chapter Six

"You ready?" Brock stood at Treva's door, anxious to start his mission. The soldier in him wouldn't let-up, but the man in him didn't miss the lickable cleavage the vee of her dark green dress showed.

"That's worse than I thought it was going to be." Treva immediately reached out and bracketed his face in between her hands as she examined his black eye. He felt the inner beast, rumbling in his chest.

*Take. Claim.*

He inched in, one more millimeter, a little more... Still probing, she didn't seem to notice how close he had brought them. He took a second to enjoy the feel of the heat coming off Treva's body. He liked the way her forehead furrowed in concern for him, and her gentle care soothed something deep down inside him, almost instinctual, like petting a wild animal. For the first time in his life, he actually craved cuddling with a woman, pictured himself rubbing against her in a sensual dance designed only to take them one place—bed. What would his Marine buddies say about him right now, taken down by a mere slip of a woman and panting after her like a dog in heat?

She brought him back to the present when she hit a particularly sore spot.

"Ouch."

Her green gaze snapped up and ran over his face. "Did you ice this?"

"Sure."

"I'm sorry." She went back to the task of

touching around his eye. Her remorse sliced through him. Her emotions were discernible, the subtle hitch in her voice, the tightening of her lips. Her scent flared and engulfed him. Must be because of the changes in his body, because he felt pushed to take her burden away, sooth her.

He ran a single finger down the pale softness of her cheek.

“Don’t be.” He stepped back a bit. Brock had to cool the fire threatening to drive him toward something he’d regret. . Treva had shown she wasn’t ready for him yet, not by far. Her actions when she tossed him across the room and he’d kissed her proved that. He held up the book.

“Ready to eat? I’m ready to ask questions.”

“Oh. Yeah, I’m starved.” She shut the door and trailed him to his car.

He drove the short distance to the Italian restaurant he’d chosen. The hostess guided them to a lone table in the corner. The ambience was perfect, low Italian music piped in, candles burned at the table, the scent of fine Italian food and grapevine painted walls completed the picture. The setting was ideal for a slow seduction on a peaceful night between two consenting adults. That’s why he’d selected it. In Italian, he ordered a bottle of their finest red wine.

“You speak Italian?” Treva asked.

“I have a lot of skills.”

“I bet you do. I’m impressed with you, Brock Manyon.” She surveyed the room. “This is nice.”

“Buddy of mine told me about it, really good food,” he cracked open the book, trying to act casual about the location he had strategically selected. “Would you mind if I got right into the asking part of this dinner?” He wanted to put her mind at ease, show that their meal was a business get-together.

“Please, do.” She removed the napkin from the table and settled it on her lap.

“So this Council of seven elders makes all the decisions for the Lupine Pack?”

“Yes, together they carry over five hundred years of our history.”

“But this Rand Charvez has only been the Pack leader for the last hundred years? Who was the leader before that?”

“That was a little before my time. Rand’s been our Alpha male since my birth. Before him, there was another Pack leader, Gavin Shelton. He was killed, so the leadership passed to his second, Rand. There were no Beta challenges to Rand’s leadership, so it fell naturally to him.”

“So your Pack hierarchy is structured much like a traditional wolf pack?” He took a sip of wine, which encouraged her to do the same. He wanted her relaxed, at ease. That way, when the time came to ask key questions, she would feel comfortable supplying answers.

“In some ways we do, in others we don’t. For example,” she lifted her glass and studied the wine before she drank. “In traditional pack structure, only the Alpha male and Alpha female are allowed to mate. In the Lupine Pack, those who discover they are a mated pair are allowed to be together.”

Interesting. Forgetting his original purpose, he leaned in, wanting to know more about this.

“You talked about that before. How does a pair actually know they’re mated?”

“It’s instinctual. They are drawn to each other in a ways that can’t be mistaken in the Lupine race. There are physical signs, scents attracting beyond reason, males have a feral possessiveness towards their mate, and it’s said some even have psychic connections to the point they can project themselves into each others dream state. As I said before, they become one in every way.” She shrugged her small shoulders. “It’s hard for me to tell you anything about mated pair feelings from personal



experience—besides what's been documented—because I've never been mated."

Brock's heart picked up a few beats at her description, the familiar sound of it. He stayed silent, willing her to continue.

"Once a pair is mated in a physical sense..." She twirled her hair with her fingers and tilted her head. He could tell she was nervous talking about this "You mean once they do the wild thing?"

She gave a feminine chuckle at his description. He loved when she was happy—her pleasure became his. He also experienced a certain masculine pride that she was at ease enough to laugh.

"Yes, once they are intimate, then each will bear the mark of a mated pair, a unique raised brand. Each pair will carry this symbol. The placement is different with each couple."

"You mean they will develop something like this, but they will both have it?" He lifted his wrist to show what the book described as his 'human Changeling mark.'

"Yes. That's how it's known they are a mated pair."

"Wow. That's wild."

"The mark is built into their genetic code and, again, arises when they finally consummate their relationship."

"Lupines are serious about mating."

"This structure follows the tradition of the wolf pack you're familiar with, wolves mate for life."

"What happens if they are separated?"

"A crippling longing will attack the mates. If one of a mated pair is killed, the other will succumb to grief and die."

"That's more binding than our human marriages or the way they are supposed to be."

"Yes. A little." She winked and took another drink of her wine. He liked her like this, relaxed—open. He rested his arm along the back of the booth

and shifted over until his hip was touching hers.

"The book said human conversions were disallowed over a decade ago and you mentioned the same thing. Why?"

"There were physical complications with the human conversions. Some humans went insane, others died. With our Pack growing strong without converted humans, the Council decided to ban the practice."

Now they were easing toward the subject Brock really wanted to discuss.

"Is there any way for you to know who converted me?" God, he hoped her answer was no.

"There isn't any scientific way, no blood test, nothing like that to determine the Lupine who converted you, no."

Silently, Brock sighed in relief.

"However."

He tensed.

"I'm confident I'll discover who did this and they will be punished."

"How?" he asked casually as he took a gulp of his wine.

"We have our contacts in the human world."

Brock relaxed. Sean had sealed down the leaks in the military and without anyone there, the Lupines didn't stand a chance.

"What will happen to them?" He rubbed a hand around the back of his neck where tension was building once again.

"I can't tell you. The ultimate sentence for breaking that particular law can be as extreme as execution. The Council will decide."

"You guys are a little over the top with these laws, aren't you?"

"Brock, you don't understand. Without the order of the Lupine laws, the Pack would be lost. We must not allow any leniency on breaking the rules."

Such a similar response to Sean's. These guys

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were brainwashed on the idea change was destructive. It was disturbing to see, like a bunch of religious fanatics following a leader who was really a serial killer.

Brock nodded and buried his head in the menu, trying not to let his relief show that the Lupines didn't have very much information about Sean. He was going to make sure they didn't.

The waiter arrived, forcing them to stop their conversation to order. The next few minutes were filled with dialog back and forth between them and the waiter, then the bringing of salads and bread. Wine glasses were refilled.

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Treva placed her order and faced Brock. Even with his black eye, he was so hot. She felt this insane need to touch him. It was crazy, but nonetheless, the feelings were there, tapping at her brain like an annoying drummer. He had moved closer and she didn't mind. She loved his smell, the way his hair brushed his collar, the lines of his ruggedly handsome face. Even the little scar above his lip turned her on.

What was wrong with her? From the first moment, she'd met this man, he'd kept her off balance and now she was doing the one thing she'd vowed not to do...lusting for him. There was a connection between them that Treva wanted to explore, but her sensible side yelled, *not a good idea*.

"Have you noticed any substantial changes to your senses?"

"Yeah. I can't stand the smell of women's perfume."

"Enhanced smell is the first sense to develop in Changelings."

"Well, I guess you can check that box off then, because I've got it and it's annoying."

"You'll get used to it. Eventually, your other enhanced senses will begin to balance out the smell."

“Hope so.” He grabbed a piece of bread, buttered it and chomped down. She enjoyed watching him move, he had the grace of a Lupine, all sinew and muscle, purposeful, strong hands and never a wasted action, and the temperament of a leader, sure of his purpose. Alpha male, through and through. She wasn’t usually lured to that kind of personality in a man, but with him, the bond was immediate and strong. It was no wonder she had guessed pretty quickly he was one of her kind.

“Have you had any dreams of running in wolf form, felt any itching through your skin?”

He stopped chewing and glared at her like she was an alien.

“No.” His response was abrupt. He set down the bread. “Sorry, this is really weird for me.” His tone was much softer. He raked a single hand through his hair. She could feel his frustration.

“You don’t need to be embarrassed to talk to me about this.”

“I’m not embarrassed...” he waved his hand, “never mind.” He took a deep interest in his salad, ignoring her. She could feel him shutting down.

She tipped his face toward her and ran her thumb over his gruff jaw. His eyes narrowed.

“The Lupine Change Process is beautiful. There’s nothing to be concerned about. You will begin to feel foreign urges in your body. I can help you learn to control these.”

He snorted. “I’m feeling urges in my body all right. But I don’t think it has anything to do with the Change Process. Come closer, *Little Red Riding Hood*, and I’ll show you.” He bared his teeth in a predator’s smile.

Her eyebrows climbed at the implications of what he was saying. She instinctually dropped her hand. Then she did something she hadn’t done in a really long time, she gave a full belly laugh. Her laughter led to his.

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After their mirth died down, he placed his arm around her and squeezed her shoulder. "I was playing with you. Tell you what...I'll let you know if I feel the need to change into a big, bad, hairy wolf. Okay?"

"Fair enough."

The waiter came and exchanged their salad plates for their meals. The scent of spaghetti with meat sauce made her mouth water.

"I'm taking a road trip tomorrow. I'll be going to our semi-annual Lupine gathering at our Lodge in the Mountains. The location's about an hour away, no cellular service, very peaceful and beautiful. If you can, I'd like you to come with me, become familiar with some of your Pack mates. I have to meet with the Council, discuss your situation."

"Sure. Count me in. So this is like your family picnic?"

She shook her head. Human Changelings were the worse to train, Brock was particularly difficult because he hadn't been exposed to her culture before. Thank God, she hadn't had to train a human in a decade or she wasn't sure her patience would hold up.

"Yeah, I guess you could say that."

"Lots of food and volleyball?"

She bit her bottom lip. This next bit of information probably wouldn't go over so well.

"Um. Well. We don't really bring food, per say. We sort of..." she took a huge mouthful of her wine, feeling the reinforcing calming affects of nearly two glasses already, "...hunt it."

Brock coughed as he choked on his food. She thought he was going to spew out the bite he had just taken. She started pounding him on the back. He grabbed his glass of water and began gulping it down.

"Shit. Could you have waited until I actually swallowed before you sprang something like that on

me?" He wiped his mouth with his napkin and cleared his throat.

She circled her hand on his back, trying in her own way to sooth and apologize. She could smell his distress, a tang to his normal masculine draw.

"Sorry."

"So you all get naked, change into wolves and tear the local game apart?"

"Now you're being crass. This is our Pack, our ways. To insult the Pack is to insult me. Hunting is part of our nature. To be asked to join the hunt is the highest honor a Pack mate can be given. It helps develop leadership and teamwork in our young and reinforce adult relationships."

Brock slumped in the seat, dropped his head into his hand and rubbed his temple with his index finger.

"You're going to need to cut me some slack. I don't mean to insult your Pack. I'm not used to dealing with strange situations like this. It's my military background, we plan missions, deal in intelligence, strategize. This is all so..." he held up his hand, "unbelievable. Treva," he ran his thumb over her cheek, "I would never do anything to hurt you. It's my turn to apologize."

His sincerity pleased her, but he had missed one critical point. "Your Pack."

"What?"

"Brock, this is your Pack too."

She could see him gnashing his teeth.

"My Pack."

It was as if the words were being dragged out of him. He waved his hand toward the food. "Can we eat here without any more shocking statements? Maybe save them for when my mouth isn't full." He smiled at her, a masculine tilting of his mouth.

She nodded her head in agreement. She probably should have waited on that one.

The rest of the meal went without incident.

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Treva was really enjoying spending time with him. His former job had helped shape him into a strong man with honor and integrity, two qualities she admired. Although his personality was gruff from his military roots, he could be charming when he put his mind to it. She found the combination of his character traits endearing and she was quickly losing the inner battle to keep her distance from him. His intense gaze heated her all over until her palms were sweaty, and she could feel the flush, not only on her face, but down her entire body to her toes. The wine wasn't helping. Inhibitions began to slip away.

"So, no siblings?"

"No, my parents were killed when I was a baby. I was raised mainly in the foster care system. Went into the military when I was eighteen."

His story tugged at her heartstrings. No family. She was more determined than ever to bring him into the Pack.

He raised his hand to signal the waiter to bring the bill. Two hours was probably long enough to take up a booth, she thought, as Brock threw cash onto the table.

She grabbed for her purse. "Let me pay my part." As she reached for her wallet, he immediately set his hand on hers.

"No." His tone was firm, his expression hard, brooking no argument. There was that Alpha again. The thought thrilled her in a deep down place. She was in trouble with this man.

"Thank you."

"My pleasure."

He relaxed his face and smiled at her, making her heart tilt against the wall of her chest with a hard thump. Why did he have to be so damned easy to talk to, not to mention intelligent and with masculine intensity pushing him right into the extremely sexy department. She ran unsteady hands

through her hair, lifting it up, then dropping it back down to cool her neck.

The ride back to her house was accomplished in seemingly silent companionship. The dinner had helped take the hard edge off their relationship, settling them into a quiet compatibility, laced with an undeniable heat she'd rather dismiss.

But she couldn't.

He walked her to the door, taking her keys and opening it in a gentlemanly way, then followed her inside and prowled around as if he was ensuring she was safe from intruders. His obviously innate, protective nature was charming. He set her book on the coffee table. She leaned against the wall and watched him.

"Will you go back to the military?"

"Can't, I've already been medically discharged."

"So that's it, a fifteen year career over?"

He shrugged and slid his hands into the pockets of his slacks as he looked around her house.

"I could probably pull some strings and get back in, now that I'm medically stable, but...got other things to do right now."

His intense predatory gaze came back and settled on her. She originally thought he was distracted, but she could see the heat burning in his stare now. He wasn't distracted at all—he knew what he wanted. He'd never cease being a soldier, she could sense that about him, but right now he seemed to be on a different mission.

"You better get going." If she was in wolf form, she'd be backing away from him right now.

He nodded his head, yet continued to stalk closer and closer, one step at a time. He slowly caged her in with his arms, one positioned on each side of her, leaving her pinned against the wall's plaster.

She willingly let him.

Treva set her hand against his chest, she should push him away, but didn't.



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God, he was huge, his chest solid muscle beneath her hand. She fought an insane urge to run her hands over its contours and dig her fingers into his hair.

"Thank you for coming to dinner with me, answering all my annoying questions," he said as his body eased further toward hers. She could feel his hard length against her with every cell of her skin.

"You're welcome. It's natural for you to be curious. I didn't mind at all. Thank you again for dinner. Pick me up at seven tomorrow."

He inclined his head to acknowledge her request. "For the Lupine hunting party?" His mouth quirked up at the corner.

It was as if his presence was taking up all of her needed air. Treva dropped her head back against the wall and let out an audible breath. He was going to be a difficult man to ignore. Especially when all she wanted to do was jump him.

"Yes, for the Lupine hunting party."

"Treva," he whispered as he circled his thumb on her cheek.

She lifted her head back to make eye contact with him. Looking into those bright blue eyes, she could feel herself weakening. If he hadn't been holding her up with his body and arms, she might have melted into a puddle on the floor.

"You need to go." Her mouth was saying one thing, but she didn't make any move to push him away, and he didn't seem to be taking her very seriously anyway.

"You're really good at giving orders, must be the Enforcer in you." He ran his thumb along her bottom lip and leaned in closer.

She took in his dreamy masculine scent, the same smell that continuously sent her into a hot-wired sexual state. "You're not so good at following them," she retorted, her voice husky. "A bit odd for a soldier."

“Good thing I’m not a soldier anymore.” His answer came out in a puff of air against her mouth as he angled in. The rough feel of his finger against her lips was almost her undoing. Desire shot through her. She felt herself heating up and her heart beating so hard she was sure he could hear it.

“Don’t even think about kissing me again. Remember how that ended last time?”

“Okay.” He trailed his fingers from her lips and threaded his hands in her hair, rubbing, caressing. She closed her eyes and enjoyed his touch. She could get used to this, want it all the time. Being touched by Brock was addicting—in a dangerous way.

“I won’t think about it, how about I just do it...” Brock’s words trailed off.

He murmured so low that she almost didn’t hear him. He seemed to lose his thoughts the closer their lips came.

“Brock. Don’t.” She was pleading, unable to push him away. Her hands crawled up his chest to settle on his shoulders. She wanted him to kiss her, wanted it with every shuddering breath she took. Her senses were on fire, her body was talking to her, reminding her how she’d never connected with a man with this all consuming need before.

“Relax.” His thumb moved from her hair down to her chin. He positioned her head where he wanted.

She was beyond protesting, beyond anything except absorbing the warmth of his body pressed close to hers. Then he did it—touched his lips to hers and a light exploded behind her eyelids. As he explored, her breath hitched. Her fingers clenched on his shoulder. She tried to tamp down and deny her feelings.

It wasn’t working.

She was high, high on his kiss. Soft, his lips were so supple and wet. He opened her mouth wider and invaded with his tongue. His hands buried in her hair once again and held her hostage, only

allowing her to move the way he wanted. He took the kiss deeper than she ever imagined a kiss could go.

Treva let herself go, sinking into him. Felt so good, so right. She tangled her tongue with his, the beginning of a sensual mating dance.

He flattened his body against hers, his erection pressing against her stomach, his heart pounding against hers. She wanted much more than a simple kiss as she slid her hands into his hair. Like his lips, his hair was soft and his chin rough against her cheek. He needed to shave. She didn't care, the variation of feelings, smooth, yet hard, made her senses purr. She tightened her grip on his head. He tasted incredible. She sank down into his kiss until common sense intruded.

With a rumble, Treva released his head and leaned back. She was panting as if she had just run a marathon. All she could think was, he tasted like more, like that second bite of her favorite food that lead to so much more. She could easily see this kiss taking them somewhere they shouldn't go. She pushed him away, this time stronger—more determined than before.

"See you tomorrow."

"Sure." He shook his head and stepped back. He ran a hand over his shadowed jaw.

Her hands dropped. She puffed out a huge sigh of relief that he was backing off.

"Seven a.m." was his parting remark.

She watched him leave. How was she going to remedy her feelings about him over her duty? She didn't have an answer to her own question. Brock Manyon had surely become a complication she couldn't afford, since her body had a different agenda than her brain.

## Chapter Seven

Gripping his cell phone between his neck and shoulder, Brock threw the packaging from his most recent raw steak-eating binge into the garbage. “She wants me to go to some sort of weekend gathering. I need to pick her up in a half-hour.”

“Ah, the semi-annual Lupine gathering.” The envy in Sean’s statement wasn’t lost on him.

“Sounds like a wolf picnic gone bad.”

“Nah, man, it’s invigorating, nothing like the thrill of the hunt to get your heart pumping. You should know this better than any Lupine.” Sean’s gruff voice reminded him of their former partnership and the adrenaline rush of stalking your next kill.

“Yeah, I know those emotions too well.”

“Have you felt the Change coming on yet?”

Brock felt the tendons of his neck strain in annoyance at the turn their conversation had taken. “Nope. Can’t say I have and can’t say I want to talk about it.”

“That’s kewl, Dude. Sometimes that crap can be private.”

“Exactly.” Brock wiped off the counter as he passed his intelligence to Sean. “So she said she wouldn’t know what happens to the person who changed me until she talks to the Council.”

“Makes sense.”

“Has it been quiet there?” He wanted to make sure Sean wasn’t stirring up any attention like he knew his partner could.

“Like a church mouse. This town has nothing going on—all the time. Hasn’t changed since we

were kids”

Brock chuckled at his friend’s description of their hometown. “That’s why I like it.”

“Don’t worry about me, Brock.”

“I’m not. Just call me if anything weird happens. I’ll touch base with you Monday when I get back.”

“Will do. Oh hey...” Brock could hear the mirth in Sean’s cocky timbre, “don’t do anything I wouldn’t do.”

Brock shook his head. “Leaves it pretty wide open for me, then.”

“Guess it does.”

After Brock disconnected, he pulled on his jacket and grabbed his backpack with the essentials he’d need for the weekend. As he dug out his car keys and readied to leave, he couldn’t help question what the hell he was getting into. Ending last night with a wet dream that left his fingers itching to walk over every inch of Treva Reed’s silky body, Brock had to wonder how he was going to get the required intelligence for this operation without royally screwing it up or her.

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Treva rubbed both hands up and down her arms, trying to suppress a shiver as she glanced at the clock yet again. Longing ate away at her normal, peaceful existence.

Ten minutes.

In ten minutes, Brock was scheduled to arrive for their weekend trip. Last night’s dream had been intense and sexual. Now, in the light of day, she couldn’t seem to put it into its place, no matter how hard she tried.

The tea kettle whistled, reminding her the chamomile blend, made especially to sooth tattered nerves, was ready. *This is ridiculous.* She went through the mechanical movements of preparing her tea as she always did, trying to add some normalcy to what could turn out to be a stressful day. She wet

a dishtowel and dabbed her heated face.

An hour shut in the car with Brock would be, at the very least, an exercise in self-restraint. *Oh god*, just thinking about him sent her mind back to the dream, his naked body, all sinew and hard lines, running her hands over the soft skin of his ass and trailing to the rock hard muscles of his abdomen, inching to his hardness, wrapping around it until he groaned and arched against—

The knock at her door sent her heart racing into action. She squeaked out a startled breath. Running a hand through her hair, Treva took in a calming inhale, hoping she didn't look as flushed as she felt. Another sharp knock had her setting the tea aside and heading to the entry foyer.

"Hi." She extended the door wide in invitation.

Brock stepped inside and prowled, which seemed to be a habit of his, before he turned to her.

*Oh God*. He looked so sexy, even in blue jeans and a black turtleneck, his hair mussed, his expression intense, yet alluring, his long legs ate up the space between them in a few short steps. She fiddled with her necklace, willing her heart to slow down and tried a stalling technique. "Can I get you some coffee for the road?"

"Coffee would be great, but I'd like to...first I need to..." He crowded in on her so fast she couldn't think. The next thing she knew, she was lifted up against the wall and being thoroughly kissed. The dishtowel fluttered to the floor as she buried her hands in Brock's hair and kissed him back. She felt a sense of urgency coming from him, as if he was trying to cool the demons beating at his heels. Treva experienced the same fervor.

He broke off and stared so deeply into her eyes, her lips trembled. Speechless, Treva swallowed to clear her dry throat. Brock slowly eased back, allowing her body to slide to the floor. Ever so gently, he tucked her hair behind her ear and kissed

her forehead.

“Coffee?” He raised a brow.

Treva snatched the towel off the floor and headed to the kitchen. To confirm he was following, she glanced back over her shoulder. She couldn’t help but needle. “Feel better?”

He shrugged and rubbed his jaw. “That’s debatable.”

“Want to explain?”

As he waited for her to pour the coffee, he planted himself onto one of her bar stools. “Not really.”

She rolled her eyes and handed him a travel mug. “Ready to go?”

“Yup. Looking forward to a weekend with the Pack.” He gave her a toothy grin.

Treva laughed and fingered her well-kissed bottom lip.

His eyes tracked her movement. He licked his lips. There was a fire burning deep in his gaze.

“I’d say you’re going to be in like company.”

“Yeah.” He took a sip of coffee. “World’s going to the dogs.”

Gasping, Treva came around and socked him in the arm. He feigned injury, grabbing his shoulder; he recoiled. “Ouch.”

“It’s wolves to you, buddy.”

“Okay.” He raised his hands, palms out. “Wolves.”

“Let’s go.” She grabbed her bag. He quickly lifted the weight from her hands and shouldered it. Her lip quirked and she tried not to laugh, ending with a big smile. Brock clearly liked to take care of women and be in charge at the same time. The combination was compelling, yet, at times, annoying.

“Right behind you,” he said, his tone brisk. He checked to make sure her door was locked, then closed it. “My SUV’s at the curb. I’m looking forward to the weekend.”

He opened the back and tossed her bag in. Then jogged around and opened her door for her with a flare.

“So am I, Brock, so am I.”

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Brock banked the next curve with the ease of someone who had been in charge all his life. The trip so far had been without a hitch, the afternoon of relaxed conversation didn't rile him. The fact he seemed comfortable trapped in a vehicle with a chattering woman just made her respect him even more.

Treva laid her head back against the seat and contemplated a nap. They were a half hour out yet and Treva hadn't gotten much sleep the night prior.

“Tell me about your family?” Brock asked.

She raised her lips in a smile. “Oh they're alive and well. You'll meet my parents and my brother at the picnic.”

“Hey, great. Get to meet the parents already. How lucky am I?” By his sarcastic tone, she knew he meant the opposite.

“You'll love them.”

“If they're anything like you, I'm sure I will.” He gave her that cocky grin that was contagious.

“You're a smart ass.”

“You just figuring that out?” He actually snickered.

Treva closed her eyes.

“Hey, why don't you shut it down for a few. I'll handle the driving. The good old GPS will keep me on track.” He pointed toward the center console that was guiding the trip Treva had programmed in.

“You getting sick of me talking?”

He dropped his hand onto the top of hers and squeezed. “Oh yeah, that sweet, lyrical voice of yours is really getting on my nerves—not.”

Treva eased lower into the seat, happy because he was. What a silly emotion to squeeze out of her



## The Lupine Connection

consciousness, *happy because he's happy*. She internally rolled her eyes at herself. She'd never been one to please others, but this man seemed to bring out the instinct inside her with a blast, she thought as she slid into sleep.

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Treva moaned and arched against the warmth beckoning her. The dream had her wrapped around it like a vine. Brock and her, naked and hungry, his body poised over hers as he slowly eased his cock into her wet heat. She sighed and lifted her hips to meet him, move with his rhythm, follow him on their quest for the ultimate pleasure...a brush of air touched her cheek...*Treva, you're dreaming...*

Treva popped open her eyes. The car wasn't moving, and Brock was leaning over her, running his thumb down her cheek.

"Hey there, sleepy head."

Still stuck in her dream world, Treva reached up, anchored her hand on Brock's head, and pulled him in for a heated kiss. He grunted as if surprised, then his lips softened and worked against hers with a mastery she couldn't match, taking over her small kiss with an openmouthed taste that left her lightheaded. Tongues swirled, breaths escalated, Brock groaned. Treva sucked in a surprised gulp of air at her actions and eased back against the headrest.

Opening his eyes, Brock quirked up one side of his mouth. "Not that I'm complaining, but I think we're here."

"What?" Shaking off sleep, Treva looked around. The dark green woods of the Lupine area greeted her. The traditional log cabin, with large sprawling windows overlooking Brock's SUV, told her they were, in fact, at the compound. Various people were milling around the surrounding gardens and picnic area, a couple here, a family there. The lodge sprawled over twenty thousand square feet, plenty of

room for the Lupine Pack.

"Oh Crap." Treva scrambled away from Brock and reached for the door handle. Easing out of the SUV, she hoped like hell no other Lupine had just seen their Chief Enforcer making out with one of her charges.

Brock nonchalantly followed her as if he didn't have a care in the world. Rounding the SUV, he pulled out their bags and shouldered them with ease. "Don't worry, no one saw us." Said so casually, Treva was shocked that he had plucked the worry right out of her head as if he was seeing her thoughts and answered her concern. *What is it about him that connects us like this?* She met his stare, his hooded gaze intense as if he was trying to dissect the same question.

"Aunt Treva. Aunt Treva." Three lively children came charging out of the house, screaming for her. Distracted from questioning Brock any further, she turned and lifted the smallest one, Sara, into her arms. The other two surrounded her.

"Hey, I need room to walk," she said as she scrambled after Brock toward the main lodge entrance, her nieces and nephews bouncing along beside her.

"Who's that man?" Sara asked.

"That is our first human Changeling in over a decade. So be nice."

"Ohhh, he's pretty." Sara gave a long, drawn out sigh.

Brock threw an amused look over his shoulder. Sara wasn't the only one staring at him, everyone around the lodge had stopped what they were doing to watch Brock's progress. He had a way about him that commanded attention. Treva was sure his status as a Human Changeling had reached every corner of the Lupine community. Gossip was certainly the one Lupine communication tool that circulated without fault, and it usually started at the

top. Considering she had done her duty and already informed the Council, she was sure the news had filtered down.

Brock moved without question, his gait assured and masterful. He didn't even hesitate as he approached the lodge, except to hold the door open for her and the children.

"I assume these are some of the family members you said I'd be meeting this weekend?" As Treva made her way past him and into the lodge, he tweaked Sara's nose, causing her to squeal out a gleeful cry. Brock came in after her and set their luggage down in the lobby.

Treva smiled. "These are three." She set Sara on her feet. "There are many more." She squatted down and lined up the three in front of her. "Now, where are your parents, you little ruffians?" She hugged all three of them together.

"Their Aunt and babysitter is right here looking for these three monsters." Her sister, Amy, came striding up at a fast clip. "And I see I found them where they're not supposed to be."

"Amy." Treva hugged her sister and then turned toward Brock. "This is Brock Manyon."

She watched Amy accept Brock's outstretched hand.

"Pleased to meet you," he said with a charming tilt of his lips.

"Likewise." Amy had a twinkle in her eye that Treva recognized. It was feminine excitement, and she didn't blame her younger sister at all, who also happened to be single. Treva stamped down a surprising bout of pure jealousy taking hold of her brain. "And you three," Amy pointed to the children, "are supposed to be napping."

A round of "ahhhs" rang out over the lodge.

"I need to take them, but we'll catch up later." Amy smiled again at Brock. "I'm looking forward to getting better acquainted, Brock."

Brock arched a brow. "Likewise."

Amy shooed the children toward the stairs.

Brock slid the purse he'd been holding over her shoulder, not understanding Treva was seething with uncorked jealousy and berating herself for it like it was a bad virus. "Thought you'd want that."

"Thanks. Let's check in," she said abruptly.

"This is a hotel?" he asked as she steered him toward the check in area.

"Yep, staffed by Lupines. We strive to make this a retreat, as well as a meeting place.

"Nice," Brock rotated his gaze and took in the area.

Treva knew what he saw. The huge lobby housed a common lounge with a wood burning fireplace underneath a solid river-rock hearth. Massive laminated logs jetted to the high ceiling. The three looming stories supported over fifty rooms. A carved wooden staircase took occupants to the higher levels. Various Lupines stood at the overhead railings of each floor and watched the lobby occupants. "A Wolf hotel." The mirth in Brock's comment was evident.

"Good afternoon, Ms. Reed. So pleasant to see you again. Here's your schedule."

The clerk handed her a large envelope and a file folder, stuffed full.

"And here's your key and one for Mr. Manyon." She handed Treva two keys. "You're on the third floor. The meet and greet tea will be held," the clerk glanced at her watch, "in about an hour in the atrium. Enjoy your stay."

Treva collected the information and headed toward the stairs, Brock following behind her with the bags.

"How does everyone know who I am? He asked.

She suppressed a scoff. "The Lupine community has a very active gossip mill. You're the flavor of the month."

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“Nice to know.” With little effort, he lifted their bags and climbed the steps next to her.

“We’ll get settled, then join the meet and greet. There are lot of people who want to reconcile the gossip with the man.”

She could hear his masculine grunt as they climbed to the third floor. “I’m at your disposal. You’re the boss, this weekend anyway.” He winked at her.

“Somehow, Brock, I don’t think handing over leadership is something you do with ease.”

“Oh it’s not, Treva, but we made an agreement and you won. I am a man who always honors his agreements.”

She nodded her head. “Now that I’ll buy.”

Brock followed her as she found her room. She glanced at her watch and walked him into the hall.

“You’re next door. I’ll meet you in the lobby in an hour.”

“Sounds good.” He nodded and shifted toward his room.

“Oh and Brock.”

He turned, questions in his expression.

“You’ll need to be tolerant this weekend.”

“Yeah, that I already figured out. Seems wolves like to gossip as much as humans. Not a problem.” His lip twitched and she had a feeling he was trying to keep from smirking.

“See you in an hour.”

## Chapter Eight

Brock had never dealt with such a massive amount of nosey people in one place before. Everyone wanted a piece of him. The gathering was supposedly the first social function of the weekend, where all the Pack members met and reminisced. There were tables stacked with food, wine flowing from a fountain and the room was abuzz with loud conversation and laughing. With Treva by his side, he met Lupine after Lupine, so many he couldn't remember names. Fatigue at answering questions about his life beat down on him.

A few minutes ago, Treva had been pulled away by a very intense looking man. Although they were separated, Brock kept an eye on her. For some reason, there was something about the guy he didn't like. Brock's nose twitched. The man smelled.

Not five minutes had gone by when Brock was startled to see what appeared to be an argument between Treva and the man. His base instinct to safeguard kicked in. He excused himself from his current conversation and slowly made his way toward Treva. When the man suddenly pinned Treva against the wall in an aggressive move, a powerful need to kill washed over Brock like an unstoppable gush of wind. He rushed forward.

*Protect. Protect.*

"You'll need to get control of him, Treva. I've heard rumblings that's he's resistant. If you are incapable, I will take matters into my own hand."

"You don't understand—"

"Is there a problem here?" Brock pushed his way

into the man's path and made direct eye contact. The guy's startled gaze jumped up to his. His eyes narrowed in a glare. Brock didn't back down, he returned the man's hostile stare with one of his own.

"You must be Brock Manyon."

Brock didn't confirm or deny the assertion. He reached back and gently shifted Treva away from the wall and stepped toward the man, forcing him to back away. "And you are?"

"Tony Charvez. Number One Enforcer to our Pack leader, Rand Charvez."

"Hum, sounds like an important job."

"It is."

"That's good. Tell me, Tony. Do Lupines usually use these types of forceful intimidation tactics with their Pack mates?"

"When we deem it necessary."

Brock surged forward until he was in the man's face. He didn't drop his stare. "Back off."

Treva, despite his attempt to keep her at his back, came around his side and pressed herself between him and Tony.

Tony retreated. "This is exactly what I was talking about." He swung a look of pure hatred toward Brock and walked off.

Treva grabbed Brock's elbow. "Come with me." She dragged him down the hall. Spying an unoccupied room, she practically threw him onto the day bed. She shut the double doors. The click of the lock sounded like his final death sentence.

"Are you nuts?" She began pacing back and forth in front of him, her agitation obvious. Brock felt this insane craving to sooth her.

"What?" he held up his hands and splayed out his fingers.

"He reports directly to Rand. You don't mess with a Number One Enforcer, Brock. You just don't."

Anger rushed through him, and he snapped like a bending tree pushed too far. He stood, grabbed her

arm, and stopped her in mid-pace. He jerked her body to his.

"Screw that. I do when he's messing with my woman."

Treva's eyes went wide. "What? Okay, now I know you've really gone off the deep end."

Brock was shocked by Treva's statement. Not waiting for any further argument, he claimed her mouth, a deep mating of tongues and lips. He folded Treva into his arms and took the kiss deeper. God, he couldn't get enough of her. Her hands delved into his hair as he caught her head in his hands and tilted it so he could deepen the kiss even more. Her soft moan told him what he wanted to know.

Brock broke the kiss and trailed his lips down her neck, her chin, back to her mouth. The fire he'd tried so hard to bank exploded between them. He couldn't stop anymore, this was his woman and he was going to claim her once and for all.

"Treva," he groaned out as he stepped back and guided her down onto the bed with him. He worked off her shirt until her flushed skin greeted him. He ran his fingers up her ribs. Her lowered gaze and gasping breath inflamed him further. He couldn't think beyond the body now under his hands. He'd wanted this, wanted her, from the first moment she'd stepped into his dreams.

*So perfect.*

He attacked her bra with a single-minded purpose until he dropped it to the floor.

"Want you so bad." He rested his hands on her breasts and gently squeezed, fingering her nipples until they peaked. He ran a single finger around the darker colored areola until she inhaled sharply and arched her chest into his touch. So soft, like his dream, the softest silk under his fingertips, and her breasts fit perfectly in his palms. Her scent wafted up, teased him, touched him, took him to the next level of reckless desire.



“Brock,” she gasped. “This is crazy.”

“Crazy good or crazy bad?” he murmured as he peeled off her slacks and shucked his own shirt. Her hands ran over his pecs and down to his belly, leaving a burning fire in their wake.

“Crazy...just crazy.” She leaned forward and kissed his chest, lapping her tongue along until she wet his nipple. Brock exploded with excitement, his cock jumping in the strained confines of his pants, demanding release.

“Don’t care anymore. You’re mine,” he panted out as he shredded her underwear in one pull, desperate to have her naked and under him.

“No one hurts what’s mine,” he growled as he fumbled with the catch of his slacks. He cursed.

Treva laid her hands on his to stop his movements. His gaze met hers. In her eyes, the heat of his desire reflected back.

“Let me,” she eased the buttons apart, then unzipped his pants, running her hands down, caressing his aching erection. He pressed into her touch. “Take these off,” she demanded.

Brock stood and ripped his pants off. He took a moment to enjoy the picture Treva made, naked and sprawled out on the bed. Oh yeah, this was his fantasy in the flesh, what he’d wanted since his dreams made this woman his. She was incredible, curves in all the right places, her milky white skin such an extreme contrast to his, her parted lips trembling. He’d never seen anything so beautiful as Treva in the throes of passion.

She beckoned him forward with a look that couldn’t be mistaken. Trying not to pounce, he stretched out on top of her. “Wrap your legs around me, Treva. Open for me.”

She slid her legs over his ass.

Not able to wait any longer, Brock eased into her wet heat. Treva’s aroused moan brought him a sense of masculine satisfaction, knowing he could

please his woman so thoroughly.

"You're mine. Say it," he demanded as he rocked forward, not quite ready to thrust until he had her commitment. She moaned again and arched. Her arms snaked around his body like her legs and held strong. Nothing had prepared him for the bliss of being buried deep inside Treva Reed. *Nothing*.

"Brock?" Treva squeezed his ass, her nails cutting into him to the point of pain.

"Say it." Sweat dripped down the side of his neck onto Treva's cheek. He couldn't hold on anymore, he slid out and back in.

"Oh God," Treva cried out as her hands clenched.

"Treva." Brock kissed the corner of her mouth, then slipped onto her lips like he was coming home, intimately meshing their tongues. They rocked together in a sexual dance.

Brock released her lips. "Please."

He wasn't a man who usually resorted to begging, but having her pledge was vitally important, even though he didn't know why.

"Yes," she screamed as she curved her hips to meet his rapidly increasing thrusts. "Yes, I'm yours."

"Yes." Brock dropped his head back and roared out his satisfaction. Sparks hit the back of his eyelids as he reached and found his orgasm. Treva went over with him, crying out. As he came, long and hard, pain hit his marked wrist with a savage intensity until he emptied himself completely. He sucked in a breath and held it, willing his heart to slow, his body to calm. Treva's breathing was as rapid as his. She clenched a fist on his rear and hissed out a pained cry.

At her distress, Brock immediately pushed off her. "Treva, what's wrong?" She lifted her arm and stared at the inside of her wrist. Brock could see interlinking circles burned into her flesh.

"Shit, baby." He jumped up and rotated her

## The Lupine Connection

around until he could look at the injury. "What is that? We need some ice." The smell of burning flesh was nauseating. Brock glanced down at his own hurting arm. His circle had expanded into two interlocking one's matching Treva's.

"Oh shit, is that what..." He held his arm up next to hers. Their burns matched perfectly.

"Oh shit is right. We just became a mated pair."

Brock's eyes widened. He snapped his gaze up to hers. There was regret and something much deeper lurking there.

"Whoops." He couldn't help it, his mouth tipped up in a smile. "Guess there's no question about my claim to you now."

"Brock." Treva hit him on the shoulder. He rocked back on his heels, then shifted forward and devoured her lips. Her arms wrapped around him and she pressed into the kiss.

"This is crazy," she said when he finally let her up for air.

"You keep saying that."

"We need to get out of here and talk about this." She quickly retrieved her clothes and threw them on.

Brock reluctantly followed her actions. As much as he wanted to do this all day long, they hadn't exactly chosen the right time or place.

Treva stopped at the door. "I'll meet you in your room. Give me a few minutes." Then she was gone, just like that. Brock reached for his shoes. Guess she wasn't exactly happy about the situation. He waited about ten minutes, then headed up the back stairs to their rooms. How does a newly mated Lupine male convince his soul mate he's worth fighting for?

\*\*\*\*\*

Tony Charvez slipped into the meeting room of his brother and the Lupine Pack leader, Rand Charvez. His two fellow Sworn Enforcers were already present. This was a special meeting for

enforcers loyal only to Rand.

“Did you meet him?” Rand asked.

“Yes,” Tony slid into a chair across from Rand’s massive wood carved desk.

“What can you tell me?” Rand struck a match and lit a cigarette. He inhaled.

“He’s strong and stubborn. I don’t see him bending to the Lupine rule easily.”

“Do you believe he could be of the Niosha line?”

Tony nodded as he shrugged off his unease. This mission his brother had sworn them to was not known by other Lupines. His brother had eradicated the Niosha line over three decades ago because of their ability to take a shape shifting form more powerful than Rand’s, thereby threatening his rule. But the rest of the Lupines didn’t know of their deception. They simply thought the conversions of humans had been abolished ten years ago because they hadn’t handled the change well. But Rand had discovered the original Nioshas had passed their genes to humans, and Rand couldn’t take the chance that any more Niosha wolves would be born.

“I’ve acquired a sample of his blood from the VA hospital and had it processed by one of our trusted technicians. I spoke to them ten minutes ago for the results. He does carry the gene. Sworn Enforcer Treva Reed is close to him. She’s made excuses for his rebellious nature.”

Rand stubbed out his cigarette with an air of finality.

“Make arrangements to kill both of them. Have you found the Lupine who changed him?”

Tony nodded. “I’m very close. I have an insider acquiring the classified military records for us as we speak.”

“You’ve done well, Tony. John, Sark.” Rand nodded at the other two enforcers sitting next to Tony. “You’re with Tony. Be prepared to take action. No loose ends.”

## The Lupine Connection

“Yes, my leader,” they simultaneously replied.

“And Tony, I don’t need to ask for your discretion on this.”

“You never do.” Tony bowed his head. “I live to serve you, brother.”

“Good. Now let’s go join the hunt, boys.” Rand stood and swung his arm toward the door. Tony rubbed his hands together. He loved the Lupine semi-annual gathering. The hunt was the best part. And once he took care of this business with Treva Reed and Brock Manyon, all would be well.

## Chapter Nine

Two rapid knocks on her room door had Treva stretching to open it while she was still on the phone. Brock entered and did his normal prowling while she finished her conversation.

"I understand." Treva set down the house phone and rubbed her hands up and down her arms. As Brock approached her, Treva tensed. She couldn't believe she'd mated with her own student. What would the council say about this, what would Rand say? She could be facing serious charges.

"What's wrong?" Brock sat down on the bed next to her. Even his scent drove her crazy. She wanted to strip off all his clothes and spend the rest of the evening in bed. An echo of howls bounced off the room.

Brock's gaze jumped to the window.

"What was that?"

"They've started the hunt."

"Oh," her new mate ran a hand through his hair, disheveling it around his sexy face.

Treva's heart seized, then picked back up. Now that they were truly mated, his appeal increased by the minute. The need to mate was physically powerful, her nipples peaked, she could still smell Brock's scent on her skin, the sensations made for a heady aphrodisiac. *Oh man*, she was in trouble.

"Are you supposed to be at the hunt?"

"It's optional. I think talking about what happened is more important."

"Who was on the phone? You seem upset."

The Council has voted for execution of the

Lupine who turned you. I just got the news.”

“What?” Brock surged to his feet and paced. “Do they know who it is?”

“Apparently, they’re close. They have a human on the inside, a military connection, who’s feeding the Lupines information. We should know by the end of today.” Brock’s agitation concerned Treva.

“Brock, what do you really know about the person who turned you?”

“Huh?” He turned toward her, his expression wild. “I told you, I don’t remember what happened to me. What the hell? Don’t you trust me?” His anger was evident by the way he clenched and unclenched his fists.

“I think there’s more to this situation than what you’re sharing.”

“That’s bullshit.” He whipped her with his words.

“Listen,” Treva kneaded the back of her tight neck. “We can battle about this later. First we need to talk about what happened between us.” She raised her arm, displaying the intertwined circles.

“Why? Because we made love and now we’re a mated pair. It’s not rocket science. Obviously, this has been brewing between us for a long time. Sometimes things happen you can’t control by a Lupine law, Treva. I’ve been dreaming about us since I was first turned.”

Treva dropped her chin to her chest. “So have I.”

“So what’s to discuss?” Brock’s abrupt change of manner shocked her. Not twenty minutes earlier, he loved her like a madman—now he was yelling like a scorned lover. Confusion made her head spin.

“This is complicated, Brock. You’re my student. If the Council found out we had a sexual relationship, that we’ve mated, it could mean my job. I’m not sure I can do this.”

He threw his arms wide. “You know what, Treva. Fuck the Council.” His voice raised several

octaves. “Fuck everything about this situation. You Lupines are nuts. You can’t always wrap things into a perfect package. If you want to dump me, your bonded life-mate,” he added, “that’s fine. Whatever. I’m sick of all this shit.” He marched to the door. “I’m out of here.”

“Brock. Come on.” She’d heard newly mated males were emotional, but this was ridiculous. She contemplated going after him for about two seconds, but quickly rejected the idea, better to let him cool down.

Treva flopped back onto the mattress and rested her hand over her eyes. Ten minutes later, the familiar sound of a car engine in the parking area had her charging to the window. She was stunned stupid as she watched Brock roar out of the lot. Then Tony hopped into his SUV and took off behind Brock. This was crazy. This whole situation was insane. She needed to go after Brock and what was Tony doing?

She grabbed the phone. “I need to borrow one of the Lupine company cars, right now.”

“Yes, Ms. Reed. I’ll have one brought around for you immediately.”

Shaking her head, Treva shouldered her purse and ran toward the stairs.

\*\*\*\*\*

Brock drove as fast as he could out of the woods. He needed to find a cellular phone service area. They were screwed. Staging a fight with Treva hadn’t been easy, especially after finally making her his, but he had to get to Sean any way he could, which meant getting away from that lodge where there was absolutely no cellular service and warning his buddy. Brock checked his phone. No service yet. *Shit*. He hit the steering wheel.

A half-hour later, he silently cheered when he hit two bars on his phone. Using the voice recognition function, he attempted to reach Sean—



only to get voice mail.

"Sean, its Brock. Listen, I learned from Treva today the Council's ordered the execution of the person who turned me and they're close to discovering your identity. They have someone on the inside you didn't know about. I'm on my way back to Aaron now. We need to regroup, buddy. Watch your back. Call me right away. I'm about an hour out." Brock disconnected and pressed his foot on the gas. He had to get to Sean before the Lupines did.

The next hour was the longest in his life. As he entered the outskirts of town, his phone rang.

"Sean, where the hell are you?"

"Dude, I'm at the library using the computer. You really need to get one. Cellular service in here is spotty, man. It's like the walls are lined with kryptonite."

"Did you get my message?"

"No, I just saw your number, so I called you back."

"Sean. Shit, man. Stay where you're at, I'm coming to get you."

Taking the corner at a speed way higher than he should, Brock screeched to a stop in front of the library. Sean was standing outside. He flung open the door. "Get in."

Sean reached for the handle.

"Excuse me, Mr. Luzon. We're getting ready to close, I need you to gather your material." Ms. Banning waved at Sean from the open library door.

"I'll get it later, Ms. Banning," Sean said.

She set her hand on her hip. "You will do no such thing, young man, you'll do it now."

Sean rolled his eyes and threw a look at Brock.

"Brock, come in." She waved her hand with a come hither motion. "It's good to see you. Come visit for a few minutes, while your young friend cleans his work area."

Brock dropped his head against the steering

wheel and groaned.

"We better go in. She's like a hound with a bone," Sean said as he pushed the car door closed.

"Yeah, yeah." Brock set the emergency brake and turned off the car.

Ms. Banning shuffled her way to him and hooked their arms together. "How are you feeling, Brock?" He tried to push her along as fast as he could, but Ms. Banning only had one pace...hers. He gave a quick nod to Sean, who jogged ahead of them into the library. Ms. Banning unhooked their arms and locked the library door behind them. It was the breaker bar type, so occupants could still get out, but no-one could get in.

"I haven't seen you for a spell, Brock. You look well."

"Thanks, Ms. Banning. I'm doing well. Listen, Sean and I really need to get to dinner."

"That's nice, dear. Can you wait while I lock up the basement door? I always like to have someone around when I do it. It will only take a few minutes. I need to talk to you about a matter."

"Ah," Brock ran his hand around the back of his neck. Trapped. "Sure, Ms. Banning. We'll wait up here for you."

"Oh thank you, Brock." She patted his arm and walked off down the stairs.

Brock took the three steps to the main floor in one leap.

"What's going on, man?" Sean, notebook in hand, met him at the top of the stairs.

"I think they know about you, Sean, and they've ordered your execution."

"What?"

"We need a plan." Brock set his hand on Sean's shoulder at the same time a tapping on the glass at the library front door stopped them.

Treva Reed stood there, looking mad as hell. She gestured at him with a wave.

## The Lupine Connection

Sean and Brock exchanged a shocked stare. “Don’t panic. She doesn’t know it was you, yet. Follow my lead.”

“Open the door, Brock.” He could hear Treva’s voice through the door. She tapped so hard he thought she would break the glass.

Wincing at the noise she was making, Brock made his way to the doors and pushed one side open to let Treva in. She charged past him.

“What are you doing here?” he asked as he followed her to the foyer.

“You can’t just walk out on me like that. I followed you. We’re a mated pair, you know. Mated pairs work on issues—together.”

She lifted her lip in a snarl. “What’s going on?” She raised her hands and circled. “And what’s Sean Luzon doing here? And why was Tony chasing you?”

“Hey, Treva.” Sean waved a hand. “Long time, no see. Mated pair, huh?” Sean arched an eyebrow at Brock.

“Sean,” Treva paused and turned toward Brock. “He’s the one, isn’t he? He’s the one who turned you. You’ve been lying to me all this time, haven’t you? You staged that fight at the lodge so you could warn Sean he’s been found out.” Her look bounced between Sean and Brock. “You bastard,” she yelled.

“Treva, what did you expect? Sean is my lifelong friend. He changed me to save my life. If he hadn’t...we,” he rotated his finger between the two of them, “would never have met. You talked about killing him as if it was a stroll in the park. I can’t let that happen. It’s my job to protect Sean. He’s the only family I’ve ever had.”

“Hey, thanks, Dude.” Sean formed a gun with his finger and simulated a shot. “Back at ‘cha.”

“Brock,” Treva stepped closer to him. “You don’t understand how our laws work. They’re strict for a reason, otherwise we’d have total chaos.” She touched his fingers with hers. “We’re a mated pair,

let me help you.”

“Treva,” he ghosted his finger over her cheek. “You need to learn rules are made to be broken. If you don’t help me save Sean, our life as a mated pair is over.”

She sucked in an audible breath at his statement.

Regret hit Brock like a lead weight. He didn’t want it to end this way between him and Treva, but she needed to understand the Lupines’ mind set had to be stopped and changed. He wasn’t a mindless drone blindly following every stupid Lupine rule because he was told to.

“How can you say that?” she asked.

He rubbed his thumb over her bottom lip. “Sean is my family.

Treva encased his hands with hers. “Brock,” she whispered, tears formed in her eyes.

“Look out,” Sean screamed as the front door glass shattered and a huge black wolf exploded through it, followed by two others, a grey and white one.

“Tony,” Treva jumped in front of Brock at the same moment the black wolf launched itself. In a snarling leap, he took Treva to the floor, jaws clamped around her throat.

“Treva,” Brock yelled and grabbed the wolf by the ruff of his neck, throwing him off of Treva. The wolf hit a row of bookcases, knocking them over.

At the same time, Sean let out an ear splitting growl and transformed into the same huge animal from the Brazilian jungle. It only took a matter of seconds, but Brock was transported back, the slow motion movie returning.

Brock leaned over Treva, she wheezed and grabbed her bloody neck. “I need to transform,” she gasped out, then her body morphed, contorting into a smaller size wolf than the ones who jumped through the door. To his right, the two other wolves were

fighting with Sean.

The black wolf climbed his way out of the rubble of the downed bookshelves and bared all his teeth. He snarled and ran back toward him and Treva.

Fire exploded in Brock's brain. Dropping his head back, he howled as intense pain electrocuted his body, causing him to spasm. His human form ceased to exist as his physical body changed, his face elongated, bones popped, clothing ripped. Brock's heart clenched, skipped and contorted. With a "pop" noise, he transformed into the wolf he'd been trying so hard to suppress.

Rising to his full height, Brock faced the black wolf with a furious growl, summoning him with a wave of his fingers. The wolf paused, then launched. Brock took him down with one swipe of his clawed fingers. Before he could even plan his next move, his wolf took over and snapped the black wolf's neck. He chucked the dead body to the side and moved forward to help Sean, who had already disposed of the other two wolves in a mass of bloody carnage.

Heart pounding, Brock pivoted and scanned for additional threats. Treva had shifted back into human form. She sat on the floor with a stunned expression. "What just happened?"

Ms. Banning walked up from downstairs. Hands behind her back, face serene, she nodded at Sean and Brock. "You can change back now. Clear your mind and imagine your human bodies."

Brock closed his eyes and pictured his body before the change. This time, the pain of his transformation to human was much less painful. He dropped to his knees and sucked in one, huge breath of air. "Ms. Banning," he croaked out, his voice not quite acclimated to his human form.

She inclined her head. "I have been waiting for you. I am a servant of the Niosha line, the line of your parents. Since your parent's assassination, I was assigned your guardian, Brock Manyon."

Brock stood on shaky legs. Moving to Treva, he assisted her to a standing position. Sean shifted back to his human form and stood next to them.

"Sean and you are not the only Niosha shifters left. We've formed a rebellion with others like us. We're prepared, Brock Manyon, for you to take the position of our leader and unite us against Rand Charvez, the man who killed your parents and eradicated the Niosha line thirty years ago. We are prepared, Brock, financed and holding key positions in the Lupine Pack. We are ready and waiting. Are you ready to lead us?"

Brock transferred his gaze between Sean and Treva. He couldn't believe what he was hearing. "Ms. Banning, what are you talking about? Are you saying Rand Charvez killed my parents?"

She bobbed her head once, her intense hooded stare never leaving his. "We are ready, Brock. It is time for you to claim the leadership of the Niosha Pack, your birthright, as it was your father's before you. Niosha have and always were a threat to Rand Charvez's leadership. You must stop Rand. We will help you."

"Whoa, Dude. This is intense. Kewl, but intense."

Brock snatched his jacket off the floor and threw it at Sean, who wrapped it around his waist. Neither Treva nor Mrs. Banning needed to see what wasn't hidden by Sean's tattered clothing.

"Do you have a place where we can go? I'm sure Rand knows where I live."

"I know he does." Treva confirmed his concern.

"Yes. We have established several safe houses. Please, follow me." She waved her arm toward the basement.

"What about this?" His gaze took in the bloody carcasses around them.

"We'll take care of it. I've already called for clean-up."

## The Lupine Connection

Brock set his arm around Treva's shoulders. "We'll talk about this later. Right now, I want to get these guys to safety."

"As you wish. Drivers are awaiting you in the back. We will dispose of your vehicles and acquire you new transportation. Please use the basement exit.

Next to him, Treva swayed. Brock immediately lifted her into his arms.

"It's the change, when you have to heal, it makes you weak," She said.

"Hang in there, baby, I'll take care of you." Brock and Sean moved toward the basement.

## Chapter Ten

Treva sprawled across Brock's chest and played with the curly hair swirling down to his stomach. She was sated, rousing sex with her mate made her boneless. She was happy everyone was alive and well. Remorse clawed inside her because of the accusations she'd flung at Brock before they'd been ambushed.

"I'm ashamed of my people. We could have been killed by Rand's Enforcers. I'm sorry for the things I said." She felt a single tear ease down her cheek.

"Treva, baby." Brock stroked her cheek with his thumb, wiping away the wetness. This man, her mate, her gentle giant, had captured her heart so thoroughly she couldn't imagine life without him anymore. As far as Treva was concerned, the rumor that mated pairs were inseparable was confirmed. Without Brock, Treva would be lost.

"Don't be sorry. You didn't know. You've been trained since birth to blindly follow the Lupines' laws."

"Are you going to do this thing, lead this rebellion?" She ran her fingers through his hair and silently celebrated when he groaned.

"I think so. I'm meeting with those who've pledged their allegiance tomorrow night. I'd like you to stand by my side as we form a new Society. Are you willing?" He ran his hand down her back to her ass.

She shivered. He had the ability to make her mindless. He kissed her, slowly and thoroughly. They'd just made love, but Treva was ready to take



him again.

"Yes, I'm willing," she sighed out. "Willing and ready." She moaned when he flipped their bodies and slid deep inside her. "Our future is unclear," he whispered as he drove in. He extended his arms and married their palms, the intimacy invoked feelings she'd never imagined as he drove them toward completion.

"There is no future without you," she groaned. "We'll stand strong, together."

"Marry me," he said as he thrust in, taking Treva higher and higher. "I'll cherish you for the rest of our lives," he promised. "You will never want for anything."

"Yes," she breathed out on the tail end of a moan. "Ahhh." She met his thrust with her own until they both flew. He stretched his neck and cried out, filling her with his warmth.

After a few minutes of recovery time, he broke out into a huge grin. "Together."

"We'll knock those hurdles down like superheroes," she joked.

He laughed and kissed her. "Marry me soon."

"Tomorrow if you want."

"I want."

"You have a lot of wants."

"I definitely do and they involve one feisty Enforcer."

"Good thing I have someone perfect for the job." She slapped his ass.

"Good thing."

"I love you, Brock," she said as she ran her index finger down his cheek.

"I love you too." He sighed and snuggled closer by her side, pulling the blanket over them.

"We have a hard battle ahead of us." He settled her in front of him and wrapped his arm around her waist.

"Couldn't think of a more pleasurable way to

incur a battle scar.” She felt him chuckle against her cheek. She was sure because of his own words coming back to haunt him. Treva closed her eyes and let Brock’s essence seep into her.

All was right in her world now, no matter what the future held. She was complete in Brock’s arms.

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