

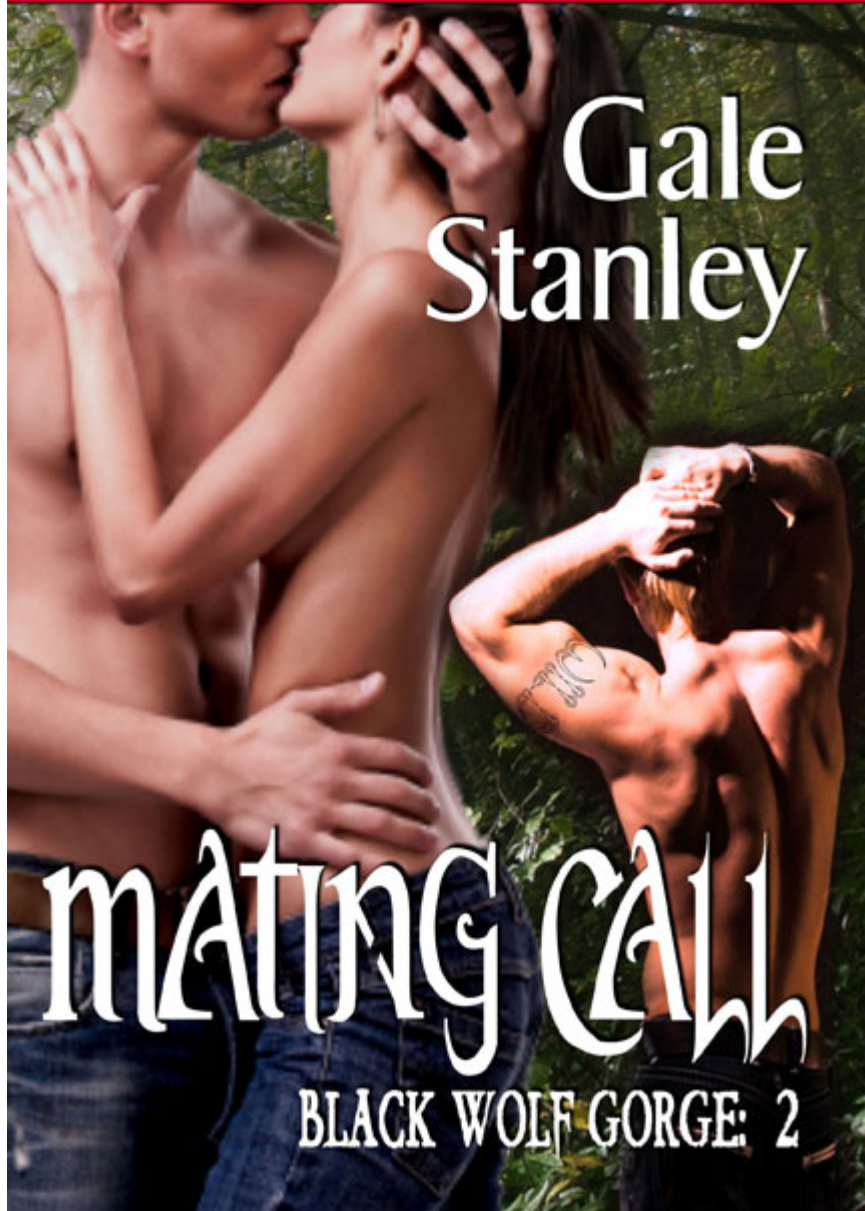
Siren Publishing

Ménage Àmour

Gale
Stanley

mating call

BLACK WOLF GORGE: 2



Black Wolf Gorge 2

Mating Call

Human contact is the last thing Sable wants, and the she-wolf lives wild to avoid any chance encounters. But when a hunter sees the beautiful woman transform into his quarry, she becomes fair game. Jude and his twin, Jonas, capture the feral creature and plan to tame the wild beast, but her mating frenzy ignites their lust and blurs the line between captor and captive.

The she-wolf can't deny her attraction to the brothers, and their passion creates a strong bond that none are willing to accept. Sable has no desire for a pair of human mates, but destiny steps in, and she finds herself mated to men who only think of her as an animal. Suddenly, she's in more danger than she thought possible, and the need to escape increases. But the bond between her and her captors is sealed, and she discovers surrender isn't necessarily a bad thing.

Genre: Ménage a Trois/Quatre, Paranormal, Shape-shifter

Length: 66,002 words

MATING CALL

Black Wolf Gorge 2

Gale Stanley

MENAGE AMOUR



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With deep gratitude,

Gale Stanley

DEDICATION

This book is for J.P. Thank God I married a man who likes to cook and doesn't mind a messy house. Love ya!

MATING CALL

Black Wolf Gorge 2

GALE STANLEY

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Chapter One

Summer 2009 Black Wolf Gorge, Pennsylvania Wilds

Jude maneuvered the ATV over the rocky trail, driving fast enough to jiggle the change in the dashboard ashtray. Cursing, he jammed on the brake, stomping so hard the tires screamed. He jumped out and trotted back a few yards.

Shit! Hot and hungry, he'd let his mind wander, and he almost drove over the wolf scat. He nudged the dark coils with the toe of his boot. Tapered at the ends and full of animal hair and bone shards, they looked to be fresh. Just to be sure, he got to his knees and smelled the dung. It had a distinct odor, one he recognized.

Wolves hadn't been seen in the gorge since they were taken off the endangered species list and hunted to extinction, but yesterday when he found that deer carcass, alarm bells went off. Some varmint had disemboweled the whitetail, torn it apart, and scattered the bones in a small radius. Every predator had its own style, and he'd bet the ranch on a wolf kill.

His neighbors, hell, even his own brother laughed at him and said they weren't about to waste their time chasing coyotes, but he knew better. Screw them! He didn't give a shit, he liked to be on his own.

The damp earth revealed almost-perfect tracks, four inches wide and five inches long and claw marks to boot. Too big to be coyote

prints. Damn if he wasn't Sherlock fucking Holmes. Those assholes would eat their words when he brought a dead wolf back for his trophy room. And they'd all be kissing his ass and thanking him for protecting their livestock.

Tracking involved more than shit and footprints. He gave himself a spritz of eau de deer piss, grabbed his rifle, and left the vehicle behind. He evaluated everything around him—scratches on tree trunks, chewed vegetation, snagged hairs. Measuring the distance between prints told him the animal had walked rather than loped. The signs weren't obvious in the dense growth, but he'd been hunting since he could pick up a gun. Confident in his element, he tracked like a predatory animal.

Few ranchers understood the wolf like he did, but then few hated them as much either. Hell-bent on eradicating the species, he had good reason to study their habits. His parents died defending him and his siblings against a wolf attack, and for the last twenty years, he'd learned all he could about them for the sole purpose of getting rid of them. His ultimate goal might be a tad too ambitious, but he did succeed in ridding Black Wolf Gorge of the feral beasts. At least he thought he did. He believed all of the relocated pack had been dealt with after they were delisted. Evidently he'd been wrong.

The trail led him toward the river, a good sign. A familiar adrenaline rush pumped up his heart rate. This is what he lived for—the thrill of the hunt, and the wolf, an elusive predator, presented a real challenge.

Wolves were smart, and this one more than most. He almost missed the den, hidden in a dense conifer stand. It had been dug under a fallen spruce, providing a stable ceiling. Fresh scat and disturbed vegetation lay nearby, proving the animal hadn't abandoned it.

He checked for multiple openings and found one. His prey made sure it had an escape route. He ached to crawl inside, but he knew better. It appeared empty, and he smelled like a fucking deer, but he could scare it off for good. Worse, it might return through the back door and meet him head-to-head. He'd be wise to come back later, better prepared, and stake out the area.

The soft rush of water could be heard in the distance. His enemy had camped near the river. He decided to make a detour and cool off.

Jude moved like a silent ghost until he reached a stand of trees bordering a clearing. He peered through the dense growth at the river beyond. *Holy shit!* A woman, buck naked and half-submerged, splashed playfully in the water. She clearly enjoyed herself, and he enjoyed the view from his protected spot behind the trees.

She bent low to bathe her face. Intrigued, he watched her ample breasts bob on the water like two plump apples ripe for the picking. She dunked her head before wading out. A real beauty. Damn, if she didn't look like Venus coming out of the sea with her tan skin and curvy body. Dead sexy, she swung her full hips as if she knew someone watched her. She stood on the bank shaking water from her long, black hair and preening in the sun. He licked his lips and let his gaze travel over her body. Tempted beyond reason his cock twitched painfully inside jeans made suddenly too tight. His own personal sex goddess just waiting for him to make a move. If he didn't, it would be his loss, and she'd haunt his dreams tonight.

All thoughts of the wolf fled. How often did a man get a chance to score a fine piece of ass like this one?

Already unzipping his jeans, he took a step forward. One look at the womb tickler between his legs and a dose of the old Outlaw family charm and the little seductress would be putty in his hands. He hadn't had any complaints yet.

About to leave the shielding trees, he saw her drop to a crouch, and he hesitated. In that second, her form blurred. He wiped sweat from his eyes with a forearm, blinked, and shook his head to clear his vision. When he opened his eyes, he swore she looked right at him, but her eyes fixed on something he couldn't see. Her body bent forward and quivered like a twanged bowstring. Muscles bunched and strained. Short, black hair sprouted from her naked flesh and grew longer. He watched, frozen in place by shock. A noise like twigs cracking underfoot and her midsection contracted while her face expanded. In another instant, a wolf sat where the woman had once crouched.

It all happened so fast. He shut his eyes. Maybe he imagined the whole thing. But when he looked again, there it sat, a sideshow freak, shaking drops of water from its fur and licking a paw.

His knuckles went white around the rifle, and he dropped to his knees, sucking back a wave of nausea. *Shit*. He was not one of those people who engaged in sexual relations with animals. It was unnatural. He pushed the thought out of his head.

Either he lost his mind or Jonas had the last laugh after all. When they were kids, his twin spouted nonsense about vampires and wolf people. Jonas watched too many horror movies, and he got a real kick out of scaring his siblings. Hell, he'd slept with the light on for years because of Jonas's stories. As he got older, he realized the bizarre tales were nothing more than myths and legends. But, were they? Right now, he wasn't so sure. He doubted his own sanity.

When the idea hit, it slammed him hard. This kind of discovery could make him a very rich man. No ordinary animal sat before him. This one came straight from hell, with the strength of a beast and the cunning of a human. No matter, he would bring her in alive, and Jonas would know exactly what to do with her.

It all fell into place, so obvious in hindsight. This black bitch had to be the rogue wolf that killed a hiker and the sheriff. Everyone thought she ran off weeks ago, and all this time she'd been hiding in plain sight, pretending to be one of them. Woman or wolf, it didn't matter. He'd bring her in one way or another.

* * * *

A sharp crackle from the walkie-talkie broke the silence. Jude bounced from one foot to the other in excitement while Jonas, always cool as a cucumber, listened intently. Jude waited impatiently but remained motionless. Not a muscle twitched. A good hunter knew how to keep still.

He watched his brother's expression, saw his cool facade disappear. His arrogant face animated with a rare display of emotion, his blue eyes grew even darker, and his smile told the story—the hunt was on.

Jude felt a thrill of anticipation, felt it in every nerve of his body. It gave him a rush like nothing else, not even sex.

"Earth to Jude."

"Uh, sorry, bro. Just thinking over strategy."

"Well, think about this," Jonas demanded. "There's more to a successful hunt than being in the right place at the right time. You have to smell invisible."

Inside he smiled. Jonas told him nothing he didn't already know. His older brother put on a good act, but he was no hunter, never would be. Then again, he had other talents.

Jude kept his mouth shut and listened. Jonas liked to be in charge. He needed to control every aspect of the hunt even though he wouldn't play an active part.

Jonas withdrew a spray bottle from a pouch attached to his belt. "This bitch will have an excellent nose, fifty times more powerful than yours. If she picks up your scent, she'll change course, and we'll never get her." He sprayed Jude with concentrated deer urine then shoved the bottle at him. "Take it with you." He reeled off the coordinates that would give Jude the best shot. "Go!"

Jude didn't like the GPS. Normally he refrained from using any kind of technology. Surrounded by six thousand acres of pristine forest, he was in his element. Technology took all the fun out of the hunt. He relied on his tracking skills and instinct, and he preferred to hunt alone.

Tonight, he deferred to Jonas. Hell-bent on owning the she-wolf, he'd planned every detail of her capture. Any screwups and Jonas would have his head.

He had to admit the equipment sped up the operation. In a matter of minutes, Jonas had five men spread in a wide radius around the den. Unlike him, they did not disguise their scent, and their very human smell would drive the bitch to take a path that would put her in his sights.

Jonas had big plans for her, and he depended on Jude to bring her in. His older brother was the genius, the boy wonder who went off to college, studied evolutionary biology, and became a damn witch doctor. When he came home with his PhD, he set up his own lab,

determined to breed livestock for the particular traits he wanted. He threw around big words and talked about how selective breeding could produce change over time.

Jude had no idea what it all meant. He was only a redneck hunter. While Jonas got his degrees, he and their younger sister, Janis, took care of business at the ranch.

He and Jonas were not identical twins although they were both six foot three and had the navy eyes that were an Outlaw trademark. Jude's white-blond hair was lighter than Jonas's, and he didn't have his twin's brains.

Maybe he had something better. When it came to shooting, no one could match him. He was the best damn shot on this side of the U.S. of A., and he'd prove it tonight when he brought the she-wolf down. Jonas could get on with his Dr. Frankenstein experiments and everybody would be happy. Drowning himself in deer piss was a small price to pay for the riches Jonas promised him.

He focused on the mission. No matter how fast the wolf moved, he would have to move faster. He rubbed his gun for luck, a custom-made beauty, completely silent and fitted with eight tranquilizer darts. He would only need one. He belly crawled into position and settled down in a depression behind a hemlock. The full moon provided all the light he needed. He set up the bipod, adjusted the laser sight, and sprayed more deer piss around just to be on the safe side. Then he hunkered down to wait.

Time passed, and he started getting antsy. He checked his equipment over and over again. There was still no sign of her. *Damn*. He had to catch her tonight. If she got spooked, they might lose her for good. He cleared his head and prepared for a long night.

Another hour went by before he saw her. Adrenaline flooded his body. Unblinking, he looked through the scope, adjusted the crosshairs, checked the red dot, and fired.

The wolf shuddered but kept moving. At first, he thought he missed the shot. His temper rose, he would not go back without her.

He followed her trail a quarter mile before he overtook her, still on her feet but moving in slow motion. He hadn't missed her after all. The tolerability of drugs varied from one animal to another.

Evidently, her metabolism processed the drug too well, and she needed a lot more to take her down. Not his fault. An easy target now, his second dart pierced her flank, and she stumbled. He waited a few seconds. When she didn't get up, he approached. Coal black, a real beauty. A smile lit his face. He'd bagged himself a werewolf.

Chapter Two

She followed the stream in her wolf form, stopping once for a cool drink. Her route wound through unspoiled woodlands. With no particular destination in mind, she took her time, enjoying the crackle of pine needles under her paws and the intoxicating scent they released. Other smells swept over her, the mouthwatering aroma of deer, rabbit, and raccoon. Her stomach rumbled, and she turned to trail a muskrat.

The sharp crack of a branch startled her, and she sensed something that didn't belong in her world. A loathsome human odor made her freeze in her tracks. She spun on her heels and ran through the underbrush. The anxious roar of her blood masked other forest sounds.

When she'd put enough distance between her and the human, she dropped to her belly to rest under a canopy of cedar trees. A thick blanket of pine straw provided a comfortable respite, and the sun warmed her fur.

She woke in fits and starts, not ready to give up her dream. Suddenly her animal instinct to survive kicked in and her eyes flew open. Something was very wrong. There was no pine straw under her, only a hard-packed dirt floor. A deathly quiet surrounded her. The sun and trees were gone, replaced by the stink of mold and humans. A leather cuff circled her hind leg.

Danger!

Every primitive animal instinct went on high alert. The darkness couldn't hide the horror of her situation. Her eyes were too well suited to see beyond the shadows. Surrounded by dirt walls, she forced herself to accept the reality of her situation. *Confinement.*

She threw back her head and howled. Losing her freedom was a fate worse than death. She willed herself to relax and tried to remember what happened. She recalled a brief sting, feeling weak and dizzy. A tranquilizer dart? How could she have been so careless?

She had to get out of here. *Now!* Turning her thoughts inward, she concentrated on an image of her human body. Muscles stretched and tightened with elastic ease. Bones popped and snapped sounding like a multitude of cracking knuckles. Black fur retracted into pores. A few seconds of discomfort and a human body replaced the wolf's.

The restraint now circled one slender ankle and cut into her tender flesh. Her nimble fingers discovered the padlock that secured it. She followed a heavy iron chain to a bolt in a concrete pad. A fresh wave of panic swept over her, tightening the knots in her stomach.

She pulled and tugged, but even her superior strength couldn't budge the leather cuff or chain. She was tethered like a dog. A sound, half-howl, half-scream, welled up from her depths.

Small, confined spaces terrified her. Fifteen years had passed since humans destroyed her home in the Pine Barrens, but the fear remained. Her parents had just enough time to hide her in a crawl space before they were attacked. The shallow trench swallowed her up, and she listened to their screams, too terrified to move. She might have died in that hole, but hunger and thirst finally drove her out. Her parents were dead. They were all dead. She'd been on her own ever since.

She pushed the memories aside. Now was not the time to feel sorry for herself. She needed a clear head to figure out her next move.

Choking down a wave of bile, she rose on unsteady limbs to take a closer look at her prison. The steel chain prevented her from reaching the only entrance, a narrow wooden door. Furious, she paced the small radius allowed by the leash.

Her mind worked frantically. If her captor wanted her dead, he would have killed her already. When she knew what they were after, she could plan her escape.

These humans had no idea they'd captured something more than a wolf. As long as they didn't find out, she had an advantage over them. She looked inside for her wolf. The familiar snap of shifting bones

calmed her, and her confidence returned with her fur. Someone would come soon. She sat down to wait.

She might have dozed. The sound of a creaking door woke her, and bright sunlight blinded her. Squinting against the light, she breathed in sweet, fresh air. The small taste of freedom teased her senses, and even the underlying scent of humans couldn't keep her from moving toward the entrance.

"Don't try anything stupid." The harsh male voice hit a nerve and sent sullen anger coursing through her.

What right did this man have to take her from her home? She snarled to let him know he couldn't hold her forever.

A frown creased his face. He held a bat in one hand, and he lifted it in a threatening manner. "Don't give me an excuse to use this."

She curled her lips, displaying wicked incisors, and her hackles stood erect. *Stupid, stupid man.* She willed him to come closer. She'd slit him open and eat his entrails while he watched.

"Let me handle this." Another figure stepped forward.

She growled her displeasure. Two against one. If she wasn't restrained, she'd kill them both.

"Take it easy." He spoke in soothing tones. "I won't hurt you."

Bullshit. His Mr. Nice Guy act didn't fool her for a minute. He was human and not to be trusted.

He came closer but not so close that she could reach him.

Her eyes narrowed to slits.

"You must be hungry and thirsty." He smiled to let her know he was on her side. "Jude. Get some water."

The other man disappeared outside and came back with a bucket.

She licked her dry lips and wondered what she'd have to do for a drink. They played a dangerous game with her. If only she could get close, she'd claw that grin off his mouth. For now, she'd play along, learn what she could, and plan her escape.

Jude pushed the pail toward her with his bat.

She lapped thirstily until she drank her fill then sat back and watched them warily.

"I know you're hungry. Shift, and I'll get you whatever you want."

Shock made her hackles rise. They couldn't know. She'd been too careful to hide her existence.

"Don't play dumb," the surly one called Jude said, grunting at her. "I've already had the pleasure of seeing your other body."

She wanted to howl in frustration. How long had she been watched? She played dumb and sat as still as the wood sculptures her father used to carve.

"So you're only a wolf. I might as well kill you then." Jude pulled a gun from his pocket and pointed it at her head.

Her heart stuttered like a jackhammer, but she held her ground.

He cocked the trigger, and fear turned her blood ice-cold.

She contemplated her options. She had none. Her enemy had the home advantage. She considered shifting.

Jude turned to his friend. "What do you want me to do?"

"Are you sure about this, Jude?"

"I know what I saw. I'm not crazy."

"Put the gun away." He stared at her pensively. "As far as I'm concerned, the only good wolf is a dead one. If you're what my brother says you are, then you're of some use to me. If not..." He let the words trail off, his meaning clear. "Think about it. When I come back, we'll talk. Or not." They turned and walked out. The heavy door slammed shut, and the ominous warning hung in the air.

* * * *

The woman threw back her head defiantly, and her long, black hair whipped over her shoulder. A magnificent creature, and all his.

Amber eyes flecked with green pinned him. *Wolf's eyes*. They held him spellbound.

Her chest heaved, and her incredible breasts rose and fell erotically. He had a sudden urge to feel her tanned skin under his fingers, to test the weight of her heavy breasts. He wondered how she would respond to a man's touch, his touch. He moved a little closer.

Her wild, musky scent didn't put him off. On the contrary, it was alluring, a pulse-twitching perfume that threatened to drug him, as

potent as the narcotic he'd put in her water. He couldn't wait to analyze it, along with everything else about this exotic animal.

It must be her musk that made him react so strongly. Not even Nicole got him so hard, so fast. He tamped down his growing arousal. He'd castrate himself before acting on his desires. Not with a creature capable of morphing into his worst nightmare..

"I'm glad you decided to cooperate. We can make things a lot more pleasant for you. I don't like keeping a woman locked up in a root cellar. But I can't let a wolf in the house, now, can I? You could be chained up in here a long time."

She stared back at him defiantly, but he thought he saw a flicker of fear before she suppressed it. *Good*. He wanted her afraid. A little fear made an animal easier to train.

Most people around here argued that a wolf couldn't be trained. He was anxious to put that theory to the test, but he needed to use more than fear. Animal tranquilizers were a good safeguard. They calmed her down, and he could begin to establish a stable animal-handler relationship. Her training had no chance of success if he couldn't develop a strong bond between them. Punishment tempered with humane treatment, that was the key. If she could talk, it would make his job easier.

"I'm Jonas. Do you have a name?"

She narrowed her eyes and curled her lip back.

"I'm not going to hurt you."

"Why didn't you call me?" Jude came up behind him.

"You were asleep, and I wanted to check on her."

"And?"

"I found her like this. She's magnificent."

"I told you so," he said smugly. "But I'm still not totally convinced it's a good idea to keep her."

"It would be a waste to kill her. We can learn so much from her."

"Just be careful. She'll turn on you in a heartbeat." Jude watched her for a few seconds, a quizzical look on his face.

Her head drooped, and her eyelids fluttered.

"What's wrong with her?"

"Nothing," Jonas replied quickly. "It's the drugs. She's going out again. Once her training kicks in, I can reduce the dosage."

"Well, don't reduce it too quick. No amount of training is going to make a wolf into a pet dog."

* * * *

She struggled to keep her head upright but felt oddly off balance. The room tilted, and she flopped back on the bed, fighting a black haze that threatened to dull her senses and put her to sleep again.

Her stomach churned, and she struggled with bedsheets that twisted around her body. Gagging, she disentangled her limbs and leaned over the side, her body racked with dry heaves. A thick leather collar circled her neck and prevented her from going any farther. A short chain tethered her to the iron headboard. She slumped back, defeated. The throbbing in her head beat in time with her wild pulse.

Her tongue stuck to the roof of her mouth. A pitcher of water and a glass sat on a small table within reach. She wanted a drink badly, but she knew it must contain more drugs. She couldn't afford to pass out again. She needed to figure out a plan. Licking her lips, she turned away.

He'd dressed her in his shirt. The fabric carried his scent, and she couldn't get it out of her nose. The woodsy perfume of his cologne reminded her of the forest, and the smell of his sweat reminded her of him. Anything that touched his body would not touch hers. She'd rather go naked. In a rage, she ripped his shirt, grinning when the buttons flew in all directions. It was a small but satisfying victory.

The door opened. He came in and stooped to pick up a button.

"If you prefer to go naked, that's fine with me." He pulled a straight back chair close to the bed but just out of her reach. "Now we can talk."

She looked at him, dumbfounded. As if she had anything to say to him. She'd cut her tongue out first.

"I'm Jonas. And you are..."

No way. He'd get nothing out of her.

He shrugged. "You must be thirsty." He lifted the pitcher and poured a glass of water, held it out to her.

With a powerful swing, she knocked it out of his hand. The glass shattered on the tile floor.

"There's no need to be difficult, but if you insist on behaving like an animal, I'll treat you like one."

Blind rage overtook her. She'd show him just how animal-like she could behave. She called to the change and felt her bones shift. Unsheathing her claws, she swiped the air between them. Her face elongated, she opened her jaws to howl but gagged instead. The collar tightened, squeezing her windpipe and preventing air from reaching her lungs. Her head felt like a balloon tied tight with string. A wave of dizziness overtook her, and her eyelids fluttered. Panicked, she felt herself fading. Her world went black.

She came back gasping, her human form anchored firmly on the bed. Jonas straddled her hips and held her arms above her head.

She took a hard breath and tried to speak. "Let me go," she said, wheezing.

"Oh, so you can talk." He looked relieved. "I thought I'd have to do CPR on you. Don't do that again."

She writhed under him in a vain attempt to get free, but the drugs weakened her. Their faces were a breath apart. His intense blue eyes, dark as a stormy sea, bored into her. For just a second, she got lost in them. She forgot where she was, and a warm, achy feeling started in her center where his hips pressed down on hers. Her body had a mind of its own, and it responded to the growing bulge in his jeans. She tamped down her arousal. Furious, she snapped at him.

He got off her immediately. "Relax," he cautioned.

Her moment of weakness worried her. This man was an adversary not a potential mate.

"Why?" She tried to wedge a finger under the collar to pull it away from her neck, but her tender flesh had swelled around it.

"To keep you from shifting. The collar is sized for this neck not the animal's." He examined her from a distance. "Amazing. I can see the marks on your neck fading already."

Bastard. He'd put those marks on her neck.

"I'm sorry it has to be this way. You'll get used to it."

Never.

She bared her teeth at him.

He sighed. "I was going to explain, but you didn't give me a chance."

"What's to explain?" Jude entered the room and stood behind the chair. "Any animal will turn on its master if given half a chance. We're just protecting ourselves."

"Like I said, you'll get used to it," Jonas continued. "Will you tell me your name now?"

She spat at him.

"I told you." Jude laughed. "You can't reason with an animal."

"Jude, let me handle this my way."

Jude shrugged. "I'll be outside if you need me."

"Your friend better watch his back," she said with a growl.

"My twin," Jonas replied, "can be a little heavy-handed at times. You'll find I'm easier to deal with. If you cooperate with me."

"Why should I?"

"Because if you do, you'll get more privileges."

"Privileges? You're not my master or my mate. You have no right to keep me here."

"I have every right. You're an animal, and I caught you. You belong to me. Or would you rather I turn you in to the authorities? I happen to know they've been hunting a rogue wolf. An animal that already killed three people. Would you rather take your chances with them?"

She stared at him, openmouthed.

"I thought not. Now, are you capable of acting civilized, or can you only snarl and spit like a beast?"

"I'm not a wild animal."

"Good. Let's start over then. What's your name?"

"Sable."

"Sable." He whispered it. "Very pretty. It suits you."

"Why am I here?"

"My brother is a hunter. You might have ended up as a pelt on our trophy wall but, fortunately, he saw you shift, and he knew I'd want you alive."

"Why?"

"Let's just say I like the idea of having a trained werewolf as a pet."

"I'm no pet."

"Right now you don't have much choice. You'll eat when I tell you to, shift when I say you can. Learn to control your temper, and I'll give you more freedom. Do you understand?"

She bit her lip to keep silent. He didn't plan to kill her. He wanted something, and he needed her cooperation. If she played his game, she could find a way out of this alive. She nodded.

"Do you need anything?"

"I have to pee."

He stared at her.

"I mean, can I go to the bathroom, please," she said through clenched teeth.

He pulled out a cell phone and made a quick call. Jude arrived with a tray.

"Put the food down and cover us."

Jude pulled out a gun while Jonas unlocked her chain and gestured toward a door that led to a small bathroom.

"Leave the door open."

Furious, she did her business while they watched. She had no false modesty, but the idea of having to ask permission rankled. She finished and let him attach the chain to her collar.

"Good girl." He ran a hand through her hair, and she cringed.
"You learn fast."

Chapter Three

Jonas was not a religious man, but if he were, he'd be down on his knees crossing himself. Watching his captive struggle for air through her constricted throat was the toughest thing he'd ever done. He'd been sick with worry until she reverted to her human form and the color returned to her face. Of course, his concern only stemmed from the fear of losing his all-important lab rat.

Shutting the door behind him, he passed through a small hallway and entered his lab where Jude stood waiting. He sat down heavily in the chair behind his desk and unlocked the drawer where he kept a bottle of scotch.

"Jesus, for a minute there I thought I lost her."

"She's a werewolf," Jude said. "What are you worried about?" He dragged a chair over to the desk and straddled it.

"Contrary to popular belief, she doesn't appear to be immortal." Jonas filled two tumblers and slid one towards his brother.

"Don't go soft on me, bro. She learned a lesson she won't soon forget. That's the point isn't it? Training her?"

"I want to train her, not kill her." He drained his glass and refilled it.

"That won't happen. I bet she can take more punishment than an ordinary wolf or a woman."

"It's the woman I'm worried about. I don't know enough about her yet, her limitations."

"Don't make the mistake of thinking she's human. She's a dog, maybe a little smarter than most. They might be man's best friend, but you can't treat them like a person. Just remember what she is, and don't get too caught up looking at that pretty face and curvy body."

"Dogs respond to positive reinforcement. There's nothing positive about what we did to her."

"Sometimes punishment works better. You can be sure she won't try shifting again." Jude frowned at him. "What's the point of all this anyway? All these years we've been hell-bent on getting rid of wolves, and now you want to keep her as a pet. Maybe I should have put her down when I had the chance."

"No!" Jonas banged his glass on the desk and whiskey slopped over the side. "Shit!" Wet papers landed on the floor with one angry swipe of his arm. He needed to control his temper. If it wasn't for his twin, he wouldn't have Sable in his possession.

He took a deep, calming breath and nodded at Jude. "Sable is far more intelligent than an ordinary wolf. We've barely scratched the surface of her abilities. Her healing capacity is incredible. You didn't see those red marks on her neck disappear like I did. The stakes are higher now. Stop thinking like a hunter. If I can figure out how to differentiate her genes and reproduce her strength and healing in humans, we can eliminate disease and live longer."

"And make a shitload of money besides," Jude added, with mounting interest.

"That, too," Jonas admitted grudgingly, though money wasn't his primary interest. He already had enough for his needs. "But, if she dies, it all goes with her." He thought for a minute. "I'm going to sleep in the lab so I can monitor her. Who knows what she might do if she gets depressed."

"Are you kidding?" Jude said, his mouth agape. "Animals don't get depressed."

"Some researchers would say you're wrong. Besides, this bitch is half-human. We don't know how she'll react. I'll feel better if I sleep out here in the lab."

"For Christ's sake, you have a camera in there."

"Yeah, and if something happens, she could be dead before I get down here."

"Well, then." Jude grinned. "Why don't you just sleep in the bed with her? Your examining table doesn't look all that comfortable."

"Don't be stupid." Jonas frowned at him. "You'll help me bring in a sofa from the den."

Jude shrugged and finished his drink. "Be careful, bro. She might just kill you in the middle of the night."

Jonas glanced up at the camera and the woman lying on his bed. "She's secured. She can't get out of that bed unless I let her out."

* * * *

God, she hated this tiny stinking room. It felt like a coffin. She might as well be dead. With nothing to look at besides white walls, white tile floors, and a few sticks of furniture, she thought she'd go snow blind. Not even a window to relieve the monotony or offer a breath of fresh air.

The two men popped in and out whenever they pleased—to bring trays of food, clean sheets, or let her use the bathroom. Jonas took her blood and made her pee in a cup. He wouldn't tell her why, but she knew anyway. Her prison smelled like a doctor's office. He was testing her.

This morning they allowed her another shower. It pissed her off to know they watched her, but she also took a perverse pleasure in knowing she aroused them.

She deliberately took her time washing. She ran her hands over her body, her breasts, pinched her nipples. She let one hand slide over her belly and between her thighs to that throbbing bundle of nerves that ached for attention. She knew how to touch herself in a way that made her eyes roll back in her head.

She smelled lust all over them, heard their breath quicken over the running water. Panting like randy dogs, and they called her an animal?

Jonas and his brother were not at all her type. Lycan men were dark and dangerous-looking while these men looked more like angels with their blond hair and blue eyes. Looks could be deceiving. Lycan men might look like big bad wolves, but they treasured and respected their women. Her captors were cruel. They were more animal than human.

Kweo, help me escape.

The wolf spirit was responsible for hunting food and for increasing his kind, but he was a warrior, too. She sighed and slumped in defeat when her Creator didn't release her bonds. He didn't hear her anymore. She had no one to blame but herself. She hadn't prayed in fifteen years.

She smelled Jonas before he entered the room. His familiar footsteps stopped at the doorway.

"Do you need anything?"

"No."

"Do you want to use the bathroom?"

"No."

"Well, goodnight then."

She ignored him. He was so predictable with his nightly routine. He left the door open and slept in the next room. Some nights she drifted off to the sound of his stuffy classical music, so boring it lulled her to sleep even when she wasn't tired. Still, if she heard the familiar notes and kept the light on, she didn't feel like she'd been buried alive. No matter how many years passed, she would never forget the terror of lying in that dark hole under the floor.

Jonas walked around for a while, and before long, she heard his soft, familiar snores. No music tonight but hearing the sound of his breath close by calmed her. She wasn't alone.

Warm and on edge, she couldn't sleep anyway. She rubbed her tender breasts, pinched the nipples until they were distended peaks, and then slid a hand between her thighs to her vulva, wet and swollen. When she brought her hand up, she saw a tinge of pink and sighed. Her heat was on her. Unlike animals that bred once a year, she had a cycle similar to human women, only stronger. She needed to mate.

Her thoughts drifted to Malcolm. He might be the last Lycan male left. Too bad he'd fallen for a human woman. She would never make that mistake. Sex with humans was barely tolerable. Getting emotionally involved was out of the question.

She knew how to take care of herself. Her fingers danced over her sensitive clit. Already wet, she rubbed the moisture around her sex. Nerve endings awakened, and a deep sigh escaped her lips. It wasn't

nearly as good as having a cock inside her, but it would take the edge off.

* * * *

Sable's rough breathing woke Jonas, and he panicked. *Shit!* Good thing he didn't have the music playing, he might not have heard her.

Jude had laughed at him. Told him he worried over her like a mother hen. Well, why not? He took good care of all his livestock, and she was especially valuable.

His muscles cramped painfully when he unfolded himself from the couch. The small sofa wasn't designed for his tall frame. He grabbed a hypodermic and rushed into the adjoining bedroom. Sable always slept with the tiny bedside lamp on, and he saw right away she wasn't choking.

Jonas blew out a hard breath. He stood by the door, transfixed, watching her pleasure herself. She was so fucking beautiful and never more so than right this minute. Her skin flushed with arousal. Her musky perfume lightly scented the air. He never had an interest in BDSM games, but the sight of her collared and chained to the bed excited him more than he thought possible. It had been weeks since he and Nicole had sex. His work came first, and their relationship, more off than on, suffered for it.

With a deep sigh, Sable pulled her knees up and let them fall apart. Her hands roamed over her belly, and when she brushed her fingers over the black curls between her thighs, he held back a groan. Any thoughts of Nicole vanished like smoke in the wind.

Her index finger traced the lips of her vulva, and her body quivered in response to her own delicate strokes. The finger disappeared inside her pussy and came out wet with her fluids. Her swollen clit peeked out from its hood. Moaning, she circled it with her fingers, never touching the stiff little nub itself. Her hips rose off the bed as her fingers moved faster. Her breath grew ragged.

Jonas couldn't take his eyes off her. His balls tightened, and his cock, fully erect and weeping with pre-cum, poked through his cotton boxers. He grasped it, and his erection throbbed in his hand.

Seeing her spread out before him like every man's wet dream, he thought he might come right then. Drunk on her scent, he had a burning desire to taste her, to experience every intimate part of her and lose himself in sensory overload. He imagined what it would feel like to have his hands on her, his face buried between her thighs and his tongue in her pussy. He wanted to be the one to bring her to release. His cock grew harder than he thought possible.

Her hips and hands moved faster. He matched his strokes to hers and somehow held off his own climax. When she arched her back and cried out, he let himself go. He went off in a fierce explosion of pleasure. When he finally opened his eyes, he caught her staring at him.

* * * *

She felt him watching. Knowing she excited him sexually gave her a sense of power. She wielded so little control over her situation. She could at least have that much. The scent of his arousal blended with hers and put erotic thoughts in her mind. His heat fueled hers. She came quickly in a series of pleasurable spasms and then watched him from the corner of her eye.

He fisted his erection and pumped. His cock, long and thick, stirred her imagination. Her womb clenched, and her sex heated up again. When a thick rope of semen spurted over his hand, she almost came again.

Her wolf sent out a mating call, and Sable couldn't suppress a soft howl. The randy little beast taunted her. *Use him. He'll fill us so completely.* Wolf and woman agreed. They both wanted him. *No!* Physical attraction be damned. She'd rather fuck a timber wolf.

But when she caught his eye, his intense gaze made her stomach flutter. They stared at each other, eyes locked in shock at the heightened awareness between them. Tremors ran down her spine, and her pulse quickened. The moment stretched out for an eternity, and still she couldn't look away. What was wrong with her, that the thought of fucking her jailer was more exciting than it was disgusting?

"I, uh." He stammered and wiped his hands on his boxers. A few awkward seconds passed and then he approached the bed.

"Brave, aren't we?" She narrowed her eyes at him.

"I thought you were choking. I just wanted to make sure you were okay." He looked like a kid caught with his hand in the cookie jar.

"I'm okay." Her eyes were drawn to his cock, already reawakening and glistening with his cum. She ran her tongue over dry lips and resisted an urge to lick him clean. A rumble, something halfway between a groan and a growl, came up from her chest, and she reached a hand between her legs.

His eyes followed her hand. "You're in heat."

"Really?" She sneered at him.

He reached out for her. She prepared to be groped, but he surprised her by cupping her cheek and rubbing his thumb along her jawline. It was a gesture she didn't welcome, a deliberately seductive move. She'd have preferred him to handle her roughly. It would make it easier to resist his advances.

"There's a cure for that," he said softly, "and it just so happens that I know a good doctor."

"And I know how to take care of myself." She caught his natural scent and breathed him in. He wasn't wearing some flowery cologne like most human men. When had she started to savor his scent so much?

"But you don't have to. All that pent-up sexual energy. You're ready to explode." Very slowly, he lowered himself to the bed, and she positioned herself in a defensive posture.

"Easy." He put a hand on her thigh.

Fuck! She liked that big, warm hand on her bare flesh, liked it way too much. Knocking his hand away, she hissed at him, bared her teeth and lunged for his throat.

He blocked her easily. Anger washed through her. The drugs had left her weakened and vulnerable with only a fraction of her strength and speed. Once again, he had the upper hand, but she refused to give in.

They eyed each other warily. He intended to get what he wanted. Why didn't he just make his move and get it over with?

"This doesn't have to be unpleasant." He trailed his fingers down her arm. She disarmed him with an indulgent smile, then raked her nails down his chest.

"Fuck!" His face contorted with pain and fury. "You bitch!" When she went for his face, he grabbed her, pushed her down, and straddled her. The pressure of his cock, like a fiery brand against her slit, ramped up her excitement again. She wanted to grind her hips against his and assuage the ache in her very receptive pussy, but she refused to give him the satisfaction. Let him be the aggressor. Expecting him to plunge inside her at any second, she forced herself to lie still and wait for the sweet pleasure of penetration.

Instead, he rolled off. He lay facing her and propped his head on an elbow. "I never intended to force you."

She blinked in astonished silence.

"You really did a job on my chest." He inspected the furrows.

"You're lucky I didn't use claws."

At once interested, he focused on her face. "Can you? Partially shift?"

She ignored the question. There was no point in giving the enemy information he could use against her. If she had the ability to partial shift, she'd have done it already. But, let him wonder and worry.

She scraped a fingernail down the length of his cock, enjoying his quick intake of breath. "Aren't you afraid I'll bite it off?"

"Wouldn't you rather have me in your cunt than your stomach?"

Unfortunately, she would. "Why would a nice, normal man like you want to fuck an animal like me?"

"Because watching you made me hot as hell. I want to feel your mouth on me," he blurted out.

"And how is that going to help me?" She laughed.

"I'll make sure you're satisfied." His voice was husky. The heat in his eyes made her pulse race. His erection pointed at her, beckoning.

"A little foreplay is always fun." She teased the nest of light-brown curls around his cock. They were darker than the shaggy mop of blond hair on his head but so much lighter than the hair of Lycan men.

"So pretty," she murmured, then stiffened in surprise. Hidden beneath the hair at Jonas's groin, a small brown mark stood out against his lighter skin.

"What's this?" She traced the outline.

"It's nothing."

"It looks like a paw print. A wolf's paw print." She snickered. "You're marked."

"It's just a birthmark, that's all." Jonas grabbed her hand and brought it to his chest.

The bright red scratch marks drew her, and she traced them along his lightly furred chest. She caved in to an urge and swiped a welt with her tongue. His taste intrigued her. She took another lick and met his eyes, dark pools of midnight blue that electrified her. He wanted her. She didn't doubt that for a minute. So why was he holding back? He trapped her, imprisoned her, collared her. She expected him to take her hard and fast. What kind of game did he play? Did he really want her to give him the go-ahead? *Not a problem. This time.* Her body responded to his, and she wanted relief bad enough to forget who he was for a little while.

She nipped one flat, brown nipple, then bent over his hips and swirled her tongue around the purple head of his cock. His taste exploded on her tongue. The salty tang intoxicated her, and she slid her lips down his impressive length, not caring about the rules of the game.

"Jesus." He groaned and put his hands on her head.

She waited for him to set a rhythm, but he twisted his hands in her hair and tugged gently. She managed one last lick before she gave in. He settled her next to him so they were facing each other.

"I thought that's what you wanted."

"I do, but already I'm much too close. If you keep doing that, I'll come, and I don't know if I can manage a third time. I think you want me inside your pussy, not your mouth." He hiked her leg over his hips and stroked her cleft.

He was right. That's exactly where she wanted him, the sooner the better.

"You're so wet," he murmured. His eyes went darker. He took his hand away, lined up his cock so it nudged her moist entrance, and penetrated her.

"Oh!" She dug her fingers into his arms. She really needed this, and he felt so damn good.

He moved nice and easy, buried himself to the hilt, and then stilled. He pulled out until only the head remained inside her. Then he plunged back in.

She answered his groan with one of her own.

He lifted her leg to change the angle of his thrusts, and she moved with him in perfect rhythm.

"Oh, Gods." Their faces were so close. He was breathing hard, his mouth open. She grasped his neck and leaned in for a kiss, but he turned his head, denying her. She bit her lip, refusing to let him see how he'd hurt her. She had no time to think about it, he rolled her over until he was on top and worked himself deeper with fast, hard thrusts that drove her wild.

She made little animal noises in her throat, forgetting everything except the sweet relief he promised.

Her inner walls quivered around him, and her breathing grew ragged. Deep in her vagina, muscles clenched, and she buried her face against his throat. Her wolf cried out, wanting something more, wanting blood. At the final moment of frenzied release, she sank her teeth in his neck. He bucked and came inside her with a harsh groan.

Stars exploded behind her eyelids, and her womb contracted. A spark found her most secret place and sent out an electric current that arced to every nerve ending in her body.

She held on for dear life and let the spasms subside. A feeling of elation, of awe and wonder, lifted her spirits. She licked his neck, tasted his blood. He belonged to her.

Gods!

What had she done? Without thinking, she'd marked him. She'd never marked anyone, not even Malcolm, who she once thought was her mate. Damn her wolf!

After a few seconds, he rolled to his side, taking her with him. Already she wanted him again. What had she done? Did she bind this man to her forever?

She touched his neck. "Now you're twice marked."

"Clawed and bitten, I'd say you're getting back at me with a vengeance. Next time I might bite back."

If only. "I've been warned." She smiled tightly.

He put a hand to his neck. "I'm not going to turn into a werewolf, am I?"

"You've seen too many movies. It doesn't work that way," she said indignantly. "Besides, I'm not a werewolf. I'm Lycan."

"Maybe you can teach me about Lycans?"

"I don't think so." He didn't care about her or her people. Besides, they were dead. She didn't want to talk about them.

"Are you okay?" he whispered to her.

Jonas made her head spin. Sometimes he played Mr. Hyde, now he acted more like Dr. Jekyll.

His lips were so close, his breath warm on her face. She parted her lips in a not-so-subtle invitation, but he pulled away and sat up.

"I'll let you get some sleep now."

Bastard!

What did she expect? That he would kiss and cuddle and spend the night in her bed? He owned her. It was only a matter of time before he exerted his right to fuck her. That she understood. The way he made her feel was another story. She reacted to him with pure animal instinct.

She'd never felt this way with Malcolm. Never marked him, even though she believed he was her mate. Not that it mattered, the bond meant nothing to a human man. Jonas had no idea she'd marked him as her own. Inwardly, she smiled. He thought he owned her. Now she owned him as well. Even though he'd never know, it still made her feel a little more in control.

He got out of bed and walked into the bathroom. A flicker of surprise touched her when he returned with a wet towel. Bewildered, she let him clean her up. He confounded her. One minute he looked at her with disgust, the next he treated her with tenderness. He would

wear down her resistance if she didn't keep her guard up. Captivity had made her soft and needy. The longer she stayed here the closer she came to becoming the docile pet he wanted. A few nice gestures didn't mean a damn thing. Soon enough he'd find out that no one could own her. In the meantime she would enjoy their mating and bide her time.

"Shut the door when you leave. Your snoring keeps me awake."

"Get used to it," he warned. "I'm not going away."

But I am.

This Jonas she understood and hated. She hated herself more for fucking him. She had to escape, and soon.

Chapter Four

The gel stress ball bounced off Jonas's head and woke him from an uneasy sleep. "Fuck!"

It lodged between his back and the sofa. He reached behind him, and his fingers closed around the brain-shaped blob, a reminder from his brother that he might be the brains of the family, but he could still be squashed. He squeezed and tossed. It missed Jude by a mile.

"Go away." Mumbling, he hugged the pillow and ground his morning erection against the sofa cushions. He fought to hang onto his dream, an image of Sable's luscious lips wrapped around his cock, a curtain of ebony hair brushing his belly.

"You throw like a girl."

His hard-on evaporated. His brother was starting to seriously piss him off.

"Wake up! What the hell is wrong with you?" Jude yanked the pillow from his arms, and he forced his eyes open. He sat up with an effort, leaned back against the couch, and combed his hair with his fingers.

"Jesus. I've seen better heads on a beer." Jude's brows drew together in a frown. He crossed his arms over his chest and shook his head.

"Give me a break." The misery of his restless night haunted him. He'd only just fallen asleep. His mind burned with images of Sable. Her scent lingered on his skin. One minute he wanted to scrub all traces of her off his body. The next he contemplated never washing again.

Dark thoughts threatened his sanity. Did he have sex with a woman or an animal? Torn between despising himself and wanting to fuck her again, he'd caught himself at her door more than once. Hell,

he wanted to do more than fuck her. He hadn't even gotten started. He wanted to take her every way possible and then fall asleep in her arms, instead of alone and frustrated.

Finally, he shut the door to her room and vowed to tie himself to the couch if he got up one more time. Despite her animal nature, he wanted her more than any woman he'd ever known. Did that make him some kind of pervert?

"Do you know what time it is, bro?" Jude hunkered down next to him. "We're supposed to be in town in thirty minutes."

"Shit! Call the realtor and tell him I got tied up." He felt hot and feverish, in no mood to talk real estate. "Tell him whatever the hell you want. I don't give a shit."

"I don't believe it!" Jude choked. "You're the one who wanted to buy up the surrounding property." He stared at Jonas's neck. "Is that what I think it is?"

Jonas planted his hand over the bite and winced. The damn thing still hurt.

Jude's jaw dropped. "Please don't tell me you fucked her."

"Okay, I won't."

"What in God's name were you thinking?"

"I don't have to explain myself to you." He couldn't even explain it to himself.

"Well, then, tell me how it feels to fuck a damn animal?" Jude stood and shook his head in disgust. "Christ, you could have rabies."

Red-hot anger surged in his veins and propelled him off the couch. He delivered a punch that caught Jude square in the jaw, and he staggered sideways against the counter, knocking glass vials, beakers, and pipettes to the floor.

Jude came back, fists flying.

Jonas blocked him, taking the blows with his forearms. He drove a knee into Jude's gut and stepped back to catch his breath. "Stay out of my business," he warned.

"Well, I guess you're awake now." Jude gasped, bent over, and hugged his stomach. He straightened up with difficulty and lifted his hands in surrender. "Calm down, bro," he said, panting. "I might've been out of line, but I thought we were on the same page here." He

wiped a trickle of blood from his mouth. "I know she looks like a fine piece of ass but don't forget what she really is."

"I'm not forgetting anything." His anger vanished as quickly as it appeared. He was more upset with himself than his twin. Jude was just a convenient scapegoat. He felt like a degenerate but that didn't stop him from wanting her again. "It just happened. She's in heat."

"Oh, that's even better. What if you knocked her up? What then?"

Shock turned his blood cold. He never stopped to think about a condom. She bewitched him, made him so fucking hot he couldn't wait to get inside her. *Shit!*

"It's the last thing we need."

"I know. I know." He wasn't ready to have a kid, especially not some little freak of nature. Suddenly a wild idea took root, and his mind ran with it.

"I know that look, bro, and I don't like it. What are you thinking?"

"What if she is pregnant? This could be exactly what I need to jump-start my research."

"You need a reality check." Jude shook his head.

"Hear me out. This is a good thing." *In more ways than one.* Now he could justify the sex. It was all in the name of research. Hell, this was probably in his subconscious mind all along.

"Am I hearing you right? You actually want to father a baby with the wolf?"

"Imagine what I could learn from a hybrid. Think about it. A creature to study that had half my DNA or yours."

Jude's brow furrowed. "Mine?"

"If my sperm doesn't do it, then, yeah, yours."

"With a turkey baster maybe."

"Not as much fun." Jonas's lips curved in a wry smile. "But we can arrange something."

"Whoa! I don't know about this." Jude's expression turned stony. I'm not ready for kids, especially her kid. The whole idea creeps me out. I don't want to bring some little wolf man into the world."

Jonas ignored him. "I'd have a control for my tests, a half-breed combining the DNA of both species."

A slew of expressions crossed Jude's face—disgust, disapproval, fear. But under the surface Jonas detected a hint of excitement, and he knew it wouldn't take much to convince his brother.

"We'd be rich and famous, make a lasting contribution to science." He could practically see the wheels turning in Jude's head.

"What if we can't mix? Birds of a feather and all that crap."

"Interbreeding might not be possible." Jonas frowned. "But it's worth a try."

"Maybe she doesn't want a baby?"

"Of course she does. She goes through this heat thing for a reason. In the animal world, sex doesn't have a purpose aside from reproduction." The words came from literature he'd read on animal breeding. He wasn't even sure he believed them, but Jude seemed to accept the idea. "Put this in another context. It's like breeding livestock. Our animals reproduce in a controlled manner to produce young. This project will be strictly under our control and top secret."

"Yeah, but why would she want a half-human kid?"

Jude asked some good questions. Unfortunately, he didn't have good answers. He improvised. "There can't be many like her, and she'll want to propagate her species. It's to her benefit to breed." He read his twin like a book, and he saw Jude's resolve waver.

"I have to admit, the first time I saw her I wanted to fuck her. Of course, that was before I watched her shift."

"Yes, she is beautiful—and passionate." Jonas let his words hang in the air.

Jude ran his tongue over dry lips. "What if she changes right in the middle?"

Gotcha! "She won't. She's collared, remember." Jonas felt charged up, energized. A new project did that to him. "And she won't object. She's in heat. Remember, she needs to mate."

"I don't know." Jude shook his head, still unsure.

"I'm telling you, she'll be more than willing to mate with both of us."

"Both of us?" Jude thought for a moment. "I might consider it with two of us in the room. It wouldn't be the first time we shared a woman."

"That was a long time ago. I wasn't thinking of a threesome."

"If you want my sperm, then that's how it's going down."

"You're afraid of her."

"Maybe I am—a little. I wouldn't feel comfortable unless you were there to cover my back."

As much as he liked sharing the guilt trip with Jude, he didn't like the idea of sharing Sable. If he didn't see them together he didn't have to picture her in his brother's arms. Why should he care? It was an experiment. Jude was right. They'd done it before, and as long as nobody stole anybody's girlfriend, and Sable was definitely not a girlfriend, it could be fun. Already he was getting hard. The image of Sable excited and moaning while being penetrated by two hard cocks was tantalizing.

"So? What do you say?" Jude asked impatiently.

"I say it's on." He smiled and extended a hand. "Now you can sweep up this glass."

* * * *

Sable's ears perked up at the sounds of a scuffle in the adjoining room. The men never fought, not in her presence anyway, so it must be important. Sometime during the night, Jonas had shut the door. It didn't matter. With her finely tuned hearing, they might as well be in the same room with her. Jonas thought he was so smart, but he tended to forget how much her senses exceeded his own.

Half-breed... study... breeding livestock...

Her body tensed. She pounded her fists on her thighs, then ripped the pillow in frustration. Eiderdown floated above her head and settled on her hair.

Each word incited another storm of emotion. How dare they think they could crossbreed her like some biology experiment? She was as human as they were. Better, even, or they wouldn't want her special abilities for themselves. Only the chain tethering her to the bed saved them from the fight of their lives.

Her wolf circled her belly, churning up bile that rose in the back of her throat. She swallowed with difficulty and tried to fill her mind

with calming thoughts—the sounds and smells of the woodlands. Finally, the unruly animal curled in a ball and found its place in her underbody. It left behind a loathsome queasiness that set off alarm bells.

Nostrils flaring, she sniffed the air, and then her arm. Soft feathers tickled her nostrils but didn't disguise the obvious. Her scent had already changed. The reality turned her to stone. Would Kweo punish her this way? She laughed, cold and humorless. Wouldn't it make Jonas proud to know he knocked her up the very first time?

As a child, she'd been taught that humans and Lycans couldn't reproduce. But, Malcolm had proven that wrong. He and his human lover had conceived a baby. She should have thought of that before she let Jonas near her.

Her highly sexual nature had gotten her into trouble before, but nothing like this. She didn't want a half-breed baby, and especially not Jonas's baby.

Did they intend to keep her locked up until the birth? Or did Jonas plan to take her fertilized egg and hatch it in a test tube. And then what? She'd be expendable. Jonas would have what he wanted. He'd put her down like a rabid dog, and the baby would live under a microscope.

Kweo would never do that to a Lycan child, not even one that was only half Lycan. The spirit had sent her a test, not a punishment. She had to protect this baby at all costs. Jonas could never know about the baby. Escape was more important than ever.

The fight ended, and shortly after, Jonas appeared with a tray. He set the food on the bedside table and watched the feathers take flight. "If you think you can behave, I'll get you another pillow."

"Screw you!"

He grinned at her. "You already did."

Her anger burned hot, and the wolf stirred again. A temper tantrum would not help her escape. She took a calming breath. "I can sleep anywhere. I don't need a pillow."

"Suit yourself. I'll be out for awhile, you better use the bathroom."

"Why don't you just put some paper on the floor?"

"Cute, but I need you to pee in this cup." He pointed to a container on the tray and took keys out of his pocket to unlock the chain. "Don't try anything, Jude's outside the door with the dart gun."

"I wouldn't think of it." There'd be no more drugs mucking up her head if she could help it. She grabbed the cup and headed for the tiny bathroom.

"And leave the door open," he called after her.

Damn him! What if he tested her urine and found out she was pregnant? How could she dilute it when he watched her every second? She sat on the toilet, held the cup under her, and scooped up some water before she peed. Gods, she hoped that would screw up his tests.

"So how long will you be gone?" she asked as she handed him the cup.

The corner of his mouth quirked. "Why? Will you miss me?"

"In your dreams," she said, sneering. Funny, she actually would miss him. What other diversion did she have? He did it on purpose, the jerk. Knowing how lonely she felt, he did everything he could to make her more dependent on him.

It wasn't like her to let anyone get under her skin the way he did. No one had gotten that close since her family was murdered. This forced confinement would drive her nuts. She needed to get out of here soon before she went psycho. She could end up like one of those victims who become emotionally attached to their kidnappers. *No way.*

"Don't look so miserable, I'll be back later tonight." He locked the chain to her ankle restraint and turned his back to leave.

"Bastard!"

She grabbed an apple from the tray and hurled it at him. It gave her a tiny measure of satisfaction when it hit him square in the back of the head.

Chapter Five

"There's no need to tiptoe around, I'm not asleep."

"Of course not, how can you sleep when you leave the lamp on all night." Jonas avoided the mess on the floor and set a new tray on the bedside table. "I know it's late, but I thought you might be hungry."

Sable eyed the food and turned up her nose. "I'm not."

"You need to eat something."

"I don't want peanut butter sandwiches and fruit. I like meat." She growled and bared her teeth at him.

"You don't scare me."

His smile set her teeth on edge. "Take off this collar and then tell me that," she snapped.

"You know that's not happening."

"Then leave me alone. Get out!" With one sweep of her arm, the tray flew off the table and joined the one at Jonas's feet. A bottle of Snapple shattered and Mango Madness splattered his boots. His body went rigid, and a vein pulsed at his temple.

Baiting Jonas gave her a rush. She had nothing else to do, and it was a safe bet he wouldn't harm her as long as he needed her for something.

Anger glittered in his eyes. He looked like an animal ready to pounce.

Cat and mouse, predator and prey. Game on.

Sable slid along the mattress, and the chain followed, reminding her of her disadvantage. Frustrated, she pulled on it. She wanted the thrill of the chase.

For a few minutes, they glared at each other, neither willing to look away first. Jonas opened his mouth as if to say something, then

shut it just as fast. He sat on his heels and mopped up the soggy mess with napkins.

"If I had you on a longer leash, I'd make you eat this off the floor."

"You could try." Outraged at his lack of respect, her nostrils flared, releasing the heat of her anger. If he thought he could master her, he'd better think again. She squatted on the bed and peed under his shocked stare.

His fists clenched until his knuckles turned white. He took a step toward her, then changed his mind and went to the table. Her smile disappeared when he unscrewed the bulb from her lamp. Only the light that came from outside the door illuminated him when he turned to face her. "Bad dog. Keep it up, and I'll have to crate train you." He took the bulb and the trays and turned his back on her.

"Fuck you! You bastard." A string of curses followed him. She slammed her fist against the wall so hard it cracked the tile.

Being able to see in the dark should have prevented her fright. Instead, it only made things worse. She'd never been afraid of anything until she turned seven. Her mother had prepared a small birthday dinner. Malcolm and her older sister, Mia, had brought presents. Malcolm's sister, Tala, came alone. Her human husband had left her. When the family went back to their own homes, her mother kissed her goodnight and tucked her in bed. She fell asleep thinking about her presents. She woke to her mother's anxious voice.

"Wake up. There are bad men coming. You have to hide." Her parents pushed her into the narrow crawl space under the floor. "No matter what you hear, don't move or make a sound." They kissed her and shut the trapdoor. She never saw them alive again.

She lay perfectly still, surrounded by packed dirt. Heavy footsteps followed by loud voices terrified her. The sound of gunshots locked the breath in her lungs. Still afraid to move, she endured the sight and sensation of tiny legs crawling over her flesh. When she finally lifted the door and came out, the ordeal was forever imprinted on her brain. Only light exorcised the demons.

She bit her lip to keep from crying and stifled the urge to yell for Jonas. He didn't need any more ammunition against her. *Damn him!*

She pulled the wet sheets and blanket off the bed and threw them on the floor. She curled in a ball on the damp mattress and used her arm for a pillow.

If only she could see the moon, she'd be okay, but there was no window. Not even a clock to shed a little light. It couldn't be too much longer until morning. She only had to hold out until Jonas brought her breakfast. She pushed thoughts of creepy crawly things out of her head. Screwing her eyes shut, she pretended the lamp was still on.

Something crawled, whisper light, along her calf. Icy beads of sweat trickled down between her shoulder blades. The unpleasant sensation traveled up her leg. When it reached her thigh, she couldn't ignore it any longer. Her eyes flew open.

Spider!

She screamed. Arms and legs flailing, she scooted up the bed and cowered against the headboard, shaking. She drew up her knees and hid her face in her arms. Her imagination ran wild. An army of tiny legs scuttled over her skin.

The mattress dipped, and two strong arms hauled her against a hard chest. She didn't protest.

"Shh." Jonas held her against his body and rocked her back and forth.

She clung to him. "Get them off." Shocked at herself, she cried on his shoulder.

"What?"

She stiffened and kept her mouth shut. He didn't need to know her fears.

Jonas tightened his hold on her. "You're okay. You had a bad dream." His voice was soft and reassuring. "I'll get a bulb for the lamp." He started to pull away, but she hung on for dear life.

"No. Please, don't go."

"It's okay, I'm not going anywhere." He settled down with her in his arms and rubbed her back. "Do you want to tell me about it?"

"No." She relaxed, suddenly very aware of how little he had on. His boxers didn't do much to hide his erection.

"It's only 4 a.m. Try to get a little sleep. When you're up for it, I'll make you breakfast." He turned her around and spooned her. "Are you okay?"

"Yes." Cocooned in his arms, she felt safe. He surprised her. The mean Jonas had disappeared again.

"It's nice to sleep in a bed for a change, even if it does stink in here."

She smiled. That sounded more like the Jonas she knew.

* * * *

The bed felt cold and empty without the safety of Jonas's embrace. Much as Sable hated to admit it, she missed him. Still, she had to give him points for replacing the lightbulb. The warm amber glow calmed her. The dirty linens were gone, too, and the floor looked clean enough to eat off. She hoped that wasn't his intention. How had he done all this without waking her?

Her mouth watered at the smell of bacon. A few seconds later, a barefoot Jonas, dressed in jeans and T-shirt, appeared in the doorway.

He flashed a crooked grin. "Is it safe to come in?"

She nodded, and he sat beside her with a tray on his lap. She reached for a strip of bacon.

He raised a brow. "I take it this tray is safe. Bacon, sausage, and ham." He looked at her for approval.

She answered by stuffing a piece of ham in her mouth.

"You should have told me sooner what you like. I'll make you whatever you want."

She looked at him warily. Last night had shown her a side of Jonas she didn't know, a sensitivity she wouldn't have expected from him. He kept her demons at bay, and she had her first untroubled sleep in a long time. But he was still her captor and couldn't be trusted. He only acted nice because he wanted something.

Jonas watched her clean the plate. It didn't take long. "Do you want seconds?"

She swallowed the last bit of sausage and shook her head.

"How 'bout a shower then?"

Of course she wanted a shower. More than anything, she wanted to be unfettered—even if only for a short time. She sniffed but couldn't detect Jude's scent. Jonas never unchained her unless his brother stood by with a dart gun. Evidently, his good mood persisted. "Yes."

Jonas took keys from his pocket and unlocked the small padlock. The ankle cuff fell away, and he rubbed his thumb over the mark it left. The red faded, but his touch set off sparks that headed straight for her pussy. She shivered as he slid his hand along her calf.

Her heat should have ended with conception, but she wanted Jonas more than ever. The look he gave her said he wanted the same thing. She might fuck him, but she wouldn't make it easy. He didn't have to know how much she craved his body. It would be one more thing he could hold over her. She tamped down her arousal, pulled her foot away, and stood to face him. "Where's the guard dog?"

"If you mean Jude, he's still asleep."

Hands on hips, she studied him. This had to be a trap. If she made a wrong move, he'd push a button, and Jude would come running.

Jonas stood. They were only inches apart. "I'm not lying." He pulled the shirt over his head and tossed it at her feet. "And I didn't come armed." He unzipped his jeans and shoved them over his hips. "At least not with a dart gun." His erection bridged the gap between them. It made her mouth water.

She studied him while her mind raced a mile a minute, calculating her chances of taking him down. She could do it easy. But, then what? Were the doors locked, alarmed, guarded by animals? If she messed up today, there'd be no second chance. He'd lock her up and throw away the key. It would be better to play his game a little longer and learn more about her prison. "Who's taking the shower here?" she asked.

"It might be a tight squeeze, but I think we can both fit."

The heat in her belly grew at the thought of Jonas's body pressed against hers. "Aren't you afraid to be alone with me?" She meant it to be sarcastic, but instead it came out seductive.

He grinned. "I'll take my chances."

She shrugged and turned to enter the bathroom. Jonas followed. She leaned back against the sink while he adjusted the water.

"Get in. See if it's to your liking."

She stepped past him and under the cascading water. Closing her eyes, she turned her head up and enjoyed the warmth. After bathing in cold river water, there was something to be said for a hot shower. She didn't complain when Jonas got in behind her.

"I'll wash your back." He gathered her long, wet hair to one side and slung it over her shoulder. His soapy hands massaged every inch of her back before working their way down between the firm cheeks of her butt and then around to soap between her legs. His fingers parted her slippery folds and pushed inside. Lust surged through her veins. She started to tremble, and he withdrew. "I just wanted to make sure you were clean."

Bastard.

His cock nudged her ass, and she pressed back, trying to make it seem accidental. He sucked in a breath then anchored her to his hips with one hand and cupped a breast with the other. He caressed the underside, carefully avoiding her nipple.

"Jonas." She sighed.

His nimble fingers found the tight bud and pinched. It wasn't enough. She pressed her hands over his and squeezed.

"I want to wash your hair." His voice was husky in her ear. "Hand me the shampoo."

She forced her eyes open, took the bottle from the shelf hanging below the showerhead, and passed it back.

Jonas poured some in his hands and lathered her scalp. "I've been wanting to do this. Your hair is beautiful. So long and thick."

No one had washed her hair for fifteen years. It was almost better than sex. She leaned into it, loving his strong massage. He took his time as if he enjoyed it as much as she did. When he finally rinsed her hair, she took the shampoo and washed his.

Sable took her time with his back. The play of muscles under her hands fascinated her. She worked her way down from his neck to his waist. The soapy lather ran over his perfect ass, drawing her attention

and inspiring an urge to sink her teeth in his flesh. He turned abruptly as if he read her mind.

Disappointed, she soaped his arms, stopping to admire the tattoo that circled his right bicep.

"Does this spell "wild"? It looks like claws."

"It is. Just something stupid that Jude and I did when we were kids. We thought we were badasses."

"You still do."

He flashed his disarming grin. "Nah. We're pussycats."

"Right. And you know how well cats and dogs get along." She grinned back. "Different species should stick to their own."

Their eyes locked, and he pulled her closer. "Is that what you want?"

A sharp retort came to her lips, and she discarded it. "I just want to clean you up."

"Then I think you forgot something."

Her slim fingers wrapped around his cock and pumped. "I never forget anything," she whispered. "I saved the best for last."

* * * *

Jonas thought he'd explode when Sable dropped to her knees in front of him. She looked like a water goddess. Her beaded nipples peeked through the silky black curtain plastered to her body. He'd never seen anything so beautiful.

She let the shower rinse the soap from his penis before inching closer. His cock twitched in anticipation. It bobbed against her lips, and her tongue flicked out like a snake to circle the head. She explored the sensitive ridge, then her clever tongue found the underside of his balls and licked up to the tip of his cock, as if he were a lollipop. Gently, she cupped his sac in one hand and took him into her mouth. His groan echoed off the tile.

Her mouth, so hot around his cock, set him on fire. She looked up at him with those golden almond eyes and took him deeper. So deep, her nose rubbed the coarse hair at the base of his shaft. Jesus, who

was taming who? Since she came into his life, he'd thought of nothing else. She would kill him for sure.

Her hand searched playfully between the cheeks of his ass while she sucked harder, destroying him with her mouth. When her finger penetrated him, he lost it. He let out a harsh cry and flooded her mouth with his cum. His body shuddered with the longest, hottest, sweetest release of his life.

"Now that's a pretty sight." Jude's voice was an unwelcome intrusion that brought him back to reality. He hadn't even heard him slide open the shower door.

Sable stood in one graceful move and looked from one to the other.

Jude put a hand under the shower. "Shit. You didn't save me any hot water."

Jonas stiffened. The water was cold. Sable made him so hot, he hadn't noticed. He reached over her to shut it off. "I didn't want to wake you."

Jude threw him a towel, then handed another one to Sable. When she grabbed it, he reeled her in. "I wouldn't mind waking up with these lips wrapped around my cock." He gripped her chin and ran a thumb over her mouth.

Jonas scowled. "I thought you weren't ready," he asked, irritated. "What's the rush all of a sudden?"

Jude grinned. "Watching you inspires me." He palmed the bulge at his crotch. "I think I'm ready."

"Now?" Jonas's mind whirled. How could he put him off?

"No time like the present." Jude stared at Sable with hungry eyes.

"Sable's tired. Give her a rest."

Jude gave him a funny look. "That's exactly what I want to give her. Looks to me like you made her do all the work." He grazed his knuckles over her bare arm. "How about it, honey? I even turned the mattress and made up the bed. You just lay back and let me take care of you."

Sable shrugged her shoulders. Jonas didn't like the way her eyes glittered at Jude's touch.

Jude raised a brow and looked at him.

"It's up to her," Jonas said, frowning.

"Why not. Isn't that why I'm here?" Sable's voice was heavy with sarcasm.

Chapter Six

Jonas wrapped the towel around his slim hips and motioned Jude to follow him out of the bathroom. "I want to talk to you."

"I don't think this is a good time." Jonas's stage whisper sounded like he was still in the room with her.

"Why not? This is what you wanted, isn't it?" Jude's confused voice was equally audible. "You still want that half-breed, don't you?"

"Of course, but I didn't mean to just spring it on her."

"What's the difference? You were right, she's willing. Jesus Christ, bro. The way she was sucking on you, I thought she'd swallow you alive. It made me so fucking hot that I don't care what she is. I'm glad I let you talk me into this."

Bastards!

Sable dropped the towel and walked out to confront them. "Don't feel you have to force yourself." She glared at Jude, hands on hips. "You might get rabies bedding an animal."

The men lowered their eyes. At least they had the decency to look sheepish.

Jonas spoke first. "It's not like that."

"Really? What's it like?"

"We're not going to hurt you."

"Why should I believe you?" she spat.

"Because I think you're special, unique. I want to learn about you, not harm you. You can have a safe home here."

Yes, he thought she was special enough to want to experiment on her and her offspring. The arrogant son of a bitch had to be stopped before he created a monster. Gods only knew what he would do next. Maybe take her apart to find out what made her tick. Or use her body parts to create a powerful half-human, half-Lycan demon.

"You mean a safe prison. You're not going to let me go," she said bitterly.

"No. But you're better off here than out in the Wilds. I can give you whatever you need. You'll never have to worry about finding food or shelter, running from the law, or anyone else."

"Freedom is all I need."

"How long do you think you'd be free if the sheriff caught you?"

"I'd rather live on the run. I can't stay in this room forever. I'd sooner be dead."

"It won't always be like this. I plan to give you more freedom. I know an animal can't be—"

Her backbone stiffened, and she spit at him.

He took a step closer. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean anything."

"Liar," she bellowed. Her wolf sat up on edge. She saw Jude watching her over Jonas's shoulder, letting this play out. "What do you want from me in return for all this?" She swept an arm around the room.

Jonas flushed. "Just cooperation. I only want to do some tests, take some blood and urine."

"That's all you want? Blood and urine?" She narrowed her eyes at him. "No sex?"

"That's up to you. I won't force you to do anything."

"No. But if I don't cooperate you'll take my light away and put me in a crate."

He shrugged. "Things will go easier for you if you cooperate."

The mention of more freedom intrigued her. She was willing to do just about anything to get out of this white cage.

"You won't have to force me," she purred in a silky voice. "But I need fresh air, sunshine." She paused. "No more tranquilizers."

"That can be arranged," he said softly. "Just be a good girl, and do what I tell you."

They measured one another eye to eye. Both had their own agendas, yet some unspoken agreement passed between them. It wouldn't be so difficult to cooperate. She could enjoy sex with Jonas, play good dog, and get out of here that much sooner. Then who would be double-fucked?

Jonas stood before her, his cock, heavy and thick, brushed his belly. She licked her lips as memories of his taste flooded her brain. He turned away, and the mouthwatering view disappeared, but another one took its place—his fine ass and lean, muscular thighs covered with light brown hair. She watched the play of his muscles as he padded over to the bed, sat, and held out a hand to her. She took it, stood between his legs, and looked down at him.

Jude came up behind her. His hands gripped her hips. She twisted in his grasp, sat on Jonas's lap, and looked him up and down. "You're overdressed for this party."

Jude didn't hesitate for a second. He pulled off his boots and unzipped his jeans.

The hard erection pressing against her back and the man disrobing in front of her made her randy wolf want to howl. Jude's cock, freed from his jeans, pointed straight at her. It appeared even longer than Jonas's.

"Like what you see?"

"I've seen better." She stuck her nose up and looked away.

Obviously not embarrassed by his equipment, he threw his head back and laughed. "It'll take care of you just fine, sweetheart."

She suspected it would, but she refused to give him the satisfaction of saying so.

"Hey, I like when you look at me. It makes me hot."

He was right. When she checked him out again, she could swear his erection grew bigger in front of her eyes.

Jude licked his lips and dropped to his knees at her feet. He lifted a foot and sucked each toe before resting it on his thigh. His big, rough hands worked their way up her calf with confident strokes that made her breath catch in her throat. Why was he doing this? He didn't need to seduce her, he owned her.

His eyes turned deep blue-black. Framed by long brown lashes that matched his shadowed cheeks, they mesmerized her. He bent his head and rubbed his stubbled jaw along her thigh. When she whimpered, he raised his head immediately, caught her hand, and kissed her palm. Her heart fluttered, and she froze.

"Do you want me to shave?" He spoke softly, rubbing her palm against his cheek.

Speechless, she shook her head. The abrasive friction set off sparks that set her on fire.

He smiled and bent to his task. Wherever he grazed her skin, he soothed it with his tongue.

Her breath caught. The raw ache between her legs thrummed in a disturbing rhythm. Suddenly she wanted his mouth on her sex. She gripped his hair and pulled him closer to her needy pussy.

Jonas pulled her thighs over his and spread her wide to give Jude better access. His hands branded her flesh with their heat. She arched back against him, and his ragged breath warmed her cheek.

Jude parted her nether lips with his thumbs, and her anticipation ramped up another notch. He stroked her pussy, and she felt herself spiral out of control too, too fast. Did she really want Jude, or did she imagine it was Jonas touching her? All she knew for sure was that if he didn't put his mouth on her soon, she'd scream.

"So pretty," he murmured. "So fucking wet." At the first stroke of his tongue along her labia, she sucked in a breath and rewarded him with a flood of moisture. His greedy tongue lapped it up, sending a jolt of electricity through her body.

"Gods, yes."

She held his head and moved her hips against his mouth to meet his wet licks and kisses. His tongue made small circles around her clit. Heat built inside her, and Jonas held her quivering legs steady.

As if he sensed how close she was to losing it, he sucked the swollen button gently and slipped a finger inside her wet folds. Another finger joined the first. When he nipped her clit, he took her over the edge, and she cried out in a moment of pure bliss.

Then Jude surprised her. He cupped the back of her head and claimed her mouth with a fierce kiss. She shocked herself with her own eager response to the touch of his lips. He explored her mouth. His tongue searched for hers and danced around it. When he finally came up for air, she whimpered for more.

His smoldering stare pinned her. "Have you ever been with two men before?"

The image of having both of them inside her made her shudder. Jonas must have thought she objected. "I think she's had enough for today."

Jude looked at her. "Let her answer."

"I've done this before." But never with two men she wanted more than these two.

"That's my girl." Jude stood between her legs.

"Are you sure you're okay with this?" Jonas asked from behind her.

Jude stilled, surprised. "You heard her. She's okay."

"I'm asking her." Jonas's hands tightened on her arms.

Sable twisted her head so he could see her face. "I'm okay with it." She enunciated every word. What was Jonas's problem? Isn't this what he wanted? Part of his big plan for fame and fortune. She'd heard it with her own ears.

For a second, he stared back. Then he released his hold, and she stood. He did, too.

Jude stepped behind her, his hands on her hips, his erection nudging her butt. "Don't worry, sweetheart, I'm not going to hurt you," he murmured in her ear, his breath warm and arousing. His cock pressed insistently at the cleft of her buttocks, one hand drifted over her belly and cupped her mound. He tangled his fingers in her curls, raising goose bumps. She covered his hand with her own, pressing his palm tightly against her swollen clit.

Jonas moved closer. All too aware of his body, her nipples tightened into hard little peaks and scraped his chest as she arched back against Jude. She ached to have Jonas suckle her, and she lifted her breasts in a silent offering. He bent his head, and his tongue circled one sensitive nipple.

More, more, more.

As if he read her mind, his mouth closed over the throbbing tip, and he drew her nipple taut. The suction went right to her womb. He licked and sucked while he used his hand to pinch and roll the other rigid nub.

Gods, she wanted this, them, now. She shouldn't let them know how much she wanted it, but it was too late to hold back. Something

about aggressive lovers turned her on. Not because she liked being hurt but because it made her feel desirable. She pushed aside the thought that they just wanted her baby and concentrated on the idea that two irresistible men were consumed with overpowering passion for her. It wasn't hard to imagine when the evidence was right there in front of her eyes.

She compared the brothers. Jude, a little shorter and leaner, might have a slightly longer cock, but Jonas was thicker, and his engorged flesh pulsed as it sought entrance. A delightful shiver of anticipation went through her, and fluid pooled between her thighs. She intended to enjoy the ride. Soon enough she'd find a way out of here, and she'd never have to see either of them again.

* * * *

Jonas released Sable as Jude edged her toward the bed. She lay on her back, a vision to behold, tall and perfectly proportioned, her tanned skin unblemished. And those magnificent breasts.

Her wide-set amber eyes watched him like a cat with a mouse. He tried to control his breathing. Not an easy thing to do when her delicious body lay in front of him like a feast waiting to be devoured. He wanted to give her a soul-shattering orgasm, but the table was set for three, and he had to consider the logistics. A fierce wave of possessiveness swept over him. *Ridiculous*. This was his idea after all. He shook it off.

Jude stepped up. "It's not a good idea to keep a lady waiting." He sat on the bed and skimmed his fingers over Sable's neck. "You're not gonna bite me, are you?" He smiled down at her. "I can't stand pain, and I don't want any scars. I think you marked Jonas for life."

She grinned back. "You're not spicy enough for my taste."

Jonas threw back his head and laughed.

"That sounds like a challenge to me." Jude snorted.

"Are you sure you're up to it," she said with a throaty voice as her fingers wrapped around his shaft.

"Oh, I'm up to it, sweetheart." Jude's cock jerked at her touch, and Jonas felt an unreasonable twist of jealousy grip his gut. He knew

what it felt like to be inside her, and now he selfishly wanted her all to himself.

Jude stretched out next to Sable and rubbed his erection against her hip. She turned to face him and lined up her hips with his. He groaned and pulled her in for a kiss.

The sight of her mouth locked to Jude's stirred a longing inside Jonas. She seemed to enjoy kissing his brother, and he envied him that. He hadn't kissed her. Not that he wasn't tempted. It just seemed disloyal to Nicole. Even though this was not an emotional relationship, he still felt guilty. He never gave Nicole enough of his time and even less lately.

Jude rolled her over until he was on top. He supported his weight with a forearm on either side of her head and leaned in to kiss her again. He nuzzled her neck and worked his way over her collarbone to her breasts. He nipped and licked at her nipples while she whimpered and pulled his hair. When he sucked hard at one swollen peak, she let out little mewls of need.

"Gods. Jonas, please."

Jude released the rigid bud with a pop and lifted his head. "Should I be insulted?"

"No." She gasped. "You can only do one at a time."

Jude chuckled. "You heard her, Jonas. Stop stalling and help me out here." He rolled to the other side, and Jonas joined them on the bed.

Jude wasted no time, and Jonas followed suit. He dipped his head to capture her other breast. Sandwiched between them, Sable cried out and arched her back. Her cries made him suck harder, and the musky scent of arousal hung in the air.

Jonas's hand drifted over her belly and between her thighs to play in her damp folds. She was so damn wet, and he wanted her taste on his tongue. He moved between her legs and bent to nuzzle the damp curls covering her mound.

"Jonas, please."

She sounded so damn needy. He spread her open and licked one side, then the other. She writhed under him, finally drawing her knees up and planting her feet flat on the mattress so she could push up

against his mouth. Her scent flooded his lungs, and desire roared through him. Christ, she would drive him insane. Her legs quivered when he penetrated her with his tongue, worked it in and out. Her fingers gripped his hair, and her hips rocked against his face. Lost in her passion, his only desire was to take her over the edge. He captured her clit between his lips and sucked hard. She stiffened and cried out his name. He buried his face in her heat and rode her shuddering spasms until they ended. It gave him a perverse satisfaction to think he'd taken her higher than Jude had.

When he finally moved up beside her, she was watching Jude fist his cock. But it was Jonas she turned to. She traced the length of his cock with an index finger, and desire thrummed through his veins.

"Jonas, I want you inside me. Fuck me."

He sucked in a breath. Her words made mush of his insides. She really wanted this. Wanted him.

"You heard the lady, Jonas," Jude said hoarsely as he reached around to fondle her breasts.

"Wait." They both looked at Jonas, astounded, as he got off the bed and walked into the bathroom. He came back with a tube of lubricant and tossed it to Jude. He might be out of his mind hot, but he still knew enough to make sure his brother didn't hurt her.

He stretched out next to her, and she twined her arms around his neck while Jude rubbed lube on his cock and between the cheeks of her ass.

She moaned and dug her nails into Jonas's flesh.

"Use more. I don't want you to hurt her."

"I know what I'm doing. She doesn't sound like she's hurting."

"Just do what I tell you."

"Are you okay, Sable?"

"Yes, yes, yes," she murmured and gripped him tighter.

Jonas lifted her leg over his hips, and she buried her face against his throat. He wanted inside—now. Evidently, she did, too. She grasped his rigid shaft and guided him to her entrance.

He slipped the crown of his cock between her damp folds, making them both gasp.

"Please, more," she moaned.

Jude spread her cheeks, and she made small mewling sounds as he entered her. With every thrust, he forced Jonas deeper inside her.

Sable wiggled back against him. "Fuck, yes." Jude groaned against her neck and reached around to cup a breast.

Jonas had been leery about a threesome, but he couldn't deny how good it felt—how right. Evidently, his two partners shared his excitement. Sable's eyes reflected his own passion. He started moving inside her.

Jude picked up his rhythm. Their tandem thrusting made her writhe between them. Jude slid his hands between their bodies and kneaded her breasts. Her hips bucked and twisted.

Heat built up and consumed Jonas. He moved fiercely, countering Jude's thrusts. Sable's sweat-shiny body lit a fire that threatened to weld them together as one. Jonas felt his climax build, and he worked hard to postpone it.

"Oh, Gods. I need to come.," Sable pleaded with him, with Jude.

Jude's hand skimmed over her belly to circle the swollen bundle of nerves above Jonas's plunging shaft. "I bet it feels good to be buried in this sweet, wet pussy," Jude said, groaning. "Her ass is so tight around my cock, I can't hold off much longer."

Jude buried his face in her neck and convulsed against her back. "Sweet Jesus."

Sable screamed in climax, and her inner muscles clenched around Jonas's cock and milked him hard. She set off his release, and he exploded inside her.

The three of them trembled as if an electric charge flowed through them and Sable was the conductor. Positive energy ebbed and flowed, forming a complete circuit that lit him up like a lightbulb. The hair on his body stood at attention.

His breathing quieted, and his flaccid penis slipped out of her. He propped himself up on an elbow and looked down at Sable. Shock flooded him. A bite mark on her neck glowed red like a brand.

Chapter Seven

A powerful current drew the three together and like marionettes on wires, they were helpless to resist. Only Sable knew an invisible manipulator pulled their strings. The high voltage energy that sparked between them singed her nerve endings and created a magnetic field that could only be Kweo's doing. To what end, she had no idea. She only knew her wolf had never been so stimulated and so sated.

A relaxed, comfortable feeling overtook her. Suddenly she felt herself yanked upright, and Jonas began fussing with her hair.

"What the fuck did you do?"

Everything you wanted!

Irritation bubbled up inside her, ready to explode, but Jude sprang up next to them and became the target of Jonas's wrath. He glared back at his brother. Was this going to turn into a pissing contest? She looked from one angry face to the other.

Jonas's mouth tightened and his eyes blazed blue flame. He swept the hair from her neck. "Look! You tell her not to bite you and then you mangle her like this?"

Jude inspected his handiwork and rubbed a thumb over the tingling spot. "Sorry. I guess I got carried away."

"Is that all you have to say."

What was Jonas's problem? Hadn't she done the same to him? "I'm okay. It doesn't hurt." Hell. Why couldn't it have been Jonas who bit her? It would have meant something—the completion of a true mating. Why did she always want a mate who didn't want her? No. She had to get these crazy thoughts out of her head. Basking in the afterglow of good sex was one thing but reading more into it would be soul-destroying. Kweo threw temptation in her path, but the key to her redemption rested with the baby's safety.

"Do you remember what you said when she bit me?" Jonas persisted.

"That was then. I'm not worried about rabies."

Jude's reply brought her back to reality. Highly insulted, she snarled at him.

"Hey, it was a joke." Jude leaned over and tried to kiss her, but she snapped her teeth at him, and he flinched.

"I'm sorry. Okay. I didn't know any better."

His apology surprised and pleased her, but it didn't take away the hurt. She snorted and averted her eyes to let him know he wouldn't get off that easy.

"I'm sorry about the bite, too, but you have to take some of the blame for that." His deep masculine chuckle sent a shiver down her spine.

"Let me see it." Jonas bent her head back for a closer look, and a territorial warning rumbled up from Jude's chest.

Her stomach fluttered, and her wolf looked up with sudden interest. Her nostrils flared and took in his scent.

Jude bumped foreheads with Jonas as they both stared at the bite. "What's wrong?"

"It's not healing," Jonas said, with a question in his voice.

"What's the big deal? So it's taking a little longer than usual." Jude sounded confident. His tone thrilled her.

"Maybe you gave her rabies. I should put an antiseptic on it."

"It's fine," she snapped. She brushed Jonas off, all her attention centered on Jude. Something had changed between them. She reached out and brushed a lock of pale blond hair from his forehead. Recognition hit her hard. A feeling of joy filled her.

He might be unaware of what he'd done, but Jude had claimed her as his mate. He thought he owned her before, but he'd just made it very real. She belonged to him. It felt good, more than good. Suddenly he'd become the center of her world. Her wolf curled up in contented submission and nipped her gut. *Bite him*. It urged her to seal the deal.

This would make it harder to leave, and she had no choice. She wouldn't live in a prison and neither would her baby. A baby that

belonged to Jude's brother. Jonas had never claimed her. He didn't want her. For that matter, neither one of them wanted a child. They wanted a lab rat. Could things be any more fucked up? What difference did it make? The baby was hers. They would never even know she carried a child. They'd be long gone before her signs of pregnancy became obvious to the men.

Jude ran his knuckles over her jaw. His eyes glowed with lust and something else. *Tenderness*? She didn't imagine it. He might not know what he'd done, but he felt something for her, and she could use it to her advantage.

He kissed her nose, her cheeks, and his mark. She lost herself in his affection. When his mouth opened over hers, she met his lips eagerly. Their tongues tangled until she sucked his into her mouth in a parody of the mating dance. She'd never tasted anything so delicious.

They broke to catch a breath, and his eyes devoured her.

"You're so beautiful," he whispered.

She saw love in his eyes. It might not be real, but she drank it in. No man had ever loved her. She let it imprint on her brain. She'd done some bad things in the past, but surely she deserved one sweet memory to treasure when she left.

She caressed him everywhere, wanting to memorize the feel of his hard muscles under her hands. He reciprocated, and she felt more and more that her body belonged to him. She moved closer until she sat between his legs, her sex pressed against his. His breath quickened, and his hands grew tighter on her hips. She rubbed her sensitive nipples against his lightly-furred chest and growled into his ear. He nuzzled her, exciting her to frenzy.

She felt the mattress shift behind her, and she twisted in a rapid move to snatch Jonas's arm before he could leave her. Her strength had increased, and she held him back easily.

"You don't need me here," he said, surprised.

"But I want you here," she answered truthfully. Jonas hadn't claimed her, but she'd left her mark on him and forged a connection. She wanted both of them. Again. The unbearable ache between her legs throbbed anew and had to be satisfied.

Looking him up and down, she saw the problem. His flaccid penis needed attention. She reached out and stroked it to life. It surged in her hand, and she gave him an intimate smile. He had to know how much she wanted this.

"What do you want me to do?" he asked hoarsely.

She cupped her left breast and offered it to him.

He inched closer, and she waited in an agony of desire until his mouth finally closed around the tip. Ecstatic pleasure filled her, and she threw her head back.

He nipped the hard bud with his teeth then soothed it with his tongue before sucking on it hungrily. Each tug sent a wave of pleasure straight to her pussy.

Jude teased her other breast, making her moan. He raised an eyebrow. "Too much for you."

"Not enough," she complained.

"We can fix that." He chuckled. "Jonas, help me out." He gestured to the headboard, and Jonas sat back against it. She followed him, and he settled her between his legs, her back to his chest. He reached around and fondled her breasts, his cock, rock-hard now, pressed against her back.

Jude spread her thighs, and she felt his warm tongue swipe her pussy. She cried out, and her hips arched off the bed. He lapped at her cream until she went crazy. She pulled his hair, and he penetrated her with his tongue and then his fingers. When he sucked on her clit, she saw stars, cried out, and ground her hips against his face. She thought she might suffocate him, but he didn't stop, and she came again. Her hips bucked wildly, but Jonas kept her legs spread wide while Jude took her up one glorious peak after another. Finally, a tidal wave of pleasure took her higher than ever, and when she came down, she saw Jude watching her intently.

She stared wordlessly at him, her heart pounding. His deep blue eyes regarded her with the strangest, most unreadable expression.

Behind her, Jonas hugged her tight, and she felt the fires ignite deep in her pussy again. Unexpectedly, it was Jonas she wanted to taste. She twisted in his arms.

Clearly aroused, Jude watched her with hot eyes. His time would come. She turned her attention to Jonas, his engorged cock stood at attention. She reached for it, wrapped her fingers around it, and squeezed. His eyes rolled back in his head. Satisfied, she pumped up and down in long, slow strokes, and the purple head wept pre-cum for her. She licked her lips and bent over his hot, swollen flesh, swirling her tongue around the flared head. Jonas groaned, slid further down, and widened his legs to give her better access. She dipped the point of her tongue into the tiny slit, and his taste exploded in her mouth, exciting, familiar, hers. She traced a vein along the shaft then slid her lips down his length, enveloping his cock until he hit the back of her throat. She squeezed his heavy sac and withdrew, letting her teeth graze his silky skin on the way up.

"Fuck! Don't stop now."

"Don't be selfish," she purred. "We want to come along with you." She looked over at Jude, who watched, transfixed, and rose on her knees, presenting her ass in invitation. Then she took Jonas in her mouth again.

* * * *

Jude sent Jonas a warning look, not pleased with all the attention he was getting. This possessive streak was not at all like him. What the hell just happened?

In spite of his annoyance, he was hot and hard. The sound of Sable's mouth sucking on Jonas's cock, and his brother's moans in response, were as arousing as if he was getting sucked off himself. Her ass jutted in the air, and her legs were spread, revealing her dark pubic hair and a sliver of glistening pink pussy. God help him. She might be the sexiest woman he'd ever been with.

He got up on his knees and rubbed his hands over the firm cheeks of her ass. Then he reached under her and stroked her pussy, already hot and wet for him. He teased her clit, and she rewarded him with a spurt of liquid that coated his hand. He stroked his fingers along her lips until she moaned around Jonas's cock. She squirmed and wiggled her ass, letting him know she wanted more.

No question, she was in control here. He anchored her with a hand on her stomach and rubbed his cock against her slit, coating his shaft until it glistened with her moisture. He positioned himself at her entrance and entered her slowly. She gasped and pushed back against him.

"Relax," he murmured to her. "Let me take my time with you." Hot as he was, he hoped he could stick to the plan. He pulled back a little and entered her again. He molded his body to hers. She felt so damn good.

She started sucking Jonas harder.

"Jesus, I don't know how long I can hold off." Jonas groaned.

He wasn't sure he could last much longer either. The soft keening sounds coming from her throat reverberated along his nerve endings and drove him higher. Could she tell how much she affected him? He leaned over her back, one hand splayed over her lower belly, the other fondling a breast. He nuzzled her neck. He wanted this to be good for her. He barely moved. Instead of pulling out, he twisted his hips.

"Yes, like that," she mumbled around Jonas's cock. She reached a hand back to yank his hair. Jude kissed her back and murmured encouragement.

"Oh, Jesus..." Jonas groaned and pushed his hips up.

His brother seemed on the verge of release. He wasn't far behind. Sable made little mewling sounds and matched him thrust for thrust. He stepped up his pace. It seemed to drive her wild. He slipped a hand down and worked her clit, and she responded by moving back against him harder. She started making soft animal noises, guttural sounds in the back of her throat.

She worked Jonas harder, and he came with a shout. When she released his cock, he slid under her and latched onto a nipple. She let out a low-pitched moan that made Jonas suckle her harder. He released her breast with a pop and turned his attention to the other one.

She howled and came with an intensity Jude felt through his own body. He couldn't hold back, and he abandoned control to the most incredible climax of his life. He emptied himself inside her sweet

pussy, and after a few minutes, he rolled to the side, taking her with him.

They lay still, he and Jonas flanking her.

He'd never understand women, and especially not this one. Yesterday she'd been an angry she-wolf. Today she was a beautiful passionate woman—his woman. At least that's how it felt when they made love. Yeah, love. He wasn't *in love*, not by a long shot. But, damn, it felt good being with her. All his protective instincts surfaced. Damn strange since she was probably a lot stronger than he was. She acted as if she wanted to be with him—them. And she wasn't even chained. The idea of her being restrained like that ticked him off. She deserved a little more freedom. He kissed the bite mark on her neck. "Jesus, Sable, I love being inside you."

She let out a contented sigh.

It felt right. Their bodies so in tune they were more like one person instead of two. Or three.

Chapter Eight

Late Summer 2009 Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Karin Connor sat on the suitcase and bounced up and down a few times. Even with her baby weight, she couldn't get it to close. She'd been tempted to buy another set of luggage, but she just didn't feel like shopping for it. Besides, she'd never use it again. Once she moved back to Black Wolf Gorge with her new husband, she planned to stay there for the rest of her life. Trash bags would suffice for anything that didn't fit in a suitcase.

Karin looked up to see Malcolm watching her with a big grin on his face. She crossed her arms over her bulging belly and narrowed her eyes. "What's so funny, Mr. Connor?"

"Sorry." He tried to wipe the smile off his face but didn't quite succeed. "Who would have thought you had so much stuff. You're always in jeans and T-shirts."

Her mouth dropped open. "That is so unfair. You're not exactly Mr. GQ."

He raised an eyebrow. "Only married a few weeks and you're complaining already."

"You started it, and you just talked your way into buying me a new wardrobe after the baby is born."

"My pleasure, sweetheart," he said, turning serious. "Want some help?"

"Absolutely. Let's see you put those impressive muscles to work." She hopped off the case. "Please."

"Since you said please."

That fast, he muscled it shut and snapped the locks. He flexed his impressive biceps, and she pretended to swoon.

"My hero."

"And don't you forget it." He swooped her into his arms and kissed her breathless.

"I bet you need all those muscles to lift me and Junior. This baby is going to be a linebacker for sure." At first she'd been worried about the baby's size, but Malcolm assured her that Lycan children grew fast and the women only carried them for seven months. According to her last ultrasound, she was eight months pregnant when, in reality, she was barely six. And Malcolm Junior was only half Lycan. Obviously, when it came to size, her son took after his father.

She could hardly believe that in only one month she'd be holding him in her arms instead of in her stomach. She felt like the luckiest woman in the world, reunited with her mate and getting ready to move back to the Pennsylvania Wilds to raise a family. It didn't get any better than that.

She'd fallen into the habit of calling him her mate so easily. He was more than a husband. He was her soul mate, her other half. She rubbed the bite scar on her neck where his mark proclaimed their bond. Even though they had a small civil ceremony with just her mother and aunt present, she felt the importance of his mark more than any piece of paper proclaiming them man and wife. They'd been together since the day he came to the city looking for her, and nothing would ever separate them again.

"A penny for your thoughts, sweetheart." He set her down.

"They're X-rated and worth a hell of a lot more than a penny."

"Now that sounds like an invitation." He made a move to grab her again, and she danced out of his reach.

"Believe me, there's nothing I'd like better, but I have too much to do." She caught his disappointed look. "Tonight, baby, I promise." She shook her head. "I just don't know where all this stuff came from? I haven't been back long enough to accumulate all this, and you didn't bring much with you. Maybe you should have leased a U-Haul truck instead of the Highlander."

"We'll take what we can, and if there's anything else you want, maybe your mother will hang onto it for us. She can send it on, or we'll come back."

"Good idea." Every time she thought about returning to the Pennsylvania Wilds, she got more excited. Despite all the painful memories, it was home, and she couldn't wait to get back. A new life waited for her, one she'd be sharing with the man she loved. She never thought she'd get her happily ever after, but this was a fairy-tale ending if there ever was one.

Malcolm gave her a quick peck on the nose. "I'm going to take the dogs out, be back soon."

She heard Ralf protest when Malcolm put the collar and leash on him. The hybrid was used to running free in the woodlands, but they couldn't take the chance here. He might be spooked by the heavy traffic in the city and get hurt or worse. No matter how much he protested, they refused to let him out on his own. Her tiny Yorkie was already leash trained. She wondered how Wolfie would take to the woodlands. Ralf would probably take him under his wing and show him the ropes. They'd become best buds. Good thing, too, because when the baby came, Wolfie wouldn't get as much attention.

She heard the apartment door open and then her mother's voice scolding Malcolm.

"Oh, come on, now, we're family. What kind of welcome is that? Don't I get a hug and a kiss?"

Smiling, she left the bedroom to rescue him.

He looked at her, helplessly, over her mother's shoulder. At six feet four inches, he towered over her.

"Mom, what are you doing here? We're not leaving until tomorrow."

"What? I can't spend these last few hours with my only daughter and her husband?" She clucked disapprovingly. "I thought you were back for good, and now this man is taking you away again—and my grandson." She wiped a tear from her eye.

"This man is family, remember?" She hugged her mother tightly, wondering what she would say if she knew her son-in-law could shift into a wolf whenever he chose.

"Oh, you know what I mean." She grabbed Malcolm's arm and pulled him in for a group hug. "I just wish you were all staying here."

"Don't worry, Mrs. Stone. We'll bring you out as soon as the baby comes."

"If not before," she admonished him. "And call me Mom. Family, remember?"

Malcolm fidgeted, and Karin grinned at his expression. His own family had been murdered fifteen years ago, and he'd been alone ever since. He wasn't used to being part of a family. Her mother would take some getting used to.

"Sure, Mrs. Uh, I mean. Mom," he stammered.

"That's better, son." She smiled at him then looked down, finally paying some attention to the dogs crouched at her feet.

Wolfie yipped hopefully, and she scooped him up for a cuddle. "I'll miss you, too." The Yorkie bathed her face with his tongue. She set him down and patted Ralf's head. "You're too big to pick up." They never told her he was half wolf. She thought the hybrid was a German Shepherd.

Satisfied with their greeting, the two dogs walked to the door and sat side by side. Wolfie eyed the leashes in Malcolm's hand and barked impatiently.

"I'm here to take you to dinner, so don't be long." She narrowed her eyes at Malcolm.

"Mother, we really hadn't planned on going out."

"I'm not taking no for an answer. This is your last night in Philly, and I want us to have dinner together."

Karin caught Malcolm's eye and shrugged. She knew he'd been looking forward to alone time and some X-rated activity.

He winked and flashed the sexy grin that said, *You owe me*.

No problem. Whatever his price, she'd be happy to pay up.

* * * *

"You were very sweet with my mother tonight."

"She makes it easy. She's a warm person."

"So are you, baby." She shooed Wolfie off the bed and snuggled closer to Malcolm's big body, as close as she could get with her round

tummy between them. His wild, masculine scent and body heat sent her temperature soaring.

"You know you're irresistible." She looked into his eyes, relishing the fact that she could lie in bed with him every night and wake up with him in the morning. They were together—finally. All the time they were apart, she felt a vital piece of her had gone missing.

"I'm glad you think so, but I'm still not sure what your mother really thinks of me. I was afraid when we finally got to meet she'd read me the riot act. I sure as hell deserved it for letting you get away."

"My mother didn't ask a lot of questions. She told me when I was ready to talk, she'd be there. I guess she could see I was hurting and didn't want to press me." She stroked his cheek. "I don't blame you for anything that happened. In your shoes, I might have done the same. Being torn between love and responsibility is a tough choice. And being confronted by a woman you believed dead for fifteen years had to be a shock. You're a good man, and you tried to do right by Sable. She was so alone and vulnerable. I can understand why she didn't want to lose you."

"If I had confided in you from the beginning, we could have worked it out together. My own damn fear, that you wouldn't accept me, kept us apart and put you in a vulnerable position. If Sable had killed you, I'd never forgive myself."

"That's all in the past. Sable's dead. We're together, and nothing else matters." She planted a gentle kiss on his lips.

"I'm so lucky to have you, sweetheart. He turned her around, and she leaned back against him, giving him free access to her breasts. "I love you."

"I love you, too, baby." She whimpered at his touch. Did every couple generate so much heat between them? She didn't think it possible. Any man she knew before Malcolm paled in comparison.

"I think I'm going to miss these." He caressed her breasts.

"You liked them just fine before I got pregnant." Karin covered one hand with hers and directed it where it would do the most good, between her legs. "A little less talking, please, and a little more action."

"Your wish is my command." His deep, throaty chuckle sounded in her ear.

"That's much better." She gasped. "I'm not going to last long at this rate." His growing arousal twitched against her butt. "Neither are you."

She wiggled out of his grasp, got on her hands and knees, and presented her butt to her mate.

"Gods. Do you have any idea how much you turn me on?" He came up behind her and growled in her ear. "Sometimes I think my mark actually turned you Lycan."

"I wish it did," she murmured wistfully. "I'm going to feel awfully left out when Junior is born."

"Never happen. You know I can't stay away from you too long." He guided himself inside her moist entrance. "At this rate you'll be pregnant again as soon as Junior vacates."

"Oh!"

"Gods, Karin. Did I hurt you?" Malcolm's voice lost its lightness.

"In a good way, baby. Jeeez, don't stop now."

"If anything happened to you, I don't know what I'd do." He breathed a sigh of relief as he cupped a swollen breast and rubbed his thumb over the marble-hard nipple. He stayed motionless inside her until she squirmed restlessly. Then he pulled out and, in slow, controlled movements, entered her again and again.

She pressed back against him, grinding her hips and murmuring nonsensical words of pleasure that elicited another growl from her mate. He was earthy, uninhibited, and so damn sexy he took her breath away. And he was moving much too slow to suit her. She thrust her hips back harder, encouraging him to pick up the pace. He got the idea and matched her rhythm. His deep, hard penetration drove her crazy. She felt her inner muscles contract around his cock and knew her climax loomed just out of reach. When his finger circled her swollen clit, her ardor built and her blood rushed red-hot through her veins. So much pleasure, almost too much to bear.

She drew a deep breath as his warm mouth closed over the mark on her neck and shivers coursed through her body. His teeth broke the flesh and wild excitement coursed through her, igniting powerful

spasms. Mindless, she surged back against him, wanting to be closer still. He held her quivering body, released his seed inside her, and uttered a howl that went straight to her soul.

Chapter Nine

Jonas leaned against the doorframe watching his twin and Sable sleep. Jude spooned her, one arm around her waist, a leg thrown over hers. Since their threesome, two days ago, Jude had slept in Sable's room. The bed was small, but they didn't need much space. Sable's sleek, sensual body molded to Jude's as if she were part of him.

Although the men were twins, they were polar opposites in their preferences, especially those that concerned women. Jonas had never before considered his brother a rival—until now.

Common sense warred with lust. Sable's inviting curves begged to be touched. It should come as no surprise that they both wanted her. But the feelings of jealousy and possessiveness were a shock.

He could so easily slip in beside her and hold her warm body in his arms again. They wouldn't mind. They would even welcome him. Jude had asked him outright why he kept his distance. He claimed work overload, but it was a lie. He hadn't been working at all. It just seemed like Jude and Sable meshed so well together, he felt like an outsider. Almost as if he was infringing on his brother's territory. How fucked up was that?

Truth was really stranger than fiction. Every time he looked at the bite scar on Sable's otherwise unblemished skin, he wanted to put his own mark on her. This ridiculous need to mark his territory and stake out his own claim made him no better than an animal. He needed to keep his distance in order to keep his sanity.

Sable stirred but didn't open her eyes. In one fluid move, she turned as Jude slid his leg off hers. Now her leg crossed his, and she twined her arms around his neck as he guided his cock inside her. *Damn!* It was like a fucking ballet.

The room smelled like a whorehouse. The heavy odor of sex stimulated his senses like an aphrodisiac, and his swollen member begged for attention. He slipped a hand in his shorts and fisted his stiff cock.

Jude's steady thrusts grew harder. Sable whimpered and matched his rhythm. Jonas pumped faster, his balls tightened as release loomed.

Fuck!

He felt like some pervert at a peep show. He would not get off by watching his brother fuck the woman he wanted. Just for the sex, of course. He had a real woman in his life. One he would marry someday. Jude didn't, so why not let him have Sable. And the way he was riding her, she'd be pregnant before long.

* * * *

Drifting between sleep and wakefulness, Sable felt Jude's warm body against her bare back, and she snuggled closer. She liked the feel of his arm wrapped possessively around her waist and his muscular leg draped over her thigh.

His growing erection nudged her bare bottom as if it had a life of its own. Desire rose in her veins, and she turned in his arms. He moved instinctively to accommodate her, and his cock found its way to her center like a homing pigeon. They were made for each other, no doubt about it. She moved against him, rubbing her clit against the coarse hair at his groin. He cupped her butt, burying his hard shaft deeper inside with each thrust. He touched a place no one had ever reached before, physically and emotionally.

The small room smelled of their sex, but under it, she detected another scent, Jonas's arousal. He was close by. Maybe he'd join them. Sex with Jude was heaven, but Jonas could take them even higher. Disappointment flooded her when his scent drifted off. *Screw him.* He was probably just checking up on them. Jude didn't want her chained. At least not when they were together. Jonas didn't like it, but he gave in.

“Good morning, sweetheart.”

Jude's sexy drawl made her stomach do flip-flops. She opened her eyes and looked into dark blue pools of lust.

"Mmmm... It's a very good morning." He looked so damn cute when he woke up. His shaggy blond hair stuck up all over the place like Dennis the Menace. And his five o'clock shadow was more like ten o'clock. If only she could take a picture. No, she didn't need a photo, she'd never forget her mate. Besides, she'd have a living reminder, a miniature Outlaw with blond hair and blue eyes. Of course, it could be a girl, with black hair, but she didn't think so. The baby would look like the Outlaws. She just knew it.

"A penny for your thoughts." Jude kissed her nose right before he pulled out.

"Hey!" she yelped, displeased.

"You are a demanding bitch." He grinned at her then rolled her on her back and kneeled between her knees. "You're in la-la land, and I want your attention on me." He gripped her thighs and brought her toward him so her hips were off the bed and her ankles rested on his shoulders. He plunged back inside, and the angle made the penetration so much deeper.

"Do I have your attention now?" he said, grunting.

Her answer was a sharp cry as he hit a sensitive spot inside her.

His cock tugged at her swollen lips as he plunged in and out, controlling their movements with his hold on her thighs. "God, you are a sight, darlin'. I love watching my cock sliding in and out of that sweet pussy."

His words made the heat rise in her veins, and she clutched the sheets with her fingers.

"Jesus, I'm getting close. Help me, baby. Touch yourself."

She kneaded her breasts, pinched the nipples between her fingers until they hardened to tight points. "Like this?" she asked in a throaty whisper.

"Baby, that is so fucking hot."

She slid a hand over her belly to tug first her pubic hair then his. Every time he pulled out, she teased his cock with her fingers. When she rubbed the spot above her throbbing clit, she lost herself in the pleasure of her own touch and his hardness filling her.

His eyes burned blue flame, and he plunged deep. She knew he was close. So was she.

His eyes locked on her hand. She circled her clit with an index finger, pinched it hard, and went off like a firecracker. Her muscles gripped him like a vise.

"Sable!" He gritted her name through clenched teeth, and she felt his cum spurt in staccato spasms. His release went on forever. Finally he lowered himself on top of her, kissing and licking the scar on her neck. The attention he gave to his mark sent shock waves through her, and she wiggled under him.

"Am I too heavy, sweetheart?" He breathed against her throat.

"No, and don't you dare move." She wrapped her legs around his hips, and they shared a wild, hungry kiss.

* * * *

"Do you want to go out or not?"

"Of course I do. But I'm not going anywhere on a leash," Sable protested vehemently. "It's humiliating."

Jonas leaned against the doorframe, watching her. "Well, I guess you don't want it that badly."

"You promised." She sulked like a petulant child. She'd been waiting for this chance.

"You did promise," Jude added.

"I'm keeping the promise, but we're going to do it my way. If Janis sees a woman walking around the property, she'll freak out. She doesn't know anything, and I want to keep it that way."

"Who?" *Janis? Who the hell is Janis?* She thought the two brothers lived here alone. Was Jonas married? Is that why he didn't touch her anymore?

"Nobody you have to worry about," Jonas assured her.

"Janis is our sister," Jude added.

Sable breathed an inward sigh of relief. She didn't like the idea of Jonas in another woman's arms.

Jonas gave Jude a look that said, *Keep your mouth shut*. He turned to Sable. "What's the big deal? You get to shift and go for a run."

"Okay, I'll do it," she agreed reluctantly. She didn't want to go on a leash. And she didn't want them watching her shift like some freak in a sideshow, but she didn't have much choice. Staying inside was not an option when she had an opportunity to get the lay of the land.

"Jude, get the tranquilizer gun and Sherlock's collar."

"No more tranquilizers. That was part of the deal."

"It's just a precaution until I know you'll behave."

She turned her head and looked at Jude. He shrugged and walked out to follow instructions like a good beta. No big deal. She planned to play their game. Nothing mattered except the chance to get outdoors. She fairly trembled with excitement, but she couldn't let her enthusiasm cloud her judgment. This was an all-important first step to her freedom. She'd see exactly where they were holding her, and she could plan her escape.

Jude returned, and Jonas took the collar. "Are you ready?"

"It smells." She wrinkled her nose in distaste. "I'm not a dog," she snarled.

"Then stop acting like one."

Bastard. She looked at the gun in Jude's hand and shut her mouth.

"What if it's not big enough and she chokes?" Jude asked.

"It won't be a problem." He looked at Sable. "And it's radio controlled, so if you think you can get away, forget it."

"Okay, okay, can we just do it?" she said impatiently.

Jonas put the collar on, adjusted the buckle, and locked it.

"I still don't think it's a good idea. Let's put it off for a few days," Jude blurted out.

"Don't you have some work to do?" Jonas turned to him. "Give me the gun and get lost."

She didn't want to put it off, she needed this. "It's okay, Jude. Really," she pleaded.

"Take care of her, I'll be back later."

She watched him go, not at all surprised he agreed so easily. He didn't want to watch her shift. He danced around her Lycan heritage, preferring to think of her as a human woman.

Jonas attached a cable leash to the collar and removed the smaller restraint. He sat back and looked at her expectantly.

Suddenly she felt shy. She never shared this side of herself with anyone. Of course, he'd seen her wolf before, but she never actually shifted in front of him. It seemed more intimate somehow.

He looked just as nervous, more likely, scared of her. He had no reason to be. Looking at his twitchy trigger finger made her anxious enough to play nice. Besides, this was a reconnaissance mission.

She turned her back and pulled the V-necked tunic top over her head. It caught on the collar, and he stepped up behind her to help. His fingers brushed the curve of her breast, and her heartbeat skyrocketed as she turned to face him.

His gaze drifted down her chest, and his hands came up to palm them. "You have beautiful breasts," he said huskily.

He rubbed the tips with his thumbs, and her nipples beaded tightly under his touch. Moisture pooled between her thighs.

Their eyes locked for a long moment and then he stepped away.

"We should probably do this now."

She sighed. He wore her mark. Why was he able to resist her so easily? She untied the drawstring on the green scrub pants, pushed them over her hips, and stepped out of them.

She concentrated on her wolf but nothing happened. Something held her back, as if her body ran out of fuel. It had to be the drugs. She focused, tried harder, and felt the change coming. Her pulse and heart rate sped up, familiar sensations that signaled a shift.

Her leg bones twisted, she dropped to a crouch and rolled her head forward then back. It felt good. Real good. Her neck snapped, and with a bone-cracking shift, her jaw stretched into a muzzle. Ears and teeth grew longer. She watched her fur spread over her limbs like hair growing in a time-lapse video. In a few seconds, a thick black pelt covered her body like a protective blanket. She looked up at Jonas, her tail high and proud. She was Lycan.

He stared at her as if she were an alien. He thought she was a beast. It only proved what she already knew. The differences between them were insurmountable. He'd never see her as a real woman or accept the beauty of her wolf. *Screw him!* In her world, she'd been beautiful.

Silently, he picked up the leash and led her out the door.

Anxious to be outside, she followed him like a docile puppy. From the lab, they entered a small hallway. Jonas unlocked another door, and they were outside!

At first, she just stood and breathed in the first fresh air she'd had in days. The sun felt warm on her back, and being outside was sheer bliss. They were in a clearing fringed by old pines and hardwood. The house, white clapboard with a wraparound porch, seemed much too big for three people. And, surrounding everything, a high chain-link fence. She took it all in and stored it in her memory.

Jonas attached her leash to a long line that ran between two oak trees. He backed away and let her do her thing.

A raven dive-bombed her and pecked her head. She snapped at it, but the crow let out a raucous caw and sped off. Normally she would have caught the damn bird before it knew what happened, but she wasn't one hundred percent yet. It made her angry—and sad.

She ran, back and forth, over the same path between the trees. Her energy picked up, as did her spirits. Sable danced and frolicked around Jonas. Finally, she bowed at his feet, the front of her body flat on the ground, her rear high in the air. She wagged her tail, teasing him. He laughed and threw a branch. She didn't like playing a dog, but she enjoyed showing off. She caught the stick every time and dropped it at his feet until she tired of the game and let it fly over her head.

She left it where it lay and pounced on Jonas, hoping to initiate a game of chase and tumble. He was happy to oblige. When she knocked him over, he lay there laughing, and she nuzzled his neck.

He grabbed her head, held her by the ears, and looked in her eyes with an odd expression. A possessive wave swept over her. She shook off his hands and gave him a gentle nip under his ear.

"Oh, my God!"

Her ears pricked up, and she turned to check out the newcomer.

A woman stood near the house screaming. She left Jude in her dust and ran towards them.

Jonas rose to his feet while Sable sat back on her haunches.

"Dammit! Shoot it, Jude!" The woman stopped short of Sable's reach and stood shaking. "Jonas, get away!"

The female's whiny voice and short ginger hair set off red flags. Ears pinned back flat to her skull and fur bristling, Sable showed her teeth and snarled at the stranger.

"I'm okay, Nicole," Jonas shouted. "She's just playing." He patted Sable's head. "Settle down," he whispered to her. She let out one last growl and lay on the grass like a silent black sphinx. She kept her eyes on the woman like a hawk.

Jonas brushed the dirt off his jeans and walked over to the bitchy human female. She tackled him, and Sable sent a low warning growl her way. She squelched it when Jonas turned back and glared at her over his shoulder. The woman smelled like trouble. She hung onto Jonas as if she owned him.

"What are you doing out here, Nicole?"

"I was worried about you. I haven't seen you for two weeks."

"I know. I'm sorry." Jonas looked contrite. He put an arm around her and kissed her. "It's my fault, I've been busy. I'm training a new dog."

"Should I be jealous of a dog?"

Sable inched closer, as far as the cable allowed. If she were free, the woman would be more than jealous.

"Don't worry about the dog, Nicole."

"She looks like a handful."

"You have no idea." Jonas took her arm. "Let's go inside."

Jonas passed the gun to Jude. "Take care of the dog."

Jude grunted at him and took the gun. He slapped Sable's ass. "Come on, girl. Playtime is over." She uttered a low-pitched growl, and he laughed.

"It's not my fault your outing was cut short." He took hold of the leash and led her away. "If Jonas took care of Nicole as well as I take care of you, she wouldn't have to come looking for him. She actually asked me if he was seeing another woman." Jude let out a gruff laugh. "I told her—yeah, a real dog."

Not funny. Pissed off, she stopped short.

"This is going to hurt me more than you." That fast, he shot a dart into her flank. She looked at him in disbelief.

"I'm really sorry, but with Nicole here I'm not taking any chances."

By the time they reached her room, she could barely drag one foot after the other. She flopped down on the floor and rested her muzzle on her paws. Jude walked out and shut the door. She used her last bit of energy to shift.

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Jude slid into the bed behind Sable and pressed his throbbing hard-on against her bare buttocks. He slid a hand down her arm, enjoying the silky feel of her skin and the goose bumps he left in his wake. She responded so beautifully to his touch. They were so in tune, almost as if they belonged together. He kissed her shoulder.

"How did I get into bed?" Her voice was muffled in the pillow.

He sighed. He still had some explaining to do. "By the time I came back with Jonas, you'd already shifted. Jonas changed your collar, and we put you to bed."

"Why do I have to wear this collar?"

"You know why. Jonas doesn't want you changing unless he says so."

"What do you want?"

"I want you." He rubbed her back.

"You bastard!" She twisted away and rolled to face him. "You promised no more drugs."

He flinched. "I'm sorry." He surprised himself by really meaning it. It pained him to hurt her. "It's just that you got a little aggressive when Nicole showed up."

"Who is she?"

"Jonas's girlfriend. We've known her since we were kids. They dated, then went off to different colleges, came back, and picked right up where they left off. They'll probably get married some day. That is if she doesn't get tired of waiting for him."

Her mouth got hard, and her eyes blazed amber fire. He didn't blame her for being angry. She felt betrayed and justifiably so. "It won't happen again."

"How can you be sure?"

"I'll set up a run farther from the house where no one will see you." God, he hated this. The more time he spent with her, the more he came to realize how very human she was. Keeping her penned up like this wasn't right. When he tried to bring it up with Jonas, his brother shot him down. He didn't know the real Sable. "I'll make it up to you. I promise."

She stared at him but said nothing.

He slipped a hand between her legs and stroked her pussy. Christ, she might be mad at him, but she was wet and ready. "Am I forgiven?"

"This is how you want to make it up to me. You think you can fix everything with sex."

"No." He wanted to fix it for real, but he had no idea how. "I hate seeing you like this. I'll make it better for you." He grazed her jaw with his knuckles, and her face softened. "I promise. It won't always be this way. Do you believe me?"

"I must be crazy, but I do."

"Then how 'bout some make-up sex?" Jude took her smile for a yes. He sat up and took her with him. When he stretched his long legs out, she straddled his lean hips, her back to his chest.

"I hate when you're mad at me." He held her hips, and she spread her pussy lips and guided his penis inside her. When she slowly sank down on his length, he groaned appreciatively and pulled her back until he was firmly seated inside her.

Jude lifted her arms up and draped them around his neck. He fondled her breasts, caressing and kneading them until her cries for more drove him crazy.

"Squeeze them harder, Jude."

He did as she asked and pinched her nipples.

"Yes." She moaned. "Like that."

He buried his face in her hair. "I love your hair. I don't ever want you to cut it. It's so silky, so beautiful. Like you."

She gave a little sigh, and he could tell the flattery pleased her. He'd never been good with pretty words, but they came easy with Sable. He realized he meant every one of them.

Every time they made love, their connection grew stronger. Sometimes he wished they could have a real relationship. He wasn't complaining. She drove him insane. He'd never wanted a woman more. His breath quickened, and he lifted her buttocks to adjust her movement.

"Gods!" Her rhythm sped up. She moved on him furiously. "Please. Jude, I need to come."

He reached around, rubbed her swollen clit, and set off the ripples that signaled her climax and set off his own release.

Their cries of satisfaction got softer. Her arms came down from his neck, and he rolled to his side, taking her with him. Still locked together, they fell asleep.

Chapter Ten

Jonas slumped in his seat and watched Jude wolf down his lasagna. Janis stood at the sink scraping her plate. His own plate sat untouched in front of him.

"I'm going to ask Nicole to marry me." Jonas threw out the comment in an offhanded way and waited for the reactions. He averted his eyes when Jude stared at him across the massive oak kitchen table.

"Think she'll say yes?" Jude guffawed.

"Of course she will."

Jonas turned his head to look at his sister, and she gave him a big, sappy grin.

"She's getting the most wonderful man in Black Wolf Gorge."

"Hold on there, sis." Jude scowled at her.

"One of the two most wonderful men is what I meant to say." She grinned at Jude and threw her arms around Jonas's neck.

"Hey, you're going to strangle me," he protested, although secretly pleased. He loved his siblings. They were inseparable, like The Three Musketeers. All for one, and one for all.

Janis stepped around and looked him in the eye.

"Does this mean I'm going to be an aunt at last?"

"Well..." Jonas sputtered. "One of these days."

"I just thought, well, you know."

"I do know, but it's not like that. It won't be a shotgun wedding. Nicole is tired of waiting, and frankly, so am I." He squirmed uncomfortably, pushed his chair back, and rose from the table.

"It's about time, bro." Jude slapped him on the back and pumped his hand. "This is great news."

Then why didn't he feel great about it? His siblings were more excited than he was.

Janis looked at him funny. "What? Getting bridegroom jitters already?"

He plastered a big smile on his face. "It just seems so final."

"Nothing is final nowadays. Not when getting a divorce is so easy. But, you and Nicole will be fine. You've been together long enough to know if it'll work. And it will. I'm really happy for you, Jonas. Nobody should be alone."

"Hey, don't get all emotional." Jonas put an arm around her. "None of us are alone as long as we have each other."

"Don't get me wrong. I'm blessed to have you both for brothers, but I want to meet my soul mate before I'm old and gray. Eligible men are few and far between in Black Wolf."

"I know. I've been thinking about that a lot lately." This was the perfect time to segue into plan B. "I need someone to handle a real estate deal in Philadelphia. A change of scene might do you good. And it will give you a chance to meet some new people."

Speechless, Janis gawked at him.

"Why don't I know about this?" Jude asked, peeved. "What kind of property?"

"An apartment building. Prices are down, and I can get it for song. I've been wanting to branch out, and this is the right time."

"Okay, I'll get right on it."

"No. I think Janis can handle this one." He ignored their stunned faces. "I need you here, Jude."

"Who's going to take care of you? Clean the house and cook?" Janis protested.

"I think Jude and I can manage on our own for a short time."

"But you're getting engaged."

"Don't worry. I'm not going to get married without my sister."

"Well, if this is what you want."

"It is," Jonas stated firmly. "And the sooner the better. The owner wants a quick settlement, and you'll need to meet with the lawyer. I want you to leave this week. Book a flight at Erie International, and Jude will drive you to the airport."

"This week! Jonas, I have appointments, and I need to buy a few things."

"What's the problem? Philly doesn't have stores?"

Janis threw down her dish towel. "This is insanity." She gave him a dirty look and stormed out of the kitchen.

Jude waited until she left before turning to him, fire in his eyes. "What the hell is this all about? I'm not capable of taking care of business all of a sudden?"

"Relax. It's got nothing to do with you. Sable needs more freedom, and after the fiasco with Nicole the other day, I'm thinking it's best if Janis isn't here. I can't have them running into each other. The sale is a no-brainer, but I'll make sure Janis is occupied with fixing the place up. And, who knows, she might meet a nice guy while she's there."

"I get it, I think. But how are you going to keep Nicole and Sable apart?"

"Nicole isn't living here, and I'm not getting married tomorrow. We've been dating for years. We can be engaged for a few more."

"Why get engaged at all?"

"I didn't have much choice, she gave me an ultimatum. She's antsy, but a nice ring will keep her quiet for awhile."

"And you think a long engagement is going to fly? Just how long is your research gonna take?"

"You can't put a time limit on something like this. I have to know where the she-wolf came from, her genetic code."

Jude looked mystified.

"The genetic code is important because it passes data through the generations. If I had a baby to study, I might be able to discover how she passes on her special abilities to her offspring."

"That's really more than I need to know," Jude muttered, shaking his head.

"Just know this, if I can successfully reproduce her traits, we can live longer, healthier lives."

"Okay, bro, I'll leave the Dr. Frankenstein stuff to you, but how can you be sure Sable won't run away."

He hesitated for a minute. "I'm going to put a shock collar on her."

"Don't you think that's a little harsh?"

"Who's going soft now?" Jonas forced a nervous laugh. "This thing has a vibrating alarm that'll warn her before anything happens."

Jude remained silent, a sullen expression on his face.

"Look, we're going to keep a close eye on her. That's why I need you here. She'll be fine. And just in case she gets past the fence, the collar is fitted with a tracking device that works in densely covered areas."

"Okay, bro, I guess you know what you're doing. You can count on me to take good care of her."

* * * *

"Jeez, bro, a checkered tablecloth, I didn't think you had it in you." Jude pulled it out of the wicker basket and spread it over the grass. "I'm impressed."

Sable's mouth watered. There were sandwiches with thick slabs of roast beef, potato salad, and even a bottle of red wine.

She was wearing Janis's clothes today instead of the scrubs she normally wore. The khaki shorts, red T-shirt, and sandals were a good fit. She almost felt normal, like any woman on a picnic with her man—actually, her two men. Jude might be her mate, but Jonas had fathered her child.

In the past few days, Jonas seemed more relaxed. Jude told her their sister had gone on a trip, and she figured that must be the reason. Maybe Jonas got rid of the other woman, too. The thought pleased her. She wouldn't be here much longer, and she wanted them all to herself in the time they had left.

Today Jonas decided they should take advantage of the Indian summer and eat outside. If he was trying to appease her, it worked. Even the heavier restraint she wore didn't make a dent in her good mood. At least the new collar didn't smell like dog piss.

She gave Jonas a few points for trying, but she didn't delude herself into thinking it meant anything. A prisoner, no matter how well treated, was still a prisoner. She had about as much freedom as his other dogs. So what. She played her own game. The little bit of freedom he allowed her was her ticket to escape.

The food disappeared quickly. Her men had big appetites, and so did she. The wine mellowed her. She wanted more, but she only allowed herself one glass. Lycan babies were big and strong. The women had never worried about drinking intoxicating spirits when they were pregnant. But her baby was half-human, and she had no idea how the infant might react. Besides, she needed to keep a clear head and be alert to anything that might help her escape. Jude went on and on about his new hunting rifle. The man-talk bored her, and she curled up like a cat snoozing under the warm sun.

A smack on the butt brought her up snarling.

"Hey, sorry." Jude backed off and put his hands up in mock surrender. "I thought you wanted to enjoy the great outdoors." He gestured around the enclosure.

"I am," she protested.

"You know, you're getting fat and lazy," he teased. "Your stomach used to be flat as a board."

She patted her stomach. It couldn't be noticeable, not yet. *Shit*. Soon there would be no hiding it. She really needed to leave. "It's your fault. I've spent too much time indoors."

"Well, you're not indoors now, and I don't see you taking advantage of it. I doubt you could beat me in a footrace."

"Oh yeah? I can beat your ass any day." She jumped up and kicked off her sandals.

"Hey, I'm only kidding."

"Well, I'm not." She took off running.

Jude rose and took off after her. "No fair, you got a head start," he yelled.

She ran like the wind. The earth felt good under her bare feet. Her hair flew out behind her like a contrail. Jude shouted, but she paid him no mind. He couldn't catch her, and his voice faded in the distance.

Unused muscles came to life. Her speed increased as she let her long, powerful legs take over. The collar vibrated. Jonas must be tracking her. Let him. She had no plan to get over the fence—not yet. But she could test its strength. There it was in front of her. She stretched out her hands and slammed into it.

A sharp pain stabbed her neck like a hot needle and buzzed through her body as if she'd touched a live wire. She went down, landing on her back. Her muscles contracted, and a shadow crossed the sun, like an eclipse.

"Sable, wake up. Talk to me."

Her eyes fluttered open, and she saw Jonas's worried face looking down at her before Jude yanked him up by his shirt and started screaming at him.

"What happened?" she mumbled.

Jude released his brother and dropped down beside her. "I'm so sorry, sweetheart. It's Jonas's new toy, a shock collar. It was supposed to vibrate to warn you." He glared up at his brother. "Take this goddamn thing off."

"I will when we get inside," Jonas said quietly. "I'm sorry. It was a bad idea."

"Christ!" Jude tried to look under the collar.

"Oww! It hurts."

Bastards! Of course, it had to be Jonas's idea, but Jude should have said something. Too often, he let Jonas take the lead and played Beta to his Alpha. Screw both of them. Maybe she could use this to her advantage. She felt better already, but they didn't have to know it.

She buried her face against Jude's shirt, thought about sad things, and pinched the tender skin between her thumb and pointer finger. When she looked up at Jude, big crocodile tears rolled down her cheeks. She'd perfected the art of crying during her years living on the streets. Crying on cue had come in handy more than once.

Jude looked stunned. He cupped her face in his hands and swept the tears away with his thumbs. "This is coming off. For good."

"Let me take a look." Jonas brushed the hair away from her neck and checked around the collar. "There's a slight burn, but it's already fading. I don't see anything else. Except your bite scar. You'll be fine."

Sable shed a few more tears just for good measure.

"Now, Jonas," Jude insisted. "Take it off now."

"Okay," Jonas said reluctantly. "I'll be right back."

Yes! She would get this fucking thing off her neck and be one step closer to freedom.

Jude fussed over her. He insisted on carrying her back to the blanket and pouring her more wine.

"I'm okay, really."

Jonas returned and crouched next to her. He held out a silver choker necklace. "Let's try it on, and I'll take off the other one." He produced a tiny key and locked the narrow band around her neck before removing the heavy leather collar.

She ran her fingers over it. "It feels like a steel rope."

Jonas lifted her chin with a finger. "Exactly. You look like a sexy slave girl." A pulse beat in his throat.

She felt feverish and tried to fight her own rising hunger. He made her feel helpless and compliant. He pushed all her buttons. But she wanted him more than she thought possible. She met his gaze squarely and saw something in his eyes that sent shivers down her spine. A question asked and answered in a visual exchange that needed no words.

"Your wish is my command, master," she whispered.

His eyes burned with blue flame. "What if I said that right now I want to be inside you so bad I can't think straight?"

His words left her speechless. They started a fever in her blood, and her womb tightened in response. The mark on her neck, his mark, glowed hot. It burned a path to her soul and terrified her.

"But first I want to bury my face in that hot, little pussy of yours." Jonas's breathing turned rough, his voice, strangled.

Gods, she wanted it, too. She knew to the second how long it had been since he'd been inside her. His absence was a burning need, an emptiness that only Jonas could fill.

Jonas watched her intently, gauging her reactions. He circled her neck with one hand and trailed his fingers up her bare thigh with the other. She wanted to kiss him, but Jude turned her head and gave her a serious look.

"You're not his slave," he told her. "You don't have to do this."

"I want to."

Before he could protest, she grabbed the hem of her shirt and pulled it over her head. The sun warmed her swollen breasts. She cupped them, as if in offering. Jonas pushed her hands aside and replaced them with his own. He strummed the pebbled tips with his thumbs, and she couldn't contain her moan of pleasure.

"That feels so good," she whimpered and leaned back against Jude.

"Tell me what you want, Sable," Jonas murmured, as he rolled and tugged her nipples between his fingertips.

"I want you both." She felt flushed, whether from the sun or Jonas's hands on her body, she couldn't tell.

Jude's grip tightened on her arms. She knew he didn't miss her reactions to Jonas's touch, and it made her hotter. The men moved in unison. She loved to watch them undress. They were similarly built, tall, lean, and muscular. Jude's pale blond hair seemed to glow in the sun. Jonas's hair, while several shades darker, had gold highlights that mesmerized her. Already hard, their impressive erections electrified her.

Jonas helped her lay back on the grass, and Jude sucked one aching nipple into his warm, wet mouth. She shuddered.

Jonas fumbled with the zipper of her shorts and pulled them off. He slipped a hand between her legs and groaned at the wet heat that greeted his fingers. He kissed her stomach and circled her navel with his tongue.

"Jonas, please."

He settled between her thighs and lapped at her cream. Jonas nibbled and sucked until her clit throbbed with need. They would drive her mad.

Jude took her breast in his mouth with the strong suction that made her heart lodge in her throat. He drew her nipple taut with his lips and then nipped it with his teeth.

She trembled on the edge of orgasm and then Jonas sucked her clit into his mouth, and a wild wave of pleasure took her over the precipice.

When her shudders quieted, Jude released her breast, and Jonas climbed up her body. He supported his weight on his elbows and

ground his hips against hers. A fire started in her belly. He looked down at her. His eyes blazed hot. "Tell me what you want, Sable."

"I want you inside me. Fuck me, Jonas."

Jude withdrew, and she turned her head. "Jude, I want you in my mouth."

The two men looked at each other, and an unspoken agreement passed between them. Jonas rolled off her body, and she crawled toward Jude. He lay back on the grass, and she positioned herself between his legs. She rubbed her cheek against his penis, silk over steel. He reached up and wrapped his fingers in her hair, urging her to take him in her mouth. His musky scent enticed her, excited her. She didn't need much persuasion.

She tongued a drop of pre-cum from the tiny slit on the mushroom head of his cock. His taste exploded on her tongue and made her hungry for more. She started at the base and licked her way up his length, clamping her lips around the crown and gently sucking on it.

When she increased the suction, he cursed softly and widened his legs. Afraid he might come too soon, she squeezed the base of his cock with her thumb and finger and scraped the sensitive head with her teeth as she pulled off.

"Fuck!" Jude shuddered.

She looked over her shoulder for Jonas. He fisted his cock and watched them with hungry eyes. "Don't make me wait any longer, Jonas."

She bent over Jude and slid her mouth down his cock. His groan vibrated through his body. He tasted so damn good. She sucked and licked, but she needed more. Where was Jonas? She lifted her bottom higher and felt him come up behind her.

He caressed her ass, squeezed, and then kissed the small of her back. She shivered in delight. He covered her with kisses and then bit the cheek of her ass, making her cry out. Her cunt throbbed and pulsed with her hunger. "Gods, Jonas. Fuck me."

Instead, he withdrew. She snarled around Jude's cock, but a second later, she felt Jonas's warm tongue on her cunt. He licked her sex from bottom to top, and her soft, keening sounds filled the air. She lifted her head. "Stop teasing me," she begged. "Please."

"I think our girl wants to come," Jude muttered. He twisted her hair in his hands and held her head in place.

Jonas reached under her and pinched a nipple. "Soon," he promised.

She loved the feeling of being overpowered, of being at the mercy of her two delicious men. Every moan, every touch sent currents of pleasure through her. She'd never seen them so hot, so like two wild animals in their hunger for her. They had to feel the bond.

Jonas put a hand on her belly to anchor her and penetrated her soaked cleft. He panted against her back as he moved inside her, his rhythm gradually increasing as his excitement mounted. He stroked her pussy, so stretched around his cock, and found the little bundle of nerves that would send her into a shattering release.

They were killing her. She would surely die from pleasure. Her heart rate increased as primal need took over. Jonas growled, and his thrusts became erratic.

She grasped Jude's balls and felt them tighten in her hand. His body stiffened, and he cried out her name as he spilled his hot seed in her mouth. Jude's flaccid member slipped from her mouth, and he rubbed and kneaded her breasts while Jonas fucked her.

He pumped faster, one hand on her stomach, one on her clit. She was so close. One more hard, deep thrust and she shattered. Her scream scared the birds from the trees. She heard them take flight as Jonas found his own release.

He held her until she came down from her peak, then he tumbled over, pulling her down with him so she lay between him and Jude. Now she felt complete. They lay in comfortable silence for a few minutes.

"Let's sleep outside," Sable said suddenly.

"Are you crazy?" Jonas laughed. "This ground gets awfully hard after awhile."

Jude leaned over and kissed her. "If you want to sleep outside, I'll take you camping one day."

"Really?"

"Sure, a tent and one sleeping bag, that's all we need."

"For the three of us?" He really sounded serious.

"I don't know about this," Jonas said doubtfully.

"Good, that means more room in the sleeping bag for us." Jude tickled her and made her giggle.

"Can we do it soon?" she asked eagerly. Afraid they'd get suspicious, she didn't say anything else.

"Sure. How about tomorrow?"

"Oh, yes." She threw her arms around Jude and squeezed. Tomorrow she might be out of here.

Chapter Eleven

Jonas's grim expression unnerved her. Whatever he decided would seal her fate.

"You're outside every day. Why do you have to sleep outside, too?"

Jonas still needed convincing. He didn't like the whole camping thing, and if he said no, well, that would be it, and all her plans would go down the drain. She looked at Jude and pouted.

"What is your problem, bro?" Jude wanted to do this as much as she did. She just hoped he would stand up to Jonas for once.

"I just think it's a bad idea," Jonas repeated for the fifth time.

"Tough. We're going anyway."

Yes!

Jonas turned red. She could practically see steam coming out of his ears.

"Go ahead then. But I'm holding you responsible for her."

"Nothing is going to happen. You already dog-proofed the damn fence, and she'll be in my ever-loving arms all night."

Jonas clenched his fists, turned on his heel, and stomped out of her bedroom.

She ran to Jude and hugged him. Jonas didn't bother to chain her when he or Jude was with her. She played her part well, and they trusted her to behave while they were around. Acting the willing participant wasn't difficult when it came to sex. She enjoyed it way too much. Being a docile pet the rest of the time provoked her last nerve. She had no choice. She had to play their game.

They weren't stupid. They might think she'd been tamed, but they still added electrified wire to the chain-link fence. She was nothing more than premium livestock, to Jonas anyway. Jude turned out to be

the soft touch. Thank Gods one of them could be manipulated. She'd be out of here tonight if all went well.

Jude's arms tightened around her, and she squeezed him back.

"Don't worry about Jonas." Sable kissed him. "I'm glad he's not going. It'll be more fun with just the two of us."

"Damn right. I'm gonna go pack some stuff." He got a sheepish look on his face. "I better put the cuff back on till I get back."

She gritted her teeth and sat on the bed. Thank the Gods she wouldn't have to put up with this much longer.

* * * *

"Let's find a good spot."

"What's wrong with this one," Jude asked.

"I can see the house," she whined. "It ruins everything. I want to feel like we're really camping."

"Okay, but not too far. All this crap is heavy."

"Want me to carry it." She knew the weight didn't bother him. He still feared she might try something.

"No, I can manage it."

They followed the irregular property line until the house disappeared behind a stand of trees.

Too busy thinking about escape, she walked right into her second worst nightmare—an elaborate, silken snare. The gauzy strands clung to her face. She brushed them away frantically and spotted a large black spider literally hanging by a thread.

Gasping, she stepped back and fell over a tree root, landing heavily on her backside.

Jude came to her rescue. She waved her limbs around so much he could hardly get his arms around her.

"Shhh. It's okay, I got you." He held her until she calmed down. "What happened?"

"Spiders," she said it without thinking. She didn't like to reveal her weaknesses.

He didn't laugh or make fun of a wolf that was afraid of spiders. He held her gently and brushed the hair from her face. "Tell me about it."

They sat in the grass, and she clung to his shirt while she poured out the story.

"You poor baby. No one is going to hurt you here."

She felt lost and confused. Why was she telling him this? She tried to push him away. "You're lying, Jude. You're a hunter, just like the men who killed my parents."

"You're wrong, Sable. I hunt animals, not people."

"Animals like me," she spat.

"No. You're not an animal." He cupped her chin and turned her face so she had to look in his eyes. "Maybe I thought that once, but not anymore. People change. I changed. Listen to me. I know what it's like to lose your parents. Mine were killed when I was about the same age you were—by wolves."

She looked at him, stunned. "That's why you hate me." She shook her head adamantly. "My people kept to themselves. They stayed away from the humans."

"I know that, baby. They were just timber wolves." He touched his forehead to hers. His voice turned husky. "I don't hate you."

"We're natural enemies."

"It doesn't have to be that way."

She shook her head sadly. "You can't help yourself, Jude. Every time you look at my wolf, you see the animal that killed your parents. Every time I look at you, I see the humans who killed mine."

"No, you're wrong. I see Sable. A smart, beautiful woman who makes my heart beat faster. We can get past this. I admit I'd rather look at you the way you are now, but I want to be your lover, not your enemy. Can't we put this behind us and enjoy tonight?"

"Yes. We can." *Why not?* In a few hours, she'd be gone. For now, she could pretend he really meant what he said and have a special memory to take with her.

They walked a little further, and Jude stopped. "How's this?"

"Much better."

"Thank God." He dumped everything on the ground. "I'm not so sure we even need the tent. It's a beautiful night. No coyotes are gonna get past the fence, and I'm here to protect you anyway." He put his arms around her.

"But I want the whole camping experience." If Jonas should happen to look for them, it would take him longer to check inside the tent, and she wanted every extra second of getaway time she could manage.

"Okay, baby. Whatever you want." He started picking up rocks and other small debris. "If you're a happy camper then I'm happy."

She bent to help him. She'd slept in worse places and all alone. It was kind of fun doing this together. She almost regretted what she planned to do to him.

"Don't worry about the branches. We're gonna use them for the fire."

Jude spread a ground cloth over the clean area and unpacked the poles, stakes, and all the rest of the gear he needed. He had the tent pitched in no time.

"My hero." She looked at him with admiration.

"Come over here and give your hero a kiss."

"Uh, uh. Not until you feed me."

"Boy, you women want it all, dontcha?"

"I didn't ask for this."

"Hey, I'm just kidding." He came to her and put his arms around her. "I know you didn't ask to be here, but I'm glad you are. Can we make the best of it tonight?"

"Sorry. I'm really having a good time. But I'm hungry."

"Me, too." The look in his eyes said he wanted more than hot dogs.

She narrowed her eyes at him. "Food first."

He laughed. "Okay, as long as I get dessert later."

Before long, he had a good fire going, and he showed her how to roast the hot dogs.

"This is absolutely the best part of camping." Sable ate her fifth dog and watched the flickering glow of the fire.

"It's only hot dogs and beans. Baby, I'm saving the best for last." He leaned over and licked grease from her lips. "But this is nice."

"Are you done eating already?" Sable looked at him in disbelief.

"I am." The sun was long gone, and he lay back, linking his hands under his head. "But you take your time. I like to watch you."

She ate the last dog, scraped the pot clean of beans and settled down next to him. Just a whisper of a breeze feathered her bare arms and legs. Lying back, she looked at the sky. Her brow creased in concentration, and she reached her arms up to embrace it.

"What are you doing?"

"Reaching for the stars." The tiny pinpoints looked close enough to touch.

"Reach for Orion, honey."

"You know their names?"

"You sound surprised. Do you think Jonas is the only Outlaw with any brains?" He looked hurt.

"I didn't mean that."

"It's okay. I don't know all of them." He hesitated. "My parents were killed on a starless night. The wolves came out of nowhere and surrounded them before they could get inside. After that, I couldn't stand the dark. Jonas used to tell me stories about werewolves and vampires just to scare me. My grandfather told me that my parents were stars in heaven. That they watched over me with the other constellations. I thought Orion, the great hunter, was my personal protector." He stopped, embarrassed.

Sable looked at the sky intently. "Show me, Jude."

"He shines bright in the winter. If you still want to go camping in January, we'll find him."

She kept silent. She wouldn't be here in January.

"I never talk about that," he said suddenly.

"I never talk about my family either." She sensed him relaxing. He wasn't used to sharing secrets. Neither was she. She hadn't shared a secret with anyone since she was a kid. It felt nice.

"I won't tell anyone."

"Not even Jonas?" she asked.

"Not even Jonas. They're our secrets." Jude pulled a bag from the knapsack. "Hey, I almost forgot dessert."

"Yeah, right."

"Not that dessert. Marshmallows." He ripped open the bag. "Unless you're cold. Do you want to go in the tent?"

"Not yet." She sighed and savored the illusion of freedom.

"Okay then. You're gonna love these." He put one on a stick and browned it over the flames.

She sat up and took the twig from him. "Trying to sweeten me up."

"You're sweet enough already, honey."

Her chest hitched, and she swallowed the knot in her throat so she could bite the spongy confection. It was just hormones. They'd taken her on a roller-coaster ride since she got pregnant.

"Oh! Hot."

"Let me kiss that tongue and make it better." Jude brushed a hand along her cheek and sent shivers down her spine.

She stuck her tongue out, and he wrapped his lips around it, sucked it gently.

A sudden burst of hunger raced through her body. She wanted him desperately. Her pulse quickened, and she made needy little noises.

He pulled his head back, and a wicked grin creased his face.

"Want something?"

"Yes, and I hope it's not as mushy as these marshmallows." She unzipped his jeans, and his heavy cock twitched in her hand. "Nope, it's hard as a baseball bat." She squeezed, and his grin disappeared.

She struggled out of his arms.

"Hey, come back here."

"Uh-uh. I refuse to fuck a man who's still wearing his boots." She pulled them off along with his socks and then got to work on his jeans.

"Your turn." He fumbled with her shorts while she yanked the T-shirt over her head.

He filled his hands with her breasts, and she leaned her head back, relishing his touch. Soon it wasn't enough, and she pulled him down

to the ground with her. She trailed her fingers over his balls and lower, teased the puckered entrance but didn't penetrate him.

"Do you like this?" she murmured.

His answer was lost in a low moan of sexual pleasure. He squirmed and pulled her closer, took one brown nipple in his mouth.

"I guess that's a yes." One finger slipped past the ring of muscle and into the tight heat of his ass. She moved it in and out, and he groaned into her breast. She squealed when he grazed the pebbled nub with his teeth then soothed it with his tongue.

"I need more, Jude," she begged.

He sucked hard, grabbed her other breast, and rolled the nipple between his fingers.

They ground against each other like two teenagers on a tryst in lover's lane. At this rate they'd come much too fast. She wanted to make it last because she wouldn't see him again, but they were both too far gone. Her heart twisted. She wouldn't think about that now.

He released her breast with a soft pop and pulled back. "I gotta slow it down, or I'm gonna come much too soon."

She ran a hand up and down his muscular leg. Bending, she kissed the glistening head of his cock and licked the milky fluid leaking from the tip.

Jude let out a howl, and her breath caught. She loved knowing how she affected him.

"I want to be inside you, Sable." His voice sounded husky.

The words and her name on his lips thrilled her. He reached for her hips, and she straddled him. She grasped his cock like a horn on a Western saddle, stroking until it pulsed against her belly. Her eyes fluttered closed. She imagined him filling that empty place inside her that cried for him.

"Stop fucking around." Jude growled.

Laughing, she lifted her hips, guided him to her moist entrance, and impaled herself on his stiff penis. She rocked on his hips then withdrew slowly and sank slower yet. All the time his eyes blazed with wild heat in the starlight. The emotion in them made her breath catch.

He dug his fingers in her hips and set a harder pace. She met every thrust with one of her own.

"Kiss me," he hissed.

One last time.

She bent forward and planted her lips on his, afraid she might cry.

"Much better," he whispered into her mouth. Her body responded to his as if they were one, fused together by their combined heat. Being on top let her control the depth of his penetration. She writhed on his cock until he hit a spot that sent shock waves skittering along her nerve endings.

"I can't wait." Jude gave a last desperate thrust and rubbed her swollen clit to take her with him.

She screamed and shuddered over him then collapsed against his body.

Still joined, they rolled over on their sides. Jude held her close for a long time, silently stroking her back. Softening, he slipped out of her body but didn't move away, just rested his head on his arm and looked at her with an unfathomable expression.

"I want to do this again," he whispered.

"Fuck?" She smiled at him.

"Go camping, hiking, teach you about the stars."

"Hey. Look. A shooting star." She pointed up, silently thanking the lucky stars for a chance to change the subject. "It's so beautiful," she said, turning back to Jude.

"Not as beautiful as you, baby." He watched her instead of the sparkly show in the sky. "Did you make a wish?"

She shook her head. "My wishes never come true."

"Go ahead, make a wish. Maybe this time it'll happen."

"Okay." She shut her eyes. She didn't have to think about it. "Now, let's have a nightcap." She took a bottle out of her bag. "Only the best. It's Jonas's private stock." She laughed.

"You little devil. You took this from his desk."

"So what?" She shrugged. "He shouldn't have left his drawer open."

"Do you even like this stuff?" He took the bourbon and lifted the bottle to his lips.

"I don't know." She shrugged. "Bring it inside with us, and I'll try it." She took one last look at the night sky and crawled into the tent.

* * * *

"What's the matter, baby?" Sable crooned. "Am I too much for you?"

"No way, I'm just getting started." Jude's eyes were at half-mast.

"Sure, but let's lay down for a few minutes." She helped him into the sleeping bag and crawled in with him.

"I just feel a little queasy and light-headed."

"You drank too much, that's all. A little nap and you'll be good as new." She held him in her arms and almost decided not to go—almost. Had she given him too much of the drugs she took from the lab? She never meant to hurt him, just put him to sleep. She wouldn't leave until she was sure he wouldn't choke.

He snuggled up to her, and in fifteen minutes, he was out.

Sable slipped out of the sleeping bag and snuck out of the tent. She scooped up her clothes and sneaks and withdrew silently, heading for the fence. She hadn't had much opportunity to check out the new wiring, but she had a plan.

She followed the perimeter, picking up a stick along the way. When she reached a corner, far from the house and the tent, she stopped and hurriedly put her clothes on. Regretfully, she left the sneaks. She could climb better without them.

Crossing her fingers, she jammed the stick into a bundle of hot wires connected to the fence.

A shower of sparks signaled a short circuit.

Whoo-hoo!

Concentrating on her fingers and toes, she tried to make her nails grow. She'd never been able to do a partial shift, but it was worth a try. Claws would make climbing the fence a hell of a lot easier.

Warm breath grazed her back. *The hell with claws.* She threw her body against the chain link and scrabbled up like a monkey.

Chapter Twelve

In one smooth motion, Sable grabbed hold of the top of the fence, pulled herself up, and vaulted over. She had the righting reflex of a cat, and she landed elegantly on her feet.

Her heart lurched as she hit the ground running. *Freedom!* And no time to enjoy it. She glanced back over her shoulder and saw only the empty enclosure. She'd been so sure one of them found her. Fear made her imagination go wild. It also set her adrenaline pumping. She ran faster.

Pine branches lashed her face and snagged the thin material of the T-shirt. The scratches would heal. The wounds inside were another matter. Tears blurred her vision, and she swiped at them with the back of her hand. She should be ecstatic. So why did she feel as if she'd left part of herself behind? As if what she wanted most in the world was still back at the ranch. *Idiot.* She actually made a wish on a star and asked for a life with Jude. As if that could ever happen.

She'd been alone for two-thirds of her life and gotten along just fine. Maybe not fine, but she survived. She'd been on her own too long, she had no idea how to live with someone. Especially a human someone.

She'd tried it once with Malcolm. He was Lycan, and look how that turned out. The short time she'd spent with him they'd both been miserable. He'd only been with her out of some misplaced sense of duty and guilt. The whole time he wanted someone else—Karin. He must have been miserable. Now that she knew what it felt like to give up your true mate, she could sympathize.

Still, doubts crept in. Sometimes she suspected that Kweo engineered her capture to bring her together with her mate. But these men would never accept her as an equal. Jonas treated her like a pet.

Jude pretended she was human. He ignored her wolf. He thought as long as it didn't come out, it didn't really exist.

She couldn't wait around hoping they would change, she had the baby to think about now. Funny, she never wanted a baby, but now every possessive instinct in her surfaced. She would protect this child with her life.

Crying wasted time and energy. Better to save it for what lay ahead. She'd escaped, and she would never go back. They'd have to kill her first.

She had no idea how long Jude would be out or whether Jonas would check up on them. The more distance she could put between her and the Outlaw ranch the safer she'd feel.

She ran for what seemed like a long time and her breath rasped in her chest. Moonlight filtered through the canopy overhead, but she didn't need it to light her way. Sometimes she stopped to wipe her tracks away with pine boughs. It wouldn't fool Jude, but she hated to leave clear tracks.

Ahead, a giant hemlock blocked her path, leaving a gaping hole where its roots had once anchored it. She jumped into the depression and leaned back against the dirt. It was as good a place to think as any. A multitude of chirping cicadas serenaded her while she rested. Concealed, she could relax for a few minutes and try to figure out her location.

Everything looked the same in the forest. She could wander for days, maybe even end up back at the ranch. She hadn't picked up a familiar scent to guide her. She'd just gone on instinct. So far, she'd been lucky, but it wouldn't last forever. Jude was a damn good tracker, the best. He'd been the one to capture her in the first place. No doubt, he'd be out looking for her again.

Maybe there was another way she could throw them off her trail. It would take a little time, but in the end, it might gain her time.

She bit her finger until she opened a wound. Then she tore off a piece of her T-shirt and wrapped it around her bloody finger.

She climbed out of the hole. Turning ninety degrees from her path, she walked a few feet looking for a spot that would catch a tracker's eye as he followed her trail. A flock of squawking crows

caught her attention. They were fighting over the carcass of a rabbit. The biggest one cocked its head and studied her with black, beady eyes. With a harsh, raucous caw, it warned her off and turned back to its meal.

"I don't want your dinner, stupid bird." Laughing, she turned away and spotted a large, mossy rock. She planted her butt on it and slid around a bit. Then she made a noticeable mess of the surrounding vegetation and snagged the remnant of fabric on a low-hanging branch.

She ran a few miles then backtracked. At the very least they'd split up, and she'd only have to deal with one of them. Jude was the better tracker. She wondered which path he'd take.

* * * *

Jude woke with an excruciating headache. The inside of his head felt like the rhythm section in a jazz ensemble. He tried to sit up but the pain drove him back down.

Shit! Why did I drink so much?

He reached over for Sable and found only cold, empty space.

Fuck!

His heart missed a beat. Calm down, old man. She's probably outside peeing.

He wasn't supposed to let her out of his sight. If Jonas knew, he'd pitch a fit. He'd been against this camping idea from the get-go because he was so damn afraid of losing his property. *The hell with Jonas*. He treated her like a dog. He didn't have the same feelings for Sable, and he sure as hell didn't own her.

When had his own feelings changed? It happened so gradually he couldn't be sure when it stopped being all about the sex. He wasn't knocking the sex, it was explosive. He wanted her all the time, but more than that, he wanted to be around her. He could talk to her, and she liked the same things he did, running, camping, sleeping under the stars. He loved the time they spent together. Hell, sometimes he forgot she was only part human. Most of the time, he didn't care.

"Sable!" he yelled, and, damn, it made his head hurt more. He crawled out of the tent on all fours and looked around. Dawn was breaking. He wanted to watch the sun come up with Sable. Another twinge of dread hit when he didn't spot her.

She must have gone for a run. He dressed quickly. Following the path of flattened grass she'd left, he kept calling her name, but only a hoot owl answered him.

He saw her sneaks lying by the fence, and his pulse quickened at the thought she might be hurt. Then he caught sight of the charred stick by the wires and he knew she'd escaped.

Fuck!

All the time he'd been mooning over her, she'd been planning the great escape. She must have been laughing her ass off at him, calling him every kind of idiot. Tears of anger, hurt, and worry stung the back of his eyelids. Most of all he felt lost. He missed her already.

He pulled the cell phone from his pocket to call Jonas. His brother didn't say much except to stay there and wait for him.

Fifteen minutes later, he watched him approach with Sherlock on a leash. The big, gentle bloodhound had the best nose in the county, next to Sable herself. If anyone could find her, it would be him.

Sherlock wore a GPS collar unit with a whip antenna that transmitted via a radio signal. Jonas carried a handheld unit that looked like a walkie-talkie. He barely looked at Jude.

"I'm sorry, Jonas."

Jonas took a bottle of deer piss out of his pocket and threw it at him. He sprayed himself while Jonas crouched down to look at the sneaks Sable left behind. He picked them up and started walking. Jude followed a few paces behind.

Once outside the gate, they headed back to the spot where Sable had made her escape. Jonas held the sneaks out to Sherlock who sniffed and snorted then bayed in acknowledgement.

"Find her," Jonas said.

Sherlock put his head to the ground and never looked back. His long ears brushed the scent up towards his nose as he picked up speed.

Without another word, Jonas followed.

Jude held back and kept his mouth shut. The best course of action for him was to keep his distance. Jonas barely controlled his temper. He didn't need much more of a reason to unleash it.

Jude didn't need a dog to track. And if wanted to follow Sherlock's trail it would not be a problem, even without a handheld like the one Jonas carried.

He tried to think like the she-wolf. If Sable were as smart as he thought, she would find a way to cover her tracks. He took his time and searched the trail carefully, looking for anything out of the ordinary.

He wanted Sable back for his own reasons. He'd find her. Of that he had no doubt. And once he did he'd never let her out of his sight again.

* * * *

The forest came to life as the sun rose. A few clouds moved across the sky, hinting at rain. Sable wished for a downpour. It would cover her trail. She'd been running for hours. The men had to be out looking for her by now, but she'd been running so long she allowed herself to hope she'd eluded them.

She slowed to get her bearings again, and that's when he tackled her from behind. He knocked the wind from her lungs, and she went down with a whuff. She was stronger than him, but he caught her off guard, and she struggled against his weight.

Howling her sorrow to the sky, she twisted in his grip to no avail. She should have known her false trail wouldn't fool Jude for a minute. All the time she wasted only gave him a better chance to catch her.

"Going for a little early morning walk without me?" he whispered in her ear.

"Get off!" she cried, angry and desperate—and, yes, a little excited, too. The thrill of the chase and the warmth of his lean, muscular body covering hers confused her. She couldn't think straight. He was her lover and her mate, but, damn it, she would not let him take her again. If only she didn't have this stupid collar on he'd be no match for her wolf.

"Is that any way to treat your lover?" He slipped his hand under her and inside her shorts.

She stifled a gasp at the sharp spike of arousal he set off. She tried to hate him, but instead she wanted him to fuck her hard and fast.

"Jesus. You're so fucking wet. If that's for me, baby, you should have woke me up this morning."

Damn him. She got wetter as he stroked her.

"Let me go, Jude." She bucked up against him.

"Mmmm. That feels good. Maybe I'll fuck you before I bring you back home."

"I don't have a home." She gritted her teeth and tried to ignore the fire he ignited in her belly.

"Your home is with me, and this time I'm gonna make damn sure you stay there."

He fumbled in his pocket. She knew what that meant. No more drugs. Assembling every bit of strength she could muster, she reared back and threw him off her.

He grabbed her leg before she could run and took her down. Her hands closed on a good size tree limb, and she swung it at his arm, knocking the dart gun out of his hand. It flew several feet into a pile of dead leaves and branches.

"Bitch!" he swore at her, his face twisted with pain, and he released the death grip on her ankle to hold his injured arm.

She jumped to her feet, feeling his pain as acutely as if it belonged to her. An urge to go to him put her off her game. She hesitated a second too long.

That fast, he grabbed the discarded branch and whacked the back of her knees.

Her legs buckled, and she went down, biting her lip until she tasted blood.

"Why are you doing this?" she sobbed. "Please, just let me go." The thought of being held captive again terrified her. This time there would be no escape.

His face softened for an instant, and she thought he might actually let her go.

Then he jumped up, grabbed her in a bear hug, and, swearing under his breath, he dragged her across the dirt to look for the gun.

She squirmed and kicked, but adrenaline must have given him strength. Even as he bent to search through the leaves with his injured arm, he kept a tight hold on her body with the other.

She sniffed the air curiously. A split second later, something leaped out of the trees and slammed into them. Jude's head made a sickening thump as it struck the tree trunk.

Chapter Thirteen

Ralf!

Half-wolf, half-dog, with his canines bared, he looked every bit the wolf. Sable showed her teeth. He might have two more legs than her, but he didn't scare her.

Jude's motionless body demanded her attention. She kneeled at his side and put her face to his. Thank the Gods, he was alive. She cradled his head in her lap. Her hands came away bloodied and salty tears slipped down her cheeks.

"Damn you. Why did you have to follow me?" she wailed. Her filthy hands painted his clammy face with dirt. "I never wanted this. I love you, you bastard. You're my mate, I'd never hurt you."

Ralf watched her intently but didn't approach. She ignored him. The hybrid had never liked her. She didn't like him either. The whole time she'd lived with Malcolm, they'd avoided each other. There'd been times she wanted to kill him, but for Malcolm's sake she'd put up with his irritating presence. Ralf acted like an overprotective guard dog. Intensely loyal to Malcolm, he didn't trust her. He'd been right. She'd almost killed Malcolm's true mate and his unborn child. She wasn't the same person, but Ralf couldn't know that.

She heard it before Ralf—the faint sound of a dog barking in the distance.

Ralf picked it up a few seconds later. He shook his head, whined, and took a few steps back. When she paid him no mind, he jogged to her side and nudged her arm with his muzzle. His blue eyes bored into hers, trying to tell her something. She got the idea but shrugged him off. "I can't leave him." She shook her head and stayed put.

A faint whiff of dog came on the breeze. It smelled like the big collar Jonas had once made her wear.

"Aaroooo!" The bay of an excited bloodhound sounded closer. Her heart lurched. *Stay or go?* The dog had her scent. If she wanted to escape, it had to be now.

Ralf jumped around, frantic. He nipped her hand and ran a few yards. Gently, she laid Jude's head on the grass, gave him one last kiss, and got to her feet. Jonas would find him and take care of him. He would be fine.

She followed Ralf. He kept looking back at her, urging her to hurry, but she hung back. Worry over Jude slowed her feet. *Stupid.* What could she do for him if she stayed?

She'd never get another chance like this. Jonas wouldn't leave his brother to die in the woods. He'd let her go to save Jude, and she'd have a chance to get away and make a life for her baby.

Ralf howled and picked up speed. So did she. They traveled through an area of forest that became increasingly familiar. She knew Ralf was taking her to Malcolm's house, and although she dreaded seeing him, she kept going.

While making her getaway plans, she'd thought about going to Malcolm, and every time she discarded the idea. Why should he help her? She'd come between him and his mate and ruined his life.

If she had only herself to think about, she'd take off and go into hiding, but not with a baby. Suddenly, the baby had become the most important thing in her life. She wondered if Malcolm knew he had a child. Karin meant to tell him, but Sable never gave her the chance. She attacked Karin and ran off when Malcolm showed up. He followed her, but Jude caught her first. She had no idea what happened after that. For all she knew, Karin could be dead now.

If only he'd give her a chance to explain. It might not make any difference, but she wanted him to know how much she'd changed. She'd been a feral animal then. Living wild on her own had done that. Those days were behind her now. Creating a baby had opened her eyes. It made her realize that every life was important. She would never hurt anyone again.

The trees started to thin, and suddenly Malcolm's house appeared in a clearing, an A-frame with big expanses of glass to let in the

outdoors. He'd built it himself, even the furniture. She'd never really appreciated it when she lived there.

Sable stopped near his Jeep. The idea of showing up on his doorstep terrified her. If he shifted and tore her throat out, she wouldn't blame him. Ralf continued on, but instead of going to his usual entrance, an open window, he trotted up to the front door, threw back his head, and howled. She cringed. Malcolm would recognize it as an alert.

Almost immediately, the door opened, and Malcolm stepped onto the porch. He saw her and froze.

Her breath caught in her throat. She hugged herself and willed her pounding heart to slow down. He looked the same, tall and lean, very dark, and as graceful as he was powerful. But it wasn't lust that made her heart hammer against her ribs, it was fear.

His eyes remained fixed on her as he approached. She wanted to run and never look back but she stayed put. Even if he didn't want to help her, he deserved an apology for everything she'd put him through.

He stopped a few feet away and clenched his fists. He looked like he might hit her if he got too close. "What are you doing here, Sable?" His voice dripped ice down her spine.

"I'm sorry, Malcolm." She swallowed and kept her head down submissively.

"Look at me." His face was marked with loathing. "You didn't come here for that, and I'm not interested in hearing your apology. What you did was unforgivable. I looked for you a long time. You're lucky I didn't find you."

Afraid, she trembled and choked back a sob. "I know I can't change things, but if I could take it all back, I would."

"I don't believe you. You're a dangerous woman, Sable. I'm not sure I should let you leave here."

Her heart near exploded. She quelled the urge to flee and stood quietly, silenced by the threat in his voice.

"Where have you been?" He looked her up and down, his expression dark and angry. "Are you hurt?"

She realized what she must look like. Her clothes were ripped and reeked of Jude's blood. "It's not my blood," she answered meekly.

"So you hurt someone else."

"No," she protested. "Ralf—"

"Don't try and blame Ralf for whatever you've done," he said harshly.

She hunched her shoulders, trying to make herself as small as possible. "I was attacked, and Ralf saved me. The man hit his head on a tree," she sobbed. "I tried to help him, but we heard others coming, and Ralf led me here."

Malcolm folded his arms across his chest. "I don't know why he led you here, Sable. I can't help you."

"You have every right to hate me. I wouldn't blame you if you wanted to kill me."

"I'm not going to kill you, mainly because Karin would never forgive me." His face softened the tiniest bit.

"Karin." Her hand flew to her chest. "She's okay?"

He ignored her. "You should go. And don't come back."

"I'm pregnant," she blurted out.

"My God!" A gasp came from the porch, and they both turned at the same time.

"Karin, get in the house," Malcolm thundered. "I told you to stay inside."

Karin shook her head and came to stand next to him. Her arms rested on her stomach in a protective posture.

"Damn it, Karin." Malcolm frowned at her.

Sable couldn't help staring at Karin's big belly. She would have one soon enough. "I'm sorry, Karin. Is the baby okay?"

A rumble of warning came from deep in Malcolm's chest. Karin inched closer to Malcolm. "The baby's fine."

Relief flooded through Sable. "Thank the Gods." She started crying and choked on her words. "I'm so sorry, Karin. I wish I could go back and make it right."

Karin stared at her, sympathy plain on her face. "I believe you."

Nobody spoke for a minute. Then Karin asked, quietly, "Is it true? Are you pregnant, Sable?"

She nodded. "I didn't know where else to go. I wouldn't ask for myself." She shrugged helplessly.

Karin took a step toward her. Malcolm pulled her back and put a protective arm around her.

Karin looked up at him. "She's pregnant, Malcolm. Look at her. She needs help."

Malcolm shook his head and sighed deeply. "All right. You can come inside. But just for a meal."

Malcolm gestured for Sable to go ahead. He didn't want to turn his back on her. She walked into the house, and they followed. Everything looked the same except for the little dog yapping at her heels. Ralf gave it a nudge, and it sat on the Navajo rug in front of the fireplace, watching her.

Karin suggested she clean up, and Malcolm led her to the spare room on the first floor. "Everything you need is in the bathroom, soap, towels." He left her alone, shutting the door as he walked out.

She couldn't resist taking a shower. The hot water felt incredibly good, but nothing could wash away the sadness. Seeing how Malcolm looked at Karin brought everything back. Her child would never have a loving father, a nice home... Thinking like that wouldn't help anything. She'd take care of her baby on her own, give it whatever she could.

She wrapped a thick terrycloth towel around her body and used another to dry her long hair. A pile of clean clothes waited for her on the bed, sweats, shorts, underwear, even a pair of thongs. Why was Karin being so nice? She didn't deserve it. She felt like crying again. What in God's name was wrong with her? She hadn't cried this much in fifteen years. Since she'd become pregnant, her emotions had been all over the place.

She sat down and put her head in her hands. Where would she go from here? Maybe Malcolm would lend her some money for a bus ticket. A ticket to where? How would she take care of this baby on her own?

She sighed and went out to face the music. Karin stood by the stove warming up something that smelled delicious. Malcolm sat at

the table. He gestured for her to sit, and Karin set a plate of meat loaf in front of her.

"Thank you, it smells great."

Karin looked at her funny. "What's that on your neck?"

"A collar." She lowered her eyes.

"Oh, my God." Karin's shocked voice made the tears flow again.

"Malcolm, we can't send her away like this. She needs us."

"I'll take it off after she eats. Then she's going." Malcolm spoke as if she wasn't even there.

Sable wolfed down the meal, and Karin put more in front of her, telling her she was eating for two now. She cleaned the plate and looked up to find Malcolm staring at her.

"Come out to the barn with me, Sable. I'll find something to get that thing off your neck."

The barn was his workshop, the place where he constructed the furniture he sold online. His creations were beautiful, something else she took for granted when she lived here.

She sat on a bench and watched while he rummaged around in a toolbox until he found what he wanted.

"This should do the trick. It's a wire rope cutter." He straddled the bench and looked at her neck. "Hold your hair back."

It hurt that he didn't even want to touch her, but she couldn't blame him. She did as he asked, making sure she covered the scar on her neck. It struck her that she felt no physical attraction to him. Well, things were different now. She had a real mate.

"Don't move."

When she felt the collar give, she breathed a sigh of relief.

"Thank you, Malcolm." She rubbed her neck. "You can't imagine how good it feels to get that off."

He nodded tersely. "I want to talk to you without Karin around."

Okay, now he would tell her to leave. He had helped her more than she deserved, and he wanted her gone.

"Do you have anywhere to go?"

She shook her head. "I'll figure out something."

"Karin wants you to stay here. At least until we know you and the baby will be okay."

Her jaw dropped. She couldn't get a word out.

"I don't like it, but I agreed to let you spend the night."

"Malcolm, you don't have to do this."

"This is Karin's doing, not mine. If you hurt one hair on her head, I'll kill you. Do you understand?"

"Yes," she whispered. "You have my word."

"For all it's worth," he spat. "There's one other thing. We're going back in the house, and I want the truth out of you. Who put that collar on you for starters? Understand?"

"Yes, Malcolm. You need to know."

"Save it until we go back. Karin deserves to know what's going on, too."

They walked outside, and the afternoon sun felt good on her bare neck. She could shift if she wanted. A run on four legs would be heaven now, but she owed them an explanation before anything.

The Outlaws would never stop hunting her, and if Jude died, Jonas would want her life in exchange. He wasn't stupid. He would track her to Malcolm's door and wonder why they were helping her. Eventually he'd figure it out, and Malcolm would be in danger. He and Karin had to know the position she'd put them in by coming here.

She felt like she was on a witness stand. Karin and Malcolm sat on the couch. She sat across from them on a chair. "I feel so much better. I don't know how to thank you. Both of you. I don't deserve it."

"No. You don't," Malcolm said gruffly. "Pregnant or not, you're only here because Karin insisted."

"Malcolm, please," Karin begged. "We all make mistakes and we all deserve a second chance."

"Karin, if it was up to her, you wouldn't have had any chance at all."

"He's right. I almost killed you and the baby." Sable lowered her head. "I don't want to make any more trouble for you. I'm going to leave. If you could do one more thing for me." She hesitated and looked at Malcolm. "Lend me some money for a bus ticket."

"And go where?" Karin blurted. "You're pregnant for God's sake. How will you take care of a baby?" She turned to Malcolm. "We can't let her leave. There's something else. This might be the only other

baby with Lycan blood. Think of it. Junior will grow up with a friend who's like him. He won't be alone."

"I want more children, Karin," Malcolm said quietly.

"I know. So do I. But what if it doesn't happen. And even if it does, they need more, Sable's baby needs more."

"You're right. I was alone for fifteen years. I don't want my kids to ever go through that." He looked at Sable. "The baby is half-human right? The father isn't Lycan?"

"No." She shook her head. "I don't know of any others like us who are still alive."

"Sable." He hesitated. "Do you really want this baby?"

"How can you ask me that?" It hurt, but of course, he had good reason to ask.

"You called my son a half-breed and said he didn't deserve to live. You almost killed him," he snarled at her. "And you wonder why I believe you don't want a half-human child."

She hung her head. "I should never have said those things."

"You're in no position to raise a child, especially one who's half-human. I can find you a place to stay and help you financially."

Would he really do all that? For her?

"And after you give birth, Karin and I will adopt the baby. Your life will be easier without a baby to care for, and we'll give the child a good home."

Her heart twisted. Give up her baby. *Never.*

Even Karin looked shocked. "He doesn't mean it."

"I do mean it, Karin. It would be the best thing for all of us."

"I'm not giving up my baby, not for anything. I'll find a way to take care of him—or her."

"You won't need to. We're going to help you." Karin grabbed Malcolm's arm. "Aren't we?"

He glared at Sable. "It's time you tell us who the father is."

"Jude."

Karin looked shell-shocked.

"Jude?" Malcolm thundered. He rose and stood over her. "How the hell did you get involved with him?"

She cowered at the look on his face. Malcolm and Jude had a bad history. At least now, knowing who fathered it, he wouldn't try to take her baby away.

"Malcolm, can't you see how upset she is?" Karin looked pale as a ghost. "How did you meet him?"

"They trapped me," she confessed. "Him and his brother. They kept me at their ranch."

"Son of a bitch!" Malcolm growled. He started pacing. "They raped you."

"Not exactly," she whispered, embarrassed. "I was in heat."

"Just as bad. He took advantage of you. Gods, I'll kill him, both of them."

"Malcolm. Please." Karin turned back to Sable. "How did you escape?"

Bit by bit, she got most of the story out. She didn't change a thing except the identity of the baby's father. If Jonas knew the baby was his, nothing would stop him from taking it. Jude wasn't like him. He would never let Jonas experiment on his child.

"He might already be dead." Gods, please don't let it be true.

"Do you care?" Malcolm yelled.

"Yes," she whispered. "He's my mate."

"Impossible!"

"Why? Karin is your mate."

"That's different."

"How? How is it different?"

"It just is. We love each other. This man didn't take you out of love."

"I know." It hurt like hell to hear Malcolm say that. She loved Jude, and she wished he felt the same. "But he does care about me. He bit me. I felt the bond. But..."

"Finish it. What else?"

"I bit Jonas." She lowered her head again.

"That's just great! I suppose you think he's your mate, too."

Her heartbeat raced, and she crumpled against the back of the couch.

"Gods, what a mess." Malcolm shook his head.

"Is that even possible?" Karin asked.

"It's not unheard of," Malcolm admitted. "Our people lived in a closed community. The men outnumbered the women, and we're a highly sexual race."

"Really." Karin smiled at him.

He returned a small smile before his face got serious again. "We were always encouraged to stay with our own kind. Our elders told us we couldn't reproduce with humans. Obviously, they were lying to keep us from going outside the clan and diluting our blood. Some formed triads." He paused. "Some found human partners anyway."

"Like your sister," Sable said bitterly.

"Yes." Malcolm sighed. "Like my sister. Who knows? Maybe there are more of us out there, married to humans and hiding what they really are. You're not the only one who's made mistakes." He shook his head ruefully. "But I don't think the Outlaws are looking for a mate. And I don't particularly want them in my family."

"What do you want, Sable?" Karin asked quietly.

"It doesn't matter what I want. Malcolm is right. They don't want a mate. Jonas only wants a baby so he can study it. I won't put my baby through that."

"No, of course you won't." Karin's mouth tightened.

"But I don't want them coming after you and Malcolm either. What if they find out Malcolm is a Lycan? They might come after your baby. If I leave now I can throw them off the track."

"It's too late for that. You already left a trail they'll have no trouble following. Damn!" Malcolm ran a hand through his hair.

"Malcolm?" Karin looked on the verge of tears. "What are we going to do?"

"You will go to the city and stay with your mother. I'll stay here with Sable. We can handle the Outlaws if they show up."

"No! No way," Karin stated adamantly. "I'm not leaving you, not ever again."

"I won't come between you and Karin, and I don't want anyone hurt on my account. If they come looking for me, I'll go with them."

"You can't go back there." Karin cried.

"Don't worry. I won't let that happen," Malcolm snarled.

"Malcolm?"

"What is it, Sable?"

"I won't let you have my baby."

"Good!" He offered her a tight smile. "I'm not going to raise an Outlaw. Besides, Karin's right. A baby belongs with its mother."

She sighed with relief.

"I have an idea," Karin offered. "Sable will go to my mother's house. You can drive her to the airport. There are enough Jeep tracks around here to confuse a trail."

"But they'll still come here," Sable protested.

"We'll tell them you showed up on our doorstep, and we felt sorry for you. We took you in and fed you. Then you ran off without a word and we have no idea where you went."

"It could work." Malcolm nodded. "We don't have another option."

"What will your mother think?"

"She would never turn away a woman in trouble, especially one who's pregnant. There's just one thing." Karin looked embarrassed. "She doesn't know Malcolm is Lycan. We thought it safer that way—for her as well as for us. You couldn't shift there."

"I understand."

"Good. I'll call my mother and pack a few things for you."

"And I'll check the flights," Malcolm added. "We should do this as soon as possible. I want to be back home before anybody shows up here."

"I'll keep Ralf and Wolfie by my side. We won't open the door until you're back," Karin promised.

Chapter Fourteen

Jude put his feet up on the ottoman, leaned back against the leather seat, and groaned.

Jonas shook his head in disgust. Jude put on a good act, but he didn't buy it. When he found his brother lying unconscious in the dirt, his heart just about stopped. His siblings were all he had in the world. But he couldn't let Jude take advantage of that and play on his sympathy forever.

Jonas had to let Sable get away in order to take care of his brother. Jude's head wound had already stopped bleeding, but Jonas couldn't take any chances. A head injury was not something to mess around with. Fortunately, he had his cell phone on him, and he made a quick call to their doctor. Jude came to, woozy but able to walk, and their doctor met them back at the ranch. Despite an impressive-looking goose egg, the injury wasn't serious. Doc prescribed an ice bag and aspirin. He told Jonas to keep an eye on Jude for signs of a concussion, but he didn't think there'd be any. Jonas sat up with his twin all night, and fortunately, there weren't any problems.

Once he knew Jude would live, the anger took over. His brother hadn't listened to a damn thing he said. The next day he went back and followed the trail to Connor's house. He forced himself not to knock on the door. He needed a plan before he did something stupid.

"It's been two days, Jude. You can stop faking it." He went to the cherry wood bar, threw the doors open, and reached for the Glenlivet.

"Did you see the size of this thing on my head? It hurts like hell." He fingered the dressing that covered his injury. "I'm lucky to be alive."

Jonas felt his patience snap. "You're not out of the woods yet."

Jude stiffened under his withering glare. "I'm sorry, Jonas. I should have kept a closer watch on her."

"Damn it. What were you thinking? Oh, I forgot. You weren't thinking."

"Give me a break, bro. I feel bad enough as it is," Jude whined in an injured tone. "Get me a glass while you're over there."

Jonas filled two glasses, handed one to Jude, and clinked it with his own. "To what might have been." He sat on the other chair and downed his scotch in one large, hurried swallow. "You should have called me when you knew you were close to catching her."

"Everything happened so fast, I didn't have time to go for my cell phone."

"You're supposed to go for the cell before you jump in feet first. You should have called me before you grabbed her." He walked back to the armoire and refilled his tumbler.

"Don't worry, I'll get her back." Jude took a small sip from his glass. "I'm going to the house. She'll listen to me."

"Are you crazy?" Jonas choked on the scotch. "Connor won't let you near her. And if he did, what would you say?"

"I'll apologize." He shrugged.

"Just like that. I'm sorry I hunted you down and kept you locked up in my house." Jonas laughed. "And they'll invite you in for tea—after they call the sheriff."

"They're not calling anybody. Sable doesn't want the sheriff sniffing around. She'll be worried somebody else might find out what she really is."

"Maybe so, but she probably told Connor she's running from somebody, and he'll be waiting for us with a shotgun." Jonas took another big swallow. "The man has no love for you after that fight at the refuge."

"He gave as good as he got."

"So you're looking to let him finish what he started?"

"You got a better idea?"

"I say we keep an eye on the house and trap her again. She can't stay inside forever."

"What makes you so sure she's still inside? She might have taken a runner before you tracked her to the house."

"I'm not sure. I was busy, remember. I had to take care of your sorry ass." His voice got louder. "You had to go camping, like you were on some kind of date. Stupid son of a..." He tried to calm himself before he popped a blood vessel. "Bad enough you let her get away, then you land flat out cold trying to bring her in." Jonas took a deep breath. "Forget it. I'm not going there again. What's done is done. But I need to have her back. I can't finish my research without her."

"Why don't you just ask her if she'll cooperate? Maybe if you didn't treat her like a lab rat she'd work with you."

"Right. And do you think that cooperation will extend to having my baby. Or yours?"

"Maybe the baby thing isn't such a good idea."

"I've come too far to give up now."

"Then let me go over there and find out what's going on."

"No way. If Connor doesn't shoot you, his dog will tear your throat out. Too bad you didn't finish him off in the spring when you had the chance."

"Hey, I wasn't aiming to kill somebody's dog. I thought it was a wolf."

"Wolf, dog, whatever he is, he must have recognized your scent. No wonder he attacked you. You're damn lucky you were out cold, or he might have torn you apart."

"It was a bad break, him being in woods. Sable fights like a she-devil, but I almost had her."

"All right. We have to make a move, and we don't have much choice. If we stake out the house and she's there, she'll sniff us out. If she's not there, we're just wasting time, and she's getting further away. I don't see any other way. I'm gonna have to go over there."

"Wait a minute," Jude interrupted. "I'll go with you."

"No. The man has no love for you, and he might feel like we're trying to strong-arm him if two of us go over there. He doesn't know me well. Maybe he'll talk to me."

* * * *

Jonas didn't try to be quiet. He pulled right up to the house and parked his ATV next to the Jeep. As soon as he got out, he heard a dog barking—maybe more than one. Before he had one foot on the porch, Malcolm had the door open and stepped outside.

He didn't look happy to see him. The dog came out and stood at his side. Hackles rose on its back, and it growled, showing lots of sharp teeth. Another yappy dog came out to join them. It looked like a little feather duster.

"Yes?"

He'd never actually met Malcolm before, only seen him in town. Up close, he cut an impressive figure, tall and muscular. Not someone you'd want to mess with. He gave Jude credit for standing up to him. "I'm Jonas Outlaw."

"What can I do for you?" Malcolm crossed his arms over his chest and leaned against the threshold. His easy stance didn't fool Jonas. The man looked like an animal eyeing its prey.

"I'm looking for someone. A woman. I thought she might have come this way."

"Oh?"

Jonas took a deep breath. Malcolm wasn't going to make this easy. "My girlfriend."

"Why would she come here?"

"We had a fight, and she ran off. When she didn't come back, I followed her here. Look, I don't want to bother you, but I really need to find her and apologize."

"You want to apologize?" Malcolm asked.

"The fight was all my fault. I need to tell her that."

"Well, you're too late."

"What do you mean?" He didn't even have to pretend to be upset.

"She came here the other day looking for help. Showed up at the door exhausted, hungry, dirty."

Jonas flinched at every word. He didn't want any harm coming to Sable.

"We fed her and gave her some clothes, a place to sleep." Malcolm shrugged.

"And?"

"She took off during the night."

"Any idea where she went?"

"None." Malcolm stood up a little straighter and glared at him. "I don't know what you two fought about. It's really none of my business. But that woman was terrified."

"I only want to make it up to her. You must understand how worried I am," he pleaded. "I know how this must look, but believe me, I only want what's best for her. If you hear anything—"

"I can't help you." Malcolm turned away, the dogs followed, and the door slammed behind them.

Chapter Fifteen

This arthropod stalks its prey on the ground instead of catching it in a web.

And the question is, What is a wolf spider?

Sable frowned. She didn't like hearing that she shared a name with something she hated so much. She filed the information away in her head, along with all the other facts she learned from *Jeopardy*. Jonas was wrong, she wasn't a dumb animal. She'd earned a high school diploma while stuck in foster care. His opinion didn't matter anyway. She knew who she was.

Startled by the doorbell, Sable's hand jerked, and tea spilled over the rim of her cup. She cursed softly and grabbed a napkin to blot the spot on her jeans. At least it wet her jeans and not the sofa. The flowered fabric looked expensive like everything else in Mrs. Stone's three-bedroom brownstone. The townhome in Rittenhouse Square, with its marble fireplace, antiques, and tiny backyard garden, intimidated Sable. She'd lived in foster homes, on the street, and in the forest. She'd never lived anyplace like this. Even Malcolm's house, with its comfy, cozy, lived-in feeling, couldn't be compared to this elegantly decorated museum. No matter how hard Karin's mother tried to make her feel at home, she still felt ill at ease.

At least she had the third floor all to herself, two bedrooms, one with access to the rooftop, and a full bath with tub and stall shower. She welcomed the space and privacy. Best of all, Mrs. Stone asked no questions.

Sable envied Karin. If only her own mother were alive to welcome the new baby. A grandchild, even a half-human one, would have meant the world to her. Mrs. Stone asked Sable to call her Mom

or Grace, but it wasn't the same. She couldn't bring herself to do it, but she appreciated the gesture.

Mrs. Stone worked at a bookstore on Walnut Street three days a week and she always brought a book home for Sable. A copy of *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* sat on the coffee table. When *Jeopardy* ended, she turned off the TV and picked up the book.

The doorbell rang again, but Mrs. Stone's warning sounded in her head. She had recited a litany of bad things that could happen in the city, break-ins, robberies, rapes. Those things didn't worry Sable. She could take care of herself, but she didn't want Mrs. Stone to find out she had a guard dog living in her house. Anything she did might hurt Malcolm and Karin, as well as herself. So, she stayed inside and kept out of trouble. When she wanted a breath of fresh air, she went up on the roof.

At first, she didn't mind keeping a low profile, but now this house felt as much a prison as the Outlaw ranch. There were no chains on her, but she couldn't come and go as she pleased, and she couldn't run. She'd traveled to many cities looking for her own kind, but she never stayed long. The forest always called to her, and it called now. She longed to go back to Black Wolf. She allowed herself to hope that one day it would be safe to go back and Malcolm would let her live on his land. She didn't need much. A small cabin for her and the baby would be more than enough.

She sat back on the sofa and rubbed her growing tummy, annoyed when the bell rang yet again. This time it was followed by loud and insistent pounding. In the few months she'd been living here, there'd been no visitors, not so much as a UPS delivery or someone selling magazines. This must be important. She couldn't ignore it any longer. What if Karin's mother had been injured?

Sable put an eye to the peephole and recoiled in shock. *Jude!* The possibility always existed, but she never really believed they would find her here.

Relief overrode her fear. Karin told her he recovered, but now she could see it for herself. It should be enough just to know that he was okay, but it wasn't.

She wanted to catch his scent, hear his voice, touch him. She hesitated, wavered. Her hand hovered over the knob. It would be a huge mistake. Her hand lowered until it rested on the knob. It was like watching someone else moving in slow motion and being helpless to stop them. She turned the knob, and the door opened a few inches, stopped short by the brass chain lock.

Cool air wafted in carrying her mate's unique scent. It drew her and held her spellbound. He smelled of forest, of home. Her wild spirit soared. How could a human male affect her like this? He stared at her through the narrow gap. Thank the Gods her baggy sweats hid her belly. For a few seconds neither one spoke.

"Let me in, Sable." He spoke quietly, but he couldn't hide the urgency in his voice.

"No." She should slam the door in his face, but she couldn't think straight.

"Please. I only want to talk."

"Then talk." Her body responded to the hurt in his voice. She wanted to wrap her arms around her mate and make it go away.

"I miss you, Sable. I don't want to talk with a door between us." His voice sounded husky and intimate. It implied more than talking would follow if she let him in.

She leaned her head against the edge of the door and fought the urge to unchain the lock. "I can't trust you."

"I won't hurt you, you have my word."

She wanted so much to believe him, but she couldn't let her hormones overrule her head. "Go away."

"I won't leave. I'll camp on this doorstep until you talk to me. Look, I'm not carrying a gun." He pulled out his pockets to prove it. "No drugs." He removed his jacket, then his shirt.

Sable sucked in a breath. She wanted to snatch up his shirt, press it to her face, and breathe him in.

"You're stronger than me. You can kill me in a heartbeat if you shift." He started unbuckling his belt.

"Jude! What are you doing?" She tried to look beyond him to see if anyone was watching, but her gaze locked on the hard planes of his

chest. She followed the line of golden hair that disappeared under the waistband of his jeans.

He worked his belt off and then went for the button. "Let me in, Sable." She couldn't take her eyes from his hand as he tugged on his zipper. "The only thing I have in my pants is a hard-on for you." He let out a shudder as he freed his cock from the confines of his tight jeans.

Her mouth went dry. A throbbing ache started in her womb, and moisture soaked her sweatpants. If she let him in, this would only end with him inside her. She took the chain off and pulled him through the door.

He slammed it shut, leaned back against it, and hugged her tight against his chest. His kiss was hungry, demanding, desperate. He tightened his hold on her. The hard ridge of his erection pressed against her.

She returned the kiss, moaning into his mouth, while her hands roamed down his back and over his ass. She squeezed, pulled him tighter. He belonged to her.

Jude took her face between his hands. "Jesus, Sable. I've been so worried about you."

She looked up at him, breathless. "You're insane."

"Yes, crazy for you." He kissed her again, as if he couldn't get enough. "Come back with me."

Reality hit her over the head, and she twisted out of his grasp. "You better get your clothes before some homeless person takes them." She backed away.

He grinned at her and opened the door to retrieve the shirt and jacket he'd thrown off. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to maul you as soon as I got close, I couldn't help it." He tucked himself back in his jeans and zipped up.

"You can only stay a few minutes. My landlady will be back soon."

"Sable, I know whose house this is, and I know where she's at. I just want some time alone with you to work this out. Can I sit down?"

What harm could it do? She'd already let him in. She nodded, and he took a seat on the sofa.

"I'm glad you're okay, Jude. I never meant for you to get hurt."

"I know that." His handsome features were shadowed with fatigue. "Can you sit here next to me?"

She ignored the question and stayed on her feet. "Jude, just tell me why you're here."

"I already told you. I miss you."

"Yeah, I bet Jonas misses me, too. Who's he experimenting on these days?"

"I don't speak for my brother." His expression tightened. "I miss being with you. I'm not just talking about the sex." His crooked grin made her heart twist. "I like being with you. We had some good times, didn't we? Running, camping?"

She frowned at him, annoyed with herself for letting him con her. No one ever wanted her for any reason other than sex. "So you're here to, what, ask me on a date?" She couldn't keep the sarcasm out of her voice.

"I think we've gone beyond dating." He stood and put his arms around her.

"That's what I thought. You want to fuck me."

"I wouldn't turn you down, sweetheart." He nuzzled her hair. "It's more than that. You know it is." He slipped a hand down her sweats, aiming for her pussy. His whole body stiffened. The hand moved back to her belly. She could actually feel his heart pounding. His eyes bored into hers.

"Is it mine?"

"Yes." She held her breath. It was better this way.

"Jesus, Sable. You should have told me. Why did you run?"

"You know why."

He rested his forehead against hers. "God, I'm glad it's mine."

She let out a surprised breath. "You're happy about this?"

"Sweetheart, you have no idea. I'm over the moon."

She couldn't believe he'd really claim a half-Lycan child as his own unless he had an ulterior motive. She studied his face, wondering what was really behind this. "Did Jonas send you?"

"No. I insisted on coming myself. I wanted to talk to you alone."

Was this a trick to get her to come quietly? If only she could think straight. "How did you find me?"

"It wasn't easy." He sighed. "I don't even know your last name. We checked the bus station, the airport. Nobody remembered a tall, beautiful woman with black hair down to her ass. Don't know why, unless you were disguised. I'd sure as hell never forget you." He grinned at her. "We got lucky. The sheriff's secretary gave us a lead."

"I don't even know her." She stared blankly at him.

"Trudy is the town gossip. I overheard her tell someone that Malcolm brought Karin back from Philadelphia. We took a shot they might have sent you here and hired a private investigator."

"You went to a lot of trouble for nothing, Jude. I'll never go back."

"Sweetheart, just give me a chance. I'll be in town for awhile staying with my sister. We can spend some time together, away from the ranch. Let me prove that I can take care of you and the baby the way you deserve. Then you can decide whether you want to come back or not." Jude's eyes begged her to say yes. They caressed her like the hands of a lover. The temperature in the room rose a few degrees.

Get a grip, Sable. You have the heart of a predator and the spirit of the wolf, and yet you melt like marshmallows when he's around. No matter how sincere he sounded, she couldn't let her guard down. He might mean it now, but his twin had a big influence on him. "What about Jonas?"

"This is about me and you, Sable. And of course, the baby. I never really thought about having a kid until Jonas brought it up. He had his own reasons, and I went along with them, but then I started imagining a little girl with long, black hair and gold eyes like her mother. The more I thought about it, the more I wanted it. I like the idea that we created this little life together, and I want to be part of it. I will never let anyone hurt my daughter. Hey, don't get me wrong. A son would be great too, a mini-me that I could take hunting. In fact, I'd like one of each."

She started to cry, and he wiped her tears away with his thumbs.

"I'm sorry. Nobody asked you what you wanted. It's a little late now, but I want to do right by you."

If she looked at him, she might give in. She chewed on a nail. Should she trust him? Her body said yes, but her mind said no. *Kweo, help me see the truth.*

"Can't you look at me?" He tilted her chin with one finger and touched her lips with his thumb.

Tiny shivers raced down her spine. He bent to brush his lips against hers. A second of hesitation and, as he started to pull away, she caught his lower lip and kissed him back.

They broke apart. He could fake the words but not his expression. His eyes begged for forgiveness. Longing etched lines on his face. An urge to hold him close came over her, and she wrapped her arms around him.

A small moan escaped his lips before he kissed her again, deeply and passionately. His tongue searched for hers while his hands rubbed her back.

She whimpered in protest when he lifted his lips from hers.

"I want to touch you," he murmured against her ear. "Everywhere."

"Yes." She drew a ragged breath. Gods, she'd missed him.

His warm, calloused hands slid under her sweatshirt and briefly caressed her breasts, already heavy and aching. He tugged the shirt over her head, and she rubbed her sensitive nipples against his chest.

She took his face between her hands and opened her mouth over his for another greedy kiss. He deepened it, dominating her with his intensity. Mindless animal desire took over as his taste, touch, and smell permeated her senses. She had no idea how long they kissed. It could have been a second or an hour. It wasn't long enough.

Breathless, he pulled away. "I have to be inside you. Now."

Refusal didn't enter her mind. He hooked his thumbs over the waistband of her sweatpants and slid them over her hips. They pooled around her ankles, and she stepped free of them to help him with his jeans. He sat wide-legged on the chair, fisted his erection, and pumped a few times. The chair creaked as she straddled his lap and rubbed her cleft along his cock.

He caressed her belly reverently. "I'll take care of you, baby, I promise." He cupped her breasts, flicked his thumbs over the nipples.

Her quick intake of breath encouraged him, and he tugged on them, pinching until they tightened to rigid, little peaks.

Being in his arms felt like home. She needed him to fill the void inside her. A flood of emotion took over, and she bit her lip before she could say, *I love you*. It would kill her if he didn't say it back. She believed he cared, but love seemed out of reach. She wasn't a human woman after all.

She guided his rigid penis to her entrance and sank down on his length. They rocked back and forth, finding a rhythm. Jude murmured encouragement in her ear and rained kisses on her cheek, her jaw, and, finally, her mouth. He smelled like aroused male. Desire swirled around him like a vortex, pulling her deeper.

Sable's possessive animal nature floated at the edge of her consciousness, responding to the stimuli of being close to her mate. Her womb ached and throbbed, her body temperature rose. Every instinct told her to take him. Her wolf shifted inside her, urging her to claim what was rightfully hers, pushing until she lost what little control remained. She leaned into him and clamped her teeth on the tender flesh between neck and shoulder.

He howled a sound halfway between agony and ecstasy. She sucked at his torn flesh, lapping at his blood as if it was the sweetest nectar. He exploded inside her, every hot jet of his seed setting off a myriad of sensations she'd never felt before. When the spasms ceased, she collapsed in his arms, and he cuddled her against his chest.

"You bit me," he whispered into her hair.

"I owed you one. Did I hurt you?"

"Yes. No. Hell, you can bite me anytime. I never came so hard in my life. I guess I'll have a scar like Jonas."

"Like Jonas and me." She tossed her hair back to reveal her mark. "We'll have these for the rest of our lives."

"Is that supposed to mean something?" he asked, confused.

Her face fell, he'd never understand. They were too different.

"Hey." He kissed her. "It's okay. I don't mind having a scar."

"Even a scar that means we're connected. In my world a bite is the mark of bonding." Would he laugh at her or tell her she was crazy?

He frowned. "What about Jonas's scar? Did you bond with him, too?"

"I don't know," she whispered.

"It's okay. It doesn't really mean anything. Not to us. It's just a bite."

Disappointment surged. Surely, he felt something, even if he didn't know what it meant.

"So what now, baby?" he asked gently. "If you believe we're bonded, you can't let me go home without you."

Her eyes misted. "I can't go back. I won't let Jonas have my baby."

"Our baby," he reminded her. "Don't forget that."

She smiled weakly. "Our baby."

"I think we should get married."

Astonished, she gaped at him. "You want to marry me?"

"Yes." He laughed. "Isn't that what people do when they make a baby?"

No. It was what people did when they loved each other. She thought about Malcolm and Karin. He adored her, and she accepted his wolf unconditionally. Sable had no illusions that Jude felt that way about her. He ignored her Lycan nature and pretended she was human. That wasn't love. They had great, explosive sex. She liked to go camping, and he thought she carried his baby. He didn't love her.

"According to you we're already bonded, so why not make it official?"

Why not? "I can't go back. Not if it means living in a prison. Not if Jonas is going to hurt my baby."

"Sweetheart, don't worry about Jonas. You and *our* baby will be legally mine, and there isn't a damn thing he can do about it. There's a lot of Outlaw property, and one-third of it belongs to me. I'll build you a brand new house with as many rooms as you want for all the babies we're going to make together."

It was her childhood dream, a mate, children, and a home of her own. Could it be that simple? Things rarely were. What would he do when he tired of her and found someone he really loved? Lycans mated until death do them part. She loved him, really loved him. Could she deal with losing him one day?

She'd worry about it when the time came. Surely, she deserved a little happiness despite the bad things she'd done in the past.

The hell with Jonas. She'd just claimed Jude, why not go all the way and have a human ceremony. At least her child would always be taken care of.

"Okay."

"Okay what?"

"Okay, let's get married."

His face lit up like a kid on Christmas morning. "That's great! You won't be sorry. I'll take good care of you, both of you."

Chapter Sixteen

Sable sat at the window watching the moon and stars fade in the wake of the rising sun. Her wedding day dawned sunny and full of promise. She let her fears slip away with the dark.

Her new ring, a princess-cut, two-carat diamond, sparkled on the bedside table. She couldn't wrap her head around it all. The ring, the new clothes hanging in the closet, the marriage license on the dresser, they were all hers. She must be dreaming. In a minute, she'd wake up in an abandoned coyote den in the forest.

Startled by a knock at the door, she bolted upright.

"Are you awake, dear?"

"Yes. Come in."

"I brought you some breakfast." Mrs. Stone set a tray on the bed. "You're going to lose that beautiful ring for sure. You need to put it on and leave it on."

"I guess I'm just not used to wearing a ring," she said lamely.

"Did you sleep at all?"

"Not very much," she admitted.

"Are you happy, Sable?"

"Of course," she answered, surprised by the question.

"You know you don't have to get married if you don't want to. These days a woman can raise a child on her own, and you know you always have a home here."

"I do know, and I appreciate it. But this is the right thing for me to do."

"Forget about what's right. Do you love your young man?"

"Yes." It was the first time she admitted she loved him out loud.

"Okay then. Put that ring on and eat your breakfast. We have a lot to do today."

You didn't want to mess with Mrs. Stone. Sable smiled and picked up the orange juice. The past week had been a whirlwind of preparations. How much more could there be to do?

Like a magician pulling a rabbit from a hat, Jude had materialized a social security card and ID, providing her what she needed to get the marriage license. He gave her his credit card, and his sister, Janis, showed up to take her shopping. Meeting Janis had been a shock. She looked so much like the twins they could have been triplets. They were all very close, and Janis didn't like the idea of keeping secrets from Jonas. Somehow, Jude convinced her not to tell him about the baby or the wedding.

Today a judge would marry them at City Hall. It was all happening so fast that she had trouble keeping up.

"After you finish eating, I want you to get dressed. Janis is coming over, and we have appointments to get our hair done."

Sable ran a hand through her long mane. She'd never gotten her hair done in her life.

"Now don't look so stricken. They're not going to cut it all off, just fix it in a nice updo."

"No. Jude likes it long."

"Okay, we'll figure out something."

* * * *

A stranger looked back at Sable from the mirror. A woman with French braids circling her head. The rest of her long, black hair cascaded down her back in a mix of sexy waves and spiral curls. A manicure, pedicure, and skillfully applied makeup completed her transformation. Never had she been so fussed over. It made her tense and anxious, but the results were dramatic. Would Jude like the surreal creature she'd become?

"You look gorgeous!" Janis appeared in the mirror behind her. "You'll be the most beautiful bride ever."

"Do you think Jude will like it?" She twisted this way and that, trying to see more of the hairstyle.

"Are you kidding?" Janis asked, astounded. "You'll knock his socks off. Won't she?" She turned to Mrs. Stone, who stood by the door.

"Absolutely. He's a very lucky man."

"I hope he thinks so."

"Sable, you have to be more assertive with him," Janis advised. "Show him who's boss."

Sable laughed with them, but secretly she disagreed. She wanted her mate to be the alpha in the family. The years on her own had toughened her, but the time she'd spent with Malcolm brought back her submissive side. A true she-wolf, she wanted to be dominated by her mates, in the bedroom anyway. *Mates?* What was she thinking? Jude was hers, but no matter what she felt, Jonas belonged to someone else.

"We're meeting Jude at City Hall in two hours. You should dress." Janis broke in to her thoughts.

"I don't need two hours to dress."

"Trust me, you do," Janis insisted.

"Why isn't Jude coming here?" Sable asked, disappointed.

"It's bad luck for a groom to see his bride in her wedding dress before the ceremony," Mrs. Stone explained.

"Why?" It sounded kind of dumb.

"Well. I don't really know." She looked at Janis, who shrugged.

"It just is." Mrs. Stone pulled a slim box from her pocket and handed it to Sable. "Something borrowed and it's old as well."

Sable held up a strand of pearls secured with a diamond heart in a white gold clasp. "They're beautiful."

"They're for good luck. Karin wore them when she married Malcolm."

Could she and Jude ever be as happy? She hoped so.

Mrs. Stone recited. "Something old, something new, something borrowed, something blue, and a silver sixpence in her shoe."

"More good luck." Sable smiled. "Are you trying to tell me something?"

"It's just tradition, dear." She reached in her pocket again and pulled out a shiny penny. "It's tough to find a sixpence these days. We'll have to make do with this."

"And I have something that's new and blue." Janis handed her a small box with a clear top. Inside was a fancy blue garter with white lace. "After the wedding I want it back. Whoever catches it is next to get married." Janis squinted at her. "Don't you dare cry and ruin that makeup."

"You've both been so wonderful. I don't know how to thank you."

"Well, if you come across a nice guy, you can send him my way." They all laughed and clasped each other in a three-way hug.

* * * *

Sable froze in front of the judge's chambers. She straightened her dress with shaky hands. She wondered if Jude would like what she'd selected, a tea-length ivory silk with a V-neck and sleeves a hair above her elbows.

"There's no reason to be nervous. You're the most beautiful bride I've ever seen," Janis assured her.

"I've never seen one lovelier," added Karin's mother. "Except for Karin, of course."

Laughter broke the tension, and Janis opened the door.

The minute she stepped over the threshold and saw Jude, everything was okay. They locked eyes and stared at each other for a few minutes. Then he walked over to get her. At a loss for words, he took her hand and planted a gentle kiss on her lips.

"You'll ruin her makeup," Janis scolded, though no one bothered to acknowledge her.

"You look like a Grecian goddess," he whispered, finally finding his tongue.

"And you look like a Greek god." She'd never seen him in a suit before. He was beautiful. She touched his smooth cheek, no stubble today. She couldn't believe he belonged to her.

"Ahem." The judge cleared his throat. "We should get started."

Jude led her to their place before the judge. Janis and Grace flanked them.

"We're gathered today for a joyous occasion, the marriage between Jude Outlaw and Sable Hemmings. Marriage is a pact and a promise to be faithful, kind, and supportive. It can only work if both partners promise to protect, listen, and love each other unconditionally. So many relationships fail because people are not honest with each other and..."

Sable's heart twisted. Was their union doomed to failure because it was based on a lie? If Jude knew the truth about this baby, he'd never marry her. Her heart sank like an anchor.

"Jude, do you take Sable to be your wife? Will you love...?"

Everything after the word love faded to a buzz in her head until she heard Jude say, *I do*. It rolled off his tongue so easily. Did he mean it? He never told her he loved her.

"Sable?" the judge interrupted her thoughts.

"I do!"

"Not yet, sweetheart." Jude laughed. Her face flamed, and she lowered her eyes.

"Sable, do you take Jude to be your husband? Will you love, honor, and cherish him, in good times and in bad, and do you promise to stay true to him as long as you both shall live?"

"I do." The promise was heartfelt. She dared to hope this would really work.

They exchanged rings, hers a circle of diamonds to match the engagement ring that adorned her right hand, his a plain gold band.

"And now, you have made your vows, each to the other, and have declared the same by giving and receiving your rings. I pronounce that you are husband and wife. Jude, you may kiss your bride."

Jude's sweet kiss promised her the world, and she returned it in kind. They broke apart smiling, but the witnesses sniffled.

"They're just happy tears, dear." Karin's mother blotted her eyes with a tissue.

After hugs and kisses all around, Janis pulled a small camera from her purse and took pictures. Then they took off for an early wedding dinner at the Fountain Restaurant in the Four Seasons Hotel.

The women oohed and ahed at the fancy lobby with its lovely fountain. Intimate seating areas filled with enormous bouquets of flowers were scattered throughout the large expanse.

In the elegant restaurant, the maître d' showed them to a table with a stunning view of the Benjamin Franklin Parkway. Sable, unaccustomed to having her chair pulled out and pushed in, felt like a princess.

Jude ordered for her, Duet of Beef Filet and Short Rib.

Janis's jaw dropped. "He tells you what to eat, too."

"Hey, I know my girl." Jude winked at Sable. "She likes red meat. Right, sweetheart?"

"You're right, baby." She smiled back at him.

"You two are sickening." Janis made a face.

Dinner went much too fast. Sable took a sip of her champagne when Janis made a toast and left the rest.

Dessert was crème brûlée. Sable could only taste a bite before sitting back in her chair, stuffed. She excused herself to go to the powder room.

When she returned, a small envelope was at her place.

"What's this?"

"It's for you and Jude. Open it," Mrs. Stone urged.

Sable pulled out two plastic cards and glanced at Jude with a flicker of uncertainty.

"They're keycards, sweetheart. We're staying here tonight, compliments of the ladies."

"Oh, you've done too much already. My hair, the makeup."

"That was for you. This is for you and Jude."

"We wanted to do more, but we didn't have much time," Janis added. "We'll make up for it when the baby comes."

"Thank you. This is wonderful." She thought she might cry. "Oh, and this is for you, Janis." She handed her the garter she'd removed in the ladies' room.

"What's that," Jude asked.

"Insurance. I plan to be the next one to marry." Janis stuffed it in her purse.

"Right. I don't think Jonas wants to wait that long."

Janis punched him in the arm.

"Hey, I'm only kidding. Your time will come."

"You deserve someone wonderful," Sable said. Inside, her heart broke thinking of Jonas with another woman. She buried the thought. It wasn't right to be thinking of another man on her wedding day.

"She should be as lucky as you, sweetheart." Jude leaned over and kissed Sable, full on the mouth.

"Oh, Lord. Grace, I think it's time for us to go."

"The night is young. Let's stop somewhere for a nightcap."

"Grace, you and I are going to be great friends." Janis pushed her chair back and stood.

They walked to the elevators together, kissed, and hugged. Suddenly she felt nervous to be alone with Jude. She held on to Janis like a lifeline.

"Come on, sweetheart, you'll see Janis again."

"Of course you will. Once that baby comes you won't be able to get rid of me."

Jude held her hand in the elevator and all the way down the hall until they stood at the door to their suite. He used the card, swept her off her feet, and carried her over the threshold.

"Here we are, Mrs. Outlaw." He kissed her gently and set her down.

Her heart stuttered. *Mrs. Outlaw*. It would take some getting used to. "This is lovely, Mr. Outlaw." The furniture, rich carpets, and artwork reminded her of Mrs. Stone's house.

"Hey, look at this view." He set her down in front of doors to a balcony that overlooked the Swann Fountain in Logan Circle.

"Can we go outside?"

Jude slid the door open, and they stepped out.

"It's all like a beautiful fairy tale."

"You're beautiful," he murmured, taking her hand and drawing her close.

Her heart pounded wildly. She slipped her hands under his jacket and around his waist, every curve of her body molded against his, and she tilted her head to gaze at him. He was so beautiful and all hers.

His closeness ignited a fire in her, and she writhed against him. "Pretty soon I won't be able to get this close."

"We'll improvise."

She laughed, giddy with the knowledge that he'd be by her side throughout her pregnancy and after.

"Are you cold, sweetheart?" he asked suddenly.

With or without fur, the autumn chill didn't bother her. "No. I'm on fire."

He grinned suggestively and set her pulse racing. "Good, because I want to look at you." He unzipped the back of her dress and pushed it over her shoulders, trapping her arms in the sleeves.

"Very sexy," he said breathily, running his fingers under the straps of her lacy, beige bra. "Your cup runneth over. I could get used to this pregnancy thing." He unhooked the bra, and her full breasts spilled out into his hands. "You make me so damn hot," he murmured against her bare shoulder. He kissed the hollow of her throat while his hands roamed over her exposed breasts. Her nipples tightened to pebble hardness, and she pressed them into his hands. Her breath caught in her throat.

"Let's get rid of this." He inched the dress over her hips, and she shrugged off the bra.

Jude got to his knees in front of her, hooked his fingers in her panties, and slid them down her long legs. She stepped out of them, and the cool night air caressed her bare flesh.

He positioned her against the balustrade. His hands burned her hips as he kissed her taut, round belly. She gripped the rail on either side, trying not to think about where she really wanted his warm lips. They hadn't been together like this since the first day he found her. Did he need this mating as bad as she did?

He spread her legs to give himself access. His thumbs parted her nether lips, and he dipped his head to lick first up one side, then the other. He slipped his hands around her hips, cupped her buttocks, and pulled her closer. His heated mouth covered her clit, and he sucked and nibbled until she felt ready to explode. She screamed as her climax hit, and he rode the aftershocks with her, his face buried between her thighs.

Finally, he stood, and they locked in a deep kiss. She tasted herself on his lips and felt a familiar heat course through her body.

She unzipped his slacks and slipped her hand inside to caress his hard male flesh.

"Fuck." His breath rasped in her ear.

She wrapped her fingers around his cock and squeezed, massaging his sac with her other hand. Each stroke made him gasp, and each gasp made her stroke harder. His balls tightened in her hand.

He clenched his eyes shut, gripped her arms, and thrust into her hand. She increased the pressure, and he sucked in a breath. Fluid leaked from the tip of his cock, and she smoothed it over his length. Traffic, horns honking, a dog barking in the distance, it all faded until nothing existed except the two of them. All of her attention focused on Jude, touching him the way he liked to be touched, watching him respond.

The guttural sounds he uttered were more animal than human. He rested his forehead against hers, and his sweat bathed her brow. She loved this, knowing she could make him lose control. His body tensed, his hips bucked. She sank her teeth into his flesh where her mark bore witness to her possession. His control snapped. He came hard, in great pulsing spasms, and she continued to stroke him, riding out the waves until he went soft in her hands.

* * * *

More asleep than awake, Sable nestled her bare bottom against her husband. Jude molded his body to hers, enjoying the way she felt in his arms. She was made for him.

He'd surprised himself when he suggested they get married. It came out of the blue. Deep feelings surfaced when he saw her again and realized how much he loved her. When he found out about the baby, it seemed like a sign from God. Over the past week, he'd had second thoughts. Marriage was such a big step for any couple, let alone one that started out on the wrong foot. And they were so different.

But when she arrived for the ceremony, all his doubts fled. He knew he wanted her by his side for the long haul. The baby was a blessing in disguise. She might not have married him if she wasn't pregnant. He didn't kid himself that she loved him. Why would she, after what he and Jonas had done to her? He knew he had a long road ahead trying to make up for the past. But maybe in time she'd come to trust him and care for him.

Jonas would be furious, but he didn't give a damn. He loved his brother, but he belonged with Sable. He found he liked being part of a couple, being married and waking up with her in his arms.

She stretched, and he spooned against her warm, soft curves. He tightened his hold on her waist and threw a leg over hers. He would make sure she always slept naked with no barriers between them. He fondled a breast and rubbed his thumb over her nipple until it hardened under his touch. She was so responsive, so sensual and passionate. His morning erection nudged her bottom.

"Are you awake?" he whispered in her ear.

"I am now." She yawned and started to turn in his arms.

He stopped her, reached a hand between her thighs. "You're so wet, sweetheart."

"I was dreaming about you." She squirmed against his hand.

"I'm going to make your dreams come true." He pulled her leg over his and guided himself to her warm, moist entrance.

"Yes." She arched back, adjusted her angle, and he entered her slowly. She moaned, and he stilled immediately.

"Am I hurting you?"

"No, Jude. Don't stop."

He slid his right arm under her so he could stroke her pussy and press the little bundle of nerves that drove her crazy. Her quick intake of breath spurred him on, and he cupped her breast with his left hand, squeezing softly while slowly easing in and out of her clingy, warm sheath.

"Harder. Please, baby." She quivered under his touch. Her hands covered his and pressed them harder against her body.

His own excitement mounted, yet he wanted nothing more than to give Sable all the pleasure he possibly could. It was all about her.

With other women, his emotions had never come into play during sex. This was new and uncharted territory. Surprisingly enough, it took him to a new high, and the sensation was heady.

Sable leaned back. Her breath came in pants. The smoky scent of arousal hung over them.

He rode her relentlessly. On the verge of exploding, he fought to draw out her pleasure.

She matched his rhythm and tried to increase it. He whispered soothing words in her ear and kissed the spot where the scar of his bite mark marred her perfect skin. A moan of appreciation made him linger over the blemish. He rubbed his stubbled jaw over it then licked it with his tongue. Every touch elicited a howl of pleasure. Each sound she made was music to his ears and aroused a need inside him to brand her as his own. He closed his mouth over the scar and bit down. She surged wildly against him, pressing her face into the pillow to muffle her scream. She came with a fiery intensity that set off his release, and they shared the final moments of climax.

Sated, they lay quietly. Jude spread his hand protectively over her belly.

"Jude?"

"Yes, baby."

"Can't we stay here a few more days?"

He nuzzled her shoulder. "I already booked the flight, and we're all packed. I don't want you to worry about Jonas. Everything will be fine." *I hope.*

Chapter Seventeen

Their flight took to the skies, and Jude promptly fell asleep. Had morning sex tired him out that much? Maybe he needed vitamins. Sable picked at her new acrylic nails and stared silently out the window. Soon they were over the clouds, and the view became boring. She looked at Jude with envy, wishing she could be so relaxed. The closer they got to landing, the more nervous she became. Her mental demons wouldn't give her any peace. When the captain's voice came over the speaker and told them to fasten their belts, her heart dropped with the altitude.

She woke Jude. He took one look at her face and told her to stop worrying. His words were meant to be reassuring, but she heard doubt in his voice. Even he couldn't predict the kind of reception they would get. Jonas had been told they were returning together, but he had no idea Jude was bringing a wife and baby home with him.

Jude thought Jonas should hear the news in person. She gave in, but she insisted on calling Malcolm and Karin. At first Malcolm was furious. He refused to listen to reason until Karin's mother took the phone. Grace gave their marriage her seal of approval and managed to calm Malcolm. *One less hurdle to overcome at least.*

Sable got off the plane on shaky legs. Jonas would be waiting for them. He'd insisted on meeting their flight. What could they say? It made sense.

Jude led her to the baggage claim area.

"Did I really buy you all this stuff?" He laughed.

She had more than she left with, for sure. Jude spoiled her with lots of new things, even maternity clothes so she wouldn't have to fasten her pants with safety pins.

"Sweetheart, wait here while I get a cart."

She nodded and smiled weakly. She wished the women had come back with them. Having Karin's mother and Janis at the ceremony made her feel like part of a family for the first time in years. They might not be so accepting if they knew she was Lycan, but she put that out of her mind. They would never know.

But Jonas did, and he would never recognize her or her half-Lycan baby as an Outlaw. She and Jude shared something special, and she was afraid Jonas would ruin it. Jude looked up to his brother, and his opinions counted for a lot. She didn't want Jonas to come between them.

On the other hand, she didn't want to be the cause of a rift between the twins. Whatever Jonas might think of her, she cared deeply for him, and not in a sisterly way. The whole situation made her sick, and the butterflies in her stomach took flight again.

She slipped her rings off and put them in her purse. When she looked up, Jude stood there with the cart, watching her.

He frowned. "What are you doing?"

"I don't think it's a good idea to just show up with rings on our fingers. You should tell Jonas later, when you're alone."

"Maybe you're right." He took his ring off and loaded up the cart. "Let's go. Try not to look so miserable."

She spotted Jonas through the glass doors. Leaning against the hood of the Wrangler, he looked every bit a real outlaw. His lean, sexy body encased in tight jeans and a denim shirt with rolled-up sleeves did things to her libido that were downright sinful. Her fingers itched to ruffle his shaggy light-brown hair and trace her mark on his neck. She reminded herself that she was his sister-in-law now.

"There he is," Jude said.

She walked a step behind Jude and buttoned her heavy sweater to make sure her belly was well hidden. The two men hugged, and Jonas caught her eye over Jude's shoulder. Jude stepped away, and Jonas approached her.

A few awkward seconds passed before Jonas spoke. "Hello, Sable." He took her hand. "I'm glad you came back." She luxuriated in his scent and the touch of his hand. Jude cleared his throat, and Jonas released her.

"Sable is tired. It's been a long day." Jude opened the car door, and she climbed in the back.

The men talked about the ranch and local news. Some of her tension evaporated, and she let her mind wander.

When they drove up the narrow road that led to the house, her jitters came back full force. The sight of the fence made her want to scream. She had to get over it. She was married to Jude now. Things were different.

Jonas parked on the gravel driveway, and Jude hopped out to open her door. She couldn't make herself move. Jude squeezed her hand reassuringly and helped her out.

Jonas turned to his brother. "Do you mind getting the bags while I have a few minutes with Sable?"

Jude looked at her, a question in his eyes. She nodded, and he said, "I'll be right in."

Silently, she followed Jonas inside. He led her into the den, and they stood facing each other.

"I just want to say I'm sorry and thank you for coming back. It's more than I deserve."

She didn't know what to say, so she said nothing.

"Things will be different now. You can come and go as you please."

He sounded sincere, but she knew he'd say anything to get her cooperation.

"Did Jude explain what I need? I just want to take some blood and urine, do a physical, that kind of thing." When she didn't respond, he frowned. "You don't have to do anything you don't want. We can make it a business arrangement. I'll pay you."

She winced. He wanted to pay her for her services. That hurt. This was harder than she'd imagined. When she shut out his words, the chemistry between them made her wolf sit up and howl. She tried not to get lost in his dark blue eyes. Instead, she looked down and caught sight of the bulge in his jeans. Her breath caught in her throat.

"Sable." He cupped her chin and lifted her face.

She ignored the tug in her womb when he looked at her. He skimmed her cheek with his thumb. She leaned into his touch and

breathed him in. His scent flooded her lungs, and the need to reestablish their connection slammed into her.

Dimly, she heard a door open, and reason came back in a flash of lightening. Flustered, she jerked away. Jude would walk through that door any second. If she gave herself over to the passion she felt for Jonas, he'd be crushed. She couldn't do that to him. She loved him.

Jonas backed away. "You should get some rest. I fixed up a spare bedroom for you."

"That won't be necessary." Jude came up behind her and put his hands on her shoulders. "Sable will be staying in my room. Let me get her settled, and when I come back, we'll talk."

Jonas's mouth tightened, and he gave her a strange look, but he didn't say anything.

Sable followed Jude upstairs to his bedroom. She looked around at the masculine furnishings, the spread and curtains in blue and brown plaids.

"It's temporary, sweetheart." He wrapped his arms around her. "I'm going to build us a house, and you can decorate it any way you want."

"It's fine. I've lived in worse." She grinned at him. Her smile faded. "Please don't fight with him."

"I have no intention of fighting. As far as I'm concerned he has his life, and we have ours." He tilted her chin and gave her a serious look.

"Please, Jude. I don't want any trouble. Tell him I still intend to give him what he wants."

"What if I don't want you to?"

"It's okay. Let him have his blood and urine and his research. You have me."

"He gets nothing if it's going to hurt you or the baby in any way."

"Agreed."

"Okay. Don't fall asleep on me. I won't be long." He gave her a gentle smack on the butt and disappeared.

* * * *

Jonas sat in the den, a tumbler of scotch on the coffee table in front to him. He found himself in an emotional upheaval he hadn't expected.

When Jude called and said Sable agreed to come back under certain conditions, he agreed immediately. Evidently, she missed the Wilds. She was a creature of the woodlands. She hated the city. Jude had promised her freedom and a home in exchange for her cooperation. It was a good arrangement. The best he could hope for. Maybe in time she'd even agree to a test-tube baby.

But as soon as he saw her, his pent-up lust took over. He had a hard-on the likes of which he'd never experienced. His balls were still heavy and sore. They gave truth to the expression *blue balls*.

He wasn't sure sex was part of their arrangement, but Sable looked agreeable at first. He felt like screaming when she pulled back. And when Jude announced Sable would be sleeping with him, you could have knocked him over with a feather. Who died and left him the boss? If he thought he had sole rights to Sable's body, he was mistaken. The green-eyed monster raised its ugly head, and he wanted to tear his brother apart, piece by piece.

Where had all this anger come from? Before they arrived, he had it all set in his head. If she wanted it, they'd both have access, and if she didn't, so be it. He and Jude would have to work something out between them.

Jude entered the room and went straight to the liquor cabinet. He poured himself a drink and sat across from Jonas.

Jonas lifted his glass. "To a job well done. I don't know how you did it, but thanks." His brother didn't respond to the toast.

"You may not thank me when you hear me out."

Jonas's stomach clenched. He downed half his tumbler in a swallow.

Jude pulled a gold ring from his pocket and slipped it on his finger. He held his hand up. "We're married."

Jonas swore his heart stopped beating. He shook his head like he hadn't heard right. "I don't understand. I know I told you to do whatever you had to, but you didn't have to marry her to get her to come back. I would have thought of another way."

"You're right, you don't understand. I wanted to marry her."

"I don't believe this. You want to be chained to an animal the rest of your life?" After the things Jude had said, what in God's name had possessed him?

"I want to be happy," Jude said tightly. "She makes me happy."

"The sex makes you happy. You could have had that without the marriage license."

"Look, it's not like that. I'm no prize catch for any woman. I'm rough around the edges, and I'd rather wear a hunting vest than a suit. She gets that. We're good together. Besides, there's something else. I want my kid to have a father."

Jonas's heart twisted. The glass dropped from his hand and rolled on the floor. They both ignored it.

"You're full of surprises." Why did he feel sick to his stomach? This is what he wanted. "How can you be sure it's yours?" He sneered at his brother.

"Sable is sure, that's good enough for me," Jude said through clenched teeth.

"Well, what's done is done," Jonas said flatly. "We got what we wanted. It really doesn't matter how. Actually, it might work out better. You can play house as long as you want. When you get tired of her, just make sure you get legal custody of the baby."

Jude stood up with fists clenched. "You asshole. This isn't a game. It's my life."

"You're a fool, brother!" Jonas stood, too. "Do you think you're married in the eyes of God? She's an animal for Christ's sake."

"Keep your fucking mouth shut. You're talking about *my* wife and *my* baby. This house is one-third mine, and we'll be living here until we get our own place. Stay away from Sable. If you ever put a hand on her or my baby, I'll kill you." Jude had blood in his eyes. He stomped out of the room, and Jonas heard his footsteps on the stairs.

Jonas's hands shook. Nothing had turned out the way he'd expected. The image of Sable waiting in Jude's bed enraged him and cut his heart open at the same time. Despite the things he'd said to Jude, he wanted Sable in his own bed. And that should be his baby in her belly, not Jude's. *No*. That wasn't right. He didn't care who the

father was. He shouldn't drink so much. *Jesus, what a fucking mess.* He couldn't think straight. In a matter of minutes, everything had changed. And not in a good way.

Chapter Eighteen

Living on the Outlaw ranch took a toll on Sable. When she was a prisoner, the brothers permitted her to shift and run as a wolf occasionally. Now she was Mrs. Outlaw, and Jude expected her to act like a proper human wife. Not that he forbade it, but whenever she mentioned it, he would frown and look disappointed in her. He didn't want any reminders of what he'd married.

One afternoon he dropped her at the Connor house to see the new baby. It was the best day she'd spent since she'd been back. Karin's mother hadn't arrived yet, and Malcolm took her for a run. They returned in wolf form, and Karin watched them shift back to their human bodies.

She'd asked Karin if it bothered her, and she replied that she would love Malcolm even if an angry witch turned him into an ugly toad. He looked at her with puppy dog eyes and told her she was okay—for a human. She marveled at how they could laugh at one another. You could only do that if you were truly in love and accepted each other. Jude didn't feel the same about her, and he never would.

Malcolm's son looked just like him, with obsidian eyes and a mop of dark brown hair. Sable wondered if he would take after Malcolm in other ways. Lycan children didn't shift until puberty. When they became sexually mature, they went through a rite of passage. But other signs, such as highly developed hearing and sight, might show themselves earlier. The ecstatic parents didn't care. They adored him the way he was.

Worried about her own baby, Sable took Karin aside and questioned her. Sable's belly seemed to grow in front of her eyes, and the heartbeat jumped all over the place.

Karin was shocked she hadn't seen a doctor yet. She had a good ob-gyn in Macon, and she set up an appointment for her.

Jude almost hit the roof when he found out. He insisted she go to the doctor in town. He claimed Macon was too far away, but she knew the real reason. He didn't want her spending too much time with Karin. He didn't like Malcolm, and he was afraid they would find out she was Lycan. He had no idea they already knew.

She gave in, and Jude took her himself. Doc thought she was further along than her four months, and he lectured her about not seeing him sooner.

He did an ultrasound. She waited on pins and needles for the verdict. Gods, let everything be okay. The news was more than okay.

Doc narrowed his eyes at her. "Are you sure about your dates? These boys look more like seven months than six."

"Boys?" She and Jude exclaimed in unison.

"Yep, twins."

Her mouth dropped open in utter shock. They were having twins, two boys. She thought Jude would pass out. He gripped her hand so hard he left fingerprints.

He chattered all the way home. She never saw him happier, not even when they got married.

Jonas should have been thrilled, but when they told him, he turned white and didn't say much. She knew why. He was afraid Jude would put an end to his tests. Jude wanted to stop him before, but she disagreed. It didn't amount to much, and she didn't want to make Jonas angry. She didn't want him and Jude to fight. Why disrupt the status quo when things were going along peacefully?

Aside from the tests, she hardly saw Jonas. He spent most of his time in the lab. Sometimes Nicole came to the house and dragged him out. When she did run into him, they averted their eyes.

It didn't matter. His presence surrounded her. His scent permeated every room, even Jude's, and it drove her crazy. She couldn't wait to move into their own home, but the construction moved far too slowly. They'd had a run of bad weather, and it held things up.

Learning to cook kept her busy. Stuffing a chicken, she didn't turn when she sensed Jude behind her.

"Hmmm, I can't wait for dinner." He put his arms around her and kissed her neck. "Everything okay?"

"I just wish the house were done."

"Me, too. I'm gonna drop by the site to make sure those guys bust ass. I'd like to be moved in by the holidays. Do you want to come?"

"No. I thought I might call Karin and see if she's free. I haven't seen her since her mother went back home."

"I guess that's my fault," Jude suggested irritably. He let her go.

"No, not really. I don't like to intrude. They're always so busy with the baby. I'm just glad I got to see Mrs. Stone once before she left. She asked for you."

"Yeah. Well, I'll see her next time." He hesitated and wet his lips. "Want me to hang around and drive you over there."

She smiled. He did try. "No, baby. If it's convenient, one of them will get me. I'll wait out on the road so they don't get lost." So he doesn't worry about them coming in his house.

He looked relieved. She kissed him good-bye and finished up in the kitchen.

* * * *

Disappointed, Sable ended her conversation with Karin. They put off the visit. Malcolm had gone in town, and their only vehicle went with him.

She went into the den to look for something to read. Jude had several shelves of books about horses, both fiction and non-fiction. He promised to teach her to ride.

Jonas's scent taunted her while she looked through the books. She always felt his presence. It wouldn't end until they had their own home. She should have gone with Jude.

A thrill ran through her body when she sensed him nearby. She slid the book back on the shelf. Every nerve ending reached out for him. Her body, so in tune with his, felt the soft displacement of air as he moved closer. She shuddered when he finally touched her. His fingers glided over the exposed flesh of her throat. He pulled her hair

back and traced her ear with his tongue before sucking the lobe into his mouth. The heat between them reached a dangerous level.

"Jonas. No." But she wanted him. Wanted him so bad, she was already wet and swollen, her body preparing itself for his penetration.

He slipped his hands under her top and cupped her tender breasts, teasing the sensitive tips with his thumbs. One hand snaked under the waistband of her slacks and over her swollen belly.

"Please. Don't do this." She moaned. He had to stop because she could no more push him away than stop breathing.

"I miss you, Sable. It drives me crazy knowing you're in Jude's bed every night."

"We're married now. Things are different."

"An arrangement, not a real marriage."

The words were a stab in her heart. She knew Jude didn't love her, not really. What had he told Jonas? "You're wrong."

"Am I? You know you want this, Sable." He leaned in and rubbed his cheek against hers. "I'm not blind. I see the way you look at me when you think no one's watching."

He cupped her mound with his palm and rubbed gently. When he teased her clit with his thumb, her knees went weak and she leaned back against him, afraid she'd melt to the floor.

He anchored her to his body while he stroked her. Pants and moans filled the room, and she realized they were hers. His fingers, probing and insistent, spread her open. Two long fingers slipped inside, and her inner walls contracted around them, wanting more.

"Fuck, you are so wet, baby." His breath was ragged against her jaw.

Gasping, she bucked back against him. He was so hard, his erection pressed like a steel rod against her back. Gods, she needed him inside her.

"What do you want, Sable?" he whispered in her ear.

"You know what I want." She groaned.

"No. I want you to tell me."

"I want you inside me," she begged, shamelessly. He'd lit a fire in her, and only he could put it out.

"I want to hear my name," he insisted. "I want there to be no doubt who you want fucking you."

He was her mate. She had a right to him. "Jonas. I want you, Jonas," she cried. Tears rolled down her cheeks. How could she do this to Jude? It would break him.

"Beg me," he ordered. He rolled her clit between his fingers and pinched.

She fought to keep her sanity. It was too much. And it was much too late to stop. She'd already passed the point of no return.

"Please, Jonas, fuck me."

"Take your slacks off. And don't turn around," he warned harshly.

She heard him unzipping his jeans behind her and then his hands were on her arms guiding her backwards until they stood in front of the leather chair.

"Spread for me," he said sharply.

She bit her lip but did as he asked. The smell of their arousal perfumed the air. He cupped her butt in his hands, squeezing her cheeks and sliding his erection along her sex. It felt so damn good. Her wolf howled for release. She arched back and growled encouragement.

"Now, Jonas. I need you now," she demanded. Her heart quickened, her vulva grew hot and swollen.

"Jesus, Sable. I want you so fucking bad. I'm going to fill your hot, little pussy until it overflows and you scream my name." He pulled her down on the chair with him. She straddled him, and he spread her open with his knees, holding her hips up so she could grasp his penis and guide it to her pussy. The swollen head slipped past her labia. She whimpered and lowered herself on him, taking his rigid length inside her.

He stifled a groan against her back, and she stilled, enjoying the feel of him after being apart for so long. She wanted to tell him to remove his shirt so she could feel his skin against her back, but she couldn't speak.

He pulled her hair aside and nuzzled her neck before sinking his teeth in her soft flesh. Incredible warmth spread from her pussy down the long length of her legs to her toes.

She screamed and climaxed as he sucked on the mark.

"You scarred me," he murmured in her ear. "Now we're even."

He had no idea what he did. He'd sealed their bond with his bite. She'd wear it forever. Mindless with pleasure, she started to move on him. He grunted with each counter thrust. Cries of pleasure mixed with the sound of flesh slapping against flesh.

He increased the pace, and she matched him. There was no stopping. His cock throbbed inside her, and she ground against him frantically. And then as he burst inside her, he reached around and rubbed the bundle of nerves that set off another orgasm. She saw stars explode behind her eyelids she cried out with the little breath left in her.

She leaned back against him, closed her eyes, and let the spasms subside. He held her with one hand on her belly, one on her breast, but he didn't speak.

They stayed like that, for what seemed an eternity, until a hand twisted in her hair and yanked her upright.

"Am I interrupting something?" Jude snarled, nostrils flaring.

The blood drained from her face. "Jude, please—"

"Get out of my sight." He let go of her and turned away as if he couldn't stand to look at her. The hatred in his voice pierced her heart like a dagger.

Shaking, she bent to retrieve her clothes and backed away.

Jude lunged at his brother, grabbed him by his shirt, and pulled him off the chair.

"You son of a bitch! You couldn't wait to get your hands on her again." Jude exploded.

"I'm sorry, Jude, but what did you expect?" Jonas said harshly. "She's not like us."

She saw Jude draw his fist back, and, crying, she ran out of the house.

* * * *

Jude had felt killing rage once before in his life, when his parents were slaughtered by wolves. Right now, he had that same blood in his eyes, and he focused it on Jonas.

He hit him with a jab that snapped his head back and exposed his chin. Before Jonas could block, he nailed him again with a right to his jaw that sent him to the floor.

Jonas turned over on his hands and knees, but Jude didn't give him a chance to get up. He planted one booted foot on his bare ass with enough strength to force Jonas flat on his face.

"Get up," Jude bellowed. He tucked his chin to his chest, moved to the side, and balanced on the balls of his feet, ready to spring again.

"I don't want to fight you." A shaky Jonas sat up and rubbed his jaw.

"Come on, motherfucker. Defend yourself." Jude glared at him.

"No. Just hear me out." Jonas stood on rubbery legs and snatched up his jeans. He sat on the chair and struggled into them. His face was swelling up nicely.

Jude went at him again, but this time Jonas deflected the punch with his arm.

"Did she look like she was fighting me off?" Jonas protested. "She's not worth it. She's not even human. You forgot the real reason we brought her here, and you fell for a killer body and knockout sex, but there's more to a relationship than fucking. You need to find a real woman, one who will be a partner, like Nicole is to me."

Jude saw red. "Yeah, some partnership. You keep her waiting while you're screwing your brother's wife." Jude grimaced and rubbed his temples. His blood surged through his veins like water in a high-pressure hose, and a thick, painful fog swirled inside his head. He wanted a couple aspirin and a tumbler of whiskey to wash them down.

"She played you, put on a really good act, too. It even fooled Janis."

"You're wrong." Jude snarled. "You don't know her."

"Neither do you," Jonas stated flatly. "She's different than us."

"No." She'd put that wolf stuff behind her when she married him. She didn't shift anymore.

"Believe me, she can't help herself. No matter how hard she tries to behave like us, her true nature will always come out. You've seen her in heat. Animals are compelled to fulfill a primal need. They don't need an emotional attachment. When she needs sex, she sends out a signal to attract a male, any male. Well, her signal broadcast loud and clear. I'm sorry, but think about it, and you'll see I'm right."

Jude's rage faded, replaced by a gut-wrenching sadness. The knife in his heart twisted a little more, and he bled inside.

"I just want you to be happy."

Jesus! He thought he was happy. Was it all based on a lie? He'd been a fool.

"...not too late." Jonas's voice droned on and on. "...hassle-free divorce ...of course the baby complicates things, but she'll want to avoid exposure. Let me help you. I'll take care of everything."

Jonas was the expert in all this. He was just a hunter who fell for a pretty face. Bitterness filled the empty place in his heart.

* * * *

Sable's eyes burned with tears. She'd never forget the way Jude looked at her. The hate on his face was forever etched onto her brain, and Jonas's look of contempt cut her to the core. Why had she given into that mating frenzy? She'd ruined everything.

She cared for both men, but neither of them would believe her or understand. Jude had enjoyed being part of a threesome before they married, but he had no idea what it really meant to her. The scars they bore were marks of a bond as surely as the marriage license hanging on their bedroom wall.

Jude wanted a traditional human marriage, one man and one woman. She tried. She really did. But her fierce attraction to Jonas proved they were already bound in a Lycan triad. The men wouldn't accept it any more than they accepted her wolf or anything else about her heritage. No amount of explaining would ever make this right in their eyes.

How ironic that the only place she felt accepted was with the two people she once tried to destroy, Malcolm and Karin. She headed there now, wanting their comfort and acceptance.

She stopped short at the porch, nervous when she saw them. They sat flanking the baby asleep in his carriage. She looked from one to the other. Malcolm's stormy expression forecast trouble. Karin, always the peacemaker, jumped up.

"Malcolm, why don't you keep an eye on the baby while I take Sable inside and find her something to wear?"

He nodded curtly, and Sable stepped up on the porch and followed Karin into the house. They went into the spare room, and Karin shut the door.

"I know something is wrong." She took some of her old maternity clothes from the closet and laid them on the bed. "Why don't you shift so we can talk?"

Sable wanted to hide in her fur, but she did as Karin asked. In a few minutes, she was sitting on the bed crying. She poured out her story while she dressed. It seemed so much worse in the telling.

"I know it sounds horrible," Sable sobbed, before Karin could say a word. Afraid she would think her some sex-crazed beast, she couldn't even look the human woman in the eye. "But at the time it felt right. I missed Jonas so much, and I couldn't think straight. Gods, I was so stupid to hurt Jude like that."

"I understand," Karin said gently. "Your side and his. You need to make Jude understand both sides as well."

"I don't know, Karin. You didn't see his face. He hates me."

"How do you feel about him?"

"I don't know. At first I thought I never wanted to see either one of them again, but I still feel our bond."

"Everyone needs some time to cool off. By tomorrow morning Jude will be breaking down the door wanting to talk to you."

"Do you really think so?"

"I know so." She shook her head adamantly. "Malcolm and I went through some really bad times. I thought I lost him forever, but in the end, it all worked out. It will for you, too. In the meantime, you'll stay here with us."

Chapter Nineteen

A week went by without a word from Jude. Sable slept in the spare bedroom in Malcolm's house and cried herself to sleep every night. So many times, she stopped herself from calling him. He needed time to think and calm down. She gave it to him. When he was ready, they would talk, and she would beg him to forgive her.

She got into a routine. The remote area and extreme privacy allowed Malcolm to run with Ralf everyday. Sable got in the habit of joining them. Karin fussed over her and worried like a mother hen, but Malcolm knew her limitations, and he adjusted his speed to accommodate her, Ralf too.

Karin still worried, and she took Sable to her own doctor in Macon who pronounced Sable in excellent health but suggested she stop running. Twins sometimes came early, and hers were so big already, it seemed likely.

Sable helped Karin with the baby and learned all she could. Keeping busy helped pass the days, but it didn't fill the void in her life and her heart.

They were getting ready for dinner one night when the doorbell rang. Sable froze. Her heart lurched. No one ever came to the house. It had to be Jude. She started fixing her hair.

"I'll get it," Malcolm said firmly.

She had a view of the door from the open kitchen, and she saw Malcolm open it to a stranger. He returned quickly and set an official-looking envelope on the table.

"It's for you, Sable. Do you want me to open it?"

Her chest felt tight as if she couldn't take a breath. She nodded, knowing that somehow this paper would change her life.

Malcolm sat and tore open the envelope. Karin stood behind him reading over his shoulder. She gasped as he rifled through the pages then threw them down in disgust.

"Oh, honey." Karin came and put an arm around her.

Scared to death, she looked at Malcolm.

"They're divorce papers," he snarled.

Too deeply shocked to react, Sable sat speechless. Her new life was over before it started. Jude didn't want her anymore. He hated her.

"And that's not all. The son of a bitch wants to take custody of the babies."

"No!" All the blood drained from her face, and she started crying.

"He claims he's the innocent and injured spouse."

"Oh, my Gods," she moaned. She had injured him, but surely he wouldn't take her babies away.

"Committed adultery and offered such indignities to the innocent and injured spouse as to render that spouse's condition intolerable and life burdensome." Malcolm's expression turned hard. "This is bullshit."

"What can we do?" Karin took a deep breath, trying to steady the shakiness in her voice.

"Let me make a call. I know a lawyer in Macon. He helped me set up my business."

After what seemed an interminable time on the phone Malcolm came back to the table. "Pennsylvania still has fault-based grounds, and the divorce is awarded to the *innocent and injured spouse*."

"But I don't want a divorce," Sable sobbed. "What if I just say no?"

"Contesting a divorce is expensive and emotionally draining. The attorney said most divorces proceed under the no-fault method."

"How does that work?" Karin asked.

"Both spouses have to sign an Affidavit of Consent."

"And if one doesn't sign?"

"Then a no-fault decree can be entered if they've been separated for at least two years. The lawyer doesn't think he really wants the

babies. Jude's just trying to scare you so you won't go after his property. He gave me the name of a good divorce attorney."

"The lawyer is wrong. They want the babies. I'll never give them up." This had to be Jonas's doing. She didn't want to believe Jude could do this to her.

Malcolm crouched down by her chair. "Listen to me, Sable. I don't care what kind of BS the Outlaws are trying to pull, it will never happen. No judge in the world is going to take these babies from their mother. First thing tomorrow I'll call this guy."

"I can't afford a lawyer," Sable cried.

"That's exactly what the Outlaws are counting on, but don't you worry. I have money in the bank. I'll mortgage the house if I have to." He looked up at Karin.

"Of course. I have some money, too. Before I moved to Black Wolf I saved every penny to start my own veterinary office."

"We don't need to use your money, Karin. I've done okay in the past years."

"What's the difference, my money is your money."

"Thank you both, but I won't take your money." She'd done enough to Malcolm and Karin. They were finally together and happy, and here she was messing up their lives again. The more she involved them, the closer Jonas would get to finding out Malcolm's secret. "I can't let you get involved. You have your own family to worry about."

"Don't talk crazy. We're not letting one of our own be raised by some ignorant bastard who knows nothing about us and isn't willing to learn." Malcolm slammed a palm on the table. "I'll kill him first."

Her eyes went wide. She'd never convince Malcolm to stay out of it, and there was no way in hell she'd let any harm come to any of them. She knew what she had to do.

* * * *

Sable woke with a cramp, a tightening in her belly that radiated to her tailbone. It felt like someone was digging an elbow into her back. Heart pounding, she sat up, leaned against the headboard, and took deep breaths until it receded.

She forced herself to relax. It was all perfectly normal. The doctor called them Braxton Hicks contractions, her body's way of getting ready for the real thing.

She glanced at the clock on the night table. *Gods! 2:00 a.m.* She hadn't meant to fall asleep.

Now she had to bust ass to get out of here. Her wolf felt her agitation and stirred inside her. Stress brought out her feral side. She put a hand over her heart and calmed the beast. *I'll let you out later, I promise.*

She slipped out of bed and padded across the floor to the bathroom. Standing at the sink, she washed her face with cool water and took a drink.

She packed a few things in a small plastic bag, and after a few moments' thought, threw her rings in, too. She might not wear them anymore, but they would buy a lot of diapers for her babies.

It bothered her to take money from Karin's purse, but she did it anyway. She needed it to get out of town, and it was far less than they'd lose if she stayed.

She snuck out of the house, walked a half mile, and then prepared to shift. Her clothes went in the bag and then she brought on the change. She snapped up the bag in her jaws and took off, propelled by her powerful hind legs.

The rhythm of her movements on four legs and the play of muscle rippling under her skin took her mind off the infrequent contractions. The trail she left in her wake couldn't be helped. There was no time to cover it. Hopefully, by the time anyone missed her, she'd already be on a bus to wherever.

Her path took her through Outlaw property. She could go around it, but it would take longer. Their acreage was so big she'd be nowhere near the house. She figured she'd reach the bus station before dawn.

A dog barked in the distance, and her hackles rose. She increased her speed, but she still heard him advancing. Her breath came hard and fast, and the sound of her furiously beating heart almost drowned out the barking. Fear took over. Her insides seethed with it. She didn't want a dogfight on her hands.

A painful spasm made her stomach contract, and she slowed to a walk. It peaked, and when it subsided, she started running again. Another came ten minutes later and then another. The time between contractions got shorter, and they increased in intensity.

She recognized a pattern, and her heart sank. They couldn't be coming now. It was too early. A hard cramp, the worst yet, brought her to a stop. Unable to ignore the signs any longer, she looked for a quiet, secluded place where she could give birth. Ahead, she spotted an enormous tree that offered some protection, and she made her way there. Sprawled under its exposed roots, in a pile of pine needles, she panted through each recurring cramp.

An eerie calmness came over her and with it the knowledge that she could trust her wolf's instinct to bring the babies into the world.

Suddenly a dark shape crashed through the undergrowth to her left. She lifted her muzzle and growled a warning. Her wolf would fight to the death to protect her pups. The bloodhound stopped a few feet away. Sable snarled and bared her teeth to keep him at bay.

"Over here!" Jonas's shout rang clear in the quiet of the woods, and she got ready to do battle.

He appeared in the clearing, Jude right behind him. They both carried rifles. Did they recognize her? Terrified they might shoot first and ask questions later, she looked inside for her human form and watched the black fur recede in the cold light of the moon. She and her babies were one. They changed when she did. That would stop after the birth, but now they relied on her for everything.

Her muzzle receded, and she screamed. "Don't shoot!"

Jonas looked from her to Jude. "Looks like we caught a wolf on our property. What should we do with it?"

Jude gave him a dirty look, and then he turned to Sable. "No one is going to hurt you."

A hard, painful contraction made her groan, and she clutched at her stomach. Jude rushed to her side and dropped to his knees. Frightened, she cowered against the tree.

"Don't be afraid of me." He looked so miserable. She couldn't bear it. "I'm sorry." Was he apologizing to her?

"Jude?" She reached out for him.

He pulled her into his arms. "Let me help you."

Sable started crying. He looked worried and totally helpless, but just having his arms around her helped more than anything.

"Jonas, do something for God's sake," he yelled. "Let's get her back to the ranch."

The ranch was the last place she wanted to go, but she wasn't getting a vote. At this point, it didn't matter. Only the babies mattered.

Jonas knelt at her feet, helped her bend her knees, and spread her thighs apart. "It's too late for that. The baby is crowning."

"What the hell does that mean?" Jude's voice shook.

"The head is visible, and it's not slipping back in. This baby wants out."

"Jesus Christ!"

"Calm down, I need your help. Grab that bag and take out whatever is in it. We'll need something to wrap the babies in."

Jonas slipped a shirt under her hips, and Jude got behind her so she could lean back against his chest and push. He murmured encouragement in her ear while she groaned through another contraction.

"Just a few more," Jonas urged.

She visualized her baby and gave a long, hard push.

"The head is out!" Jonas sounded as excited as if he did it himself. The baby wriggled a shoulder free and flopped into Jonas's waiting hands, already wailing. "He's perfect, you did good."

She started crying again and held her arms out.

"Let me clean him up a little." Jonas started to wipe the tiny face, and the infant let out a howl that scared the bloodhound. He started backing away.

Jonas laughed. "Hey, Jude, you all right? You look worse than Sherlock." He handed the baby to Sable.

"Oh, Jonas, he looks exactly like you," she whispered. "And Jude. He's so beautiful." He went right for her breast.

"Takes after his father." Jude chuckled.

"Oh!" Another hard contraction hit.

"Uh oh. Here we go again." Jonas got ready to catch baby number two.

Her heart lurched when she saw the look on Jonas's face. The baby was so quiet.

"Jonas, why is he blue?" she cried. It was too early for him. If anything happened she'd never forgive herself. This was all her fault.

Jonas laid the baby on his lap and lifted the tiny feet. He flicked the soles with a thumb and forefinger until the infant let out a tiny whimper. Jonas rubbed his back and let out a sigh of relief when the whimper turned into a wail. He handed him off to Jude. "He's smaller than big brother. Keep him warm."

Sable sighed with relief. "Thank you, Jonas. If you weren't here I might have lost him."

Jonas narrowed his eyes at her. "The dogs started carrying on and we came to investigate. What were you doing out here in the middle of the night?"

Sable kept her mouth shut. She didn't want to tell him she was running away.

"Let's worry about that later." Jude spoke up. "After we take them home." He handed baby two to Sable, and she cuddled the twins close.

"Please, just take me back to Malcolm's house." She was afraid if they took her to the ranch, they'd never let her leave with her babies.

"No way!" Jonas exclaimed. "It's too far. The babies need to be checked properly and kept warm. We had less than ideal conditions out here, and those cords could get infected. Besides, you're bleeding a little more than I like."

"Is she going to be okay?" Jude's voice shook. He really was worried about her.

"They'll all be fine." Jonas took the shoelaces out of his boots and tied the cords. "Jude, give me your knife so I can cut these." Jonas checked his handiwork and passed the knife back. He looked at Sable. "Now give me the babies, and Jude will carry you."

She shook her head and wouldn't let them go. Finally, Jude had to pry her fingers off them. "You'll get them back as soon as we get home. I promise." Jude took his shirt off and wrapped it around her before he lifted her. She hoped she could believe him.

* * * *

"She looks so pale." Jude's voice cracked.

"Lay her on the exam table and get a blanket from the couch. Then go get that cradle you made and whatever else you have for the babies." Jonas shifted the twins in his arms.

Sable looked up at Jude. "You made a cradle?"

Jude's eyes got suspiciously wet. "It was supposed to be a surprise for you. It's not perfect." He kissed her hand. "Thank you."

"For what?" she whispered.

"For my sons. I love you." He bent to kiss her mouth.

She threw her arms around his neck. "Oh, Jude, I'm so sorry. I love you, too."

"Jude! Hurry the fuck up." His brother was a fool. He knew Jude missed her, but he thought he was getting over it. Seeing her and the babies turned him into a sappy idiot.

"Right away." Jude covered Sable and turned to go. "I'll put everything in my bedroom. They can stay with me after you check them out."

"No, they'll be staying right here."

Jude looked like he was ready to argue, but Jonas didn't care, he wasn't about to give in on this one. If scare tactics were necessary, so be it. "Unless you want to take the chance on her bleeding to death while you're sleeping."

Jude turned white and threw Jonas a dirty look. He walked back to Sable. "Nothing is going to happen to you. Or the babies. I'll be right here with you." He squeezed her hand. "All night," he reiterated to Jonas before walking out.

Jonas shook his head and took the twins into the little white bedroom that used to be Sable's. Then he went back to check the mother.

"Are they safe in there by themselves?" Sable asked.

"Of course," he assured her. "I wouldn't have left them otherwise. They're on the bed, they're not going anywhere."

"They might be friskier than human babies," she told him. "Take care of them, I'll be okay."

"They're cocooned in clean towels with a headboard on one side and a footboard on the other. They'll be fine for a few minutes." If nothing else, at least he was sure of that. There was so much he didn't know about Lycan physiology, he'd have to wing it and rely on what Sable could tell him.

Her normally tanned skin had a gray cast he didn't like. "We should think about getting you to a hospital. You might need a transfusion."

"No. No hospital. You said you could take care of us here."

"We'll see how it goes."

"The babies go where I go."

He didn't answer. "Looks like the bleeding slowed down." Relieved, he checked her blood pressure and heart. "I'll examine the babies, and if all's well when I come back, we'll nix the hospital."

Those big eyes followed him like laser tracking. She didn't trust him. He couldn't blame her. He wasn't a pushover like his brother.

"This thing weighs a ton." Jude set the cradle down.

"It's beautiful." Sable looked at Jude as if he was Superman, and his twin lit up like a Christmas tree.

Disgusted, Jonas shook his head. "Stay with her while I check the babies."

He threw a few things in the cradle and carried it into the bedroom. The babies were right where he left them. He sat on the bed, and damn if they didn't turn those blue Outlaw eyes on him as if he were getting the examination.

He started to remove the towel from the second born, the smaller boy. The sudden movement triggered a loud cry. The infant extended his arms then bent them and pulled them back to his body.

"I don't blame you, little guy, you had a rough night. But the worst is over."

The infant fisted his tiny hands, screwed up his face, and started crying.

"Okay, buddy, I didn't mean to scare you. I know you're probably hungry, and I'll make this fast." Luckily, they'd purchased baby equipment including a pediatric stethoscope, thermometer, and even a baby scale.

He finished quickly and put a tiny newborn diaper on him. He looked at the nightgown and shrugged. "This looks a little girly to me, but at least it's got blue flowers." He wrapped the boy in a soft baby blanket and picked him up.

"You stay put," he admonished the other baby. "I'll be right back."

He walked into the lab and handed the bundle to Jude. "Baby B. I think he's hungry. Give Sable a hand." Jude held him gingerly, he looked nervous as hell.

He chuckled at Jude's ineptitude. "He won't break." He looked over his shoulder as he walked out. "But don't drop him."

Big brother waited placidly and didn't complain at being uncovered.

"Well, you have a little more meat on your bones to keep you warm." He put him on the scale. "Five pounds, a half pound more than your brother, a real bruiser for a preemie."

The baby stared at him as if he understood every word.

"Okay, big guy, time for your once-over."

Cute as a button. He reminded himself they might look like Outlaw babies, but they were half Lycan. There had to be something different about them but damned if he saw it.

He should have been a little faster, the infant sprayed him, and the unexpected shower took him completely by surprise. "So you think that's funny, do you? Marking your territory already and you don't even know how to use that thing?" He swore the baby actually smiled while he cleaned him off.

"I have to learn how to stay out of the danger zone when—"

He took a closer look. The baby was perfect, just like his twin, except for a tiny spot in his groin. His blood went cold. This baby was a Jonas mini-me, right down to the miniscule birthmark that Sable called a paw print. What were the odds that Jude's son would carry his birthmark? Not impossible, but not likely either.

Did the bitch lie to his brother? It sure looked that way. She didn't know who the father was, but she figured Jude was an easy mark. He played right into her hands and married her.

In his heart, he already knew the babies were his, and in a weird way that pleased him, but he needed to be sure. There was one way to find out the truth. *A DNA test.*

Chapter Twenty

Jonas ran the DNA twice. He expected the tests to confirm his suspicions. After a five-day wait, the results knocked him for a loop. It had to be a mistake. He went over every step of the procedure and finally conceded that the results were correct.

He'd been so sure he fathered the twins. The joke was on him. He was half-right. The first-born boy, the infant with the birthmark was his son, no surprise there. But the second baby had been fathered by Jude.

Bi-paternal twins. Multiple eggs released in a cycle and fertilized by sperm cells from two different men. *Voilà*, twins with two different fathers, a rare phenomenon, at least in the human population. Maybe not so rare in the Lycan community, but then he wouldn't know about that. After all the research he'd done, he still didn't know a whole lot about the shape-shifters. They were an enigma. He doubted Sable knew much more. She'd been a lone wolf since childhood, and much of her history had been lost.

She'd had a tough life. He'd lost his parents, too, but he had siblings and grandparents. She had no one. Until Jude. No matter what had transpired between him and Sable, he had to admit she genuinely cared for Jude and the babies. The few times Jude let him get near her, he could see how close they were. They shared something he'd never have with Nicole.

He should have left them alone. His motivations were selfish. Jude had been right all along. He just couldn't keep his hands off her. He'd taken advantage of Sable's primal instincts because he wanted his brother's wife, and he hated himself for it.

"What are you doing?" Jude entered the lab and walked over to his desk.

Startled, he quickly slid the papers into the shredder. "Just cleaning up." They would be Greek to Jude, but he didn't want them lying about. No sense taking any chances. They didn't change anything, and he'd already made up his mind. "Sit down for a minute. I have something to tell you."

Jude's expression darkened. "If it's about Sable, I don't want to hear it. I've already called the lawyer and put a stop to the divorce."

"It's not that." Jonas reached for the drawer where he kept his bottle. "It's early, but have a drink with me?"

"Yeah, okay."

"Don't look so worried, this is good news." He poured them each a tumbler of scotch. "I regret all the grief I caused you."

"You already apologized, Jonas."

"Just hear me out. Seeing the twins made me realize how much they need both their parents. This time I want you and Sable to have a real chance to make it work. I'm taking a long, much-needed vacation. Now you and Sable can play house and have all the privacy you want."

"What are you talking about? You don't have to do this."

"No matter what you say, we both know I'm responsible for the trouble between you two. It's only natural for you to have some hard feelings. So don't pretend you want me hanging around. I'm not exactly the poster child for harmonious family relationships. I want to do the right thing here and get out of your way for a little while. Without me hanging around you can make a fresh start." Jonas stared at him. "That is what you want?"

"More than anything," Jude said firmly. "Hell, we know it won't be easy, but we'll figure it out as we go along." He paused. "You're family, Jonas. We need you on our side."

"And I'll always be there, but that doesn't mean I have to be breathing down your neck. It's time for me to make an honest woman of Nicole and have a few kids of my own. Why should you be the only one to have a wedding in the big city?"

"Hell! Why didn't you say so in the first place?" Jude came around the desk and gave him a bear hug. "This is great news. Janis is gonna be pissed. She wanted to be next."

Jonas smiled. "Her time will come."

"So when are you two leaving?"

"I'm flying out tomorrow. Nicole needs a few days to get her stuff together." He rolled his eyes. "You know how women are."

"I can't tell you how happy this makes me."

"Well, I'm about to make you even happier." He gestured at the shredder.

"I don't understand."

"I'm destroying my research notes, everything and anything pertaining to Sable. I've already wiped my hard drives. Consider it a belated wedding gift."

Jude looked stunned. "I don't know what to say,"

"There's nothing to say. I should have done it a long time ago. It's up to Sable who she wants to confide in. I won't say anything." The look on his brother's face was worth more than anything he'd gain from the research. He felt a little better. "Will you tell her for me?"

"I think you should tell her yourself."

"You do it, Jude. I don't want to start bringing up past history with her." He hoped to leave without seeing Sable and the babies again. Despite his decision, his heart twisted whenever he thought about his son. Seeing the boy would only make it harder to leave. He might get some stupid idea, like wanting to play father. He'd screwed up his own life, he'd be damned if he'd screw up his kid's.

He just hoped he wasn't making another mistake. His brother looked so damn happy. What if someday he found out one of the boys wasn't his? *Not gonna happen*. Not if he could help it. They were all better off this way. Jude would make a better father than he ever would. No one need ever know the boys were only half brothers.

He raised his glass. "To new beginnings."

"I'll drink to that." Jude clinked his glass, and they each took a swallow.

As soon as Jude walked out, he slumped back in the chair and put his head in his hands. He didn't want to leave, but he forced himself to pick up the phone and confirm his flight. Next, he called Nicole. She sounded so happy, while inside he felt like he was dying.

* * * *

Jonas set his bags by the front door. He had hoped to sneak out early, but he heard Jude coming downstairs.

"I know you weren't going to leave without a good-bye."

"No, of course not." He sighed inwardly. *Almost made it.*

"Sable has the boys in the kitchen. Come in for a minute."

"Sure." He'd make it quick and be on his way.

Sable held his son against her shoulder. Anguish seared his heart. He wondered how it would feel if they belonged to him. They locked eyes for a second, and he had a flashback. He almost felt her in his arms. He looked away.

"Just look how big this kid is getting." Jude took the baby and handed him to Jonas, oblivious of his awkward silence. "My kid is going to be a linebacker or a sumo wrestler."

Jonas forced a smile. *"Double trouble. Cute shirts."*

"Karin and Malcolm sent them, along with a bunch of other stuff." Jude looked over at Sable. "We're going to take the babies over there for a visit." Sable smiled back at him.

Jonas's son grabbed his finger and held on for dear life, as if he didn't want him to leave. Maybe he felt the connection, too. "He's got a hell of a grip."

"His name is Samuel," Jude said proudly.

Jonas looked up, surprised. It was their father's name.

"It was Sable's idea." Jude lifted the other twin from an infant seat. "And the little guy is Maxwell, after Sable's father."

From the corner of his eye, he saw Sable watching him, trying to gauge his reaction. The names were fitting, a connection between two families. Two species. Who the hell cared? His brother was happy, and he'd make sure no one destroyed that happiness again, especially not him.

He looked right at Sable. "It's a wonderful idea. My father would be honored."

Sable's eyes brimmed with tears. So did Jude's. He felt like crying himself.

"Christ, we're all gonna end up bawling like babies. Jonas, tell Sable your good news before you take off."

Sable looked at him expectantly, and he winced. He had to talk about it sooner or later. "Nicole is meeting me in Philadelphia. We're getting married."

Surprise siphoned the blood from Sable's face. She looked like he punched her in the stomach.

Jude looked from one to the other. "No congratulations for your brother-in-law?"

"Of course. I'm just surprised."

"Ugh." Jonas broke the tension, wrinkled his nose. "When do they get toilet trained?"

Jude laughed and set Max back in his seat. "I'm on diaper duty. Give him here."

Jonas handed off his son. "Looks like my cue to get outta Dodge." He was more than ready to make a hasty retreat.

"I'll walk you out," Sable said quietly.

Both men looked at her in surprise.

"Have a safe trip, bro. Call us when you get there."

"I will, Jude. Take care of your boys."

Sable followed him outside. Being alone with her made him nervous. They stopped by the car.

"Jude told me you destroyed your research. Thank you for that, Jonas."

"You don't need to thank me. It was a mistake from the beginning. I was playing God." Uncomfortable, he changed the subject. "How are you feeling, Sable? You look great."

"I'm good. You saved my life. And Maxwell's. I owe you a lot."

Her unique musky scent wafted over him, and his stomach tightened. He kept a safe distance between them. "You don't owe me anything. I'm just glad you're all okay and happy. You are happy?"

"Yes." She hesitated. "And you? Are you happy, Jonas?"

"I'm okay." He shrugged.

"That's not what I asked you." Her amber eyes glittered.

"Things aren't perfect, but whose life is? How did we get suckered into believing we had to be happy every minute of our lives?"

"When did you decide to get married?"

"What is this, twenty questions?" Christ, he was getting sick of this cat and mouse game between them. She didn't give a shit about him, so why pretend. "It's time. Man's not meant to be alone. Right?"

"You're not alone, Jonas. You have us."

"It's not enough, Sable. I'm a third wheel here. I need a partner, a few kids of my own. You and Jude got the fairy-tale ending."

"Not quite." Her voice trailed off.

"What does that mean?"

"Nothing. Maybe I have that postnatal depression thing." She gave a strained laugh.

"That's nothing to laugh about. You should talk to your doctor."

"I will."

"I'm serious, Sable." He looked at his watch. "I better get going. I have a flight to catch."

She stepped back. Jonas got in the car and pulled away.

Sable did seem down. She must be exhausted. Breastfeeding two infants could take its toll. She should pump and fix a few bottles so Jude could do some night feedings. He caught himself. It wasn't his business. She was Jude's wife, not his. He was right to get out of here. The sooner the better.

No way in hell he'd hurt his brother again. He saw the way Jude looked at Sable. He loved her, really loved her. Jude never wanted the divorce. He was the one who pushed and goaded him into filing those papers.

And the babies. They were half Lycan, but they looked just like Outlaw babies. Jude was over the moon, he doted on them, both of them. If and when the time came for the boys to shift, Jude would handle it better than he ever could. He was better off being the uncle who saw them on holidays.

As if things weren't complicated enough, he lusted after Sable. He wasn't sure he could fight it if he stayed. He suspected nothing would make it go away, not even marriage to Nicole.

* * * *

Jonas came to, just like every morning, hungover. His head felt like an anvil being struck with a hammer, over and over again. Sunlight streamed through the blinds, and he shut his eyes against the light.

Naked, sweaty, and too sick to move, he tried to piece together the previous night. He remembered an argument with Nicole, nothing after that. Speaking of Nicole, where was the bitch?

As if she heard him, she appeared in the doorway of the bedroom, dressed in slacks and a jacket.

"What time is it?" he croaked.

"It's one o'clock, Jonas. Are you getting up today?" she asked bitterly.

"Eventually."

"What's going on, Jonas? I've known you since we were kids, and I've never seen you like this before."

"You never lived with me before. You bring out the best in me."

"You bastard! Are you saying it's my fault you're drinking?" Her voice rose in pitch, it hurt his ears.

"Calm down. It was a joke."

"This is no joke. You can't function without getting buzzed. Face it. You're an alcoholic, a barely functioning alcoholic. You're throwing your life away."

"Give me a break. You make it sound like I'm some kind of skid row bum."

"You're well on your way, you son of a bitch," she screamed at him. "Make a choice. Me or the booze."

"Gimme a minute," he grunted.

"I'm done, Jonas. I've been here a month, and I can see nothing's going to change. I'm going home. If you can get it together, call me, but I'm done waiting. I've waited long enough."

He heard the door slam, and he knew she was gone. She really meant it this time. *Good*. She was better off without him. He didn't love her, and he'd only fuck up her life. He was good at that. Look what he'd done to his own.

Chapter Twenty-One

Samuel sucked rhythmically, his warm body and sweet baby smell almost unbearably pleasurable. Max, already fed, slept soundly in the crib. Jude propped his head on an elbow, his eyes fixed on Sam.

"Shouldn't you get some sleep?" Sable whispered.

"I'd rather watch you and Sam." He stroked the baby's pale downy hair with a finger.

These midnight feedings were the best part of her day, the quiet time with her little family together and safe. Not all of her family. Her heart twisted thinking of Jonas. She felt bereft without him.

Sam's rosebud mouth stopped tugging at her breast, and he nestled against her chest. He should have nursed longer, but it would be useless to encourage him. Stubborn like his father, he did as he pleased.

The jangling phone, a sinister portent of trouble, startled all of them. The baby opened his eyes wide, waved his tiny fists, and let out a howl of protest. She snatched him to her chest and soothed him.

Jude already had the receiver to his ear. His expression changed from peaceful to angry. "Why didn't you call me sooner?" He slammed the receiver down. "Fuck!" He cursed softly, threw the blankets off, and groped for his jeans lying on the floor.

Max cried out, joining his brother in a duet.

"Sorry." He looked over at Sable. "I tried to be quiet."

"What's wrong?" Already out of bed, she laid Sam down next to his twin and felt around for their pacifiers. In her heart, she knew something bad had happened to Jonas.

"Jonas is in the hospital," he muttered, his voice strained.

Her heart stuttered. "Oh, my Gods!" He should have been here, safe with his family. Why had she let him leave without knowing the

truth? No matter what he felt for her, he wouldn't have gone off and left his son. She comforted the babies, rubbing their backs until their eyes closed. "Is he okay?" She held her breath waiting for the answer.

"Janis didn't say much." He got down on his knees and looked under the bed. "Where the hell are my boots?"

"You left them downstairs."

"I'll grab them on my way out."

"Way out?"

"I'll catch a flight to Philly. They run pretty often."

"Jude, he's going to be okay, isn't he?"

"I think so. Stupid son of a bitch could have got himself killed."

"I'm going with you." She had to see for herself. She'd never forgive herself if Jonas died not knowing he fathered the twins.

"No way! You belong here with the babies. As soon as he's up to it, I'm bringing him home. We'll be back in a couple of days."

"What happened?"

"A bar fight with a couple of punks. They waited for him outside and knifed him."

"This is all my fault," she said, moaning.

"What are you talking about? This is all Nicole's doing. If she hadn't left him, he wouldn't be drinking like this. He should have come home instead of brooding alone in an apartment."

"He's confused. He doesn't know what he wants. Here." She handed him a duffel bag from the closet.

"Thanks." He threw it on the bed. "Fuck!" He let loose a few painful invectives.

"Shh. You'll wake them again."

"I stubbed my toe on the bedpost." He hopped over to the dresser and snatched up underwear and shirts. "It's time for Jonas to wake the fuck up and figure out what he wants.. If somebody hadn't walked out and called 911 he could've bled to death. Janis said she's never seen him like this. She can't talk to him. She should have called me sooner."

"What could you have done? He doesn't listen to you," Sable whispered. Maybe he'd listen to her. Jonas must be feeling the same sense of loss she did, only he wouldn't understand why. She knew

Jude felt it, too. He chalked it up to missing his brother, but it was more than that. They weren't just brothers anymore. She had linked them in a bond stronger than they could ever imagine. She took out another bag and unzipped it.

"What do you think you're doing?"

"Jude, I have to see him."

"You'll see him when I bring him home. He hates the city. I guarantee he'll feel better as soon as he's back." Jude looked down at the babies and grazed their chubby cheeks with a knuckle.

Sable grabbed a robe and followed him out of the bedroom. "I have to go. He won't come home unless he knows we both want him back."

"He'll come home if I have to hog-tie him and carry him on the plane." He took the steps two at a time with Sable on his heels.

"Jude, you don't understand."

He stopped at the foot of the steps, and she almost ran into him. "What don't I understand, Sable?"

"We need to talk. Please." She grabbed his arm, and he let her lead him into the den. They sat on the couch and turned to face each other.

"This is nonnegotiable. You need to stay here with the babies."

"I can get Karin and Malcolm to watch them. They'd love it."

"You're breastfeeding, Sable. Remember?"

"Karin can give them formula for a few days."

"I thought you were totally against that?" Jude raised a disbelieving eyebrow. "What's really going on here?"

"I need to tell you something."

"I'm not sure I like the sound of this."

"I love you." She took his hands.

"I love you, too. Now what's this about?"

She tried to have a monogamous relationship with Jude. She really did. But deep down, she always knew that none of them would be happy unless they faced the truth.

Jonas's life had spiraled out of control, and only she knew why. He needed her. He needed all of them. He might not accept it or even believe her, but she had to try.

"Jonas needs us."

"I know that, sweetheart, that's why I'm going out there."

"I need him," she whispered, squeezing Jude's hands so tight she was afraid she'd break his bones.

"What the hell does that mean?" She felt Jude stiffen next to her.

She steeled herself for the final plunge. Once she told him, there'd be no going back.

"There's a connection between us, the three of us. We need to be together. I think Jonas is feeling lost, and he doesn't understand what's happening to him. It's tearing him apart."

"What kind of bullshit is this?" His face contorted with anger. "Some story you thought up because you want to sleep with my brother?" He stood and made a grab for his bag.

"Wait." His expression scared her, but she started this, and she had to finish it.

"I don't want to talk about this now."

"Jude, just hear me out. Please. You must be feeling it, too, a sense of something missing. Your brother is miserable, and we're the only ones who can help him."

"What does all this mumbo jumbo mean?" He came back and sat down heavily.

"Remember when I told you that you marked me with your bite."

"Slow down a minute, you're talking about a hickey I gave you in the middle of sex?"

"It meant more to me than a love bite. My people mark their mates with a bite. It's a real sign of commitment like our marriage license." She paused to let the words sink in. "Jonas has a mark on his neck. I gave it to him when I was in heat, but I've come to realize the truth. It happened for a reason."

He covered the scar on his neck with a palm. "And this scar on my neck?"

"Yes, I marked you as well. I told myself the marks meant nothing to you and Jonas, but I was wrong. You both feel the connection as strongly as I do. I know you do."

He pulled his hands away. "He's my twin. Of course I feel connected."

"This is stronger. Our lives are forever connected. Jonas left because he loves you and wants you to be happy. He thinks that's only possible if he's not around. But the opposite is true, and he's going to kill himself if he doesn't face it. You may not believe it or want it to be that way, but the Gods brought us together. There's nothing we can do about it."

"You're saying we're supposed to live together like some group of swingers? Share you like we did when we first brought you here? Maybe you want to add another man. Or a woman? I thought I knew you after all these months."

The look of anguish on his face cut deep. Was she going to lose him again? "No, you don't know me at all." She tried to take his hands, but he pulled away. "I love you and Jonas. I'm bonded with you for life, I'll never love anyone else. Triads are part of my culture. In my world, a marriage between a woman and two men is not something to be ashamed of."

"This isn't your world. We practice monogamy here. I love you and my brother, but that doesn't mean I want him in our bed."

"This isn't just about sex, Jude. It's love, trust, a powerful, intimate connection. But it can only be successful if there's communication. I should have told you all this before."

"Look, I appreciate your tribal customs, but they don't apply to me. I have you and my kids, and that's all I need."

"The kids." Her heart squeezed with anguish.

His face went deathly white.

She felt raw, like she'd been pulled inside out. It had to come out. "Jonas is the father," she blurted.

His beautiful face crumbled, and she wanted to cry with him.

She reached out for him, but he stood and backed away.

"I can't talk about this now. I have to go."

She'd hurt him beyond measure. He'd never forgive her.

* * * *

"Why is it so goddamn hard to find a cab in this city?" Jude complained as he climbed inside the taxi.

"Where to, buddy?" The driver laughed.

"Philadelphia Hospital." Jude leaned back and tried to relax. Flying had ceased to be fun on a good day, and this was definitely not a good day. The drinks he consumed on the plane had soured in his stomach.

The driver muttered an oath as a black SUV barely missed taking the side mirror off.

In Center City, the heavy traffic slowed to a crawl, increasing Jude's dark mood. The ride took forever, and he suspected the meter reading was higher than it should be. The driver probably hacked it to overcharge his passengers. God, he hated the city. No wonder Jonas drank too much. He didn't belong here.

The cabbie let him out in front of the hospital, and he stood on the curb, out of his element and uncomfortably hemmed in by the skyscrapers. Is this how Sable felt when they captured her? Claustrophobic and defeated?

What had they done? He and Jonas had made a real mess of things, and he couldn't blame Sable for any of it. They took advantage of a naive woman who only did what came naturally to her. She was right. He didn't know her or the world she came from. No matter how many times he told himself he accepted her, he never made the effort to find out more about her heritage. He couldn't get his head around her customs because he hadn't tried hard enough. He'd fallen in love with a woman that only existed in his head. He didn't know the real Sable at all. He'd made some big mistakes, but this was the biggest.

He tensed up and had to force himself to walk through the doors. One thing he hated more than being in the city was being in a hospital. Anyone unlucky enough to be admitted was more likely to leave sicker than they came in, if they got to leave at all. After his parents were attacked, they were taken to a hospital. It was the last time he saw them alive.

The antiseptic smell hit him as soon as he got off the elevator, and his throat constricted. The white tile reminded him of Jonas's lab. His brother probably felt right at home, but it brought back disturbing memories of Sable locked in the tiny white bedroom.

Some overly cheery nurse pointed out the room, and he peeked in. Jonas looked like hell, pale and sporting bags under his eyes that were big enough to pack for his trip home. How could he dump this on him now? *Hi, bro, how are ya. Wanna marry us? Oh, and by the way, you have two sons.*

Were they really Jonas's babies? He still felt like their father. He always would.

Jude stood by the door for a few minutes. There was no sign of another patient sharing the room, so he sat on the other bed and watched his brother sleep.

He missed Jonas. Sable was right about that anyway. They were nothing alike, yet they'd always been close as two peas in a pod. But close enough to share a wife? He didn't think so.

What would happen if he and Sable split up again? He tried to imagine a life without her and the twins. He couldn't do it. It would kill him for sure.

The possibility existed. If Jonas decided to exercise his rights as the father, he'd be left out in the cold. He couldn't imagine watching his brother caring for those boys. But then, he couldn't imagine Jonas as a father at all. Sometimes his brother acted as if he had ice water in his veins. Jonas would never love those babies like he did. He loved those kids more than life itself, and he was a damn good father. He would take care of them no matter whose sperm created them.

"Hey." Jonas opened his eyes and looked up startled. "What are you doing here?"

"What are you doing here?" Jude threw back at him. "Janis called me, and I took the first flight out. What happened?"

"Nothing. I let my guard down. My own stupid fault." He let out a breath. "You were always the better fighter."

Jude shook his head. "How are you, really?"

"Just a flesh wound. I'm not that easy to kill." He pointed to a dressing on his shoulder. "So you can turn around and fly back to the nest. The wife and kids need you more than I do."

"Jude!" Janis ran in and threw her arms around him. "How long have you been here? I got stuck in traffic. How are the babies and Sable?"

He stiffened perceptibly and mumbled something. This probably wasn't the best time to unload.

Janis narrowed her eyes at him but said nothing.

Best to keep the focus on Jonas. "What's the real deal with this slacker here?" He gestured towards the bed.

"He'll live," Janis replied, dryly. "They cut his shoulder. Thank God, someone walked out of the bar and scared them off. It could have been worse."

"Just a couple of street punks," Jonas added. "They took me by surprise. I shouldn't even be here, but Janis carried on like some overprotective mama."

They both ignored him.

"When can he go home?" Jude asked.

"He can leave today, if he behaves and doesn't overdo it."

"Good, because he's coming home with me. You, too, if you're smart. The city is no place for us."

"Whoa! Wait just a minute." Jonas raised his voice. "I'm right here, you can talk to me."

"You're too pigheaded to listen. Get your shit together, and we'll talk when we get out of here." Jude walked his sister out of the room before Jonas's temper boiled over.

"I'm worried, Jude. Something's bothering him." Janis's grim expression scared him. "He's desperately unhappy, but he won't talk to me. Maybe you'll have better luck."

Jesus. Was his brother in love with Sable? His chest felt tight. Maybe the two of them belonged together. Who was the third wheel now?

He never thought a woman would come between him and Jonas. Then again, he never thought his brother would come between him and his wife. They were all miserable. Could Sable be right about this? *What a fucked-up mess.*

Jonas walked out, and they left the hospital, each lost in their own thoughts. They climbed in the car, and Jude offered Janis money for parking. Then he shut up again. He had a golf ball-sized lump lodged in his throat, and he couldn't get past it.

The building turned out to be nicer than he expected, a newly renovated midrise not far from the hospital and popular with the med students. With a bit of probing, Janis admitted to dating one of the tenants, an ER doctor, probably the reason they kept Jonas overnight.

Janis sensed something between them, and she left them at the door to Jonas's apartment with strict instructions to keep her posted.

"It's a one-bedroom. You can sleep on the couch. I missed you, but not enough to have you in bed with me."

Jude threw his bag on the floor and wondered how to tell his brother that's exactly what his wife wanted.

Jonas went right to the kitchen. "Let me get you a drink for your jet lag."

"Christ, Jonas. I wasn't even on the plane an hour. Sit down and talk to me." He planted himself on the leather couch and looked around. Modern, sleek, uncluttered, it looked like nobody lived here.

Jonas sat on a matching leather chair and looked at him over a glass-topped coffee table. "Why did you rush out here?"

"You know how excited Janis gets. She made it sound like you were dying."

"No, I don't know. Janis would never scare you over the phone like that. Are you avoiding the ball and chain? Maybe you needed a vacation from family life?" He laughed, a dry, humorless sound.

Jude ignored his comments. "I hear you're drinking too much."

"Since when is that your business?"

"Sable was worried about you." He looked for Jonas's reaction.

"Then why didn't she come?" he asked bitterly.

"Would you have liked that?"

"Look, let's make this quick. I'm fine. You've seen it for yourself. Go home to your wife and kids."

"There's one problem with that statement." He couldn't hold back. Jonas had to know the truth. "The kids aren't mine."

Chapter Twenty-Two

Jonas needed a drink before he could process Jude's words. He went into the kitchen and started pulling cabinets open.

Jude watched from the doorway. "Do you know anything about this?"

He looked in the refrigerator. There had to be a bottle here somewhere. *Shit. Think, Jonas. You couldn't have polished off everything.*

"You were always good at putting on a poker face, but news like this should get some kind of reaction." The frost in his brother's voice lowered the room temperature by ten degrees. "Why do I get the feeling that you're not surprised?"

He wasn't ready for this. Not in any way, shape, or form. Should he bluff his way through? Try and act surprised? Too late for that, he guessed. "I'm not," he said simply.

"You son of a bitch." Jude pounded his fist on the counter. "All that bullshit about wanting me to be happy and starting over. It's all crap. You've lied to me from day one. If you weren't hurt I'd—"

"You'd what? Kill me?" Jonas said harshly. "Sit down. You wanted to talk. Let's talk."

Jude pulled out a chair and sat on the edge, like a wild animal waiting to pounce. "Why did you really leave, Jonas? Was it because after all was said and done, you couldn't accept the fact that you fathered half-breeds?"

Jonas closed the space between them in an instant. Pent-up feelings of frustration and jealousy exploded like a ticking time bomb that had just been detonated. He clenched his fists to keep from slugging Jude. "Whatever you think of me, leave them out of it."

"They're innocents in this whole fucking mess. They didn't ask for any of this."

"So you do have some feelings. You're not a complete stone-cold, unfeeling bastard."

Jonas suddenly remembered where he hid the bottle. The anger disappeared as quickly as it came. He went down on his knees and started rummaging under the sink.

"Aha." He came up with a half-full bottle of Absolut. He found two water glasses in the dish strainer and filled both of them. "You need this." He set one in front of Jude and then took a seat across from him. "How did you find out?"

Jude took a big swallow. "Sable told me." He stared at Jonas. "Now you look surprised."

He was. Why would she screw up her life again? "She told you they were yours."

"And now she says you're the father. I don't know what to think. How could she know? Did you run some kind of test and tell her?"

"I did, but not until later, and I never told Sable. I don't know how she thinks she knows, but she's only half right."

Jude looked at him blankly and took another drink.

"You know Sam has a birthmark like mine."

"So that means he has to be yours?"

Jude was beating himself up for nothing. "No. But it got me thinking, and I ran DNA tests. We're both fathers." His brother didn't believe him. He saw it written all over his face. And why should he? It sounded crazy even to him. "It's hard to believe, but it happens. Two eggs fertilized by two different men and you have bi-paternal twinning. *Heteropaternal superfecundation* is the medical term."

Jude's eyes narrowed. His brow furrowed. "This is for real?"

"Max is yours. Sam is mine."

"You should have told us. Why didn't you?"

"I did what I thought was best for all of us. I already screwed up your marriage once, I wasn't about to try again."

"You can give up your son, just like that?" A frown crossed Jude's face.

"You'll be a better father than I could ever be, and the boys will grow up as full brothers. Tell that to Sable. And tell her not to worry. I won't try to separate them. I know you'll take care of Sam like he was your own." His heart twisted. "Sable will understand."

Jude let out a sigh. "No, Jonas. She won't. She has some crazy idea we're connected, the three of us. That these scars on our necks are Lycan marks of bonding. Some kind of three-way marriage."

Jonas put a hand to his neck and rubbed the scar, a constant reminder of the woman he wanted more than any other. "Her tribal customs don't mean anything to us, you know that."

"After what you just told me, I don't know what to believe anymore. A birth this rare has to mean something special."

"Don't read more into it than you have to. There are documented cases. We're not the first."

"All I know is you need to come home. Sam needs to know who his real father is. We're family. We can work this out somehow. But we need to sit down and talk it out."

Jonas shook his head and took a drink. "Don't play Dr. Phil with me, Jude. The kids deserve to be taken care of, and I'll help support them financially, but don't expect me to tie myself down to a woman who's not even human. It won't work." He watched the blood drain from Jude's face. It tore him up inside to mouth those words, but he had no choice. If he didn't distance himself from Sable, he'd be all over her, and Jude's marriage would be doomed to failure. They'd thank him one day.

"Then you come home and tell her," Jude said furiously. "For some crazy reason she thinks you're worth caring about."

* * * *

Sable waited in agony, afraid Jude wouldn't call. When he finally did, she breathed a sigh of relief and thanked the Gods. She'd thanked them a lot lately. Fifteen years ago, when her people were massacred, she became a nonbeliever. But when push came to shove, she prayed for their help, and Kweo responded. She prayed that he would bring her men home again.

Jude's phone call was short and to the point. He didn't end their conversation with *I love you*, but just the fact they had a conversation at all gave her hope. He was thinking about what she'd told him and trying to convince Jonas to come home. He'd call back before he returned. Other than that, he refused to discuss their situation on the phone. It needed to be dealt with in person. She agreed. A discussion of such importance required face-to-face contact.

Karin and Malcolm were supportive. They came over every day to help with the babies. Her twins were almost as big as Malcolm Jr. The boys would be great friends when they got older.

They talked a lot. Malcolm told her stories about their Nature Gods. He still believed. A carving of Kweo, the wolf spirit, sat on his mantle. The Gods inhabited everything, animals, revered ancestors, and the elements. Her parents had believed they created the world. Their origins were shrouded in mystery, but one thing was clear. When Kweo took a human lover, he created the first Lycan.

The stories helped. Having family that understood her helped. Karin and Malcolm convinced her to give Jude and Jonas time and space. A Triad would be a hard thing for them to accept. They weren't brought up that way.

She would give them whatever they needed and hope for the best. She didn't want to think about the very real possibility that the brothers would never agree to a three-way marriage. The alternative would be unbearable. She couldn't live without either of them.

* * * *

Sable waited on pins and needles, only it felt more like lying on a bed of nails. She tried to be patient, but it was six days before Jude called back and told her they were coming home.

As soon as Jonas walked through the door, Sable knew he didn't want to be there. Her first sight of him broke her heart. He looked exhausted, thinner, and so unhappy she couldn't bear it. All she wanted to do was wrap her arms around him and comfort him.

She breathed a sigh of relief when Jude came to her and kissed her cheek.

"I missed you," she told him.

He accepted her hug. "I missed you, too. And the boys."

The words brought a smile to her face. He knew they weren't his, and he didn't plan to shut them out. She couldn't ask for more than that.

She led them into the den. The babies were asleep in a portacrib. They weren't identical twins, but she dressed them alike in blue onesies. Strangely enough, Max looked like Jude with his white-blond hair. Sam, a little darker, looked more like Jonas.

Jonas's expression softened as soon as he laid eyes on them. The boys seemed to sense they were being watched. They opened their eyes in unison. Jonas reached for Sam then pulled back.

"Jonas has something to tell you." Jude's voice sounded strained. "Let's sit down."

Her anxiety must have shown on her face because Jude put an arm around her and led her to the sofa.

Jonas took a chair across from them. He sat hunched over, staring down at his hands clasped in front of him.

"You're scaring me." Sable's heart pounded against her ribs. Was he going away? Was he sick?

"Spill it, Jonas." Jude took one of her hands in his.

"Sam is my son, Jude is Maxwell's father."

She looked at him, stunned. In her wildest imagination, she never expected this.

"How can that be?" she whispered.

Sable hung on Jonas's every word. She didn't understand the medical terminology, but she knew about DNA testing. "There's no mistake?"

"I ran the tests twice."

Jude looked so serious. Sable feared the worst. A feeling of certainty came over her. Jonas planned to take his son. But to what end? Research? Close to tears, she looked from one brother to the other. "The boys are already so attached."

Jonas stared at her. "I don't want him. You don't have to worry about that."

His callous attitude stunned her. Happiness warred with hurt. He didn't intend to separate the boys, but how could he not want his own son? Tears rolled down her cheeks.

"Why are you crying? I just told you I'm not taking him. Jude will raise him as if he's his own son." He looked at his brother as if for confirmation. Jude nodded. "The boys don't have to know different."

"This is what you really want?" Sable asked.

"Yes."

The way Jonas looked at Sam broadcast a different message than the one that came out of his mouth. She didn't believe for one minute he could give up his son. She wouldn't let him do it no matter what it took.

* * * *

With only iced tea to sustain him, Jonas barely made it through dinner. He breathed a sigh of relief when Sable took the boys upstairs to feed them and get them ready for bed.

Jude cleared the table, and Jonas went straight to the den for a drink. He expected a lecture from Jude, but instead his brother joined him. They sat on opposite sides of the coffee table with tumblers of scotch in front of them.

Jude didn't say much, and Jonas allowed himself to relax. He only came back because Jude wouldn't leave without him. Tomorrow he'd be gone again.

But it was hard to see his son, knowing he had to give him up. It was just as hard to give up Max. He loved them both. Jude did, too. At least he could be sure his son would have a good life.

"I'm glad you're not letting this triad nonsense come between you and your wife."

"I'm not sure it's nonsense," Jude replied slowly.

"You can't be serious. I can see you love her." When he didn't get a response, Jonas took a big swallow from his glass. "You're crazy."

"If you had said that a week ago, I'd have agreed, but I've been doing a lot of thinking since you told me about the twins. I have

strong feelings about how they should be raised. I don't want them separated."

"Great. Then that's settled." Relief flooded Jonas. He stood up.

"Sit down. I'm not done yet."

Jonas let out an exasperated sigh and sat.

"I believe they're a gift from a higher power. A sign to bring us together. We shouldn't need a road map to point us in the right direction, but we Outlaws are hardheaded."

"You're buying into Sable's folklore because you feel guilty. Don't. Sam is better off with you."

"Guilt has nothing to do with it. I only want what's best for those boys. And for us. There's more to it than the babies. Sable is right. There's something connecting the three of us. Fate won't let you run away from this one, Jonas. Whether you admit it or not, you belong here with us."

"You're wrong, Jude. Give it up. I'm leaving tomorrow. I'll stay in Philly until your house is done. Maybe I'll come back when you and Sable move out. Maybe not. Either way it doesn't matter. Philly isn't that far. Uncle Jonas can come and visit." He stood and picked up the bottle. Frowned when he saw it was empty. "I'm going to bed."

Jude gave him a disgusted look. "At least think about this. Sleep on it."

"Good night, Jude." He had to get away. Talking about this drove him nuts. If he listened to Jude long enough he might start believing him.

Sleep eluded him. He kept thinking about Sam, hearing his baby giggles and smelling his sweet baby powder scent. Another drink. That's what he needed. He went downstairs to look for a bottle of scotch.

Chapter Twenty-Three

"You don't need that, Jonas."

"Fuck." He jerked upright. He never even heard Sable creep up behind him. "Are you sure you're not part cat?" He turned to face her. "What are you doing sneaking around in the middle of the night?"

"I heard you get up." Her eyes went right to the erection tenting his boxers.

Damn her. The way she looked at him only made him hotter and harder. Annoyed, he scowled at her. It was 2 a.m. for Christ's sake. Did a man have to dress to come downstairs in his own house? "Go back to your husband's bed, Sable."

"Jude knows where I am. Just come and sit with me for a few minutes. Please."

He meant to say no, but he found himself following her. His eyes were drawn to the leather chair. He remembered sitting there, Sable impaled on his cock and grinding on him. Her moans ringing in his ears. He shook it off and sat on the couch. Big mistake. She sat next to him, and her scent attracted him like a bee to honey.

"Jude told me you're leaving tomorrow."

"That's right. You can have the house to yourselves."

"It's your house, too, Jonas."

"I have business in the city that will tie me up for awhile. It works out perfectly." He worked it out perfectly. For them. Not for him.

"Things are far from perfect."

"You and Jude will work it out." He started to rise. "I need to get some sleep. Busy day tomorrow."

Sable put a hand on his thigh, and he froze. "We need you here."

He knew she cared about him although for the life of him, he couldn't figure out why. It had to be because of the kids. Or Jude.

He'd be fooling himself if he thought for one second she really loved him like she loved his twin.

Ah, Jonas, my boy. There's your problem in a nutshell. You're jealous. You want her to have the same feelings for you as she does for her husband, and after the way you treated her, you know that's not happening.

"Sable, we've been over this. I can't be part of this sick arrangement you're suggesting." He wanted to move, but he couldn't. Her touch anchored him to the chair. "It would never work."

Raw anguish glittered in her golden eyes. It killed him to hurt her, but her pain couldn't compare to his. When he left, she'd still have Jude and the babies. He'd be alone.

All the time he spent in the city without her he felt lost. Not a day had gone by that he didn't think about her. He'd missed her with a profound need that bordered on obsession. He couldn't make love with Nicole if he wanted to. He couldn't get it up for her. No such problem tonight. He wanted to fuck Sable so bad he could taste it. Christ, he was a sick bastard, a complete shit. He'd fallen for his brother's wife.

"We can make it work. Don't leave, Jonas," she whispered. "I need you here."

"Isn't one husband enough for you? Do you have to fuck over Jude again?" As soon as he said it, he regretted it. Her face crumpled, and she turned deathly white. Isn't that what he wanted? For her to finally hate him so much she'd push him away and save him the trouble.

"Jude understands. He knows I would never intentionally hurt him." She shook her head sadly. "It kills me to see you hurting, Jonas. I can't bear it."

Jonas felt like he was drowning and he needed a lifeline. He grabbed onto Sable and pulled her in. She didn't resist. She wrapped her arms around him, and her hot tears scalded his bare chest. "I'm so sorry, Sable. I didn't mean it. I don't know what I'm saying half the time."

She looked up at him, her face wet and flushed. "I love you, Jonas."

His heart stopped beating, and he knew he was lost. The magic words hung in the air between them, and he knew they were true. It didn't matter how he knew. He just did. Suddenly everything was clear. They were right. This is where he belonged. But he was afraid he'd burned too many bridges. Jonas took her head between his hands and looked into her amber eyes. "I'm not good enough for you, Sable. You deserve better."

"I've done bad things, Jonas. But I've been given a second chance, and so have you. Don't throw it all away."

He took her lips in a gentle kiss. With a soft sigh, she opened up to him, and he slipped his tongue inside her mouth. Nothing had ever tasted so good. He never wanted to stop, but he needed to tell her something. "I love you, Sable." Her smile made his world light up. "But I don't know if I'd be any good at this."

"Do you want to try?" Hope glittered in her eyes.

"Yes." It was true. He didn't want to lose her, to lose any of them.

"Then come with me." She stood and took his hand.

He knew where they were going, and he followed her up the stairs to the room she shared with his brother.

A small lamp illuminated the room. Jude reclined against the headboard.

A chill ran down his spine. "Where are the twins?"

"Sleeping in the room next door." Sable pointed to a video baby monitor.

He stared at the image of the two sleeping babies and thought his heart would bust. He didn't have to leave them.

Sable squeezed his hand. "You'll see them soon. They'll be hungry before long." She drew him to the bed.

He stared at Jude. "Are you okay with this?"

"I am. Are you, Jonas?"

"It's not like we haven't done it before," Jonas said, in an attempt to lighten the mood.

"This is different."

"I know. I'm sorry," he said. "I don't mean to be flippant. I'm out of my element here."

"Join the crowd." Jude flashed an ironic smile.

"I will."

The three of them sat on the bed. There were a few moments of awkward silence, and then Jude cleared his throat.

"Sable loves you, Jonas."

"I know." He turned to Sable, took her hand, and smiled. "I love her, too."

Jude let out a breath. "Good. Because you said some harsh things and I don't want her hurt again."

"I talk a lot of crap to cover up my real feelings. Especially when I drink too much. You don't have to worry about that anymore." He lifted Sable's hand to his mouth and kissed her palm. "I was lovesick and homesick and most of all sick of myself. Thanks to you, I finally came to my senses. Everything I ever wanted is here, and I almost threw it all away."

"And the drinking?" Jude pressed him.

"That's over and done with, Jude. I promise I won't touch a drop. I don't want my boys to grow up with a drunk for a father." Jonas looked up and shook his head. "I mean, my boy."

"You were right the first time. They're our boys, just like Sable is our wife. I might have a piece of paper that says we're married, but in our hearts and in the eyes of Sable's Gods, we're co-husbands and co-fathers."

"Do you really believe we can make this work?" Jonas asked. "It's nontraditional. People will condemn us."

"We'll tell who we want and the hell with everyone else." Jude's eyes burned.

Sable took Jude's hand so they were all connected. "We're not alone. Malcolm and Karin support us one hundred percent."

Jude chuckled. "I never expected to be buddies with Malcolm Connor. Not in this lifetime."

Jonas felt at peace for the first time in a long time. "So we share everything, in good times and bad."

"Exactly," Jude replied. "The name of the game is caring, commitment, and communication."

Sable turned first to Jude, then to Jonas. "I love you, and I love you, and I take you both as my mates."

"And I love you and take you as my mate." Jude brushed a gentle kiss across her lips.

"I don't deserve you, Sable, but I want you more than anything. I love you and take you as my mate." A quick kiss wasn't enough for Jonas. The touch of her lips was too delicious. His tongue moved over hers as he familiarized himself with her taste. Slowly the pressure of lips increased, and she clung to him, returning his kiss with reckless abandon. They broke for a breath of air, and he rested his forehead against hers.

"Gods, Jonas. I've wanted your kisses for so long." She looked radiant and unbelievably beautiful. "You make me so happy."

"I've been a fool. I'll make up for it, I promise."

"We've all made mistakes, but from this minute forward, we start fresh." She traced his jaw with her fingers. "I want you, Jonas." She twisted her head to look at Jude. "I want both of you."

The men slipped off their boxers. Jude helped her take off her sweatshirt while Jonas pulled off her sweatpants. Heat built between them, surrounded them, and drew them closer together.

Jonas looked over her shoulder at Jude. He nodded back.

* * * *

Thank you, Kweo. This is what she'd been waiting for, love and acceptance.

Jude brushed her hair back and smiled tenderly. He urged her to lie down, and he placed a pillow under her head. He rained soft little kisses on her eyes and the tip of her nose before pressing his warm, sweet lips on her. She opened her mouth, and his tongue swept inside, searching for hers. The pressure of his lips increased, and she gave herself over to the hunger they shared.

Jude broke their kiss first and dropped his head to nuzzle her breasts. His tongue teased one sensitive nipple while he attended the other with his fingers. He sucked gently, then harder with her encouragement.

Jonas massaged first one foot, then the other. He kissed each toe and sent tingles coursing up her leg to her pussy. When he kissed her

calf and the inside of her thigh, her breaths became quick and shallow in anticipation. Her cream flowed as she imagined his warm, wet tongue on her aching pussy.

"Please, Jonas. I can't wait," she begged him.

Jonas's clever fingers teased her wet folds. He parted her labia with his thumbs and licked her from bottom to top.

"Baby, I love the way you taste."

"More, Jonas."

His tongue worked magic, and wicked sensations coursed through her body while she gripped the bedsheets. He feasted on her and when he sucked on her ultra-sensitive clit, she went over the edge.

They both held her until her shudders quieted.

She looked at Jonas for a heartbeat. They were drawn to each other like magnets. He pulled her against his chest, and their lips met in a white-hot kiss full of intimacy and passion. She held on to his head and pulled him closer with her leg. His kiss was everything she thought it would be and more. She couldn't get enough. Her thoughts fragmented at his deep, sweet exploration of her mouth.

She reached for Jonas's cock and wrapped her fingers around him.

He groaned into her mouth. "Do you want me inside you, Sable?"

"Gods, yes." She'd been denied him so long. Tonight she wanted everything.

"Ride me, sweetheart."

She straddled his hips and positioned his cock at her entrance. Then she sank down on him, impaling herself. They both groaned at the contact.

Jude took a bottle of lubricant from the nightstand, poured some in his hand, and worked it over his cock. Sable watched him with mounting excitement. Jude's substantial erection pulsed in his hand like a living thing as he oiled it to prepare for her rear entry.

Jude came up behind her, and she bent over Jonas with her butt high. He stroked the curve of her ass and then rubbed more of the cool lube between her cheeks. Jude set his hands on her hips and pulled her a little closer so he could position himself to enter her.

Sable hissed as he slowly pushed past the ring of tight muscle. He murmured encouragement and words of praise as he worked himself

deeper. With Jude buried deep in her ass and Jonas in her pussy, their cocks separated by only a thin wall of tissue, she felt as if they were one. A surge of passion flooded her body and, shocked, she realized it wasn't just her own. The hunger and emotions coming from her men flowed through her body until they all blended into an intimacy she'd never experienced before.

Both men murmured in husky tones. "Are you okay?"

Tonight would change everything between them. She wanted to reassure them that she was okay with their mutual possession and everything it represented. "Yes, more than okay. I love you both."

Jude murmured to Jonas over her back. "She's ours."

She looked down at Jonas. The hunger in his eyes reflected hers.

Jude started moving behind her. She felt the pressure of his pelvis each time he thrust into her. He timed his rhythm to Jonas's, keeping it slow and easy. They moved in tandem, and she trembled, caught between her men in ecstatic pleasure.

Jonas slid his hands up her body and cupped her swollen breasts, heavy with milk. "You are so beautiful. I love you."

Her womb tightened and heated up like a furnace. "I love you so much, Jonas." She bent to kiss him.

Jude gripped her hips and kissed her back. He whispered words of love against her skin. She quivered with pleasure and called his name.

The musky scent of sex hung in the air. Their thrusts and parries grew faster, harder. She squirmed and writhed between them.

Jonas stiffened, and she knew he was close. He pulled her head down, and at the moment of his release, he sank his teeth in her neck and gave up control.

The pleasure of his bite started the ripples that signaled her climax. She felt the pressure of Jude's thrust, and all rational thought fled as he pulled her head back and bit her at the moment of his release.

They collapsed in a sated heap until the sound of crying babies made them bolt upright. Sable laughed as the men flew out of bed and ran for their sons. Jonas returned with Max in his arms. Jude handed her Sam.

Max screamed for dear life, and Jonas looked terror-struck. "What do I do with him?"

"Give him here, Jonas." Sable chuckled.

"You're kidding, right. Two at a time?"

She raised a brow. "You and your brother don't have a problem with it."

He grinned sheepishly and handed off the wailing baby.

She positioned them in front of her with their legs making an X across her lap. They each latched on to a breast and quieted immediately.

Jonas looked at her adoringly. "You're amazing."

The men flanked her, both tickling little toes and annoying the infants until they kicked out in frustration.

She looked from one to the other. This was her favorite time, when she had her little family around her. Come what may, they were together, and all was right in her world.

THE END

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gale always loved to read, especially fairy tales where marvelous things happened and a girl could grow up to be anything she wanted. She dreamed of being a writer and creating her own magical stories, but real life got in the way, and she put those dreams aside. When she heard the wakeup call, she took the plunge and escaped from cubicle hell. Now she has the best job in the world. She can be anything she wants and she doesn't mind living vicariously through the smokin' hot alphas and strong heroines she loves to write about.

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