

Spellbound Moon 2: Twice Shy

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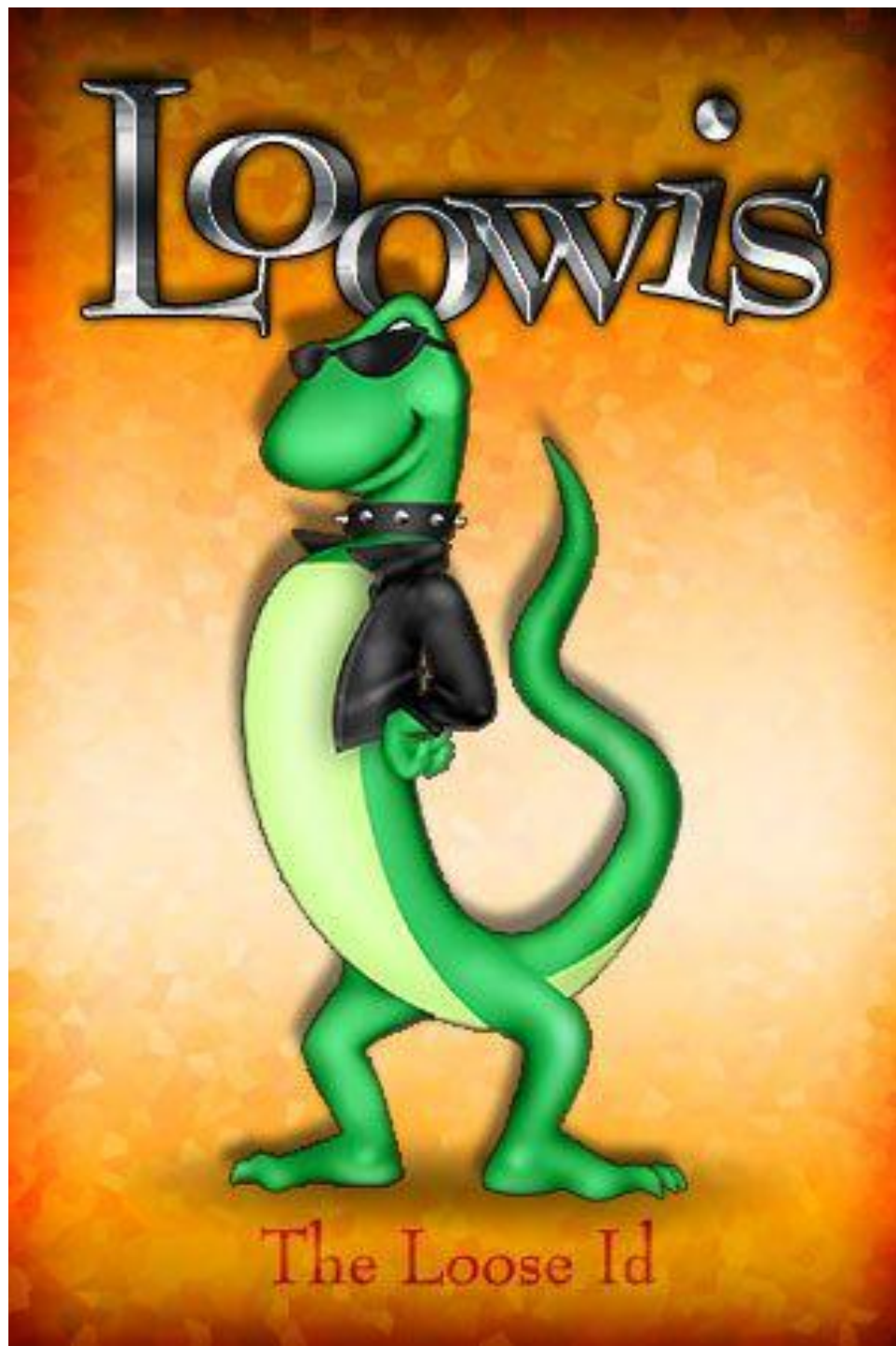
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Chapter One

Jonas wasn't sure if being put in charge of their sanctuary-seeking witch was a vote of confidence in his abilities or a new form of torture cooked up by Zach, Redhawke's beta. Or maybe it was Liza. She'd handed him the assignment after all. On further thought, as paladin, Liza was third in the pack hierarchy, but she rarely let that stand in her way. She probably thought this assignment was "good" for him. She thought he was too solitary. That he stood too far apart. What the hell did she know?

The night was gathering. Harper, the witch slowly driving him out of his fucking mind, stood next to him in the trees watching Liza put on her magic show while she told the werewolf version of *Little Red Riding Hood*. Colored lights, shaped as characters, acted the tale out in the air as Liza entertained a gaggle of transfixed youngsters. It was a telling nothing like the witch version. A fact that had been hammered into his head over the last few days by the witch at his side.

"Incredible," she whispered, not hiding the awe in her voice.

He glanced down. She stared forward, as mesmerized as the pups at Liza's show. Her face soft, lips turned up in an easy smile. It was the first time he'd seen her relaxed, and the change stunned him. She was at times meek. Others fractious. But there was always an undercurrent of fear in her. He'd had no idea she could morph into this lovely, beguiling creature. His gaze slid down her body, taking in full breasts, full hips. An ass that made his mouth water. His lips parted in surprise. How the hell had he missed this?

"You'll catch flies," Harper said. She was prickly. Acerbic.

Oh yeah, now he remembered. She said the right things, sounded in control, but her scent sharpened with fear. Her eyes were round with it. Her body trembled. He liked his women with teeth and claws, able to tangle with him, and she was more unarmed than most.

“Don’t worry, honey. You’re not my type.”

He turned his attention back to Liza and kept the rest of his thoughts to himself. The paladin was definitely more his speed. Caleb, their alpha, walked up behind her to circle her belly with his arms. He rested his hands on the swollen mound. Twins. Liza smiled and leaned into him but didn’t pause in her story. Jonas sighed. She might be more his type, but she was categorically not his.

She was coming to the end of the story. Little Red Riding Hood, promised to the woodsman, her grandmother’s favorite in a village full of admirers, chose to rebel and run away with the boy she loved. Because of her sin, her own grandmother cursed her and her young man to live their lives out half human and half the wolf that had aided in their escape. It was a curse they passed to their children, a feud passed to their descendants and the descendants of the witch who had created them.

The witch version was different, of course. In it, the boy was a jealous, spurned suitor cursed to his half life for accidentally causing Red’s death.

“Which do you suppose is true?” Harper mused softly.

He shrugged, but before he could frame a response, Mick approached. Just what he needed. The lover who currently wasn’t speaking to him and the witch who brought out a protective streak that was not only alien but made him feel uncomfortably vulnerable.

“Mick,” he greeted casually when he really wanted to yank the other man to him and kiss the irritation out of him. “Have you met Harper yet?”

“At lunch yesterday.” When she’d been with Liza, not Jonas. He should have been happy with the brief separation. Instead not having her in sight had left him surly and antsy.

Mick smiled, all charm and smooth confidence, and lifted Harper's hand, then pressed a kiss on her palm. Jonas turned to hide his surge of jealousy, though he wasn't sure if it was because Mick was showing someone else so much attention or because of the scent of Harper's arousal, sweet and intoxicating, which filled his senses. Arousal that was for Mick, not him.

Mick gave him a knowing look and a wink when Jonas turned back to face them. He struggled to bury his feelings, the jealousy and confusion, and knew he was successful by the disappointed look that came over Mick's face. He covered it quickly enough, turning back to charm Harper.

Jonas followed them to the buffet, then to an unoccupied table, and stayed silent as Mick slowly drew her out. There was something, an air about her that called to him. Sweet. Fragile. Breakable. She was not the kind of woman he was normally drawn to, but he couldn't deny that he was.

He just listened as they spoke, his wolf scratching against his skin to escape. His wolf side was nothing but pure instinct, and its instinct was to protect. *This* woman. He was a dominant male, Liza's number one lieutenant, but the urge went far beyond the protective streak he normally felt for members of the pack. There could only be one reason for that. She was his mate. He sucked in a deep, shocked breath.

She wasn't what he expected, wasn't what he wanted. He needed a warrior, not a frail witch who couldn't fight him, who couldn't meet him on equal terms. He didn't want a mate he had to hold back with.

Harper, pretty and alluring as she was, was not for him.

Chapter Two

Harper shouldn't have followed him.

She knew it. It was several days after the celebration where Jonas had first looked at her with heat in his eyes instead of only contempt and Liza had warned her to stay inside tonight, on the full moon, but it was also her brother's birthday. She hadn't dared contact him to let him know she'd arrived in Redhawke, that for the moment at least she was safe. But even if she couldn't risk the communication, couldn't risk her father discovering her whereabouts, she wanted to do a blessing ceremony for him. She'd discovered a tiny glade on a previous walk, the ideal serene place for her protection prayer, and had returned to it late in the afternoon. She'd finished before the sun began to set.

On her return she passed Jonas's house. He was on his back deck, slowly removing his clothes, folding them methodically to place on a table. She couldn't move, stayed hidden and frozen as each magnificent, hard inch of his body was revealed. If he hadn't made his disdain so damned clear at the celebration a few days ago, and so many times since, she might have sashayed forward and propositioned him.

She couldn't believe he didn't hear her sigh of appreciation when he strolled forward, all those big, tight muscles gleaming and contracting. And his cock... Wow. They really came in that size? Her fumbling college days suddenly seemed much less the education than she'd thought.

So no one could blame her for spying, could they, when he stopped in the clearing behind his home and transformed into a wolf? Because, really, who could walk away from that wonder? *Certainly not me.* She cast a quick simple tracking

spell so she could follow when he loped off into the woods. But she didn't in any way count on the scene she came upon following that spell.

His large black wolf fought with another, just as big but almost solid white. Well, more blond than white, and that's when she realized it must be Mick, the pack's healer. They snarled and circled. They drew blood, and once she thought she heard a bone crack. Finally, sides heaving, they fell apart, on their bellies, and shifted.

Mick naked was just as beautiful as Jonas. She wasn't surprised when Jonas growled and pinned the other man. Shouldn't have been surprised that they were both hard, that Jonas's cock pressed against Mick's ass, declaring his dominance over the healer. What surprised her was how much it turned her on.

And it just got better.

Mick twisted in his hold and flipped Jonas over. They were face-to-face. Chest to chest. Cock to cock. *Oh gawd*. Harper groaned, not sure if she wanted to watch or be in the middle. Jonas's hand was on the back of Mick's head, and he pulled the other man down for a kiss that seared *her* toes.

She wanted to leave, to ease her way out of view. That was real emotion, real desire she saw, and it made her want. It made her hurt. She'd never seen so much raw feeling openly displayed. What would it be like to be on the receiving end? What would it be like to be free to express it?

She hadn't been living with the werewolves long, but it was already long enough to know her former cold, insular world of magic was sadly lacking. This was just further proof of it. And she wasn't a part of it. Not a part of the open affection and love she witnessed so often lately.

She had to get away before they discovered her. Maybe get out the vibrator she'd bought on her last trip to town. But when she took a cautious step backward, eyes still soaking in the scene before her, her breath caught, and she sank to her knees to watch.

Mick broke away from Jonas's grip and started to kiss his way down the other man's body. He used his tongue. His teeth scraped over Jonas's nipple, and he cried out, harsh and guttural. Jonas's back bowed, and when she looked down his body, he was grinding his cock against Mick's erection.

Mick moved lower, until his lips brushed against the head of Jonas's cock. He gripped the werewolf's hips, holding him still while he looked up at Jonas. She wished she could see his eyes, his face. All she saw was his profile, both their profiles, all hard angles and skin drawn tight and flushed.

She held her breath, silently urging him on as he oh so slowly lowered his mouth. She almost came when the wide head disappeared into Mick's mouth. He took Jonas deeper, working up and down on his length. Fast, then slow, then fast again. Just when she thought there was no way Jonas could last, Mick reared up, head thrown back. That's when she noticed that Jonas's hand was wrapped around Mick's cock, and it was now shooting jets of cum.

Mick couldn't believe he'd come so damned fast, but it was such a turn-on knowing Harper watched while hiding in the bushes. He could smell her. A sweet mix of woman and an invitation to sin. He and Jonas should have invited her over. Hell, they should have done it days ago. She was theirs, and Jonas's antagonism, his reluctance, didn't make much sense to Mick. He'd held off seducing her, claiming her, until his partner was on board. Maybe that time would come tonight.

Before he could bring it up, point her out, Jonas flipped him over and pulled him to his knees. Jonas stroked Mick's cock, his belly, gathered the cum clinging to his skin, and then rimmed his asshole. He groaned and pushed back when first one finger, then two worked in, spread a bit before working back and forth. Then they were gone, the head of Jonas's cock was pushing into the tight channel. One slow inch at a time. Jonas leaned over him, chest tight against his back, and nipped his ear. Mick reared back, forcing Jonas to shove the rest of his cock in his ass.

Jonas chuckled. "Enjoying our audience, are you?"

He withdrew almost the entire length of his shaft and then slammed back in. Mick gasped, pushed back for more.

“Should we invite her over?” Mick was almost panting; pain and pleasure mixed. It was so, so good.

“Not yet.” The pace of Jonas’s thrusts sped up. “Let her see what she’s getting into.”

Under other circumstances, Mick would have breathed a sigh of relief. He was tired of not claiming what was his, of not having her in their bed. Then having her every way they could think of.

Jonas fucked him in earnest now. Hard and fast. He bit Mick’s shoulder and let one hip free so he could fist Mick’s cock. He was already hard again, and Jonas pumped his cock in a rhythm that matched the fucking in his ass.

“Look at her,” he whispered against Mick’s neck. “Watch her while I fuck you.” He inhaled deeply. “Smell how much it turns her on.”

Mick turned his head and caught her gaze.

“She’s flushed,” he told Jonas. “Dazed.” His gaze slid down her face to her torso, and his eyes narrowed. She didn’t seem to notice. “And she’s touching herself.”

Jonas shuddered against him. Mick felt and shared his irritation. That was against the rules unless they gave her permission. What kind of punishment would be appropriate? She was fragile, emotionally and physically. It would have to be something light to begin with. Maybe with time, more would be possible. Of course, they hadn’t claimed her yet, so she didn’t know any better. Didn’t know what to expect from two werewolf mates, the demands they would make of her. The pleasure they’d give her.

He lifted his gaze to meet hers again, and this time she noticed. She startled and pulled her hand out of her shirt. Her nipples were hard points against the thin fabric, and he couldn’t wait to suck them into his mouth. Roll his tongue over them. Bite.

Just imagining it was enough to push his mind and body into another orgasm. Jonas's hand tightened on him, probably trying to hold him back, to draw it out, but it was too late. When he shook with his release, his muscles clamped around Jonas's cock. The pressure was too much to fight, and with one last slam, Mick felt the orgasm roll through his lover's body too.

They collapsed to the ground and reluctantly rolled apart. Mick's sides heaved with exertion, and his body felt heavy and satiated. A few minutes later he glanced back at the bushes. She was gone.

Next to him, Jonas sighed. "Let's run a bit. Then we'll go after her."

That suited Mick fine. In a cruel twist of fate and genetics, Mick only had one night a month to run as a wolf. He was unable to change the rest of the time, unlike Jonas, who could shift whenever he liked.

He rolled to his knees and embraced the change, let the wildness of his wolf side take over. His bones popped and muscles contorted until he stood on four paws. He threw his head back and howled his joy to the moon peeking through the clouds. Then he ran.

Jonas stayed close on his heels, never letting him get far ahead. Sometimes he bumped into him. Sometimes he just leaped at Mick's back so they rolled through the dirt and brush in a mock fight.

Mick was fast. Tough and agile. But when it came down to it, he was no match for Jonas in a real fight. There were only three people in the pack strong enough to beat Jonas—Caleb, Zach, and Liza—the alpha, beta, and paladin. Liza was the problem, Mick thought, although Jonas didn't seem as hung up on her in the last year, especially since Harper's arrival.

Liza'd been the main cause of dissension between them in their long on-again, off-again relationship. Jonas loved her, but she wasn't his mate. She wasn't Mick's mate. Mick had pushed to leave the pack, at least for a little while, and see if they could find their true mate. Jonas, bitter and angry and heartsick, always refused. Mick had suffered knowing he would never be enough, but he also knew Jonas

would never be enough for him either. He had always known that they were supposed to be three.

And here she was. Harper. Another witch. Yet Jonas hesitated. It was slowly driving Mick insane, this delay in claiming what was his. He looked at Jonas as they slid to a stop in his backyard and shifted. Jonas went straight for his jeans while Mick drank him in. He wanted to officially claim *all* that was his.

“Are you going to move back in? Or are you still torturing yourself?”

Mick sighed. This was another point of contention. They hadn’t lived together for months. He never knew where Jonas’s mercurial moods would take them, so it was easier to have his own place to retreat to. Not a good way to have a healthy relationship, but Mick had learned the value of self-preservation.

“Not yet,” he answered softly.

Jonas’s cell phone rang before Mick could continue, and as he watched the color rise on Jonas’s face, Mick knew they wouldn’t be coming back to it anytime soon. After a few seconds he answered with a curt “on my way” and snapped the phone shut. “Grab some jeans from inside. Harper has a visitor at the gate.”

He didn’t need any more invitation. Jonas had made it a point to *not* find out why Harper had come to them. Mick was not so reserved. He hurried inside, found a pair of jeans he’d left behind, and then had to race to catch up with Jonas.

Harper’s people had come for her, and there was no way in hell Mick was letting her go.

Chapter Three

Damn it. Jonas hated not knowing what he was walking into, and that was his own fucking fault. When Harper had showed up looking for sanctuary, he'd taken one look at her and just *known* she'd be trouble. Trouble with a capital *T*. He'd done just enough digging to verify she was who she claimed to be—Liza's cousin and the only daughter of Benjamin Alexander, the chairman of the Magical Council. Jonas hadn't bothered to find out more. Those people had nothing to do with him or the pack after all, and okay, fine, he'd been reluctant to get to know her on a personal level. That reticence was coming back to bite him in the ass. Now they had a wizard at the gate demanding access to his daughter.

A grown woman no less. Couldn't she handle her own damned family? He shook his head as he jogged. He knew the answer to that. He should have done a thorough background check on her, but he'd *known* what he'd find if anyone broke the wall of silence surrounding the magical community. She'd been so scared, so cowed when she'd shown up. A woman didn't get that way all on her own. There were men in her life who were more abusive than protective. It made his hackles rise. You didn't treat the people you loved like that.

Okay, okay, he sometimes didn't treat Mick as well as he should. But Mick could handle him, teeth and snarls and all. Harper? Harper couldn't handle a spider. It was starting to make Mick a little crazy not claiming her, but Jonas didn't trust himself. Didn't trust himself with such a delicate woman. She would be too easy to hurt, and as much he wanted her, he wouldn't endanger her. Not for his own satisfaction, not even for Mick's, and he'd do damned near anything to make Mick happy.

Which was a problem in the making. Mick didn't have the same hang-ups. They didn't have to worry about hurting each other, and Mick knew he'd never hurt his mate. So far he'd followed Jonas's lead, but though Jonas was stronger, Mick was definitely *not* a submissive male. Eventually he would claim Harper, and when he did Jonas wouldn't be able to keep fighting his instincts to do the same. Borrowed time. He was on borrowed time, and it made him cranky. He hated not being in control.

He arrived at the gate to see a small crowd gathered. Mick was right behind him. Harper stood, more like cowered really, between Liza and Liza's mother, Elspeth. An older, distinguished-looking gentleman stood just outside the gate. A few other wizards surrounded him. Jonas paused in his sweep of the crowd. One looked very much like Harper. A younger brother maybe? His anger seemed focused on Alexander.

"I want my daughter back."

Liza shrugged. "You can't have her. She came to us for sanctuary. Those are rules that cannot be broken, even between our races."

"She came in a fit of pique."

He took an aggressive step forward but stopped just shy of crossing onto their land. Given his position in the wizard pecking order, Jonas bet he'd never been denied anything. How had Harper found the backbone to take off? More importantly, *what* had made her do it? Her father's gaze seemed to make Harper shrink even more into herself. That just pissed Jonas off, and he had to put a restraining hand on Mick's arm. His questions would have to wait for later. Right now he just wanted this asshole gone, preferably to some dark, inescapable dungeon where he could never hurt Harper again.

"Whatever her reason," Jonas said, stepping forward, "she's here now, and here she will stay."

Her father barely bothered to grace Jonas with a contemptuous glance. He held his hand out to Harper. "Come now, child. Enough pouting. Your wedding date draws near."

She jerked as if slapped, but still didn't utter a word, and Jonas felt his rage rising even higher still. Liza stepped back as Jonas moved to take her place, closing his hand around Harper's elbow.

"That is impossible. She already has a mate."

Her father's eyes held nothing but disdain. "A werewolf? I will never allow that."

Jonas handed her behind him to Mick and focused on the threat before him. He let his wolf rise to the surface. He knew his grin was feral, and he didn't care.

"She's a grown woman and a woman claimed. You know you can't interfere with that." But he could see from the other man's face he wanted to. Jonas spread his arms. "Try to take her from me, Wizard. You won't survive the night."

The wizard's eyes narrowed, and Jonas felt power rising, sharp and fast, in the air. But Redhawke had their own witches. Liza and Elspeth stepped forward, and in a move that stunned him, so did Harper, linking her hands with theirs. Maybe she had more strength than he'd realized. More than *she'd* realized. Then in the real stunner of the night, the young man who looked so much like her stepped forward and joined his power with the three women's.

"I believe you're not welcome here, Father," the young man said, satisfaction oozing from his voice.

"No, you aren't," Harper echoed.

He gave both of them a look full of malice and hate before spinning on his heel and returning to the black SUV he'd arrived in. Harper held herself ramrod stiff until her father and his retinue disappeared down the road; then all the fight seemed to rush out of her. Instead of turning to him or Mick, she rushed to her brother, whose arms wrapped around her so tightly Jonas wondered if he'd need a crowbar to get her free. It was the second unexpected moment of jealousy he'd

experienced in the last few days, and he struggled against the urge to snatch her away from a moment she obviously needed with her sibling.

The other werewolves drifted away until it was only him, Mick, Caleb, and Zach left. Even Liza left after a low, heated conversation with her mates, Zach and Caleb. Elspeth went with her. Mick fidgeted, shifting from foot to foot, his aggression level rising until Jonas sighed. He would have to interfere. But before he'd fully decided to, Harper stepped away from her brother.

She looked over her shoulder and was clearly surprised to find four men behind her and no sign of her cousin. Unease and fear crossed her face, two emotions he was growing accustomed to seeing from her, and that irritated the hell out of Jonas. She should know by now he'd never touch her, much less hurt her.

Her brother stepped forward and held his hand out. Jonas took it with a touch of hesitation. Not because the kid was a wizard, but because he was family who mattered to Harper, and Jonas had no way of knowing yet if he could be trusted, if his presence was part of a plan to steal Harper back. "I'm Dane. Harper's brother."

"Nice to meet you." He gave the polite answer. Dane's grip was firm, dry, and brief. He showed no signs of nervousness. Jonas didn't scent any deceit, but he couldn't let his guard down yet.

Dane grinned. "Under these circumstances? Not really." He switched his grin and his handshake to Mick. "I can trust you to take care of her?" he asked softly.

Jonas looked over to where she stood a few feet away. Head down, arms crossed over her stomach, she looked so dejected. It hurt his heart to see her that way. He'd gotten used to sparks of temper, to wary interest.

"You can," he answered just as softly, mostly convinced by Dane's voice and expression he meant his sister no harm.

Dane nodded. "Good." Then he walked over to her and took her shoulders in his hands until she looked up with a shaky smile. "I have to go."

"No!"

She looked at Caleb and Zach and then at Jonas when they didn't say a word. Perhaps he should have interfered, but he wasn't thrilled with the idea of her brother hanging around over the next few weeks. Later, when he and Mick and Harper were sure of each other, maybe.

Dane gave her a shake that made Mick step forward aggressively. "You belong here, Harper. I have a different destiny."

He pulled a cell phone out of his pocket.

"Here. Father can't track this phone. My number is programmed in."

She put the slim phone in her back pocket. He kissed her forehead and hurried through the gate to the final vehicle left behind by the other wizards. Waving one last time, he was gone.

Harper turned and gave Jonas a look full of accusation, but she hurried off without saying a word. Caleb and Zach blocked him before he could follow her. His sigh was heavy with exasperation.

"What?"

"She's important to Liza," Caleb said.

"I know that." He didn't hide his irritation. Did they think he was a blind idiot?

Caleb shrugged. "We just don't want to see her hurt."

He turned narrowed, angry eyes on his alpha. "I don't tell you how to take care of your mate."

Caleb showed almost no reaction to his aggression. "She's unclaimed. That's a hurt of its own."

Jonas fisted his hands. Like he didn't fucking know that? Every day the separation was more painful. If he left the pack, it might become bearable, but he couldn't bring himself to leave.

"I can take care of my own," he ground out between clenched teeth.

After several long seconds, Zach nodded. "See that you do."

Then both alpha and beta turned and melted into the growing darkness. Mick's gaze was just as hard and unforgiving when Jonas turned to face him.

"Come on," Jonas said, resigned to the inevitable. "Let's go deal with our mate."

Chapter Four

Harper ran, cutting off the well-worn path to save time through the woods. Unfortunately, it was dark, and she missed the brambles until she was thigh high in them. They tore at her jeans as she pushed through, cutting into her skin. It stung, but finally she was free, and she saw her back-porch light.

She went straight through the house to her bathroom, where she shimmied out of her pants and looked at her legs, fighting back a sob. Bad enough to have faced her father, bad enough to have lost her brother again. For some reason the blood streaking her calves and thighs made her want to bawl. She blamed it on the delayed effects of adrenaline. Her hands were shaking, her heart racing. At least her body and mind had waited to freak out until after the confrontation with her father.

After several deep breaths and feeling a little more in control, she turned the shower on and stepped in, ignoring the knock on her front door. It was probably Jonas checking up on her, even though he hated the job. Or maybe Mick, who would look at her with desire and compassion but not make a move to comfort her.

Under the scalding water, she washed and conditioned her hair fast, then used the cloth and soap to gently clean her legs. She'd dab on some antibiotic cream when she got out. She'd seen some in the kitchen cabinet where Liza apparently kept all her first-aid supplies. Harper supposed it was the sensible place to store them if you were often giving aid to others. From what she'd seen, Liza wasn't the one likely to need assistance after a fight or injury. Harper had never seen her fight, hoped she never would, but she'd heard the stories, and there was no denying the strength Liza radiated.

She turned the water off. She dried off with one towel and wrapped a big, fluffy one around her body before stepping into the hall. Her scrapes stung. The cream would make them sting more, but there was also a bottle of rum in kitchen. A shot sounded like just the thing to soothe her aching heart.

Without turning on the hall light or even glancing into the living room as she passed, she went straight for a glass and the bottle. There was enough moonlight streaming in to see, so she poured a finger and downed it before pouring another. Then she rummaged in the cabinet where the first-aid supplies were, but had to reach over to flick on the light when she couldn't see inside the dim space. She found the antibiotic cream, a box of Band-Aids, and carried both to the table before going to retrieve her drink.

"What the hell happened to you?"

She almost dropped her drink. Heart pounding, she set the glass on the counter and turned slowly. She should have known Jonas wouldn't leave when she hadn't answered the door. His gaze moved over her possessively, and she was suddenly aware she was standing there in only a towel. She wasn't sure if it was mortification or lust that sent a heated flush up her throat to her face. Clothes. She needed clothes ASAP. Before she could sidle past him, however, Mick nudged Jonas aside. He walked right up to her and dropped to one knee, his hands gentle as he examined her legs.

"What did you do, sugar?"

It took a moment to find her voice. His touch was professional, but her body didn't care, and she couldn't get the image of him and Jonas having sex out of her head. He looked up with a sexy grin, and she groaned. He was a werewolf. Of course he could smell her arousal. Standing, he took her hand, then tugged her to the table. He lifted her to sit on it, went back to the cabinet, and returned with a bottle of peroxide and a bag of cotton balls.

He pulled a chair to face her, tugged her feet to rest on the edge and pinned them with his thighs. He wet one of the cotton balls, then reached for her leg. Jerking away was reflexive, and she didn't stop until his low growl filled the room.

"I already cleaned it," she whispered.

"With what?"

"Soap and water."

"Think of this as added precaution." His fingers circled her ankle gently, but she knew there was no way he'd let her go. Resigned, she sighed and repressed a flinch when he touched the cotton ball to one of the smaller scrapes.

"Harper." She shivered at Jonas's voice. She could hear the wolf in it, but it was sexy rather than frightening. He moved to stand behind Mick and waited until she looked up to meet his gaze. "What happened?"

"I cut through the woods. And found a briar patch."

He shook his head. "You can't be left unsupervised at all can you?"

She bristled. "I'm fine. I can take care of myself." But she didn't try to pull free of Mick's gentle healer's grasp.

Jonas crossed his arms over his chest, and his face seemed set in stone. Privately, she called it his stern face. He wouldn't use it on her nearly so much if he knew how much this hard, unforgiving side of him turned her on.

"Is that right? You get yourself hurt walking home. Spy on people in the woods." Oh gods, he had to bring that up? Her face was so hot she knew it'd be scarlet. "And you get yourself engaged to some wizard when you have two mates already."

"I am *not* engaged to anyone. My father came up with that plan all on his own."

Jonas, arrogant as ever, cocked one eyebrow. "Is that right?"

She nodded. She couldn't find the voice to answer when he looked at her with that avaricious heat in his eyes.

“Can’t really blame her for that anyway,” Mick said calmly. She jumped when the peroxide contacted the deepest cut and the scrape up the outside of her calf. “She didn’t know she belonged to us then.”

Was it interest or terror that filled her at the possessiveness in their voices? Terror, definitely. She was in no way prepared to handle one of them, much less two. Tempted maybe, but not prepared. It was just good fantasy material. Fine. *Great* fantasy material. Scary and intoxicating at the same time, but impossible.

Mick tossed the used cotton balls to the trash can in the corner and then picked up the antibiotic cream. She trembled under his soft touch as he smeared it on each scrape, paying particular attention to the long, ugly one.

When he was finished, he held both her calves in a light grip. “Why are you so afraid, sugar?”

The air seemed to chill. The question was gently asked, but the demand for information was in his eyes.

“Who says I am?”

Jonas’s voice was harsh. “We can scent it. It’s sharp and tangy, and I like it a little too much. Answer the damned question, Harper.”

Oh, that pissed her off. He acted like *witch* was synonymous with *leper*, in her case at least, and now he wanted... What? He’d used the word *mate* with her father, had insisted here in her kitchen she belonged to him. That shoved her anger into fury. She’d fled the only home she’d ever known because she refused to be owned by any man. Not her father or some man he chose for her, and sure as hell not a werewolf who held her in nothing but contempt.

“Get over yourself, Jonas,” she snapped. “I don’t owe you any explanations.”

For a moment surprise crossed his face, and he arched that damned eyebrow again. “Got a backbone after all.”

She finally succeeded in jerking free of Mick's grip and hopped off the table, clinging to the towel so she didn't give anyone a show. She nodded at Mick, trying to completely ignore Jonas in the process.

"Thank you for helping with the scratches. Y'all can show yourselves out."

She didn't quite run from the room, but she didn't give either of them a chance to stop her either. In her bedroom, she slammed the door behind her and leaned back against it. It was a long time before her heart slowed to normal, before she quit trembling. She dressed and sat on the edge of the bed, wiping damp palms against her jean-clad legs while straining to hear sounds in the house.

Had they left? She hadn't heard any doors shut, but she didn't hear any movement or voices either. Her stomach rumbled, and she glared at the door. Was she really reduced to hiding in her room in her own damned house? No way. She jerked the door open and stomped down the hall.

Chapter Five

“Good job, man.”

Jonas stiffened but didn't respond to Mick. He walked to the fridge and opened both doors. There wasn't much. TV dinners, salad makings. Certainly not anything that appealed to two werewolves.

“The woman has no food,” he grumbled.

She had dangerous curves, curves that made his mouth water and all the blood in his body rush to his cock. There was no way she'd keep them if she continued to eat this crap. Scowling, he shut the door. Actually, she'd dropped a few pounds since her arrival. Why hadn't he noticed before? He turned to face Mick.

“I've got steaks at home. I'll go get them. Be right back.”

But Mick didn't move out of the doorway to let him pass. Jonas grunted. “What?”

Mick cocked an eyebrow. “I'm not the one with the problem. She's not a soldier. Quit treating her like one.” He hesitated. “She's not Liza.”

All the air rushed out of Jonas's lungs. He had to take several deep breaths before he could speak. “Believe me, I know that. And I'm not comparing her to Liza. She doesn't have anything to do with this.”

He'd thought he loved Liza once, but once he accepted she'd never be his, that feeling had faded. Eventually he'd realized it wasn't Liza he wanted in particular, but a woman like her. Strong and fierce and independent. Yeah, he felt protective and possessive of Harper. Hell, he felt that way about most of the pack. It was just part of his nature. But he never counted on having a mate who couldn't match him in strength of will, if not physically.

Harper, lovely and appealing as she was, didn't have the fortitude to stand up to him. She didn't have the will to rein him in when he went way overprotective, and he knew he would. She would never be an equal partner the way Mick was.

He'd been in a nonstop struggle with his wolf side since she'd shown up. It wanted to claim her and protect her. It wanted to possess her, and not doing so just pissed it off. Jonas was struggling for control, and the wildness in him was winning. Harper couldn't handle it, as clearly evidenced by her fleeing the room.

But even knowing that, knowing she couldn't take the wolf and she wasn't what he'd expected, he no longer had the willpower to walk away. She was his. Eventually, she'd come to grips with what he was. Maybe. Hopefully.

Perhaps with the right kind of encouragement she'd grow into the kind of woman he needed at his side. Perhaps with time the damage done in the past to her self-esteem, her spirit would fade. He sincerely hoped so. He didn't want a doormat for a mate.

"Jonas?"

He shook his head. He knew Mick wanted to know what was on his mind, what kept holding him back, but he wasn't ready to discuss his fears. Sometimes he wanted Harper so badly he shook with the force of it, and admitting he was afraid she might never accept him, accept his wild side and be able to tame it was more than he was capable of yet. Just knowing how deeply his passion ran would probably scare her off.

"I'll be back in a few minutes," he told Mick and then stepped out the back door.

They hadn't left. She stood frozen in the hall and listened in. So that was it. Jonas might have wanted her, he couldn't hide the desire she sometimes saw lurking in his eyes, but he was in love with someone else. When he left by the kitchen door, she moved into the light. Mick turned around with a sigh.

"How much did you hear?"

“Enough.” The bottle of rum and her untouched glass were right where she’d left them. She walked over, turned to lean against the counter, and lifted it to her lips. “How long has he been in love with Liza?”

For the first time she felt a bit of sympathy for Jonas. Liza was incredible. Harper felt familial love for her and a hell of a lot of gratitude for Liza’s having taken her in. She was strong and confident and outspoken. In short, everything Harper was not. But unfortunately for Jonas, anyone could see she was totally in love with Caleb and Zach. Harper swallowed the liquid, enjoyed the slight burn as it slid down her throat.

“That’s gotta suck for him,” she went on softly.

“He’s not in love with Liza.” Mick shook his head. “And I shouldn’t be discussing it with you. Jonas needs to tell you what that’s about.”

He didn’t have to. “I’m nothing like her.”

“No. You aren’t. Why should you be? She grew up here. She was always loved. Never abused.”

It was only years of practice that kept her face calm, kept her from flinching. She didn’t fool him for a minute.

“How bad, Harper?” he asked the question so softly, so gently with a voice thick with compassion, not pity, that she almost gave in to the instinct to rush over and cling to him. She was so tempted to steal a moment of time, a few minutes of comfort, and she knew he wouldn’t deny her. “I saw the scars on your legs.”

Tempted, but in the end she wasn’t able to let her guard down so much. She let her chin drop to her chest, stared at the floor, and shook with years of repressed fear and anger and self-disgust. She was smart enough to know it wasn’t her fault. Not one of the many times her father had raised a hand against her had it been her fault. But it was damned hard to not hate herself for not getting out, for not saving herself and her brother all the big and small humiliations accumulated over a lifetime.

She looked up to meet his gaze. "It doesn't matter anymore. I'm free. Dane is free."

And she would continue to rebuild herself bit by bit. She'd stood up to Jonas, hadn't she? She was getting braver about risking smart-ass retorts when he slung his subtle insults her way. She was under Liza's protection, and she was pretty sure even if she hadn't been, Jonas wouldn't have hurt her. For the first time in a very long time, she experienced a sense of empowerment.

The door opened before Mick could push her for any answers, and Jonas walked in with three reusable shopping bags filled to bulging. He must have run to his house and then packed like a maniac. She arched her eyebrows when without a word he started to unpack and fill her small freezer, fridge, and pantry.

"Are you planning to feed an army?"

He grinned at her over his shoulder, and her stomach did a slow flip-flop. Wow. He didn't have a right to look so hot when he spent 99 percent of his time trying to annoy her.

"Werewolves eat a lot. Especially fully grown male wolves."

"Maybe it escaped your notice, but I'm not a werewolf. Or male. There's no need to fill my kitchen."

He swept a critical eye over her. "You're not eating right."

The comment surprised her speechless. For the first time in her life she was losing weight. And she'd stumbled across the only male in creation who didn't appreciate that? She wasn't sure if she should be insulted or kiss him in thanks. She shrugged, going for nonchalance.

"I've lost a few pounds. It won't kill me to lose a few more either."

Jonas growled and with two long strides was right in front of her, so close his chest brushed against hers. It was damned hard to hold back a moan of longing. He put his hands on her hips and pulled her flush against him. There was no way to miss his erection, hard and hot even through his jeans.

“It might kill me,” he said before leaning down and nipping her neck. His hands slid around to mold her ass, and this time there was no way to hold in her moan. “I like your body like it is. I love your curves.”

He nibbled her throat, searing a path up over her jaw to her lips. The kiss was slow and teasing. Coaxing. He broke away gradually with little bites and licks. Her heart raced, and her body went into a slow meltdown. He was being nice. He was being...seductive. He was sending major mixed signals, but how the hell could she resist him like this?

With a wink he stepped away and rummaged in the lower cabinets for cooking pans. Her fingers hovered over her lips. She might prefer him grumpy and snarly. In a good mood, with a teasing smile, he was too damned enticing. He’d lull her into a sense of security and then morph back to the big bad wolf, wouldn’t he?

Mick, who hadn’t said a word, came up behind her and wrapped his arms around her waist, pulling her close. His chin rested on her shoulder.

“He’s nice when he’s like this,” he teased.

“When does he turn back into a pumpkin?”

Mick laughed at her joke. His tone was light, but she wondered if his next remark was serious. “When he does, it’s just because he’s trying to keep up his macho image.”

This time she laughed. “Is that why? You mean he’s not just mean tempered?”

Jonas turned from the counter, where he was cracking eggs into a bowl. “You really think it’s wise to harass the chef?”

She grinned. “Maybe not. But it’s kinda fun.”

And she hadn’t had nearly enough fun in her life. Not enough of this teasing banter. A look crossed his face that made her suspect he knew that.

He nodded. “You get a pass. This time.”

“Don’t listen to him,” Mick whispered close to her ear. “He likes it when you give him attitude.”

It was hard to concentrate on his words with his lips so close to her skin. Especially when he left a trail of kisses down her throat and over the exposed part of her shoulder. His fingers tugged the collar of her V-neck sweater out of the way, and he continued the soft kisses across her shoulder. When he dipped his hand down her torso and under her sweater to cup her breast, she gasped, arching against him when he shoved her bra down.

She stared down at herself, knowing she should protest. Her breast rested on top of the bunched-up cup of the garment. He held the weight in his hand, stroking the skin above her nipple with his thumb. His fingers were lightly callous, rough and sensual on her smooth flesh. Her eyes slid closed, only to snap open seconds later when Jonas spoke.

“Beautiful,” he murmured, his voice rough with lust.

Then he leaned forward and sucked her nipple into his mouth. He was gentle. She wasn’t sure if she wanted gentle. She tunneled her hands through his hair, holding him to her. He increased the pressure, the suction until he was taking long pulls. She shook when she felt teeth. Her hands slid to his shoulders, fingernails digging as she struggled to stay upright.

She needn’t have worried. Mick held her with one palm on her belly. Under her sweater. His palm felt hot and fevered. She didn’t notice he’d unsnapped and unzipped her jeans until his finger slid through her slick folds.

“Oh gods,” she moaned.

He nipped her shoulder hard enough that it should have hurt. “Should I stop?”

“Don’t you dare.”

He chuckled, spread the lips that hid her pussy, and pushed one finger inside her. Then a second. He thrust them in and out, building up to a fast, even rhythm, each withdrawal scraping over sensitive, inflamed tissue.

Jonas switched to her other breast, pushing her bra down to expose her and stare a moment. She swore she could feel the heat of his gaze on her skin. He took her nipple into his mouth, sucking hard, and she started to quake. Mick’s fingers

fucked her harder. Faster. When his thumb grazed her clitoris, she bit her lip and fought the orgasm rising in her body. She wanted to come, but this felt too good to ever stop.

“Let go, sugar,” Mick said gruffly. “Come for me now. I want to feel you on my fingers.”

She would have been able to hold it off if not for that order. She’d always longed for a take-charge lover. Someone who would dominate her with loving protectiveness, not cruelty. She quit fighting the sensations in her body. It was like a dam breaking, flooding her with pleasure, pouring through her body until it almost hurt, and she cried out.

They didn’t give her time to enjoy the warm glow that suffused her. Mick’s fingers were suddenly gone. He pushed her jeans and panties down so they pooled at her ankles.

“Look at me, darlin’,” Jonas ordered.

She pried her eyes open. He moved closer, skin to skin. The front of his jeans was open, and his cock pressed against her pelvis, hot and insistent. When he lifted her, she kicked off the jeans and underwear caught around her ankles and followed her instinct to wrap her legs around his hips, gasping when he slowly pushed the broad head of his cock inside her. She wriggled, trying to adjust or get away—she wasn’t sure which. He was too much, and it had been so long since she’d let a man get her naked.

“Stop that,” he panted, leaning over to rest his forehead against hers. “You’re so tight.”

“You’re too big.” She gasped when he worked another inch in.

He chuckled. “No, I’m not, darlin’. You’re just out of practice.”

She could tell that pleased him. This was a wolf who didn’t like to share, not even with the past.

“Relax,” he whispered. “Take all of me.”

Then Mick's hands were on her again, popping the hook on the back of her bra. His fingers rubbed her nipples. Jonas gave her another couple of inches. He withdrew until just the tip of his cock was still inside her, and she moaned a complaint, feeling the loss. But then he slid back, deeper and easier this time, aided by Mick's attention to the other sensitive spots of her body.

The rough pinches on her nipples, the sharp bites on her neck muscle and nape sent desire spiraling through her again. Her pussy grew wetter, slicker. She wanted Jonas deeper. With a low moan he complied, in one thrust filling her so completely she didn't think she'd be whole if he ever stopped, and still he was not in her all the way. She wriggled, no longer uncomfortable, only needy, but unsure what she needed.

"Take all of me, darlin'."

He withdrew and thrust back in hard. Her head fell back with a gasp. He couldn't get any deeper. She felt his balls against her ass, the head of his cock deep inside. He didn't give her a chance to adjust to the new penetration. He slammed in and out of her in fast, furious thrusts. She'd never felt so used. She loved it, lust winding tight in her body, a hard ball of building need coursing through her.

The quivering started deep within her body, her magic combining with the pleasure and demanding release. She fought to contain it, but it was no use, and for the second time in minutes she cried out as it consumed her.

Mick watched as they came together, though he doubted Harper was aware of it. Breathing hard, Jonas grabbed a chair and flipped it to sit down with her straddling him. She shimmied closer, resting against his chest, her long blonde hair covering them like a blanket. Jonas pushed it aside, leaving the smooth column of her neck exposed.

He met Mick's gaze, his eyes asking a question that didn't need to be voiced. *Yes.* Mick nodded. Make this real. Make her theirs. He would do so later tonight. Jonas's incisors lengthened, and he held Mick's gaze as he lowered them to her nape

and bit. She whimpered but settled when he rubbed her back. When Jonas lifted his head, he saw a tiny bead of blood on her neck. He lapped his tongue over it, and she stirred, lifting her hand to cover the spot.

He lifted her to her feet, and Mick caught her when she swayed. She leaned back against him, and he hissed when her ass rubbed over his cock. Jonas grinned. He knew exactly what Mick wanted.

“I’m going to start dinner. I’m sure our mate would like to...clean up.”

Mick didn’t need to hear the suggestion twice. He swung her up in his arms and carried her through the master bedroom straight to the bath. He smiled when he saw it. Gods bless Liza. It was one of those huge, jetted affairs. More than big enough for one large werewolf and his woman.

She looked at him curiously when he guided her to sit on the side. Then he reached forward to turn the water on. Hot but not scalding. He pulled her sweater and bra off and helped her in. Her eyes widened when he started on his own clothes.

“About this mate thing?”

“What about it, sugar?”

“Don’t I get a choice?” she asked tartly. He’d give her damn near anything, but this one was not negotiable.

“Not really. Mating is an instinct that can’t be fought.”

Her eyes narrowed. “I came here so I wouldn’t be sold off.”

Chuckling, he climbed in behind her, pulling her back to rest against his chest.

“No one is selling you off, sugar. No one is taking you away from us either.”

He reached for the bar of soap and built up a lather. He started cleaning her at her wrists, slowly working up her arms.

“Why would I want to be with someone because of that? It’s just based on lust, not love. Or hell, even like. It’s so...so...”

“Animalistic?”

“Yes!”

He cupped water and rinsed her left arm, then lifted it behind his head and turned to nibble at the tender skin on the inside of her arm. She sucked in a breath, tried to pull away, and he bit her. She yelped.

“We *are* part animal. We’re possessive.” He cupped her breasts, molded them before moving to tease her nipples.

“And protective,” he murmured, nuzzling her neck. She wiggled against him, and his cock, already hard, started to throb.

“And we tend to bite,” he added just before his teeth sank in.

Not hard enough to break skin. Not hard enough to mark her. He’d get to that soon enough. First he wanted to taste her, wanted to know if her pussy tasted as sweet as it felt convulsing around his fingers. Then he’d see if she fit his cock as well as his fingers. He groaned, got himself under control, and finished cleaning her. He got them both dried off before herding her into the bedroom. She met his gaze and backed up warily.

“What is it?”

“Your eyes are glowing.”

He smiled, felt fur rippling under his skin. “The wolf is close.”

Her knees hit the back of the bed, but she stood her ground as he approached. “Is it always like that?”

He shook his head. “It recognizes its mate.”

She took a deep breath, and oh, the phenomenal way the inhale made her breasts rise. For a moment he was transfixed. Then his nostrils flared as he took in the change in her scent. She had been aroused, but his open appreciation had ratcheted it up ten times. His wolf clawed at the corners of his mind, demanding he take her. *Now*. She was ready, willing, and able.

His hands fisted, though. He didn’t want to rush. He wanted to taste her, to savor, then gorge. “Sit down, baby. Spread your thighs for me.”

Her knees seemed to go out on her, and she sat with a bounce that jiggled her breasts enticingly, but she kept her knees pressed tight together. He didn't smell any fear on her. Embarrassment, then? He knelt in front of her, resting his hands on her knees.

"Disobeying already, sugar?" This time there was a spike of fear filling his nostrils. He sighed. "I would never hurt you. This is about pleasure."

He gently pushed the insides of her knees. She spread enough to let him lean in and kiss her, leave a quick bite. Then he nudged her again, and with a sigh she let him spread her legs wide enough to accommodate his shoulders. He slid forward, pushed her to her back with one hand on her belly, and pulled her legs over his shoulders.

"Oh!" she cried when he put his hands under her ass and lifted her to his mouth.

He held her to him with one hand and used the other to open her folds, brushing tight blonde curls out of the way. He licked her from her anus to her clit, one long stroke to take her in. Sweet heaven. He pushed his tongue into her pussy, letting her cream coat him, her flavor exploding in his mouth like fine spun sugar.

He flicked her clit and loved the way it swelled under his tongue, but he couldn't resist going back to her pussy, fucking her with his tongue while she squirmed and whimpered and finally begged him to fuck her. Her pleas fell on deaf ears. She came, and he kept her on that high, refusing to let her body settle down, determined that come morning she wouldn't associate mating with anything other than unbearable joy.

Finally a throat cleared behind him, and with one last lingering lick he turned to meet Jonas's gaze. Jonas smiled.

"Much as I'm enjoying the show"—and he was, his hand was pumping his cock—"dinner is ready."

Grunting, he rose, kissing his way up her body. "It can wait."

She looked at him with glazed eyes when his cock nudged her entrance. Pushing against him, she pleaded, “Now, Mick. Now.”

He didn’t hesitate and knew there was no way he was going to last when she came immediately, her inner muscles clamping around him in fierce undulating rhythm. He fucked her through it. Jaw clenched, hands gripping her hips too hard. When he couldn’t fight the orgasm pulsing at the base of his spine anymore, he lifted her to him, tilted her head to the side Jonas hadn’t marked. Her pale, creamy skin was all the invitation he needed. His incisors lengthened. Her skin broke under the pressure as jets of his cum spurted into her. Marking her in the most primitive way of both man and beast.

Reluctantly, he released her, swiped his tongue over the drop of blood, cock still thrusting shallowly inside her. When there was no more fluid to ejaculate, he slid from her, picked her up, and turned to sit on the bed. It took a long time to catch his breath, to slow his heart.

Jonas watched from the doorway with the slight sexy smile that always made Mick inhale sharply. The look that said the evening was just getting started. When she began to stir, Jonas went into the bathroom and came back with a short red robe, and placed it in her outstretched hand.

“Nothing under that robe, darlin’.”

His voice was hard and stern, and for a second Mick thought Jonas might be pushing her too hard. But she nodded and lowered her eyes, a slight tremble rocking her body as she stood clutching the garment in front of her. Mick’s cum trickled down her leg, and he grabbed the robe, placing it on the bed.

“Wait a minute, sugar. Come with me.”

Mick led her to the bathroom and wet a washcloth with warm water. He started at the end of the trail and moved up, cupping her pussy and pushing one cloth-covered finger a mere inch inside her.

“Mick, there is no way—not so soon,” she protested with a drawn-out groan, but her body welcomed him.

He tossed the cloth in the hamper and followed her to the bedroom, where she put the robe on, belting it tight over her waist. He grinned. Did she think that would be any kind of deterrent? If anything she was sexier wearing the short, satiny thing.

Chapter Six

Jonas waited in the kitchen. He'd made steak and scrambled eggs and handed her a plate when she entered. She sat at the table and stared at it a moment before a laugh bubbled up. Jonas gave her a stern look.

"Eat."

"This is way too much," she complained, rolling her eyes, but picked up her fork.

She didn't do much more than nibble and push it around her plate, though. His voice lowered to a sexy growl. "Do I need to feed you, darlin'?"

Her glance at him was startled, and to his disappointment she took a real bite of the steak. The idea of feeding her by hand was strangely appealing. She ate, not enough to appease him, but by the third time she tried to hide a yawn, he gave in. He pushed back from the table, picked her up, and headed into the living room, where he settled on the long sofa.

Mick moved around the kitchen, probably cleaning up, and Jonas picked up the remote from the side table. He flipped through channels, looking for anything interesting. He was wired. Mick probably was too. Their mate, on the other hand, was exhausted. Hell, she'd had a busy day. Looking down, he brushed strands of hair off her face, and his heart stuttered. She was so beautiful in sleep. Calm and peaceful with none of the fear and worry that seemed to haunt her eyes while she was awake. He wanted to see her like this in the morning. For the rest of his mornings.

It was a stunning realization.

How had he gone so quickly from wanting an entirely different kind of woman to suspecting it would rip out his heart if he couldn't live with this soft, delicate creature? Mick sat down next to them, close enough to widen his legs and brush his knee against Jonas's. Mick laid his head against the back and looked over to meet his gaze, deep and soulful and as always knowing exactly what Jonas was thinking.

"She soothes the wolf."

"Yeah." He stared at her, ran his fingers through her hair. "I didn't expect that," he admitted.

"Because you're so much a protector. A defender. You expect everything in life to be a battle."

"And the two of you don't," he murmured confirmation, knowing it was the truth.

Mick shrugged. "I'll fight to protect the ones I love. But I *am* a healer."

Jonas didn't envy him. To be a healer in a wolf pack was to have dual natures. His wolf was just as predatory as Jonas's, but his human soul made him pay for causing pain or death. It was something Mick was born to do, the same kind of calling to help and cure human physicians felt. Jonas had always admired him for the way he walked the line between his two natures with honor. He loved him for so much more. His dedication. His loyalty. Mick was the kind of man who'd always have your back.

Now they'd brought this woman into the mix, and Jonas wasn't quite sure what to make of her. He'd thought he knew her. Thought he knew what he wanted. He was beginning to accept he was wrong.

His hand rested above her knee, and he itched to slide it up. He wanted to know every pale inch of her. Wanted to find all the hidden spots that turned her on, that tickled. Wanted to discover all the old hurts and make them better. The lighting in the room was dim, but he didn't need more to make out the scars crisscrossing her thighs. He hadn't missed them when she'd turned her back and walked into the bathroom with Mick earlier.

He kept a tight stranglehold on his rage. It wouldn't help her to see it, but he couldn't fight the desire to find the monster who'd left them on her and rip him apart piece by piece. If he'd claimed her before her father had shown up at their gates demanding her return, he would have known, and the man wouldn't still be breathing.

The need for vengeance grew to a pulsing fury. His hold on her tightened until she voiced a sleepy complaint, and he released her so fast she almost fell off his lap. This was his worst nightmare, inadvertently hurting his mate because she was human. Because sometimes he forgot his own strength. It was only her hand twisted in his shirt and Mick's quick leap that saved her from a nasty bump on the head. He didn't release her to Mick's hold, though. He pulled her close, careful this time not to do it too tightly, and met Mick's gaze over her head.

"The moon is still up," Mick said softly. "Let's go run."

His first instinct was to refuse. How could they leave their mate unprotected?

"She's safe here," Mick reminded him. "She's on our land, and no wolf would dare touch her. She carries our scents now."

Still, Jonas hesitated until Mick rolled his eyes and huffed. "You can't stand guard all the time, and neither can I. She has a long way to go to heal, and overprotectiveness will stunt that healing," he said bluntly. "Is that what you want?"

"Of course not."

"Then take charge of the wolf. You're letting the animal have control."

Jonas responded to the insult with a low growl, but he didn't try to defend himself. After standing, he passed her over to Mick, who carried her down the hall and put her in bed. Jonas had to force himself to step outside and strip.

He didn't want to leave her alone, but he could see the wild joy in Mick as he joined him and shifted. It was the only night a month they could run together. Jonas owed it to him. He had no control over the twist of fate that left Mick only

able to change on a full moon. It had taken a couple of years to get over feeling a bit guilty about it.

Even during the times when Mick was angry and disgusted with him, the times he either kicked Jonas out of his house or moved out of Jonas's house, Jonas made sure they were together this night. It was the only night they really let themselves go. The only night when their relationship was nothing but raw emotion. It seemed fitting somehow they'd joined Harper to them on a full moon. No logic or forethought or illusions of being civilized had gone into the decision.

Out in the yard, Mick danced and yipped at him. He was anxious to run. Jonas smiled. Probably to fuck too. He shifted into his wolf form and let the euphoria of the moment take him as he chased after Mick under the glow of the moon.

Chapter Seven

“Okay. Concentrate on the wick and try it again,” Harper told Liza.

Her cousin scowled at the candle, and a tiny flame sputtered for a second before going out. They’d claimed a back corner of Liza’s veranda and dragged a tall table and candles out to practice. It was a nice morning, and well, safer to play with fire *outside*.

“Why haven’t you learned this before?” she asked curiously. It was simple magic Liza should have learned as a kid.

“I couldn’t access my magic until a few months ago.”

She shrugged as if it was no big deal, and Harper didn’t push for more information. It was rare, but she’d heard of cases where a witch had powers but couldn’t use them. If the barrier in the mind ever broke, it was usually because of something deeply personal or traumatic. She would bet in Liza’s case it had been joining with her mates.

She ignored her curiosity and watched as Liza tried it again with much more success. Harper laughed as Liza yelped and jumped back from the flame she’d brought up. “I don’t think you really need lessons from me.”

She pointed to the flickering candle, and her cousin grinned at her.

“That’s a pretty nifty talent to have, isn’t it?”

“Well, you’ll never be cold on a snowy night.”

“Oh, honey,” Liza joked. “I don’t need a fire to stay warm.”

Harper blushed. She’d seen the way Liza’s mates looked at her, so there was no doubt in her mind she spoke the unabashed truth. Liza gave her a wicked grin.

“Neither do you.”

If it was possible, her blush got hotter. She turned and tugged at the top of her turtleneck. She *knew* those marks were hidden, so why did she feel like everyone she’d come into contact with this morning had seen them? She considered bluffing, but what would be the point? Besides, maybe Liza would explain a few things.

She walked to the porch swing, sat, and faced her cousin, who leaned against a railing. “Why the lessons? You obviously don’t need them.”

Liza arched an eyebrow. “Really? That’s where you want to start?”

It got very annoying dealing with people who always seemed to read her mind. Although in Liza’s case, that might be reality. She didn’t know her cousin well, didn’t know what secret talents she might be hiding.

“It’s a place to begin,” she pointed out, proud of herself for not backing down.

Liza’s lips turned up in a half smile of approval, and she nodded. “I think you’ll do.” She sat in a rocking chair a couple of feet away, and Harper pushed her foot against the floor, set the swing into a gentle motion. “For the pack, of course. Your being around me and Caleb and Zach so much shows that we’ve accepted you.”

“And that’s important?” She felt a little light-headed and was glad she was already sitting down. It was so much more important today than yesterday.

“Isn’t it?” Liza asked, her voice kind and gentle. “Aren’t Mick and Jonas important to you?”

“How do you know about them?”

“I can’t shift, but I do have all the normal abilities of a werewolf in human form.”

Her confusion must have shown.

“Your scent. It’s covered in theirs.”

She couldn’t have hid her horrified embarrassment if she’d tried. Liza moved much faster than a woman that pregnant should have been able to and sat next to Harper on the swing.

Liza took her hand. "Hey, it's okay. This is normal for us."

Her laugh sounded a little manic. "Normal? Everyone knows?" Liza nodded. "What happens when they get tired of me? When they decide they've made a mistake?"

When Jonas decided that, she wanted to say. When her heart lay broken and bleeding at her feet. Liza's look was one of confusion that morphed into exasperation.

"Didn't explain anything, did he?"

"Who?"

"Jonas."

She opened her mouth to defend him, then snapped it shut. What the hell? He turned her on, and okay, he *definitely* delivered, but she didn't even like the man. Right?

Liza took pity on her. "They won't decide that. We wouldn't scent them on you if you weren't their mate. And your scent is on them. There's no breaking a mate bond, Harper. You've been here long enough to pick that up."

She knew the werewolves took their mate thing seriously, she just hadn't realized how seriously. Or maybe, if she were honest with herself, she'd simply chosen not to see it was a bit more permanent than marriage.

"Jonas won't like that," she whispered. "He doesn't like me much."

Liza tilted her head to one side and studied her. Harper felt like a science specimen. "Likes you well enough to get naked and mark you."

The blush came back in a furious rush. "Gods." She groaned. "Please tell me not everyone knows that."

"Sorry." Liza shrugged with a teasing grin.

Harper put her face in her hands and mumbled. "That is so embarrassing. *I* can't believe I had sex. With both of them. Everyone else has to know it too?"

"It's normal for us. A strong sexual appetite is part of a werewolf's nature."

"I'm not a werewolf."

Liza smiled. "But you belong to one. Well, two."

A door opened at the other end of the porch, interrupting them. Caleb poked his head out, grinned, and was in front of them in seconds, but he didn't even notice Harper. He pulled Liza up and kissed her. Harper jerked away from the naked passion, and her gaze clashed with Jonas's who was standing at the door Caleb had exited from.

He strolled forward, smiling a little the closer he got, probably at the appreciation she couldn't hide. She ordered her eyes to move away, close, something other than drink him in, but they didn't obey. By the time he stopped in front her, she'd completely forgotten they weren't alone.

He stopped close, not quite enough to touch, and reached out with one hand to grip the back of her head. He stared at her a second before hauling her forward and fusing his mouth over hers. His tongue dueled with hers; his teeth nipped. She was breathless and clinging to his shoulders for support when he pulled back.

"Glad to see you took care of that," Caleb said drily.

She wanted to melt into the floor. Jonas pulled her under his arm, and she hid her face in his chest. His shielding her, protecting her seemed out of character, but she didn't hesitate to take advantage of it.

"You ready?" Caleb asked.

"Whenever you are," Jonas replied. She hadn't been around long, but even she knew that cocky reply and tone were out of line. She turned her face enough to see, wondering if she needed to get the hell out of the way, but Caleb only laughed. He pulled Liza with him, and they disappeared into the house.

"Should you be talking to him like that?" She regretted it as soon as the words were out of her mouth. "Sorry. None of my business."

His hand slid from the back of her head between her turtleneck and skin to rub over the spot where he'd bitten her the previous night.

“This gives you rights.”

His face remained calm, but his voice was moody, questioning. The skin-to-skin contact, despite the innocuous spot, was beginning to make her toes curl. She tilted her chin up and gave herself a pep talk. Damn it, she *could* have a conversation that did not devolve into sex or arguing. He’d done something, changed something between them, and she needed to know what. It took all her strength of will, but she managed to free herself from his embrace, ignoring a pang of disappointment when he let her go.

“What rights do I have?” She made her voice firm. She wanted to be clear on this.

His eyes glowed hot, but the moodiness, the edginess remained. “The same as any mate.”

She dug her fingernails into her palms while she fought the urge to punch him. She’d never struck another soul in her life, but right now it was damned tempting. “I’m not one of you. I didn’t grow up here like Liza. I don’t. Know. What. That. Means. Jonas!”

Okay, so she lost it. Her fist connected to his chest, though it didn’t faze him. He grabbed her elbow and yanked her close, a feral smile on his face.

“I like this side of you,” he growled softly, bending to nuzzle her neck.

It stunned her. First, that a male of her acquaintance hadn’t lashed out at her outburst. And second, that he had most definitely liked it. His erection ground against her stomach, and his teeth, nibbling her through her turtleneck, made her eyes roll to the back of her head. She was gasping when he gently set her away from him.

“The explanations will have to wait. I have a meeting with Liza and Caleb, and Mick is waiting for you at the clinic.”

“Why?”

“I think he misses you,” Jonas teased.

“No. Why the meeting?”

Who cared if she was being pushy? He said she had the same rights as any mate. Surely that included questions.

“Pack business. Boring stuff.”

Ouch. Guess having rights didn’t equate to being trusted. He leaned over to buss her cheek and turned her toward the stairs.

“Go find Mick, darlin’,” he ordered. With a slap on her ass he was gone, leaving her to fume through her wounded pride.

Chapter Eight

Zach waited just inside the door, leaning one shoulder against the wall with his hands stuffed in his pockets. He fell into step beside Jonas as he walked down the hall.

“She’s going to make you pay for that.”

“Who? What are you talking about?”

“Your mate. Blowing her off. The ‘don’t worry your pretty little head about it’ response back there.”

He snorted. “Not your business how I deal with my mate, Beta.”

Zach grabbed his arm, stopping him before he could open the alpha’s office door. “*Everything* in this pack is my business, up to and including how you treat your mate. Caleb and Liza think you have it under control. I think that’s about as far from the truth as you can get.”

Jonas wrenched free, barely restraining a growl. Harper was *his*. He wasn’t going to tolerate any interference, not even from his beta.

“I seem to recall your relationship had some growing pains,” Jonas reminded him, fighting to contain his wolf.

Zach watched him and waited until he was back under control before he nodded. “That it did.”

Zach reached out to open the door but paused a moment first. He continued, “Harper is fragile, but you shouldn’t confuse that with broken. A woman doesn’t survive what we suspect she did without an iron will.”

Jonas wasn't sure he agreed, but he nodded anyway and followed Zach inside. Everyone else was already there. Caleb and Liza—alpha and paladin. Plus Gabby and Ethan, two of the other lieutenants, the highest-ranking soldiers in the pack. The six of them met at least once a week.

Caleb was behind his desk, and Zach sat in an armchair off to the side. Liza went to take her usual perch on the front corner of the desk, but Zach grabbed her before she could and pulled her into his lap. Everyone pretended not to notice the way she blushed.

There was another chair in front of the desk and a sofa tucked under the window. Normally, the chair was his, but when he signaled Gabby to haul her ass out of it, she gave him a mutinous look. Ethan didn't look much happier on the sofa. Jonas sighed. He was going to have to do something about that. Like he didn't have enough going on? He sat next to the younger werewolf and let his mind wander as they went over training reports and other mundane tasks involved in running a pack the size of Redhawke.

"Something odd in town," Ethan said when Liza asked if there was anything else. "There seem to be a lot of new people coming and going, but none of my people have been able to get any specifics."

"For how long?" Jonas asked.

"A few days. Maybe a week."

He looked at Liza and saw his suspicions mirrored in her eyes. "Harper's—" He cut off *people*. She wasn't theirs anymore. "Family?" Though he objected to calling them family also.

Liza nodded agreement. "Go check it out."

"Anything else?"

He stood and looked around the room. When everyone either shook their head or said no, he stalked out, digging his cell phone from his pocket as he hurried to his house and his truck. He put the call through, and it was answered on the first ring.

“Yeah?”

“Mick. You got Harper?”

“She just walked in.”

“Keep her close.”

“What’s wrong?” Mick snarled, low and mean. Sometimes Jonas forgot he had that side.

“People snooping around town. I’m going to check it out.”

“Watch your back.” It was as close as Mick would come to telling him to be careful.

“Always.”

Jonas got his truck and drove out the main gate, and hung a left on the dirt track to head for the closest town, which was twenty miles away. Redemption, Florida, wasn’t much more than a hole-in-the-wall. Redhawke had spent generations encouraging that. Half of the town’s five hundred residents were pack members, either werewolves or humans who had mated in. The other half knew exactly who owned the land they bordered, and most were the descendants of the original founders. A handful were refugees from the magical world.

Redhawke had a good relationship with the town. They depended upon each other for survival. Thirty minutes later Jonas turned onto Main Street. It was a scenic little town, mostly turn-of-the-century buildings and bungalows. He pulled into a parking slot in front of the tiny police department and strolled inside to find the man who ran the operation.

He was sitting behind a desk, leaning back in his chair with his feet propped on the edge while he juggled tennis balls in the air without using his hands. He grinned when Jonas walked in. He was one of the few people Jonas called friend, a lone wizard in werewolf territory, who’d earned respect and trust over many years.

“What brings Redhawke calling?” Harris asked.

“Heard there’ve been some strangers around.”

“Ah, good.” Harris’s feet thumped to the floor. “Ethan found you.”

“Why didn’t you call me?”

“Tried yesterday. You didn’t answer.”

There was a question in that statement, but Jonas didn’t respond to it. He’d been focused on Mick because of the full moon, and later Harper.

“Fill me in now.”

Harris shrugged, standing as he grabbed his hat and gestured for the door. “There were five or six snooping around. I got wind of it yesterday morning, but a couple of the locals remember seeing them as early as a week ago. Though, looks like they’ve all cleared out. ’Cept for one.”

“Describe him.” The wolf was in his voice. Harris gestured him to follow.

“Let’s go visit. He’s staying at the McCaller place.”

The last McCaller had died before Jonas was born, and left his house to the town. The town used it as an inn. Redemption was wolf territory, but they’d established it as a neutral meeting ground decades ago. Whoever the stranger was, he wasn’t hiding. Jonas would lay odds on Harper’s father. He was arrogant and brazen. Neutrality or not, that particular wizard had no business there.

Since it wasn’t far, they walked down Main Street and then turned left to follow a lane to its end. The big house sat on a corner, porches wrapping the exterior upstairs and down. Their guest was waiting in a rocking chair when Jonas walked up the steps. It wasn’t who he had been expecting, but he shouldn’t have been surprised.

“Dane.”

“Took you long enough,” he grumbled.

Jonas cocked an eyebrow. “If you wanted to speak to me, you could have done it yesterday.”

Dane rolled his eyes. Jonas supposed the kid was now technically family, his brother-in-law, and maybe he shouldn't give the juvenile a lesson in manners. He was pretty damned tempted, though.

"Harper's been through enough. I *did* give her a phone. I figured *you'd* use it."

"I was busy," he said defensively, and that just pissed him off. He was not explaining his actions to a damned kid. "Why are you still here?" he growled.

Dane's spine stiffened until he stood at his full height, and he narrowed his eyes. Jonas studied him. The kid was tall and lanky. He hadn't filled out yet, but there was promise there, especially in the hard, determined look on his face.

"I hope I didn't make a mistake sending my sister here. You're supposed to take care of her."

"Says who?"

The kid did the shutting-down thing Harper was so good at. His expression went blank, even his eyes. He held himself calm and loose, no sign of distress in his body language. It didn't just fuel Jonas's anger. It made him sad. No kid should have to learn that kind of coping mechanism.

"Your father must be one real piece of work," he muttered.

"You don't know that half of it." Dane's smile was cold and humorless. "If you can't or are unwilling to protect my sister, bring her to me. I'll take her somewhere safe. Somewhere he can't reach us."

Jonas didn't care how the fuck important the kid was to Harper. Dane wasn't taking her anywhere. In one long stride, he had the boy's shirt twisted in his hand, yanking him close.

"No one takes what is mine, and she *is* mine, you understand?" He felt magical power building in the air and shook him. "Don't even think about it, kid."

Dane ignored him and used his magic to add to his strength enough to shove Jonas away. "If you think my father has given up, you're gonna get her killed. He won't hold back out of concern for her feelings."

Jonas bristled at the unspoken threat. "And you are?" Dane just nodded once, curtly. But there was something in the kid's eyes. Something...uncertain.

"Are you strong enough to fight your father?"

"Yes. Maybe." Dane shrugged. "He's older and a hell of a lot more experienced."

Jonas made a split-second decision he was sure he would regret later. "Go pack. You're coming back with me." He opened his mouth to protest, and Jonas speared him with the look that made every juvenile in the pack obey him. "Do it."

He sprinted off, and Jonas pulled out his phone to scroll through numbers. He should call Liza first. She'd welcomed Harper into the pack, but he got the feeling she'd draw the line at Dane. Caleb would back her up. Zach, on the other hand, had left four brothers behind in his pack when he'd joined Redhawke. He might be more sympathetic. Plus he understood better than Caleb the struggle Jonas was experiencing. He found the number, hit Send, and stepped off the porch to get some privacy.

"Jonas. What's going on in Redemption?"

"Harper's brother is here."

There was a long silence. "And?"

"I'm bringing him in. He's definitely not a threat to Harper, and I don't think he is to us either."

"What else?"

"He thinks their father hasn't given up. That he'll be back. Zach, this is her kid brother. I can't leave him out here unprotected."

Zach sighed. "You didn't call Liza, did you?"

"No."

Another long silence.

"Liza is an only child. So is Caleb." Jonas didn't add that he was too.

"Sneaky, Jonas. I'm not sure whether I should congratulate you or beat you into the ground."

"You can try," Jonas growled before thinking better of it.

Zach chuckled. The bastard knew how much that irritated Jonas. "Bring the kid. But he's your responsibility."

"Of course. Thanks."

"No problem. You're the one who's gonna have to deal with Liza. She won't be happy about you circumventing her." He sounded entirely too happy about that circumstance.

"Right," Jonas answered drily before flipping the phone closed on Zach's laughter.

Dane waited silently on the porch, a big duffel slung over one shoulder. He looked mutinous, but he obeyed when Jonas gestured him forward. Jonas and Harris dropped back, but neither spoke until they were on Main Street and almost to the truck.

"Care to explain what the hell is going on?" Harris asked.

"My mate's younger brother."

"Mate?"

"Harper. You've met her."

"So all the activity in town was looking for her?"

"Probably. And we don't want anyone finding her."

"Got it. I'll call if anyone else shows up."

"Thanks." He shook Harris's hand and shoved the kid in the truck before recalling the other matter he needed to deal with.

"Anything else you need?" Harris asked.

As a matter of fact there was. Crossing his arms over his chest, Jonas turned back to face Harris.

"Yeah, one thing. About Gabby and Ethan. But first," he added in a lazy drawl, "nice of you to step up and help when Dane tried to use his magic against me."

Harris grinned, cocky and assured and arrogant. "He's a puppy. You didn't need my help."

True, but... "This is our town, Harris. We welcomed you. You belong. We need to be certain where your loyalties lie."

"You don't have to worry about that."

Jonas nodded. "Good. So about Gabby and Ethan."

Harris's expression turned wary. "What about them?"

"Don't you think it's time y'all all made up and made nice?"

"I have no idea what you're talking about." His tone had turned flinty.

"Sure you don't. You know how to find me if you want advice on straightening that out."

Harris snorted. "Right. 'Cause you're an expert on relationships."

Jonas grinned. "I'm learning at least."

Harris shook his head, shooting him a dirty look before turning and going back inside the police station.

Jonas got in the truck and turned toward home. His phone rang on the drive, and he might have winced a little when Liza's name showed up on the screen.

"Yeah?"

She jumped straight to the point. "You know, you could have asked me."

"I thought you'd say no."

"I would have. At first. We don't need to create an interspecies incident. There was almost a war when my parents mated."

The reminder made him go cold. "I can take Harper and Dane somewhere away from the pack. Mick will come with us, of course."

"Oh, give me a break. That is not what I'm suggesting. You're Redhawke. And so is Harper. And now her brother too, I guess." Liza sighed. "We just need to be prepared."

“What do you want to do?” Liza was paladin. He’d defer to her on this.

“For today, you take care of Harper and her brother. I’ll talk to Ethan and Gabby about increasing patrols and my mom about magical defenses. I’ll see you in my office at dawn.”

“Fine. See you then.”

He ended the call just as he drove through the gate. The question was where to put his new charge? Harper and Mick both lived in small cottages with one bedroom. His house had four. No-brainer, right? Except the part where he convinced everyone to move in with him.

He drove to his place. He figured he could tell Harper there was no way he was letting Dane out of his sight, and she’d hustle her cute little butt on over. Mick wasn’t so easy. Jonas might have to grovel.

Chapter Nine

Harper was waiting for him. She'd gone to Mick like she had been told. Like a good little girl. It made her spitting mad to be out from under her father's thumb and following the orders of a different man. So she'd hung around a few minutes until Mick's bright gaze finally focused back onto his work, and then she'd sneaked out.

Which was surprisingly harder than it sounded. She liked watching him. Jonas had farmed her off to Mick a few times, so she'd had time to observe him with his patients. Some he was kind and gentle with, his voice soft and soothing. Others he was just as obnoxious an alpha as Jonas, bullying soldiers until they allowed treatment or examination.

She went to her place, knowing eventually Jonas would come looking for her. If she weren't careful, he'd order her around, and because against her better judgment she felt safe with him, she'd follow. She'd do it blindly, with no explanations from him, and she knew that was just *wrong*. He wasn't supposed to be keeping her in the dark. She couldn't explain how she knew that, but she did.

What would it take, though? To throw him off balance enough he opened up? To shake him enough he took her seriously? Sighing, she walked to her room. Found her backpack and tossed it on the bed. She couldn't think of a thing. He was just so...Jonas. An immovable force of nature.

How the hell did Mick handle him? She scowled as she moved to the closet and started pulling her few belongings off hangers. She left the things Liza and other women in the pack had given her. When it was all out, she moved to the dresser and did the same.

Then she realized Mick didn't have much more of a handle on Jonas than she did. How many times had she seen him and Jonas interact and nothing but frustration and sadness in Mick's eyes when Jonas turned away? Sucking in a deep breath, she stopped packing and sat on the bed, struck by new knowledge. She wasn't the problem. Mick wasn't the problem.

Jonas, on the other hand... She appreciated that he was a dominant male. Hell, she liked it. But even a dominant male had to let loose with the people he loved, right? Caleb and Zach didn't seem to have that problem with Liza.

She shoved the rest of her things into the pack and opened the back door. Okay, Liza didn't have the same problem with her mates, but that didn't mean it had always been that way, right? Dropping the pack just inside the kitchen door, she stepped out, tipped her head back to enjoy the afternoon sun before setting off. She needed advice, and she couldn't imagine anyone better than her cousin to seek it from.

When she walked up the stairs of the alpha's house, she didn't sense Liza inside. She hesitated but knocked anyway. She'd turned, given up on any answer when it was pulled open with an abrupt "yes?"

"Zach. Is Liza around?" Why did she ask? She already knew the answer.

"Sorry, little one. It's just me." He gave her a teasing smile and opened the door wide. "Come in. Want a beer? It's five o'clock somewhere, right?"

She laughed. "Yes, it is. And yes, I want one."

She followed him to the kitchen and sat at the long table when he motioned. A second later he handed her a cold Coors Light.

"What brings you here?"

She shrugged. He was male and huge and outranked Jonas. He scared her as much as he comforted her. His hand covered hers.

"Harper?"

"I don't know what I'm doing," she confessed in a soft whisper. "I thought it was just me, but I think he might be just as bad with Mick."

She clapped a hand over her mouth. This was their beta. She shouldn't be talking to him about their private relationships.

With a small smile, he pulled his hand away.

"You aren't betraying anyone, Harper," he said gently. "Jonas is hard to handle."

She bristled. Okay, fine. He was an obnoxious jerk, but he was *her* obnoxious jerk, damn it. But Zach was just trying to help. She took a deep breath.

"I don't know what to do. Part of me just wants to say all or nothing. Pick."

Zach laughed. "Might be the best way."

"An ultimatum? Even if he gave in, he'd never forgive me."

"This kind of ultimatum?" She swiveled to see Jonas standing in the doorway, her backpack held up in his hand. "Going somewhere, darlin'?"

Jonas watched her swallow, the motion as exaggerated as her fear. Good. He couldn't remember the last time he had been this fucking pissed. Bad enough she'd packed to leave him, but to find her with another man? Even knowing Zach was totally committed to Liza didn't soothe the sting of that betrayal. She'd gone to another person, another man for advice? He felt fur under his flesh. Claws poking through his skin.

She stood and faced him, gingerly took one step forward. He clenched his fists and felt skin break. She should be running like hell. He was losing control. But she kept coming closer. Her hand lifted to rest on the side of his face.

"I'm not afraid of you," she whispered.

"You should be."

She trembled and nodded her head. "Yeah. Probably."

He wrapped an arm around her back and pulled her close, glaring at Zach over her head. "Interfering again?"

Zach gave him a hard look. "I'm taking care of a member of the pack. You'd do the same."

That got through to him as nothing else would have. Protecting, caring for the needs of others was in his makeup. It was the emotional shit he had problems with. Not being able to deal with that was going to cost him both Mick and Harper if he weren't careful. The only reason it hadn't cost him Mick yet was the man was stubborn as hell. But it wasn't fair to either of them, and Jonas knew it.

With a nod at Zach, he led her outside, taking her hand as he urged her down the porch steps. "Where were you going to run to?"

She glanced over at him, but he couldn't read her expression. "I wasn't running exactly. I thought I'd take a few days in town. Think things over."

Right. She was running. He couldn't, wouldn't let her do that. "Look. I know I'm hard to live with."

His confession startled a laugh out of her. "Ya think?"

He scowled down at her. "I'm trying to be honest here in a way that is totally alien to me, okay?"

"Okay."

She answered simply, calmly, not asking or pushing for more. Unfortunately, she sounded more resigned than anything, and that scared the hell out of him. He panicked. He couldn't lose her now. And not just her. Mick would go with her. He would lose them both.

He waited until they were on the path, out of sight from the house, and pulled her to a stop. But he had no idea what to say. No idea how to make this better.

"What?" She lifted her hand to his face again, her expression softening a little.

He kept his arms at his sides. If he touched her, there would be no going back. "I can't..." How did he bare his soul? "I can't lose you. Or Mick."

He thought he could see her heart in her eyes. Just for a second. Just long enough to pierce his soul before she shut down. “You’ll lose us both.”

She spoke nothing but the truth, and he knew it. “Give me time?”

Her nod was reluctant, but she fell into step beside him, quiet until they took a turn she didn’t expect. “Where are we going?”

“My house. It’s bigger than yours or Mick’s, and we have a guest.”

“Who?” She swung to a stop, and he heard the sudden pounding of her heart. The sudden surge of suspicion and fear.

“Your brother. Do I need to worry about that, Harper? Is he dangerous?” He didn’t think so, but her reaction was so extreme he had to ask.

She took a deep breath, her scent immediately changing to one of relief. She’d been afraid it was someone else, probably her father. He was disappointed. And insulted. But he couldn’t blame her, could he? She was used to betrayal from the one person who should have loved her more than anything else, and she hadn’t been with Redhawke long enough, with him and Mick long enough, to fully accept they were nothing like that. Simple logic that made sense, but it still hurt.

“There is no way I’d bring your father here or hand you over to him,” he said coldly.

She shrugged and started walking again. “I really want to believe that, Jonas. But you aren’t exactly forthcoming, you know.”

They continued in silence. She seemed calm, but he stewed. It was an odd reversal. He wasn’t used to feeling off balance, and he didn’t like it one bit. He reclaimed her hand, which calmed his wolf, so he refused to let her go when she tugged.

“You mean everything to me. You and Mick. The three of us—we’re meant to be together. You know it.”

There was a break in the trees, and he saw his backyard. She pulled him to a stop at the tree line.

“Maybe we are. I won’t pretend that I can handle this. But I’ll try. I want to try, Jonas, if you don’t cut me out. I can’t take that. Don’t treat me like I’m a kid who can’t handle reality.”

“And if I think you’ve dealt with enough evil in your life?”

She smiled. “I came through it, didn’t I? There isn’t any avoiding it.”

“Don’t ask me to pretend your life has been normal, Harper. I can’t do it.”

She sighed. “It’s not like I’m bitching and moaning and whining about it, you know? If I can move on from it, why are you dwelling on it?”

He pulled her to a stop at the picnic table, set her on the edge, and moved between her legs. She spread them to make a space for him, sliding her hands up his chest, and he felt his heart crack open a bit.

“Why?” he ruminated about it while he traced the freckles across her nose. “You’re mine. It pisses me off to know I couldn’t keep you safe.”

“You didn’t even know me,” she said softly, her voice soothing.

He shrugged. “Doesn’t really matter, darlin’. It’s how I feel.”

He couldn’t resist touching her anymore, and his hands slid up under that stupid turtleneck. Palms flat, fingers splayed as his hands slowly crept up. With each inch her eyes changed, growing hazy with lust. Her breath hitched when he finally reached her breasts and firmly palmed their weight.

“My brother...” she let the thought trail off.

“Sent him off with a pack member. He’s getting the grand tour.” He nibbled her neck while pushing the top of her bra down to stroke her nipples. “Then dinner. We won’t see him for a while.”

He lifted her shirt and stared at the tantalizing flesh he’d left bared. Her skin pimpled in the cool air, her nipples growing into hard points that begged to be sucked. He leaned over and pulled one into his mouth, supporting her with one hand on her back.

He heard Mick approach, his scent heavy and aroused, his cock bulging in his jeans when Jonas looked down the length of the table to meet his gaze.

“We should take this inside,” Mick said.

“Mmmm.” He moaned before releasing her nipple with a pop. “Yes.”

He swung her over his shoulder in a fireman’s carry, smiling at her startled giggle. And then she grabbed his ass. The little minx.

“I *can* walk.”

Her voice was husky, teasing, and very satisfied. He didn’t let her down until he’d run up the stairs in the house and walked down the long hall to the bedroom. There he dropped her on the bed. Laughing, she crawled to the edge and hopped down, giving him the sultriest look he’d ever seen. *Oh shit, I’m in trouble.*

He stood stock-still, afraid to move as she circled him, trailing one hand on his chest as she walked around his body. When she stopped in front of him, she tugged the hem of his shirt and glared until he cooperated, pulled it off, and tossed it aside. Then she slid forward, her hands flat on his belly, and licked his nipple. Scraped her teeth over it. He lifted his hands to grab her, and she jumped back.

“No,” she said firmly. “It’s my turn.”

Sitting on the edge of the bed, she pulled off her boots and socks, followed by the shirt. Her jeans. Until she was left only in bra and underwear. He remained rooted in place, gaze clashing with Mick’s where he leaned lazily against the back wall. Mick, who didn’t look at all surprised by the new brazenness of their mate. Had they planned this? The demand for that answer was on the tip of his tongue, but suddenly she was in front of him again. Touching him. Exploring. The look on her face was so rapt he was afraid to breathe.

“I’ve always wondered,” she said in a breathy wisp of air, kissing her way down his body, “what a man’s cock tastes like.”

She dropped to her knees. Then she unsnapped the button on his jeans and rested her fingers on his zipper. She looked up at him through thick eyelashes, gaze

a little uncertain, but a lot turned on. Asking for permission. It was damned hard not to order her to unzip him, not to insist she take him in her mouth. It was the heat between them bringing her to this point. He couldn't believe she was really ready for it. His claws pierced his palms, and he forced them to retract.

"You don't have to, Harper," he managed to croak out.

"But if I want to?" Her fingers gave a little tug. The zipper gave half an inch. "If I belong to you, then don't you belong to me?"

She tugged the zipper a bit, exposing the swollen head of his cock. She leaned forward and gave it a long lick.

"Yes," he hissed.

Instead of taking him in her mouth, she looked up again. "Yes, you want in my mouth? Or yes, you belong to me too?"

She was killing him. She wanted to talk about the nature of mating now?

"Both," he ground out between clenched teeth. And if it wasn't soon, he'd throttle her for teasing him later.

But she gave him that sultry smile again, carefully unzipped him the rest of the way, and with her hands starting on his hip bones, slowly pushed his jeans down. They caught at his knees, and as much as he wanted to kick them free, there was no fucking way he was moving.

Okay, Harper. Now what?

She had no idea what had come over her, but she liked it. She liked it a lot. She especially liked looking up and seeing that bewildered, wild, and barely controlled look on Jonas's face. Everything going according to plan.

She'd realized on the walk to his house that the problem with Jonas was control. He had too much of it, and he used it to hide his emotions. Control saved him from having to tell Mick how much he loved him. Saved him from telling her... She wasn't sure what yet. The only way to really get through to Jonas was to make

him lose control. She just hoped she could handle what she unleashed if she succeeded.

One thing she was certain of, though. She wasn't going back to her old life. Sterile and cold and full of people who silently hated each other. No way. And she wasn't going to let Jonas create some little microcosm of it to house her in here either.

Decision made, she gripped his hips, then leaned forward to place her tongue at the bottom of his erection and licked up. He tasted masculine and salty. He tasted of the wildness of the forest. She licked again, slower this time, exploring the ridges of hard flesh, searching out and tasting bulging veins. His hands tightened on her nape, urging her up, toward the head.

She followed his lead, and he moved his hands to grip her shoulders. Her tongue followed. First licking around the head, then dragging over the slit, taking in a tiny drop of precum as she did. He jerked when she took the head of his cock into her mouth and sucked.

"Gods, Harper. Like that."

She let her lips slide lower, taking his shaft into her mouth before slowly withdrawing, sucking as she moved, rolling her tongue under the skin just below the head of his cock. He groaned when she took him back in, this time about half his length.

Her hands rested on his thighs, and she repeated the action, again and again. His muscles trembled, but he didn't move. Didn't thrust into her mouth. Didn't fist her hair. He was still too much in control.

She might not have any experience, but she'd read. A lot. She wanted to please him, to break his hold over himself. She slid one hand around to cup his balls. Squeezed and kneaded a bit harder when he rewarded her with a raw groan. She bobbed her head faster on his cock.

And finally his control began to slip. Both hands fisted in her hair and his hips began to subtly thrust to meet her. But she wanted more. So much more. She took him deeper. Allowing her teeth to barely scrape the sensitive skin.

His fingers moved to grip her head, to guide her faster, and she hummed with the exquisite feeling of satisfaction. She dug her nails in his ass when he tried to slow the pace, the depth of his strokes, and to pull away, and with a growl that infamous control finally snapped.

He fucked her mouth. Hard. Fast. The head of his cock hitting the back of her throat. Until finally he was coming, roaring in the still air, cum shooting down her throat as he held her in place to take it all. With a great shudder his grip loosened, but he stood rigidly as she let his flaccid cock slip from her mouth. She licked him, cleaning the last of his cum away, loving the way his cock jerked at her touch even though he'd just come. Loving his taste. Loving the way she'd made him lose control.

When she looked up, he wore a stunned expression she couldn't help but smile at. He pulled her to her feet, but it was the growl behind her that made her gasp. Mick pushed against her so she was sandwiched between them. Two hard bodies crowding her close, the one behind her fully aroused. She moaned, excitement surging through her, every pore feeling electrically alive.

Jonas took her mouth while Mick's cock pressed against her lower back. He bit into her nape while his hands slid to her front, claiming her nipples in pinches that were just on the right side of pain. Jonas worked his hand down her body, pushed two fingers into her pussy with no warning, making her arch into him and break his kiss with a cry.

She was wet. Hot. Wanting. There was no way to conceal it, and she didn't try. She just wanted them. Both of them together, at once, she realized with a jolt and pushed back, grinding her ass against Mick.

"Oh, sugar," he muttered. "Trust me, we'll get to that soon enough."

His fingers tightened on her nipples as he kissed his way across her shoulders.

“Not soon enough,” she complained.

A fire was building in her, so hot it threatened to wipe her away. Jonas removed his fingers, tracking slowly to her rear entrance, and she froze, held her breath as anticipation swept her away. He pushed one finger coated with her juices gently against her opening, rimmed it. He didn’t satisfy the need until she made a sound almost like a growl and pushed against him.

He pushed one finger knuckle deep, and it startled her so much her eyes snapped open. When had she shut them? She didn’t remember. He watched her, his gaze hooded and hungry and intense. Then he worked his finger in higher, added a second, and she felt the first resistance of her body.

“You are so tight, darlin’,” he whispered, leaning in for a quick kiss. “You have to relax.”

She nodded—she couldn’t speak if her life depended on it—and concentrated on relaxing her muscles, on accepting him. She wanted them both. She wanted them like this.

Jonas smiled and praised her, his fingers slipping farther into her rear entrance. “Just like that.”

Mick moved one hand down her body, and dipped his fingers into her pussy just enough to pull out her cream before rolling over her clit. Just like that she came, a tidal force of pleasure consuming her completely, and she didn’t notice they’d moved. Didn’t notice until she blinked and found herself braced on her hands, leaning over the bed with Jonas behind her.

His hands stroked her back, her flanks, dipping in every now and then to rub against her asshole. Groaning, she moved against him. Silently demanding until he chuckled, until he gave her one finger and held her still. She quivered with pent-up need.

“Darlin’, I don’t think you’ve done this before.”

She gasped when he gave her a slow back-and-forward thrust. “No.”

“Hmm,” he hummed.

She heard a squeaking sound. Then he worked a second finger in, easier than before. Lubricant. His fingers worked her, scissoring a bit. Stretching her, she realized. She held her breath, desire building, but then he withdrew, and there was more of that squeaking sound.

He sat beside her, totally back in control. His face was calm, his eyes hot but not demanding. She sensed Mick behind her, tried to turn to look, but Jonas leaned in and took her lips. Mick’s hand pressed against her lower back, pushing her till she broke the kiss and her upper body rested on the bed.

Jonas urged her knees apart, and Mick pressed something hard and cold and slick against her ass. Her eyes jerked up to meet his. That was not Mick’s cock pressing against her, into her. Jonas smiled.

“Relax. It’ll hurt more if you don’t. Or we can try another time?” Jonas made the offer, but there was something in his gaze that suggested this was a test. She bit her lip and shook her head. Then there was more invasion, enough to wring a gasp from her and a panicked look. “It’s an anal plug, darlin’. You can’t take either one of us yet. You need to be...stretched.”

When he put it like that, did she really want to do this? Hell yes. She expected it to hurt at first. But she knew they wanted her to feel pleasure so if it was only pain, they wouldn’t do it, would they? She nodded, somehow forced her muscles to go lax.

“Do it,” she whispered.

Mick didn’t wait for another invitation. He pushed in, fast and sure, wringing a gasp of pain from her when it pushed past the ring of muscle unaccustomed to such invasion. But then it was in place, and the discomfort faded. Hands gently laid her on the bed on her side, and Mick laid down next to her, propped up on one elbow.

“Better?”

She couldn't answer. Could only nod, because the plug started to vibrate. Smiling, he pushed her to her back and leaned over her. She was so focused on the wicked intent stamped on his face, she didn't notice Jonas on her other side until he leaned down and sucked on her nipple.

It started easy and gentle, but in seconds his teeth clamped down hard. She lifted her hand to twist in his hair, holding him close. Gods, who knew a little pain could be so good? Her back bowed to give him access, silently begging for more. She squeezed her eyes shut until she felt the same sensation on the opposite breast, this time from fingers instead of teeth. Mick leaned into her slowly to kiss her, a low growl rumbling in his chest.

His lips on hers were so soft, so gentle, so opposite of the other sensations flooding her body that when someone's hand moved to cup her mound, to push fingers into her pussy, she came in a rush. All at once. Mick's tongue thrust into her mouth as she screamed, his big body rolling over hers to thrust his cock into her.

She shook. Consumed. Then she came again, her channel clamping down until he moaned and withdrew. He flipped her over and pulled her to her knees, gave her no warning before thrusting into her from behind. The full feeling in her ass increased, and the vibrations kicked up a notch.

There was no way to fight the pleasure. No way to survive it, maybe. She gave in and became a creature that was nothing but feeling. Nothing but bliss. He made her feel every microsecond of it until she was sure she wouldn't survive. Until she was sure she really could have an overdose of pleasure.

She felt him grow harder, his strokes grow faster, his roar filled her ears, and in one final release she literally saw stars. Her overloaded brain shut down, and she slumped to the bed. Minutes later when she finally could crack open her eyes, they both leaned over her, wearing the same expression of worry. The plug was gone. Her body felt sated and heavy and replete, and she vowed never to move again.

"What?" she asked sleepily.

"You're okay." Jonas's voice was full of relief.

She found the strength to stretch her arms over her head, arching her back to loosen those muscles. “Oh yeah. I’m not moving for a week, but I’m perfect.”

His eyes narrowed, and it made her sex clench.

“It’s a very bad idea to test my control, darlin’.”

“Yeah? I thought it worked out pretty well,” she said smugly.

He growled, his expression stern, but he looked too satisfied to pull it off. She looped her arms around his neck.

“Maybe control is overrated?”

“Not yet.”

He pulled her arms loose and sat up, looking over her moodily. Starting at her face, his gaze moved down her body, stopping at her stomach. His fingertips lightly grazed the faint pale scars there before his lips did the same. She sucked in a breath, tried to move him away, but he wouldn’t budge until he’d traced them all. He sat up, his gaze traveled down to her thighs, and Mick’s lips took over where Jonas had stopped.

Jonas didn’t speak until Mick lifted his head. His eyes were cold and determined. “This is a story I will have from you, Harper.”

She tried to wiggle her way out between them, to avoid having to paint a picture of herself as weak and damaged, but they easily held her in place. She sighed.

“It was a long time ago. I got between him and a horse that had pissed him off.”

“Who, Harper?”

“You know,” she whispered. Why were they insisting she rehash this? “My father.”

The story spilled out against her will. It had been a beautiful summer day, her last week in high school, and she had felt freedom in her grasp. She had been planning to go away to college in the fall, had been ignoring her father’s taunts and

jeers and hints that he would force her to stay. It had been that freedom, that feeling she was going to break away, that emboldened her to step forward and protest when he'd raised the riding crop against the horse. He had simply transferred his fury from it to her. It had taken weeks for her to recover. Weeks that had seen his emotional torment focused more and more on Dane, and she had known when the time came to leave in the fall, she couldn't abandon her brother.

"I'm going to kill him," Jonas said, softly, but with so much rage it scared her. And infuriated her.

Wrenching free, she jumped off the bed to glare down at them with her hands on her hips. She was a little surprised they let her go, but pissed off enough she didn't care. Why were they trying to mess up her new start by reliving the past? She'd been afraid, but obviously it wasn't a problem. Or had they missed the fact it was her screaming her head off in pleasure anytime either one touched her?

Worse, Jonas couldn't go after her father. Couldn't even entertain the idea. He was the most powerful wizard she knew, maybe in his generation. He wasn't afraid to use black magic, and he loved to make her miserable. And killing Jonas would rip her heart out. She had to stop this madness before it took root. But before she could launch into a lecture, before she could collect her thoughts and give them the yelling she wanted a banging came from downstairs on the front door. It opened with a thud.

Chapter Ten

“Harper!”

Holy shit. Just what she needed. Her overprotective baby brother joining forces with two overprotective mates. Then it occurred to her she was naked. And footsteps pounded up the stairs. She pulled on the first thing she reached—Jonas’s shirt—and tossed two pairs of jeans on the bed.

She didn’t wait to see if they’d dressed before flinging open the door, hoping to meet Dane out in the hall. No such luck. He stood on the other side of the threshold, fist raised to knock, face a furious red. He reached out and grabbed her in a tight hold.

“Thank gods,” he muttered. “Are you all right?”

“Of course.” She pulled back and scowled up at him. “What happened?”

He shook his head, looking over her to take in Mick and Jonas, who both, she noticed when she turned to look, waited in only jeans. She felt power rising, recognized it as her loving brother’s, and tapped him on the chest to get his attention. He rubbed the spot, looking down at her with a surprised expression. Okay, maybe she’d hit him harder than she’d realized, but... She poked him in the chest.

“They are off-limits.”

“You sure, Sis?”

She gave him a tight smile. “*Mine.*”

She surprised herself with her vehemence. She could get used to this werewolf stuff, where possessiveness wasn’t considered a character flaw. Looking over her

shoulder, she caught Mick's approving grin. That didn't hurt either. She pushed Dane out of the doorway and toward the steps.

"I thought you were going to dinner."

"I got distracted."

It was *almost* a growl, but the rage in his tone was all real. She led him to the kitchen, opened the fridge, and pulled out four beers still on the plastic ring. She shouldn't give her underage baby brother a beer, but she recognized that look in his eyes. She knew he'd had a vision that frightened him, and it still held him in its grip. She shook her head at Jonas's disapproving frown when she handed one to Dane. Hell, at eighteen he was older than most of the thirtysomethings she knew. She dragged him to a chair.

"Tell me."

He sat, silent, Adam's apple bobbing while he got himself under control. Then he popped the top on the beer and took a long swallow.

"Dane?"

"He's coming."

"But you already knew that, right?" she said gently. That was why he'd hung around when it was so dangerous for a wizard to impede on werewolf territory.

His eyes were haunted. "This time he's going to kill you," he whispered.

She repressed her immediate reaction. She'd worry about terror later. Grabbing her brother's hand, she focused on his face, focused her power into her voice. Convincing. Certain. "No, he isn't. There is no way Mick and Jonas will let that happen."

"Harper—"

"No," she said sharply. "You're good, but you're young. You don't have perfect control. You know that."

For the gazillionth time in her life she wished this were a gift, a burden she could take from her baby brother.

The table was huge and round, probably capable of seating eight men. Impressive, considering the size of most of the men in Redhawke. She sat next to Dane, Jonas next to him, and Mick took the chair behind her.

"Tell us about your visions," Mick said softly, but there was no denying it was an order.

Dane's head jerked up to glare at him. A wizard's natural suspicion at war with his need to recruit whatever help was necessary to protect his sister was easy to read on his face. Harper opened her mouth to intervene, but Mick squeezed her hand and shook his head. This had to come from Dane, and Mick wouldn't allow him to hide behind his sister. That would stunt a boy on the cusp of becoming a man.

"They're flashes of images. Like snapshots."

"And they aren't always accurate?"

Dane sighed. "No. But I'm more accurate than most. Maybe eighty, eighty-five percent of the time."

"But you're more likely to be wrong about me," Harper pointed out.

Dane's nod was reluctant. "Emotion can cloud things."

That had better be true, because no one was going to be permitted to harm Harper ever again. Not even death would take her from them.

"What did you see?" Jonas asked, glancing over at Harper. "Darlin', why don't you go get cleaned up."

Mick moaned to himself. Jonas's suggestion was an order, and Harper wasn't about to let herself be bullied into following it. Maybe a few a days ago, but not now. Mick wondered briefly if Jonas realized how much she'd changed, opened up in the last few days? That conversation would have to wait for later.

"I'm not going anywhere. If I want other people running my life for me, I know exactly where to go."

Jonas growled. Mick gripped the back of her neck and snapped his teeth in warning before she could dig herself a deeper hole. Leaving them was not an option. Ever. She rolled her eyes.

“Didn’t I just say I *wasn’t* leaving?”

Her words soothed his wolf, but her confrontational attitude excited it. “Keep pushing, sugar,” he growled.

He didn’t think she was ready to play the kind of games she was inciting just yet. Dane cleared his throat, and everyone’s attention swung back to him.

“The vision. It’s soon. Probably tonight. We have to get Harper out of here.”

“No. He’ll just come after me wherever I go. I’ve hurt his pride now.”

Dane turned a little green, and Mick jumped up to grab the trash can. Better than vomiting all over himself and the table, but when he handed it over, Dane shook his head, pulled himself together.

“So we know when. Do you know where?”

Dane looked around. “Here.”

Jonas snarled and stood to pace. Mick could guess what he was thinking. This damned wizard was coming after their mate in their territory? Stupid. But lucky for them. Jonas got control of his initial rage and turned to meet Mick’s gaze. They were definitely thinking the same thing.

“Why do you think it’s tonight?” Jonas asked.

Dane turned and pointed to the window over the sink. “Because in the vision I could see the moon, almost full, in that window. And if the weather report is right, tomorrow will be too overcast to see it.”

Well now. Maybe the kid was smarter than he looked. Mick never bothered to check weather reports. His wolf alerted him to impending changes. A storm was moving in, probably after daybreak, and it wasn’t quite dark yet.

“We need to get you up to the alpha’s house,” he told Harper.

“What? No. It’s me he wants.”

“And he isn’t getting you. We need you someplace we know you’re not in danger,” Jonas growled.

She lifted her chin in the air, stubbornness radiating from her tense body.

“You need my help. Dane is a seer, but not a great a spell caster, and Liza isn’t good enough yet. So you’re stuck with me.”

Jonas snarled and resumed pacing. Thinking. Unfortunately, he’d reached the same conclusion Mick already had. She was right. But they sure as fuck didn’t have to like it.

“I’m not going either,” Dane said belligerently. Mick sighed. Apparently, pigheadedness was genetic. “I’m good with fire if nothing else,” he added with a glare at Harper. From what little he’d seen, he’d guess Harper protected her younger brother from danger as much as possible.

“Is that why Liza sent me down here?” a voice drawled from behind them.

Jonas turned to see Zach lounging against the door frame behind him. Great. Just what they needed to add to the clusterfuck. Zach was annoying on his best days, antagonistic the rest of the time.

“Why would she send you here?” Jonas asked.

Zach shrugged and strolled into the kitchen. “Said she had a bad feeling and wanted me to check up on Harper.”

One day very soon Jonas was going to give into the urge to knock his beta on his ass, but the threat to Harper had to be eliminated first. He could guess by Mick’s expression he’d decided to give in to her demand to stay. Like her, he hadn’t thought the whole thing through. He was a healer; he’d never kill unless in the heat of battle. Jonas was not so reserved. They were only thinking of beating the bad guy, not what it would take to keep the bad guy away forever.

He walked outside, past Zach, who followed and closed the door behind him.

“Kid says he had a vision. Harper’s father isn’t willing to let her go after all.”

“You believe him?”

“Yeah.” Unfortunately. “If the kid is right, he’ll show up tonight.”

Zach’s expression changed from predatory to amused in half a second. “The kid has a name.”

Jonas snorted. Like they had time for stating the obvious? “Whatever. I need them out of here. All three of them.”

Technically, Jonas outranked Mick, but under the circumstances Mick wouldn’t follow the order if he gave it, and because of what they meant to each other Jonas was reluctant to force him. Zach, on the other hand, was beta. Not even Mick would go against his orders. Zach nodded.

“And then we wait for her father.”

Jonas nodded.

“Get Gabby and Ethan here too. And put a couple extra patrols on my place.”

He tossed his phone to Jonas and left him outside to make the calls while he went back into the kitchen. Jonas stepped away from the house and scrolled through the address book. He picked up raised voices inside but couldn’t make them out. A few minutes later, everyone trooped out, and he turned his back on Mick’s angry glare.

He should’ve known he wouldn’t get off that easy. He scented that Zach, Harper, and Dane had moved away, but he knew when he finished his last call, Mick would be standing there waiting for him. Knowing he couldn’t put it off any longer, he flipped the phone closed and turned to face him.

Mick strode forward, stopped inches from Jonas, a growl rumbling in his chest. “She’s my mate too. You wouldn’t try to stop anyone else from protecting what was theirs.”

“No.” Jonas closed the distance between them, lifting his hands to cradle Mick’s face. “But do you want her to watch me kill her father? Is there another way to keep her safe?”

Mick's body jerked, but he didn't pull away. "Mick, baby, let me do what I have to without worrying about y'all," he pleaded.

Mick's eyes glowed in the evening gloom. "You think I'm not capable? You think I can't help?"

Jonas took a deep breath. "I think it's against your nature. I think it would eat at you. And that would make me feel...less. For not protecting you too."

When was the last time he'd been this honest? Had he ever? It surprised him how easy it was to do, to just lay everything bare. He leaned his forehead against Mick's. "I need you to stay whole," he whispered.

Finally, finally Mick touched him. His arms lifted, circled Jonas's waist, and yanked him close. "You are not getting off the hook for *not* discussing this with me."

No *but* and Jonas heaved a huge sigh of relief. Mick was going to go. "Someone has to watch Harper, and I have to be focused elsewhere. You know that." He couldn't help push, though. "Could you really do it?"

Even Mick's scent went cold. "If it meant protecting you or her, yes."

"And that I don't want you to have to make that choice? Does that mean anything?"

Mick smiled, slow and sweet and sensual. "Baby, the time is going to come you have to let someone take care of you."

They did something—those words—to Jonas. The sensual promise. The exacting command. He whispered, "Maybe. For now, though, I need you to go." He leaned forward and kissed Mick. All teeth and tongue and bite. "Be safe. Keep her safe. And let me do my thing."

Mick didn't let him go so easily. He bit him hard on his bottom lip. "We *are* going to talk about this again."

He scented Zach returning, and he wanted Mick away. Safe. "Go."

He wasn't happy about it, but he turned to leave. Jonas watched until he disappeared in the growing dark, and Zach stood at his side. Then Gabby and Ethan strolled into the yard. They both radiated tension.

Zach heaved a sigh. "You two. Can it."

Gabby flashed a quick rueful grin, and the anxiety seemed to deflate out of her. "What's the plan?"

"You're playing decoy."

Ethan jerked, his eyes glowing wolf yellow, but he nodded. Even if he claimed her right now, she was a lieutenant in the pack, and she'd remain one. Up close she looked nothing like Harper, but they were the same height and had similar builds. Harper's father wouldn't realize he'd gone after the wrong target until it was too late.

The patrols had been ordered to let the man slip through or believe he had. He'd probably use magic at the gate for entrance and to find the location of Jonas's house, so the gate guards hadn't been warned. Jonas felt a little bad about that, but they couldn't accidentally betray a plan they knew nothing of.

Now it was simply a matter of waiting, and he was nothing if not a patient wolf. If he'd been in lupine form, his lips would have been pulled back in a snarl. This was one kill he was looking forward to.

The plan was put into action.

Hours later, he could see Gabby through the window where she pretended to be Harper, pattering around the kitchen. He could smell the others in the woods—his backup should things go wrong. He wouldn't need it. He had determination and cold, cutting fury on his side. He lifted his snout to check the angle of the moon. Almost time.

But the minutes stretched on and on until the wolf that was sometimes Jonas thought Dane's vision must have been wrong. The wolf grew restless, then agitated when suddenly the forest around it felt wrong. Too quiet. Too still. There was a

yelp—Ethan’s—that was cut off too quickly to indicate anything other than unconsciousness or death.

Teeth bared, he crept forward from his place hidden in the trees, sharp wolf’s eyes quartering the open space. Watching and waiting for the wizard to reveal himself. The only movement was from Zach, who crouched in bushes close to the house.

Sensing something approach from his left, he froze. His muscles coiled tight, ready to spring at any attack or threat. Careful to keep the movement small and natural, unnoticed, he swung his head in that direction, keeping his eyelids narrowed to tiny slits to avoid giving his location away. The glow of a werewolf’s eyes couldn’t be mistaken for anything else.

He saw nothing but a *blackness* where there should have been trees, and barely restrained his triumphant howl. The wizard was cloaking himself, or trying to, but he couldn’t hide from Jonas. Couldn’t hide from justice.

The wolf edged closer, still careful, but moving faster now. The wizard was too far away to spring at. Yet. The blackness moved forward, no longer cautious as it approached the house. It didn’t notice the wolf pursuing at its back. But the other wolf had been spotted. The blackness solidified into form for a moment and Zach rolled out of the way just in time to miss a blast of energy erupting from the wizard’s hands. Then Alexander was that almost invisible again.

Jonas leaped for his back, worried only fleetingly as his teeth sank into the blackness. The illusion dropped so fast Jonas almost lost his hold, disoriented. The hesitation nearly cost him everything. He was amazed at the strength of the wizard, who dropped desperately to knock him off his back. Then there was nothing but a human cry of pain as Jonas’s teeth closed over his jugular. Nothing but the sound of gurgling death when he ripped it out.

He shifted as he dropped the wizard. Spit blood out of his mouth, then wiped it away with the back of his hand. Zach joined him as Gabby ran out of the house, shaking and panicked.

“Ethan?”

He didn’t smell Ethan’s death in the air, but that didn’t mean he wasn’t in trouble. “We’ll find him. Go get Mick.”

She took off up the trail. Zach jerked his head to where the trees were thickest. “This way.”

It only took a few minutes to find Ethan. He was unconscious, pale but breathing. Jonas slung him over one shoulder and followed Zach back to his house, where a crowd had gathered inside. He wasn’t surprised Gabby and the others had beat him back to the house. Jonas carried him to the living room and laid him out on the couch, where Elspeth approached and looked him over.

“Knocked out by a blast of magic. He’ll be fine in a few days,” she gently told Gabby, who’d knelt by his side and taken his hand, refusing to be moved. “He’ll be more comfortable at home in bed.”

Jonas stepped forward to lift him again, but Zach and Caleb stopped it. “We’ll handle it. And get all our women out of your hair,” Caleb joked, his critical eye sweeping over Dane also. “And the boy. Grab your things.”

Harper, looking pinched and worn, jerked forward. “Why?”

“Don’t worry, little one,” Zach said. “He’ll be safe at our house.”

Mick stood behind her, his hands massaging her shoulders, and she nodded, relaxed at the comfort given by her mate. Jonas felt something tighten, then snap in his chest. Emotion overwhelmed him. He couldn’t speak as everyone left. Didn’t know what to say when it was just the three of them alone. It was Harper who broke the spell. With a cry, she pulled free of Mick and rushed to him, clinging around his waist.

“What is it, darlin’? What’s wrong?”

Chapter Eleven

She shook, but it wasn't until she looked up at him that Jonas realized it was with fury. "If you ever scare me like that again, I swear I'll rip your heart out."

That seemed a little extreme under the circumstances, especially coming from his gentle-souled mate. He looked over her head at Mick and cocked an inquiring eyebrow.

"Gabby was pretty freaked-out when she came to get us." He shrugged one shoulder, but Jonas knew he wasn't as unaffected as he appeared. He seemed to vibrate with pent-up energy. "We didn't know until you walked out of the woods with Ethan that you were safe."

Harper's hands fisted in his shirt at the base of his back. "I mean it, Jonas," she said fiercely. "Never again."

He held her tighter, sliding his hands up and down her back in an effort to comfort her. He kissed the top of her head and looked up to meet Mick's gaze.

"Let me make it up to you," he whispered, letting the desire, the love he felt for them color his voice.

Mick didn't budge, and his arms were crossed over his chest. "Is this a breakthrough, then? Something has changed?"

He laughed. "You mean other than I've been an idiot?"

That startled Harper enough that her scent changed with it, the anger finally leaking away. She leaned back in his arms. "You'll have to explain that. Now would be a good time," she said tartly.

She amazed him. So vibrant. Full of life. *His*. “Why did I ever think you were submissive?”

Mick finally moved, hands dropping to his sides as he strolled closer. “Oh, she has her moments, don’t you, sugar?”

“Um.” The scent of arousal spiked, lush and tangy in the air, on his tongue. “We’re talking about Jonas right now.”

“Later,” Mick murmured against her nape. “He’s not going anywhere.”

“No, I’m not.” Not now. Not ever.

Harper escaped from their arms and retreated a few feet, switching her gaze back and forth between him and Mick. He groaned when he got a good look at the mutinous, stubborn look on her face. She pointed a shaky finger in his direction.

“I have questions you two need to answer. I’m new here. *Not* a werewolf. I’m flying blind, and sometimes I get the feeling you prefer it that way.”

Well, hell. “That’s not true. I just forget that you don’t know our world like...” He almost said *like Liza*, but something told him that would be a mistake.

“We can answer questions just as well naked, sugar,” Mick drawled, his voice deep and sexy and coaxing, rushing to Jonas’s rescue.

Harper wasn’t being deflected, however. One eyebrow cocked, she switched her attention to Mick. “Maybe the more answers I get, the more skin you’ll see.”

He jerked at the tone of her voice, felt the subtle flare of magic she used to infuse it with a sultry invitation to sin. “Not fair,” he croaked.

She shrugged. “Neither is you keeping me in the dark. I’m here for more than sex, aren’t I?”

Finally, he could retreat into irritation. This emotion shit sucked. “Of course you are,” Jonas snapped.

Mick sighed and gave him the baleful look that seemed to scream *you damned idjit*. This was his worst nightmare. Outnumbered. Hell, he’d said he wasn’t going anywhere. They knew how he felt. Why did he have to put everything into words?

He was so much better at action. He almost said all that. He almost stomped out of the room. One look over and he knew Mick was his usual calm, or maybe resigned, self. He didn't expect Jonas to do anything but avoid expressing how he felt. Hadn't he promised himself he wouldn't do that to Mick anymore?

Then he looked at Harper. Her arms were crossed over her chest, her face blank as she waited for him to respond. But though she seemed relaxed, she stood straight and sure, like she'd built a wall around herself. A wall that kept him and whatever cruelty he might come up with out. There was a hurt, a disappointment in her eyes she couldn't quite hide.

And all it would take to make that go away was to answer a few uncomfortable questions. He nodded.

"But let's go out on the porch." He needed to be outside, under the cool glow of the moon, where his animal nature was more at peace. "And, darlin'?" No reason he couldn't have a little fun while he bared his soul. "For each question I answer, you lose an article of clothing."

She met his gaze with a startled one of her own. "Outside? It's cold."

"No one will bother us. And the sun porch is enclosed and heated."

He recalled all the games of strip poker he'd played as a teenager. "Shoes and socks stay inside." They'd slow the game down.

"How is that fair?" she grumbled but sat to remove them, and when she stood, her color was high, her eyes bright. It was a weird game to play with his mate, but he didn't think she'd had much chance to play in her life.

Just to make things even, he took his footwear off too, then gestured for her to lead the way. It was full dark, the moon high and bright, and she walked away from him to lean against a glass wall with one shoulder. She didn't say a word, just watched, and the longer she remained quiet, the more nervous he became. What the hell was going on in that pretty little head? Finally, though he knew it hadn't been more than a couple of minutes, Mick joined them. He was barefoot and tossed a bottle of lube on the double-wide lounge.

“We’re all here, darlin’. Start.” Jonas ordered.

“Okay.” She licked her lips nervously. “But we all take something off. Not just me.”

“Fine,” Mick answered and elbowed him sharply in the side when he opened his mouth to point out that had not been the original deal.

Harper nodded acceptance, though, straightened away from the wall, and gave him a hard look. “Are you still in love with Liza?”

Fuck. He turned to glare at Mick, who backed away, hands held up in a placating gesture Jonas didn’t buy for a minute. “Don’t look at me. I didn’t talk to her about it.”

He turned his glare to Harper and then ripped his shirt over his head. She wanted to play? Fine. They’d play.

“No, I’m not. I don’t think I ever was. We’re friends. I have a great deal of respect and admiration for her.”

“You wanted someone like her,” she accused.

How could he deny it? “I thought I did. Then I met you, and I started to rethink things.”

“Why?”

He fought a smile. This might work out well after all. “That’s two questions, darlin’.”

With a huff, she pulled the turtleneck off and tossed it away, then let her arms fall to her sides. Oh yeah. He could get used to this game. The anticipation was invigorating. She was left standing in tight jeans and an even-tighter, barely there white lacy bra. He wanted to lick his way around its edges but managed to stay still. First things first.

“I thought, for a long time, that if I had a mate, she needed to be another soldier. I thought that was the only kind of woman strong enough to stand up to me. To take me on. I was wrong.”

“So you don’t want someone as tough as you now?”

He smiled, looked her up and down in a blatant reminder of the rules. She played with the snap on her jeans and rolled her eyes before popping it free and shimmying out of them. She was left in a tiny pair of panties that matched her bra. Oh yeah, baby. He edged closer to her.

“I’ve decided soft is more appealing.”

He was calling her soft? Was that a good or bad thing? Part of her said *bad, bad, bad*. But the other part pointed out how *good* bad could be. Playing by the rules, he and Mick both dropped their jeans. Bad was looking better and better. *Focus on something besides sex, Harper*. But gods, was that difficult to manage with two hard, sexy, and mostly naked bodies in front of her.

“Nothing soft there,” she whispered.

Mick chuckled and approached, then moved around behind her. He set his hands on her hips while leaning forward to nuzzle her neck.

“Mmm, no. But this is soft.” He pushed his erection against her ass. “And this.”

His hands slid up her back to the clasp of her bra, and she felt it pop free. He moved to cup her breasts, his teeth nipping the sensitive skin between her shoulder and neck. “More softness.”

“Any more questions, darlin’?” Jonas asked, approaching her and Mick. His gaze ensnared her. Hot. Open. He stopped close enough she could feel the heat pouring off him, but not close enough to brush against her. Mick held her still when she tried to close the gap. Jonas cocked an eyebrow. “No more questions?”

“Um.” How could she think right now? Mick’s hands were hot on her body, stoking a fire she wanted to set free, and Jonas’s body was tight, coiled to spring, his eyes full of carnal promise. Finally, he stepped closer, lifting one hand to stroke the side of her face.

“I choose you, Harper, and Mick. I don’t want anyone else. Does that answer your questions?”

She couldn’t do anything but jerk a nod. He grinned in response, and oh was it wicked. When he kissed her, it was slow and unhurried, a deep exploration that left her gasping when he broke away. Mick took her hand and pulled her to the lounge.

“Lie back,” he whispered, and she did as he ordered, her anticipation building.

Jonas knelt in front of her and spread her legs wide to accommodate his shoulders. His hands slowly slid up the insides of her thighs, rough calluses leaving a hot trail in their wake, until he reached her panties. He leaned forward, his tongue tracing the edge, his fingers working under the sides to tug them down. She lifted her butt and helped wiggle them off, raising her legs to kick them away. Jonas’s clamped his hands under her thighs and held them high, staring at her like a starving man. She shivered and held her breath. Gods, she hoped so.

Then his mouth was on her, his tongue spearing inside her while his fingers found her clit. It was exquisite. It wasn’t nearly enough. She tried to wiggle free. She wanted him inside her. She wanted *them* inside her. But he held her still with one arm across her pelvis, fucking her with his mouth.

She turned her head to look for Mick and found him kneeling beside her. He smiled when she met his gaze, leaned forward to steal a quick kiss before breaking away. It wasn’t until she heard a squeaking sound that she realized he was holding a bottle of lube for Jonas. Until she heard the squeak, she hadn’t realized his arm was no longer holding her hips down.

She lay frozen in place as Jonas lifted his head and held his hand out to Mick. She watched half-fascinated, half-scared as Mick squeezed a generous amount of the lube onto his fingers. And then those fingers disappeared from view, and she could do nothing but wait, shaking, unsure. Jonas blew a hot breath over her sex.

“Relax, darlin’,” he whispered, and her laugh strangled on a moan of pleasure as his teeth closed over and tugged on her clit. She was so focused on the sensation

that she didn't flinch when his wet, cold fingers circled her rear entrance, when he slowly, carefully worked two fingers inside.

When Mick lay down next to her, he kissed the tip of one hard nipple before sucking it, biting it, and she came with a hoarse yell. Yet neither stopped what he was doing. Jonas worked another finger inside her, eased them back and forth, stretching her. His mouth moved over her clit. Sometimes slow and gentle, sometimes fast and hard, until she was begging, pleading for release, her hips thrusting against his fingers. She was desperate to come.

She wanted to weep when Jonas pulled away, when his tongue and fingers abandoned her body. But she knew it was only temporary, watched with nothing but anticipation as he reached for the bottle of lube. He squeezed enough on his palm to coat his shaft and more around her opening. She held her breath when he moved into position and paused with the head of his cock pressing against her.

"Ready?"

She nodded, unable to speak, hoping her eyes held her response if the motion did not. His entry was slow, what felt like a millimeter at a time. She tried to thrust against him, eager to come, but he held her still.

"Easy, baby. I don't want to hurt you."

He worked the head of his cock in, then more, giving her so little at a time she thought she'd lose her mind until he started working through that restricting ring of muscle, and she gasped. Pain and pleasure. Pleasure and pain. She didn't know which was more, which was in control. Mick put a finger under her chin and turned her to face him. He tugged her bottom lip with his teeth, swept his tongue into her mouth, then broke away.

"Relax, sugar."

He stood, the bottle of lube in his fist, and moved to kneel behind Jonas. His grin was sinful, his face flushed with excitement, and Harper felt her own grow. Jonas slid more of his cock into her ass, and this time there was no pain, just some residual discomfort. He smirked when she met his gaze.

“You like the idea of watching me get fucked, darlin’?”

He withdrew his cock a bit, thrust back in a little harder, deeper. He wasn’t quite all the way inside yet. She was disappointed when he kept his thrusts shallow.

“Harper? Answer my question.”

She looked over Jonas’s shoulder to meet Mick’s gaze. His hands stroked down Jonas’s back, face bent forward to nuzzle his neck. He held her gaze while he waited for her answer.

“Yes,” she whispered. “I like it.”

Mick groaned and straightened, and she heard that telltale squeak again, but she couldn’t see anything from her position. She could only guess from Jonas’s reaction.

“Gods, babe, a little warning,” he growled. “Remember foreplay?”

Mick laughed, one hand gripping Jonas’s shoulder as he leaned over to look down. “How much more do you need?”

His tone, his expression was teasing as his gaze traveled up her body, winking when he met her gaze.

“I just need someone to *move*,” she said a little more tartly than she had intended.

“Yes, ma’am,” Mick drawled, and when he thrust into Jonas, Jonas thrust into her. She gasped. This time his cock was fully inside her. He was a tight fit. She couldn’t believe it was possible to be so full and not burst.

“I hope you’re ready.”

He lay down over her, pressing her into the lounge, his mouth fusing over hers. He withdrew and thrust back in, Mick moving in tandem with him. They were shallow, quick thrusts. Jonas broke the kiss, his lips moving over her mouth, down her neck, finally stopping at her breast. He flicked his tongue over her nipple before

his mouth closed over it. He sucked her hard in long, even pulls that matched his thrusts in her ass. She couldn't take any more, couldn't hold back the pleasure any longer.

She gave in to the ecstasy building, flooding through her body, short-circuiting her nerves and her brain. Every muscle pulled taut as the tension broke free. Even her vocal cords were out of her control. She couldn't do anything but keen as the orgasm overtook her. After a couple of minutes she focused on the men leaning over her, her men. Jonas was no longer moving inside her, no longer buried inside her. He searched her face, seemed to see what he was looking for, and nodded.

"Slide up on the lounge, sugar," Mick ordered.

She did, but they stayed where they were, and she realized she'd come and Jonas had come, but Mick hadn't yet. She held her breath, watched as he gripped Jonas's hips and surged forward. Mick's head was thrown back, his skin drawn tight over his cheeks, and his lips pressed together.

"Beautiful," she murmured and wondered if they knew what they looked like together. How raw and carnal and easy to read their love for each other was. She quashed a moment of unease, the fear she might not be part of that love. But Jonas was watching her like he knew exactly what was going through her mind.

"Touch yourself for me, darlin'."

She sucked in a breath. She was no stranger to her body, but to masturbate while someone watched—no, while Jonas and Mick watched—felt scandalous. Decadent.

"Do it, Harper." His voice was low, more coaxing than demanding. "I want to see your fingers in our pretty little pussy."

She blushed from her toes to her forehead, and embarrassment warred with lust as she slowly palmed her breasts, squeezing her nipples to tight buds before sliding her hands down. Over her ribs, past her belly, to spread the lips hiding her

sex. Jonas's eyes glowed the eerie blue she knew meant his wolf was close to the surface.

"Yes," he hissed. "Keep going."

But she wasn't sure if the words were for her or Mick, who was fucking him faster, harder. Who cared? It was a major turn-on, and if she got to get off watching them, she wasn't complaining. She pushed a finger into her pussy, moved it in and out a few strokes, gathering the hot moisture before moving her finger to rub her clit. It was hard, pulsing, begging for attention. So good. She arched her back as the feeling built, thrusting fingers from her other hand into her pussy, switching her gaze from Jonas to Mick and back again as she did. She tried to hold on to the enjoyment, tried to drag it out, and in minutes she was shaking with the restraint.

"That's it, sugar," Mick moaned. "Come now. Come with us."

She was helpless against the order, could only fall apart as she watched a shudder move through Mick's body as he came, matching the one that racked Jonas while he pumped his cock and cum spurt from its tip.

It was a long time later, while she was lying back on the lounge between them, that her brain reengaged. "This is going to be complicated, isn't it?"

"What's complicated?" Mick said. "You love us. We love you."

Her heart stuttered. "Is that right?" she asked lightly. She loved them. She couldn't say when or how it had happened, it certainly made no sense, but she couldn't deny to herself how she felt. But is that what they really felt?

Jonas rolled to his side and leaned up on one elbow. "That's right," he said. "I know this seems fast to you. You don't know us well yet. You don't know much about werewolves yet. But we'll get there. It'll all work out, I promise."

"Even if I'm soft?" She honestly wasn't sure how she felt about that assessment.

His smile was slow and lazy. "I like soft, and you are soft in all the right places, darlin'."

She rolled her eyes and fought a losing battle to control the new flight of butterflies in her belly.

"I was mistaking soft with weak," he continued, leaning over to kiss her forehead. "But our mate isn't weak."

"No," she agreed, but she wasn't convinced he wouldn't change his mind later, and her fear was in her voice.

"What are you afraid of?"

"Witches are so different from you all. No affection. No love. At least not openly." She shrugged. "To feel a part of that, but fear losing it..." She let the thought trail off.

Mick scooted closer to her, his heat infusing her and making her feel less exposed. "There is no way you'll lose us, Harper. Mating is forever. There's no splitting up. No divorce."

"I've heard that. I just, I guess I'm afraid one of you might regret it later."

"Me. You're afraid I'll regret it," Jonas said, and she could only nod. She was sure of Mick's feelings. Jonas's? Not so much. He laughed.

"Oh, darlin', that's not going to happen. You are exactly what I want. Exactly who we need." His lips met hers, soft and gentle and warm. He lifted his head enough to meet her gaze. "I love you. That isn't going to change."

When he looked at her like that, no barriers, totally open, she believed him. She wanted him and Mick, wanted to be part of their lives, their love, and was forced to face her last fear.

"I don't know much about love," she whispered.

"Don't worry about it, sugar," Mick said, and she switched her gaze to him, heart tripping at his lascivious grin. "We know all the ways to love you."

She laughed at the audacious claim, joy bursting inside her and she was certain everything was going to be all right, everything was going to be perfect. She wrapped an arm around each of them. “Show me,” she demanded.

And they did.

THE END

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