



SELENA ILLYRIA

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LAST CALL: EUROPE

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Last Call Europe: Dog Sled

Selena Illyria

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Last Call Europe: Dog Sled

Selena Illyria

Dog Sled: Werewolf looking for a break from the pack life with a passionate encounter.

Werewolf Silvano wants a break from the drama in pack business. A night out is exactly what he needs. He doesn't count on his rival's familiar, Hexuba, strolling into Last Call.

Black cat shifter and wizard's familiar Hexuba has always wanted Silvano even though he's the enemy. One night is all she asks to indulge her wildest fantasies with him. Come morning she'll be gone.

Will one night be enough?

Chapter One

Rome, Italy

Silvano stood in his bathroom staring at his foggy reflection in the mirror. He drew in a breath and blew it out. Tension sung through his body as he prepared himself for the monthly fuckfest. Or, as his elders liked to call it, the compatibility test. He didn't buy it for a second. *Find your mate by fucking them.* He scoffed at the notion, but there wasn't much he could do about it. Either he slept with all the available females in his pack to find a suitable alpha female or he lost his pack. So it was decreed in the pack bylaws, the rules his father had followed as laid out by his father before him and so on and so on, ad nauseam.

As a hormone-driven youth, he'd reveled at the chance to fuck so many willing women. Now, as an adult of thirty-four, with his thirty-fifth birthday right around the corner, he was tired of it. All of it. He'd fucked practically every available woman in the pack. His father had even thought of bringing in women from an allied pack to see if he would fit better with one of them. He'd turned them all down. It wasn't just the sex that was tiresome, but also the elders and his second lieutenant, the rules, the obligations...

He was alpha, the leader, and yet he couldn't make new rules or lead his people the way he wanted. The system was antiquated, governed by laws and decorum that didn't fit into today's world of paraphiles, people obsessed with the paranormal and all aspects of it. The young pups lived in a sort of static environment, caught between tradition and the modern age where werewolves could blend in with the normal populace without being shunned for doing so.

The other problem on his horizon was twofold. One was from an ex-pack member, Turk. The man had been begun to dabble in the dark arts, accessing the magick in his blood from his wizard ancestry in a bid to take over the pack that had

exiled him long ago. Silvano feared for his once childhood friend. According to reports, Turk was going insane, being driven by dark forces. There was very little Silvano could do short of killing the man, and he was reluctant to do so. Many in both packs had blamed him for Turk's current behavior. Silvano had refused to step aside during the pack challenge and let Turk win.

He shook his head. Silvano couldn't have allowed that. The man was unstable. And now there was the problem of Turk's black cat familiar, Hexuba. Just thinking her name heated his blood. His cock went from flaccid to semi-hard. He could see her face, the velvety dark chocolate colored eyes. Just a glance made him want to drag her someplace private, away from distractions, and discover what secret places on her body made her cry out and moan.

"Fucking hell." He fisted his cock at the base and stroked slowly, allowing the arousal to grow. "Hex." He hissed out her name as his mind painted her image among the wisps of steam. Her delicate nose, high cheekbones and lush, full lips came into view. He groaned again as his thoughts drifted to feeling those lips against his as she explored his body. Silvano could feel the pebbled tips of her nipples scraping across his belly as she moved downward. He wanted to feel her mouth on him, feel her tongue lap at the slit atop his cockhead before swallowing him whole.

The fantasy continued to build as his imagination painted Hex on her knees, lips dragging along his hardened length. The minx would tease him, giving him just enough pressure to send pulses of pleasure up his spine and throughout his body before releasing his cock. She would lap up his seed while pumping him with her hand before returning to torment him with her mouth, and he would love every minute of it.

"Silvano, are you ready?" a high-pitched female voice called out.

The fantasy evaporated just like the steam and he swore. His cock lost some of its hardness as real life came crashing in. With a sigh, he shook his head. "Time to do my duty."

He went to open the door and join the latest female in bed when he felt magick skittering across his flesh, stopping him in his tracks. The sensation teased and taunted

him. He sucked in some air and blew it out. *Hex*. His cock responded, hardening as the cat shifter's magick wrapped around it. Every nerve ending and muscle twitched and strained, demanding that he go out into the night, find her and drag her back to his cabin.

She needs to be punished, his wolf whispered.

Punished? Silvano asked.

A decadent daydream started of Hex on her hand and knees, her rounded ass high in the air, wiggling slightly as she waited for the first swat of his hand or the paddle as her punishment for trespassing. A low growl started deep in his chest before slipping past his lips. He could see her slick folds, nice and damp. Her pussy clenched, her scent beckoning him to claim her. Her smooth milk chocolate skin was unmarred, save for the tribal tattoos glittering on her arms. He wanted to mark her. Every inch of her flesh would be covered in teeth marks. Silvano wanted to rub his scent into her skin, claim her as his own. Consequences, pack elders, alpha status be damned. His blood boiled and a roar built within him. Only to die down as he felt her coming closer.

Silvano closed his eyes. Her presence wove around the small pack village. A misty image formed in his mind's eye of the layout of his safe haven. A small, black cat prowled gracefully among the shadows, her whip-like tail waving to and fro.

Such a delectable creature. I think I want to eat pussy tonight, the wolf murmured.

Moron, we are eating pussy tonight.

Not that one. I want her. I want to devour that delicate creature until she screams. You may fuck her when I'm done.

Gee, thanks. I feel so loved. Silvano snorted.

I am a most generous wolf, aren't I? Get rid of the woman in the bedroom and bring Hex to us. I have no taste for whiny tonight. I want feisty. Hex's feistiness to be exact.

As if the woman in the bedroom heard the wolf she called out, "Silvano? I've started without you."

Silvano scowled. *Tradition calls.*

And we must grin and bear it. Be quick about it. Make her come and then search for Hex.

Of course, I live to obey you, oh great wolf.

The wolf in turn bowed his head and meandered off. With reluctance, Silvano turned the doorknob and joined the female of choice in the bedroom. As he took in the woman's trim waist, flat stomach, the slight curves of her hips and long legs, he tried to remember her name. *Heather? Hestia? Harmony? No, it's Heather.*

Her tanned flesh was made golden by the firelight from the flames burning in the hearth. The scent of strawberries mingled with jasmine floated on the air. He looked around. Apparently, she'd made herself quite at home, adding her own candles to his. She'd also closed the drapes. Silvano didn't ask. He strode over and pulled them open. The moon was in waxing gibbous phase. It peeked out behind silver clouds, and he breathed easier at the sight.

Silvano gazed up at the pale moon and sighed. *Ah goddess, I wish Hex were with me tonight.* As if hearing his wish, he spotted the form of a black cat moving closer to his building. Arousal spiked in his veins. His stomach clenched in need.

"Silvano?" He felt the press of the other woman's breasts against his back. Her hands came around to drag her fingertips up and down his abdomen.

"Let me be what you need tonight," she whispered, placing a kiss on his shoulder.

He struggled not to push her away. Desire fought with duty. He hissed when she dragged her fingernails over his pecs.

"I'm all yours," she whispered as she dragged her teeth down his shoulder.

Anger burned through his veins, mixing with the arousal that scorched his body. He hung his head. *I can't have Hex, not now, not ever.*

With an anguished sob he turned around and grabbed the woman's shoulders. Taking care not to hurt her, he walked her toward the bed and gave her a gentle push. Her almond-shaped eyes sparkled back him. He saw no desire, no need in the emerald depths. *She's in the same position I am.*

That almost took him out of the haze of desire. Instead, he was even more determined to get this over with. Before joining her on the bed, he grabbed a condom and sheathed himself.

Hex's magic pulsed along his skin the closer she came.

"On your hands and knees," Silvano ordered.

"Yes, alpha."

It wasn't the unfamiliar female wolf with him on the bed, rolling onto all fours. No. In his mind it was Hex. He groaned. The woman's sex was already slick with dew.

"Please, alpha, fuck me, choose me," she murmured. It was Hex, not Heather, who begged him to fuck her. He climbed onto the bed behind her.

"Hex," he whispered before positioning himself at her entrance. The cat shifter's magick now slid along his skin like oil. He felt her gaze upon him. He growled as he drove into the wet, willing flesh of the woman beneath him and began to pump his hips. He wasn't gentle. In his mind she was Hex, and he was claiming her as his own.

Her thoughts slipped into his head.

Oh my gods, he's fucking someone. Why do I always find him either naked or having sex? Holy shit, he's got a nice ass.

He groaned, slowing down his thrusts, giving her a view of what could be hers.

Her whimper echoed in his mind.

Yours, cara, all yours.

He felt her desire for him merge with his arousal. The inferno built until he was sure he'd turned into a living ball of flame. Silvano closed his eyes. He could see Hex clearly, her milk chocolate skin bathed in the silver glow of the moonlight. Her legs were spread wide, hand moving between her thighs. He could taste her desire; the sweet and salty tanginess rolled over his taste buds, making him groan aloud. He fucked the woman on the bed faster as he felt Hex's climax approach. Her panting rolled around in his head. He felt her magick pulse, seeping into his pores, saturating his body with heat and lust.

Silvano lost himself in a world where only they existed. "Hex," he whispered.

"Silvano," Hex moaned.

He buried his head in her neck as he rode her hard and fast, needing her to come. "I need you," he groaned as he rocked into her.

Her pussy fluttered around his cock. She cried out as he fucked her hard and fast. A keening cry sliced through the air. Her cunt contracted around his shaft like a vise. He continued to ride her through it until his balls pulled closer to his body. Heat sizzled along his spine. His cock expanded and lengthened. He came on a howl, pouring his seed into the condom.

Silvano came down from the high as he felt her magick withdraw from his body. He blinked and gazed down at the woman with on the bed. Her body quivered. The sound of sobbing could be heard. Panicked, he withdrew and carefully rolled her onto her side.

"Did I hurt you? Was I too rough?"

Heather shook heard. Fat tears rolled down her face. She looked up at him, sadness in her eyes. "I'm sorry, alpha, truly I am, but if we are a match, I don't know what I'd do. I will serve my duty to you, I swear it. It's just... it's just I'm in love with someone else."

"Why are you sorry? That is wonderful! You can be mated to this person, and there would be no need to go through this again." He shook his head, not understanding why she was sad.

She shook her head. "No, alpha, you don't understand. The someone else... is a woman. I'm in love with the alpha female of the Krager pack. Jacob Krager's sister."

Silvano cradled Heather's face in his hands. "Does she know?"

Heather nodded. "Yes, but there is nothing to be done. Pack law states one female for every male and if there is a shortage, two females for every one male. Our love is forbidden."

Silvano swore. "Come on, Heather, you can use my deluxe Jacuzzi, as long as you like."

"But, alpha, I can't kick you out of your own --"

He interrupted her with a kiss on the cheek. "I have a second bathroom on the other floor. We'll figure this out. I need to meet with this female alpha of yours, see if her emotions are true. After that, it's me against the elders." Silvano climbed off the bed, ignoring his own nudity.

"But, alpha!" Heather scrambled after him.

"No buts, Heather. As your alpha, I command you to use the Jacuzzi and relax. I'll take care of things, I promise you." He strode out of the room. Anger and arousal buzzed in his body. He was pissed at the old laws and unfulfilled sexual desire.

"I'll fix this. I swear it." Silvano growled before he headed for the second shower at the other end of the house. Hex's magic returned, slipping along his skin like silk. Her power followed him. He smiled.

"Now that we're alone, I can give you a good show." Silvano murmured before stepping into the bathroom, careful to leave the sliding doors open so she could have a perfect view of what he was about to do. His cock pulsed, his balls tightened. Heat slid into his veins as arousal coiled tightly in his stomach. He turned on the water and soaped up his hand. Silvano fisted his erection, stroking with slow precision from base to tip, pausing to smear the evidence of his need for Hex along the wide mushroom cockhead. When he felt her at the window, he flexed his hips and fucked his hand.

"Hex," he hissed.

* * *

Hexuba stood at the window in her human form. Sexual need flared hot in her stomach. She closed her eyes, but the vision before her was seared into her eyelids. Silvano covered in suds, water sluicing down his body, his hand sliding up and down his thick erection. The air around her grew thin as she began to pant. It felt like forever since she'd last seen him, even though it was few minutes ago.

She opened her eyes and watched as he turned his body toward her, hand working his shaft. He placed his free hand against the closed glass door. His hips

pushed forward and pulled back, mimicking the act of sex he'd just finished performing.

She swallowed, wanting to enter the house, fall to her knees and suck him off. Her body flashed hot as she watched him fuck his hand.

"Silvano," she moaned. Her hand trailed between her breasts, over her stomach and between her thighs. Her pussy tingled with desire. Her cunt contracted as her juices slid down. She was still aroused from watching him fuck another woman. Hex still couldn't wrap her head around getting off to that image and yet she had. Now, they were alone, both masturbating. She wished to the goddess that she knew who he was picturing at that very moment. His eyes opened; green fire stared into her. She gasped, and her fingers faltered. His gaze narrowed, emerald heat surrounded by a fan of dark lashes. Need burned in those dark green depths. She was caught like prey to his wolf. Her cat mewed, batting at the air, purring loudly as Hex stared at him.

He can't see me. And yet it felt as if he knew she was there. A glance down at his hand showed he was stroking himself faster. His hips picked up the pace. She could practically feel every push. A whimper fell from her lips as she wished he were pounding into her.

As she watched him, she sunk one finger into her tight, wet channel, then another and another. She used her thumb to stroke her clit as she finger-fucked herself.

"Silvano," she whispered.

Hex, his deep, gruff voice replied.

Instead of being shocked at hearing him in her head, she accepted it as part of her fantasy.

That's it, cara, fuck yourself with your fingers. Picture my cock sinking into your sweet pussy, my fingers working your clit.

Hex used her free hand to pluck, roll and pinch her nipples, imagining it was his teeth. His hand matched the pace of her fingers as she watched him jerk himself off faster, and faster. His pre-come was washed away with the water. She whimpered, hating that she couldn't be with him to taste his come and swallow it down. Hex bit her

lip and finger-fucked herself faster, pressing her thumb down on her clit. The first tremors of her climax rumbled up her spine.

She groaned and spread her legs wider. "Silvano."

The tremors became waves until the pressure inside of her broke. Fire burst from her stomach and moved outward until it engulfed her body. She shook as she came. His name came out as a sob. Hex bit her bottom lip hard as she tried to not make a sound. Through tears, she watched him come. His head was thrown back; muscles on his neck stood out. Silvano's body flushed a bright red as jets of white come flew into the air and dribbled down his hand. He let out a howl that rattled the window.

Hex stumbled back. The air around her grew cold as the sweat cooled on her body. Her heart pounded against her ribcage. Deep inside of her, her cat continued to purr.

Go in there, it demanded.

Where?

There.

Are you insane? Have you been at the catnip again while I've been sleeping?

He wants us.

No, he wants to get laid again. He's a horndog.

Who cares? He's delicious.

Not now. Awareness rippled along her skin. She felt three wolves coming close to her location. Without a thought, she shifted into her black cat form and scampered off, not wishing to be caught. Hex doubted they would be kind to her when they found her close to their alpha's cabin. Once over the fence on the edge of the perimeter, she shifted back into her human form and got dressed. She ignored the pulse of her body and the constant mewed demands from her cat.

By the time she returned to her own pack, she was exhausted and in need of a shower. Hex had just entered her apartment when she felt the tattoos on her arms begin to burn hot. She hissed. Tears formed at the corners of her eyes at the pain. *Turk*. It felt as if her body was being sucked into a small hole. Her muscles cramped as the

summoning tattoos ramped up in power. The world around her shifted out of focus. Her small, clean living space with its single book shelf, couch, coffee table and television blurred until they were a mass of colors.

When her surroundings came into focus again she was in a dark, foul-smelling room. The odor of burnt herbs floated through the air to mingle with blood and dark magick. Her cat hissed and she fought the urge to retch.

"On your knees," a deep voice demanded. A force pushed her down until she sank to the ground. She felt hands around her throat. Her body lifted off the ground and went flying. Cold air rushed passed her. Her lungs emptied as her back hit the hard stone wall. She reached up to pry the hand away, only to meet nothing.

"Damn it, Turk, release me," she sputtered. Her feet kicked in empty space as she struggled to get down.

"Report," Turk commanded.

She could make out a dark figure, cloaked in black and hidden by shadow. He sat on a stone throne covered in worn red velvet. Hex tried to swallow as she urged her body to relax. Her muscles protested the request as her lungs burned, demanding more air.

"Turk... air... please." She loathed adding the plea at the end, but it was either that or call him a scum-sucking bastard, and she liked breathing far too much. *Maybe after he lets us go.*

The grip on her throat eased and she gulped in as much air as she could.

"Report," Turk ordered again.

"Nothing to report."

"Liar!" he roared as she stood up. She waited, the seconds ticking by as the expected attack didn't manifest. "You were there for four hours, and yet you found nothing I could use against him? What the hell do I pay you for?"

He began to pace.

"You don't pay me at all," she spat out. Hex squeezed her eyes shut waiting for retaliation. Nothing. *He's off his game tonight,* her cat pointed out.

Maybe he's not getting laid enough, Hex responded. *Lack of sex can do that to a man.*

"I expect results from you. I should bind you to me properly."

She tensed. A true binding between them could mean he could see what she did, feel what she did. *Bound to that hairy freak? No way in hell am I being bound to a dog,* her cat hissed.

And yet you want to fuck a wolf. Hex's eyebrow lifted in amusement despite the situation.

He's got a nice cock.

So, basically, what you're telling me is you'd be willing to be bound to Silvano because he's got a nice dick? Slut.

Whore, you wanted to fuck him too.

But I'm not talking about being bound to him.

"Would you pay attention to me?" Turk demanded.

Hex fought not to roll her eyes. The grip on her throat tightened again and she gasped.

"Now that I have your attention, tell me what you saw." Turk resumed his seat. She could feel his gaze burning into her and fought not to squirm.

"I saw nothing, just like on my last missions."

The blow came out of nowhere. Her head snapped to the side and was pinned to cold, rough brick.

"Love taps like that make me think you don't like me," Hex gritted out.

"Don't sass me, woman, tell me what I need to know." His humid breath brushed against her cheek. The scent of peppermint and vanilla wafted past her nose.

At least he's got nice minty breath.

"I saw nothing," she repeated.

Her face was turned forcefully toward him. She squeezed her eyes shut, not wanting to see what a year of dark magick use could do to a person.

"LOOK AT ME!" He roared.

Her eyes disobeyed her. They opened to be confronted by a figure covered in a heavy cloak. With a free hand, he threw back the hood. Ancient runes and symbols carved in dark red marred what had once been a handsome face. Red eyes now replaced what had once been pale gold. He shrugged off his cloak to show a gaunt figure. His jeans hung low on slim hips. He looked emaciated, as if he hadn't had a proper meal in a long time. More dark red symbols, carved deep into his skin, were scattered on his arms, over his chest and stomach. She could only imagine if the rest of him had been cut up like that.

"Tell me what I want to know. Has he found an alpha female yet? Do the elders trust him?" His garnet gaze shimmered eerily at her. They reminded her of another set of eyes that had looked at her with lust and hatred. Terror wrapped around her body and squeezed. She whimpered as memories rushed into her mind, unchecked like a flood.

"Hex," he hissed. "Tell me what I need to know."

Cold fingers caressed her cheek. "Please."

Her back arched as his hand wrapped around her neck. Power, her power, moved upward. She felt him suck her magickal energy like a mosquito drinking blood. Up and out and into him. "No!" she cried out weakly.

"If you won't tell me, then I'll take it." His mind crashed into hers. Mentally she screamed and pushed him out. He would not take her fantasies of Silvano. She refused to let him take what she'd seen that night. Hex managed to shove him out of her mind, but not for long. His power poured into her like cold gel, replacing the energy she had lost.

Her body was lowered onto the floor. She fell on her hands and knees gasping.

"You will tell me what I need to know, or I will send you out again, and if you come back to me without information, I will bind us together. Silvano Cipriani's pack will be mine."

"Why do you even want them? They exiled you." She fought to breathe normally and get her heart rate under control.

"The reason is my own business. Now get out of my sight." He turned and strode into the darkness.

"Drama queen," Hex whispered. She rose to her feet, feeling a bit lightheaded, and stumbled away. "I need to get out of here. Far away."

She remembered a flyer she'd received about a bar called Last Call, for paranormals only. "Perfect." Hex stopped off at her apartment, grabbed her coat and was off to the club before Turk could call her back.

Chapter Two

Silvano sat in the dark with a glass of Scotch and contemplated what he was about to do. He couldn't ignore the issues any longer. He was alpha in name only and that was a problem. A really big problem. His thoughts returned to Heather's teary confession. His grip tightened on the glass. He could hear the delicate cup crinkling as the glass became compressed. Silvano eased his hold, drained the contents and placed the glass on a side table. He steepled his fingers and allowed his thoughts to brew.

He thought of calling his assistants to him and spending a night in the ancient text rooms of the village library. A glance at the clock showed him that it was nearly eleven o'clock at night. He didn't want to bother them at such a late hour.

He stroked his stubble roughened jaw. "I could call Vidal."

His lips quirked into a smile at the thought of disturbing his second in command at such a late hour. The man would be furious but he'd come running anyway. He shook his head. "Can't do that. That'd be abuse of power no matter how amusing it might be."

A pounding on his door drew his attention. "Pack business." With a sigh Silvano got up.

Two of his pack members still in wolf form nodded their heads toward his office building. Silvano stepped out into the cool night air and locked the door behind him. He led the way. The soft scent of dark spices and wild magick brushed against his skin in a caress. *Hex.*

A whimper drew his attention and he could see fear in their eyes. With a sigh he settled his mind in the here and now, knowing there was trouble brewing. Or at least an irritation. He opened the door to his pack offices and stepped into the warmth. Vidal

stood by his desk, a folder in his hand. The other werewolf bowed low and held out the file.

“My alpha, you’ll want to have a look at these.”

Silvano took the proffered folder and sat behind his desk. He shuffled through the photos. His lips quivered with effort as he tried to hold back a smile. *Hexuba*. The name purred through his mind.

Vidal turned his attention to the two other wolves in the room. “How did you miss this? You’re supposed to be security.”

Silvano didn’t blame his security team for missing her. She was as sneaky as her cat form. That’s what made her an excellent spy and assassin. “Vidal, give them a break. Hexuba is a woman to be reckoned with.” He watched as Vidal blustered and shook his head.

“They failed in their duty to the pack. She could have killed someone before these inept wolves spotted her. Not acceptable.” He turned back to the security team. “You are on perimeter duty until I say otherwise.”

Both wolves cringed.

Once the subordinates had left Silvano finally spoke his mind. “Don’t you think you were being too harsh with them? Perimeter duty will take them away from pack festivities and any available females. The boys need release now and again.”

“Alpha, she could have killed you,” Vidal pointed out.

Silvano laid down the photos on his desk and rested his hands one atop of the other. “We’re alone, V. You can call me Silvano or Vano or even asshole if you like. And she didn’t even attempt it. She just looked in on me.” Heat simmered through his body as he remembered. The soft tingle of her magick brushed over his skin. “I sensed her. I knew she’d shifted and was on the property before anyone else did. She posed no threat. I could follow her on her journey throughout the village without worry. She didn’t hide her aura from me. Which she could have done.”

His cock hardened and lengthened. His the leg of his pants tightened around the shaft. He resisted the urge to move it to ease the pressure. Instead, he focused on Vidal’s

face, which was now white as a sheet. "Alpha, you should have raised the alarm. She could have --"

Silvano held up his hand. "I would know if she tried anything."

He didn't elaborate on how he knew, he just did. It was in the way she looked at him, dark brown eyes filled with desire and awe. Her body language, whenever they met, was guarded and shy. Normally he'd give wide berth to a woman like her. She was the familiar of his rival, as well as the type of woman who would want a relationship. He didn't do relationships, not anymore.

Silvano had tried a few times to form a connection with the women who had been chosen for his bed, only to fail. Most of them wanted to be the next female alpha for the position, rank and power that came with it. They didn't care about him. The others just wanted to use him as a substitute for their vibrator, or so they could say they'd gotten laid by the alpha. They didn't care that they weren't the only ones in his bed. Hex was different from those women. He could see she wanted him but didn't go after him. It was refreshing.

"Alpha, she's dangerous. Her past allegiances say as much. She murdered her former mentor, in front of her coven," Vidal pointed out.

"That woman was a menace who trapped Hexuba into her service. I'm well acquainted with Hex's history." He didn't tell Vidal just how much he'd studied up on the cat shifter. His thoughts turned to Turk. How he got the free spirited Hexuba to agree to be his familiar made Silvano uneasy. Every time he saw Turk and Hex together she looked afraid of him. Which in turn would piss off Silvano. Unfortunately, to point this out could only make things worse for Hex, which he didn't want, so all he could do was remain silent.

Tension sang through his muscles, driving away any desire he had. His protective instincts were raised, and he had to keep himself from going out into the night and trying to find Hex, dragging her back to his pack for protection, and of course, indulging in the mutual desire he knew was there.

“Alpha, please, reconsider your stance on her. She should be put down before she can do anything to harm you.”

A growl pressed past his lips before he could stop it. The shift began. First his nails elongated, turning into claws. Next his jaw began to lengthen as his teeth became sharper. Silvano stood up so fast that his chair was knocked over. He leaned over the desk to fix Vidal with a predatory stare. “Touch one hair on her head, or allow anyone else to harm her in any way, and I will rip you apart and anyone else who dares touch her. She is under my protection according to pack law until I say otherwise.” His voice had taken on an animalistic gravel tone. Silvano didn’t care.

Vidal sputtered. “I apologize, Alpha. Truly, I am sorry for any displeasure I have caused.”

Vidal began to back away, bowing as he did so before he left Silvano’s office. The click of the door closing triggered Silvano to come back to reality. His wolfish instincts receded and he returned back to normal. He’d overreacted and that was a bad thing. He couldn’t afford to alienate people, especially those who had treated him fairly. “Shit. I’m going to have to apologize later. For now, I need a break.”

His gaze fell upon a business card for the Last Call Bar near the center of town. “Just what the doctor ordered.”

Silvano stood up, grabbed his coat and set off for the pub.

* * *

Hexuba walked along the nearly empty street in a small, down-trodden section of Rome. It had been an exhausting day. She wanted to drown her sorrows in a pint and forget everything, maybe even find a random guy to fuck to take the edge off of her need for Silvano, too. She shook her head. Even before she went to spy on Silvano, her thoughts and dreams had constantly drifted toward him. Twice in the past week she’d lost her focus and almost set fire to her apartment, and another time she’d walked straight into a wall. *Why the hell is it that every fucking time I spy on him he’s naked or having sex? Oh wait, I know why, he’s auditioning mates. Ugh.* Her body tightened. Liquid heat filled her cunt as her pussy tingled with awareness.

"Damn it, damn it, damn it! Stop thinking about him." Despite telling herself that, a movie reel of him in the shower began to play. His lean body, water sluicing over solid muscle, soaking his dark brown hair, his rampant cock rising from a nest of dark brown curls, the head wide and thick, flush with blood. A soft groan fell from her lips as her mouth filled with saliva. Her fingers curled with yearning. She wanted to taste him, touch him, jerk him off and swallow every last drop of his seed.

Her own arousal floated up through the air and she cursed as her body went into heat. No one else would do. Only Silvano could help her scratch the itch that was threatening to cause her to come undone. Her magick was out of control, and all she could think of was sex with Silvano everywhere and anywhere. It didn't matter that he was supposed to be the enemy. All she saw were soft green eyes filled with blatant sexual heat and possession.

She usually went for guys who were available and he had "Stay Away" and "Unavailable" stamped on his forehead and every other part of his deliciously rock hard body. In fact, he had "Danger" written on his cock in neon lettering, and yet she still wanted him. Hungered for him. Desired him with a yearning so strong it bordered on insanity. How else could she explain her only reconnaissance of his pack was of him in the shower or fucking. Hex felt ashamed of even staying to watch him during both moments.

"You look worried." Twyla, her best friend, came up next to her. "What's wrong?"

"I'm thinking of leaving Turk," she said quietly.

"Are you insane? The man will go ape shit and declare you free game for hunting. Besides that, he's got your grimoire, which contains most of your power. Can you really leave that behind?" Twyla pointed out.

Hex said nothing. She couldn't tell her best friend that it was either stay and die under Turk, or leave and be killed. Both options sounded better than the pain she was going through at being without her source of power. It felt like she was a plant being cut off from the sun, so weak and hungry all the time. She wasn't whole, not by a long

shot. Part of her was missing and it was killing her, but she couldn't take the abuse anymore.

Then there was Silvano. The man was a temptation she couldn't afford. He wasn't good for her. The werewolf had heartbreak written all over him. She didn't want to go through the pain and yet she still wanted him. Fiercely so. Hex sighed aloud. It was a heavy sound that filled the air with the confusion she felt.

"It's not Turk, is it? It's Silvano? You have to get over him. He's a man whore. Bide your time, wait and see if Turk can be turned around."

Hex said nothing. She didn't want to drag Twyla into it. Twyla loved Turk. If she found out Turk was dabbling in dark magick, it would hurt her. And there was no telling what she might do once the truth was out. Hex didn't want to think about it. She'd stay, but only until she knew Twyla was safe and she could get her book back.

The thought of leaving Silvano behind, surprisingly, hurt. She wasn't sure where the pain was coming from though. They didn't really know each other. There was no attachment. All she wanted from him was sex -- at least that's what she thought. Her cat remained silent on the subject, which didn't help clarify her thoughts any.

Her mind turned back to Turk. She shuddered, remembering his nearly skeletal body. Hex had seen pictures of him before. He'd been a handsome young man, a bit younger than Silvano, give or take a year. In the photo he'd been smiling, happy, his arm around a younger Silvano.

She remembered the way Twyla had been as a child. Such a tomboy. She'd followed the older boys around and did whatever they did regardless of the danger. A glance at her best friend had her wondering where that little girl had gone. She'd been replaced by a sunny ball of energy focused on clothes, shopping and make-up.

Must be to make Turk happy. She shook her head. Turk was possessed, that much she was sure of. The look in his now transformed eyes made her shudder. She was terrified of what he'd do if she left him alone, especially with her personal grimoire. That book was too powerful to be left in his insane hands.

It was bad enough he'd figured out how to mark her for his personal summoning. She absently rubbed her arms and felt the soft tickle of magick through the leather. Her summoning tattoos were so screwed up that she couldn't ever reverse what he'd done. They walked along in silence and part of her prayed Twyla would leave her on her own. As much as she loved the werewolf, she couldn't hold her tongue against Turk for long. It took too much energy trying to survive. She was tired, especially today.

"Twy, look I'm going off to drink myself stupid. Why don't you hit a few of the clubs, have fun? I'm not good company tonight." Hex held her breath and waited.

"You shouldn't be on your own, then. Come on, let's go. Where to?" Twyla slid an arm through hers and led the way.

Shit. "Last Call. The para-bar just up ahead." She nodded her head toward a non-descript brick building a few doors down.

"Fun! Come on, I'll buy you a drink and we'll get you laid."

Hex groaned as Twyla dragged her to the front doors. They showed their IDs and were let in. Once inside the bar, her world stopped completely. There at the bar was Silvano, one arm resting on marble countertop, his body half turned away from her, but he knew she was there. She could feel his mind pressed against hers. He looked up. Even from a distance she could see his dark green eyes simmering with banked heat. It was as if, for the first time, they could both be in a place and just be there, no tension whatsoever. Her body relaxed a bit.

I want you. His gruff, lightly accented voice slipped in her mind. Just the sound of that whisky rough voice made her knees shake and her body quake. She licked her lips as his gaze took her in. Her nipples pebbled. Her pussy flooded with liquid heat. *Fuck woman, are you even wearing underwear?*

She sucked in a breath at the question and glanced down. Her skinny jeans didn't leave much to the imagination as far as underwear was concerned. She looked up and shook her head.

For me?

For you what? She asked tentatively with her mind. Hex had never spoken to him via telepathy before. For some reason being away from the packs made her feel a bit bolder than normal, especially in the face of the desire that burned in his eyes. It was the same look she'd seen while he'd been in the shower.

Wet? Is your pussy wet for me?

She swallowed. Her clit throbbed for attention, and she was having trouble remembering how to breathe. Hex didn't want to say yes, so instead she deflected his question. *Why are you talking to me?*

Because you're here and I'm here. We're away from our respective packs and I want to talk to you.

Don't.

He narrowed his eyes, green fire burning behind dark lashes. His eyebrow rose in question. *Don't?*

I'm with a female werewolf of Turk's pack. I don't want trouble. Besides, I'm sure you have other women you can talk to.

She turned her attention away from him but knew he was still staring at her, could feel the tingling burn of his gaze on the side of her face.

A soft hiss filled her head and she turned back to him.

What the fuck did he do to you? Silvano demanded, his voice a low, deep growl that filled her with terror.

Hex took a step back at his tone. Thankfully Twyla didn't notice. She was too busy taking in the bar.

"It's like the freakin' TARDIS in here. So much bigger than the outside lets on." Twyla gazed around in awe.

"Uh huh." It was all Hex could respond with. Her attention was solely on Silvano.

Nothing. He didn't do anything to me.

Woman, don't lie to me. I can feel your pain. Did the son-of-a-bitch hit you?

My name is Hexuba, not woman, and he didn't hit me. The lie came so smoothly to her mind, she balked in horror.

You lie. I will paddle your sweet ass for that.

Stop talking to me!

Or? His eyebrow rose in challenge and she nearly stomped over and slapped him.

I'll leave. She tried to fold her arms over her chest, only to have Twyla's arm pulled up in the process. With a scowl she let her arms drop back to her sides.

Adorable. He gave her a smirk that made her want to slap him even more.

Fuck you.

No, cara, I'm not fucking you. Yet.

And you never will. She glared at him before turning her attention back to Twyla.

"Let's go sit over there. Perfect spot to bar watch without being caught." Twyla pulled her toward a darkened table on the far side of the room.

"Sounds great," Hex murmured. She threw a glance back at the bar to see Silvano's attention otherwise engaged by a buxom blonde witch.

* * *

Silvano resisted the urge to growl. He moved his head this way and that, trying to spot Hex only to have the witch move with him.

"Listen, I'm not interested in you," he said curtly.

"Oh, but honey --"

He cut her off. "I'm waiting for someone."

A tap on his shoulder drew his attention. He turned back to see a blond bartender holding out a menu. "For you."

In an attempt to look busy, he flipped open the menu and scanned the drinks.

Dog Sled- Werewolf looking for a break from the pack life with a passionate encounter.

Perfect. Sounds like just what I need.

"I'll take a Dog Sled," he murmured before handing back the menu. The bartender smiled. "Good choice."

She was mixing his drink when Silvano spotted Hex again on the far side of the room. Her attention was focused on Twyla, a female of Turk's pack. Hex was very tense around the werewolf woman. Her posture was rigid. She radiated a combination of exhaustion and fear, as if she expected someone to ambush her any minute. Silvano's protective instincts went into overdrive as another werewolf wandered up to her table.

Normally different species couldn't communicate with each other easily, but he'd touched her mind before. That only made her all the more interesting. He opened his mental link to Hex. *Send him away.*

What the hell? Hex swiveled around in her seat to look at him. She glared daggers at him and all he could do was smile. *What the fuck is your problem? I'm busy.*

Not with him.

I'm not your type.

You are if I say you are.

Don't you have a bone to chew on or car to chase? Maybe some asses to sniff?

I'm not some fucking golden retriever.

Well then, grab that blond witch with the ginormous chest and go play fetch in the park. Or maybe you should play bury the stick.

What the hell are you talking about? I'm not a dog!

Look, this -- you -- it's all straining me. Can't you just find a fuck buddy for tonight?

He could hear the tiredness in her thoughts, as well as taste the lie. She wanted him; that much he knew. He wanted to take her far away from here and take care of her, help her relax.

Hex --

Silvano was interrupted by his drink being set down beside him along with a room key. "Last call! The gentleman to my left ordered a Dog Sled. Any takers?"

"Huh?" Silvano turned around to ask the bartender what was going on. His conversation with Hex had confused him.

Women of all shapes, sizes and species strode forward, hope clear on their faces. Then he remembered the meaning of the drink and groaned. Hungry gazes stared back

at him as they looked him up and down. The erection he'd had up until then withered. He turned to Hex for help. *Please. Save me.*

Amusement made her eyes sparkle. *Why?*

Her reaction pleased him. *Please.*

Fine, but I better get something out of it. She rose from her seat, leaning down to speak to her friend. Hex gave him an excellent view of her rounded ass, which made him groan aloud. She straightened and pushed her way through the crowd. "He's mine," Hex declared with bold confidence.

"Who do you think --" the blond witch started, her power sparking out from her fingertips.

"Perfect, I want her."

Chapter Three

Silvano grabbed his drink, the key, and Hex's hand before things could become too dicey and led her to the back of the bar toward the elevators.

"What just happened? Silvano, let go." She tried to yank her hand out of his grip.

"I'll explain in the elevator. Come on, *bella*." Silvano resisted the urge to pull her to him and kiss her hard. Instead, he continued onto the elevator where they got on with an amorous couple who started making out the second the doors closed. He pulled her close to him, letting go of her hand to wrap his arm around her waist. Her spicy scent reminded him of wild magick under a full moon. There was heat and dark energy that called to his wolf. It batted the air and whined.

Silvano ignored his animal and concentrated on the cat shifter next to him. Her warm body pressed against his side. He lowered his head. "Look at them, *bella*. Watch his actions, how badly he wants her. He doesn't even care that we're here. Look at his hand trailing up her thigh, her leg hooked over his waist," Silvano whispered.

The woman moaned and rocked against the man as soft sucking sounds floated over to them. The man's head moved lower as his hand came up to push down the strap of the woman's dress. Beside him, Hex gasped and moved closer to him.

"Don't be frightened, *bella*. I know you like to watch. I felt you each time you came to my cabin."

She sucked in air and ducked her head.

"I loved knowing your eyes were on me. It turned me on. Did you enjoy watching me?"

Hex looked up at him.

"I got off on knowing you wanted me. I could feel your desire for me even through the window. Goddess of the Hunt, I wanted to be with you, feel you against

me, watch how you responded to my actions." He pressed his lips closer to her ear. "You could have come in, you know. I would have let you join me."

"We can't -- I can't -- This is wrong." She turned away from him only to be confronted by the humping couple. The elevator slowed to a stop.

"You can get off, leave, and nothing will happen. Or you can come with me and see where the night leads." He heard her swallow. Silvano opened up his senses further. Her heartbeat chased away the heavy breathing from the couple in the corner. He buried his head in the crook of her neck and whispered against her milk chocolate skin. "One. More. Floor."

He moved back and waited as the seconds ticked by. Her indecision quivered in the small space between them. Finally the elevator dinged and the door slid closed with a soft thud before it began to rise and with it his hopes. In silence they both watched the couple growing closer and closer to sex. The scent of arousal saturated the air. Like wine, it rushed through his senses. His wolf demanded that he fuck Hex here and now, join in on the possible sex fest that was just on the horizon.

The elevator came to a stop and Silvano dragged her out of the elevator and down to the room he'd been assigned.

"Silvano --"

"Relax. Nothing we do tonight will be against your will. This will just be the culmination of what has been brewing between us for some time." Worry clouded her eyes. Silvano reached up and caressed her face. "Shhhh, *bella*, I promise, I will protect you with every fiber of my being."

He meant that. What hounded her steps would not darken this door. He refused to let it happen. If Turk came for her, he'd have a fight on his hands, one that would see one of them dead, Silvano was sure of it. For her, he'd take on his own pack to keep her safe. Something about Hexuba spoke to him on levels that went beyond just basic interaction. One look in her chocolate brown eyes and he was lost.

Her features softened. "I've just never... This isn't like me."

"Good. Let's explore this new side of you, together. I doubt you'll regret it." He unlocked the door and led her into the room. Silvano slid his hand around on the wall until he found a light switch. A flick of the switch illuminated a large room.

"The layout looks like your cabin."

He heard her teeth snick as she closed her mouth. Silvano chuckled.

"Yes, it does. I love it." He threw the keys on a side table and pulled her into the room, kicking the door closed with the heel of his boot.

She let go of his hand and wandered toward the bedroom area. "So much bigger than my apartment." The wonder on her face made his heart melt. It also made him want to give her a huge house; he'd build it himself if he had to. The urge to give her all of himself shocked him. *Perhaps there's hope for me and relationships yet.*

He followed her, putting his hands on her hips and pulling her back to him. He hissed at the feel of her body against his again. Silvano didn't want to ever let her go. *No matter what happens, she's mine.*

He nuzzled her neck and inhaled her spicy scent. His hand drifted up to cup her breasts. He couldn't get enough of touching her. Silvano nearly whooped in joy when she moaned and wrapped an arm around his neck. She arched her back and murmured his name.

The husky, breathy sound of her voice sent a rush of heat through his body.

"What do you think, *bella*? Do you want to spend the night together?" He didn't push his way into her mind and allowed her the time to answer aloud. Her body relaxed against him. The tension and fear she'd felt was gone.

"What happens come morning?"

"Anything you want."

"What about our packs?" There was no fear in her voice, just curiosity.

"I've declared you under my protection. I won't let anyone hurt you, not ever," he murmured against her neck. His tongue snaked out to taste her skin. Salt and magick tingled on the tip.

"I want to taste every inch of you. I've wanted you for so long." He rocked his hips against her ass. "Now I have you and I want to take my time exploring every delicious inch of you. Would you like that, *cara mia*?"

"Yes."

"Yes to what? Tell me what you want from me."

"I want it all," she whispered.

"Oh no, *cara*, no whispering. Only screams I want from you. All night, every night." He paused, waiting to see how she'd react.

The conflict on her face made it clear. "Silvano, I can't --"

"Don't deny me, not after we've danced around this for so long. I meant what I said, Hex, every word."

She turned his arms and placed her hands on his chest. Her eyes glittered with unshed tears that made him growl. He brought a hand up to her face. "What's wrong, *bella*? Tell me and I'll try to make it all better."

She shook her head. "You can't, but I'll take this night. Just don't push for more."

Secrets sparkled in her eyes. He opened his mouth to press for more, only to snap it shut. "Fine."

"Nothing personal tonight, okay?"

"For now, nothing personal, but I do want to know you." He silenced any objections by kissing her hard. She moaned and wound her arms around his neck. Silvano nipped her lips. When she opened for him, he sank his tongue into her mouth. Hex tasted like wild spices and cherries. He groaned, slipping his hand into her hair. Silvano tilted her head back slightly and deepened the kiss.

She took hold of his jacket and pulled him closer. Hex pulled her head back and gazed up him, her lips swollen, dark brown eyes nearly black. The soft musk of her arousal drifted up to him. He groaned at the scent.

"Show me what I've been missing all this time," she murmured before pressing biting kisses along his jaw line and down his neck. He moaned at the soft sting as bursts of heat went off with each nip.

"*Tesora*, Goddess, you have no clue what you're doing to me," he moaned as she bit down hard on the skin over his pulse point. His heartbeat tripped and sped up. Heat danced along his nerve endings as anticipation spiked high. His grip on her hair tightened. With his free hand he mapped out her back and moved down to cup one of the cheeks of her ass, giving it a hard squeeze.

"Tell me. Describe to me how I make you feel," she whispered, her velvety voice huskier than usual.

"I'm burning up." Silvano released her hair and shrugged out of his jacket without breaking contact with her body. "I ache to feel you, skin against skin. I've wanted you for so long. Fuck. My cock is so hard for you."

Hex grabbed his shirt and ripped it open. Buttons flew everywhere. He chuckled. "Eager, are you?"

"Very."

Silvano allowed his mental shields to drop and be open to her.

"Let me in, *cara*, please." When he'd slipped into her mind before Silvano had been so consumed by passion he hadn't asked permission. This time he was asking, no, begging. Hex gazed up at him, eyes unreadable.

He sucked a breath when he felt her mind press against his. Her emotions crashed against him like a wave against the shore. Her magick joined in the emotional downpour tingling along his skin, raising the hair on the back of arms and neck. He took it all in, allowing it to cover him. Every emotion was like candy: some sweet, some soft, some sour and some bittersweet.

As he gave it all back to her, allowing her to feel his emotions, her body arched against him. Taking advantage of her momentary distraction, he parted her jacket and pushed it back to reveal a simple white t-shirt. He filled his palms with her breasts, testing their weight with his hands before squeezing them softly. She moaned and thrust her chest forward.

"More."

Silvano grabbed her neck line of her shirt and pulled it apart, chuckling at her gasp.

"My shirt!"

"I'll get you a new one."

She held up a hand and took a step back. For a moment he thought she was going to put an end to what had only just begun. Instead she gave him a saucy smile.

"Don't want you to rip my bra. I paid a lot for it." She shrugged out of her jacket and the remains of her shirt to reveal a lacy bit of black froth that molded to her breast perfectly. He could see the dark outline of her nipples. Silvano licked his lips, wanting to taste a taut peak and suck the dark chocolate nub into his mouth. He watched her flip a clasp on the front and shrug out of the bra. Her breasts bounced gently with her every movement.

He took a step forward, intent on carrying out his desire, only to be stopped by her outstretched hand.

"*Cara,*" Silvano started.

"I happen to like these jeans too."

He laughed. Amusement added to the heat in his body. "Fine. Strip for me."

Silvano looked spotted a chair. Undressing, he dragged it over. He sank down onto the seat and grasped his erection in a tight grip. "Proceed," he urged as he began to pump his fist, stroking his cock slowly.

For a moment Hex stood there, staring at his cock. She licked her lips. He could see the indecision in her eyes and grinned. "Unless you'd rather suck me? I'd enjoy both as long as I get to fuck you afterward."

A purr rumbled up from her chest and radiated outward. The vibrations hit his skin, as the heat and tingles of her magick increased. His eyelids dropped down until he was looking at her from behind a fan of dark lashes. He allowed himself to revel in her reactions to him. Her mind continued to press against his, her thoughts spilled into his head and swirled around, all of them surrounding the need she had for him.

He groaned and stroked himself faster. Even without being inside her, he was close. His climax was just on the horizon. It wouldn't take much for him to come. "Hex," he hissed. "Goddess, please, do something, anything. I don't want to come on my hand."

"Look at me," she commanded. Her voice was soft and husky. The sound wrapped around his cock, causing it to jerk in his hand. He slowed his strokes and opened his eyes wider, trying to fight off his need to come. Hex moved in front of him, her lithe body dancing to music he couldn't hear. Her hips swayed from side to side, tearing a groan from deep in his chest. The sound rumbled out, becoming a growl of frustration.

"Hex."

She continued to move with a slowness that tried his patience. The room was too small and hot. His skin felt too tight. The inferno had become too much for him to take. His balls throbbed for release. The perfume of her arousal and magick swirled around him. She swayed closer, but just out of his reach. With his free hand he tried to reach out only for her to dance away. He swore and stopped stroking his cock. "Damn it, Hexuba, come here."

Her eyebrow rose in question. "Demanding, aren't we, alpha?" She dropped down to her knees and crawled toward him on all fours, stopping just a foot away. Hex rose onto her knees and sat back on her heels.

"Mmmm, my, my. What a delicious looking cock you have, so nice and thick and just begging for my mouth."

He gritted his teeth and held himself back from joining her down on the floor.

"Do you stroke that gorgeous cock when you're alone and thinking of me?" She spread her legs but he didn't have a clear view. He wanted to see just how wet she was for him.

The scent of her desire rose between them, pushing at his self control. The fuck and jerk off he'd had earlier that night had stemmed his sexual desire for her

momentarily, but now that she was before him, he wasn't sure he could control himself completely. "You're testing me, woman."

She chuckled. "Like you've been testing me all the times we met?"

He shook his head. "No, no, I know the difference between a probe and a testing." She laughed, the sound so bright and musical, it took him by surprise and made him smile in response. He wanted to hear her laughter always. Hex placed her hands on his knees. She leaned forward, bringing her head dangerously close to where he needed her. He watched as she pursed her lips and blew on his cock. The gentle cool air caressed his overheated cock, setting off sensations that made him groan aloud.

"Besides, I wanted more than just a tease from you." Hex moved closer until her moist breath caressed his aching cock. His body tensed when he felt the first lick from her tongue, followed by another. She lapped at his hot flesh with short touches of her tongue. Each contact drove him crazy. These small licks weren't enough.

"Hex," he groaned and spread his legs wider. Silvano reached out with his free hand to bury his fingers in her hair and urge her closer. "Please, take me into your mouth."

A shuddered breath escaped his mouth at the first touch of her tongue to the slit on the crest of his cock. She tormented him with gentle cat-like laps before taking just his cockhead into her mouth. His body tensed when she increased the pressure around the thick crown. Pleasure slid up and down his spine and shot through his nerve endings as his heart thudded harder in his chest.

"Hex," he hissed as he lost himself in the sensations threading through his body as lava burned through his veins. Silvano was now between coming and burning up. Gripping her hair tightly, he tried hard not to thrust his hips forward. His body shook with effort to stay still.

When his balls pulled closer to his body, he fought to keep from coming, holding on by fraying threads to stop it. "I need to be inside of you."

He pulled her head back, released her hair and pushed back on her shoulders. Hex fell on her back, pushing herself up on her elbows and gazing at him with lust

darkened eyes. Her legs were splayed open, showing off the thick lips of her cunt slick with her juices.

"Want me, doggie? Come get me." She scrambled up and raced around the room.

Silvano felt the change. Instead of the beginning of a shift, his wolf took control of his mind. Now in predatory mode, Silvano rose up from the chair and took off, scenting her desire, following the trail she made around the room. They raced around furniture until he cornered her at the far end of the room.

"Gotcha," he murmured. Her heart beat thudded in his head, her excitement cracked and popped against his skin, her emotions rushed into him like a tide. Arousal, desire, need and a sense of safety hit him square in the chest and almost knocked him to the ground. Instead, he took hold of her waist and pulled her away from the wall. Silvano took her lips in a hard, biting, possessive kiss that only fed the hunger. He released her lips to plant open mouthed kisses down her neck to her shoulder. Her nipples teased his chest with small touches before she pressed her body closer. She threw her leg over his hip, grinding her pussy against him. The damp heat sent his desire spiraling higher.

"*Cara mia*," he groaned and tugged her down to the floor with him. She stretched out, legs spread open, her face softened by desire.

Silvano covered her body with his, pressing soft kisses all over her face as he silently fought with the wolf to claim her now. With great effort, he shoved his need back and concentrated on showing her how he felt with his touch. His lips ghosted along her skin, moving down her body until his face hovered over her breast. He moaned when her fingers threaded through his hair and urged him closer to her tight nipple.

"Taste me," she urged. Hex arched her back until the hardened bud pressed against his mouth. With a groan he lapped and scraped the thick tip with his tongue and teeth. He kissed his way to the other, showing it the same amount of attention. His reward was soft cries and the way her body squirmed underneath his.

She wrapped her legs around his waist and rocked her damp flesh against his groin. Just the feel of her feminine heat against this cock pushed his control back a bit. He paused to regain some stability before going back to teasing her nipples.

"Silvano, eat me," she urged.

He didn't have to be told twice. Silvano kissed his way down her stomach to her bare mound, pausing to inhale the scent of her need for him. He wanted to take his time, bringing her to the peak over and over again before he finally sunk into her tight, slick channel.

* * *

Hex was losing her mind. If he didn't do something soon, she was going to just take care of the ache between her thighs herself. The first lick of his tongue on her labia caused her toes to curl and her body to tense as pleasure took hold of her and refused to let go. She gasped and held onto his hair tighter. In the back of her mind, she wondered if she was hurting him, but all that was forgotten when he flicked her clit. Sparks of pleasure were set off with that small action.

"Silvano," she cried out as she angled her hips upward, closer to his mouth. "More."

He parted her pussy lips to blow on her clit. She cried out as the heat built higher. When Silvano sucked the bud into his mouth she bucked and buried a second hand in his hair. Hex urged him closer, needing more contact than he was giving her.

"Please, eat me." This was a fantasy come true. She had Silvano, here, with her, and he desired her as much as she wanted him. His lips tugging her clit followed by the pain of his bite tore a cry from her. She reveled in the pain as her orgasm coiled in the pit of her stomach. Tingles shivered through her body as the arousal pushed her higher and closer to the edge.

Unable to keep still, she rocked against his mouth, trying to find that sweet friction that would set her off. He released her clit and chuckled. The deep rough sound sent shudders through her body. She arched her back and squirmed. More of her juices leaked out of her cunt.

"Not yet."

Hex sucked in a deep breath when two thick fingers were shoved into her tight sheath.

"Silvano," she cried out.

"Do you fuck yourself this way? Do you take two of these pretty little fingers and slip them inside your pussy, fuck yourself on them until you come? Or do you use a vibrator?" He pumped the fingers in and out of her with aching slowness that drove her crazy. She tried to move on them only to have him stop completely.

"Damn you, Silvano. I use a vibrator. Now FUCK ME!"

He chuckled again. This time the sound was darker. Her stomach clenched. Waves of pleasure flowed up her spine, making her squirm. His fingers began to move again, this time a little faster.

"Do you try and hide your pleasure so others can't hear, or do you let it out, hmm? Do you scream out my name when you come, like I do yours?" His mind pressed into hers, pushing an image into her head. She could see from his point of view, his cock in his hand, the sounds of his moans woven in with heavy breathing. Thick trails of white come slipped over the wide head from the slit. Her name filled her head as his hips began to move. The slick sounds of his hand on his cock, his breathing and groans, combined to create an erotic symphony. Her pussy fluttered in response as her own desire grew.

"Next time, remember this night, my mouth on this sweet pussy, my cock inside this tight cunt and me pushing you toward ecstasy. I'm yours, Hex, all of me, always."

She tried to protest only to have it cut off when his fingers curled inside of her. He found the secret bundle of nerves and rubbed over it. Hex came instantly. Her pussy contracted as she cried out. Her body tensed as waves of heat and pleasure slammed into her.

"Silvano," she gasped out. Hex felt the thick head of his cock against her entrance. His thick shaft stretched her inner walls to the point of pain. She whimpered as he slipped inside of her. Thankfully he took his time. Inch by inch he sank into her

until he was fully seated. She could feel every vein, each beat of his heart echoing through her body. His thoughts continued to slip into her mind, images of him alone, jerking off, thinking of her, popped up, increasing the desire she felt.

Everything that made her who she was began to merge into him until they were so entwined, it scared her. She began to panic and tried to push him away.

"Shh, *cara*, relax and let me in. Please," he murmured as he peppered her chest with butterfly kisses. "Focus on my voice, on me, on the pleasure."

Silvano withdrew just as slowly as he had entered her. She allowed him to set the pace, unable to move as she struggled with herself. The emotion, his feelings toward her, seeped into her body, his desire and hunger added to her own. The wolf shoved forward, rubbing against her cat. The feline in turn began to purr and respond. The slide of fur on her flesh shocked her, before she gave into the comforting contact.

It's okay, just be at peace, a gruff voice murmured. The sound surprised her, until she felt the fur again, this time coarser than her cat's. *His wolf*.

You'll always be safe with us. Always, the voice said again before she felt the softer fur of her cat. Each animal took a side and brushed against her as Silvano pushed into her and drew back. The glide of cock against the sensitive walls of her pussy caused the pleasure to spike higher as he latched onto a nipple and pulled hard. Sparks of electricity shot straight to her clit. Hex released his hair to slip a hand between them and tease her clit. The word, *Ours*, rolled around inside her head as Silvano picked up the pace, pounding her pussy harder and deeper with each stroke. She wrapped her legs around his waist.

"Silvano, please, make me yours," she moaned. He stilled over her. She gazed up into forest green eyes. The emotion she saw in the green depths was too much to take and yet she couldn't look away.

"Claim you?" A wicked smile curled on his lips as he pulled out with a soft pop. "Run, *cara*, run like you mean it."

For a moment she was confused until understanding dawned on her. Unlike before, this wasn't for play, this was for mating. Without hesitation, she slid out from

under him and on shaky legs rose to take off. A long, mournful howl filled the room, bounced off the walls and hit her from all directions. For a moment she thought she was being chased by a pack instead of one man. *No*, she corrected herself, *Not a man, a werewolf. An alpha.*

Strength returned to her legs and oddly enough the room seemed to stretch and grow bigger. When she reached the bed something tackled and pinned her to the mattress. Chest heaving, breathing coming out in harsh pants, Silvano was over her. His teeth were elongated, his face harder, more chiseled, and his eyes were the color of the moon at full orb. She sucked in a breath.

Mine, he growled out before he moved back. "On all fours."

She shook her head, refusing, not wanting to give in to him so easily. A dark eyebrow rose in challenge.

"No?" He reached out and grabbed a shoulder and tried to roll her onto her stomach. She fought against him, kicking and scratching, but he was much stronger than she was. Finally on her stomach, she felt his fingers thread through her hair. Silvano took a handful and pulled back.

She screamed when sharp teeth pierced her shoulder. Inside her cat's purr increased until she was shaking with it. Both feline and woman reveled in the rough handling as his other hand grasped her hip and pulled her up until she was on all fours. Her hands and knees sunk into the mattress and her legs spread wide, waiting for him to claim her.

"Mine," man and wolf growled. *"Ours."*

"Then fuck me, oh great alpha, claim me," woman and cat purred in response.

She moaned aloud at the pressure of his cock against her dripping entrance. He rammed into her, this time not slowing down or giving her time to adjust. Silvano took what he wanted, fucking her hard, each stroke of his cock branding her as his. His grip tightened as his bite increased. Her fingernails dug into the comforter as her toes curled. He rode her hard. She threw her hips back at him, fucking him. The orgasm tightened and curled, twisting higher and higher until she was close.

"Silvano, harder, claim me," she cried out.

His pace slowed down, causing her to curse. "Stupid wolf, what the fuck are you doing?"

Not yet. A solid wall of power hit her. Her skin was covered in warmth before it began to spread and saturated her body. It was as if her pores had opened and taken his energy inside of her. The heat spread until she was enveloped in it. It fed her magicks, making her feel stronger, better than she had been in a long time. *This is what it is to be an alpha's woman. Your body is mine, to protect, to keep, to satisfy.*

More energy hit her, this time tearing a moan from her as the fur and heat brushed against her nipples and teased her clit. His bite sank deeper until she was sure he would hit bone. The worry was scattered as more of his power poured into her. Her desire expanded and flexed. He pulled out and pushed forward, rocking into her harder with each stroke. Silvano pushed her head down until it was against the duvet. His skin pressed hers. She could feel the reverberations of his heart pounding against her back. With short, staccato thrusts, he claimed her. Each movement seemed to go deeper inside of her.

She moaned and tried to move against him. "Silvano, please." Hex wanted to come. Needed to come. She squeezed her cunt around his cock trying to draw him deeper, urge him to come. He growled but held his bite as he increased the speed of his thrust. His cockhead brushed against that sensitive bundle of nerves and one of his hands snaked around her hip to strum her clit. She came on a muffled scream. Heat burst from her stomach as power hit her again. This time she could feel something shift and change within her, and she was helpless to stop it.

She gave in. Silvano came with her, bathing her pussy in hot jets of his seed. He released her shoulder to let loose a howl that sent a thrill snaking down her spine.

"You belong to me now." He wrapped his arms around her waist and pulled her down to the mattress with him. He peppered the nape of her neck with kisses and small nips and licks. As her muscles popped and twitched in the aftermath and she settled down, Hex couldn't help but wonder what had just happened.

Chapter Four

Silvano released Hex and rolled over onto his back, heart pounding against his ribcage. Arousal still burned through his body. He looked over at Hex. She looked dazed. Sweat glittered on her body in the low light. He could still taste her cream. The salty, tangy juices rolled over his taste buds. He groaned. His wolf demanded another round from her, and judging by her fluttering eyelids, he doubted she wanted more at the moment. He rolled onto his side and studied her.

He reached out and brushed her hair away from her face. For the first time in a long time the tension in his body was gone, melted away during his joining with her. Silvano felt as if he could stare at her forever and never tire of studying her face. He traced the slope of her nose, her lips and cheeks with his fingertips before moving down the column of her neck. A neat set of bite marks marred her shoulder. The wound had healed but the indents remained. His wolf preened at the sight.

Ours, it murmured.

Silvano nodded in agreement. He outlined the marks and watched her body writhe. Her desire spiced the air and he smiled.

“Want another round, *cara*?”

She turned her head. Dark brown eyes stared back at him. The heat in that gaze nearly took his breath away. She rolled onto her side, mimicking his pose.

“Depends,” Hex reached out to trace a line down the center of his chest. He sucked in a breath when she wrapped her fingers around his now hardened cock. Silvano groaned and pushed his hips forward. She moved her head until their lips were a hairsbreadth away. “Do I get to mark you this time?”

The idea of wearing her mark anywhere on his body made his cock twitch in her hand.

"Mmm, you like that idea. Now where should I bite you? Maybe on the shoulder? Or how about your chest? Lower, perhaps?" Her eyebrow rose in question. She gave his cock a hard squeeze that would make most men tear up. Instead, he reveled in the pain.

"Do with me what you will. I'm yours to command."

Her lips curved into a wicked smile before she closed the distance between them and gave him a soft kiss. Her magick poured into him. His lips fell open as he swallowed her power. His back arched as heat flooded his body. Her magick danced along his skin, filling him up like a cup. He couldn't breathe past the energy that surged through his body. The intensity of his arousal multiplied. He groaned when she slipped her tongue past his lips, swirling, teasing, exploring the recesses of his mouth.

He pulled back his head and gasped for air. "Hex," he moaned.

Her hand moved up and down his shaft, pausing at the head to swipe pre-come across his cockhead.

"You want me? Hmmm, wolfie? Wanna fuck me again? Do you want me to come all over this thick cock again?"

He growled low in his throat at her teasing tone. The air filled with the scent of the forest and wild magick. Silvano breathed in deeply as he pulled back his hips and thrust.

"Don't tease me, kitty. You won't like what I do."

"Is that a threat? We can stop right here." Her hand stilled and he let the growl slip past his lips.

"Don't you dare stop," he hissed.

"Or what, oh great alpha?" She placed a hand on his shoulder and pushed. He fell willingly, loving her take charge attitude. Hex climbed on top of him, straddling his thighs. Her hand began to move again, this time in a slow rhythm that drove him crazy with lust. He wanted to be inside her, to feel her tight, wet sheath squeeze his cock perfectly. Silvano groaned.

"I've always wondered what makes an alpha? Does he have to be good in a fight? Good in bed? Both? What makes you an alpha?" Curiosity glittered in her eyes.

"Let me show you." He grabbed her hips and sat up. She cried out as she fell back. Her hand released his cock as she landed on the mattress.

"Mm, I like this position much better." Silvano pulled her up onto his lap until his cock brushed her dripping entrance. "A good alpha, who's worth a damn, can fuck as well as he fights. But he also knows how to take care of his pack."

He released her hips and ran his hands up her sides and around to cup her breasts. "And I know how to take care of my woman."

Silvano squeezed the mounds, gently at first before increasing the pressure. She arched her back and moaned. "Please," she murmured, covering his hands with hers.

"Show me how you like it. I want to know what you do when you're alone, thinking of me, needing release."

She raised an eyebrow, a wicked smile curving her lips. "Who says I'm thinking about you?"

Silvano pushed his way into her mind, extracting the memories of her masturbating while thinking of him. "Naughty girl," he pinched her dark nipples and held them. "Don't lie to me."

She whimpered but didn't resist his mental invasion. Instead, she reciprocated, slipping past his shields to draw out more memories of him alone, jerking off, fantasizing about her. "What's this?" she whispered. "More images of you stroking that delicious cock of yours while thinking of me?"

He released her nipples and watched her cry out and arch her back. Her juices coated the head of his cock as she rocked against him. "That's right. Maybe one day, if you behave, I'll finish showing you what you do to me."

Hex settled down and snorted. "One day? No, you'll show me tonight."

He rocked his hips forward. "What? You don't want to get fucked now?"

Indecision flitted across her face, along with regret. He narrowed his eyes. "What's going on, Hex?"

Hex shook her head. "Fuck me." She moved forward, the head of his cock sinking into her tight, wet sheath.

He gripped her hips and held her still. "No, you tell me what's going on."

She glared at him. "Nothing personal. Now, fuck me."

He growled in frustration. For a moment, he flirted with the idea of taking the answer from her. Their mental connection was still open. Instead, he decided to allow her to tell him. Silvano withdrew and pushed his hips forward, taking his time filling her with his cock.

"Yes," she hissed. "Goddess, Silvano, I could get addicted to your cock."

Silvano would have preferred she become addicted to him, and their time together. Anger drove his actions. He gripped her hips and rose up. With short, deep thrusts he pushed her to the limit again. Hex moaned and gripped the bedspread tightly as he pounded into her. She released the cloth and slipped a hand between her thighs. He watched hungrily as she worked her clit. Soft moans and cries filled the air, combining with the slap of wet flesh.

"Beautiful. I want you to come for me, *cara mia*." He increased the pace, slamming into her with each push.

"Silvano," she cried as her pussy fluttered around his cock before she tensed. Her cunt clamped down on his shaft as she came, milking him of his seed.

Silvano gritted his teeth as he fought the pressure burning in his gut. The tension sung through his body as he pushed back the desire. "Mine, mine, mine."

He stopped thrusting. "Sit up," he ordered.

She didn't even fight him. Hex maneuvered her body up until she straddled his thighs. Her hand worked between them, stroking her clit. She wrapped one arm around his neck and stared into his eyes.

"Ride me." He buried a hand in her hair and yanked. Hard. She cried out. He took advantage of her momentary pain to brush his lips over her unmarred shoulder before he bit down and held her as she screamed. *Mine, mine, mine, mine*. Silvano shoved his thoughts into her mind, claiming her as she rose up and lowered herself on

his cock. The rhythm built up again until she was riding him hard. Blood filled his mouth as he kept up the grip.

"Silvano," she moaned again before she came, her body shook against him. As the aftershocks trembled through her, he thrust upward, fucking her through her orgasm. Heat sizzled along his nerve endings. Fire burned at the base of his spine as his balls pulled closer to his body. He came.

Silvano released her shoulder and lapped at the wounds. "Mine," he murmured in between flicks. Her body quivered against him.

She sighed and rested her head against his shoulder, her breath fanning his slick skin. Her heartbeat pounded against his chest, echoing his own rapid pace. Peppering her shoulder with soft kisses. "Please, don't leave me, Hex. I don't think I can survive if you left."

Never had he asked for anything for himself once he'd become alpha of his pack. Now, he took that moment to beg the woman he wanted to stay, for him. Silvano stroked her back. "I know I'm being a selfish bastard right now. You don't owe me a damn thing, but I'll protect you. Whatever you need me to do, I'll do it. I'll even go against my pack for you."

She gasped and shifted on his lap. "Silvano --"

"I'll take care of you. I have enough money to support us for the rest of our lives."

She stopped. "So you'll take care of me?" Hex scrambled off of his lap. "I can take care of myself. I don't need you."

Her tone was defensive. He closed his eyes, knowing he'd screwed up. "I'm not saying you can't. I'm just trying to --"

"Show me what a good pack leader you are. You can provide for your woman and any offspring, right? I don't need that. This is just to scratch an itch."

"Tell me you don't feel anything for me. You can't possible dismiss the attraction we have." He loathed that he sounded as if he was begging but he wanted her to understand. "Is it Turk? Is he forcing you to stay?"

"Turk is not a part of this."

That, he was pleased with. "Then why won't you stay with me? What's he got over you? I'd like to think I know something about you. I know you killed the witch you belonged to first, that she'd abused you. Does Turk abuse you? Is he dangerous? I'll put him down for you."

"Why me? Why not for his pack?" She wrapped her arms herself. The look of confusion pierced his heart. "Why am I so special?"

"Goddess." He crawled across the bed and took her in his arms. "You are special to me. You're the wild laughter of the wind, as sexy as the Goddess of the Forest herself, as beautiful and enchanting as the moon. You are so many things and I desire them all. My gorgeous Hexuba, you are everything I desire in a woman, and I want to show you, in as many ways as I can, how special you are."

"Very pretty, but that doesn't help now, does it?"

"What are you hiding from me?" He used a soft tone rather than order her like he usually would. She was his mate, his equal, and he would treat her as such.

"What makes you think --"

He tightened his arms around her. "Don't lie to me. Tell me what's wrong." He kissed his way down her neck. "Explain it all to me. I'll understand."

"My family members were all familiars. It was our duty to serve one family, to aid them in their magick work, enhance their powers and guide them. The last of that family was murdered by the witch who overthrew the head of the coven. In order to save the rest of the witches, I swore an oath to her, one that I've broken to save the lives of the people who now have a death warrant out for me. I needed someplace to hide, and Turk gave me that."

He smelled the lie as she spoke it. The words soured his stomach but he refused to let go of her. "My spies tell me Turk stole something of yours. You didn't go to him willingly. He forced you to join his pack."

She turned her head away. Tears sparkled in her eyes. A growl rumbled up from his chest and out of his mouth before he could stop it. She flinched and shrank into herself.

Son of a bitch, the wolf growled. *What did he do to our mate?*

Silvano had to stop himself from shaking her. Instead, he tried to calm down despite the chaotic emotions swirling in his gut. "What did he do?" This time he used a gentle tone.

Hex looked up at him. "He has my grimoire. I don't know how he got it." Her body began to shake as the tears fell. Silvano enveloped her in his arms and stroked her hair.

We're going to kill him for this, the wolf hissed.

"Don't worry, *cara*, we'll get it back. I promise you, this won't go unanswered." He placed a kiss on the top of her head and let her cry.

"You can't," she sniffled. "You can't do that. This isn't your problem. It's mine."

"And I can help."

"Your pack won't allow this. Your elders --"

He growled. "They can go fuck themselves. You're my mate. I've claimed you and I will help you, their rules be damned."

Her head lifted and she looked at him, eyes wide, awe in the dark brown orbs. "I won't ask this of you. It's... it's not right, Silvano." She stroked his face. "I can't ask this of you. I want you to let me handle it, please."

"How, *cara*? How will you do this?" He held himself back from demanding more. Silvano would interfere only if he felt her plan was dangerous.

"I'm going to leave."

His heart clenched in his chest. "Leave?"

She nodded and reached up. Her fingers traced his cheek, setting the skin ablaze as arousal awoke. "I'm going to run away, where not even you can find me."

He didn't correct her. As his mate, with his power pulsing inside of her, he could track her anywhere she went.

"One day, I'll come back, when I'm strong enough, but not now. Please, let me have this."

He closed his eyes. The very thought of being parted from her hurt him. The ache started in his heart and spread.

"Please, Silvano," she urged. "Let me handle this."

He caressed her cheek. "And what if I wanted to run with you?"

She sucked in a breath and stared at him.

"I can't be the alpha I want to be. Do you see these marks on my shoulder? These tattoos? They signify my status as an alpha, but they mean nothing. Not the way things are. My own people can't be with the ones they love because of the rules," he grumbled. "Laws that even keep us apart because we are not only of a different species of shifter, but also because you are Turk's familiar. I can't live like that, Hex, and I won't."

"But your people --"

"I'll challenge the pack elders, and if I fail, I leave."

She shook her head but he didn't let her speak.

"Will you stand with me?"

"What do you mean?"

"You're my mate. I'll need your strength if I take on the elders."

"So you want me to just show up and what, stand by your side?"

"Something like that."

Her eyelids dropped. "I'm not a fucking cheerleader."

He chuckled. "But you'd look damn good in the outfit."

Her lips quivered before the laugh finally broke free. He grinned only to stop when her face became serious.

"Silvano, this is dangerous. There has to be another way."

He reached up and caressed her cheek. "Worried about me, *cara*? How about I say for you I will be careful?"

She shook her head. "Not good enough."

"What do you want me to tell you? What will soothe your mind? I can't let things remain status quo. Not for my people's happiness and not for your safety."

"You don't know what Turk's done. He's messed with some pretty bad things. I don't think he can be saved." Sadness flashed in her eyes.

"Do you think he should be saved? For your friend, perhaps?"

She shook her head. "I don't like killing. I never did, even though it was my job. I never saw the victims, made sure to get only the barest information on them. Turk may have abused me but there's something wrong with him."

Silvano couldn't stop the flash of anger or the growl that rumbled up from his chest.

"He's obsessed with taking your pack from you. I don't understand why. You kicked him out, exiled him."

"Turk lost the fight for alpha. Many felt I shouldn't be alpha of this pack. They didn't believe I was strong enough, dedicated enough. I proved them wrong but they still loathe me because I don't do as they wish. I haven't found a mate. The women they gave me I didn't want." He reached out and brushed some hair out of her eyes. "What has he been doing?" Silvano didn't want to hear the lengths Turk had gone to for power but needed to know.

"I know he hasn't accessed my grimoire yet, but he's tattooed runes into his skin. He looks so skinny, like he hasn't eaten in a long time. I think he's even doing blood magick, but I can't be sure."

"Are you worried about him?"

"Twyla, my best friend, she loves him, and I worry about the lengths she'd go for him."

"She can't be convinced to leave?"

Hex shook her head. "I've known her for a long time. She used to be so full of sunshine and energy, all tomboy. Then she grew up and I don't really know who she is anymore. I'm scared for her."

"Hex, how did Turk find you?" Silvano asked. He had his suspicions but didn't want to give them voice just yet.

"I don't know. I was in Tokyo for a job. When I got back to my room, it had been ransacked and my grimoire was gone. Then I got a call from Twyla telling me she missed me."

"My sources tell me that he hasn't left the country since he was exiled. So one of his pack must have taken it."

"But no one can handle it unless they have magick ability." Hex sighed, her shoulder slumped.

"We can figure this out. I promise you, I won't let him hurt you anymore."

"And I won't let him hurt anyone I care about." She turned to him. Her magick tingled on her skin. He groaned as it caressed his cock. Hex leaned forward, bringing her head closer to his. She allowed first one kiss and then another until their lips moved against each other in desperate abandon. He tried to lift his arms to wrap them around her, only they felt heavy. His head felt light and his eyelids started to sink down. Sleepiness wove around him. Her magick poured into him as it wove around him. His body grew heavy until the world became fuzzy. Before everything became black he realized she was putting him to sleep.

Hex pulled away. "Shhhh, it's going to be okay. Just lie back."

He felt her hand on his back as he fell to the mattress.

"I'm not going to let anyone hurt you. I promise." He felt her lips before sleep took him under.

Chapter Five

Hex pulled the covers up over Silvano, caressed his face and padded to the bathroom. His concern had touched her as had his desire to protect. Talking to him had made her see that running away wasn't the answer. It also raised a question she hadn't thought of: who had taken her book and given it to Turk? A few years ago he hadn't had enough magick to levitate a feather. She started the shower. "Someone had taken it for him, someone close to him. Turk is too damn paranoid to trust the book to anyone else."

She stilled. Hot anger surged up until she couldn't see straight. "Twyla. She's not only a werewolf but she's got familiar blood in her."

Her feline hissed. *The bitch betrayed us?*

"I don't know, yet, but if he asked -- Fucking hell!" Her eyes narrowed as she thought of all the times she and Twyla had gone out. She'd been so overeager to take her places, show her nice things and buy her presents. It had been Twyla who'd called her to Italy, because she missed her friend, she'd said.

Her magick crackled in the air around her.

Woot! We're gonna deep fry some bastards tonight. I get dibs on the assbat.

Hex's excitement didn't last for long. "I'm so stupid. Goddess, I should be slapped. It's been so long, too long. All this time I tried to find the book and got nowhere. I shouldn't have been trying to find it. I should have tried to access it. Ugh. As long as Turk hasn't accessed the book or put it in a circle of protection, I should be able to draw from it. If I can draw from it, I can track it. Goddess, why didn't I think of that? Ugh."

'Cause you were scared and surprised and horny?

"You're not helping."

I'm supposed to help? Where the hell does it say that? If you'll recall, I was trying to help before we left Japan.

"You wanted me to shag that bartender!"

He was hot and sexy, and boy did he know his way around ice cubes.

"My cat is a slut."

No, you're the slut. Anyway, are we gonna leave tall, dark and gorgeous sleeping like that or go for another round?

"Tramp! And no, we've got some havoc to wreak. I want vengeance, and I'm going to do whatever it takes to make sure that not only will Turk back the fuck off my man, but he'll give me back my book."

Our man. Our. Man. Plural.

"Ugh, whatever. I'll get cleaned up and we'll be off. I'll ask the bar staff to check in on him if he's not awake by noon."

Whatever, just as long as he's out of harm's way, it's all good.

"There's still the matter of the challenge."

He can take on the whole pack if need be.

"But still, he'll need help and I'm not going into a fight at half power. First things first, Turk and Twyla."

Hex finished her shower and got dressed. With reluctance she placed a soft kiss on Silvano's lips. "I'll see you soon."

"Hex," he murmured in his sleep.

"Don't worry about me. I promise to be there when you need me." She pressed another kiss to his lips before leaving the room. As she entered the bar area below, it looked as if they were closing up. She strode up to the blonde bartender wiping down the counter.

"Hi, if the gentleman who ordered the Dog Sled isn't down by noon, can you send someone up to check on him?"

"Why would I need to do that?" She narrowed her eyes at Hex, making her uncomfortable.

"I gave him a magick kiss to get him to sleep. He didn't do anything wrong. But where I'm going, he would want to follow and protect and what I have to do -- it's gotta be done alone."

"Ah," the woman smiled. "Understood. Have fun."

"Oh, I intend to." Hex grinned as she left the bar and headed for her apartment.

She breathed in the herbal scents drifting on the air. After shrugging off her jacket and locking the door, she got to work warding the entire living room. She set up the candles and drew the circle before settling down to start chanting. The air around her heated as magick sparked and danced on the breeze. Energy seeped into her. She felt her cat awaken. Its head came up. She began to stretch. Hex's own core temperature rose as the power slipped into her. Every cell of her body seemed to vibrate. New strength emerged as her body absorbed the magick she'd thought had been cut off from her.

Pounding on the door made her smile. The voice calling out to her made her eyes narrow.

"Hex, love, open up. I've got some booze, and I heard you're back. You have to tell me all the details." Twyla called out before pounding on the door again.

"Oh, I'll tell you all about it," Hex purred. Her fingernails lengthened, turning into sharpened points. There was no pain or effort, just ease. A smile curved on her lips. "Haven't been able to partially shift anything since my book was stolen."

Are we going to hurt her?

"Not yet."

Hex rose up. Her body vibrated with new energy. Her book continued to pour more power into her. She made her way to the door and unlocked it. Twyla stood before her, smiling and holding up a bottle of tequila.

"I have chocolate in my bag. So, you wanna explain why you left me all alone for Silvano Cipriani?" Twyla's face contorted into a mask of disgust as she brushed past her.

Hex reached, grabbed the bottle, and then used her new found power to pin Twyla to the wall.

"Half blood isn't as strong as full blood, even with additives." Hex pulled the cork out of the bottle of alcohol with her teeth and took a swig. She winced at the bitter taste and burn.

"Hex? What's going on? Why are you doing this?" Twyla's face was bright red. Fear sparkled in her eyes.

"I'm going to ask you questions and you're going to answer them." Hex took another swig of alcohol before moving closer to Twyla.

"What? Why are you doing this? Hex, this isn't funny." Twyla squirmed against the wall.

"Relax, you tell me the truth and this will be over quickly. You lie to me and I'll have to do some very terrible things to you."

Tears streamed down Twyla's face. "Hex, please, stop this. I don't know what happened or what that mutt told you, but he's lying to you."

More of her power poured into Hex and as the energy filled her up so did the rage.

"Don't you dare drag my mate into this," she hissed. "This is about you and me and Turk and why the fuck I'm here, or rather how I got here. Now, tell me why you stole my grimoire."

She took another swig of the alcohol, which only served to fuel the fire burning in her belly.

"What are you talking about? Hex, please, this isn't funny."

"Answer the gods damn question! Did you take my book? Was your call a lure to get me to Italy, to Turk?" Hex paused, waiting. "My best friend, my only friend left from the coven disaster, and you turned on me. Sold me like a whore to your boyfriend. I can't believe it."

"You were so stupid," Twyla spat out.

Finally the mask had fallen. The tears stopped and a mask of rage replaced the terrified woman. Hex stopped walking toward Twyla and stood her ground.

"You could have had it all if you'd just have taken the bitch's place. We could have had it all."

"Who is this we? I was alone, no one to back me. As I recall, you had an emergency you just had to take care of before I took on Ramona. You left me to face the coven's wrath alone. You didn't even intervene when they passed judgment. You didn't show up at the trial. All this time I thought that emergency had been serious. I see the truth now. You had just wanted to get out of Dodge."

"Could you blame me? You were going to take on the most powerful of witches. I wasn't going to die if you got caught."

"Did Turk order you to take my book?"

Twyla snorted. "Turk doesn't order me around."

Hex narrowed her eyes. The power sparked around her, burning brighter and brighter as the anger continued to rise. She could feel her calm ebbing away and the alcohol was having no affect in dulling her some. It only added fuel to flames. Everything she'd known about Twyla was shattering before her very eyes. When her parents had died Twyla had comforted her. When Ramona had bound Hex to her, it had been Twyla who had assured her everything would be okay. Twyla had been the one to call her back to Italy.

"How far does this go back?" Hex whispered.

Twyla snorted. "Think you can handle it?"

"Tell me!"

"No."

"Then I'll just have to take the answers."

Twyla snorted again. "You're not a werewolf. You can't break into my mind. You're a cat."

"We'll see about that." Hex threw her power into Twyla and watched the werewolf's body buck. Her back arched. Lips parted and a soft cry fell out. Twyla's eyes were wide. Defiance shone in the golden depths.

"That all you got, kitty?"

Hex felt the venom and challenge in those words. Her once best friend was changing before her eyes. Becoming someone she didn't know, didn't want to know. Anger and pain ripped through her body like a whirlwind. Her vision clouded with tears.

"So bold, so strong, everyone thinks you're this badass assassin, but look at you, crying your wittle eyes out cause life wasn't what you wanted it to be. You're pathetic. So glad your parents aren't here to see this."

Hex lashed out without thought. A ball of power formed in her hand and landed right on Twyla's chest. The werewolf bucked and howled in pain. Hex opened her mouth to apologize only to have Twyla settle down and hiss at her. "Still not tough enough to get the job done, eh? Silvano would be wise to choose another alpha female, seeing as you'd crumple at the first challenge."

At the mention of Silvano, Hex hissed. Her hands formed into claws. "Don't you dare mention my mate." She slashed at the air and watched the marks show up on Twyla's chest, shredding her shirt. The scent of blood slipped into the air to join the magick swirling around the room. The grimoire seemed to like that. As a surge of energy pushed into Hex, flooding her muscles and blood with heat and power.

"Look at you. The grimoire feeds you, and yet for years you went without. We would've used it better than you. Now you know what it feels like to be all powerful, don't you? Like the goddess. You could create worlds with that kind of power. Destroy everything with a flick of your finger. Stop playing with powers you know nothing about, little girl," Twyla taunted. "Give it back to the people who know what to do with the grimoire."

The book didn't seem to like that. Hex felt more energy being poured into her in larger doses. The grimoire's anger was unlike anything she had ever felt. Centuries old

rage poured into her as dark power pulsed through her veins. *Use me*, the book whispered.

Hex felt fur ripple along her skin as the shift began. Her legs elongated rather than shrunk. Her eyesight sharpened as her senses increased. She could feel everything in the room, knew where everything was, but the thing that caught her attention was that she could feel Twyla's emotions. They didn't just have a taste. There was weight behind them. The werewolf female's heartbeat thudded in her head. Hex could feel the pressure of her fear, taste it like bitter licorice.

A line formed between herself and Twyla. Thin glowing threads latched onto the werewolf. At first Hex didn't know what was happening.

Shh, let me show you, the grimoire whispered. Twyla gasped as bubbles floated into the air, each one with scenes playing out on them. At first Hex was confused until she saw Turk's body buck as Twyla kissed him. Without sound Hex knew that Twyla was feeding off of Turk's energy, his magick. Another scene showed Twyla conversing with Ramona.

Hex's eyes narrowed. She reached out and grabbed the bubble. On instinct, she opened her mouth and took it into her. Heat flashed behind her eyes as the memory played out.

I'll bring her to the commissary. She'll be alone. All you have to do is kill her and the book is yours. Just as long as you keep up your end of the bargain. I want the power owed to me.

But of course. Ramona held out her hand and Twyla took it, shook it and left.

Hex came back to the present. With her mind she brought herself over to Twyla, peeled her off the wall and slammed the werewolf into the floor. Wood cracked underneath her. Splinters and woodchips floated up into the air. "You betrayed me to Ramona? You plotted against me?" Hex roared in anger. The sound shook the walls and rattled the windows. The odor of urine now joined the blood. Twyla's heartbeat tripled in Hex's head. "You, my so-called friend, my confidante, the person I trusted the most?" Another howl of rage rumbled up from her chest to spill out in a loud screech.

Twyla reached up and gripped Hex's wrists in a tight hold. "Hex, please, don't..."

Hex hissed. "Shut up, bitch. You will now pay for your crimes."

More memories floated between them. Twyla shifting into a large dog, performing magick. Hex understood now. "You can shift into the familiar form of a dog." She brought her face closer to Twyla's. "You have magick in you. But it's not enough. You're not full like me. You can't use a grimoire. It rejects you because you don't have enough magick in you to control it."

Her lips twisted into a smile. Her teeth grew as her tongue flattened. Power rippled through her body in a simmering heat as the book slowed the energy transfer. Another memory floated between them, one of Twyla throwing Hex's grimoire across the room when it wouldn't open.

"You fucking bitch! You threw my book. You hurt it." A roll of power ran down her arm and hit Twyla in the chest. Twyla's heartbeat stuttered before righting itself. "Kill me or I swear to the goddess, I'll kill you first," Twyla promised.

"Go ahead and try. I know your game now." Hex lowered her head just a fraction more until their lips were a breath away. "And I know how to stop you."

Twyla squirmed and writhed underneath her, but Hex refused to let her go. Her grip tightened on Twyla's jacket. She pushed her down into the floor, holding her fast. "I declare you exiled, oh dog familiar known as Twyla. You are cast out from the magick of the familiar, sent out into the world without magick to aid you or friend to house you. I declare you outcast. In the name of the Goddess, I brand thee banished."

Hex pressed her lips to Twyla's forehead. Dark energy seeped into her body as Twyla screeched underneath her, kicking and raked Hex's arms with her fingernails. "Get off of me!" Twyla screamed.

Salt water mingled with blood. The werewolf's cries fell on deaf ears as Hex continued to absorb more of Twyla's magick. Her lips heated as burning flesh joined into the cacophony of scents swirling around her. In the distance she heard a door slam

against the wall but didn't break contact. With her mind she formed a circle of protection, something she hadn't been able to do before.

The nails stopped raking her flesh and the feet stopped hitting her as Twyla's heartbeat slowed and her body relaxed. Hex lifted her lips as the last traces of magick slipped into her body. She sat up, closed her eyes and sent Twyla's magick into the grimoire, who absorbed it with glee.

"In the name of the Goddess, I declare thee exiled, Twyla Perkins-Bicker, from now until eternity."

Hex slumped down as her energy plummeted. The barrier disappeared with a pop. Hands grabbed her and feet trooped into the room. She lifted her head, vision blurry. She saw red runes coming in and out of focus.

"Turk?"

"Is it over? Is she done?" His voice was raw, his fear palpable in the air, replacing Twyla's blood, tears and fear.

"She's done."

Profound relief hit her and she moaned from the impact.

"Get that bitch out of my sight."

Hex's body jostled as she was lifted into the air. The world began to move at a fast pace. "Turk, what are you doing?" She tried to get out of his arms but didn't have the energy to move.

"Rest now. Silvano will need you."

Chapter Six

Silvano awoke with a start. For a moment he felt light-headed. His thoughts were cloudy and he couldn't focus on any one thing. The ceiling was a kaleidoscope of dark colors and too bright lights. He had to shake his head twice to get his vision to clear. With a groan he mentally checked himself for wounds or aches and pains just in case. The last time he'd felt like this had been after a very exhausting sparring match at the gym -- with an excitable pup.

His body didn't twinge with phantom pain, which was a relief. He sat up, only to have his head go swimming and his vision go blurry before everything cleared. *Hex*, his wolf whispered. It sounded hoarse, as if he had spent the whole night howling.

What's wrong with you and what about Hex? She's... He looked around and found the bed empty. No sounds of running water and, as far as he could see, he was alone. "Fucking hell." He threw back the covers and stood -- a little too quickly, as the room swayed again before righting itself. With slow steps, he shuffled away from the bed, and headed for the nearest door. It led to a closet. He tried the next door and found it was to the bathroom.

Why aren't you going after her? His wolf demanded.

"Because I feel like shit, I'm naked, and she's the one that did this to me." He remembered her kissing him. After that everything went back. Silvano turned on the water to the shower.

Hurry up. She's probably got a good head start on us.

"I think I know where she went, though I've never been there. I'm sure we have intel on where she lives. I just hope she's there when I arrive." Steam billowed over the glass doors. Silvano stepped into the stall. He hissed when the water hit his skin.

Fine. And after that? Are you still gonna challenge the council?

"I have to. There are no options. Either fight and stand up for the rights of my pack, or allow them to destroy us to the point where we are nothing." He reached out and grabbed a bottle of body wash.

If we lose?

Silvano didn't want to think of that. He squeezed some of the gel into the palm of his hand and began to wash, concentrating on that rather than answering. The wolf wouldn't be ignored.

If we lose, do you start a new pack with the defectors?

"Any defectors would be declared exiled. The word would spread and we'd be pariahs with no alliances."

There are worse ways to survive.

"By constant challenges for dominance? We'd be on the run."

And?

"What about our mate? She's been on the run most of her life."

And we'll protect her with everything we have.

Silvano was still uneasy about that. As he ran his hands over his face, his thoughts drifted to his pack.

You said you could take care of our mate. How is that different from taking care of those who came with us? We can do it.

The wolf's confidence in him bolstered his ego. "Father had some land to the east of here, deep in the mountains. We can use that as our base for a bit until we can find something with more space. I'm sure I can cut a deal with Ashura, get her to give us safe passage. It'll cost a pretty penny, though. I'll send someone I trust to scout. Even if I win, we'll still move. A loss for the council will be retaliated for by others. They won't be able to accept that I -- above others -- was able to best them." Silvano finished showering. "First, we have a mate to go spank."

The wolf let out a bark and Silvano smiled. "Hex has been a very bad girl."

He headed down to the bar where he returned the key. "Thank you."

The bartender just smiled and took back the key. He made a mental note to come back here with Hex and finish what they'd started in the room upstairs. With a smile, he left to find Hex's location. A chill raced up his spine as soon as he got within viewing distance of the village. Stretching out his senses, he tried to find the wolves who had been assigned to perimeter duty. Nothing. Unease caused his stomach to clench as he moved closer to the village. Early morning light cast a gold glow over the small cabins. A few chimneys had thin wisps of smoke rising up from them, but no life stirred outside the houses.

Light wolf musk floated on the air. He narrowed his eyes. *Too light*. Instead of going straight into the village, he moved back into the shadow of the trees and began to make a circuit around his home base. No movement whatsoever. Not even at the small bakery, or the shop that sold goods they couldn't get in town without raising suspicion, like extra strong tranquilizers or rare herbs that no longer grow around these parts, was open. He crept toward the side of the village where his cabin was. The pungent odor of werewolf musk was heavy in the air. The door to his house stood wide open. The scent of Vidal was the most potent. His wolf growled at the intrusion.

"I must insist, the alpha isn't home. This is a breach of protocol. Please, wait for him to return." Vidal's voice floated over to him, urgency in the tone that settled his wolf down.

Silvano smiled. *Loyal to a fault, regardless of his stick-up-the-ass demeanor*.

"This is insane! The alpha will be here soon. Please, wait for him." Vidal emerged from the log cabin first, looking cross. Behind him were all three members of the council.

"He's sheltering the cat shifter, protecting that *thing*. It is not to be done -- especially in light of Heather Rosmund running away. He can't even keep control of this pack. He doesn't deserve to lead," the one called Nostro declared.

Silvano's wolf growled. Silvano smiled. *Perfect timing, although this doesn't explain the absence of sentinels*.

He strode forward, out into the open. The snapping of a twig announced his arrival. All heads swiveled toward him. Backs stiffened. Eyes narrowed. Nostro's head tilted back, nose in the air. His wizened features took on a condescending look.

"Silvano, where have you been?" His unctuous tone sent annoyance skittering down his back to make him shiver.

"Minding my own business. What is this about Heather having run off? Where to?" He climbed over the short wooden wall and onto pack property. The council took a step back. Their annoyance and fear vibrated in the air.

"The breeder was last seen leaving your cabin. Nothing has been heard from her since."

"So? She might have gone off for a run or a walk or to town." Silvano continued to approach, keeping his eyes solely on the council. "Vidal, where are the sentinels? There is no one guarding the village."

The sour scent of shame cut the air. "The council felt the sentinels would be best served going after Heather."

Silvano growled. "So, you leave us unprotected? Is that how the pack is best served?"

The one called Anko snorted. "You left the pack unprotected when you went to fuck the familiar."

The transformation began before Silvano could stop it. Pain and anger lanced his body as muscles and bone changed and flexed. Tendons lengthened. His fingernails became claws. In a flash he moved from the fence to Anko. His clawed hand wrapped around the smaller man's throat.

"Alpha!" Vidal laid a hand on his shoulder. "Please, this is not the way."

"Spying on me, you feckless pup? I'll rip your throat out for looking at her."

"Silvano, control yourself," Detrick murmured, placing a hand on his other shoulder.

Soothing energy slipped into his body, tempering the beast. In that moment, he hated Detrick, the most reasonable of the council.

"Damn you." Silvano released his hold and stepped back. *Challenge him now before he can recover*, the wolf urged. Silvano shook his head. *That wouldn't be fair or honorable. What leader would I be to challenge a man while recovering from an attack?*

"I tell you this now, I intend to challenge the council for the right to change pack bylaws and rules. Prepare yourselves and pick your champion." Silvano stepped back but didn't shift to man form.

"A true alpha would attack --" Nostro started.

Detrick held up his hand. "A true alpha is fair. Silvano is being a good alpha by giving us warning. I nominate Nostro to answer the challenge."

Silvano's head whipped up and stared at the council member, unsure if he'd heard him correctly.

"I second that," Anko responded, a wicked grin on his face. It was clear that Anko was looking to move up in the council ranks since there were only three members. He couldn't fathom Detrick's reasons.

Nostro shook his head. "I can't possibly. It's been an age since I've last answered a challenge."

"Motion passed. Nostro shall represent us." Detrick smiled and brushed past the group. "If you'll excuse me..."

Nostro swore and wandered off while Anko remained behind, glaring at Silvano. He just shrugged in return and headed into the house. Vidal followed, hot on his heels.

"Alpha, I'm sorry. I tried to stop them but Nostro wouldn't have it. Anko broke the lock before I could protest. Detrick tried to get them to see reason but they were having nothing of it. The sentinels were horrified when it was suggested that they leave their posts. Nostro and Anko refused to allow me to at least get replacements."

Silvano glanced over his shoulder to see Vidal hanging his head. "It's all right, V. This has been a long time coming. I either continue to allow them to stifle us with their rules and force people like Heather to run away, or I do something about it. I should have done something when I assumed control of the pack but I was too green and

young. I thought the council should be respected. Now I see two out of the three are old men holding onto power."

"If you need a second, I shall be more than happy to step in." Vidal's head lifted. Fire and anger burned in his golden eyes. Dark musk and spices filled the room. "Before you became alpha, my brother was sent away for being gay. I lost a family member because of them. I refuse to lose more pack."

Silvano turned around to stare at his second-in-command. "Why didn't you tell me this?"

"I didn't think you'd do anything. Most alphas before you wouldn't. It's the law and the law must be obeyed."

"And the law must be obeyed," he murmured along with his friend. "Well, the law must be changed. *If* Heather ran away, it was due to her love for a woman she can't have. That can't be abided."

"You don't think she did?"

Silvano shook his head. "My gut is telling me she needed to think. She told me about the woman she couldn't be with. I think she wanted some time alone to decide what to do. Although I do feel that if I lose, the pack will choose me."

Vidal nodded. "I believe that too. The youth are being stifled by the laws and the parents are seeing more and more of their young leave home to never return except on holidays, and sometimes not even then. Too many don't feel welcome."

Silvano nodded. "I see that too. V, I need a favor. I need you to pull up all the info about Hex. I need to find her, make sure she's all right."

Vidal didn't protest as Silvano thought he would. Instead, the man bowed and left, closing the door behind him. The slab of wood moved open, as if an invisible hand was pushing it. With a sigh, he grabbed a chair and pushed it against the door, making a mental note to call the locksmith. Alone, he allowed the shift to recede and the wolf to slip back into the recesses of his body. He ignored the pain and headed to his bedroom.

His mind turned to Hex, considering all the possible scenarios and settled on the one that made the most sense and felt right in his eyes: she had gone home to confront Turk.

With closed eyes he reached out with his senses, trying to find her wherever she might be. He almost kicked himself for not thinking of it sooner. *She's my mate. We have a connection, not closed yet though.*

His cock twitched at the thought of her marking him as hers. Once it was completed, he wanted to have it tattooed, to make it permanent. The skin on his neck tingled. *There, I want her to bite me there.* Desire traced its way down his back, delving between his butt cheeks to settle, humming, in his balls. Blood, thick and hot, slid into his groin, filling up his cock, hardening what had been soft, lengthening what had been flaccid, until he was aching for release. He groaned and cupped himself through the fabric of his pants.

Hey, moron, stop that. We have to find her before you can get your rocks off.

"I need to make sure she's okay, truly okay."

We'll find her and bring her back.

His retort was cut off by banging on his door. Vidal's voice cut down any hope that he had for going after her. With a sigh he changed into clothes that weren't ripped and headed downstairs to let his second-in-command in. He led Vidal into the kitchen, where the man spread books and maps all over the kitchen table.

"What did you find?" Silvano pattered around, gathering ingredients to make an omelet.

"Our sources tell us she's got an apartment across town, not among the pack."

Silvano frowned. *"Interesting. I didn't think Turk would allow such distance."*

"I agree. It's odd that a familiar would have any distance from the witch or wizard."

"What about the apartment? Is it accessible?"

"Takes up the entire top floor of the building. The records show she dropped a huge amount of money for it, bought up all the apartments, knocked down walls and

did a major renovation. A balcony was installed, along with a stairwell that leads from the top floor to the back garden of the complex. Look at this.” Vidal slid some photos across. Silvano walked over while stirring the ingredients for the omelet together. A large whitewashed building was shown with ivy climbing up the sides. Vines and flowers spilled over the roof. It looked peaceful and serene, a good place to relax and unwind.

“Funny thing is the apartments for two floors below her are empty.”

“Do you have info as to why?” he asked as he walked over to the stove.

“Nope, but each apartment is owned by the same person. I’ll look into it further. The street and the building itself are warded. I believe she’s set up a few watchdogs, so I don’t think we can step onto her street without her knowing it.”

“I’m sure we can find a way around that. Anything else?”

“Nothing that I can see. Turk doesn’t seem to have a presence at all, which, again, is odd.”

“She was very careful to make this her space, not his. Can you call the locksmith? I need a new lock.”

“Of course, alpha. Would you like to go after her now?”

Banging on the door made him sigh. “I don’t think we can. Go see who that is. If it’s Nostro, let him know I need to eat first.”

“Of course.” Vidal stood and bowed before exiting the kitchen. Silvano glanced longingly at the pictures of Hex’ apartment. “You’ll have to wait a bit longer, *cara*.”

* * *

Hex lifted her head and put it back down on the pillow. She felt drained and a little shaky. Energy continued to shiver up and down her arms, legs and spine. It felt as if she was vibrating. Even her vision shook. Her fingertips and toes tingled and there was a buzzing sound rolling around her head.

“You’re awake.” A soft, raspy voice murmured not far from her.

She turned her head and saw Turk, bathed in sunlight -- but pale as the moon. The red runes that covered his body and marred his skin shone in the golden glow from

beyond the window. She flinched. Panic began to rise as her heart thudded against her ribcage. Her lungs labored to take in enough air. She was finding it hard to move. *Move, move, move*, she willed her legs and arms but they lay on the bed, useless.

Turk moved closer to the bed but stayed about a foot away. That didn't put her at ease at all. "It was years ago when we first met. I believe it was after you'd murdered Ramona. She was looking for a safe haven, and I was just picking up the pieces of my life after my having been exiled. Twyla started out sweet, a shoulder to lean on. Then she told me about her familiar blood. I was still angry over my exile, my loss to Silvano. The council had handicapped me. Told me I couldn't use all of my abilities to fight Silvano. My family has a history of magicks in it. For years I'd honed it and then to be told I couldn't use it, to hold me back like that, it was like a punch to the gut."

His confession made things click into place that she hadn't understood before. Turk's magickal prowess when she first met him had been more than some stupid werewolf playing with powers he hadn't understood.

"When I met Twyla and heard her talk of revenge, it had made me feel as if perhaps I should show them they were wrong. That a true alpha should be adept at all forms of defense even if they are magickal. I just didn't realize she was feeding off of me. I'd never been in love before." Crimson flushed his cheeks and he turned away. In that moment Turk looked young and vulnerable.

Perhaps the person he was before Twyla was peeking out? Hex could only guess.

"When I realized what was happening, it was too late for me to change things. The dark magick was consuming me and I couldn't control it. Truth is, I wasn't sending you to spy on Silvano, but I couldn't tell you what I really wanted without you telling Twyla. I needed a layout of the village to see if any new buildings had been put up since I'd been exiled. I'd been told that they were moving their library there. When I left, I couldn't take anything with me except the clothes on my back. I didn't have time to get my family's books."

"That's why you wanted to bind us together, so you could see the changes for yourself."

He nodded. "I couldn't tell you --"

"Because of Twyla. How bad was it?"

"She'd almost bound us together. But I didn't have enough strength to go through it."

Hex nodded her head gingerly. "Yeah, in order for the binding to work, both parties have to survive. One person dead is a loss of power and the spell could rebound with horrible consequences."

"You may have thought I was taking power from you, but I was actually pulling it into myself and putting it into the book."

Hex's eyes widened. "You can do that? That's not exactly easy magick there. Wait, you can do that but not open the book?"

Turk gave her a sly smile. "I made it seem I couldn't open the book. I have enough magick in me to bypass most of the securities. I just didn't do it because of Twyla."

"Clever."

He blushed again and nodded. "Thank you."

"Now what do we do?"

"You rest. Word has reached me that Silvano intends to challenge the council for true dominance. He'll need you."

She opened her mouth to ask him why he would say that but decided to stay quiet. Turk left the room. For a moment she didn't move. She lay there staring at the ceiling. Her world had shifted in the matter of twenty-four hours. Emotions rolled over her in a bittersweet wave as she began to truly face Twyla's betrayal. Her heart ached. Pain shot through her as tears formed at the corners of her eyes. Again, she labored to breathe as her airways tightened. A sob tore from her throat. She rolled over and curled up into a ball. Anger surged up, followed by helplessness. In that moment she hated feeling this way- so weak, so vulnerable, so open. Without Silvano here to hold, she felt the loneliness creep up and shroud her in darkness.

The air was so thin. The room was freezing. Everything hurt: her limbs, muscles, fingers and toes. Her vision blurred as the tears overcame her. She gulped in air and struggled to calm down, to find her center. It felt so far away. The pain began to fade as blessed numbness -- not calm -- slid over her. It felt like an eternity before the depression passed. Her heart didn't hurt. Each breath came slower, easier.

Hex rolled onto her back and stared up at the ceiling as the tears slipped down her temples. She grasped the moment, praying the pain would come again. Hex refused to be dragged to the edge of that dark place. The ease didn't last long. Her heart contracted again as sobs racked her body. A scream rumbled up from the depths of her soul. She fought tooth and nail to keep it in. It tore, clawed and ripped through her. Pain pierced her heart, ricocheted around her insides as her body trembled. Shivers racked through her limbs. Her arms and legs shook as she fought to not let a single sound out.

Small cries slipped out, muffled by her closed lips. She bit her bottom lip, refusing to let the sound that most wanted out. Her heart hammered against her chest. Her lungs burned as she held her breath. *Don't lose control. Do not scream. Don't cry. Damn it, don't you dare lose it!* She kept ordering herself as the scream grew in size and strength. The pain increased tenfold.

Let go, her cat urged. The hushed voice of her familiar, her constant companion, was like a balm to the wounds that were being ripped open. She hadn't realized just how much pain she'd been in. The hurt took her by surprise, so much so that she gasped. A scream rushed up her throat and out of her mouth before she could call it back. The sound was so torn, so ripped and raw, that it hurt her to hear it. She gasped for breath, chest heaving as she took air in and out of burning throat and lungs.

With a growl of anger, Hex rolled off the mattress and stood. She began to pace, cutting a path in her carpet. The plush fabric crunched under feet, pricking the soles as she moved back and forth like a caged tiger.

Stop beating yourself up. Her cat's purr vibrated through her. It was an act of soothing. The small gesture didn't work. Her heart was ripped open and bleeding all over the place.

"I've been betrayed. Some purring isn't going to do shit," she spat out. The soft sound was cut off abruptly as the cat hissed.

Call me when you stop being a bitch.

It took a moment for the guilt to set in. Hex crouched down and hung her head.

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean..." She stopped herself before she spoke the lie. With a sigh, she allowed herself to be honest with the one entity who had been there for her every step of her life. "I did mean it. I did want to hurt but I am sorry."

The cat didn't return. She felt older and drained of energy. Her legs shook with effort to hold her up. Her arms hung loose, like weights, the backs of her hands rested on the carpet. It was difficult to lift her head. It felt like a hundred pounds were settled on her neck. Her mind was a blank. The anger had faded away to be replaced yet again by the numbness. She fell onto her back, head hitting the cushioned floor. Hex winced at the slight thud. No pain burst, which was a relief.

Silvano. The name came unbidden to the forefront of her mind. It was jarring to be reminded of him. She couldn't remember why she had worried about him before. Yearning to be held and touched by him rose up. She pushed it away, not wanting to be held or comforted. In fact, she didn't know what she wanted. The idea of leaving the bedroom horrified her, and yet the thought of crawling back into bed repulsed her. So she remained on the floor as her psychic wounds pulsed and continued to drip emotional blood. With a shuddering breath she sat up slowly, bent her legs and drew her knees to her chest.

Life that she thought she knew and understood flashed before her eyes. *Had it all been a lie?* Her parents' deaths had been real enough. Pain flashed through her, heating her body, only to die down almost instantly. Despite the many years that had gone by and the countless times she'd faced it, it hadn't gotten any easier, just less painful. A mental mirror was held up and for the first time she saw things she hadn't noticed

before. Hex watched Twyla slip into her life -- the jovial life of the party, the endless flirt, the support system that had held her as she stood over her parents' graves. Always, Twyla had had a kind word, some bit of comfort to offer. There had been laughter and tears. And yet, with stunning clarity, she realized she knew nothing about her friend beyond the surface.

Twyla's family was a mystery. She knew that the werewolf had two brothers and a sister. Her parents lived in the United States, somewhere in the south. One brother and her sister were married to shifters. Not once had Twyla gone into great detail but Hex had the distinct impression that Twyla wasn't close to her family, not at all. With a sigh, she dropped her head to her knees. She didn't mind the discomfort so long as she didn't start crying again. "The attachment was all mine."

Twyla had never made an attempt to be closer to Hex. She had never offered up anything of herself to the relationship. Shards of pain burst in her heart only to break apart and burn. Her chest tightened as another wave of tears threatened to break her down. Her whole life, Twyla had slipped in and out like a shadow, taking what she wanted and barely offering up much in return. There had been no one else. Twyla hadn't even been there when she'd killed Ramona. Only in the aftermath, after all the chaos had turned to calm, had Twyla returned.

The more she thought about it, the more Hex felt out of touch. So alone. The scent of forest and midnight rose in the air as the tears fell. A howl filled her ears and the brush of coarse fur slid against her back. Goosebumps rose in the wake of that phantom contact. *Silvano*. She heard his name in her mind. It began to repeat on a loop as the howl grew in strength. She couldn't shut it out, nor could she push the wolf away. It breathed through her mind like a lover's sigh. The name caressed her in the parts that ached, throbbed and bled. It made her sigh as she was lifted up to a place that didn't hurt as much.

The challenge. She gasped and shot up to her feet. *He needs me*.

Purpose pumped through her veins and self-pity was pushed away in favor of helping someone who had wanted to take care of her.

"I'm not gonna let him down." Anger surged into heart, pushing away the cold of loneliness. She rushed over to the bathroom. Hex took a quick shower. Just standing under the stream of hot water washed some of the pain and numbness away. As she threaded her fingers through her hair, the movement was slow before the desperation set in. Over and over and she combed through her wet tresses as her heart thudded out a frantic pace. It took her a moment to realize that she was worried about Silvano and what would happen.

What if no one came to his aid? Or everyone turned on him? The thought of losing him hurt her more than Twyla's betrayal. Silvano had wanted to protect her and would have gone against his whole pack for her. "I'm not going to let him fight alone."

She rushed through her shower and got dressed in a simple pair of comfortable pants, boots and a tank top. As she went through her weapons she selected them with care.

"He better still be alive when I get there, or I'm going to haul him back into this world and kill him myself." The bite mark on her shoulder throbbed. "I don't know what that means." She shook her head as she slid her knives into the sheaths on her boots, thighs and wrists. Hex loaded silver bullets into her twin Colts and put them into her shoulder holsters. Once she felt properly outfitted with weapons, she pulled on her favorite jacket and opened her apartment door, duffle bag in hand, filled with herbs and potions in case the guns and knives weren't enough. She stopped short when she found Turk leaning against the wall just beyond the door.

"You can't help Silvano alone. My pack is yours." Turk bowed and stepped out of the way.

Hex shrugged. "Whatever, but if you harm him, I will kill you."

"I owe you. Helping you will make us even."

"Don't --"

"I heard you the first time." He straightened up. "You ready to go?"

She didn't need to be asked twice. Hex brushed past him and headed for the stairs.

Chapter Seven

Silvano stood in a circle of the pack with Nostro across from him. *Not even twenty-four hours had passed.* He shook his head. *I should have expected this.* Vidal stood to his right. Anger radiated off the werewolf, so much so that he thought Vidal would snap and rush at Nostro. Never had he seen his second-in-command so emotional.

"Calm down, V. It'll be all right," Silvano murmured out of the corner of his mouth.

"I'm sorry, alpha."

"Don't be. Just have my back."

Vidal grunted, which Silvano took as an affirmation. The seconds ticked by as both Silvano and Nostro stood, staring at each other. Neither man moved. The pack had gathered around them. Tension hung in the air. To Nostro's right was Anko. A wicked-looking dagger glinted from its position tucked in his belt. Detrick was off to the side among the pack, his face inscrutable. Silvano was about to move when someone from the crowd shouted, "We're all with you, alpha!"

Heather stepped forward, her arm wrapped around the alpha female of Kregar pack, a smile wide on her face. The scent of pine drifted toward him. He glanced to his left and saw the alpha of the Kregar pack, Friar. The man grinned widely at him and gave him the thumbs up sign.

"We back you, Silvano."

Silvano's heart expanded in his chest. Just a look around showed him that the pack -- his pack -- were all gazing at him, admiration in their eyes, as well as hope. When his gaze settled on Nostro and Anko again, fear and hatred flickered in their eyes. In this moment, Silvano knew that even if he lost, his pack would not allow things to

remain the same. A surge of confidence rushed up in him. The air now sang with defiance and barely banked anger. "You will all pay for this," Nostro hissed.

Silvano raised an eyebrow. "How? Whether I lose or not you will still have to deal with the pack, and as of right now, they don't look happy with you."

He crossed his arms over his chest and watched the color seep from Nostro's face as the realization hit him. "I know of ways."

Dark magick perfumed the air. The acrid scent burned his nostrils and made Silvano cough. He shook his head as his senses spun. The world became blurred as tears formed at the corners of his eyes. He reached up to wipe away the moisture only to have his eyes start to sting. Something hard hit him mid-section, knocking the air from his lungs. Stars burst in his line of sight as his hand and back hit a solid surface. *Crack. Snap.* The scent of pine burst around him, cutting the acrid odor, but only for a moment.

His body wracked with coughs as his throat and lungs burned. Each gulp of air was like swallowing down thick smoke. Pain screamed down his arm as a set of sharp teeth sunk into his bicep. Silvano refused to cry out. Instead he called on his wolf to lend him power. Warmth rushed through his body. The ache faded away to a dull throb.

Silvano reached up with his free hand and wiped away the tears before grabbing Nostro by the throat and squeezing with all he had in him. The other werewolf released his hold on Silvano's arm. Nostro reached up, pried open Silvano's hand, and jumped back. Tingling raced up his fingertips, forearm to bicep. The arm dropped from the air, as if asleep. He tried to pick it up again only to have it not respond. He looked up at Nostro in astonishment.

The older werewolf smiled. He began to shift. The change was so rapid that in the blink of an eye he was a wolf the size of a black bear.

Shit! Silvano ordered himself to change. The tingles now raced across his chest and down his other arm. The pit of his stomach burned with sharp spikes. Again and again he called forth the change only to have nothing happen. His wolf whimpered.

"Trouble, Silvano?" Nostro said. The wolf's large mouth opened wide to show off rows of sharp, blood-stained teeth.

Silvano looked down, horrified to see black markings racing up his arm. Symbols covered the back of his hand, forearm, bicep and shoulder. Pain speared his spinal column. His legs shook. He fell to his hands and knees. Nostro moved forward as the pack growled, booed and yelled their disapproval. Nostro turned his head and snapped his great mouth open and shut with a sharp clicking sound. Beyond him, Silvano could see Anko had shifted as well, his tan, gray and white fur marred with dark red. He could see one of his pack -- a youngling named Sam -- holding his side, glaring at the great beast.

Silvano growled at Anko only to have him smile back, maw and muzzle stained with blood. "Try it, Silvano. You can't protect them, just as you can't protect yourself."

Anger boiled inside of him as the twinges continued their journey, moving down his legs to his feet and the tips of his toes. His arms shook with effort and sweat covered his face. The effort of trying to remain off the ground was too much. He tried calling his wolf one more time but the command to change boomeranged back at him. The howl of the wolf reverberated through his body but he couldn't connect to him.

A soft brush of fur against his arm drew his attention. A small black cat with dark brown eyes glanced up at him. She came closer, her seductive scent of wild magick teased his nose.

Hex? Her front paws rested on his shoulders and a thin pink tongue slipped out of her mouth. The sandpaper texture ran over his lips. He winced and sputtered in horror. *I don't know where that tongue has been.*

The cat's mouth seemed to form a frown. She turned away and her tail smacked him in the face. Her voice slid into his head like silk. *And dogs eat their own vomit.*

He sputtered again. *That's not true and you know it.*

Again her lithe body brushed against his, warm fur lulling him to relax. His weight sank into the hard, cold earth at his palms and knees. The tingles faded away

and heat rattled up his arms and through his core as she used her magick to draw out that which poisoned him.

They do. Now shut up and let me help you. Arousal burned at the base of his spine as his cock hardened and lengthened. She hit him again with her tail. *Stop thinking about sex and get the fuck up.* She leaped away. Each step brought on a new transformation until she stood in front of him naked. The world seemed to stop. Everyone stared at Hex. He in turn let out a growl of disapproval and scrambled up to his feet.

"My mate," he yelled loud enough for everyone to hear. Everyone but Nostro and Anko turned their faces away. Another great wolf, the size of black bear, ran forward, its gray, tan and white coat threaded through with dark red patches of fur. It held a small bag in its jaw. He tilted his head up and Hex dug, in withdrawing two knives.

"I challenge Anko to a fight for dominance." Hex's words sent a ripple of shock through him as both Anko and Nostro began to shift. The entire pack, both Silvano's and Kregar's wolves' heads, snapped around to stare at her.

"I'm sorry, alpha. Something was wrong with me. I couldn't move." Vidal moved to his side and kneeled. "Does she not understand blood law? If she loses, she belongs to him. Your claim will be forfeit."

The odd wolf with the red markings moved away.

"Hex --" Silvano nodded but knew to deny her would only make her angry with him.

"Don't worry," Hex called back.

Silvano strode forward and placed a hand on her shoulder. He bent down, allowing his lips to caress the shell of her ear. Her body trembled, which made him smile. "I'm not worried," he lied. Silvano was scared for her. "I would just feel better if you'd get dressed."

"Oh." She turned and ushered the wolf forward. He came closer, smelling of cloves, magick and pine. Silvano couldn't place him but knew the cologne was familiar. As she pulled clothing out of her bag Nostro and Anko moved forward. Silvano wasn't

going to let them get the upper hand. He called forth his shift. A burst of heat started in his gut as his muscles and bones began to shift and grow in size. He dropped to all fours and became the wolf. Gleeful at being able to change, he let out a joyful howl. His pack followed suit, the air filling with the song of midnight with the full moon high.

"Yeah, yeah, you're all wolves, but you're making this cat a little nervous." She let out a squeak when Silvano licked her bare calf. "Eep, don't do that."

Imagine what this tongue could do to that delicious pussy of yours.

Arousal spiced the air and Silvano groaned inwardly. He didn't want to fight in that moment. Both man and beast wanted to drag their mate off to the cabin house and fuck her senseless.

Later. Fighting now.

Silvano nodded and moved off to the side. The odd wolf was nowhere to be found.

"Ready to fight now."

A glance in Hex's direction showed she'd opted for a skintight black outfit that only increased his arousal. She held the knives with a relaxed grip. Her body vibrated confidence and intent. He grinned as her head tilted back. Looking regal, she surveyed all before her. "Come get me, wolfie." In an unexpected move, she turned and ran, Anko hot on her heels. Nostro moved forward to intercept but Silvano charged him, slamming his head into the large wolf's mid-section, sending them both into a tree. The great oak shuddered. Leaves and twigs rained down on them. Nostro shook his head and Silvano retreated. Before Nostro could fully recover, Silvano attacked. Jaws wide, he took a bite out of the wolf's side. Nostro howled as the metallic, salty taste flooded over Silvano's tongue. He spat it out and bit in again, his teeth shredding through the fur and flesh. Hot liquid spread over his nose and jaw as he kept biting, spitting out chunks of flesh as he went. Nostro whimpered.

Silvano rose up on his hind legs and pressed his front paws onto Nostro's body, pinning him to the tree as he continued to bite and tear at Nostro's side. He paused. The shiver and weight of magic didn't press against his skin. His stomach flipped as unease

filled him. Cool air rushed past his nose. Another musk mixed in with Nostro's odor. Suspicion pricked at his mind. The scent of his pack moving around him, coming closer. They scented blood and wanted in on the attack. Silvano turned his head and snapped at them before backing up. The urge to finish the fight and kill his enemy was shoved out of the way in favor of caution. He didn't trust what was before him.

"Silvano, what are you doing? You had him!" Heather demanded.

He shook his head. "Something's not right. No magick."

Silvano approached with trepidation. Nostro continued to whimper. He began to change, shifting from beast to man. A large portion of his side was gone. His brown hair was shot through with silver, covering his face.

"Please, no more," a shaky voice pleaded. The hair was pushed back to reveal not Nostro but another man, one that Silvano hadn't seen before.

"A trick!" Silvano looked around, trying to find his enemy. Realization shot through his mind as his body began to move before the thought became clear. *Hex*.

He raced through the woods following her scent. *Don't know when he switched but...*

Blood tinged the air, making his hair rise up. A shudder raced through him. *Hex!* He stopped short when he saw the strange wolf again and Hex gutting Anko, but Nostro was nowhere to be found. Cautiously, Silvano approached the two.

"This is just disgusting. Oh, God, I'm reaching into a wolf's belly to get back my favorite knife. I think I'm going to throw up."

"You're the one who shoved the thing at him," the wolf replied in a husky grumble.

"Yeah, but I didn't think he'd try to swallow my arm. Ewwww, what the fuck did he have for breakfast? Oh, God the smell." She started to make dry heaving sounds.

"Don't you dare throw up on me." The wolf moved back.

"Wuss. Listen, Turk, I don't think this is over. That was waaaay too easy. Anko's very proficient in fighting and he does this? I smell a rat."

"You think they did a switch? Powerful magick."

Turk? Silvano stopped short. *She's working with Turk now? What is going on?*

"Oh, oh this is just gross. I'll get a new knife, screw digging around in this bastard's gut. Silvano, stop hiding and get your ass over here." She looked up. Their eyes met and in a flash two large wolves appeared. Magick pulsed in the air. It was so heavy it pressed against his body, sifted through his fur to beat along his flesh.

"*Hex!*" He moved forward only to have Turk in wolf form launch himself at the real Anko. The two wolves met in midair, dropped to the ground and rolled around the forest floor for dominance. Nostro stayed where he was, amber eyes on Silvano. With horror, he realized Nostro was closer to Hex than he was.

The wolf prowled around Hex but kept his gaze on Silvano, taunting him with his eyes. Hex raised her hands. With a few muttered words, Nostro flew through the air and hit a tree but was on his feet in a flash. He growled at Hex but was now farther away from her, much to Silvano's relief. He took advantage of the other wolf's distraction with Hex to rush him, slamming him into another tree. This time when Nostro got up, his rise was much slower.

With great satisfaction, Silvano rushed him again. Their heads crashed against each other, jaws snapping, teeth clashing. Silvano jumped back and charged at him again, his head hit Nostro's belly. The wolf grunted as he fell to the ground on his back. Silvano didn't wait -- he bit into Nostro's stomach. For the second time that day, fur and blood filled his mouth. Claws scraped Silvano's shoulders and the musk of wolf filled his nostrils as Nostro curled up. He bit down hard and tore his head away, taking a chunk of fur and flesh with him.

Power hit him hard in the face and he stumble back. Nostro rolled into his side and got up to all fours. His legs shook with the effort. Silvano spat out the fur and skin and rushed toward his enemy. Nostro dodged, jumping to the side. One front leg folded and he stumbled. Silvano rushed at him again, this time knocking the other wolf into a large rock.

Nostro rose up, shaking his head. His legs continued to shake until both front legs folded. The magick in the air thinned. The tingle on his skin dulled. As he watched

Nostro move around he saw large droplets of blood hit the ground. Silvano charged and hit Nostro again sending the wolf tumbling into the base of a tree. This time he didn't get up. Instead, he turned his head and bared his neck in defeat. Silvano nodded and rushed toward Hex.

She sat on a rock, blood dripping off of her knife. Hex nodded her head behind her. "Turk's put down Anko. I'll explain everything later. Right now I just want a shower. A nice, loooong, shower. Let's get Nostro back to your pack. I think they'll want to do the whole exile thing."

Silvano shifted. "You can shower at my cabin and then we'll talk." He glanced over to Turk who had yet to turn back into a man. The carcass of Anko lay unmoving in a pool of blood.

"Let's go home." He didn't bother to correct himself. She said nothing in response. Vidal, in wolf form, rushed to him.

"Nostro is defeated and Anko is dead. Have the pack come out here to do the clean up. Hex and Turk are coming with me and are under my protection."

Vidal nodded and moved past him. When they got back to the village, Detrick was waiting for them. He began to clap, a smile on his face.

"All hail the conqueror. I suppose I can expect a meeting to revise the laws and rules sometime this week?" He folded his arms over his chest.

"Yes. As well as elections to replace Nostro and Anko."

Detrick bowed his head. "Understood."

Silvano led Hex and Turk to his home where he gestured them inside first. Exhaustion shook his system as he struggled not to succumb to the weariness of the fight and shifting so quickly. He prayed that the explanation would be fast or he'd fall asleep during it.

Chapter Eight

Hex looked around. She'd seen the outside and looked in but never really took any interest in anything other than Silvano. Now that she was inside and looked around, she liked what she saw. It wasn't overtly masculine. The living room was more neutral in tone. Turk walked behind her. When she stopped to gaze at the large stone fireplace, the man in wolf form nudged her hand.

"Huh?" She looked down. Without thought she ran a hand over his head and down his neck to wince at the sticky, thick matting of blood and fur at the nape. "I see. You want to know what's going on. Can't you shift into man form?"

He shook his head. She sighed. "I'll heal you as best I can while you're in this form. Can you send word to the pack that you'll be here a bit? You're not exactly up for the trek back just yet. Anko got you good."

She held back a grin at the displeasure that shone in Turk's eyes. "Just sayin'."

"Will he stay like that? In wolf form?" Silvano returned wearing a robe and holding towels and robes. He handed both to Hex.

She put them down on the nearest chair. "At the moment, yes. Due to his dabbling in the dark arts as it were, it takes a long time for him to shift from one form to the other. He'll stay like this for several hours. And even in this form, unlike most shifters, his healing will be very slow, almost human like, but a bit faster."

Silvano's face scrunched up in disgust.

"You don't know the whole story so don't start passing judgment just yet. He had your back when you took on Nostro and Anko. I'm still adjusting to this new Turk. I'm willing to give him a chance."

"After all he's done to you?" He raised an eyebrow in disbelief. She didn't blame him. For years Turk had done a lot of terrible things to her and others, but after seeing

just a snippet of what Twyla had done to him she could understand. Dark magic used on a person was just as damaging to the user.

"Before I start with the explanations, can I take a shower?" She felt filthy. The blood was already drying. It felt caked on and ground into her skin just like the dirt and mud. She was sure her hair was a mess of leaves and twigs. For a moment she didn't think it was safe to leave Silvano alone with Turk given how disgusted he still looked. When he nodded it was a bit of relief. His features relaxed and his shoulders came down.

"Okay, come on." He turned and headed out the room.

"You stay here and try to relax. I'll be back soon." Mournful red eyes stared up at her. *He didn't think things would go so well.* She wasn't sure how to put him at ease. *I'll heal you as soon as I get my energy levels back up.* She gave him a pat on the head and followed Silvano out of the living room. The space seemed larger than she'd first thought. Usually when she'd spied on him, her focus had only been on the bed with him in it. There was a large fireplace against the far wall. A circular table stood near the window. Bookshelves and chests of drawers lined the wall. She caught sight of a trunk at the end of the bed. For some reason it snagged her attention. It was a simple chest, nothing ornate, only two golden handles on either side.

"The lid lifts up and a flat-screen TV rises up. Good for watching porn."

Her foot snagged on a rug and she almost tripped. She caught herself at the last moment. Hex glanced in front of her to see Silvano hadn't turned around, so she wasn't sure what to make of the comment, whether it was a joke or just making conversation. He led her into the bathroom. The shower was already on, steam billowing over the doors. Silvano had shrugged out of his robe, body marred by scratches. He turned around and she winced at seeing the huge reddish-purple bruise on his back. Without thought, she went to him. Taking great care, she ran her fingertips over his wound. Hex charged her hand and sent a burst of energy down his arm, running her hand down his back, watching the bruise start to fade away instantly.

"Oh, that feels nice. What are you doing?" Silvano turned around and grabbed her wrist.

"Helping the healing process." She pulled her out of his grasp. "If you don't want me to --"

"I want you to. I would prefer we do that in shower."

She raised an eyebrow at him. "We shower together?"

"I want to take care of you." He grabbed the hem of her shirt and tried to lift it. "Come on, *cara*, work with me."

She lifted her arms and allowed him to help her take it off. Next, he helped unbuckle her pants. She pushed them down only to be stopped by him.

"Sit. Let me take off your boots."

Hex didn't protest. She pushed down the lid to the toilet and sat down while he unlaced her boots.

"Tell me about Turk and this new alliance you two have."

She'd known this was coming. Hex started the story from the beginning -- how she had been lured back to Italy, how Turk found her, everything, not leaving any of the gruesome details out. At times during the story, Silvano would tense up. His body would shake and then he'd let out a hiss of curses in Italian. By the time she was done, it felt like a thousand pounds had been lifted off of her shoulders. A glance down at Silvano showed he wasn't too happy.

"Silvano, it's okay. I'm okay and everything will work out. I know you're angry but this can be fixed and it is. I'm healing and Turk is just beginning his recovery. Twyla has been exiled with no magicks to aid her." She placed a hand on his shoulder.

He shook his head. "Never again. I won't let that happen to you ever again." Silvano stood up. His body shook with restrained anger. The air around them heated up. "Why didn't you tell me this before?"

"Was I supposed to Morse code you with my blinking? Look, it's not exactly easy to confess this, and I'm still dealing with her betrayal. It will take a long time for me to truly accept what happened. I'm asking you now to just let me handle this situation and

not take your anger out on Turk. Despite his actions -- and yes, he was at fault in a lot of ways -- he was just as much a victim of Twyla as I was, and your pack didn't exactly help matters with him as far as he was concerned."

His jaw clenched.

"Please." She stood up, hooked her thumbs into the sides of her panties and pushed them down along with her pants and stepped out of them. "Come on, we need to shower. I reek and need to clean all this blood and stuff off of me and wash my hair. Goddess, I just showered a few hours ago."

Hex grabbed his hand and pulled him toward the stall. "Let's go. The water's probably cold by now."

She yanked open the door and dragged him inside. Hot water sluiced down her scalp, over her face and dripped down to her chest. She moaned. "Oh, this is wonderful."

"Just wait."

Opening her eyes, she watched as he fiddled with a few knobs and more water hit her against the back, the side and from above.

"Turn around. I'm going to wash your hair and the rest of this beautiful body and then we'll go to bed."

"Sleep?"

"Yes. Honestly as much as I would love to make love to you until dawn, I'm too tired and I ache too much. That magick took a lot out of me."

"Understandable. We can do that. Does this mean I get to mark you later?"

"When things calm down and I deal with Turk. And no, I won't kill him. I'll get his story and we'll go from there. For now he will be a guest in my home."

"And what about me?"

"What about you?"

"Am I a guest?" She turned around and blinked back the water blurring her vision.

He wrapped his arms around her and pressed a kiss to her forehead. "You are my mate. Hexuba, you are more than a guest. You may come and go as you please. Just let me know. You aren't a prisoner."

She grinned up at him. For the first time in a long time, life felt right. She felt safe at long last. The urge to escape and run away didn't bombard her. "I can live with that."

"Just live with that?"

"I accept your terms and like them. What I'd like even more is to shower and crawl into bed." Her body felt heavy, not with weariness, with relaxation. The heat of the water was seeping into her tired muscles. She half expected to turn into pudding soon. Her state of relief was only increased by his fingers working their magic on her skull, washing away the dirt, blood, leaves and twigs.

"Mmm, so good."

"Just imagine what I'll do when I have enough time to give you a full body massage."

Her knees nearly buckled. "Later. Much later. Now let's finish this."

His hand roamed over her body, sending tingles of sensation where they touched. By the time he got to her feet, she was leaning against the wall, trying not to slide down. Her eyelids grew heavy, and she was struggling to stop the yawns that were threatening to spill out of her mouth. She didn't even notice when the water stopped. Silvano towed her dry and carried her out of the shower, settling her on a stool. She leaned on the back. Her mouth opened wide as she yawned loud and long. Hex barely registered the loud whirr of the hair dryer until Silvano began to comb out and dry her hair. Just being under the heat again pushed her closer to dreamland.

She smiled sleepily at the care he was giving her. He even pulled her hair into a loose ponytail. When he had her on her feet he slipped a robe on her only to have her shrug it off.

"I sleep in the nude."

"Good to know." The deep, rough timbre of his voice rumbled through her drawing out a sigh.

"Bed now?"

"Yes."

"What about Turk?"

"I'll put him in the guest room. He'll be fine. You both are under my protection."

"Good. Sleep now?" She yawned again. Hex didn't protest when he scooped her up out of the chair.

"Yes."

Another sigh was pulled out of her moments later when she felt as if she'd been placed on a cloud. Warmth followed when another cloud was laid on top of her. Despite feeling in the lap of luxury, she didn't feel at ease. Seconds ticked by until she felt the bed dip. Silvano's warm, naked body pressed against hers. *Home*. She snuggled closer, throwing her leg over his hip and pressing herself as close as she could before sleep took her. For the first time in a long time she felt safe and loved.

* * *

Silvano's arms curled around Hex and he let out a sigh. His world had settled. He felt whole. No more fucking random women to find his mate. He had her, right here. His pack was free of Nostro and Anko's influence, and for the first time since he became alpha, he felt as if he truly had power. He tightened his hold around Hex and kissed her head. After getting Turk settled and having a bit of talk with him, things felt as if they were going toward a better place. Turk, as alpha of the other pack, assured him that he meant no harm and was willing to repair the damage he'd done any way he could. For Hex's sake, Silvano believed him.

The only thing left was for Hex to mark him as hers. A grin tugged at his lips at the thought. *Later*. His eyes drifted closed as the exhaustion of the day washed over him. His life, home and pack were finally complete.

Selena Illyria

Interracial author Selena Illyria was born with an overactive imagination. With great curiosity and a love of writing that pushes her imagination there are many worlds she'd love to explore, from paranormal to sci-fi from cyberpunk and beyond.

Are you willing, dear reader, to step into her worlds? If you do, feel free to poke around. Mind the pixies. They can be very um... excitable by newcomers. *wink*

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