

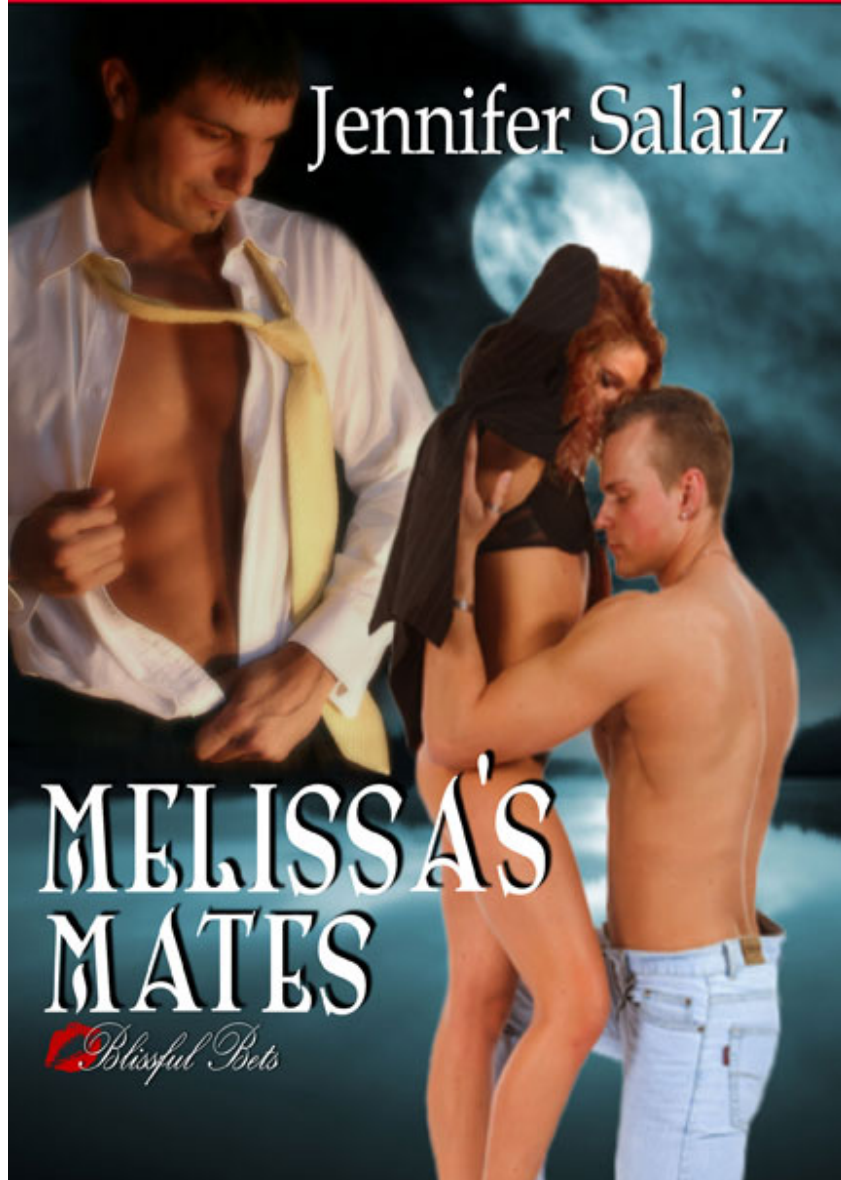
Siren Publishing

*Ménage Àmour*

Jennifer Salaiz

# MELISSA'S MATES

*Blissful Bets*



### Blissful Bets 3

## Melissa's Mates

When Channing is offered to Melissa as a bet, she's sure her bad luck in the game is over. But soon, passion and lust reach their peak, exposing the truth about what he is. Escaping, Melissa finds herself protected by the one man who links them together. Now faced with a choice, does she submit to their pleasure or does she do what she does best, and fight?

Channing and Connor are ready to do whatever it takes to make Melissa see how much they can love her. Can they help her get over the past so they can all move forward, or will Melissa's trust issues overpower the pull of her mates?

**Genre:** Ménage a Trois/Quatre, Paranormal,  
Vampires/Werewolves

**Length:** 41,658 words

# **MELISSA'S MATES**

## ***Blissful Bets 3***

**Jennifer Salaiz**

**MENAGE AMOUR**



**Siren Publishing, Inc.  
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With deep gratitude,

Jennifer Salaiz

## **DEDICATION**

To Mai, a devoted Bets fan, and to all of you who are enjoying these stories. Thank you for all the e-mails!

# MELISSA'S MATES

## *Blissful Bets 3*

JENNIFER SALAIZ

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### Chapter 1

The soft caress trailing down Melissa's body, accompanied by the loud bass pumping through the Martini Bar, left her in an erotic trance. Although she and the remaining girls continued to play Bets, the last four weekends were a complete bust. But now, right in this moment, she knew her bet was definitely in the bag. Thank God! She needed this.

Opening her eyes, she connected with light brown eyes staring back at her. The tall cowboy's wide body moved closer into her curves while his fingers traveled to the junction of her neck. Currents of need tightened her skin as he lingered over the spaghetti strap of her top.

"How 'bout you and I get out of here? What do you think, darlin'?"

"I think that's a marvelous idea." She slowly moved her hand up his chest, feeling the muscles flex. "I'll be right back. Let me tell my friends."

Disconnecting from Chris' warmth, Melissa managed to flash him a smile as she headed to her friends' regular booth. As she squeezed through the crowded bodies, she saw Natalie stand.

"You outtie?"



Winking at her new friend, she grabbed her purse. "You know it. Tell Jules for me, will ya?"

"Absolutely. Have fun tonight. I'm about to head out, myself."

Natalie stepped closer, yelling over the loud pop music playing in the background. "You see that guy over there by the bar?"

Turning, Melissa caught a glimpse of a man in dark denim jeans with a white, long sleeve, button -up shirt. She could barely see the tiny black stripes stretching across the material. "Yeah, I see him. He your bet?"

"Sure is. I'll have this wrapped up in five minutes. He's been eyeing me all night. I thought I'd play hard to get." Natalie laughed and reached for her beer, finishing it off. "Be careful. You need anything, call. Hell, Ev said Stephen was headed out here, but that was a good half hour ago. He should have been here by now. It's too bad she's sick."

"Yeah, tell me about it. Well, I'm out then. It seems like every time I have a bet, he finds something wrong with them. I'm not taking the chance tonight. I need this!"

A laugh came from her friend. She knew Natalie understood what she meant. Stephen had put an end to a lot of their bets in the last few weeks. "I get you, girlie. Go have fun." Melissa watched Natalie's grey eyes dart in the other direction. "I'll tell Jules on my way out. She's over by the pool tables."

Noticing the man dressed in a suit, she had no doubt that's who Julie was targeting. "Sounds great. You be careful, too. Call me tomorrow." Melissa gave her a serious look. Natalie might have started out as Evelyn's friend, but over the past few weeks, they'd grown close. They all had one thing in common—past problems with men. Natalie wasn't an exception.

"You bet."

Both women laughed at the bad pun and took off in different directions. Flipping her dark auburn hair over her shoulder, Melissa looked up at Chris.

“You ready? I can’t wait to get out of here.”

Bright, white teeth flashed as he wrapped his arm around her shoulders and led her to the exit. Warm air brushed against her face as they entered the packed parking lot. The humidity filled her senses, making it hard to breathe. For being so close to the water, there was usually a constant breeze, but not tonight.

“So, your car or mine?” Melissa faced him as they came to a stop. She noticed how he looked around the parking lot as if expecting to see someone he knew.

He took a few seconds before answering her. “Maybe we should take yours. I mean, with you being a girl and all, you’d probably feel more comfortable that way, right?”

Red flags shot off in her head, but she could possibly be overreacting. Trusting any man put a metallic taste in her mouth, almost as if she was biting on tinfoil. No way. For once, she pushed away her suspiciousness.

“Okay, we can take my car. No problem. Just follow me.” The red, jacked-up truck couldn’t be missed. It sat higher than any other vehicle in the parking lot. Proudly, she walked toward it.

“This is yours? Holy shit, darlin’. Can you even get in that thing? How many curbs have you clipped? Women aren’t meant to drive trucks. Men are.”

Melissa felt her eyes roll back as she slowly looked toward him. All right. Not a good start. If there was one thing she didn’t like it was a man who considered women incapable and helpless, not to mention cocky. She couldn’t argue women had trouble doing *some* things the opposite sex could, but driving a truck? Come on. Quickly, she weighed her options. Could she go another weekend without a bet? She wanted to scream out in frustration. She needed contact, skin on skin preferably. Damn it! If she could just tape his mouth shut, everything would be great.

"I can get in my truck just fine, thank you." The attitude was clearly laced in her words. She couldn't help it. There was something about him that she was starting not to like.

"Oh, come now. Don't get upset. There's nothing wrong with you having a truck. What I was getting at was how you need to be with a man who can drive the truck for you. You'd look cute sitting on the passenger side." He paused. "Or in the middle, closer to me."

Anger flared. She could argue fifty ways with how she'd look cuter behind the wheel, alone, but as he pulled her into his body, the words disappeared. Softness pressed against her lips, and Melissa felt lust roar through her.

Wrapping her arms around his neck, she pushed her breasts into his chest. Before she could catch her breath, he was lifting and pressing her back into the driver's side door. Hungrily, she massaged her tongue into his. He tasted like beer. There was something about the flavor that turned her on even more.

"Fuck, I want you. Let's go before I fuck you right here in your truck."

"Over my dead body." Melissa covered her hand across her lips.

"Excuse me?" Chris' head reared back as if he'd been slapped.

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean it like it sounded. What I meant was—"

"Was what?" He cut her off, narrowing his eyes.

"Put me down." Melissa wiggled, but he clamped his fingers tighter onto the jeans, covering her thighs.

"No. Explain. Am I so repulsive that you don't want any memories of fucking me in your truck? Is that it?"

An internal groan echoed through her head. She so did not feel like going into her problem right now. "Repulsive? No, not even close. I would just like to keep my truck clean of sexual encounters."

"So now I'm just an encounter?"

Growing aggravated, Melissa wiggled a bit more. "Listen, I just met you, and I'm not looking for a relationship, especially one that

starts out with me meeting the person at a bar, if you know what I mean. Now, let me down. I've changed my mind."

"You've changed your mind? I don't understand. All I did was ask you some questions."

"And I've answered them. Now let me down."

"No. Maybe I don't want to. Maybe I want to ask you a few more."

This guy had no clue what he was getting himself into. She'd had a hell of a time keeping her mouth closed this long. Could she bite her tongue for the next five to ten minutes it was going to take to ditch this guy? The longer he kept her pinned against the truck, the more she felt trapped, and for Melissa, that was the wrong thing to do.

"I'm done. I want to go home. Let me down or else I'll make you."

Chris's loud laugh echoed throughout the parking lot. The sound, so appealing before, now grated her ears.

"You're going to make me. That's so cute. Really. I like that. How about we stop talking and kiss again. That felt good, didn't it?"

Melissa turned her face and pushed against his chest as he tried to put his lips against hers. Great. This was just what she needed. How in the hell did she manage to get herself into these messes?

"Hey Mel, you okay?"

Stephen's voice had Chris turning his head around, but he quickly turned back to her. "Who's this guy? Your boyfriend?" He nodded in Stephen's direction.

"My friend. Now put me down."

He dropped her on command. Melissa hit the ground hard, knocking the breath from her. Damn, she was going to have a bruise on her ass tomorrow. But she would worry about that later. Right now, all she could feel was rage.

Jumping up, Melissa dusted off her pants. Stephen pulled her toward him and glared at the cowboy. "I don't think that's what she

meant by put her down. Can you give me a reason why I shouldn't kick your ass right now?"

A female voice had Chris stepping away from Stephen.

"Chris! What in the hell do you think you're doing? You said you were having poker night with the guys? You promised you wouldn't do the bars anymore!"

"I was just grabbing a beer on my way over there, baby. Everything's cool."

In shock, Melissa could feel her lips part. Oh, hell no. Throwing a glance at Stephen, she stepped around him and walked forward. "He's lying."

"You shut your mouth." Chris threw her an angry expression and looked back at the petite blonde. "I don't know who this is, honey."

The woman looked back and forth between them. Melissa cocked her head to the side giving the girl a "don't be stupid" look. "Listen, I have no reason to lie to you. He was about to take me to a motel. Insisted we take my truck. You'd be stupid to stay with this piece of shit."

"Hey, fuck you! Crazy, bitch," Chris said.

"Crazy?" The word made Melissa literally see red. He could have called her anything in the world and she would have walked away like she intended, but no one called her crazy.

Before she even knew she'd moved, her fist was clutching Chris's shirt and Stephen was pulling her off. "Call me crazy again, you fucking bastard. All men are the same! Fucking assholes."

"Mel, calm down. Come on, let's go."

"Yeah. Get her out of here. She needs help," the girl spat.

Chris threw her a glance and then wrapped his arm around the blonde while he whispered and led her away.

Wiggling out of Stephen's arms, Melissa pulled down her shirt, trying to calm herself. Damn, that one word triggered her like nothing else. It opened wounds she knew she'd never be able to forget.

“Actually, Stephen, I think I’m going home. Don’t worry, I’m not drunk. Go ahead and go inside. I’m not sure if Nat has left yet, but Jules is still inside.”

“Are you sure you’re okay?”

Melissa watched as Chris and the girl walked off. Turning her attention back to Evelyn’s boyfriend, she nodded. “You know me. I’ll be fine.”

“And you’ll call me the moment you get home?”

“Yes, officer. I promise.” Melissa laughed and opened her door, climbing into her truck. Leaving it opened, she watched the tall blond peer up at her.

“Mel, please be careful. Evelyn would be lost without you.”

Growing serious, she nodded. “I’d be lost without her, too. I’ll call. Tell her I hope she gets to feeling better.” Shutting the door, she watched as he waited for her to pull out. The traffic wasn’t too bad as she headed back toward the island. The drive wasn’t but a half hour tops, so she’d make great time.

Cranking up the country music, she let herself get lost in the lyrics while she went over her life. Reflection was something she kept getting sucked into lately, and it was getting worse as the weeks went by. Everything started with Evelyn getting back together with Stephen while also having Brandon as a boyfriend. Their ménage relationship had really taken her by surprise. Then Sarah got into one, too, and *bam*, Melissa’s reality took a blow.

Seeing the lights from town coming into view, she let her thoughts drift to the morning. Tomorrow would be Monday. The truck’s clock read fifteen after midnight. Perfect. She was going to be tired as hell. Another great start to a never-ending routine. Damn.

## Chapter 2

The week didn't go as badly as she thought it would. Evelyn didn't show up to work until Thursday. Even then, she didn't look very good. Now, as Melissa sat at the table at their favorite Cajun restaurant, she was having a hard time focusing with the words she'd just heard. Confused, she looked back and forth between her two best friends, unable to get over the shock of what just passed their lips.

Again, she let the words process in her mind, repeating them over and over. After a few seconds, she shook her head. Nope, she still couldn't believe it.

"You're both what?"

Fingers weaved through her red hair while she pulled it annoyingly out of her face. Evelyn and Sarah, the two people she counted on most in the world, turned to look at each other and then back to her. Picking up her glass of soda, Melissa took a big drink and tried to catch her breath. The longer they remained silent, the more their statement sunk in.

Sarah leaned across the restaurant table, her long blonde hair spilling forward, and stared deeply into Melissa's eyes, hurt. "Mel, Evelyn and I are both pregnant. That's why we can't go out anymore. If you would have just let the argument drop, we wouldn't have had to tell you this way."

"How pregnant are we talking here?"

Evelyn's eyes cut to Sarah. "I'm around eighteen weeks. Sarah's a little over twelve."

Opening her mouth, a response tried to come out, but nothing left her lips. Standing, dazed, she reached for her purse. Melissa had no

idea what she was doing. Pregnant? Evelyn, okay, she could accept that. Sarah? No way. She'd just barely grasped the idea that Devon and her friend were now back together, not to mention Gavin, Sarah's other boyfriend. How could she be pregnant just a little over three months later? Weren't any of them thinking straight at all? And so far along? That would mean she got pregnant almost immediately. Her world began to swim as she processed everything.

Melissa bit her lip so she wouldn't say anything that might unwillingly come out. Well, to Sarah, anyway. The fear that her beautiful friend would end up losing another baby or have the man she'd so easily forgiven hurt her all over caused tears to come to her eyes.

"I think I should go. I'm sorry. Please, don't think I'm not happy for you both. A baby is wonderful, a gift. I just need to think some things over."

Melissa turned and left the crowded Cajun restaurant and headed for her truck. Pregnant. Jesus. She prayed everything worked out for her friends. She really did. The protectiveness she felt toward them bordered on insanity. There wasn't anything she wouldn't do for either one of those girls. Although she had five very close friends, Evelyn and Sarah she'd known since she moved to Port Aransas, Texas. They'd helped her get over the worst time in her life, and for that she'd be forever grateful.

Music blasted through the interior, but she quickly cut off the sound. She already couldn't think, and although tempted to drown herself out completely, she couldn't get past the nagging feeling that those two girls were hiding something more than just pregnancy. Even though technically nothing changed since they'd found their men, normal people just didn't get into relationships consisting of three people. It was hard enough with two. Three had to be impossible.

Pulling out of the parking lot, Melissa pushed away what had just happened and made her way to her small, one-bedroom house. The



majority of the homes on the island were on stilts, and hers wasn't an exception. But from the main floor on the second story, the view was to die for. Countless times, after a long night at the bars, Melissa would watch the sun rise. She couldn't help but wonder if she'd ever have someone to share the beautiful experience with. But she knew, deep down, now wasn't the time.

After countless years of being in one bad relationship after another, she decided instead of wasting her time on the wrong man, she'd wait for the right one. Everyone always said when you see the person your meant to be with, times stops. Although she didn't believe that, she had no doubt the feeling of aptness would be immediate.

Pulling into her driveway, Melissa jumped down from her truck. The conversation with Ev and Sarah kept coming back. She tried to think of something else to occupy her thoughts. A voice saved her from having to.

"Gosh darn it, Mel! I nearly had to run the red light to catch up with you."

The sound of Julie's voice had her smiling as she turned around. "I thought you couldn't make it to town today? Shouldn't you be at work?"

"Work, right." Julie dragged out the last of her sentence, rolling her eyes. "Hell no. I finished court early today. Why aren't you going back to the office?"

Melissa walked over to the sporty, two-door Mercedes. "Not in the mood. Plus, the office will forward over my calls if anyone needs anything. The market is slow, you know that. Not too many people want to buy houses in this recession."

"Very true. Now, how 'bout you jump in and come with me. I've had one hell of a morning. I need a drink."

"This early? Are you kidding me?"

Melissa noticed the blonde highlights that had streaked her friends' brunette hair were gone. As one of Julie's perfectly sculptured eyebrows rose, Mel knew she was serious.

"Do I look like I'm kidding you? I got fucked this morning at court. I think I'm going to lose my first case, and truthfully, I don't want to think about it. Thompson, fucking genius. I should have had my guard up better with him. He's the best in the area, and you know I wouldn't admit it if it wasn't true."

"If you colored your hair already, then you must need a drink pretty fucking bad. "

"Oh, you noticed that." Julie patted her now dark brown hair. "Yeah, I was tired of the blonde. Thought I'd go back to a more natural look. So, are you going to get in or just stand outside my door all day?"

Melissa climbed in, pulling her black, knee-length skirt down. "Where are we going?"

"Fuck, I'd settle for a forty from a convenience store right now. I need alcohol."

Studying her friend cautiously, she tried to ignore the desperation in her voice. Surely she wasn't getting out of hand. Maybe it was the stress of basically getting her ass served on a silver platter at work, but still, she felt the need to watch Julie carefully. The last few weeks at the bars, Julie had gone beyond having a good time. Once, she literally passed out in the restroom and had to be carried out of the bar by Stephen.

They took off toward town. Rap settled through the car, and Melissa inwardly groaned. How could she have forgotten about Julie's love for bass? The whole car was set up to be heard a mile away. Although she didn't have a dislike toward some rap, the vibrations of the music gave her a headache at the volume her friend preferred.

Pulling up to the restaurant Melissa had just left, she prayed Sarah and Ev weren't still inside. There wasn't really a need to worry about

Natalie. She worked in Corpus, too, so her getting here was impossible sometimes. The traffic was a bitch to fight at lunch time.

"You're drinking with me, right?"

"You know I can't do that. Who will drive us home?"

"Fuck, you're right. Hell, we could walk. You only live three blocks away."

Melissa mouth parted, shocked that she was distressed enough to ask. Well, hell, after the morning she'd had, why not. "You're buying me some new pantyhose. I refuse to walk the three blocks in these heels. You owe me so big, Julie, it's not even funny."

"Oh, God, I love you, Mel. Come on, let's get so wasted Stephen has to threaten to arrest us for public intoxication."

"Shit."

They both walked in, and Melissa sighed in relief to see her other friends had gone already. They sat at their regular table, Julie not even picking up the menu before flagging down the waitress. "Two Coronas. Thanks."

"Ugh, Julie, you know I don't like those. Bud Light, please."

The waitress nodded and left. Melissa looked over at her friend. "So, you're going out tonight, right? I mean, now that Sarah and Ev aren't going to be going anymore, I think we need to find some new people. This sucks."

"Wait, why aren't they going anymore?"

Melissa could have kicked herself. Why did she always do this? For some reason, her mouth and brain just did not communicate well together. Damn it. At least this one hadn't been embarrassing. The things she allowed to slip at times could turn her face as red as her hair.

"You'll have to ask them. It's not my secret to tell."

"Fuck, this day just keeps getting better and better. If I find out those men turned into possessive pigs, I'm going over there and laying down the law. That's horse shit."

Julie practically grabbed the beer from the waitress. Melissa watched, shocked as the bottle didn't leave her lips until it was empty. "Yeah, keep them coming, like every few minutes." The waitress's eyes grew wide as she nodded her head.

"Slow down, I'm not carrying your ass to my house."

"We'll call a cab. About tonight —of course I'm going. I already talked to Natalie, and she's coming, too. I think she's bringing a friend with her. Cindy, I think."

"Good, we're going to need more people at this rate." Melissa picked up her beer and took a big drink. "Julie, do you feel like something weird is going on? Well, I mean, with the whole ménage thing? First Ev, now Sarah. It's one thing for it to be a freak occurrence, but now with Sarah, too. Something feels off."

"Hell no. Shit, if I had two men wanting to be with me, and they looked like any of the men those two have, I'd jump for joy and die happy."

"You see nothing wrong with being with two men?" Melissa couldn't believe her ears. Her friend couldn't be serious.

"Melissa, get real. Those two trios love each other. If the love is there, why fight it?"

Taking a bigger drink, she kept quiet. Why fight it? Why! Well, maybe because it just didn't seem natural. Hadn't most people been taught growing up that you find one man and fall in love? Nowhere in the fairy tales did it mention two hot men coming in to sweep Cinderella off her feet. There sure as hell was no Snow White and the seven studs. Melissa laughed under her breath at the thought.

Yeah, why was it that she could imagine that? Maybe she wasn't as far off from accepting the scenario, or maybe she was just losing her mind with all these suspicions of secrets. She'd be damned if Ev and Sarah weren't hiding something.

## Chapter 3

Looking at her watch, Melissa cursed. They'd been here for hours. If they didn't leave soon, the dinner rush would no doubt be coming in, and she sure as hell didn't want to be here when they began to arrive.

"Jules, that's number eight you just finished. You ready to go back to the house? I thought you wanted to go out tonight. At this rate, you'll be passed out by nine."

"So right. I prolly should sober up if I want to be able to make some sort of appearance."

"Absolutely." Melissa stood and reached for the new brunette the moment she started to sway back. Grabbing her arm, she barely was able to keep her from pulling them both to the ground.

"Wow, okay, I admit it. I think I've had a little too much. Fuck, get me out of here before I fall over someone's table." Even though Julie seemed a bit concerned about her condition, she still couldn't hold in the laugh that escaped from her mouth.

"Just hold on to me. We'll try to get out of here before we both make asses of ourselves. I may have only had four, but I've never been much of a drinker, you know that."

Both women tried to play it off as they weaved through the tables. Melissa finally was able to breathe as they stepped outside and connected with the salty air. The sound of the seagulls had her closing her eyes and smiling. Walking forward, blind, wasn't the smartest idea, given her equilibrium. The connection she made against what could be described as nothing short of a wall of stone made her

bounce backwards. Off balance, she waved her arms desperately, reaching out for Julie.

The air left her lungs as an arm reached behind her and nearly gave her whiplash from the instant stop. Anger coursed through her blood as she looked into the most gorgeous face she'd ever seen. It was enough to give her pause, but her mouth had a mind of its own.

"What the fuck do you think you're doing? Couldn't you see me walking?"

The light blue eyes grew wide, and she froze. She knew those eyes. Tom had eyes just like his. Just the thought of the man who tried to kidnap her best friend made the rage worse. True, he wasn't Tom, but anything associated with that evil man didn't sit well with her.

"I was here first. Didn't you see me? Plus, I believe I saved you from falling."

He smiled down charmingly at her, but she quickly removed herself from his arms. "No, you almost broke my neck. I think falling wouldn't have hurt so much. Jules, let's go."

"Wait. I'm sorry if I hurt you. It wasn't intentional, I promise." His voice quickly rushed in. "Can I ask you a question?"

Melissa spun around and looked back at the man. Once again, she looked into his eyes, and this time she felt something different. The feeling of getting sucked in pulled her closer to him. Taking a step forward, thoughts of seducing this man burst into her mind. He was beautiful, charming, and...Melissa blinked and ripped her gaze away.

"What did you want?"

"Your name." He smiled as if surprised by something.

"Her name is Melissa Taylor. She'll be at the Martini Bar in Corpus tonight if you're interested. Now, we have to leave because I don't think I can stand too much longer."

Melissa glared at Julie. For some reason, she wasn't sure if she wanted this man to know her name. There was something about him that left her anxious, yet appealed to her. Her mind kept telling her to run for the hills, but her body wanted to wrap itself around him.

"Nice to meet you, Melissa. I'm Channing."

She nodded wearily and eased back to her friend. Julie sat propped against a palm tree, her hair catching in the bark. The poor girl was absolutely wasted. For four in the afternoon, that wasn't a good sign.

"Let me call us a cab, Jules. We'll be out of here in no time."

"Allow me to drive you wherever it is you ladies need to go."

Melissa took in the business suit and Channing's jet black hair. Pulling her vision to the parking lot, she looked at the vehicles filling the space. There was only one she could imagine him driving —the only other Mercedes in the lot.

"No thanks, we'll call a cab."

"Mel, come on. I don't want to have to wait. Aren't you sober enough to drive my car?"

Even though she was sure she could make it the three blocks, she wasn't willing to bet anyone's life on it. There were too many pedestrians that walked this island. A lot of them happened to be high school kids.

"No. The cab shouldn't take long."

Julie let out a groan and sunk to the ground in her business skirt.

"Please, let me help you. I'm sorry for whatever I did to make you angry at me."

"We don't need your help. You were going in to eat. Please, go enjoy your meal."

Distance. She needed so much more separation from this man. What was it about him that made her want to flee? He was beyond gorgeous. Yet something, an energy about him, definitely pushed her away. The moment he took a step forward, she took a step back. The pain that washed over his face was the only reason she didn't continue.

"As you wish. I'm sorry."

Hesitantly, she watched him walk inside. Torn, she felt the need to go apologize. She'd been rude, something she hated. Instead, she

pulled out her phone and called a cab company. It didn't take them long to arrive. Helping Julie in the back seat was nothing short of her friend falling inside. It wasn't two blocks of passing houses and palm trees before she saw Jules sway to the side. After a few seconds Julie's hand reached forward.

"I think I'm going to be sick."

Melissa looked over, alarmed. Even the driver of the cab tensed as he made the turn to her house. Their speed increased, and he stopped abruptly. Julie opened the door and became ill right there outside her house.

"Well, thanks for not doing that on the stairs." Melissa paid the driver and helped her friend into her house. By the time she got Julie showered, dressed in some of her pajamas, and into bed, the clock read fifteen till seven. So much for going out tonight. She guessed it didn't matter. There would always be tomorrow, but still, she'd been excited to go and release some steam, especially after the disaster of last weekend.

Walking to look out the glass on her door, Melissa watched the sunset from her view of the beach. No one was around, leaving the large expanse of beach deserted. Just the thought of walking along the water caused her to head to her room. She grabbed her black bikini and a pair of shorts. Feeling a sense of urgency, she put them on and was running for the ocean like her life depended on it.

Something drove her faster until fire raced down her lungs. Pulling the clip out of her hair, she let her red curls cascade into the wind that whipped past her. Melissa didn't stop until her toes connected with the rush of water. The slight coolness soothed her racing heart, and suddenly she didn't want to stop. Walking deeper, she stared captivated at the setting sun.

Waves crashed against her chest while she ventured even farther. The soft sand beneath her toes urged her until the water rested even with her chest, and she had to fight to stand against the waves. Random thoughts poured through Melissa's mind. She couldn't help



but think of her conversation with her friends earlier. Babies. They were going to become mothers. The revelation brought a new batch of tears to her eyes.

Where had time gone? Here she was right at thirty, and even though motherhood crossed her mind on occasion, she couldn't actually picture it. First you needed a man, and then came the rest. She didn't trust men. She'd yet to meet one that didn't hit, cheat, or drink himself into oblivion every night. The day that one of the "good guys" came along, she'd probably just say something to ruin it anyway.

Darkness begun to close in around her, and still Melissa didn't move. Without thought, she took a breath and emerged herself under the water. The weightless current carried her out further, and she let it. She wasn't afraid of being taken out too far. She'd been a certified lifeguard and knew the conditions didn't pose any threat.

Keeping her eyes tightly shut, she drew her body out straight and could feel herself float towards the surface. She felt so free, so light. This was how she wanted to be, always. No worries, just her, the ocean, and peace.

Pressure gripping her arm caused her to scream out. Flailing wildly, she choked on the salty water. Someone dragged her toward the shore, but with her hair matted across her face, she couldn't see anything.

"Are you trying to kill yourself? What in the hell do you think you're doing!"

Gagging and halfway submerged under the water, Melissa tried to catch her breath. Fire raced through her eyes. Rubbing her arm, she stood and glared at the man. Immediately, she noticed his height and how the water rested just at his hip bones. He was completely nude.

"Answer me! What in the hell were you doing? Do you know how much you frightened me?"

Confused, anger sparked inside of her at his tone. “I was...what the hell does it matter what I was doing? What in the hell are you doing, scaring me like that?”

He remained quiet as he stared at her. She looked into his hazel eyes, barely catching their color in the darkness. The moon gave enough light for her to notice his features. Strong cheekbones rested above full lips. His jaw squared off at his chin. He didn’t look a day over his mid-twenties. Something tugged in her chest, and she stepped away from him.

“I should be going. Next time you decide to save someone, make sure they need to be rescued before you dive in.”

Melissa began walking back toward the beach, leaving the stranger in the moonlight of the water. The sound of his angry splashing made her turn in his direction as he distanced himself a good ten feet, parallel to her.

“If you wouldn’t have disappeared and stayed under the water so long then maybe I wouldn’t have needed to *rescue* you.” The words were spat in her direction, and her lips parted.

“No one told you to, so why did you waste your time? What, are you telling me a person can’t swim at the beach anymore?”

He stomped in her direction, until mere inches separated them. Heat inflamed her body as his nude form grew closer. With as far as they made it, the water only reached to his knees, it was thigh level on her. Alarmed, she scanned the area, but it was still deserted.

“Listen, lady, I was trying to help you. I’m sorry if I scared you, but you scared me. What am I supposed to think? You come tearing down the beach, running at the speed of light. Then, after countless minutes, you’re like a zombie staring straight ahead, only to disappear under the water and not resurface. I panicked, okay? I wasn’t sure what was going on.”

Melissa could feel her breath quicken. The rise and fall of her breasts nearly closed their distance. Just thinking about their skin touching caused her nipples to tighten painfully.

"I couldn't think," she whispered.

His features softened as he continued to look down at her. "Well, I can't think right now."

The hoarseness of his voice caressed places deep inside of her. Suddenly, she didn't feel angry or afraid of this man anymore. He was so close. If she just lifted her hand, or took a step closer, she could unite their two bodies.

Watching his hand rise, the air left her completely. The moment his palm cupped her cheek, a growing hunger took over. Their eyes locked, and she could have sworn time literally stood still. Everything turned into slow motion as he stared. No matter how hard she tried, she couldn't break their gaze. Hazel, that was all she could see, and oddly, she never wanted to leave their presence.

*Kiss me, please! God, I think he's going to do it. He's getting closer!*

"Melissa, is that you!"

Startled, she jumped, and her head spun towards the shore. The glow of the white pajama's rested there, motionless. Julie stood with her hands on her hips, watching them.

"Are we going out or not? I feel better."

The sound traveled loudly over the calming water. Even the wind seemed to have died the moment Melissa's universe had tilted. Fuzzily, her head wouldn't focus with what had just occurred.

"I should go."

She pulled back and took another look at him before she ran for the shore. The shakiness coursing through her body nearly made her legs collapse out from under her on repeated occasions. She turned back noticing he had moved into deeper water. Remembering the fact that he was nude, she was glad. For some strange reason, she didn't want her friend to see him like that.

Taking in Julie's messy appearance, she sighed. "Are you sure you're up for going out tonight? You've only slept maybe an hour. You still have to be pretty drunk."

“I’m good. Let’s go figure out what we’re going to wear. I feel like dancing.”

Melissa looked back to the silhouetted figure as they made their way back towards her house. The large sand dunes separating the beach soon made him disappear completely. An ache raced through her heart. She hadn’t even gotten his name. Would she ever see him again? As much as she wanted to, she wasn’t sure if she ever would.

## Chapter 4

The lyrics to the song playing in the crowded bar were being yelled in Melissa's ear. She looked over laughing at the still intoxicated Julie. "Come on, girlie, sing with me. This song fucking rocks." Her friend went back to singing as Natalie and a new girl walked up.

Gray eyes looked amused as Natalie looked down at her and smiled. "I see someone started without me. Damn, I'm going to have fun catching up with her. This is Cindy. She works with me at the bank. I think she'll be perfect for our little game."

"Bets is definitely the way to go if you're looking for fun and not wanting to get tied down. Although, with the way things have been going, I'm not so sure about that anymore." Melissa whispered the last part to herself.

Evelyn had actually come up with this game last year when they were waiting for spring break to arrive. Boredom didn't last as they all found the game of betting on men a challenge they couldn't resist. With one point of a friend's finger, if the challenged woman approved, she set her sights on her target and tried to see if she could get him to leave with her. Melissa loved the distraction for a while. Now it seemed like bad luck had glued itself to her side.

"So, any takers for tonight? I saw a really hot cowboy for you, Melissa."

"Where?" She craned her neck to see where Natalie pointed. The moment she saw him she shook her head no. "Too skinny. I like my men—"

"Hello, ladies."

Melissa's mouth twisted at the man dressed in a pair of khakis and a blue and white polo shirt. Light blue eyes pierced hers, and she could feel her heart race. "What are you doing here?" The words slipped out, and she cursed. Now why did she react like that? This guy wasn't bad. And she was thankful the "run" feeling was gone. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean that like it sounded. Here, sit. I'll make it up to you. Julie, scoot your ass over."

Channing smiled and took a seat. Melissa had no idea what she was doing, but she really hated the way every time she opened her mouth the wrong thing came out. "So Channing, was it?"

"Yes, and you're Melissa."

"Yes." She laughed. "Well, what brings you out here? It wasn't that my friend mentioned it earlier, was it?"

"That's exactly what it was, actually."

A laugh broke from her throat. "Well, at least you're honest. Can I buy you a drink? I feel a little bad about earlier. My day has been off. I was extremely rude to you, and for that, I'm sorry."

"How about I buy you a drink?"

"I'm not drinking tonight. I have to drive back to the island at some point."

"Well, I'm not drinking either. Would you like a water or something?"

Melissa studied his light blue eyes. What was it about their depths that drew her in? He quickly looked away and broke their contact.

"No, no water. So, do you live on the island, or are you vacationing? Taking the suit from earlier, I don't think you're a tourist."

A smile flashed white teeth. Something about them made Melissa pause. She wasn't sure what it was. Her brain felt like it blanked, leaving her feeling confused.

"No, I'm not a tourist, but I don't live on the island, either. I was visiting some new friends."

"Really? Maybe I know them. I've lived on the island forever."

"Well, do you know a guy named Brandon De La Cruz?"

"Brandon! Yes, he's one of my best friend's boyfriends. Ev and I go way back."

"Small world." He grinned and looked toward Julie who was dancing in the seat. His laugh made Melissa's body spasm. Jolted by the feeling, her fingers clamped to the table. Warmth caressed her neck, bringing her eyes down heavily.

"Are you all right?" He whispered in her ear, causing her stomach to tighten even more.

All Melissa could do was nod. She forced her eyes open. What in the hell was happening to her? She wasn't lying about today definitely feeling off. She'd said it earlier, but she couldn't stress the point to herself, enough. Something wasn't right. It started with the news about babies, then meeting Channing, then the guy at the beach, and now Channing again. What a day.

Natalie stood and smiled down at her. She pointed her finger at Channing, the classic sign she was making him Melissa's target. "You need to dance. Why don't the two of you go and have fun? I'm taking Julie and Cindy over to these really hot guys across the bar."

As the girls left, her heart beat even faster. She looked at Channing, seeing flashes of them together. The thought of having sex with this man was somehow different. *He* was somehow different than any other man she'd been with before. The music brought her out of the fantasies. Remembering Natalie's words, she tried to keep the images of the two of them so close together out of her mind.

"Would you? Like to dance, that is?"

"Sorry, I'm a horrible dancer." Melissa looked away quickly, but turned back to him.

"I bet you're not so bad. Come to me."

The words, with the combination of looking into the endless depths of his eyes, drew her closer to him. Leaning forward, she stood as he did. A large hand gripped the side of her waist, and she couldn't

look away. She felt hypnotized, in awe of his overall aura, not to mention how attractive he was.

Before she realized what she was doing, her body was pressed tightly to his as he moved her against him erotically. Every nerve ending she possessed felt consumed. Her body pulsed and vibrated against the hardness of his thighs and chest. He felt perfect. The two of them together blew her away.

“See, I knew you were a very good dancer.”

“Maybe because I’m not thinking. I don’t know, I can’t...think.”

“Don’t think. Feel.”

Feel. Just hearing him say that, she could have sworn she almost had an orgasm. Clutching her fingers in his polo shirt, she pulled him closer. The smell emanating from him intoxicated her. Leaning closer, she breathed in heavily, suddenly feeling lost in the crowded bar.

“Channing?”

“Yes, Melissa?”

The need to pull his mouth to hers was crippling. It hit her hard and fast. What was it about this guy? “Would you like to leave with me?”

He jerked back so suddenly, he bumped into a couple standing behind them. As he apologized, she watched him look around nervously and come back toward her. A look of anger passed his face, but quickly vanished.

“Melissa, I’m not a bet. I know all about your little game. I didn’t miss the sign, either.”

Stunned, she watched as he stalked off. Oh, she was going to kill Ev or Brandon! How could they have told? Damn it. She really wanted to leave with him, and it had nothing to do with the fact that he was the one that got pointed out to her.

Rushing forward, she quickly caught up with him as he approached the front doors. “Channing, wait!” Pulling his arm, he turned to her. “I wasn’t asking you to leave with me because of that. I



know what you saw, but weren't we talking and getting along fine before that?"

He looked deeply into her eyes, pulling her back into some weird, spellbinding state. "Yes. But would you have asked me if it weren't for that?"

"Absolutely." The answer left her mouth before she even knew she'd opened it.

He laughed. "I believe you. But, I really should be going. I must...eat dinner."

"Oh, I would think you would have grabbed a bite before coming. That would have been smarter." She quickly clamped her mouth closed. What he did was none of her business. Now not only did she make it sound like he was stupid, she'd probably scared him away permanently.

*Geez, way to go Melissa.*

Once again, he laughed. "You're right. I should have grabbed a bite, before coming." Something about what she'd said seemed to make him laugh harder. Confused, her hand came to rest on her hip. She didn't necessarily like getting laughed at, especially when she didn't know what could possibly be so funny.

"How would you like to go to lunch tomorrow?"

"Lunch? Why are you asking me out tomorrow? Why not to go catch that bite to eat you were wanting? I can go with you. Julie's going to ride home with Natalie since they both live here in Corpus."

He looked around uncomfortably. "Not tonight, okay? Why don't you give me your number, and I'll call you in the morning."

Desperation clutched to her conscious. Why was she scared for him to leave? It was so unlike her. Regardless, the rejection was enough to snap her out of the weird spell. "Wow, that hurt. Nice. If you wanted to blow me off you should have just said no thanks."

Melissa shook her head and walked back toward the table. Great, the one guy who could make her melt with his eyes and he totally rejected her. She wanted to laugh. Served her right for having such

high hopes. Snatching her purse, she spun around to leave, when she collided with his hard chest. Damn, if she wasn't making it a habit of literally running into him.

"I wasn't blowing you off. I really want to see you."

"Right. Listen, I'm not going to tell Brandon or Ev that you're not interested, okay? Have a nice night."

She walked past him, ready to just go home. Fingers wrapped around her waist, and she couldn't help the way her body responded to his touch. A moan almost left her lips as she bit the softness of her bottom one to keep them closed.

"I couldn't care less what you tell your friends." The length of his hand traveled up passed her ribs as he pulled her back against him. Tightness erupted over her body at feeling his thick cock pressed right above her ass. "You see, I'm not one to care what other people think. Out of courtesy, I was trying to spare you from who I am. But seriously, why should I? I don't plan to let you go. Come, let us go."

Melissa only paused for a moment. His words were confusing but a complete turn -on to her. She let him wrap his arm around her shoulders as she followed him out of the main doors. They approached the same Mercedes she saw earlier. Channing was definitely not someone she would usually leave with. Imagine that — her leaving without a cowboy. She couldn't believe it.

"Channing, nope, pick someone else. You can't have her."

Melissa spun around to make contact with Stephen's tall frame. "Hey, what the hell? I thought you weren't going to be here tonight? Where's Ev? She didn't come, did she?"

"No, she's at home, but she sent me to watch over you girls again. Good thing I came, too. Mel, go back inside. You're not leaving with him."

Taking a step closer to Channing, she raised one of her eyebrows at her friend's boyfriend. Stephen being a cop had its benefits, but it didn't tonight. "I don't think you understand. I want to leave with him. It's okay, really."

"No, it's not. I'm telling you I don't care what you want. You're not going to."

"I think the woman has made herself clear. She wants to leave with me."

"Don't make me call Ayden."

Melissa could feel her eyes widen at his words. She knew who Ayden was, but not that well. They'd only met a time or two through passing and only because Ev and Ayden's wife were friends. "What is Ayden going to do?" When neither of them said anything, she raised her voice. "Damn it, what the hell is going on?"

"Go inside, Mel. Don't make me tell you again."

She knew they were hiding something, and she wanted to know what the fuck it was. "I'm not going until you tell me exactly why I can't leave with Channing. And I want to know where Ayden fits into this."

"Listen to Stephen, go inside." The man standing beside her was so quiet, she almost didn't hear him. Snapping her gaze to Channing, she looked at him, hurt. She wanted to lash out she was so angry. What was it? What could the secret be? She knew she couldn't be imagining this. Too many things kept clicking together the wrong way. Why would Ayden care what Channing was doing? Why would the two of them being together even concern Stephen's good friend?

Planting her feet apart, she crossed her arms. "I don't plan on taking a step until one of you either tells me what this is about, or Channing and I leave."

"Melissa, you don't know what you're doing. You don't know who he is."

"So tell me, damn it! Who is he?"

Stephen took a step to the side, closer to her. "He's one of the most feared men I know. "

Pieces began to come together. Stephen and Ayden were both cops, so if this guy was feared, he had to be into something illegal or bad. "Oh god, are you a drug dealer or a murderer or something?"

Taking a step back from Channing, she looked at him skeptically. He laughed, and the fear vanished instantly, leaving her confused as to what they were referring to. The look he shot to Stephen was one that made her feel stupid for asking the question, which only replaced the earlier anger. Impatience left her fists clenched.

"No, I'm not into anything criminal, I assure you. Now, do you want to leave with me or not? I'm not letting anyone tell me what to do. I'll deal with the consequences."

Melissa looked back over at her best friend's boyfriend. "Stephen? Please tell me why you don't want me to go. Is he going to hurt me?"

A look she couldn't make out crossed over his face. "Hurt you, no, probably not." He turned his attention to the tall man standing beside her. "Channing, you need to tell me what your intentions are. Is this just for tonight? What are you planning to do with her?"

"I want her."

Those three words caused Melissa's heart to race. Stephen's eyes grew the size of saucers. She looked back and forth between them, feeling as though she was missing some large piece of his statement. "Channing...oh fuck. I don't know. You don't know her temper. She's all wrong for you."

"God damn it, Stephen! What the fuck is the matter with you!" Tears clouded Melissa's vision. It was one thing for someone to say something like that behind her back, but so bluntly caused hurt like she couldn't imagine. She had problems. She knew that. But what was wrong with *her*? Channing said he wanted her. She wasn't sure exactly what that meant, but she liked the sound of it.

"Mel, that didn't come out right. I'm sorry. You know I love you, but Channing doesn't know you. I just think both of your personalities don't mesh well together."

"We're talking about a night, Stephen, not forever."

"I don't know about that," he mumbled.

“What did you say?” She’d heard him perfectly well, but she still couldn’t believe what he’d said. Not waiting, she grabbed Channing’s hand. “Let’s go.”

“Mel, wait. Just please, think about this. Don’t look at him, and look at me. What does your mind, your heart, tell you to do?”

Stephen grabbed her face and made her stare into his. For seconds she stared into his eyes, searching her own mind for the truth. “I don’t know what you mean, but I know I feel compelled to go. I want to. Now let me, and tell Ev congrats. I wasn’t the nicest person earlier. Tell her I’ll call tomorrow.”

He nodded and dropped his hands. “Be careful. Call me if you need anything. Anything! I’ll come get you or whatever needs to be done.”

Channing pulled her closer to the car, and she climbed in as he opened the door. Settling back on the seat, she tried to process exactly what just happened. She felt more lost than ever. Before she and her soon-to-be lover parted ways, she was going to figure out a way to get him to tell her everything. To do that, she wanted to be on familiar ground. No hotel rooms for this one. For the first time, she’d bring a bet home.

## Chapter 5

Nervousness filled Melissa as they pulled into her drive. Leaving her truck probably hadn't been very smart, but she'd called Julie, and it just so happened that Julie left her keys on the counter to her car and her friend had a spare at her house. She could drive the Mercedes to Corpus, pick up her truck, and lock Julie's keys in her car. It worked out perfectly.

"Second thoughts?"

Looking into Channing's face in the dark ness, she shook her head no. Melissa opened the door and proceeded up the steps. When he paused, she turned around to see him staring out toward the sand dunes.

"Is something wrong?"

"No." He moved forward but kept his gaze in the general direction of the beach.

Unlocking the door, Melissa walked in and dropped her stuff on the coffee table. Heat enveloped her from behind so fast the surprise made her suck in air. Wasn't he just at the door? She hadn't even heard it shut.

"Your smell has been driving me wild since I met you." Pressure gripped her hips as he pulled her ass deeper into his form. The hardness pressing against her through the thin fabric of the dress caused her legs to tremble.

An arm wrapped around her chest, wedging between her breasts as his hand cupped her chin. The smoothness of his face nestled into her neck and sent currents all throughout her body. Melissa moaned, moving closer against him.

"I want to taste every inch of your body. I'm betting you taste even better than you smell."

Suddenly lifted, Melissa clutched to his arm. He walked straight to her bedroom without so much as a pause. When she was placed stomach-down on the cool comforter, he didn't give her time to roll over. The weight of his body covered hers.

Fabric ripped, causing cool air to brush against the exposed skin of her back. Shocked, her head turned to the side, trying to catch a glimpse of him. The top of his head was all she could see. Lips began placing nearly nonexistent kisses along her spine. More fabric ripped the further down he trailed. Heat scorched every inch of her body, igniting a path of fire wherever he touched. A cry escaped her as he lightly sucked her skin into his mouth.

Channing growled under his breath, flipping her on her back. He tore his clothes off faster than anyone she'd seen undress in their life. Excitement caused her to pull what remained of hers off, too. They reached for each other at the same moment.

Melissa swept her tongue against his and moaned loudly. He tasted like nothing she'd ever savored before. Sensations exploded, working their way down her body. Weaving her fingers through his hair, she pulled him further into her. No matter what she did, it didn't feel like enough.

"Slow down, *mon amour*. Let me take my time tasting you."

"Oh God, was that French?" Melissa moaned, feeling his mouth trail down her neck.

"*Oui*."

"Oh, fuck. Tell me something, anything." No one had ever spoken another language to her intimately before. Especially, when she was this hot and ready. The way the words flowed smoothly from his tongue sounded so right, so perfect.

"*Du moment que je vous ai vu, je savais que tu serais à moi.*"

"Oh my God, what did you say?"

"I said, from the moment I saw you, I knew you would be mine."

Channing sucked her nipple into his mouth, and she screamed out against the pleasure. On numerous occasions men had done this, and never once had her body responded so powerfully. She wasn't sure what to think of it. Everything felt so new. It was as if her body had been reborn again, just for him. How long had it been since she felt like this? This was past just needing to be filled with him inside of her. She craved him, couldn't think without him touching her.

Fingers trailed her slit, rubbing the wetness into her smooth folds. Melissa arched, waiting for him to make an entrance, but he didn't. Instead, he brought his fingertips to her clit with a touch that barely even registered. She felt heat blaze through her at the small circles he made.

"Melissa, you know you are mine, right?"

"You mean for tonight. I get it."

"No, not for tonight." Channing's body lifted, and the missing weight made her cry out.

"You want to stay tomorrow, too? I guess that would be okay." She reached back for him, but he caught her hand and pulled her to her knees. Hands grasped her face, and she immediately looked into his eyes.

"I want you forever, *mon amour*. Come with me. Be mine. I smell it in your skin, taste it on my tongue. You belong to me."

"Belong to you?" Melissa shook her head hard and looked away from his eyes. "Wait, what do you mean? Leave with you? I can't leave. This is where I live, where I belong."

"The mere fact that you can break yourself from my gaze tells me I'm right. You're the one. Don't fight it, Melissa. Just come with me."

"The one what? Channing, I'm not sure what you're talking about, but I just met you today. If you seriously think what I think you are referring to, maybe I should have listened to Stephen. When you said you wanted me I thought, well, like now, you wanted me. If you're talking about happily ever after or something like that, then you're looking at the wrong person. I'm not the Vegas type."



“Okay, let’s start over. My words are getting confused, I think. No more talking. Just feel.”

Uneasily, Melissa looked back into his eyes. “ Why wouldn’t I be able to break myself away from your gaze?”

“No more talking. I will explain afterward.”

Thoughts rushed through her head. Something told her she was about to discover this big secret she *knew* everyone was keeping from her. Of course, she shouldn’t get her hopes up. It was quite possible she was losing her mind. She wouldn’t doubt that it was hereditary.

“You promise?”

At his nod, she felt relief flow through her. Leaning closer, she brought her lips to his. Pressure from his hands gripped around the back of her thighs, pulling her from her knees. She clung tightly to his neck as he completely held her off the bed. Wrapping her legs around his waist, she felt him ease from his knees to sit down. Resting her legs against the mattress, she paused, feeling the tip of his hard cock rub her entrance.

“Wait.” Melissa jumped off and pulled open her bedside table drawer. Pulling out a condom, she tossed it to him. He looked at it a few seconds, and then looked up at her.

“You want me to wear this?”

Melissa tried not to let herself look puzzled, but she knew she was failing miserably. “Yes, don’t you wear protection?”

“Well, I haven’t actually had sex in a long time. I...”

Shocked, she crawled up to him and took the package from his hand. She wasn’t sure if he was telling the truth or not, but she could play along just in case he wanted her to think that. Opening the wrapper, she kept eye contact with him as she wrapped her hand around his width. At the shock, the need to look down almost overpowered everything. He was big. Not just big, but huge compared to what she was used to.

A ragged breath escaped him as she slowly managed to roll the condom down his length. Once again, she was lifted. Wrapping

herself around him, their moans filled the room as he eased his thickness into her wet pussy.

Melissa could feel herself stretch to take him in. Tightening her arms, she clutched around his neck. The tingling in her nipples increased while she moved her way down his chest. “Channing.” She looked into his eyes, forgetting what she wanted to say. All she wanted to do was kiss him. For once, she pushed the thoughts away and lost herself in his taste.

\* \* \* \*

Channing couldn’t describe the emotions that kept sweeping through him. For so long, he thought he’d never find the right woman. From the moment his vision captured Melissa walking toward him with her eyes closed, a smile on her face, he knew, knew more than anything he’d ever experienced in all of his years. She was meant for him.

He couldn’t explain it and didn’t even feel the need to. Nothing would keep them apart—not Ayden, not anyone. He didn’t live here, anyway. He traveled more than anything else, but with him being in the Alpha’s territory and Melissa being somehow connected to the pack, he needed permission. Now that was going to complicate things. His reputation wasn’t the best. But if all else failed, he hated to think what things would come to.

Tightness enveloped his cock as he buried himself deep inside of her. The feeling was so different than what he could remember. It could have been the condom, but he wasn’t sure. He’d never worn one before. It had been over five years since he’d last been with a woman. Even then, he’d never thought to wear one. There really wasn’t a point. He knew when women were infected, plus, it wasn’t like he could catch anything, anyway.

A groan came from his mouth as she started to rotate her hips up and down his length. Channing bit his lip, praying for the strength to let him please her before he expired. "Melissa, slow."

She looked up and immediately connected back with his lips. Her taste stole his sanity, made it impossible for him to think straight. Drinking her in, he hardly noticed that he'd somehow managed to get her on her back. He pulled back, looking at her wide eyes.

"Did I hurt you?"

"No, but how did you move so fast? I think you broke the frame of my bed."

Searching through his memory, he couldn't recall how they'd gotten there. He really should have fed before letting things get this far. He knew, more than anything, he would not be able to stop himself from tasting her completely before they were finished. Fire burned his throat just smelling her essence.

"I'll buy you a new one. I'm sorry."

"No, don't worry about the bed." She wrapped her legs around his waist, pushing him into her deeper. Wetness coated the protection. He looked down, annoyed with it. He wanted to feel her on his skin, not something separating them.

Small hands pulled at him, and he lowered, forgetting about everything. Their mouths connected, and he could feel himself begin to thrust faster. Sweet moans poured into his ears, and he pushed harder. He wanted for her to never forget what he could bring her.

Tightness clutched around him, and Channing lost it. He could feel his fangs lower. The scent of her skin called to him, begged him to pierce the flesh they lingered on. Burying his face in her neck, heat raced through his eyes. He tried fighting it, but he knew he couldn't battle the bloodlust he felt for the woman he knew was meant for him.

A cry accompanied by nails digging into his back were barely heard or felt as her flavor exploded over him. Flashes of her life, everything she ever had experienced, poured over him, and he went through them, desperate to know who this beautiful woman was. The

need to understand her likes, dislikes, passions, hobbies, drove him into a frenzy of impatience. Memories blinded him. He could still feel his thrusts, still feel her clutched around him greedily as she tried to cope with the multiple orgasms associated with his bite.

Her last few days filtered through him, and just when he thought he was almost done, he slowed a memory down. He stared at the man who had pulled her out of the water, watched as they yelled at each other. When time stilled and he felt her pull to the wolf, he wanted to yell out angrily. Cum shooting from his cock jerked him from his own thoughts, and he pulled back from her neck.

Melissa's wide-eyed gaze looked up at him. Tears ran down her face, but she remained quiet. "Oh God, did I hurt you? I'm so sorry." Channing tried to comfort her, but she pushed him off.

"You fucking bit me hard!" Multiple expressions passed her face while she lightly shook her head. "But that wasn't just a sexual bite, was it?"

Her whole body was shaking as she slowly edged off the bed. Fuck. How had he forgotten to lock her memories? He'd been so consumed by seeing the beginnings of a bonding the thought didn't even cross his mind. He really didn't want her to remember this. Shit, he didn't even make the marks disappear.

"No. When I said I needed to eat before—"

"My blood?" A small hand reached to her neck as she continued to back away.

"Don't be scared, Melissa. Please. I'm not going to hurt you. Was it truly so bad?"

Her face looked dazed as she stared toward the bare wall. "No, but that's beside the point. Is this what everyone is hiding? Please tell me I'm dreaming. Vampires!" She got quiet as her eyes darted around in different directions. He knew she was deep in thought. "Is Ev a vampire? She's pale."

"You're friend Evelyn is not a vampire. Now, Brandon, he's the vampire. Stephen is the werewolf. Evelyn just carries one of their children."

A shuttering breath came from her as she blindly reached her hands around. Channing eased from the bed and inched toward her. "Melissa, please do not fear me."

"Stay away from me!"

A curse left his mouth as she grabbed a robe hanging from the door and bolted from the room. Quickly, he threw his clothes on and used his mind to feel where she was going. The stairs. He rushed toward the living room and out the front door. The pale skin of her legs flashed in the moonlight as she headed toward the sounds of the beach.

Taking off at his vampire speed, Melissa was just approaching the sand when he pulled her down. "I told you I wouldn't hurt you. What are you worried about?"

She tried to scream, but the moment she looked into his eyes, he stopped her. He hated having to use his abilities. He put everything into it, knowing no matter what, it wouldn't be enough. The screams might not come, but he wouldn't be able to keep her quiet completely. The realization at what he was doing made his stomach sick.

"Nothing is as it seems." Her voice cracked as sobs took over. "I've always known, always felt that something more was out there. But this...I didn't expect vampires and werewolves. Angels, maybe, but not this."

"Get off of her, Channing."

A low growl had his vision snapping up. He looked into the face of the man he knew had been outside of her house when they arrived. He was the same one that had made time stop for her now hours earlier.

"How do you know my name? Who are you? Why are you watching her?"

The man tensed, and Melissa wiggled under Channing's body. He looked down at her, but then continued to stare up at the man. The stranger kneeled down and came face to face with him.

"My name is no concern. Ayden sent me to watch over her when Tom was on the loose. Maybe I didn't want to leave."

"Well, maybe you should."

The men stared at each other for countless minutes, neither budging. A stinging raced across Channing's cheek. Melissa lay under him, absolutely livid as she stared into his face. One moment she was scared, the next angry. He quickly grabbed her hand before it could strike again.

"Why did you slap me?" He couldn't keep the shocked tone from his voice.

"I thought maybe your gaze was stuck. I was helping. Now get off of me. I have sand in places I don't care to mention. The shower is calling me. Now off!"

"Wow, Stephen wasn't kidding about your temper. Remarkable."

Channing stood, gaining a new respect for the woman. Wasn't she just scared out of her mind? Now she'd somehow turned that fear to anger. Good girl. They were going to get along together perfectly. But what was he going to do about the wolf? Fuck. He really didn't want to think about what he feared was happening.

## Chapter 6

Melissa turned on the shower, still numb from shock. Vampires and werewolves. No fucking way. This had to be some sort of horrible dream. Looking in the mirror, she saw the puncture wounds and wiped her last thought away. Nope, this was no nightmare. Damn it. What was she supposed to do now? Would they try to kill her for knowing? Just thinking of what happened between her and Channing, she couldn't believe that.

She jumped in the shower and quickly washed herself off. The need to get back out there and check on the two strangers in her living room made her move extra fast. Drying off and slipping on her white silk nightgown, Melissa walked into the living room and came face to face with the two men. They both sat stiffly at opposite ends of the couch, staring at her with weird expressions on their faces. Nervously, she walked to the chair and eased herself down.

"So what happens to me now? One of you aren't going to kill me for knowing what you both are, are you?"

"No way! No one is going to touch you. I won't let them," the stranger said, breathing heavily.

Taking in his handsome face, Melissa scooted forward. "Who are you?" The rudeness in her voice made her sigh. "I mean, I'm sorry. What is your name?"

"Connor."

"Connor, it's very nice to meet you. You mentioned Ayden sent you to watch me when Tom was after Sarah, is that correct?"

"Yes."

Melissa nodded. "That was weeks ago. Why haven't you left?"

He took a shuttering breath and ran his fingers through his dark brown hair. Strands fell to his eyes, capturing her attention. "I don't know. I mean, I couldn't leave. We're meant to be mated. I have this feeling for you, the need to protect you. It's something I can't control."

"Shit." Channing stood and walked into her kitchen. She turned and watched as he began messing with her coffee pot. Turning her attention back to Connor, she focused on his words.

"You said we're meant to be mated. What do you mean by that?"

"Werewolves have mates. Once the bond recognizes who that person is, the pull begins. Once the pull goes into effect, there's no escaping it."

"And this pull, has it started?"

"It has for me. For you, I'm not sure. When you saw me earlier, did you feel anything?"

Melissa didn't even need to remember back. The image she saw in her head of his hand touching her face sent heat sizzling over her. "I think I did."

"She felt it. I saw it in her memories."

"My memories? What are you talking about?"

Channing walked in as the sounds of the coffee pot echoed in the background. "When I drank your blood, I learned and saw everything that makes you the person you are today. I needed to see it. See, for vampires, we go through something similar to werewolves. We don't have bonds, but there is a pull. And I know you feel it for me, too."

Connor jumped to his feet and stalked forward. "You're lying."

"Ask her."

Channing sat down while Connor sunk to his knees directly in front of her. The sadness crossing his face sent weight pushing into her chest. His hand reached for her, but quickly withdrew. Offended that he stopped, she grasped his hand and pulled it into her lap. The beginnings of a smile surfaced on his face.

"I didn't think you wanted me to touch you. I'm sorry."



"That's ridiculous." Hearing her words, she thought she was the one sounding completely absurd. She didn't know this man. Why would she want to hold his hand, or even get angry that he'd pulled back?

"Is it true? Do you really feel something for him?"

"Yes. Something. I don't know what is going on with this...thing we all have going on, but I plan to find out first thing in the morning. Actually, would you both excuse me for a moment?"

Melissa stood, grabbed her phone, and walked to her bedroom. She hit Stephen's number just as she shut the door.

"Hello?" Music made it almost impossible for her to hear him.

"Stephen, you better go somewhere where you can hear me, right now!"

The music died out as it sounded like he walked outside. "Melissa, are you all right?"

"Fucking vampires and werewolves, Stephen? Please tell me this isn't possible."

"I see Channing didn't erase your memory."

Air wouldn't come upon the confirmation of her lover. She knew she'd been bit, but hearing it from someone other than the people under her roof was enough to almost make her pass out. "Son of a —" Melissa took a deep breath. "What do I do? I have a werewolf and a vampire in my living room who both say we're all meant to be with each other. Are they full of shit? Should I kick them out?"

"Wait. How did you come across a werewolf, especially one that admitted who he was?"

"Well, I met him earlier today, and when I ran from Channing after he bit the shit out of my neck, he appeared saying Ayden sent him to watch me."

"That was weeks ago!"

"Yes, well, he says we're to be mated."

"What's his name?"

"Connor."

A deep intake of breath made panic rush through Melissa's body.  
"What? What!"

"Oh, nothing. You've just managed to capture the two people with the worst reputations. Way to go Melissa."

"What do you mean?" Her heart raced at his dry tone. If this was serious, where were his emotions?

"You landed one of the most powerful, ruthless vampires in the world, and one of the most deadly werewolves to walk this earth. They can tell you more about it. Have fun. You'll have them like putty in your hands by the time it's over with. Damn, wait till Ayden hears how his go-to guy gets to be matched to you and Channing. So much for getting rid of the vampire now."

"Why would you want to? He doesn't seem so bad."

"You haven't seen what he's capable of. He puts everyone's nerves on end. He's like a ticking time bomb that no one knows when it's going to go off. Now that you can possibly calm him down some, we all might be okay. Go talk to them, Mel. And do what you do best: tell them how it's going to be. Don't let them have power over you."

"Okay." Numb, she hung up the phone.

A knock sounded at her door, and hesitantly, she opened it. The look on Connor's face confused her even more. Calming her nerves, she tossed the phone to the bed and gave him her full attention.  
"What's wrong, Connor?"

"This isn't how I wanted you to find out. I'd made plans to actually meet with you and see what happened between us, but now I'm not sure what to do. I'm not very good with people."

"Is the coffee ready?"

"I believe so."

Melissa nodded and grabbed his hand, pulling him into the kitchen with her. "I figure since we're all...stuck. No, that's not the right word. Please excuse me. I'm going to warn you both now. I have a problem with the way things sometimes come out. I tend to hurt people's feelings on accident. A lot. I don't mean to, but it's

something I've tried to control, and I just can't. So, if I say anything that offends either of you, just tell me, and please don't take it personally."

Melissa made a cup, sighed, offered it to Connor, and made herself another. Once they sat down, she looked between both men. "I don't know how else to put this. So I'm just going to say it. I'm apologizing beforehand because I know this is going to sound rude. Now, I don't know either of you. To just give in and say okay without a fight is not like me. So, after this cup of coffee, I'm going to nicely kick both of you out so I can get some sleep, and if I see you great. If not, well, nothing is different. We'll all move on and pretend this night never happened."

The men just stared at her. Channing was the first to lean forward. "After talking to Stephen, because I know that's who you called, you still think you can move on like nothing is wrong. I don't know about Connor, but I already know us three were meant to be together. I don't like having to share you, but I've seen three relationships that I can compare with this, and you know what, I think I'm okay with how things worked out with them."

"I don't like it, either, but I know what Channing is talking about. I think this could work."

Melissa laughed. "And I know the three trios you're both referring to, and you both may be right, but I'm not changing my life around backwards because of some *pull*. It's going to take more than an invisible force to win me over. I want true love or nothing."

"You wanted time to stop. With Connor you got it. I read your thoughts. I know what lingers deep down in your heart. You wanted an immediate connection, and you got that with me. You also were crushed when you discovered the news from your friends this morning. You were crushed because that's what you long for more than anything else. You want love, a family. You want what was destroyed for you at a young age."

Melissa felt her heart break at hearing the words out loud. Putting down her coffee cup, she noticed how her hands shook uncontrollably. The anger pulsing through her was about to explode. “Leave, right now.”

“Excuse me?” Channing’s eyebrows rose in his confusion.

“I said, get out of my house and don’t come back. Both of you – out, now!”

Their mouths parted, and Melissa couldn’t think. Flashes of the horrible memories raced through her mind. She didn’t know whether to pace or throw something. Why weren’t they leaving?

“Go, get out!”

They both stood, and she practically pushed them out. Turning the lock, she stomped to her room and slammed the door. What she needed was sleep to erase this horrible day and make her forget the two men she was supposedly fated to be with.

\* \* \* \*

Connor followed Channing down the steps and kept walking. He had a room not a block away at a hotel meant for tourists. He really needed to go get his truck and head to Ayden’s to explain what happened. His Alpha wasn’t going to like that he’d hidden the fact of his staying even after he was ordered to cease watching Melissa.

“You’re going to see the big man, correct?”

Connor stopped walking and turned around. “Yeah. I think I should tell him what’s going on.”

“Hop in, I’m headed there myself. Do you think he’s still awake? It’s pretty late.”

“This is pack business. He’s always awake when it concerns these types of things.”

Walking over and getting in, Connor mainly watched the scenery as Channing headed toward Corpus. The more his thoughts bothered him, the more he knew he had to talk to someone. Glancing at the

vampire, he realized he felt more comfortable around him the longer they were together. "So, what do you think he's going to say? If it's my guess, I think he was hoping you'd leave town soon. You know everyone's scared that you might cause trouble, right?"

Channing shot him a glance, but then turned back to the road. "I'm not leaving without her, and I assume you're not going to let her go. What can he say?"

Connor felt his temper spike. For so long, he'd fed off of the anger brought on by other people. Hell, it was his job to take care of things whenever no one else could. The fact that he'd had the chance to be Alpha in New Orleans didn't matter. He never wanted that kind of responsibility. Why bring a mate and child into that kind of life?

After his own parents were killed, he swore he'd never put his future wife through something like that. Women were meant to be cherished, not put in harm's way. It was the reason he'd been watching Melissa. He wasn't about to let anything happen to her.

"What, you can't answer the question? What can Ayden say? If he tells me to leave, he can't be stupid enough to think I'd leave without her. Do you think he'd put you through not having your mate?"

"No one will keep me away from her. Not even you, Channing. I know how powerful you are, but you don't scare me. I don't even really know her, but I'd already die for her. "

"Funny how this whole mating process works, isn't it? So would I."

Silence settled through the car until they were pulling up in front of Ayden's red brick, two-story home. Lights inside were still on, and Connor sighed in relief. Good, maybe his leader wouldn't be in a bad mood, and everything would go smoothly.

They got out of the car and walked to the front door. Ayden opened it before they could even knock. Connor watched him bite into an apple and gesture for them to come in.

"Guess how many phone calls I've received tonight, boys."

Channing and Connor sat on the couch as Ayden collapsed next to Trevor on the opposite sofa. The two men stared at them. Connor could feel his wolf stir inside of him. He hated how he had the reaction of wanting to come right out and attack to defend himself.

“Well, I can imagine Stephen called you.”

Connor looked over at the vampire sitting beside him. Channing’s voice was very soothing, but he knew it was part of the glamour.

“Oh yes, he did. Right after you left with Ev’s friend, Melissa. You know, I’m finding it awfully hard to keep myself sitting here when all I want to do is rip you off that couch and tear my teeth into your neck. You’re a guest in my house, Channing. That doesn’t give you the right to go out and fuck people that consist of my pack. Ev is considered pack, therefore so is everyone she’s close to.”

Connor felt the need to speak up, to defend the man sitting beside him, but miraculously he kept his mouth shut. Ayden’s hard gaze went to him.

“Do I need to even ask what the fuck you’re doing with him? As far as I knew, you were somewhere here in Corpus. Are you planning on telling me you’ve lied this whole time?”

“I couldn’t leave. Melissa and I are meant to be mated.”

“Jesus! How long have you known this Connor?”

“Since the first time I saw her.”

Ayden growled. “Weeks ago?”

“Yes.”

The large man stood, towering over him. The speed at which he moved still had a shocking effect. “And can you tell me why you haven’t told me this until now? You know how I feel about making a mate wait. Is she in pain?”

“No, not yet. At least, not that I’m aware of.”

Ayden began to pace the floor in front of them. “So, what happened? Channing showed up and what?”

Channing shifted next to him. “Melissa and I —we’re also meant...to be together.”

Ayden fell over his feet, stumbling, and turned around with large eyes. "No fucking way."

A female voice cleared behind them. "If I hear the F-word come out of your mouth one more time, Ayden, so help me God, I'm taking over or ending this conversation. I can't even sleep, you're talking so loud. And our bedroom is upstairs!"

Connor smiled and looked down. Nicole always did have a way to make Ayden soften. He watched his Alpha immediately walk to her side. "I'm sorry, baby. How's my other baby?" A large hand spanned across Nicole's growing stomach.

"Hungry. You really didn't wake me, I wanted the strawberries." She smiled and kissed his cheek as she headed to the kitchen. Ayden's jaw dropped as he watched her walk off. He smiled and then erased it as he looked back over at the men.

"So, we have another couple consisting of three people. Great. With the way things are going, my pack is going to be half vampires. God help us. So what are your plans? How's Melissa taking the news?"

Channing laughed. "I somehow pissed her off. She kicked me and Connor out. Told us never to come back again."

"Aw, shit. Great going, Channing. I hear she's stubborn as hell. You should have heard the shit she gave poor Devon when he and Sarah got back together."

"I think between Connor and I, we'll be able to calm her."

"You better hope so because you're both ordered not to leave her side. She'll experience no pain. I won't allow it."

"Wait, you can't order me." Channing started to stand, but eased back against the couch. "I'm a vampire, not a wolf. I'm my own master. Hell, I have my own servants."

Ayden shrugged. "You still do. But since you have two of my pack you're pairing up with, you take your orders from me now. You're in my territory. I run this shit, not you."

Nicole stopped mid-step as she re-entered the room. “If you don’t watch your mouth, I’m going to make it shut. I’m told the baby can hear everything you say. Do you want our son hearing those words? I don’t. If I can refrain from cussing, then so can you.”

Trevor patted his knee, and Nicole curled into his lap. Connor watched in awe as she fed her strawberries to her other mate. Now that was what werewolf couples were supposed to do. It’s what he wanted with Melissa. He’d seen her numerous times, watching the sunrise or the sunset. She’d sit on her balcony forever and just stare at the ocean. He wanted to be the one she cuddled against when she did that.

“Is that clear, Connor?”

He looked up at Ayden. “What?”

“You’re both moving in with Melissa. Find a way to persuade her. I want you both there, starting tomorrow tonight. Now go upstairs and get a few hours of rest. You’re going to have one hell of a day convincing her.”



## Chapter 7

Melissa curled into her blanket as the sun painted the skies with beautiful shades of color. The coffee cup felt warm in her hand, and she'd finally calmed down from the hurt she felt last night. If there was one thing she didn't want to think about, it was her past. She'd done everything she could to forget it. Having it brought up again only seemed to reopen the wounds.

Sleep had proven impossible. For hours she'd tossed and turned until finally she'd given up and settled for listening to the gulf. The calm noise of the waves crashing always helped when she got in one of these moods. Standing, Melissa walked inside and grabbed Julie's keys. Now would be the perfect time to switch out the cars. She'd get that out of the way and maybe come home to finally get the rest she needed.

Slipping her jacket over her nightgown, Melissa grabbed her purse and locked the door. The moment she turned on the Mercedes, she cranked up the rap music and headed back to the Martini Bar. It hadn't taken her twenty minutes before she pulled into the deserted parking lot.

"There you are, my beautiful truck. Damn, I missed you."

Melissa locked Julie's keys in her car and jumped in her seat. She headed back to the island, feeling sleep beckoning her. As she drove, she switched CDs and put on the one she always felt compelled to listen to whenever she didn't want to think of her problems, Evanescence. The beat was just the one she needed. Before she knew it, she was turning onto her street, screaming the words to *Lose Control*.

The lyrics went on as her mouth stayed open, devoid of noise. She pulled into her driveway, right next to a Mercedes and a big jacked up truck just like hers, but instead of it being red, this one was black. Confused and angry, she ran up the steps. Throwing the front door open, she paused, noticing it wasn't locked. She could swear she locked the damn thing!

Two pairs of eyes stared at her from the couch. ESPN blared in the back ground. Shocked, she shut the door behind her. No words. Nothing would leave her gaping mouth. All Melissa could do was raise her hands in the air like an idiot, waiting for someone to explain.

"Oh, yeah, we're moving in."

Channing placed a fist full of popcorn into his mouth and held the bag out to Connor who followed suit. Still, she couldn't move. Had these men lost their damn minds? They couldn't just move into her home!

"Oh, I'm sorry. Would you like some?"

Channing held the bag out to her, and she finally managed to close her mouth, but she still couldn't talk. All Melissa could do was shake her head no. "How 'bout breakfast? Are you hungry?"

Looking over at Connor, she let her jacket fall to the floor. "No, thank you. Um, I'm sorry. What in the hell gave you both the idea to come into my home and decide you're both going to just move in? No, let me rephrase that. Break into my home. I know I locked that door."

"You're our mate. Of course we're going to live with you."

Connor reached over and grabbed an other handful of popcorn, smiled at her brightly, and popped the white fluff into his mouth.

"Plus, I have to admit. I like this place. You have a great view. I think I'm going to like living here."

"Channing, you both *are not* living here."

They just smiled at her. Smiled! Melissa smiled back and reached for her phone. "Excuse me, gentlemen." Dialing Stephen's number, she waited until he answered it.

"Hello?" The sleep edging his voice instantly made guilt wash through her.

"I'm sorry to wake you, but when you get up, I have two men who say they're moving in, and I want them to leave my house. I don't care if you have to arrest them. I want them out."

Stephen yawned into the phone. "No can do, Red. Ayden's orders. They have to stay."

"Bullshit, I'll call the chief."

"Who also has the same orders. It's pointless, Mel. You need to just accept and get to know them."

"I will not! Is Ev awake?"

"No, and I'm not waking her. She got up at five with morning sickness again. We thought it was finally gone, but I guess not. Anyways, I'm going back to bed. Have fun with those two." Stephen laughed and hung up. Melissa stared at the phone, shocked.

"So, you never answered Connor. Do you want breakfast?"

Melissa threw her phone at Channing and charged. She wasn't sure why, he just asked a question, and it wasn't even laced with attitude, but she felt trapped. Connor grabbed her around the waist before she could reach him.

"Whoa there, honey. What's wrong? We're not here to make you angry."

Sobs broke through Melissa's throat as she saw her world closing in on her. She was used to making the rules. Without the ability to do so, she felt panicked.

"Shh, baby, listen." He pulled her into his lap and sat on the couch, cradling her body. "This is going to be hard, but please just give it a try. I know you don't know either one of us, but we're not terrible people, trust me. I didn't like Channing that much at first, either, but he's not so bad."

Melissa laughed past her sob and buried her face deeper into his chest. Something about him holding her made her feel safer, at peace, like with the ocean. Heat fluttered in her chest, and she let the feeling

overpower her. Maybe Connor wasn't so bad. She hadn't thought so when they were standing at the ocean.

"Thanks a lot," Channing muttered from the sofa. Melissa wasn't sure why, but she wiggled from his arms and crawled to the other man. Guilt. Damn, she hated knowing she'd reacted that way.

"I'm sorry. I shouldn't have thrown the phone. You were trying to be nice and I –It was uncalled for, and I apologize. But you have to know that what you're both doing isn't right. It's unfair to me, and it's wrong."

"It would be unfair to you if we let you go through pain. That's why Ayden wants us here. Until you're marked, the bond is going to grow stronger and more painful. The need to be with us at all times will overpower you. If you distance yourself too far, it could be agonizing. Please understand we're not here to make your life harder. We want to make it easier. We want you to choose us."

Shaking her head back and forth, Melissa couldn't understand. Hadn't she been trying to figure this whole ménage thing out since Evelyn got together with Stephen and Brandon? "Please tell me how you're both okay with this? It doesn't make sense to me. You both want to be with me but are willing to overlook the fact that you'll never be able to have me for yourself. You'll have to share me with each other. How are you okay with that?"

Connor pulled her back in his lap, nuzzling his face in her neck. She tried to ignore how unbelievably natural the gesture felt. This man was a complete stranger, yet she could swear some part of her knew him. They kept talking about bonds and ties. She wasn't sure what exactly they were, but the link was obviously there. It tugged at her heart, sending tingling all throughout her body.

"Some things are more important than greed. I'd rather have half of you than nothing at all. Melissa, it might sound impossible to understand, but the bond is designed to make the people involved fall indefinitely in love with each other. This love will never die, never waver. It'll last until one of us is no longer here."

Melissa sighed, staring deeply into his eyes. "That sounds so romantic. And too good to be true." She wiggled from his arms and stood. "Listen, there's somewhere I need to go. Are you both going to be following me, or can I go on my own?"

"You're free to do as you wish."

She looked at Channing and nodded her head. Melissa didn't even change. Grabbing her truck keys, she ran outside and jumped in the cab, slamming the truck into drive. She needed to see Devon and apologize. She wasn't sure what this feeling was, but she knew it was connected to what they were. Fuck. She'd been such a bitch to him.

Devon's new house was located not two miles from her. Before the song playing could finish, she pulled into the long paved drive. Jumping out, Melissa ran as fast as she could. Her long, loose curls fanned around her as she slid to a stop. Gavin opened the door holding a bowl of cereal and looking around alarmed.

"Mel, what's wrong?"

No words would come to describe the endless list. Instead, she lifted her hair and she showed him the puncture wounds on her neck.

"Oh shit. Were you attacked?"

He led her through the entryway into a large living room. Sarah and Devon walked out of a hallway laughing and stopped when they saw her. Melissa burst into tears, running to her friend. "I'm so sorry, Sarah. I was so mean to your mates. But I didn't know. God, please."

Sobs wracked her chest as she could feel her legs growing weak. Sarah held her tightly while leading her to the couch. "Mel, you said mates."

Melissa pulled back her hair. "I'm to be mated with Connor and Channing. I didn't know. I don't think I want this." The tears were coming so steadily, she couldn't breathe.

"Channing! Oh that's excellent news, honey. I know not very many people trust him, but he saved my life from Tom. I couldn't adore him more. But who's Connor?" Sarah's words trailed off as if trying to remember.

Devon sat down on the opposite couch, and she looked back and forth between him and Sarah. “Devon, do you know Connor? Stephen says he has a bad reputation or something. Is that true?”

Devon’s mouth opened, closed, and then he turned and threw a quick glance to Sarah. “I know Connor. He’s... Truthfully, Mel, we don’t know much about him. He’s very quiet but very deadly. The story is that when he was growing up, something horrible happened to his family. He was meant to be Alpha, but he ran. He didn’t want it. Eventually they found him, and well, they couldn’t make him do anything. He took multiple beatings for years until finally they released him.

“But I do know one thing for a fact, and that’s how protective he is over women in general. He’s very passionate about the way the men in the pack treat them, even if they’re not mated. He’ll take good care of you. I have no doubt. But Channing? How in the world did you meet him, more less bond with him, too?”

Just the thought of what happened between them sent heat searing her body. God, she wanted to feel him again. She wanted to look into those light blue eyes and feel that strange pull as he thrust his cock into her.

Melissa shifted on the couch and took a deep breath. “Well, Julie lost her first case yesterday, and she wanted to have drinks, so I went with her. We were there a few hours, and as we were leaving, I ran into him. Literally. The moment I looked into his eyes, there was something. I felt a little scared at first because they reminded me of Tom, but after he kept trying to be nice, I could feel myself getting sucked in his direction. It was like I was meant to lean into him.

“Needless to say, he showed up at the Martini Bar last night and even though I was bet to take him home, I’d already basically decided on it myself. Well, one thing led to another, he bit me, and I got scared and ran. Connor showed up on the beach, and that’s where the shit hit the fan, and we all discovered the bond that links us all together.”

Everyone remained quiet as they took in her words. She stared around the large living area, noticing plastic things covering the walls' sockets. They were baby proofing already. Amazing. Adorable. Damn, she wanted to cry again.

"I think karma just bitch-slapped me." Melissa burst into tears, again and laid her head on Sarah's lap. She didn't want to ever move from this spot. Control. Damn, she needed some about right now.

\* \* \* \*

Channing paced Melissa's living room, ready to yank his hair out. He wasn't used to this. The pull he felt for her almost made it impossible for him to stay within the walls of her house. He wanted to go to her, make sure she was okay. Her emotions poured through him, and he knew she was distressed. Even Connor seemed to pick up on her heartache.

"What do you think is happening?"

Connor looked up from the couch and shrugged. "I don't know. The bond is still too weak for me to know exactly what she feels. All I know is I feel like my heart is breaking. If I didn't know about the effects of what we all have, I'd take it for my own emotions, but I know it's not me."

"Yeah, I feel the same thing. We have to make this easier on her. She's new to all of this. There has to be a way we can cheer her up."

"I'm lost. I'm not used to being around other people unless I'm eliminating them."

"I'm not used to it, either." Channing sighed. He sat down on the couch and rested his head in his hands. Everyone feared him. His position to his servants caused him to *make* them fear him. For so long now, that's all he knew. Now he'd have to find a way to soften up and woo a woman. He still couldn't believe it.

"Where do you think she went?"

Looking up, Channing searched through his thoughts. "I'm not sure. She has a lot of friends."

"I wish we could go and comfort her. I hate knowing she feels this way. Yes, I understand she's having a hard time coming to terms with the way things are, but we can't just sit and do nothing. We have to convince her."

"Give her time. If we smother her, it'll make things worse. Trust me. Did you not see the way she reacted earlier? She's used to having things her way. We can't take that away from her. She needs to feel in control of her life. We just somehow have to fit ourselves into it."

Connor nodded and stood. "I'm starving. Popcorn is not breakfast. How territorial do you think Melissa is over her kitchen? I'm not about to cook if she's going to get upset."

Channing looked up and laughed. "I have no idea."

Connor laughed back and grabbed his phone. "Take -out, it is. I'm not chancing pissing her off. Hey, you know what? I have an even better idea for after breakfast. Get ready Channing. With this plan, I think we can make Melissa melt."

The vampire looked into Connor's face and smiled. He had a few ideas of his own to try to get the feisty redhead to submit to her fate. With the combination of both, they might be able to master Melissa's fears after all.



## Chapter 8

Melissa walked into her house physically and mentally exhausted. Not even looking toward the men on the couch, she walked into her room and shut the door. Curling into a ball under the covers, she closed her eyes with every intention of finally going to sleep. Channing appeared out of nowhere, right next to her. She screamed and tumbled backwards off the bed.

“Holy shit! You did not just do that.”

His eyes were round as he looked at her. “I’m sorry. God, I must be stupid. I didn’t think. I’m so used to just appearing wherever I want to go. Forgive me, Melissa.”

Cautiously, she eased back to the bed just as Connor opened her door. “Smooth, Casanova. If you would have waited, we could have come in here together.”

Eyeing the men, she looked back and forth. “Did you both need something? I’m really tired and haven’t got any rest yet.”

“Then we’ll put you to sleep.” Connor crawled in on the other side of her, wrapping his arm around her waist and pulling her back against him. As much as she wanted to kick both of them out, she couldn’t ignore how relaxed and calm she suddenly felt. She was too tired to fight.

“Just close your eyes, Melissa. We’ll take care of you.”

Assurance settled over her at Channing’s words. Warmth came from both sides of her body as they pressed against her. A whole new heat rushed to her core as she felt herself become aroused at their closeness. Sleep drifted from her mind while the thought of them touching her drove her to stay awake. Keeping her eyes closed, she

tried to breathe her way through the spell, but all she could take in was the mixture of their manly smells.

Connor's chest rose and fell deeply against her back. Breath tickled her neck, and she tried not to shiver against the sensitive sensations erupting over her body.

"Melissa." The word was husky as air brushed over her exposed flesh. This time, she did shiver.

"Yes, Connor?"

His hand spanned across her stomach, lingering briefly until he gripped the gown tightly. "Your scent. It's unbelievable."

Channing's hands caressed her cheek, and she opened her eyes to stare into his depths. Light blue sucked her in, promising things she only could dream of. Melissa recognized it wasn't him telling her mind what to hear, it was herself. Deep down, she knew they all could have the kind of happiness her friends had found, but she wasn't ready to admit that's what she wanted. There were too many ifs. And she didn't like anything associated with doubt.

Hardness pushed against her lower back, and she couldn't help but moan and lean more into Connor's cock. Everything about what was happening felt so right. Channing's hand trailed down her neck, and she fought to control the heavenly vibrations racing over her.

"Just say yes. I promise you won't regret it."

She turned on her back and looked toward Connor, staring deeply into his eyes. For the second time in her life, time slowed. Captivated and immobile, it wasn't until Channing's finger lingered at the hem of her nightgown that she heard her answer.

"Yes. God, yes."

Connor's mouth eased to hers hesitantly. Wrapping her arms around his neck, she pulled him deeper into her body. Sweetness exploded over her tongue as she was swept away completely by his taste. Coolness settled over her body as her nightgown was pulled down her body. The sounds of tearing erupted all around her as Connor didn't even break his mouth away to remove his clothing.

Warmth encased one of her aching nipples and lights exploded behind her eyes. Crying out into Connor's mouth she clutched to him tighter. His body shifted, and the feel of his large hand eased down her ribs and over her hip. Fire engulfed her. The need to feel him touch her overpowered every other thought she could think of.

\* \* \* \*

The taste of Melissa's mouth went beyond anything he'd ever tasted before. Connor broke his lips from hers, breathing raggedly as he looked down into her dark green eyes. "I never thought it could be like this." The more he took in her face, the more he felt the pull. "God, you're so beautiful."

Placing kisses down her neck, he took her other breast into his mouth. His face was so close to Channing's, but he didn't care. The need to take in more drove him to try to sample every inch of skin covering her body.

Gently biting the hard nub between his teeth, her fingers weaved into his hair. He sucked her more into his mouth, moving his hand to settle on her inner thighs. Wetness greeted him, and he couldn't wait any longer. A growl came from his throat as he lifted and moved to lie between her thighs. In awe, he stared at what lay before him. She glistened, so ready, so willing.

Lowering his mouth, he traced his tongue over her swollen folds. Her flavor hit him hard, leaving his chest aching with wanting to never be parted from her again. He'd been hollow for so long that he never thought he'd get to experience what so many people had died for, his father included.

Easing his tongue into the tightness of her pussy, he felt his eyes roll back in pure ecstasy. She was made for him to savor. If it were up to him, he'd bask in her essence, just as he was, for the rest of his life, without ever moving.

The rotation of her hips brought his eyes up. Channing was now at her mouth, drinking in her moans. At the sight of her hips arched beautifully to receive him, her nipples hard with her pleasure, he circled her opening with his fingertip. More, she arched for him. These little things he loved more than anything he could remember.

Sucking the area around her clit, he eased his finger inside of her. Wetness encircled him. Slowly he thrust, rubbing her insides as he explored her depths. God, she moaned beautifully. There had to be a way for her to accept she was meant for them. Sure, things were going to be hard at first, but wouldn't their loving her be enough to overcome the tough times? As she reached for him, he prayed it would be.

\* \* \* \*

Channing lifted his lips from Melissa's, lightheaded with passion. Her hand came to his neck pulling him back down. He needed to touch her body more, taste her everywhere possible. While his mind went crazy with wanting to consume who she was, he battled the throbbing of his cock.

Connor lifted, easing up next to them, resting his head against the headboard as he lifted her body on top of his. Melissa's back rested against Connor's chest. Channing watched amazed as Melissa gripped her other mate's thick cock and slid it into her pussy. The look on her face went beyond one filled with pleasure. She was in pure bliss.

"Channing, lay on top of her while she rests against me. I want you to have access to her neck. It's time. It has to be now. God, this has never felt so right."

He nodded, sliding on top of Melissa while Connor thrust his cock into her. With her sandwiched between both of them, he never thought anything felt more perfect. Her generous breasts moved against their gentle swaying. Melissa's hand grasped around his thickness, and Channing moaned, kissing her deeply.

The softness of her stomach came in contact with his length as she began to stroke him faster. It was taking everything he had to keep his arms holding up his weight, above her. For some unexplainable reason, his body jolted. Opening his eyes, he knew they were glowing. He felt the heat. Looking at Connor, his were the same way. It was time.

\* \* \* \*

Melissa's mind swirled as she felt both of their bodies touching her. Every expanse of her skin was covered. With every thrust of Connor's cock, she knew this was the way things were meant to be. She could admit it in her mind, and it was a start.

Tingling erupted over her body the same time tightening collected in her stomach. She felt like she was in a state of pure heaven. Channing's pre-cum coated her fingers. The thickness continued to get heavier and harder with every stroke she completed.

With a hard plunge, Connor pushed to new depths inside of her. Melissa screamed as an orgasm blindsided her. Her fingers clutched to Channing's back as slight pain erupted in her neck and shoulder at the same time. Electrical currents shot through her body, making the tingling intensify.

Slowly, her world spun, but the sensation didn't make her queasy or sick. Something was different. She knew Channing was biting her again, and she was thinking so was Connor, from the stinging in her shoulder. They had said it was time. Time for what? Things weren't quite getting through to her brain.

As her pussy gripped around Connor, she felt warmth shoot inside of her and across her stomach. Millions of thoughts exploded through her mind. Lights flashed before her eyes, and suddenly, everything went black.

\* \* \* \*

Melissa awoke in a tangle of limbs. Apparently, she wasn't the only one who had passed out. Pushing Channing's weight off half of her body, she climbed out of the bed. Damn, she needed a shower. Aching raced over her body as she walked down the hall. Catching the clock on the cable box, Melissa nearly fell over her feet.

Searching her mind, she tried to recall when she'd arrived home from Sarah's. Around 9:30 in the morning, she believed. It wasn't past ten, that was for damn sure. How in the hell was it eight? Walking to the window, Melissa jumped back. It was dark! How in the hell did they sleep that late?

Confused, she headed to the restroom and started the shower. Going over the events, she could feel her cheeks heat. She couldn't believe she had actually done that. Sure, it felt right, but she wasn't so sure they should do it again. For one, Connor hadn't worn protection. She could kick herself. Never once could she remember going without it. How had she been so far gone that she hadn't even thought about the most important decision of her life?

Letting the warm water caress her skin, she remembered how she lost herself in their act. Damn, it really was amazing the way they both knew exactly what to do to make her lose every ounce of control she harbored. No. Melissa stopped herself the moment she could feel the tingling.

"Mind if I join you?"

Channing's heavy-lidded eyes stared at her, looking just as confused as she felt. How could she deny him? Damn it, this wasn't going to be good. "Sure."

His powerful, nude body climbed in, and she moved over, sharing the water with him. The fact that she didn't feel one bit self-conscious or uncomfortable made her lips twist. Shouldn't she at least feel shy from what they'd all just done? Nothing. All she felt was heat building in her again. She couldn't believe she was ready for round two.

"Melissa, are you hungry? You haven't eaten all day."

At the mention of food, her stomach growled. She laughed and looked down. "I guess so."

"Good, I'm starving." Connor climbed in and her mouth parted in shock. The men didn't seem the least bit uncomfortable standing so close together. And from the looks of things, there wasn't an inch to spare. She quickly washed her hair and moved out of the way. Connor pulled her body into his and held her while she tried to grasp the reality surrounding her. This could not be happening.

"So, where's a good place to eat? Does anyone feel like going to Corpus? We could grab lunch there."

Melissa quickly shook her head. "It's dinnertime, Channing. It's already past eight."

He stiffened under the water. "There's no way."

"No, she's right. I can feel it. It's late."

"Holy shit. What happened?"

Connor and Channing switched places while she looked back and forth between both of them. "I'm not sure. I just remember you both biting me and nothing. By the way, the biting thing, guys, has really got to stop. At least not on my neck, Channing. I have to go to work tomorrow, and it's a little warm to be wearing a turtleneck."

They both looked at her as she climbed out and wrapped a towel around her. "What?" Suddenly, she felt like she was missing something. "What aren't you both telling me?"

Not wasting any time, they both got out and followed her suit. As all three of them walked to the room covered in towels, she waited. Still nothing. They continued to look at each other, but refused to look at her.

"Well? What is it?"

The moment Connor had a pair of sweatpants on, he gazed at her sadly. "Melissa, we both put our mark on you. We sealed the deal, so to speak."

There it was, that anger she kept trying to fight. It pushed at her insides until she almost started seeing red. Containing the fury, she took a deep breath. "I'm not sure I know what you mean. You sealed the deal, as in what? I thought we were already all supposed to be together. What changed?"

"Well, we are supposed to be together. But you see, when Channing and I bit you, we finalized it. There's no turning back now."

"You mean there was turning back before? I thought you both said we couldn't escape the pull? I thought you said there was no getting out?"

"Before, you would have felt pain. Really bad pain. Now, well, it'll be worse if you do leave."

"But better for all of us since we're all okay with being together," Channing rushed in.

Melissa began counting to ten in her head. She would not explode like she wanted to. "Why didn't you tell me what you were going to do, before you did it?"

"I said it was time. I thought you knew. I thought if you didn't want it, you would stop us. Truthfully, I thought since you were all for what we were doing that maybe you'd given in."

A part of her knew she had already accepted her fate. Hell, who was she kidding? She wanted them. Both of them. But her stubborn part still couldn't give in yet. She couldn't help but think that a part of them somewhat deceived her. It didn't sit well at all. Should she be staying here with them? If they wouldn't leave, should she? Anxiety rushed through her. She'd think about it over dinner. If she needed to leave, she knew the perfect place to go.

"We're getting something to eat, and then you're both sleeping in the living room until I decide when and if I want to forgive you."

Melissa dropped the towel and opened her drawer. There, making them sleep separate would at least show them how angry she felt for them not telling her. After all, wasn't there big thing about not being away from her?



Putting on a red pair of lace panties, she turned around to still see them standing in the same spot. She raised one of her eyebrows and put on her bra. "That's not a problem, is it?"

"Can I kiss you?"

Connor took a step forward, and she immediately took a step back. Her angry façade disappeared the moment she looked at his lustful expression. "Let me kiss you, Mel. Let me love you."

Walking backwards, she connected with Channing's hard body. "Let us, Melissa. Quit fighting it, and give in to what you know you really want."

Jumping away from both of them, she pointed to the door. "Out. I'll be ready shortly, and we'll eat. Now go get dressed." Yes, leaving was really starting to feel like the thing to do. If this continued, not telling what would happen. Would she lose herself? Could they possibly, ten years down the road, end up exactly where her parents had—angry, fighting, and abusive toward each other? With the way history always seemed to repeat itself, she knew she'd better distance herself and fast.

They both reluctantly left. Melissa shut the door and sighed in relief. Damn, that had been a close one. If either of them would have given her the softest touch, she'd have been lost. It was time to escape. Cuero, Texas, was really starting to sound good right now with the river, the peacefulness, and best of all, the seclusion with no temptations. It was exactly what she needed.

## Chapter 9

Melissa kept her head down as they sat at the small table for four. While her thoughts churned, she tried to go over the plans she needed to make. First, she would call Pop-Pop and let him know she'd be there. Her grandfather shouldn't mind if she used the small cabin on the river. Shit, no one probably had gone there in forever.

After she finished making arrangements, she'd call Sarah and have her get Hanna to cover her at work. Things were slow, so it shouldn't really pose a problem. Damn, but how was she going to get clothes out of her house without them noticing what she was doing?

"Melissa, are you okay? You seem distracted."

Looking into Channing's eyes, she quickly averted her gaze. She couldn't get sucked into their depths. One look that lasted too long and she'd be lost forever. There was some kind of connection between them that she couldn't understand.

"I'm fine. There's just so much I need to do. I think I'm going to visit my grandparents this afternoon."

"Do you want us to come? I would like to meet your family."

Melissa's head snapped up to look at Connor. "No." The word rushed out faster than she could stop herself. "I mean, not today. It's too soon."

"Of course." He looked down, and she felt an ache race through her chest. Startled, she placed her hand over her heart. What was that? She couldn't possibly be feeling the way she'd affected him, could she?

"Are you thinking of running from us?"

Cold fear cove red her body while she looked at Channing. "No. No, I'm not going to run." Melissa was stuttering all over her words. How did he know?

"I'm not so sure of that. I can feel your withdraw."

Connor looked hurt, and once again, the pain weighed heavily inside of her. Fuck, this was not good. Whatever they did by biting her was about as real as it could get. The reality scared the crap out of her.

"Please don't go, Melissa. I don't want you to leave. You'll only end up hurting us all."

Her mind screamed. She had to leave. It might hurt them now, but in the end, staying would hurt them even worse. She'd seen how love could turn sour quickly. One moment her family was the Cleavers, the next her father was a raging alcoholic and an abusive husband and father. Things didn't always end in happily -ever-afters. And she wasn't about to let theirs get that far.

"Are you both done? I have laundry to do and family to see."

"But it's late," Connor whispered.

She didn't give him a response. They stood from the table, and Melissa was stopped the moment she went for her purse. Shrugging, she placed down the tip. If Channing wanted to pay, fine with her. She was way too jittery to argue. The moment she got home, she was going to rush to get out as fast as she could. Damn it, she wasn't sure how they knew, but she wouldn't worry about that now.

Warmth encircled her shoulders. Looking up into Connor's face, her eyes welled up with tears. What in the hell was the matter with her? Jesus, she felt guilty as hell. And she shouldn't! They didn't even really know each other.

"Just know, unexplainably, I do love you. You probably think it sounds stupid since we're practically strangers. But I do. "

Melissa couldn't speak past the lump in her throat. Connor led her to the brightly lit parking and rested against Channing's car. While they waited for him to finish paying, he held her. Closing her eyes,

she leaned her face into his chest and inhaled deeply. She couldn't understand, but she could swear she knew that smell. A sense of familiarity settled through her, and she squeezed her eyes tighter together trying to place it.

"Melissa!"

Well, she knew that voice. Her eyes opened to see a shocked Julie staring at her from the parking space next to them. She had never heard the car pull up.

"Wanna get your butt in the car and explain?"

Looking up at Connor and with Channing walking outside, she nodded her head and walked around to Julie's passenger side door. The moment she was in and the windows were rolled up, she looked at her friend nervously.

"Now, I was going to ask you who in the hell was that guy you were wrapped around, but let me rephrase the question. Who in the hell are those guys? As in more than one, Mel. Are you seeing both of them? Why didn't you tell me anything? People don't cuddle in public like that unless they're serious."

"It's complicated, Jules." Her conversations with Sarah and Ev exploded into her mind. God, how hard it must have been for them.

"Complicated, my fucking ass. You tell me. I've never known someone so hell bent against two men in a woman's life. Weren't you just saying something the other —Oh. My. *God!* Is that the guy from the restaurant?" Julie stared at Channing as he stood by the driver's side door waiting on her. He looked just as nervous as Melissa felt. "Oh fuck, it is! Mel, start talking. I'm a lawyer; you're not going to get out of this one, so don't even try."

"Jules, something happened. I'm leaving town."

A gasp came from Julie's mouth. "Whoa. Slow down. You're not going anywhere. What could you possibly be running from? Them?"

"I don't want to talk about it. I shouldn't be gone more than a few weeks. I just need to get my thoughts in order."

"Why can't you do that here? What's wrong with your house? Do you need to stay at mine?"

"They live there now." Melissa rubbed her eyes so the tears wouldn't come. Even if she didn't know these men, having to fight her feelings for them was starting to get harder and harder. "Listen, Jules. I can't say anymore. I'm leaving, and thanks for the invite, but it's not nearly far enough away."

"Oh, fuck me. Melissa, I might sound like you did days ago, but something is definitely going on. Tell me. You've changed. Everything's changing. Shit, I think I need a drink."

"Everything's fine. What's this drinking thing, Jules? Do you need to talk about it? I mean, you've been drinking a lot lately."

Her eyes shot over to Melissa. "I don't have a problem if that's what you mean."

"Just checking. You can call me anytime. You know that, right?"

"Enough about me. What about you? Where are you going? Why can't you just kick these men out of your house? Call Stephen."

"I can't do that, Jules. I...I'm connected to them. A part of me... You know what, I have to go. My men are waiting."

"Your men! Mel! You're acting a lot like Ev and Sarah. They have 'their men,' too."

Melissa opened the door and struggled to give Julie a smile. "I guess if it were anyone but me it wouldn't be so bad. It would be more like a dream, I guess. They're both really great guys. I just can't believe what we have will last. Anyway, I'll see you in a few weeks, Jules."

Shutting the door, she walked to Channing's Mercedes and got in the passenger side. Connor got in the back while Channing also climbed in. No one said a word as they drove back to her home. She absolutely hated this. The feeling of being torn seared her insides. The amount of anger she felt when Jules started ripping into her made her furious. She knew her friend felt concerned. Hell, she'd done the same to Sarah and Ev. But the need to protect her men came first.

That was the part that drove her to want to leave faster. How could she already be so attached?

Pulling into the drive, she barely waited for the car to stop. Melissa raced up the steps and unlocked the door, rushing to her room. She needed to call Sarah and fast. Pulling out her phone she dialed and waited.

“Sarah!” She whispered quietly.

“Mel, is that you?”

“Yes. I need you to do me a favor. I don’t have time. I’m leaving town, and I want you to tell Hanna to take care of my clients until I get back.”

“Don’t do it, Mel. You can’t stop it. Don’t make this harder for you.”

“I love you, Sare-bear.”

Melissa hung up the phone and turned to grab her laundry basket. Connor was standing at her door. A light scream came from her mouth at the shock. How had he opened her door without her hearing? Fuck.

“I knew you were leaving.”

The pain racing through her caused her to take steps back. She clutched to her chest as tears blurred her vision. “Connor, I can’t do this.”

Channing walked around him. Their presence together made her room feel as small as a closet. They were huge, and she, well, felt smaller than ever.

“Mel, please. You haven’t even given it a chance. Did you enjoy what happened between all of us? Didn’t it feel perfect?”

“Of course it did! But it won’t last. Trust me. Everything comes to an end eventually. I don’t want to feel this way if it’s going to ever go away. I can’t take that kind of hurt.”

Connor stepped forward while she backed herself to the far wall. She felt trapped, and she hated it.

"Please, come and let me hold you. I think we need to talk. If we all got to know each other better, it would help. Don't you think?"

"I don't want to talk. I already know what's going to happen."

Damn it. She needed to leave, to run, but they were blocking the door. The windows were out of the question. Taking a two-story dive down to the ground wouldn't get her anywhere but the hospital.

Connor walked over to her slowly. Just at seeing his large frame coming at her, she jumped to the bed to run across, but Channing was suddenly there. Melissa screamed and pitched herself backwards, right into Connor's waiting arms.

"Okay, I see we're going to have to do this the hard way. Channing, go find some rope."

"Wait, what? What do you need rope for?" Melissa asked, panicked.

"Well, we can't let you escape, and that's exactly what you seem to be trying to do. So, I'm going to tie you to the bed. Don't worry. Channing and I are going to take really good care of you, baby."

Alarms shot off in her mind. Melissa wiggled in Connor's arms, trying to break free of his hold. Suddenly, she could feel herself eased to the bed, and his weight settled on top of her. A moan came from her mouth at the smell that erupted around her. God, he smelled so good.

"I really didn't want to have to do this to you. But, you see, there's no way I can let you go off without me there to protect you. Do you know what I would do if something happened to you?"

Melissa shook her head slowly, no. Devon's words about his past echoed in her mind. "Do you have to tie me up?"

"Beyond a shadow of a doubt, I know you'll run. I don't plan on tying you up at the moment because I know I can restrain you from leaving, but tonight, you can bet your sweet ass that the ropes will go on. I can't risk you escaping while I try to get some sleep."

Connor shifted between her thighs. The heat that enveloped her skin made it hard to breathe. God, how could her body betray her like

this? Even knowing she still wanted to leave, she wanted him. To feel him buried inside her again would be the best thing she could think of at the moment.

A large intake of breath brought her eyes to his. The look he wore told her he knew perfectly well that she wanted him. Heat burned her cheeks, and she looked away.

“No, honey. Look at me. There’s nothing wrong with your reaction. It just shows me that we’re truly meant for one another.”

Fingers brought her face to look at him. Light kisses brushed across her forehead, eyes, chin, and then her mouth. He didn’t push, just continued to make the slightest contact until Melissa was positive she couldn’t take anymore. At the connection of their skin, sparks ignited. Pains twisted her stomach tightly with an intense need to release.

“Connor, we have to stop. Please. This isn’t going to work.”

“How can I convince you? What are you so afraid of, Melissa?”

The sound of the door opening turned his attention away from her. Relief took over. She really didn’t want to go into her reasons for knowing why things would end in disaster for them all.

“Found some rope in my trunk, but seriously, Connor, I don’t like this.”

“Thank you,” Melissa sighed. She struggled against the weight holding her down, but she didn’t make any progress.

“No, you misunderstand. I mean I don’t like the rope specifically. Maybe we can find something else that won’t hurt her skin. I’ve got a few ideas.”

Melissa gasped and shot an angry expression at Channing, who just smiled. She watched as he climbed onto the bed and lay down until he was inches from her face. Those beautiful eyes penetrated hers, and no matter how much she wanted to, she couldn’t look away. She was hypnotized by his gorgeousness. How could someone look so perfect?



"Melissa, I know why you want to run. I've seen your entire life. You can trust me not to tell anyone. But I need you to know, Connor and I will never put you through anything remotely similar to what you've had to endure in your past."

"You can't know that for sure." Melissa's breath shuttered at the realization that he saw what she'd gone through. The beatings, the hospital visits to her mother, the *suicide* of her mother. No! She wouldn't think about it. Jerking wildly against Connor, the tears came harder. "Let go of me!"

"No, no. Just let it come. Melly, I don't know what happened to you, but I'm so sorry for your pain. God, I can feel it, and I wish I could erase it. Please let us try."

At the name, she went even crazier.

"Don't call her that, Connor. Oh, shit. He didn't know, Melissa."

Flashes of her father blinded her. His hands were so large, were always reared back so high when he brought them down at her. She couldn't hide; there was nowhere to go. She wanted to run away forever. *You're worthless, Melly! You never listen to anything I say, Melly!* God she hated that name.

Wetness from Connor's tears hit her face, ripping her from the vision she could see so clearly. Burning coated her throat, and she wasn't even aware of when she started screaming. She grew still from her thrashing, horrified at what had just happened. "I'm so sorry. Did I hurt you?"

Connor looked at her through his bloodshot eyes. "Hurt me? Baby, I hurt *for* you. Not because of you." He turned over, placing her between him and Channing. "God, Melissa. I had no idea of the pain you carried. We both share that, you know? Whenever you feel ready to tell me, if you ever feel ready, I'll be here."

"What pain do you carry?" Wiping the tears from her eyes, she studied his face while Channing pulled her against his body. She thought about pulling away, but she was too tired to fight anymore, and something about him holding her felt right.

"I was born in New Orleans where my father was Alpha. I had a pretty normal childhood. My parents were great, if not a tad bit overprotective, but what kid doesn't think that? Anyway, I'd just gone through my change at seventeen, and things were starting to get pretty rowdy. Threats were coming in from a rival pack, but at the time, I didn't take it too serious. I should have." Connor took a deep breath. "Sorry, I haven't ever said any of this out loud before."

"Go on." Melissa's hand reached for his, pulling it to her chest. A look of tenderness swept across his face. He brought her fingers to his lips, and returned her hand to be placed against her heart.

"Sometime in the middle of the night, our house was attacked. I remember waking up to the sound of something crashing from downstairs. Thinking it was just one of the pack members drunk again, I went back to sleep. The next thing I knew, my mother's screams woke me. I started to run for the door to see if she was all right, but they made it to my room first. I heard my mother screaming for me to run. Without thought, I did, and to this very day I regret it."

"Oh, Connor. If you would have stayed, you'd be dead right now." Melissa's breath shuttered as she stared up into his haunted eyes. The vulnerability that she could see broke her heart. "I'm so sorry you had to go through that."

"Yeah, me, too. You see, the remaining pack brought me back and hid me at one of their houses. They wanted me to fight the man who killed my parents, but I couldn't face him back then. It took three years of them beating me to finally realize I wouldn't go along with their plan. The day they let me go, I went to him. No orders from anyone. It was all me. Needless to say, he won't ever be hurting anyone else. "

Melissa kissed his hand repeatedly. She wasn't sure why, but the need to comfort him during his pain overpowered every thought in her head.

"Would you like to tell me about your past, Melissa?"

She looked into his eyes long and hard. He deserved to know after what he had gone through by telling her his past. Searching for the words to begin her story, she tried to calm the growing panic. To say the words out loud would open wounds she didn't want to face. But oddly enough, she felt willing to do that for Connor.

## Chapter 10

“I was seven when it all started. The beatings, that is. I’m not really sure what happened. I used to think everything was perfect. The first time is still as clear to me today as it was twenty-three years ago.

“My mom was cooking dinner and I was helping.” Melissa took a ragged breath. “She used to make desert every night. I was stirring the cake batter when my father slammed the door. I remember the sound scared me, and I jumped, dropping the bowl. Chocolate mix sprayed across the floor.”

Melissa stared in a trance, seeing everything in slow motion. The plastic bowl bounced, sending the dark color across a shiny white floor. “*Where were you earlier! I called, and you didn’t answer.*”

The image of her father came rushing forward. “*Melissa, honey, go to your room.*” Her mother’s soft voice sounded so near. She knew she was speaking the words out loud, but it didn’t stop her from reliving the incident over in her head.

Melissa could see her former self trying to rush out of the room. She’d never heard her father yell that way before, and it frightened her. Just as she passed him, she felt his fingers wrapped in her hair and jerk her back. The pain was excruciating, and she remembered crying out and bursting into tears. A strong smell nearly choked her as her father’s face came inches from hers. Now, she knew it was liquor, but back then she hadn’t a clue.

“*Oh no, she’s cleaning up this mess! What, do you think money grows on trees, Silvia? Someone has to pay for the bills and food. It’s sure as hell not you.*”

Melissa could feel her tiny frame pushed down toward the chocolate. She could remember crying so hard the dark color blurred together.

*"Melissa, go to your room."*

The voice was so quiet she could barely hear it over her sobs. A hand wrapped around her arm gently, and that's when she heard it. The crack was so deafening as he hit her mother, she screamed, trying to block out the noise. She could hear her father yelling at her to be quiet, but she couldn't stop screaming.

Hands gripped her with enough pressure that she thought her arms would be crushed. The shake he gave her snapped her head back, only scaring her more. Melissa saw his hand rise, and she could feel herself become frozen in fear, just like the little girl she once was.

"How long?"

"What?" She broke from her daze and looked at Connor. She wasn't sure exactly how much she'd told. Maybe everything, maybe hardly anything at all.

"How long did this go on? With your father?"

"Oh." Melissa gave her head a little shake. "My mother committed suicide when I was twelve. Everyone said my father drove her crazy. If you ask me, it was my father who fell off the deep end. Anyway, after that I lived with my father for about a year before I came to live with my grandparents, here in Port Aransas."

"Melissa," Connor pulled her body to his, "I'm so sorry. No wonder you don't trust us. Channing and I would never do anything like that to you. God, I would kill anyone who even thought to place a hand on you."

"As would I."

Turning to look at Channing, she wasn't sure what to think anymore. They looked so sincere. Damn, more than anything she wanted to believe them. Could she really let her guard down and allow them to start breaking through the walls she'd spent years building?

Loud banging brought all of their faces toward the door. The men stood, and she followed suit. “Are you expecting anyone?” Connor asked.

“No.”

Melissa walked forward and headed for the living room. Channing made it to the door before she could get there. “Wait, let me open it.” Nodding, she watched as he blocked her view.

“You move the hell out of my way. Where’s Melissa?”

Julie barged in, pushing her way through. “Mel, get your stuff. I’m not letting you leave town. You’re coming to stay with me.”

Connor turned her in his direction. “Melissa, baby. Please, I’m begging you not to leave. Give us a chance.”

“Who are you?” Julie walked forward, pulling Melissa out of his arms. “And why are you calling her ‘baby’? How long have you known her, a second? I’ve never seen you before, and trust me, I’d remember. Plus, if Mel was dating anyone, I would know.”

“Jules, why are you here?” Her friend looked at her like she’d lost her mind. She had to admit to herself it was a pretty stupid question.

“Get your stuff, Mel.” Julie leaned in close enough to whisper in her ear. “I tried telling Stephen to come over here, but him and Ev both told me to leave it alone. Can you believe that?”

“Yes,” Melissa whispered. As hard as she tried, she couldn’t focus. Should she leave after everything they’d just discussed? As much as they were trying to convince her that they’d all live a happy life, Melissa saw her chance to escape and wasn’t about to let it pass her up. Scared at how they’d react, she turned and took in her men.

“I’m sorry. I can’t.”

Julie grabbed her arm as both men took a step forward. “Neither of you move another inch. I have pepper spray in my bag, and I’m not afraid to use it.”

Channing just dismissed Julie with his eyes and advanced another foot. “Melissa, please don’t go. You have to know that we’re meant to

be with you at all times. If you leave, we'll have to follow. It's useless to run."

"How can you both say we're meant to be and not give me time to adjust?"

Connor walked to the couch and sat down. "Julie, is it?"

"Yes." Her friend narrowed her eyes as she looked at him.

"Have you ever been in love?" Connor's voice cracked at the end of his words.

"I was married for two years. I loved him very much. I thought..." Julie let out a ragged breath. "What's your point?"

"Channing and I love her. Do you know what it's going to do to all three of us if you take her away? She's going to physically hurt at us being separated, not to mention Channing and I will be going through pain, too. I ask that you please don't do this."

"It's not up to her." Melissa grabbed Julie and pulled her backwards, toward the door. "Now, don't follow us. Just leave me alone. We'll all move on. You'll see. Everything will be fine."

Agony like nothing she'd ever experienced swarmed her insides, and she hadn't even made it out of the door.

"Let's go, Jules." Opening the door, Julie gripped her hand tightly and pulled her down the stairs. With every step down, she felt the pain intensify. By the time they reached the Mercedes, tears streamed down Melissa's cheeks.

"I'll take care of you, Mel. Don't cry."

They both got in, and Julie raced toward the highway that led to Corpus Christi. Sobs wracked Melissa's chest while she grabbed the hand her friend offered. She leaned over, burying her face in Julie's shoulder.

"Jules, tell me everything's going to be all right."

"Everything will be fine, honey. I promise. You'll see. We'll get your mind off of those men. It'll be like they never existed, if that's what you want."

“No, I’d never be able to forget them. God, why did this have to happen?”

Mindlessly, Melissa tried talking to herself to get her mind off of the pain that threatened to explode out of her chest. Everything inside of her screamed to go back, but she couldn’t. She had to let them go or at least try.

“Tell me what you want me to do. I hate seeing you like this, Mel. I’ve never seen you cry. What was that guy talking about back there? Are you really in physical pain?”

“No.” The lie came out of her mouth before she even thought to answer. Everything in her said she couldn’t let her friend grow any more suspicious than she probably already was. “Are you sure I can stay with you? I really would hate to impose.”

“You’re fucking kidding me right? I threw up in your grass, and you gave me your pajamas and put me in your bed, and now you’re asking me if I mind you staying with me while you go through the hardest thing in your life? Come on, honey. You know I don’t mind. I would love your company. Gosh, you’re like my sister. Do I mind?” Julie shook her head back and forth.

“I know, but I’m not sure how long I’ll be with you.”

“And it doesn’t matter. You can stay as long as you need. If that’s ten years, I’m perfectly okay with that.”

The lights from Corpus came into view, and Melissa clutched to her chest as she turned to look out the window. Damn, she hoped she was doing the right thing. It sure as hell didn’t feel like it at the moment. Time, hopefully, would help.

\* \* \* \*

Connor raked his fingers through his hair while he stared angrily at Channing. “I hate this. Do you feel how much pain she is in? I say we go to Corpus right now and bring her back. If Ayden told us not to let her hurt, why are we still here?”



"Because it is six in the morning and I think she needs to realize her love for us on her own. Control, remember? She needs to feel like things are exactly the way she wants them. We fit into her life. Or have you forgotten us talking about this already?"

"But it's crazy. We need to at least stay in Corpus to be closer to her. The nearer we are, the more the pain will decrease."

"So, what are you saying? Do you want to go stay with Ayden?"

"I have an apartment. Or are you forgetting that's where I'm from?" Connor shook his head at the vampire who was looking rather annoyed.

"Why didn't you mention this before? We'd have left a long damn time ago. I would have mentioned motel, but I seriously hate those things."

"We're taking my truck. Your car can stay here."

"That's fine with me."

The men walked out of the door, locking it behind them. Connor wasn't worried about getting back inside without a key. He didn't need one to get in. Pulling his truck keys from his pocket, he unlocked it with the keypad and climbed inside.

The twenty minute trip to Corpus was rode in complete silence as Connor went over his thoughts. The closer they came, the more he realized the ache eased. It actually felt like he could breathe again, which was a relief. At least he knew Melissa would be feeling better. Even now, after all these hours, Connor knew she was still awake. The mark pulled him to continue forward, but he turned into his apartment complex.

"She's further into the city. I can feel the pull to her. It wants me to keep going. Damn, this is going to be harder than hell."

"Yeah, already I feel like I'm going out of my mind. Nice complex."

"Thanks. Ayden and Trevor used to live here. I took over their lease when they bought their house with Nicole. She used to live right

there,” Connor said, pointing across the parking lot to the upstairs apartment directly across from them.

“Really, how romantic. I’ve never heard the story how the Alpha and his best friend met their mate.”

Connor laughed. “Maybe someday I’ll tell you.”

They walked up the sidewalk, and he unlocked the door, letting Channing go first. “The couch turns into a bed. I don’t think Londyn is here at the moment, but he might be back shortly. I let him crash here while I was watching over Melissa. I think he’s pretty much moved in. He’s a cool guy, so no worries.”

Channing nodded and started removing the cushions. Connor could feel his eyes turning heavy. “I think Melissa is falling asleep. I can feel her calming now that the pain isn’t so bad. I’m going to bed. If you need anything, help yourself.” He tossed the keys on the kitchen table. “Truck’s yours, too, if you need it. Don’t you dare go to see her without me, though. Do you understand?”

“I wouldn’t do that, Connor.”

“Good. I just wanted to make sure.”

Walking to his room, he collapsed to the bed without so much as taking off his clothes. He felt exhausted. Sleep would do some good. As soon as he woke up, he’d be ready to go and find out where Melissa was staying. Then he could watch over her like he needed to.

The sound of Channing settling in the living room was the last thing Connor heard before he saw the vision of his mate flash before his eyes and darkness settle over.

\* \* \* \*

Channing lay down on the mattress for hours. He couldn’t go to sleep. All he could think about was whether or not Melissa was okay. He physically knew she was fine, but not being able to see her made fear consume him. What happened if she got into some type of

accident or someone mugged her or broke into her friend's apartment? The possibilities were endless. Damn it, he hated this.

He told Connor that he wouldn't see her without him, but the thought of vanishing and appearing next to her teased his thoughts. He was dying to just see her for himself and make sure she was okay. The bond he and Melissa shared pulled at his insides. If he focused hard enough, he *could* find her.

Conflicted, he rubbed his eyes. The sound of a key sliding in the lock had him sitting up in the bed. A tall blond walked in, his hair in complete disarray. He looked like a punk kid although he had to be in his mid -twenties. Tattoos covered the lengths of his arms, and Channing couldn't ignore the barbell from the tongue ring he had settled between his lips.

"Whoa, who the fuck are you? Is Connor back?"

"I'm Channing. Connor's in the room."

"You're Channing? Holy shit, man. That's fucking awesome. You're like a legend in the vampire community. Anyone who can scare the hell out of a community of vampires has my respect. They're really tough."

"You're a wolf."

The blond shrugged his shoulders. "Yeah, but my best friend is a vampire. He's cool. I'm not like most wolves who hate you guys. I'm all right with us all mingling."

"Well, shit, I think that's a first." Channing watched the guy walk over to the kitchen and pull out a chair. "So I'm assuming you're the Londyn Connor was telling me about."

"The one and only."

Mesmerized, Channing watched the wolf play with the tongue ring. How could he stand that thing in his mouth? Curious, his mind came up with all kinds of questions. "Say, Londyn, have you ever swallowed one of those things?"

"Two, actually."

"How do the ladies like them?"

A laugh exploded out of the blond's mouth. "Oh, they enjoy it just fine, but I don't need the art to satisfy them. I got this because I thought it would get me to stop smoking. No such luck, but I find it gives me something to do when I'm bored."

"Interesting. So..." Channing's heart jumped, making him lose focus on his words. He didn't think . He felt for Melissa's connection and disappeared. Opening his eyes, a bedroom came into view. Two sleeping forms were nestled under the covers. Julie had her arm wrapped around Melissa's sleeping body.

Tears poured from his mate's eyes even as she slept. A sickening feeling swamped Channing. He wanted badly to pull her into his arms and hold her. But he couldn't. He needed to leave. Red hair flowed freely over the white pillow, and he bent down and inhaled deeply before he forced himself to go.

Feeling the couch-bed appear underneath him, he opened his eyes. Connor stood directly at the end of the mattress, glaring at him.

"Her pain woke me up. You went to her. What was wrong? Is she okay?"

"Bad dream, I think. Julie was holding her while they slept. That girl has my utmost respect."

"I'm glad she's not sleeping alone, but are you sure she was okay?"

Channing exhaled loudly. "She even cries in her sleep. I hope this isn't going to go on for much longer because I can't take seeing her like that. If I knew it wouldn't set us back in trying to win her over , I'd have brought her back here."

Connor cursed under his breath. A throat clearing had both of them looking toward Londyn.

"That whole disappearing thing was beyond awesome, man. But let me get this straight because I'm not a dumbass. You're both mated to the same girl, aren't you?"

"I knew you weren't stupid. If you would have been, I wouldn't have trusted you to stay here." Connor walked in the kitchen and

started the coffee pot. It didn't take long before the rich aroma made its way to Channing.

"So we have another trio. This is just crazy. Why does this keep happening?"

Channing shrugged his shoulders. "I'm not sure, Londyn. But you better watch it, boy, or else you could be next."

"Hell no. I'm not going to be mated anytime soon. I still have plenty of party years ahead of me."

Channing laughed and so did Connor. "Let me give you some advice. When it happens, there's nothing you can do. I don't care how you feel now. The moment the pull begins, you'll be lost and instantly in love."

"Bullshit."

Connor walked out and handed Channing a mug of coffee. "He's right, Londyn. You can't stop it or control it. It's the best feeling in the world. I promise."

"Yeah, it sure looks like the best feeling. Look at yourselves. You've both got bags from sleep deprivation blackening under your eyes. Best feeling, my ass. No mate for me."

Channing looked over at Connor and narrowed his eyes while grinning. "Yeah, okay Londyn, no mate for you, we get it. But I was wondering if I paid you, if you could do me a favor."

Both men looked at him skeptically. "Depends what it is, I guess."

He once again looked at Connor. "I want to send Melissa some flowers. Could you personally deliver them for me and make sure she gets them?"

"I could do that. When?"

"It's half passed ten, now. We'll give it a few more hours. Let the girls get some rest."

Eyes narrowed at him, and Connor smiled, understanding. It was time to test fate with his new friend, Londyn. Maybe it wouldn't work, but then again, what if it did?

## Chapter 11

Melissa woke up to stiffness covering her body. Her eyes felt swollen to shit, and her throat was on fire. Damn, even in sleep she couldn't escape her men. Lifting Julie's arm, she made her way to the restroom. Turning on the cold water, she washed her face.

"Damn, we slept forever." Julie leaned on the door, looking at her in the mirror. "How are you feeling? Are you hungry?"

Melissa dried her face. "Not really, but I think maybe it would be best if I ate."

"Okay, we'll have to go get something. I'm not much of the shopper. Not anymore, anyway. If you want, we can go to the store after we eat, and we'll buy some food. I used to be a really good cook."

Turning around, she took the brunette in her arms, hugging her tightly. "Thanks, Jules. I don't know what I would do if it wasn't for you. Everyone kept telling me not to fight the," Melissa paused. "You know, just to let it happen, that's all. I couldn't do that."

"Fight what?" Julie looked at her suspiciously.

"What? Oh. Love, you know?"

Fear made her head pound. Damn, that had been a close one. Her mouth needed a padlock for things like this. How was she ever going to keep this secret with her curse?

A knock had the girls tense at the exact same moment. Julie lifted her hand. "You stay. I'll see who it is." Ignoring her, Melissa followed.

"Who is it?" She yelled through the door while looking out the peep hole.

“Londyn. I have a delivery for Melissa . My friends Connor and Channing said she was staying here.

At the mention of their names, Melissa’s heart accelerated to dangerous proportions. Julie looked at her in shock. “How did they know where I live?” she hissed in a whisper.

Melissa shrugged as Julie opened the door. Moments of silence caused her to walk forward. Her friend was just standing there quietly. “Hello, what’s going on?” Melissa snapped her fingers, and Julie spun around, startled.

“Sorry, I was in a daze.” She grabbed the flowers and slammed the door in the delivery guy’s face. The paleness of Julie’s tanned skin alerted Melissa right away.

“What in the hell is the matter with you, Jules? You look like you’ve seen a ghost.”

“No ghost. The guy just freaked me out. Too many tattoos. I don’t know, I...Never mind. How in the hell did your men know where I live?”

Melissa shrugged and took the large bouquet of roses. “I don’t know. But the flowers are beautiful, aren’t they?” Inhaling deeply, her throat tightened. Just knowing they knew where she was made her want to go back to them. They had cared enough to find her; that alone made butterflies rush through her stomach. No one had ever attempted to make things work once she’d left.

“I know that love-sick look. Enough of this. Let’s get dressed and get some food. I’m starving. “

Melissa trailed her finger along a silky petal and just nodded. She wondered what they were doing. Where were her men? Were they here in Corpus, or were they still at her house? Holding her hand to her chest, she tried to contain the pain mixed with a tinge of happiness. At least the ache wasn’t as bad today. Maybe she could move on with her life. Or did she really want to?

\* \* \* \*

Connor flipped open his cell phone at seeing Londyn's name appear on the caller ID. "Hey, how did it go?"

"Just fucking great. I got the flowers snatched out of my hand and the door slammed in my face. I'm assuming the brunette who wanted to rip my head off isn't your Melissa."

"No, she's not. Our mate has red hair. Why do you ask?"

"No, reason. Look, I'm not going to be home for a while. There are some things I need to take care of. Tell Channing thanks a fucking billion."

Connor heard the phone disconnect and looked at it while a laugh exploded from his mouth. "Channing, Londyn says thanks a fucking billion. Are you thinking what I'm thinking?"

"Oh yes, I'm almost positive. He'll be thanking us in the long run. How 'bout you and I go watch our girl? I don't like knowing I can't see where she's at."

Looking at Channing, he smiled and grabbed his keys. "Great minds think alike. Let's go."

They made their way to the truck, and Connor let the pull lead him deeper into the city. He knew exactly where Melissa was staying. It hadn't been hard to get the lawyer's home address from Ayden. But he wasn't being led there. Channing cleared his throat, and he shrugged. "I think they left the house. We'll find her."

"She's not as bad today. I'm glad." Connor watched him look out of the window. His sad expression affected his wolf like nothing he'd ever felt before. He was used to this feeling when he felt compassion for women, but a man, never. He really liked Channing. If he would have had a brother, he assumed this is what it would have felt like to have him in pain.

"We'll get her back. Don't worry."

"I hope it's soon. Connor, I've never felt this way about anyone before. I'm not sure what to do to make her realize how deep our love



goes. God, there's nothing I wouldn't do right this moment to get her to see."

Connor laughed. "Here's your moment. Look across the light, to the right. She's going into that restaurant."

"Do we go in or should we just wait and see where she goes?"

Connor watched her and Julie walk inside. The light turned green and he pulled to the opposite end of the lot. "I don't know. What do you think? Maybe she needs more time."

"Yeah, probably. But how much more time?" Channing sighed and ran his fingers through his hair. "Every minute feels like a fucking eternity."

"Tell me about it. Listen, I am hungry. I say we go in and act like we don't even know she's there. Let's see how she reacts."

A smile lit the vampire's face, and Connor's heart leaped. Better. He wanted Channing to be happy. And he couldn't deny that getting a hint of Melissa's scent would make him feel better. He missed her smell like an addiction – one that drove him to do the one thing that could possibly push her away. Damn, he hoped this didn't backfire in his face.

Climbing out of the truck, Channing stuck by his side while they walked through the doors. Their bond wanted him to head to the back left. Instead, he walked right. The place was so small he knew they wouldn't be able to hide from her

\* \* \* \*

Melissa took a drink of her soda and began choking on it the moment she saw her men walk through the door. Julie leaned over the table, patting her back, but she couldn't even acknowledge her friend, not when she couldn't take her eyes away from Channing's. God, they both looked so good. How had they found her?

"Are you okay? Damn, slow down, Mel."

Julie caught her gaze, and she could see her friend look toward the other side of the room out of her peripheral vision. Still, she couldn't look away from them. Her body tried to pull her to stand and walk over. It took every ounce of her power to stay rooted to the chair.

"All right. I'm going over to tell them to leave. Don't move, Mel. I'll be right back."

"No, don't." Desperation made Melissa grab Julie's hand. "Please, they're not coming over here. It's fine. Let them eat. What if they're hungry? I'm not even sure if they ate this morning."

Round eyes stared at her. "If they're hungry, they can find some other damn place to eat. They did this on purpose. I bet they followed us."

"I don't care. They can stay as long as they're over there."

Melissa had no clue what she was saying, but she didn't want them to leave. With them being so close, the pain had eased considerably. She hardly even noticed it. God, she wanted to go to them. The need to inhale their skin or run her fingers down their bare chests had her biting her lip. Heat coursed through her body as she fought her reaction to the thoughts.

"Your face is flushed. Are you feeling okay?"

"Never better." Melissa turned from her friend and looked back at Connor and Channing. "They're absolutely beautiful, aren't they?"

"You love them? Impossible." Julie's whispered words broke the spell.

"It's too early to know that. Even if I did, things like that don't last."

"Yes they do. My parents have been married over fifty years, and they love each other very much. They were just as devastated as I was whenever...my ex left me."

"I'm sorry, Jules. Your parents are the exception."

"I think so sometimes, too."

Melissa scooted to the far end of the chair, closest to her men's table. They weren't even looking over. After Channing made eye contact with her, he'd never looked back. Was something wrong?

The waitress came over and took the orders. She watched as Connor said a few words and stood. A few words exchanged between him and Channing, and he headed for the door.

"Jules, I'll be back. I need-"

"You want to talk to him. I get it."

Channing stood, headed for the door, and she could feel herself panic. She wasn't sure what she needed to tell them or why she wanted to go to them, but she had to. "Jules, I'm sorry. But I have to go."

"I'll see you at the house tonight. Do come back. Don't rush back because of some feeling. Give it time."

"I *will* be back."

"Here." Rolling her eyes, Julie handed her a key. "That's so you can get in if I'm not there. You have my number; call me."

Melissa kissed her cheek and ran from the table. The men must have changed their minds. She could see the truck backing out of the parking lot. Running, she threw herself in front of it as Connor started forward. He slammed on the breaks, and she could see his eyes widen.

Channing jumped out and rushed toward her. "Melissa, what are you doing?" Arms encircled around her, and she clung to him frantically.

"I couldn't let you both leave. I'm not saying I'm coming back, but letting you leave, I couldn't."

"It's okay. Tell me what you want. Anything. Just say the words."

"Is she all right? What's going on?"

Melissa looked at Connor. Channing held onto her tighter. "She didn't want us to leave. She's still not ready, but she had to see us."

"Take me somewhere. Let us all go some place, please." Damn, she couldn't think. Words were not even coming out the way they should. Was she actually begging? Her body heated to his closeness,

and she could feel herself moving deeper into the warmth emanating from him.

“Connor, come here, will you?”

Channing’s voice sounded weak as he called for her other mate. Looking confused, he came forward. Connor stopped, closed his eyes, and breathed in deeply.

“Holy shit. She smells so good.”

Like gravity pulled her, she unwrapped herself from Channing and came to a stop in front of hazel eyes. “Connor, will you kiss me?”

The words came from nowhere, but she couldn’t deny them. She wanted his lips on hers. The need to taste him overpowered any other thought going through her mind.

“Channing, you’re going to have to drive.”

Connor’s hands gripped the outside of her thighs and pulled her to straddle his waist. Lips crushed into hers, and she was lost in his flavor. Movement of them walking and climbing into the truck was nothing but a blur as she massaged her tongue into his.

“God, I missed you, Mel.”

“I missed you, too. But this isn’t permanent. I can’t stay. I just needed both of you.” Again, his mouth crushed into hers. Jeans separated them from what Melissa wanted to feel. Hardness pressed against her pussy, and she was desperate to feel him sliding inside of her.

“I’m glad you came to us. We’re always here for you no matter what you need. Listen to your body. It wants both of us, doesn’t it?”

Melissa moaned into his mouth. “Yes.” She rocked her hips, feeling his push against her. The pulsing in her clit was nonstop. Wetness soaked her panties the further his hands traveled up her back.

“Fuck, I’m not sure I can wait until we get to the apartment before I taste you. I just want to bury my face into your sweet pussy and drink you in.”

“Two minutes, Connor. I’m going as fast as I can.”

Fingers eased into her hair at the base of her neck, tilting her head to the side. Melissa pulled her lips away from his mouth and began running her tongue down his neck. A flavor all his own overtook her. Biting his skin, she knew she needed more.

“Fuck, Melissa. That feels so good. “

The truck came to a stop, and she was being carried, but where she wasn't sure. She didn't care to look around. All she knew was that she needed to continue to take in whatever Connor was giving her, and at the moment that was pure bliss to her senses.

The sound of the door crashing open registered, but they kept moving. When another door opened and shut, she felt hands lift the back of her shirt up and pull it over her head. Lips traced her spine while Connor pulled her from his neck and plunged his tongue into her mouth.

She could feel Channing at her back. His hands kneaded the flesh at her sides as he approached her neck. Removing one of her hands from Connor's head, she reached back and pulled him closer to her. She could feel him shift behind and knew he was removing his clothes. She didn't wait. Her fingers went right to the button of her jeans.

“Connor, let me down. I want to undress. I need to feel both of you.”

“No, I won't let you down. Channing, take her pants off.” Connor ripped the shirt from his body at his words.

Melissa's legs were released as he moved one arm to wrap around her waist while the other pulled at the button and the zipper of his jeans. Channing removed her pants and panties, instantly placing kisses along her skin as he worked his way higher up her thighs. His body pressed into her as he stood.

“Tell me to touch you, Melissa. ” Channing's breath brushed against her neck as his fingers inched up her legs toward her pussy.

Locking herself around Connor's waist, she leaned back into Channing. Melissa rested her head on his shoulder, loving the way

both men had her trapped between them. “Both of you touch me, everywhere.”

In awe, she watched them look at each other. Something passed between them that she couldn’t understand or even comprehend. Was she going to regret this? God, she hoped not.

## Chapter 12

Channing knew beyond a doubt what Connor wanted. They needed to try their damndest to prove to Melissa how much she meant to them. This wasn't going to be a quick love session. No, for her they were going to take their time and keep her with them as long as they could.

Slowing his breathing, Channing brought his fingers to the wetness of Melissa's slit. Just feeling her juices coat his fingers, his cock thickened to painful proportions. She felt so swollen against his touch. The heat she was throwing off made him realize how much he needed to feed. She literally burned his skin against how cool he had become.

"Connor, I need to taste her, and so do you."

He knew he was speaking in code, but the wolf in his friend would know exactly what he meant. A smile passed Connor's face, and he pulled Melissa's hips up even with his face. She let out a yelp and gripped to Channing's arms. With her neck even with his face, he turned, nuzzling into her softness.

A moan came from her mouth at Connor burying his face in her pussy. They should have probably moved to the bed, but Channing felt rooted to the floor. He didn't want to move for fear of breaking the spell they were all under.

The smell of Melissa's blood called to him. Running his tongue over her pulse point, he felt the thudding of her heart beat throughout his body. Fangs came down under the lust he felt to consume her essence.

“Do it, Channing. I know you want to bite me. Do it. I want you to.”

The soft sound of her voice caused his vision to blur from the adrenaline rushing through him. He took a deep breath and slowly kissed his way up her skin. Just when he thought his throat would close from the burning, he pierced her neck, gently. Moans came from everyone in the room at the pleasure they all felt.

Melissa's body went into spasms from her orgasm while Connor drank her in. Channing couldn't break his stare from the glowing orbs of his love's other mate. The wolf eyes penetrated into Channing's very soul as their gaze's locked. There was no need for words. A new instinct took over, letting him know what to do. Melissa, she was their link, and what bonded the two of them together for the rest of their lives. He unexplainably knew what Connor's next move was without even having to verbally communicate with him.

\* \* \* \*

Melissa felt Channing's lips break from her neck. The feel of his smooth tongue licking over the puncture wounds caused her to shake with need. She might have just had one of the most amazing orgasms of her life, but her body was telling her she needed so much more.

Connor's face lifted from her pussy, and she watched as he turned and put her in Channing's arms. When the men had her lying between them, neither rushed to touch her. Fingertips trailed both side of her body. Staring into Channing's blue eyes, she felt the need to kiss him.

“Not yet, *mon amour*. Let us just relish in having this time with you. There's no rush.”

“If there's no rush, then let me please both of you. Can you please lay by each other for me?”

The men looked at one another and then back to her. She lifted and moved to the bottom of the bed while they scooted next to each other. Their beautiful bodies kept her fascinated. Where Connor was



so wide and thick muscled, Channing was not only wide, but sculpted and lean. She didn't want to stop taking in what so freely lay before her. They wanted to spend the rest of their lives with her. Why couldn't she just give in and try? Why? Because she knew if she grew any more attached, she'd die inside if one of them left or hurt her.

Lowering herself, Melissa slid her hands along the inside of each one of their inner calves. Both of their legs flexed under her touch. She got inches from where their bodies almost touched and inhaled their two different scents, deeply. Where Channing had more of a sweet smell, Connor held more of an erotic scent. Together, they were paradise.

Melissa took her time nibbling her way up, back and forth between them. Music exploded from the living room, making her jump. The guys even bolted to a sitting position. She looked toward the door at the recognition of what was playing. The Bryan Adams song *Have You Ever Really Loved a Woman?* filled the room. Melissa giggled and turned to them.

"Who, may I ask, is that in the living room?"

Connor pulled her to lie back between them. "Londyn. He must know you're here. I don't think there's a more perfect time for this song to play than right now."

Melissa listened to the lyrics and smiled at them both. She eased back to the foot of the bed and crawled off. Cracking the door, she saw the same tattooed guy who brought her flowers. "Hey, Londyn, put that song on repeat for me, please." They smiled at each other, and she laughed when he winked. Maybe he wasn't so bad. There was something about him that she liked.

Melissa motioned for Channing with her finger. "This is one of my favorite songs, and I can't dance. You made it easier for me the last time, and I really feel like having fun at the moment, so can you please come help me?"

"Anything you wish."

Closing her eyes, she listened to words. Channing's heat molded against her from behind, and she felt him grasp her nude hips. "Now, feel the music throughout your body. Let go, and move to the beat."

He began to sway her gently back and forth. Each string of the guitar coursed through her, stirring something deep inside. Before she knew it, her hips grew a mind of their own and began to rotate with every gentle move she made. Opening her eyes, she noticed Connor was leaning forward on the bed with his mouth parted.

"You said you couldn't dance. That is the sexiest, most beautiful thing I have ever witnessed in my life. Please don't stop."

Melissa laughed and could feel herself grow embarrassed. "I can't dance. It's Channing's doing, not mine."

"I'm not doing anything but holding your hips. You're a natural, love. But I wish to stay right where I am, if that's all right with you."

A knock on the bedroom door cut off what Channing was about to say next. Connor growled. "Hold on." He grabbed his boxers and slid them on. Melissa didn't wait, she grabbed the first article of clothing she could find, which happened to be one of Connor's T-shirts that was sitting folded on top of the dresser. She quickly pulled it on, happy it went all the way down to her knees.

She almost didn't hear what Londyn's hushed words were saying. "I told her to leave, but she won't go. She said she was going to break the windows out of your truck if you didn't come out and talk to her."

"Tell her to give me a few minutes. And make her wait outside."

Sickness flipped Melissa's stomach. She didn't hesitate. Grabbing her panties and jeans, she put them on as fast as she could.

"Connor, what's going on?" Channing's voice even sounded uneasy.

"Nothing. I'll explain when I get back in."

Nope, Melissa was not going to stick around to find out. If she knew anything about women, she knew this one obviously had feelings for him. And from the story of his past, she knew that he didn't have a sister, so she was betting this was a girlfriend or lover.

"Channing, will you take me back to Julie's?" His eyes grew big as he pulled his shirt down over his pants.

"No, don't leave. Please." Connor rushed forward, nearly stumbling on the jeans he was putting on. "It was before I found you. Since then, I haven't left your side. There's been no one else. Let me get rid of her real quick, and then we can continue."

"But you've known about this pull we've had for weeks. You're telling me you haven't seen your *girlfriend* in all of that time?"

"Fiancée, honey. And I saw him last week, if you really want to know."

Melissa spun around. Her eyes connected with the most startling pair of violet she'd ever seen. For what felt like minutes, she couldn't move. The blonde was just as breathtakingly beautiful as her friend Sarah. Bile rose to her throat against the woman's words.

"Fiancée?" She looked at Connor, shocked.

"Ex! I broke things off before I went to the island. And that's a damn lie, Michelle, and you know it. I haven't seen you in weeks."

Melissa shook her head against the confusion she felt. Her mouth opened as she raised her hand to stop their arguing. No thoughts were getting through. She felt lightheaded against the jumble of emotions pouring through her.

"Mel, listen to me. I love you. No one else."

"Yeah, didn't you use to tell me the same thing? *Oh, I love you Michelle. There's no one else, but you.* I can't believe you're doing this to us, Connor. Make the girl go, and we can pick up where we left off. I can understand you have cold feet. We'll pretend this never happened."

"Listen to me, Michelle. I said it was over weeks ago, and I meant it. I'm not having cold feet. I should have never asked you to marry me to begin with."

"Then why did you!"

"I never thought I'd find the one."

Melissa felt panicked. She had to get out of here. “Channing, please.” She begged him with her eyes. If she didn’t escape soon, there was no telling what would happen. Between her mouth and her uncontrollable outbursts, there was only so much she could take.

“Connor, give me your keys.” Channing held out his hand, but never took his eyes off of Mel.

“But I don’t want her to leave. Melissa, please. Just let me explain.”

“There’s no need, Connor. I understand it was before, but I just need time to think. I shouldn’t have come. I don’t know what I was thinking.”

Melissa rushed out of the room and headed for the front door. Large arms wrapped around her waist, pulling her up off the ground. Her back molded to Connor’s chest as he held her to him.

“Don’t say you regret coming here. God, I would do anything for you. Don’t let what she says make you leave. That’s what she wants. Just stay with me and Channing.”

He spun her around in his arms, making her face to face with him. “Connor, you were engaged. Whether you think that’s a big deal or not, it says a lot to me. Marriage is such a big step. You can’t tell me you didn’t feel something for her or else you wouldn’t have slipped a ring on her finger.”

“I did feel something, but nothing like what I have with you. I thought she was different, but she turned out to be a stranger once the ring went on. She wasn’t who I thought she was. That’s why I ended it.”

“Connor, I don’t know. There’s so much I need to think over. I’m not sure I can do this.” Why did this keep happening? Her darkest fears surfaced, and she couldn’t help but feel trapped in his arms. An ex-fiancée should have been one of the first things he should have mentioned whenever he knew they were meant to be mated.

“No! I’m not letting you leave. We can do this. There’s nothing to think about.”

Panic registered across his features, and the tone of his voice made her jump. "Connor, put her down right now." Channing was at their side before she knew where he'd come from.

"No, she can't leave. I have to make this right. She can't go until I do that."

"I said put her down. I won't tell you again. You're scaring her. Can't you feel it? You're making things worse. Now give her to me."

"God, what have you done to him?" Michelle walked over with a look of disgust on her face. "Connor, put her down and come with me. We'll leave here and talk. I know we can get past this."

"Get out, Michelle! I don't love you or want to be with you." Connor growled toward her and turned back to Melissa. "Please, I love *you*. Don't leave."

The blonde threw her ring at them and slammed the front door shut on her way out. Melissa pushed against Connor's chest. "Why didn't you tell me this before?"

"I don't know. Michelle was the last thing on my mind. From the first moment I saw you, no one else has mattered. God, I never thought I'd find a mate. Some of us never do. She was just a companion, someone I thought I could love if I tried hard enough. But toward the end, she changed into a horrible person. I didn't know her at all. Me, you, and Channing – this was meant to be. Stop running and give this a chance."

The all-too-familiar aching pushed against her insides. "I have to go, Connor."

A tear slid down his cheek as Channing pulled her from his arms. After a bit of force on Channing's part, he finally let her go. Londyn was sitting at the table. She couldn't read his expression. It looked to be a cross between shock and sadness. He didn't say a word as Channing took the keys from Connor and led Melissa out of the door. They walked to the truck in silence.

When the engine started, he turned toward her. "You have to know how hard this is for us. Connor loves you very much, as do I. I

know you need time, and I understand that. But as for Connor, it's harder for him. He's used to protecting, and with you, he can't really do that. Do you understand?"

"Yes." Melissa looked out of the window as he pulled out of the parking lot. Thoughts obsessively ran through her head to the point that she thought she could be losing her mind. Just knowing how much pain they were all going through made her conflicted. She knew she needed a lot more time, but how could she do that and not make them hurt in the process? Only one thing came to her mind. She needed to stay away from them until she decided.

After a few minutes, the truck pulled in front of Julie's building. She turned to look at Channing's sad face. "I'm sorry. Please tell Connor I won't hurt him anymore."

"I'll tell him, but I think you not being there *is* hurting him more."

Melissa released the seatbelt and climbed over to sit on Channing's lap. Normally she would never do anything like this, but the need to be close to him made her not think about how ridiculous she must look. "I can't be with you both until I know that's what I want. And truthfully, after what I just learned, I'm not sure that's possible. He should have told me, Channing. What if there's something else? Are you not telling me something I should know?"

"No. I haven't been with anyone but you in years. And you're right, he should have said something. But try to look at this from his side, too. He loves you. This pull has us all going crazy. Also, think about this: You wanted him to tell you about almost getting married, but there's something you haven't told him, either."

Melissa gasped. "I've never hidden anything from him. What could be so important that I've neglected to tell him?"

"Maybe the fact that you play a game in which men play a major role."

She could feel her eyes go wide. "Bets."

"Yes, Bets. Don't you think he deserves to know about that?"

"Yes." She grew quiet, feeling like a complete hypocrite. It could be possible that he'd forgotten to mention the fiancée. Hell, they hardly had spent any time together. And wasn't that conversation meant for people who knew each other a lot more? Even as she knew this, she also knew that they weren't going through the typical, everyday relationship. Shit. Everything between them was going so fast. Her head was spinning at trying to process the details.

"I need time to think. How do I get a hold of you?"

Channing looked deeply into her eyes. "I'm going to make you memorize my number. Will you allow me to do that?"

"Yes." The light blue eyes sucked her in, and she allowed it. The number he gave her soaked into her memory like a sponge. She could hear herself repeating it over and over in her mind.

"Got it. I'll call you if I need anything. Please don't forget to tell Connor I'm sorry."

"I won't. Here, let me walk you to the door."

He easily lifted her down. Melissa wasn't sure why, but she wasn't very comfortable coming back to Julie's home. Maybe it was because her men wouldn't be here, but she wasn't sure. They walked up the stairs, and she retrieved her key from her jeans pocket.

Channing's lips eased into hers. Tightly, his arms pulled her body into his. The breath left her lungs at the taste of him. She clung to him like her life depended upon it. She didn't want to let go. Just the thought that he was leaving her made the pain return.

"God, would you both like a room? My neighbors do not need a free show."

Melissa reluctantly pulled her lips back. Gripping to the back of Channing's shirt, she tried to catch her breath. His forehead rested against hers. "You don't want this. I can feel it. Come back. We'll leave right now, and you and Connor can get everything out of the way. Then we can move forward. Don't think, Melissa. Just come with me."

“Nope, she’s staying here. She needs time. Why is it impossible for men to understand that rushing isn’t going to solve all the problems?”

“She’s right. I need time.” Melissa nearly had to pry her fingers from his shirt. Turning to face Julie, her heart dropped at seeing her friend with a drink in her hand. She turned back to Channing. “I’ll call you if I need anything. I’m sorry. Don’t forget to tell Connor.”

Her body leaned toward his, but she made herself step back into the apartment. Julie went and sat down in front of the television, continuing to drink her beer. Looking back at Channing, she kissed her finger and pressed it against his lips. He smiled and turned toward the steps. Shutting the door as fast as she could, she could feel herself sliding down the cold metal of the door. The room was spinning. The further away she knew he got, the more the agony swelled in her chest.

“Whoa, what in the hell is wrong?” Julie rushed to her side while Melissa pushed her palms to the floor to stop the movement. “Mel, talk to me. You’re really pale right now. You don’t look good at all. Should I call him back?”

“No, I’ll be fine. Give me a few minutes.” Even though she said the words, she didn’t mean them. Yes, she wanted him back.

Pushing herself to her feet, Melissa made it the couch. Distance, that’s what she needed until she figured out what she wanted. She couldn’t continue to go through this each time one of them left her side.

“Beer?”

“No. I’m not even going to ask what you’re doing drinking already.”

“Good, and I won’t ask why you’re wearing a man’s shirt or why you have a hickey on your neck.”

Melissa’s hand slapped to cover where she knew she’d been bit. Channing! Damn it! She got up and raced the restroom. As long as it looked like a bruise and not a puncture wound, she would be okay.



Stopping in front of the mirror, she cried out. It wasn't a bite — there was no sign of one of those—it was a damn hickey! That shit was not going to fly in the future.

Julie laughed behind her. “I see you're dating a vampire. Nice. I used to date one myself. Makeup does not cover those things.”

“Vampire?” Melissa felt as though the floor dropped from beneath her.

“Yeah, that's what I call the guys who think they need to suck all over your neck and mark you so other men won't take notice. Freaking vampires are everywhere.”

“Oh.” Letting out a sigh of relief, Melissa pulled her long hair over her shoulders. That was a close one. Too close. She didn't even want to imagine what would happen if Julie knew about the world that was hidden from everyone. It was better if she never found out. And she was willing to do whatever it took to keep her friend safe.

## Chapter 13

Melissa groaned as red and blue lights flashed behind her. She'd barely made it into Corpus, and she was already getting a ticket. What the hell! She wasn't going but three miles over the speed limit. All she wanted was to bring her truck back to Julie's so she could have a vehicle.

She'd managed to keep her and Julie in a bubble for the last two weeks. Convincing her friend to call off Bets for two weekends in a row wasn't hard, but getting her to slow down on the drinking was another story entirely.

As the officer approached, she groaned. She knew who he was. Melissa had only seen him a few times, but no one could forget Ayden. His good looks could make any girl drop to their knees and beg him to do things that would make even the wildest girl blush.

Rolling down her truck window, she raised one of her eyebrows at him. "Ayden, what can I do for you?"

"I need my man back. Until he can think straight, he's useless in his position. I would hate to have to replace him. He's the best. Can you please tell me why you're doing this? I understand you need time to think, but can't you do that closer to him? Hell, you haven't even called him or Channing. They're a mess without you."

Melissa took a ragged breath. "I'm not going back because you need Connor to do his job. I'm still not convinced that things will work out between the three of us."

"Well, you're sure as hell not going to find out by staying away from them."

"I know. I'm just—" Melissa paused.

"Scared?" Ayden finished. "Yeah, this can be a scary process. I ran, too, Melissa. I know what you're going through. But trust me, running doesn't accomplish anything. The bond wouldn't have mated you three if it wasn't beyond a doubt positive that you all were meant for each other. Take my advice. Stop hurting them and yourself. Go home, Melissa. Take your men and work things out. I promise you'll never be happier. If I'm wrong, you have my permission to take a bat to me. I won't even move."

"That's not funny." Melissa tried not to smile, but his handsome face made it impossible.

"I'm not joking. I'm dead serious. You have nothing to worry about and neither will I. Go get your men, and take them back to the island." Ayden stepped forward, inhaled deeply, smiled, and took a step back. "Congratulations, and have a good day, Melissa."

Confused, she unbuckled and hung out of the window after his retreating form. "Congratulations for what?"

"Bye, Melissa."

He got in his car and took off. Shaking her head, she buckled back up and put the truck in drive. "Whatever. I don't have time for riddles." Turning up the radio, she battled the emotions his words stirred. If she got in the right lane, she could exit and go to the apartment. No. She looked back toward the busy traffic ahead of her.

"Don't do it, Mel. Don't do it. Fuck!" She barely made the exit, nearly taking out a small car in the process. "This won't work. It won't." Even talking to herself, she wasn't sure whether or not she believed it. Damn Ayden! She was doing so well at distancing herself. Shit, she'd ruined it now. She knew she needed to go and see them. Just knowing how bad her men could possibly be caused guilt to eat at her insides.

Turning into the complex, Connor's truck and Channing's Mercedes were both there. The beat of her heart shook her whole body. Melissa parked her truck and slowly walked to the door. Music poured from inside. The lyrics to the sad song made her stomach

twist. This probably wasn't such a good idea. Things had to be worse than she thought.

Raising her hand, she knocked as soft as she could. If they didn't answer, she'd run like hell and pretend she was never here. Next time, she'd call. That's what she should have done in the first place.

Channing opened the door, a look of shock quickly passing over his face. Dark circles were etched under his eyes. He looked like hell. Tears came to her eyes at how bad off things truly were.

"Channing?"

Arms wrapped around her, pulling her close and tight against his body. His cheek was freezing cold pressed against hers. "Are you okay? Where's Connor?"

"He's in his bed. I don't think he's left it for days. Hell, I don't know anything anymore. Just let me hold you."

"Can you at least take me to the music so I can turn it off?"

"Connor doesn't want it off. He's not well. I'm not so sure you should be here until you make up your mind. I don't think he can stomach you leaving again. Hell, I don't think I can take seeing him go through that."

Melissa wiggled from his arms and walked to the radio. Pushing the stop button, she crossed her arms over her chest, and faced the direction of his room.

"Channing! I said leave it on, damn it! We've been over this repeatedly." Connor came barreling out of the room, nearly knocking the door off the hinges. He stopped motionless the moment he saw her. His heavy pants shook his upper chest. "Melissa? You came back?"

She held up her hand when he took a step in her direction. "Connor, what do you think you're doing?"

"What do you mean?"

Melissa waved her arms around wildly. "This music, and look at the trash. I've never seen so many to-go boxes in my life. And this. Soda cans! Everywhere."

He looked down to the ground. "I don't know. I..."

"I'll tell you what you're going to do." He looked up at her. Melissa held in her smile. God, what was she doing? She didn't have a clue, but she knew she couldn't let this continue, and hell, she needed them as much as they needed her. She wasn't going to mention that she noticed herself wearing two completely different color socks when she climbed into her truck.

Connor interrupted her thoughts. "Tell me what to do. Anything."

"You're going to clean up this mess. Then, you're both going to pack and come home with me."

Connor had her in his arms before she could blink. "Oh, thank God. Thank you, baby. I promise you won't regret this. I love you." Lips crushed into hers only to jerk back upon impact. His eyes stared up at her wildly. "Channing, take her."

"What's wrong?" Confused, Melissa looked back and forth between the men.

Channing's arms were pulling her back before she could figure out what her other mate was upset about. Connor stepped forward, closing his eyes as he approached.

"Just smell her. I know I can probably detect better than you, but -" He again ran his fingers through his hair. "Just take in her scent."

Channing's face buried in her neck, and she pulled back. "Enough of this. What in the hell is going on?"

Wide blue eyes looked at her. "No bets?"

Appalled, her jaw dropped. "Of course not! Now let me down!" Anger flared through her. "I haven't been with another man besides the two of you for almost two months. If you're both saying you smell someone else on me, then the only person that I've come in contact with is Ayden. He pulled me over right before I came here."

"Bets? What in the hell are you talking about, Channing?"

Melissa closed her eyes. This was not how she pictured this going. "My friends and I used to bet on men. I haven't done that since a few weeks before I met Channing."

“What exactly did you bet they could do?”

“Leave with me.” Her eyes stared deeply into Connor’s. Not once did she break their contact. His hand pressed against his chest, and she felt his pain. “But that was in the past. I’ve let yours go. Are you willing to do the same for me?”

“Of course. I’m just not sure how to take all of this. You bet your friends you could...” He paused. “Fuck men?”

“Thanks for putting it so bluntly, Connor. I’ve never been more embarrassed about what I’ve done than in this moment right now. I’m outta here.”

Melissa spun around and nearly ran into Channing. “Don’t go. He didn’t mean it like it sounded. Did you, Connor?” Channing said the last sentence angrily. She turned around to look at him.

“No. I told you, I’m trying to understand. It’s not very easy. Just thinking about another man touching you, tasting you! It makes my fucking blood boil. You were meant to be cherished, Melissa.”

“I’m not a saint, Connor. I never have been. Either you accept it or not. When I walk out this door, you can come with me and leave it alone, or you can stay here. But this is the last time we talk about it. I’m willing to leave Michelle, here, in the past. Are you willing to leave Bets?”

“Yes.” There was no hesitation in his response, but she could still see how much it hurt him.

“Both of you meet me at the house. I’m assuming you’re going to want to bring your vehicles.”

“We’ll be there shortly.” Channing stepped to the side and let her pass. She continued forward without looking back. When she reached the outside, she took a deep breath. Damn, she hoped she was doing the right thing.

## Chapter 14

Connor rubbed his eyes, angrily. "You knew about these bets? Why in the hell didn't you tell me before now?"

"It wasn't my place to say anything. I knew she hadn't been with another man, but I had to make sure. That's the only reason I asked. Connor, she doesn't know yet. We can't tell her. Remember how I told you she needed to feel in control? If we take away from her finding out on her own, she's going to take it hard. We have to pretend not to know. At least until afterward."

"I can't believe this! Channing, we're going to have a child. A piece of the woman we love, in the flesh. It doesn't get more perfect than this. God, I never thought I'd see the day. If Ayden ran into her, he should know. I need to call him and make sure no one says anything. Get your things. I want to get to her as soon as possible."

Connor grabbed his phone and rushed to his room. With one hand he grabbed his bag and began tossing as many articles of clothing in as he could get.

"Ayden! You saw Melissa?"

"Well, hello to you, too. You sound better than the last time I talked to you. So, she stopped by, did she?"

"Yes, Channing and I are moving back to the house. Listen, I know you had to have sensed she's pregnant. You didn't say anything to anyone, did you?"

"Of course not. I did tell her congrats, but I don't think she knew what I was talking about. Why?"

“We don’t think she should know yet. Melissa likes to feel in control. If we told her, she’d lose it. She needs to find out on her own.”

“Ah, I get it. Okay, I’ll make sure no one says anything if they run into you. We’ve done this before.”

“Sounds great. Thank you, Ayden. I know she came here because of you. I owe you one.”

His Alpha laughed. “No, I think she would have anyway. I just gave her an extra push. Now that you’re better, you know I need you back, right?”

“Just name it, and I’ve got you covered.”

“Good, there are a few things. Call me tonight, and we’ll go over everything. I’m on patrol right now, so I can’t get into the details. Congratulations on becoming a father. Tell Channing I said so, too. It can only be one of yours, but when you’re in the se types of relationships, it’s more than that. The child and the mother become your main priority. You both are going to be great fathers.”

“Thanks, boss.”

“You’re welcome. I’ll talk to you later, Connor.”

Ayden hung up the phone, and warmth settled throughout his body. This was such good news. Excitement drove him to gather everything faster. He raced from the room to see Channing waiting for him. He smiled and gestured for the door. “Let’s go home.”

“Yes, home. “

They both walked outside and got in their vehicles. It didn’t take long for Connor to get lost in his thoughts concerning Melissa and their child. Channing and he were going to be the best fathers, and damn, he really wanted to be considered her husband.

Connor chewed on his bottom lip while he tried to think of how to break that big news. There was no way she would consent to marry him or Channing with everything that was going on. Once she found out she was pregnant, it was only going to be worse. Time was all he



needed. He could wait. No matter how long it took. As long as he had Melissa close to his side and she was safe, he'd be content.

The island came into view, and he rolled down his window, taking in the salty sea breeze. Damn, he'd missed being so close to the beach. When he'd meant home, he was serious. Since leaving New Orleans, nothing had ever felt this close to home.

Channing followed close behind him. When he pulled in front of the house, Channing pulled in the drive. Melissa's truck sat in her usual spot. It felt good. Today couldn't get better.

Grabbing his bag, Connor hopped out and rushed up the stairs. Red hair blew against the breeze. Melissa looked like an angel as she held on to the railing of the deck and stared out toward the water. He'd seen this repeatedly while watching her, and it affected him the same way every time. His chest tightened with love. She turned and flashed him a bright smile.

"I missed this," she said softly. "Being home, that is. I never thought I'd miss the sound of the waves crashing against the shore. The sound soothes me."

"I missed you."

Connor walked forward and pulled her into his arms. Her scent swept over him, and he closed his eyes, basking in the new fragrance caused by her pregnancy. "May I kiss you?"

Melissa's hands cupped his cheeks. Connor opened his eyes and peered into her deep green depths. "Yes. I think I would like that very much."

Silk ran through his fingers as he slid his hand up the back of her neck and cradled her head. Melissa's soft curves leaned into his body. Wrapping his arm around her waist, he pulled her closer. "A part of me was missing while you were gone. I was lost without you."

The fullness of her lips brushed against his. "I was lost, too. No matter how much I tried to convince myself that I was better off without you or Channing in my life, I knew it was a lie. Without the

both of you, my heart would be incomplete. Do you really think this will work, Connor?"

"I know it will."

"So do I." Channing walked up to them, leaning against the railing. He took in the ocean and then turned to them smiling. "Feels good to be back."

"Yes, let's go inside and put your things up." Melissa tugged on his arm.

"First, I want my kiss." Connor pulled her face back to his and swept his tongue over her lips. She opened for him beautifully. Heat ignited as their tongue's massaged into each other. Her taste was so sweet against his tongue. He wanted more, to taste her forever.

Channing pulled him in the direction of the front door, and he picked her up and followed, never breaking his lips from hers. Keys jingled, and he could feel Melissa move in his arms as she handed them over. Once Channing took them, she wrapped her arms around Connor's neck and pulled him closer.

"Jesus. I pray my kiss is just as passionate. You both are making it extremely difficult to open this door. My hands are shaking."

Once again, Connor was pulled forward. He walked inside and opened his eyes, heading for the bedroom. He could hear Channing following. Melissa broke her lips from his and looked up behind him.

"Wait. Channing, when was the last time you, you know, bit someone."

Connor settled her on the bed, and Channing laughed and sat down. "Connor? How long ago was it?"

He shrugged. "Hell, four or five days ago? I don't remember?"

Melissa's mouth dropped as she looked back and forth between him. "You mean, you fed from Connor?"

"He won't go to anyone else. I tried to tell him that you probably wouldn't get mad, but he wouldn't, and I couldn't let him get any sicker than he already was. It wasn't so bad."

"Channing, why didn't you come to me? I would have let you take whatever you needed. I didn't know you were sick. God, what have I done?"

"Melissa, you haven't done anything. It was my choice. Don't blame yourself."

Connor watched as she crawled in Channing's lap and wrapped her legs around his waist. "Thank you. Even though it was a completely stupid, romantic, idiotic thing to do. Thank you. I don't think you know how much that means to me." Her hands reached to cup his face. "Gosh, you're so cold. Please." She moved her hair and exposed her neck. "Do it, Channing. Believe it or not, I've dreamed about this constantly. I *need* you to do this."

Connor watched Channing's eyes flash a vibrant blue. The shaking of his body was visible even from the few feet that separated them.

"Wait. Channing, maybe you should take from me first. It's been a while. Don't you think maybe we should let Melissa go second? We wouldn't want anything to accidentally happen."

The vampire nodded at him frantically. "Excellent idea. I think you couldn't be more right, Connor."

Melissa eased from his lap and Connor and Channing met in the middle of the bed. "Just like before. I'll bite your forearm. I'll only take from Melissa's neck."

Connor held out his arm to Channing.

"Wait!" Melissa crawled to them. "Doesn't the legends say a person has to be aroused or something? Does that apply to real life? I don't want it to hurt him."

"It only hurts a little. It's okay, baby. There's no need to worry."

"No, I don't want you in pain. Kiss me while he does it. Maybe that will help."

"I'm not going to turn down that." Connor laughed and patted his lap. Melissa settled against him, and immediately she began kissing him. He felt her push him to the bed while her weight settled on top of

his body. Heat from her pussy rubbed against the hardness of his cock. Even through his jeans he could feel her warmth.

Fangs pieced his arm, barely registering in his lustful stupor. All he knew was Melissa, and with the way her eyes widened, he knew she could feel exactly what he was experiencing. Everything faded to the background. Fingers eased up the bottom of his shirt and proceeded up his chest. Using his free arm, Connor pulled the shirt over his head and left it to rest on the upper part of his arm that Channing was feeding from. Melissa pulled hers over her head and unclasped her bra. Seeing her breasts so close, he lifted his head and sucked her nipple into his mouth. Pleasure from Channing's bite continued to race through his body.

This was so different from the last time the vampire had fed from him. Before, the puncturing had been painful, and what followed hadn't been any better. But now all he felt was an overpowering amount of pleasure. Connor never knew it could be like this. No wonder Melissa didn't mind. Hell, he could get used to this. Channing could bite him whenever he wanted, as long as things continued like they were with Melissa involved.

Fingers pulled at the button of his jeans, and he lifted, helping her take them off. Damn, it had been too long. Connor couldn't think straight. Melissa's scent hit him hard as her arousal increased. "Channing, fuck, don't stop. Don't ever fucking stop."

The sight of Melissa pulling off her jeans and panties had Connor reaching for her. He couldn't wait any longer. "Baby, come sit on my face. I need to taste you."

"No, I want to taste you first."

Connor groaned as her small hand wrapped around his thickness. Slowly, she stroked him from the base of his cock to his sensitive tip. Red hair spanned over his stomach as she lowered herself above him. Warmth from her tongue traced around the head, nearly causing him to bolt from the electrifying pleasure.

“Fuck.” Connor drew out the word while he battled to keep his eyes open. He wanted to see every movement her sweet lips made. Just the sight of her pink tongue made him harder. She moaned while she suctioned in more of his length.

Channing's lips broke from his arm. Deep pants came from beside him. “Damn, our bond is so much richer when we're all together. Melissa, move this way and let me touch you. “

Connor watched as she complied. The arch in her back as she raised her ass up in Channing's direction caused him to curse out loud. “God, you're beautiful. Channing?”

The vampire smiled at him, looking to know exactly what he wanted. Lips tightened around his cock and at the same time her fingers wrapped firmly around his thickness. Hell, he was in a shitload of trouble if she kept this up much longer.

\* \* \* \*

Channing took in Melissa's beautiful pussy. The wetness glistened and called to him. But he knew what needed to be done before he claimed her.

Using two of his fingers, he traced along her folds and pushed them deep inside of her. A cry came from her mouth as she leaned back, forcing him in more. When he withdrew, she made small sounds of protest. Leaning toward Connor, he slid the two fingers past his friend's lips.

Heat from Connor's mouth encircled him, but he kept his focus on Melissa's face. Her expression went from shock to acceptance in seconds as she moaned louder and pushed her ass back toward him.

“More,” Connor moaned.

Channing nodded and brought himself back to caress her wet slit. Once again, he slid inside of her, feeling her tightness grip around him like a glove. “Do you like that, Melissa?” Pushing against her G-spot, he heard her muffled answer of yes.

He held out his fingers to Connor, who sucked them back into his mouth. Channing couldn't help but watch the increased rhythm of Melissa's strokes progress as her lips met her hand.

"Channing, please. Trade me places. I can't take much more." Connor's voice shook as he watched the wolf's eyes flash with light only to quickly recede.

"Melissa, come to me."

Slowly, she took Connor's cock from her mouth and turned toward him. Her gaze never left his as she crawled forward on her knees. Channing felt himself sinking into deep green. She held him immobile with her beauty. He knew he'd always been able to do the same with people, but that was the vampire in him. For once, he felt on the other side, stuck and willing to do whatever she wanted.

"It's my turn." Melissa moved her hair to one side, exposing her neck.

"Are you sure that's what you want?"

"Yes." Her answer was so definite, he didn't hesitate. He spun her around and pressed her back against his chest.

"Connor."

His friend moved in. Connor's face was buried in Melissa's pussy before he could position her head just right. Moans came from both of them while Channing kissed his way down the softness of her skin. There wasn't really a need for him to feed. The amount of blood he took in before had been more than enough. Connor said he didn't want him to stop, so he didn't until he knew he had to. But Melissa would definitely be desert. She was so sweet, so unbelievable mouthwatering that he couldn't resist.

Fangs came down, pressing against his bottom lip. Vibrations from her moaning throat sent waves of her excitement crashing into his senses. Sucking her skin into his mouth, he teased her with the slight penetration of his tips. Channing could feel her heart accelerate all through his body.

"Please don't tease me."

He laughed and pulled back, licking her neck. "You don't like to be teased, *mon amour*?"

"No. But two can play that game."

Melissa pulled away from him and lifted herself until she spun around. She straddled Connor's face and slowly eased her pussy to his mouth. Large hands engulfed the top of her thighs. The contrast was almost startling. Channing watched in awe as she faced him and gave him a mischievous smile.

"Now, you tell me how much you like to be teased."

She lowered herself and plunged Channing's hard cock deep into her mouth. His whole body jumped at the shock of pleasure she sent bursting through him. "*Fils d' un...*"

"English, Channing."

"I said son of a. I didn't get as far as saying bitch. Fuck. You're going to have to warn me next time you decide to do that, love."

Shit, he couldn't breathe. Blood poured into his mouth from the cuts on his lower lip. He hadn't been expecting that. The fangs would have retracted if he knew he would have ended up reacting the way he did.

Melissa's tongue swirled around this entire width while she made her way back up to the head of his cock. She raised and narrowed her eyes at him. He wasn't sure how to interpret her emotions or what she was thinking about, but it didn't last long. Her body went into spasms over Connor's face. Melissa's arms reached out to him, and Channing pulled her mouth to his.

Opening his eyes, he saw Connor's hands fly away from Melissa's hips, outward to the bed. Channing didn't think; he grabbed his friend's palms and felt as nearly every bone in his own fingers were crushed. With the strength the wolf held inside, he knew Connor was afraid of hurting her. With the new scent she carried due to pregnancy, her taste was only growing more overwhelming. The sample of her blood still coursed strongly through his body. He was

almost afraid to take in anymore. Not only was it rich, it was damn addicting.

How would they fair as time went on? Talking to Brandon would definitely come in handy. Evelyn was a lot further along than Melissa. He should know. Maybe the other vampire could give him some pointers on how to better cope with the changes. Channing knew he was going to need all the help he could get.

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Melissa felt herself lifted from Connor's face moments after she felt her release explode. Channing pulled her to straddle his waist while he leaned against the headboard of the bed. Turning to check on Connor, she noticed his whole body was shaking. He struggled to sit up behind her.

"What wrong? Connor, talk to me."

"Nothing's wrong, baby. I feel great. Too great, actually. I'm a little lightheaded from forgetting to breathe. I couldn't take in enough of you."

"Are you sure you're okay?"

"Yes, why?"

"My heart is racing." Melissa put her hand to her chest. "This is really weird how I can somewhat feel what you're feeling."

"Kiss me."

Leaning back, Melissa's mouth connected with Connor's. Channing lifted her, easing his thick cock into her wetness. At the taste sweeping through her mouth, she pulled back, feeling confused. With so many sensations pouring through her, she couldn't figure out what was different, but something was definitely off.

Slow thrusts pushed their way deeper, and again she took in the flavor of Connor's mouth. He didn't seem to want to stop kissing her. Her shoulder leaned into his chest as he cradled her neck. Melissa



reached down and began stroking his cock to Channing's slow rhythm.

"Connor, put your legs over mine and scoot closer. I don't want Melissa lying at such an odd angle. Her back looks arched a little too much. Maybe we should turn her around where she can lie against me."

Channing's voice brought her head up. "I'm fine. I mean, if Connor wants to come closer or you want to turn me, you can. But I'm not in any pain. I'm actually really comfortable like this." She paused. "What's different? Something feels off."

Neither man responded. Channing even stopped his thrusting and just stared at her. Melissa wiggled, making him continue. She ran her tongue over her lips and then swallowed a few times. "What is that?"

"What's what?"

"That taste? Is that me?"

"Not a clue what you're talking about." Connor looked at Channing and then back to her. He touched his mouth and remained silent.

"Forget it, I'm spinning around. I haven't forgotten about that bite."

Melissa lifted and turned, easing herself down Channing's cock. She didn't stop once he fully filled her. She rode him hard and fast. At the depth he reached, she wanted more.

"Fuck, slow down, Melissa." Hands gripped her hips, stopping her. A groan poured from her mouth. She didn't want to stop, ever. Primal lust ate at her insides. Every thought in her mind begged her to continue.

"Channing, let me go. I want more. God, you feel so good this way."

An arm wrapped around her chest, and Channing's hand gripped her shoulder. "There's no hurry. You want my bite, yes?"

"Yes."

“Then you need to slow. I’ll never get the chance if you continue to rush. I can’t even reach your neck.”

Connor sucked her nipple into his mouth, and Melissa wiggled against Channing’s restraint. The small movement brought a moan from her mouth. His cock eased into her slowly, at his own pace. Teeth pulled at her tight nubs. Connor took his turn going from one breast to the other. Tingling shot through her body.

With Melissa’s hips being held down by one arm and her chest being held immobile from the other, she felt her control slipping away. The panic hit her hard. For the first time, she was able to block it out. These were her men. She knew there was no reason for her to worry.

Connor eased Channing’s legs apart and spread hers wide. Resting her back against Channing’s chest, she watched Connor wedge his shoulders between her thighs. Flicks of his tongue brushed across her clit, and Melissa screamed her orgasm through. Just the thought of him so close to where Channing penetrated her turned her on more than she would have ever thought.

“Fuck, you taste so good. I’m never going to stop licking your pussy.”

Fangs sunk into her neck, and her body convulsed with rapture. Connor sucked her clit into his mouth and used his fingers to spread her folds wider as Channing plunged into her hard. Over and over, he thrust, pushing deeper each time.

“Yes, oh God, don’t stop!”

Melissa could hear the heaviness that coated her words. Her speech was drawled out and hoarse from all of her yelling. After a minute of euphoria, lips broke from her throat. Channing groaned loudly behind her. Heat shot into her core of her pussy. Seeing them just the way they were, it was like an epiphany. Looking into Connor’s face, she’d never felt so safe or positive in life. Their relationship would work. It had to.

“Channing, hand her to me.”

Like she weighed nothing, Melissa was lifted and passed to Connor. He eased his cock inside of her, and Melissa's breasts rested against his chest. Rotating her hips, she took control.

"That's right, baby. Show me how you want it." Connor tongue filled her mouth, and she couldn't get over the surprise. The taste of her release hit Melissa hard. Something was definitely different about it, but she wasn't sure what. How she even knew the flavor was unusual baffled her. Pushing the thoughts away, she put her weight down on her knees and began to ride him hard and fast.

"Damn, you feel so good. You don't know how much I love you."

Melissa slowed and looked into his eyes. "Forever?"

His smile warmed her heart. "I'll love you forever and eternity."

Connor gently placed her on her back and lifted her knee to rest over his arm. "Nothing and no one will take you away from us." Inches filled her until she was sure he couldn't go any further.

"You won't ever leave?"

"Never."

His lips lowered, and she met him halfway, drinking him in greedily. Connor's cock pushed into her and stopped halfway, barely proceeding. She could feel her nails digging into his back. After countless minutes of building up her orgasm by hardly entering her, she wrapped her legs around him and pulled him forward.

"Channing." Connor whispered the words and looked over.

Turning her head, she saw bright white teeth flash. "My honor."

"Wait, what are you going to do?"

Melissa's legs were scooped up by one of Channing's arms as he settled himself next to them. She looked at her knees which were level with her face. With her ass in the air, Connor took his time, further tormenting her with his repeated halfway thrusts.

"I want to feel all of you. No more teasing, Connor."

"Oh, I'm not teasing. Would you like me to show you how that would feel?"

Melissa could feel him beginning to withdraw his cock . Panic swept through her. “No, don’t stop. Connor, please.”

Channing used his free hand and reached down, rubbing over her clit. Thickness pushed deeper into her pussy, and she moaned at the combination of sensations both men were filling her with.

“Fuck, now that’s a beautiful sight, is it not?”

Connor pushed deeper and faster. “The prettiest I’ve ever seen. Damn it, Channing. You’re doing that on purpose.”

He laughed. “Doing what?”

“Breaking my concentration so I lose control and give her what she wants.”

“How can I not? She pulls at my heart. Of course I want her to have her way. I don’t like to hear her beg.”

Fingers pulled at the side of one of Melissa’s folds, and she moaned as Connor began to pick up his pace. “You’re right, I’m having a hell of a time. Place her legs over my shoulders. You still want it hard and fast, baby? Say the words, and it’s yours.”

“Please!”

“But not too hard, right?” Melissa looked at Channing as he awaited Connor’s answer.

“I won’t hurt her. I promise.”

Something passed between the two men, and Melissa kept quiet as she studied them. With as difficult as it was to focus, she didn’t miss the silent communication they seemed to be having. Channing nodded and placed her legs on Connor. He leaned forward and thrust into her with enough force to cause her breast to bounce.

“Faster,” she moaned.

Connor plunged into her again, and she grasped onto Channing’s arm. He wrapped his fingers around her forearm and leaned down to her face. “Tell us how much you want us to stay, Melissa. Let us bask in the words we’ve desperately been waiting weeks to hear.”

“I don’t want either of you to ever leave me.”

The slapping of her and Connor's skin bounced off the walls as he went faster. "Say it again. Say it louder."

Tightening in Melissa's lower stomach had her screaming for them to stay. She clutched to Channing while his face rubbed against the side of hers. Connor let out a deafening groan and warmth coated her insides.

"Do you love us, Melissa?"

She looked up into Connor's sweaty face. "Yes, I do. I love you both very much."

The words felt so powerful, so true coming from her lips. But she couldn't deny how scared she felt, either. Now that her feelings were exposed and she'd admitted them out loud, there was no turning back. This was it. This was her life, and her men were here to stay.

## Chapter 15

Melissa sat staring at her computer screen in a daze. The last two weeks had been perfect. She'd never have imagined life could be this way. The mornings they sat on the porch, all cuddling under a blanket on the new bench swing Channing bought. She was so glad she had someone to finally share it with. Dinner was usually made by the time she'd return from work. Things were unbelievable.

"What are you all smiles about?"

Turning, Melissa gasped. "Ev, what are you doing in the office? I haven't seen you here in weeks."

"Oh, you know. Just thought I'd come and see how you were doing."

Melissa smiled and stood, placing her palm against the tiny bump of Evelyn's stomach. "I'm great. How are you feeling?"

"Tired, mostly. But I just got my appetite back with a vengeance, so you can say I've been eating more than the men. Brandon makes sure there's always something for me to snack on. I swear, that man is a godsend. So, talk to me? I hear you've pretty much got things settled with your men."

Melissa laughed. "We're very happy. I never knew it could be like this." Heat rose to cheeks as she looked down.

"Yes, it is amazing. So, I came to ask you a question." Evelyn took a seat at one of the chairs across from the desk. Seeing the weird look on her friend's face, Melissa followed suit.

"What is it?"

Evelyn cleared her throat. "I'm going to be planning a baby shower for Nicole in a few weeks, and I wanted to know if you would

help me organize it. Sarah's already agreed to help, but I wanted to ask you, too."

Melissa stiffened. "Nicole's pregnant? No one's mentioned that to me."

"It's to stay strictly within pack. But yes, she's only got another month or so, left."

"But Ev, I don't really know anything about babies. Don't get me wrong, I'd love to help. But I'm not sure how much good I'll do."

Bubbly laughter filled the room. "You'll be great. Just think of it as insight for whenever you decide to get pregnant."

"Me?" Melissa's brain paused. Fear slammed into her mind, nearly giving her mental whiplash. *Pregnant! Shit, how long has it been since I'd had my period? Shit! Shit! Shit!*

"Mel, are you okay? You're extremely pale."

"Oh shit, Evelyn. I need to go."

Melissa hadn't even realized she'd stood until she took a step forward. Thinking proved impossible. It wasn't seconds before her cell phone rang. Evelyn just continued to stare at her startled and speechless.

"Hello."

"What's wrong? You're upset."

Melissa looked down at her desk. Damn it. She should have remembered Connor would be the first to pick up on her anxieties. "Nothing's wrong. I'm just sitting here talking to Ev about Nicole's baby shower. I'll be home shortly."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes, I'm fine. I'll see you at home. I love you."

Melissa hung up the phone and looked back to Evelyn. "I think I need a test."

"Oh, shit." Evelyn stood and smiled brightly. "This is great news, Mel! Give me five minutes. I'll run across the street and go get you one."

Her friend was gone before Melissa could blink. She sunk to her chair and began adding up the dates. By the third time, she was sure her eyes were about to pop from her head. Almost two weeks late. How could she have missed that!

“Mel, let’s go.”

Evelyn waved at her furiously from next to the restroom door. Looking around paranoid, she noticed the office was pretty empty except for the receptionist, who was on the phone. Time seemed to slow down as she approached. Fuck, she hoped she didn’t pass out.

“Call me if you need anything. I bought three different ones just in case you didn’t trust the first two. Well, I didn’t anyway. Here.”

Melissa took the bag and slowly walked into the restroom, locking the door. She had to calm herself down before she got another call. Fuck! Was this happening so soon?

Pulling out the first box, she opened it and read the instructions. By the third time, she shook her head and followed everything to the letter. Placing the white plastic test on the flat surface of the sink, she fixed her pantyhose and stared down. *One pink line...* The color edged slowly across the plastic window. *Two...holy hell!*

“Evelyn!” Melissa opened the door and thrust the test forward. “That’s not what I think it is, is it?”

“Mel,” Evelyn squealed excitedly. “Congrats! I’m so happy for you.”

“Congrats,” Melissa whispered. The word hit her like a tsunami. Ayden had said congratulations. “Evelyn, this might sound stupid, but do wolves or vampires detect pregnancy?”

“Both. Hell, Stephen knew before anyone. Brandon picked it up almost just as fast. They’re better than tests if you ask me.”

“So Connor and Channing probably already know.”

“Yeah, probably. But I think you need to look at it from their angle. They’re probably scared to mention it.”

Melissa felt a smile come to her face. “You’re probably right. It’s okay, I have an idea. I have to go. I’ll call you later.”



Running and grabbing her purse, she jogged to her truck and headed toward the first store she could find. This was going to be priceless. Her men, no doubt, were terrified for her to find out. She'd show them just how much she was committed to their life together. Sure, she was scared as hell. But knowing Connor and Channing were there for her one hundred percent made her calm.

Melissa had plenty of time to think over their future. Sure, a few weeks wasn't a lot of time. But with the unbreakable bond the three of them shared, nothing would separate them. Connor even took her to meet other bonded couples to prove that what he'd told her was the truth. She couldn't help feeling excited as she rushed through the store.

Looking down at the basket she pushed, Melissa frowned. "Damn, I should have grabbed two. Well, maybe not. I don't need everything right now."

Turning into the small baby section of the grocery store, she sighed. They were all going to have to take a trip to Corpus soon. The island didn't carry that much of a selection. Melissa looked at the bottles, pacifiers, baby food, and diapers. Then an outfit caught her attention. It was tiny. A little white onesie that read, "If you think I'm cute, you should see my dad." It was nothing a permanent marker couldn't take care of. She'd just add an S and make it *dads*.

Throwing a few packages of bottles, some pacifiers, a pack of infant diapers, and the outfit in the basket, she grabbed a blue gift bag and a permanent marker. As fast as she could, she headed toward the checkout line. She had everything she needed to surprise them.

It wasn't long before Melissa fixed the outfit and the gift bag. She was pulling down her road before she could process everything. Her head was spinning with anticipation. Connor was outside mowing the grass as she neared. She couldn't hold in her smile. Damn, he looked good pushing the mower without his shirt on.

Grabbing the bag, Melissa threw the truck in park and jumped out. He immediately cut off the noise as he waved to her. "Connor, come

inside for a little bit.” Melissa pounded up the stairs before he could catch up. Knowing her mate, she knew he would want to see what was in the bag, and she needed both of them to find out at the same time.

“What do you have?”

He raced after her, and Melissa laughed and went faster. Channing walked outside just as she reached the top of the deck. Connor was right behind her.

Placing the bag behind her back she walked backward until she reached the railing.

“What’s she hiding?” Channing looked over at Connor curiously.

“I don’t know, but I intend to find out. Baby, you want to share?”

“Well, if you insist.” Melissa reached inside the bag and then lifted an eyebrow at them as they stepped forward. “You know, it’s taken me some time to get used to the idea of what we share. But you both know I love you, right?”

“Of course.” Connor lifted his head, trying to peer into the bag.

“Then I have some news. And I’m not sure how you’re both going to take it, but truthfully, I couldn’t be happier.”

Melissa lifted the outfit and held the words for them to see. “You know, I had to make some adjustments with the lettering, but I think it’s perfect.”

Connor and Channing both beamed smiles at her. Connor rushed forward and gathered her in his arms, spinning her around. “I couldn’t wait for you to find out! God, it was killing me having to keep quiet. So, you’re happy? You’re not mad or upset?”

“Of course not!” Melissa laughed.

Channing took her from Connor and kissed her deeply. “You’re going to be a great mother. And I’m going to be the cool dad. Connor can be the enforcer.”

“Hey, now wait a minute.” Connor stepped forward and tilted his head at them. “I may be the enforcer of the pack, but here I’m the cool one.”

Melissa laughed and rolled her eyes. "I'm the enforcer, or haven't you both figured that out? Our child will be loved and have a very happy life. That's all that really matters. Now take me inside, and y'all can both show me again how much you love me. "

Channing lifted her higher in his arms and kissed her stomach. "Nice and slow. I think I'm going to like this."

Melissa pointed to her chest. "Enforcer, remember? And you both drive me crazy with going slow. I say passionate and fast."

Channing looked toward Connor, who smiled. "Oh we got this. Nice and slow, it is. Come on, Connor. I got your back and her hands."

Melissa wiggled in Channing's arms, pretending to pout. She smiled as a kiss was placed on her forehead. As long as she had both of her men, they could make love to her nice and slow, fast and passionate, or anyway they wanted. With both of them in her life, she knew things were going to be better than perfect. They were forever hers—Melissa's mates.

## THE END

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

I live in a small Texas town along the Gulf of Mexico. Family is everything to me. My mother always encouraged my reading growing up. Looking back, my earliest memories revolve around my grandmother, who was always glued to a book. Her passion for mystery is probably the reason I'm so comfortable around a police scanner. Hers was on twenty-four hours a day.

When I'm not writing, cooking, or brainstorming new ideas, you'll see me with a book in my hand. Briefly before I started writing, I was devouring a romance novel every day. For some reason, I couldn't get enough. My husband asked me the question that ultimately changed my life forever. "Why don't you try writing a book?"

At first, I laughed. Write a book? Who, me? Never having written a story in my life, I was intimidated. To satisfy my husband and to sate the curiosity that began to fester inside of me, I did. My first story was my husband's favorite. There was something that ultimately bothered me about it, though. I couldn't write a love scene to save my life. Not one that would fit inside of a "romance" book, anyway. It was way too graphic.

After doing research I came across the erotica genre and knew this is where I belonged. Details are important, and with my books, the more details during their "coupling," the better.

### *Also by Jennifer Salaiz*

*Passion Projected*

*Projected Pleasure*

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