

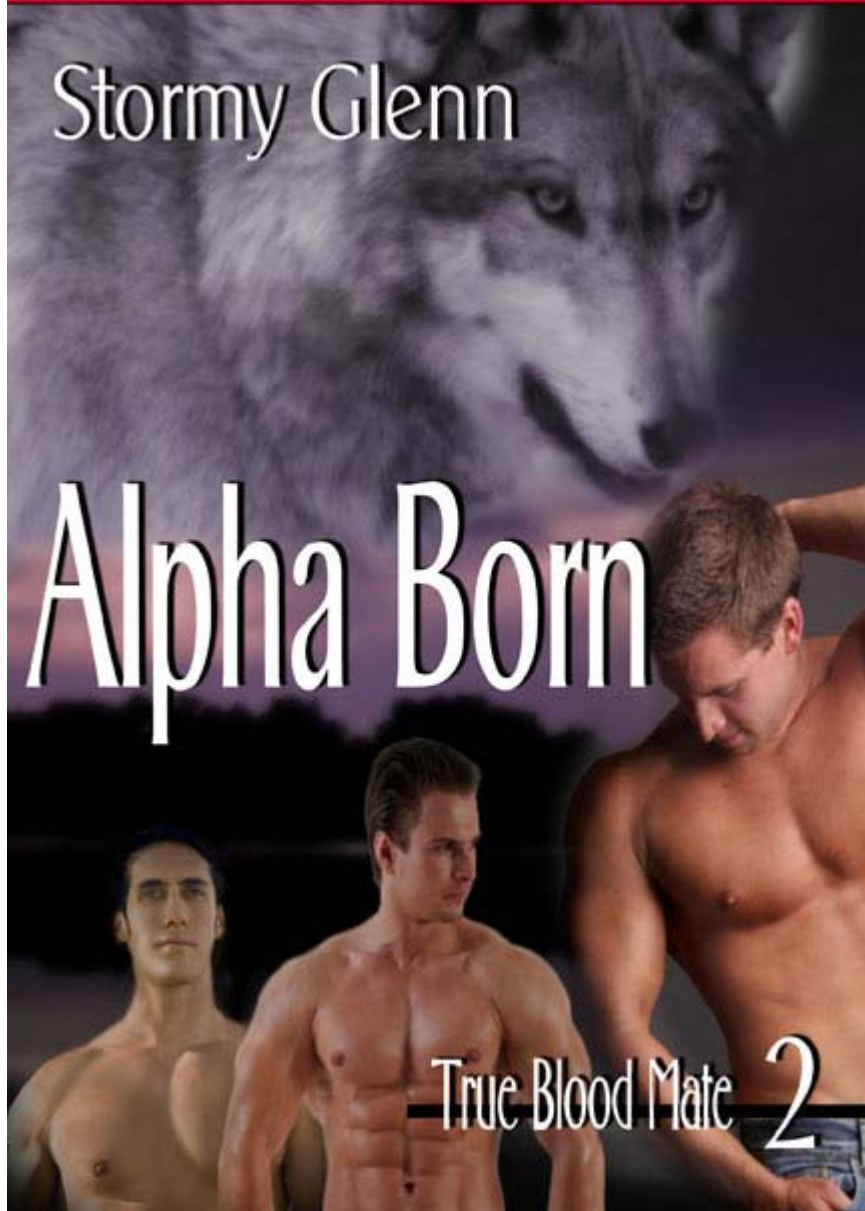
Siren Publishing

Ménage Àmour

Stormy Glenn

Alpha Born

True Blood Mate 2



True Blood Mate 2

Alpha Born

Alpha Caleb Redding has spent 20 years trying to bring his first love back into his life. When he finally devises a plan, the Council of Elders agrees to it, but they add their own stipulations. In order for the mate covenant to happen, Caleb has to agree to give up his clan and alpha status, submitting to Grayson.

Alpha Grayson Cane has watched Caleb from afar, never able to touch him or speak to him due to clan conflict. It's been a heartache that has stabbed at him for 20 years. When a peace treaty comes in the form of a mate covenant between their two clans, Grayson is all too eager to agree, especially when he learns that Caleb must submit to him.

But when the vampire mediator sent to broker the peace agreement disappears, will their second chance at being together also vanish? And what happens when Grayson accidentally mates the vampire while trying to save his life? Will Caleb have to give up his clan, his alpha status, and his dream of being with Grayson? Or will being alpha born have its advantages?

Genre: Alternative (M/M or F/F), Ménage a Trois/Quatre, Vampires/Werewolves

Length: 64,404 words

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MENAGE AMOUR



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Letter from Stormy Glenn

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With deep gratitude,

Stormy Glenn

ALPHA BORN

True Blood Mate 2

STORMY GLENN

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Chapter 1

"Alpha Redding and his contingent have arrived."

Alpha Grayson Cane looked up from the map he was going over to see his second-in-command, Taylor Cane, who was also his brother, standing off to one side of him.

"Very good," Grayson answered. "Please remind everyone that this is a peaceful gathering. I want no aggressive moves from anyone." Taylor nodded and started to turn away. "Taylor, has the mediator arrived yet?"

Taylor looked back, shaking his head. "No, alpha, there's been no word from his contingent yet."

"I want to be informed the moment he's spotted." Grayson curled his upper lip, a small growl escaping before he could stop it. "I don't trust those bloodsuckers any farther than I can throw them."

Taylor nodded. "Understood."

Grayson shook his head. "I can't believe the council is sending in a vampire to mediate a peace agreement between werewolf clans. They must be out of their fucking minds."

"They are the council, alpha," Taylor said. "I imagine they can do just about anything they want."

"They're trying to make peace between the clans. Bringing in a vampire is more likely to start a war between us all." Grayson's lip

curled again, this time in distaste. "I can't stand the little suckers. They'll stab you in the back while smiling at you. Sick little freaks."

Taylor chuckled slightly. "Better not let the peace mediator hear you say that."

Grayson rolled his eyes as he folded up the map he had been looking at. "I'd better go greet Alpha Redding before he throws a temper tantrum. No telling what he's likely to do if he isn't greeted properly."

"Grayson, you really need to keep your comments under control. You know as well as I do that Alpha Redding has excellent hearing."

Grayson chuckled. He knew that. He was counting on it. The quickest way to piss Alpha Caleb Redding off was to poke at his pride. It was also the quickest way to piss Grayson off, but he wasn't about to admit that.

Grayson and Caleb had been rivals for several years. Getting the two of them in one place without a fight was practically a miracle. Brokering peace between their two clans would be an act of God.

Once upon a time, Grayson and Caleb used to be friends, best friends. Hell, they were more than best friends. Grayson received his first kiss from Caleb, his first blow job. He had his first sexual experience with Caleb.

That all ended when their fathers both died in a challenge to the death, thrusting Grayson and Caleb into the mantle of leadership. Their clans had always had a tentative relationship anyway. The death of both alphas led to a long-standing feud that the Council of Elders was now trying to end.

Grayson waited until Taylor walked away before drawing in several deep, calming breaths. He had seen Caleb several times over the years but always from a safe distance. He was about to see the man close up for the first time in what seemed like forever.

Grayson knew he needed to calm down his racing heartbeat before Caleb heard it. Taylor wasn't lying. Caleb Redding had better hearing

than anyone Grayson had ever met. He'd know immediately that Grayson was unsettled by this meeting.

Once Grayson felt he had himself under control, he started toward the middle of the small clearing they were meeting in. He could see a small group of people moving about just on the other side, out of the light cast from the small torches lit in the field.

The plan was for each clan to be on either side of the field and meet in a small circle of light in the middle, neutral ground. Only the two alphas and the mediator could enter the circle. All others had to stay outside the circle and on their own side. Any breach of this plan would be met by strong sanctions by the council.

Grayson could see a tall figure break away from the group across the field as he entered the circle. The closer the man walked, the more of his features were revealed until he stood in the light just inside of the circle.

"Hello, Grayson."

Grayson swallowed hard before answering. "Hello, Caleb."

"It's been awhile, hasn't it?" Caleb asked.

Caleb folded his hands behind his back and started slowly walking around the circle. Grayson caught just a hint of tension in the man's shoulders as he walked past a torch. He wondered if this meeting was as hard for Caleb as it was for him.

"A few years at least," Grayson replied, hoping that his voice didn't convey the trembling he could feel in his body. To be this close to Caleb and not be able to touch him, smell him. It was hell.

"I've seen you at the yearly Lyken Gatherings," Caleb continued. "You're looking good. Alpha life must be treating you right."

"It's okay."

"Just okay?" The slight lift of Caleb's eyebrow shot right to Grayson's cock. He remembered that mysterious way Caleb had of looking at him as if his answer was the most important thing in the world. It used to drive Grayson crazy.

"It is what it is." Grayson shrugged, trying not to let Caleb know how effected he was by the man's mere presence. They were on different sides of warring factions. They were enemies. What they had before they could never have again. It was too late for that. It had been too late the moment their fathers died in battle.

"Do you think this will work?" Caleb asked as he waved his hand around the circle.

"Do I want it to work? Yes," Grayson answered honestly. "Do I think peace is possible between our two clans? Truthfully, no I don't. There's too much history between our clans for them to settle this peacefully."

Under any normal circumstances, Grayson never would have been so honest with his thoughts, but this was Caleb. Grayson had to believe that some of the man he cared about all of those years ago was still inside of the hard man he saw standing before him.

Caleb clasped his hands behind his back again, nodding his head as he started walking. "I'm tired of fighting, Grayson. I'm tired of watching my clan die little by little over something none of us had anything to do with. The fight was between our fathers, not us."

Grayson's breath caught in his throat at the misery he saw in Caleb's green eyes when the man looked over at him. "We need to end this."

"How?" Grayson asked. "A mediator is not going to be able to end the animosity between our clans, no matter how fucking good he is supposed to be. There's been too much damage, Caleb."

"We need to make a mate covenant between our clans."

Grayson gapped, his mouth dropping open in shock. "You want us to marry members of our clans together to insure peace? Have you lost your mind since I last saw you?"

"Not at all," Caleb said. "I believe it is the perfect resolution to our problem. If we bring our clans together through a mate covenant, then we would essentially be one clan."

"One fighting clan," Grayson snapped. "And who do you think is stupid enough to go along with this plan of yours? What two idiots would even agree to it?"

The potent look Caleb gave Grayson made him start shaking his head before the man even spoke. It was his greatest wish and his biggest nightmare.

"Us."

"You have lost your mind," Grayson whispered. "The clans would never agree to it. Hell, the council would never agree to it."

"Actually, I've already spoken with the council, and they have approved a mate covenant between us. The mediator is supposed to be here to insure that it happens, if you agree, of course."

Grayson's eyes widened. Well, at least Caleb had the decency to look a little embarrassed by his admission. Grayson felt dizzy. His legs shook, and he was almost afraid that they wouldn't hold him up. He knew his face was pale. He felt the blood rush from his head.

"You—"

"Would it be so bad being mated to me, Grayson?" Caleb asked softly. "We used to be close once upon a time. We could be again."

"Caleb, you—" Grayson rubbed his hand down his face as he tried to figure out exactly what to say to the man. He just couldn't seem to find the right words. How did he talk to a man that seemed willing to hand him his dream on a silver platter?

Caleb had been in his thoughts every day for the last several years. Grayson just never expected to be standing this close to him again, let alone be offered a peace treaty quite like what Caleb was proposing. He didn't know what to think.

"Grayson?"

Strangely, Grayson could hear the subtle wavering tones in Caleb's voice and knew that man was as uncertain of his welcome as Grayson felt. He'd always been able to tell what Caleb was feeling. It was part of what attracted him to the man.

It was also part of what scared him about Caleb. Grayson knew he'd do almost anything to make Caleb feel better. He'd always wanted Caleb's happiness above everything else. That made Caleb dangerous. Caleb could get Grayson to do pretty much anything.

"I need time to think, Caleb."

Caleb stared at Grayson so long and so hard that he began to fidget under the intense look. Finally, the man nodded. "I understand."

"Do you?" Grayson wondered if Caleb truly understood how he felt. Caleb was the object of Grayson's teenage fantasies. He didn't know if the boy he had loved was in the man that stood before him, and he didn't know if he could take the chance that he wasn't.

Grayson had already lost Caleb once. He didn't know if he had the courage to lose him again or to let go of the fantasies he'd built up in his head over the years. That might just be what destroyed him.

"Believe it or not, I do understand, Grayson." Caleb shoved his hands in his pocket and kicked at some small pebbles at his feet. "I probably understand more than anyone how hard this is."

Grayson's heart started to ache at the anguish Caleb suddenly let show on his face. He started to take a step toward the man when a loud noise from across the field caught his attention, freezing him in his tracks.

"Fuck!" Grayson spit out between clenched teeth as he clenched his fists at his sides. "I hate this shit. How in the hell do you expect us to work out a peace agreement between our clans when I can't even touch you without starting an international incident?"

"Do you want to touch me?" Caleb whispered so low that Grayson almost didn't hear the man speak.

"You know I do," Grayson murmured back, taking a chance that Caleb wasn't messing with him. He took a deep breath and released it slowly before continuing. "I never wanted to stop touching you."

"Then agree to the mate covenant, Grayson," Caleb said softly as he glanced toward his group of people then to Grayson's men before looking back at him. "It's the only way we can be together."

"You really think they will let us be together?" Grayson was skeptical, too skeptical to let himself start believing in something he wanted so bad.

"It's what I've been working toward for the last several years, Grayson."

"What?"

"I've been working on getting us back together since the day they separated us. I never wanted to leave you, and I could care less about all this clan bullshit. We were meant to be together despite what everyone says."

Grayson felt a spark of hope ignite in his chest. "The council really approved this plan?"

Caleb nodded, a small smirk coming to his lush lips. "It took a bit of work, but I eventually got them to agree to it. I had to wait until some of the older members had been replaced with newer ones, more free-thinking ones, but yeah, they agreed to it. That's why it took me so long to bring us together again, because I had to wait until more understanding members were on the council."

"What's the catch?" Grayson knew there had to be a catch. The Council of Elders never agreed to anything like this without there being some sort of catch, usually in their favor.

"There has to be peace between our clans."

"Isn't that why you've come up with this crazy plan?"

"It's not crazy, Grayson, a little farfetched, but not crazy. It can work if we both agree to it. The council will back us up."

Grayson glanced past Caleb to the men he could see standing beyond the torch light. He gestured to them with a nod of his head. "What about them? Will they support a mate covenant between us?"

"We're the alphas, Grayson. They have to do what we say." Caleb chuckled, a noise Grayson hadn't heard in years. It sounded deeper, more masculine than the teenager he'd listened to years before but still sexy as hell.

"Do you really think it will be that easy?" Grayson asked. "You know there are many that won't want us to be together. That's one of the reasons why this stupid war happened in the first place."

"True, we will face a lot of animosity from others, but if we bring our two clans together, we'll be stronger than ever before, maybe even stronger than any other clan in the territory."

Grayson suddenly wondered if that was the reason Caleb suggested this outrageous plan, so that they could be the strongest clan in the territory. Could Caleb have grown to crave power since they'd been apart? Was there more to this plan of his than he was letting on?

The mere thought made Grayson's stomach roll. He tried to act casual as he wrapped one arm around his stomach. It wouldn't do to let Caleb know he was upset in any manner. He couldn't give the man any power over him.

"Joining our two clans would make us very powerful," he agreed as he watched Caleb's reaction carefully. He didn't let out the breath he'd been holding until he saw Caleb roll his eyes.

"Like I give a fuck beyond keeping our people safe." Grayson's eyes widened when Caleb suddenly became agitated, clenching his fists as he began to pace around the circle. The lines of stress were clear to see on his face. "If joining our clans together is the only way I can have you, I'd join up with the devil himself."

"Caleb!"

"Can you really tell me these years apart haven't been hard for you, Grayson? The mantle of leadership isn't an easy one, especially when you're forbidden to be with the only person that truly understands you."

Grayson drew in a deep breath and forbade himself to tremble. He flattened his hands against his sides and tried to pretend that Caleb's words hadn't affected him when they meant more than the world to him.

He thought about all of the times he ached for Caleb, all of the times he cursed the man for giving in to pressure and leaving him. He thought of all of the times he hated himself for letting Caleb go, for not fighting for the one man that made him feel anything.

Caleb was right. The years apart had been hard, and they just kept getting harder with each passing day that Caleb wasn't in his life. Grayson pushed back a wayward strand of hair from his face and looked at Caleb in the torch light, really looked at him.

Caleb had changed over the years. He was no longer the gangly teenager Grayson fell in love with. His body had filled out, becoming more muscular, thicker. His light brown hair had darkened from its original light blond, a soft shadow of facial hair giving Caleb a hint of sensuality that hit Grayson in the core of his being.

"Have you been alone all these years?" Grayson asked the one question that had been eating away at him for years. The thought of Caleb being with anyone made Grayson see red.

"Pretty much," Caleb answered, surprising Grayson with his honesty. "Mostly one-night stands in backrooms and dark alleyways. It's not exactly easy to hook up when you're the alpha, you know?"

Grayson nodded. He did know. Besides the fact that many people, human and wolf alike, distained two men being together, being the alpha added an extra measure of danger.

"What about you?" Caleb asked. "I know you haven't been alone all of these years. I've seen you with other men."

Grayson winced. No, he hadn't been lonely, except for the fact that he was never with the one man he truly wanted to be with. "I've been around."

"A lot?"

The steel-hard jealousy in Caleb's voice surprised Grayson so much so that he let his shock show on his face. He held out his hands, offering an apology. "Caleb, I never made anyone any promises I couldn't keep."

Grayson wished they were anywhere except where they were at that moment. He could see the sorrow in Caleb's eyes and wanted to wrap the man up in his arms, to make the pain go away. But, with so many people looking on, that was impossible.

"You promised to always love me," Caleb said in a choked whisper.

Grayson swallowed past the sudden lump in his throat. "And I never broke that promise."

Chapter 2

A soft cry of relief broke from Caleb's lips at Grayson's words. He hoped for more but knew he wasn't going to get it when he saw Grayson press his lips together and cast a look at the others standing on two separate sides of the circle.

No matter how much he ached to hear Grayson say he still cared, neither of them was in a position to speak freely, and they both knew that. Things were precarious enough as it was.

It was impossible to steady his erratic pulse when he stood so close to the one man that meant more to him than anything in the world, even his own wolf clan. Caleb would do anything for Grayson, even defy the Council of Elders if that's what it took.

In his heart, Caleb had always been afraid that Grayson would turn him away or worse, laugh at him. His living nightmare was that Grayson would find someone to be with and forget all about him.

Caleb began to shake as those fears took hold of him. His mind was working overtime, wondering if Grayson was listening to his grand plan because he had to or because he wanted to.

Seriously, what did he know about Grayson other than what he heard over the years? Grayson could be a totally different person than the one that took his heart all those years ago. Grayson could be playing him for a fool.

"Caleb, damn it, pull yourself together." Grayson snarled. "Your people are getting agitated."

Caleb's head snapped up. He turned to look back at the group of men he'd brought with him to the peace meeting. They were getting

restless, pacing around and clenching their fists as they watched Caleb and Grayson.

Caleb turned back to face Grayson, narrowing in on his face as he took several cleansing breaths. Grayson always had the ability to calm Caleb, ever since they were small children. Just looking at the man brought him peace.

"I apologize, Alpha Cane," Caleb said after a few moments of silence. "It seems I am not as unaffected as I wish to be by this meeting."

"Alpha Cane?" Grayson's eyebrows shot up to his forehead. "After everything you just said to me, now you're calling me Alpha Cane? That's certainly not the way to get me to agree to this mate covenant, Caleb."

Caleb wanted to laugh. Instead he arched an eyebrow at Grayson. "I need a drink. How about you?"

"A *few* drinks wouldn't be amiss." Grayson chuckled.

"I have some good scotch in my car."

Caleb waited for Grayson to nod before walking out of the circle of torch light and heading for his car. His beta and second-in-command, Keenan, walked up to him the minute he left the circle of light.

"Well, how's it going?" Keenan asked. "Do you think Alpha Cane will agree to peace?"

"We're discussing it." *And a whole hell of a lot more*, Caleb thought to himself. "Right now, we've agreed to have a drink together. I need my bottle of scotch out of the car."

Caleb looked around at the other two men that had accompanied him and Keenan to the meeting. Each alpha was only allowed to bring two other clan members besides their beta. Caleb brought Lucas and Jack, the only two other men he truly trusted in his clan besides his brother, Keenan.

"You two make sure that you keep yourselves under control," Caleb ordered. "I don't want to see any aggression from either of you

no matter what you see. At this point, Alpha Cane and I are just talking. And I want to know the minute the mediator arrives."

Caleb took the bottle of scotch from Keenan the moment he came back. He turned away without another word and walked back into the small lit clearing where Grayson waited.

Caleb pulled the top on the bottle and took a small swig, coughing as the amber liquid burned down his throat. He chuckled as he handed the bottle over to Grayson. "It's a little rough going down," he warned.

Grayson eyed Caleb for a moment then took his own drink, coughing afterward. Grayson doubled up his fist and pounded it against his chest as he handed the bottle back. "Damn! That is rough. I hope you don't expect me to drink that swill when we're mated."

Caleb's eyes watered as scotch shot out of his nose and mouth, spraying all over the ground. "Fuck, man, don't say things like that when I'm drinking."

Grayson's smirk was aggravating. "Would you prefer I didn't agree?"

"No, but you could have picked a better time to say something."

"But you do want me to agree?"

Caleb's gaze sharpened on Grayson. He stared at the man as he used his senses to suppress all other sounds except those coming from Grayson. The voices of the men surrounding them faded away. The noise from the forest silenced.

Grayson's chest rose and fell with each long breath, but his heart rate started to speed up. Caleb knew the man was nervous and trying not to show it. He even knew Grayson knew he could hear it.

Caleb had always been able to hone in on the sounds around him, separating even the smallest noises. It gave him an edge in battle. He could hear the smallest of sounds, even the change in someone's breathing.

Grayson, on the other hand, had always been able to read Caleb's emotions like an open book. Caleb could never hide anything from

Grayson. As a potential mate, that wasn't so bad. As an adversary, it could mean Caleb's downfall.

"Yes, I want you to agree," Caleb finally said. "Why else would I have worked so long to bring this mate covenant about? Do you have any idea how hard it was to get the Council of Elders to agree with the idea, let alone sanction a mediator to make it happen?"

Grayson frowned and looked around the small clearing. "Just where is that damn mediator anyway?"

"Uh, I don't know." Caleb shrugged, not really interested in where the mediator might be in the face of having Grayson agree to be his mate. Nothing else really seemed important. "I kind of thought he'd be here by now."

Grayson whipped out his cell phone and started dialing, putting the phone to his ear. "You do know they are sending a bloodsucker, don't you?"

Caleb grimaced and nodded. "So I heard." He didn't hate vampires exactly. He just didn't like them much. His experience with them was small but none of them good. Why the Council of Elders chose to have a vampire be the mediator between him and Grayson, Caleb would never know.

Grayson talked on his phone for several moments before slamming it closed with a small curse. Caleb arched an eyebrow when Grayson started muttering to himself, his hands planted firmly on his hips.

"Grayson?"

"There's been no sign of the mediator since he left his car at the turnoff two hours ago. His contingent thought he was here mediating already."

"Fuck!" This wasn't good.

"His people are going out to look for him now. I suggest we join in on the search before our clans are accused of doing something to interfere in these peace talks. The Council of Elders would have our asses."

Caleb nodded. He couldn't agree more. If the council thought he, Grayson, or anyone from their clans had anything to do with the disappearance of the council sanctioned mediator, they were toast.

"I think we should split up," Grayson said. "We can cover more ground that way."

"I agree, but to keep everything on an even ground, I think we should pair up together." Besides, he didn't want to leave Grayson now that they were talking. He'd spent too many years away from the man.

"You and me?"

"Yes." Caleb waved his hand to the two sides of the clearing. "And the men we brought with us should pair up together as well. Your beta with my beta, and so on."

Grayson seemed to be considering the idea as he rubbed his chin. "Do you really think that's wise?"

"Hell." Caleb chuckled. "I think it's the best damn idea I've had all night."

Grayson snorted and rolled his eyes, but Caleb could swear he saw a small smile on the man's face before he turned away to motion to his men. Caleb felt almost giddy as he turned and waved his men over as well.

"The mediator that the Council of Elders sent has gone missing," Caleb began to explain as soon as all the men stood just outside of the circle. "Alpha Cane and I have decided that we need to join in the search."

Caleb could see the eyes of his men switch from him to Grayson and prayed that there would be no arguing. He didn't want to be paired off with one of his own men. He wanted to be paired with Grayson, to go off into the woods away from everyone else where they could talk without watching their words.

Hell, who was he kidding? Caleb wanted to go off into the woods and kiss Grayson and touch every sexy inch of the man's body. He'd wanted it since he'd seen the man again.

"Everyone has a cell phone, so use it if you locate the mediator," Grayson said. "And do not shift unless you absolutely have to. If the mediator truly has been taken, we have no idea who could be in these woods."

"And just to keep things kosher for the council," Caleb added, "we are pairing up together. Keenan, as my beta, you will accompany Alpha Cane's beta. Devon, Jack, each of you will go with one of Alpha Cane's clan members."

Caleb could see the disbelief and shock in all of the faces that turned to look at him. He narrowed his eyes, daring anyone to challenge his words. Keenan, Devon, and Jack immediately lowered their eyes. Grayson's men took another moment, quickly lowering their eyes when Grayson let out a small growl.

"We're trying to make peace," Caleb said. "We all know what it will mean if we are able to do this. Alpha Cane and I both expect you all to consider this your first foray into working together. Any sign of aggression between any of you will be met by a challenge by both Alpha Cane and me."

Caleb crossed his arms over his chest and took a dominant stance, legs slightly apart and a stoic glower on his face. He wanted his men, and Grayson's, to know that he was serious with his words.

Caleb didn't breathe a sigh of relief until all of the men paired off and started into the woods. His heart thumped harder in his chest when Grayson stepped up close to him. He could smell the man's clean scent, part rugged man and part earthy forest aroma. It drove Caleb crazy.

"Shall we go?" Caleb asked, stepping away a few feet. He needed the space from Grayson to keep his wits about him. He could so easily get lost in just the way the man smelled. Who knew what would happen if they actually touched?

Caleb felt Grayson walk next to him rather than heard him. The man had an impressive, controlling demeanor. Grayson commanded

any room he walked into. He always had. He certainly had Caleb's attention.

"You know that if we don't find this guy, we are totally screwed, right?"

Caleb nodded. "Yeah, I know."

"I just don't understand how a vampire could get lost in the dark coming from his car. Don't these guys have, like, night vision or something?"

"My experience with vampires is not that vast, Grayson," Caleb said as he stepped over a fallen tree trunk. "I have no idea."

"So, what do you know?" Grayson snapped.

Caleb spun around, grabbed Grayson by his shirt, and slammed him against the nearest tree. "I know I've been waiting twenty years to kiss you again." Caleb growled before taking Grayson's lips in a fierce and hungry kiss.

He demanded a response from Grayson, licking along his lips before delving inside to explore. Caleb groaned when Grayson met him head on, leaving his mouth burning with fire.

Caleb could feel every inch of Grayson's hard, muscular body pressed against his. He groaned, feeling a long-dormant tingle awaken deep within his body at Grayson's touch.

He finally tore his mouth away when there was no more air in his lungs to breathe. Caleb rested his forehead against Grayson's as he drew in deep drags of air. Even without his enhanced hearing, he could hear Grayson's heart pounding wildly.

"I've been waiting a long time to do that," Caleb finally murmured as he lifted his head to look deep into Grayson's hazel eyes. He was pleased to see the dazed excitement in them. Grayson wasn't immune to him despite their time apart.

"Should have done it sooner," Grayson panted.

Caleb grinned as he pushed himself away from Grayson and released his tight grip on the man's shirt, smoothing down the soft material. "I'll keep that in mind for next time."

"You think there's going to be a next time?"

"I know there is."

Caleb heard Grayson's soft chuckle as he began walking away and smiled at the man's whispered response. "I sure the fuck hope so."

The sounds of the forest moving through the darkness were the only noises heard for awhile as Caleb and Grayson walked. Caleb felt pretty sure that Grayson had a lot to think about. He knew he did.

He was on the verge of getting back what had been taken from him by narrow-minded people who thought two men shouldn't be together. It was so close he could almost touch it. And it all might be taken from him if they couldn't find the missing mediator.

"Do you smell that?"

Caleb stopped walking and stuck his nose in the air, sniffing. He smelled the forest, trees, and grass. He smelled a deer a few hundred feet away. He even smelled a creek not too far off. He couldn't smell anything else.

"I don't smell anything."

"It's this way," Grayson said as he started off toward their left. Caleb fell into step behind him.

"What do you smell, Grayson?"

"I can't really put my finger on it. One minute I think I smell blood and death, like someone has been in a fight. The next minute it smells like flowers."

"Flowers?" That stopped Caleb in his tracks. "You smell flowers... in a forest?"

Grayson swung around, a small glare in his narrowed eyes. "Stop making fun of me. I know what I smell."

Caleb held up both hands. "I believe you, but seriously, flowers?"

"I can't explain it. It's like smelling the freshest-cut roses, premium ones like they have in those fancy flower shops. And you and I both know they don't have fresh-cut roses in the middle of the forest."

"And the other smell?"

"It's like the exact opposite. The rose fragrance is wonderful, like a small breeze. It reminds me of the summers we used to spend down by the lake. The other one makes my hackles stand on end, like I need to get ready for a battle." Grayson frowned. "Does that make sense?"

"I can't smell it, but you have a stronger sense of smell than I do. If you smell it, I believe you. And that scares me, Grayson. There's obviously something in the forest that shouldn't be here."

"Do you think we should shift and track it down?"

"I think we have to track it down, but no, we shouldn't shift. If humans brought this smell into the forest and they catch us, our goose is cooked." Caleb pointed his finger at Grayson's face. "You just keep following that nose of yours. I'll follow you."

"I'll sniff if you listen."

"Agreed."

Caleb fell into step with Grayson as they started making their way through the woods again. He noticed after several feet that Grayson barely made a sound. He would have thought himself all alone if he didn't know the man walked next to him.

Caleb frowned when he heard a noise out of place in all the trees and underbrush. He grabbed Grayson's arm and pulled him to a stop. When Grayson glanced over at him, Caleb held his finger up to his lips then opened his senses to the forest.

A slight breeze rustled through the trees. Caleb had to close his eyes to muffle out the noise. When he did, he heard a strange sound that sent chills down his spine. There was definitely something out here in the forest that didn't belong.

Opening his eyes, Caleb looked at Grayson. "Follow your nose and quickly. There's something here, but I can't pinpoint it."

Grayson nodded, not even making a comment before he started sniffing the air again. "This way," Grayson motioned with his hand, "toward our old lair."

Caleb blinked as Grayson took off. He had forgotten about the old cave they used to meet in back when they were teenagers. Whenever

they wanted to be alone, they went to the cave they discovered together.

They found it by accident when they had been playing around in the woods. Grayson had slipped and fell part of the way down a cliff face, knocking himself unconscious.

Frantic, Caleb had carefully climbed down to the ledge Grayson landed on. He didn't notice the deep crevice in the cliff face until Grayson came to and Caleb knew he would be okay.

Curious as to where it led, the two of them had started exploring. After climbing through the small entrance several yards, the rock passageway opened up to reveal a large cavern. They'd named it their lair.

Caleb suddenly realized that Grayson was several feet in front of him and hurried to catch up. They walked quickly through the woods until they came to the large cliff face.

Grayson stopped and looked up. "It's coming from up there."

Caleb grimaced, a little perturbed that whatever Grayson smelled had invaded their sacred space. They had built a lot of memories in that lair, memories that Caleb didn't want sullied by anyone.

"Well, we're not going to find out what it is by standing around down here," Grayson said as he started to climb the rock face. Caleb was surprised that Grayson remembered the small rock steps they'd carved out as he watched the man effortlessly climb to the ledge several feet up.

A small smile on his face, Caleb started climbing until he reached Grayson's side. He peered into the small entrance and frowned. "I don't remember it being that small."

Grayson chuckled and reached over to brush his hand along Caleb's muscular arm. "That's because the rocks shrank over the years."

"The rocks shrank? That's what you're going with?"

"Well, if I said it was because you grew all those luscious, lickable muscles over the years, you might not believe me." Caleb

was left standing on the ledge with his mouth hanging open as Grayson dropped to his knees and began crawling into the small tunnel that led to their lair. "Coming?"

"I wish," Caleb mumbled to himself, grateful Grayson's sense of smell was better than his hearing, and climbed into the tunnel after the man.

The first thing he saw was Grayson's hard ass right in front of his face. Caleb groaned, suddenly finding crawling very uncomfortable when his cock hardened right up and asked for a reunion with their long-lost lover.

"Fuck, Caleb," Grayson groaned, barely above a whisper, "tone it down a bit. You know I can smell your arousal." Caleb grinned and leaned forward on his arms to bite Grayson's butt cheek through his jeans. Grayson growled deeply before quickly climbing through the rest of the tunnel. "You are such a dead man."

Chapter 3

Grayson tried to ignore the man behind him as he crawled through the last few feet of the small tunnel then climbed to his feet. He glanced around the large rock cave, surprised to see it unchanged from the last time he'd been here nearly twenty years ago.

Everything looked the same, the sandy floor, the hard, pale gray rock walls, even the small circle of stones in the middle of the room that he and Caleb used for firelight and heat.

The items they had carefully packed into the cave over the months after discovering the place were still stacked around the room. It was as if the place was totally untouched since the day they left.

"It's still the same, Caleb," Grayson whispered when he felt the man stand up next to him. He waved his hand around the cavern. "Nothing's changed. I don't even think anyone's been here since we left."

"Except him," Caleb said as he pointed to a dark figure lying on the ground. Grayson blinked. He'd been so caught up in seeing their old lair that he totally missed the man lying on the floor of the cavern.

"Damn!" Grayson snapped as he raced over to kneel on the ground next to the man. "I think it's the mediator that the Council of Elders sent."

Caleb knelt on the ground across from Grayson. Together, they gently rolled the man over onto his back. Grayson inhaled sharply at the bleeding ragged and torn wounds covering the man's body.

"What in the hell happened to him?"

"Grayson, these look like bite wounds."

"But how?" Grayson said as his hands hovered over the man. He wasn't sure where to touch him. The man seemed to be bleeding from almost everywhere. "I thought vampires could heal almost as fast as they got injured."

"Apparently not." Caleb grimaced. "The bigger question is who bit him? These are obviously wolf bites which means he was attacked by one of us. If the Council of Elders and the Vampire Council finds out about this, all hell will break lose."

Grayson absently nodded as he tried to take in the man's numerous wounds. There just seemed to be so many of them. Blood covered so much of the man's features Grayson could barely tell what he looked like.

"Okay, let's get him cleaned up a little and see how badly he's really hurt." Grayson pointed to the pile of supplies behind him. "Go see if all of our supplies are still here and bring me some water. I want to wipe this blood off of him."

As Caleb jumped up and raced across the room, Grayson started to peel back the material covering the man's bloody chest. Most of the clothing he wore was in rags. Grayson knew they'd have to be cut off.

"Caleb, we need some sort of bedding that we can lay this guy on, something cleaner than the ground. Do we still have blankets in here?" Grayson asked without looking away from the man. He knew Caleb would hear him.

"Yeah, I think so," Caleb called back.

"Bring me a knife, too. I think we're going to have to cut this guy's clothes off of him to treat all of his wounds."

Grayson started checking over what wounds he could see. Lifting the man's arm, he heard a small jingle. His eyes instantly went to the silver, metallic-looking bracelet around the man's wrist.

He reached for it, hissing when his fingers burned on contact with the metal. He immediately knew the bracelet was made of silver. Figures a vampire would have jewelry made of silver. It was the one metal that could kill a wolf.

Grayson noticed some etching on the bracelet. He used the edge of the man's sleeve to grab at the bracelet, holding it in place so he could read the words etched there.

J.O.E.L.

"Hey, Caleb, I think this guy's name is Joel."

"Why?"

"He has a bracelet on his wrist with the word etched into it, a silver bracelet."

"Well, that's not good," Caleb said as he knelt down across from Grayson a moment later. "Can you get it off?"

"I don't think so, but if we wrap it up in some cloth, we should be fine." Wolves didn't necessarily have to be shot with a silver bullet to die like in the movies. Silver poisoning could happen from prolonged exposure to silver.

Grayson reached down and ripped off a length of his shirt then tied it around the bracelet on the man's wrist. He glanced over at Caleb and held his hand out. "Knife?"

The moment Caleb handed it over Grayson began cutting Joel's clothes off. He was relieved to see that the wounds over the skin he revealed were not as bad as he first expected. Yes, the man was severely wounded, but Grayson didn't know it was life threatening.

"I'm really worried that his wounds aren't closing up, Grayson. If he bleeds out and dies, we're never going to keep approval for the mate covenant from the Council of Elders."

Grayson nodded. "Let's wipe him down then move him to the blankets. You might want to start a fire, too. I don't know if it's normal for vampires or not, but he's freezing."

Grayson started wiping the blood from Joel's body as Caleb moved away to start a fire. Within moments, Grayson could hear the fire crackling behind him. He tossed Joel's bloody clothes into the corner then lifted the man into his arms.

A small amount of blood bubbled around Joel's pale lips as Grayson set him down on the blankets Caleb had arranged beside the roaring fire. Grayson quickly wiped it away but more bubbled up.

"I think we have a problem, Caleb."

"I agree," Caleb replied. "His breathing is getting labored, and his heart rate is growing slower. I think there might be more damage than we first thought."

Grayson used the cloth in his hand to wipe off more blood. When that didn't seem to do the trick, he grabbed the bowl of water Caleb brought him and slowly poured it over the man's chest.

The water washed away the red blood, revealing huge, gaping wounds that Grayson hadn't noticed before. Well, he'd noticed them, but he hadn't thought they were that deep. He was wrong. If not treated, they could be mortal wounds.

"Okay, we need to do something. I'm not even sure this guy can survive long enough for us to get him to medical treatment," Grayson said as he looked across to Caleb. "Any bright ideas?"

Caleb looked pensive, his lower lip caught between his teeth. Grayson couldn't help himself. He reached over and smoothed his thumb across Caleb's lip until he let loose of the lip. A small hiss came out of Caleb's mouth as his eyes snapped up.

"Fuck, Grayson, you can't do that and expect me to think." Caleb sat back on his heels and rubbed his hand over the back of his neck. "It's been too many years, and I'm hanging by a thread here. You need to keep your distance."

"Or what?"

"Or I'll forget that we have a wounded man sitting between us and fuck your ass into the nearest wall." Caleb's upper lip rose as he snarled down at the unconscious man on the ground between them. "At the moment, I could really care less that he's the council mediator."

Grayson swallowed past the lump building in his throat, all at once feeling very flushed. He cast a quick glance at the fire,

wondering how big it was. It all of a sudden felt very hot in the large rock room.

"Okay, let's think here," Grayson choked out as he looked back at Caleb. "What can we do to keep this guy alive until we can get him to medical help or at least turn him over to his people?"

"Well, if he was a wolf, I'd say we use our blood on him, but I'm not sure what it would do to him." Caleb's forehead wrinkled as he frowned. "What does wolf blood do to vampires?"

Grayson shrugged. "I have no clue. I've never been around a vampire long enough to find out."

"Only one way to find out. We need to give him some of our blood," Caleb said. "The faster we get this guy on his feet, the faster we can get to the more interesting stuff."

Grayson rolled his eyes as he bit into his own wrist and dribbled the blood over Joel's wounds. The blood trickled down his wrist as if in slow motion, falling into the cuts on Joel's body drop by drop. He was astonished by how quickly Joel's wounds started to heal the moment his blood fell into the man's wounds. It was almost instantaneous.

"Shit!" Grayson exclaimed as he watched the cuts and abrasions start to heal. "It's working."

"Have you ever seen anything like this, Caleb?"

"He is a vampire, Grayson. Who knows what his constitution is like?"

Grayson grabbed the bowl of water again and poured it over Joel's chest, washing away the remaining blood. The only thing that remained was healing pink, puckered flesh. The wounds already looked to have been healing for several days.

"Look." Grayson gestured to the healing skin. "You can't tell me that this is normal."

"Grayson, he's a vampire. We're wolves. What's normal about any of this?"

"I'm just saying..."

Caleb held up his hand. "Yeah, I get what you're trying to say. But there is nothing normal about this situation. The best we can hope for is that Joel doesn't have any adverse effects from taking our blood."

"There is something else we haven't considered, Caleb. Whoever did this to him could still be looking for him, and if I can smell him, they might be able to also. We can't let Joel be found until he can stand on his own two feet. I don't want to be blamed for the death of a council sanctioned mediator."

Caleb grimaced and glanced around the cavern, his eyebrows pulled low together over his face. "No, until we know what happened to him, I think our best bet is to keep him here. If no one else has found this place in the last twenty years, we might be safe for awhile."

Grayson pointed to the pile of bloody clothes he had tossed into the corner. "We need to get rid of those, though, bury them in the forest or something. They smell of death. Anyone could follow their scent right back to us."

Caleb nodded. "Good idea. You stay here with Joel. I'll wash the clothes out in the creek then go bury them somewhere in the forest. The water should wash away most of the blood scent."

"Oh great, you're leaving me here with the bloodsucker?"

"Would you rather I stay here with him?"

Grayson growled. A feeling of intense jealousy and rage suddenly hit him like a freight train. He clenched his fists and pushed them against his thighs to keep himself from reaching across to Caleb and demanding that the man never be near another living, breathing person again in his life.

Grayson had always been jealous of any attention Caleb bestowed on anyone. He wanted all of Caleb's interest directed at him. It was something Grayson fought against every day they were together as teenagers. He knew it would be something he fought against for the rest of his life if they did indeed become mates.

"I'll stay here with the vamp. You go get rid of his clothes."

Caleb smirked as if he knew exactly what Grayson was thinking and found it amusing, which just about set Grayson's teeth on edge. "I'll be back soon. If he comes to, ask him who did this to him. It would help to know what we're up against."

Grayson couldn't agree more. They were hiding in a hidden cavern with a wounded vampire who was sent to be the mediator between their two clans. And it was obvious someone didn't want the peace treaty to go through.

Grayson didn't know if it was because of Caleb's little mate covenant idea or because they didn't want the two clans to find peace. It might even be someone in the vampire contingent. Grayson just didn't know. Until he did, neither he nor Caleb were safe, and that wasn't acceptable.

He shook his head at his morose thoughts as he covered the vampire up with another blanket then reached over to stoke the fire. If they couldn't keep the bloodsucker alive, they were screwed.

Grayson just about jumped out of his skin when he suddenly felt a frail hand wrap weakly around his wrist. He glanced down to find the deepest blue eyes he'd ever seen looking back at him, which surprised him. He didn't know vampires had blue eyes.

"Hey, how are you feeling?" Grayson asked softly as he crouched down next to the man again. "Do you hurt anywhere?"

"Blo—need blood," Joel choked out, his voice sounding broken and hoarse.

Grayson instantly offered his wrist, unsure of why he wasn't repulsed by the idea. Joel opened his mouth, but even Grayson could see the man was having problems drinking. His fangs wouldn't drop down. No fangs, no drinking directly from the source. Joel started to whimper.

"Shh, it will be okay. We'll figure out another way to do this." Grayson grabbed the knife he'd used to cut Joel's clothes off and sliced it across his wrist. Once the blood welled up, he held his wrist over Joel's mouth.

Grayson almost didn't keep the deep growl that suddenly built in his throat from escaping when Joel pressed his lips to his wrist. Even without the use of the man's fangs, it was an amazing feeling. His skin actually tingled where Joel's tongue lapped against him.

Grayson was shocked when he felt his cock start to harden. He turned his head away, suddenly ashamed of himself for feeling desire for anyone other than Caleb, especially someone that was a vampire.

The moment Joel's mouth fell away from his wrist Grayson jumped to his feet and strode across the room to pace back and forth. He rubbed his wrist as he walked, wondering how he could so easily betray what he felt for Caleb with a stranger.

When he paused to look back at the vampire, he could see Joel's blue eyes following him across the room. It was eerie the way Joel watched him, as if he wasn't afraid, only curious. Grayson wondered just how out of it the man really was.

"Who—" Joel licked his lips then tried to speak again. "Who are you?"

Grayson drew in a deep breath, gave his wrist one more rub, then slowly walked back across the room to crouch down next to Joel. "My name is Grayson Cane. I'm the alpha of the Cane Clan."

"How—" Joel frowned, his dark eyebrows drawing together as if he were confused. "Where am I?"

"You're safe, Joel."

"Joel?"

"Isn't your name Joel?" Now it was Grayson's turn to be confused. He grabbed the man's arm and lifted it, indicating the wrapped bracelet. "Your bracelet said Joel on it."

Grayson was shocked by the small laugh that fell from the man's pale lips. "Justice, Order, Ethics, Law...J.O.E.L. It stands for the belief that all beings deserve justice no matter who they are, that there is an order to everything, we must have an ethical standard of living, and no one is above the law."

"Okay." Grayson's eyes widened a little bit at the man's explanation. "Well, what is your name then?"

"Alejandro Xavier Fernando Jakue Antonio Silvanus."

"Uh, I think I'll just continue to call you Joel if you don't mind." Grayson chuckled. "It just seems easier."

"Yes, that would be fine." The smile slowly slid from Joel's face to be replaced with another confused frown. "Where am I?" he asked as he looked around the cave.

"You're in a hidden cave. Someone attacked you. Caleb and I tracked you and found you here."

"Caleb?"

"Caleb Redding, another alpha. I believe you are the mediator sent by our Council of Elders to broker the peace agreement between our two clans."

"I don't—I don't remember."

"Do you remember who attacked you? Or how you came to be in this cave?"

Joel's face scrunched up as if he were concentrating hard but finding no answers. After a moment, he shook his head. "No, I don't remember but..."

"But?"

Grayson didn't think it was possible, but Joel's face paled even more than it was before. His wide blue eyes dominated his face as he looked up at Grayson. "Wolves! I think I was attacked by wolves."

Grayson grimaced as he nodded. "That's what Caleb and I suspected. You had a lot of bite marks on your body when we found you. We patched you up the best we could but..."

"Did you—" Joel pressed his lips together into a thin line and glanced away.

"Hey," Grayson said as he reached down to smooth a stray lock of dark hair back from Joel's face. "Neither Caleb nor I did this to you. We have too much invested in getting this peace treaty underway. We would never jeopardize that."

Joel looked very upset. His eyes watered, and he sniffled as if he were fighting off tears. He kept glancing away like he didn't want to meet Grayson's eyes. At the same time, he seemed afraid to take his eyes off of Grayson.

"Joel, you are safe here. Caleb and I will protect you until you can stand on your own two feet and fight for yourself." He waved his hand around the cavern. "Caleb and I are the only two people that know about this place."

Joel looked at Grayson for several moments then nodded his head. A small smile played across his lips as the man's eyes slowly slid closed. The man's chest rose and fell as he let out a big sigh. A moment later, he was asleep.

Grayson sat back for a moment and watched Joel sleep. The man was attractive for a bloodsucker. He had the long, blue-black hair that was common to vampires. It was his deep, crystal blue eyes that set him apart from every other vampire Grayson had ever met. Vampires usually had black eyes.

Grayson was confused why he was even thinking about Joel's deep blue eyes when he had Caleb's moss green ones to look into. He didn't understand it. Maybe his fascination was because he willingly gave Joel blood to keep him alive. It was the only explanation Grayson could come up with.

Deciding he needed to get his mind off the vampire sleeping just inches from him, Grayson stood up and walked to the different stacks of supplies he and Caleb had brought to the cave so many years before.

Grayson figured he might as well find out what was still useful and what wasn't while he waited for Caleb to return. What else could he do? Watch the bloodsucker sleep?

Chapter 4

Caleb knew something was different the moment he stepped inside the cavern. The fire crackled next to the sleeping vampire, casting a low light around the room. The stacks of supplies that had previously been stacked against the walls looked like they had been gone through and restacked. They looked more organized.

The only thing that looked really out of place was the gorgeous man sitting on a bed of blankets in the corner of the room. Caleb sucked in a breath when the man stood up. Grayson's chest and feet were bare, his only item of clothing the tight jeans that hugged his lower body like a glove.

Damn, the man was fine! Grayson had been a deliciously handsome adolescent boy that filled all of Caleb's teenage fantasies. He made a stunning man. Caleb could already foresee many wet dreams with Grayson in the starring role.

"Grayson, is everything okay?" Caleb asked when Grayson didn't come out of the corner, just looked at him across the room. He glanced down at the sleeping man by the fire, gesturing to him. "Did the vamp wake up?"

Grayson nodded but didn't move from his spot on the blankets. "Yeah, he thinks he was attacked by wolves, but he doesn't remember much about it."

"Well, we kind of already suspected that. Did he say anything else?"

"No, but I think we're going to have to give him more blood before he is fully healed. The little bit that I was able to give him

seemed to bring some color back to his cheeks, but I think he'll need more."

Caleb arched an eyebrow when he noticed Grayson avoiding his eyes. Something more was going on here than just the injured vampire. It might have been the better part of twenty years since Caleb had been this close to Grayson, but he could still tell when the man was avoiding him. He'd seen it happen time and time again over the years at the Lykan Gatherings.

"Grayson," Caleb asked as he took a few steps closer to the man, "are you sure everything is okay?"

"Yeah, everything is fine." Grayson rubbed the back of his neck as if it felt strained. "This day is just a little hard to take in, you know? A lot has happened."

"It's not over, Grayson. You know that, right? If this vampire doesn't make it, the Council of Elders and the Vampire Council will have our asses in a sling. And we still have no idea who did this to him."

"Well, it's obvious that something is going on. I figure either someone doesn't want us to be together or they don't want our packs to be together. Either way, it's in our best interest to make sure this guy doesn't kick the bucket."

Caleb nodded as he took a few more steps across the room. He couldn't agree more with Grayson. Keeping the vampire alive was their only option. He was the only one who knew who attacked him and why.

Caleb continued to stalk Grayson across the room until he stood directly in front of the man. The musky, masculine fragrance that was a natural part of the man swamped Caleb's senses, making his toes curl with delight. He'd missed the deep scent of the man. Caleb inhaled deeply, needing more.

He growled low in his throat. Now came the hard part in his decision to try and create a way for them to be together. The Council of Elders had stipulations, just as Grayson suspected.

Caleb stepped back. The corner of his mouth lifted in a half smile when Grayson snarled in protest. Caleb leaned back against the cave wall and pulled his shoes and socks off, setting them on the floor.

Next, he pulled his shirt off over his head then folded it and set it on top of his shoes. When he stood in nothing except his jeans like Grayson, Caleb crossed back over to him until they stood chest to chest, just an inch of air between them.

Grayson's chest rose and fell with his rapid breathing, a sure sign the man was aroused. If that hadn't been enough for Caleb, the large bulge creating a wet spot behind the fly of Grayson's jeans would have done the trick.

"I've missed you, Grayson," he whispered softly. He reached up and brushed back a lock of dark brown hair from Grayson's temple. "The last twenty years have been hard without you."

He inhaled sharply when Grayson's hands gripped his hips and pulled him closer until their bodies brushed against each other. "Seems to me that is not the only thing that is hard."

Caleb whimpered when he felt Grayson's hand wrap around the nape of his neck, the man's fingers digging deep into his hair as he was pulled forward until their lips met.

Caleb's calm was shattered by the hunger of Grayson's kiss. The man didn't simply kiss, he consumed. The kiss was slow and thoughtful yet hungry and demanding all at the same time.

Grayson's lips were hard and searching, his tongue brushing against Caleb's until he opened his mouth and let Grayson in. It was a delicious sensation that Caleb sank into. He gripped Grayson's shoulders, wishing he could climb into the man and soak up his heat.

Each touch of Grayson's tongue against his was scorching. Each feel of silky skin beneath his hands was intoxicating. Caleb's mind began to reel, his senses overloading as desire started to burn throughout his entire body.

Ripping his mouth away from Grayson, he looked into the man's dark hazel eyes. Grayson was just an inch or so shorter than Caleb but

the intensity of his stare made him seem so much bigger. Grayson filled every spare inch of space around them until nothing else existed but the two of them.

Caleb dropped to his knees and tilted his head forward, barring the nape of his neck to Grayson. He could feel the immediate stiffening of Grayson's body at his submissive gesture and held his breath as he waited for the alpha's reaction.

"Caleb, what are you doing?"

"You are the alpha."

"So are you."

Caleb hid his grin by looking down at Grayson's feet then groaned. Even the man's feet were sexy, long, thin, and elegant. Caleb had a sudden urge to lick them and pressed his lips together, clenching his hands on his thighs for a moment before flattening them out, palms down.

"Caleb?"

Caleb tilted his head back and slowly looked up the tall body standing before him. He drew in a deep breath as he took in the thick thighs encased in tight jeans, the substantial bulge behind the man's zipper, and the flat, rippling abdomen that led to a wide, muscular chest.

"Damn," Caleb hissed, "you're gorgeous."

"I'm glad you think so, but I still want to know why you're being subservient to me. You're as much an alpha as I am, Caleb. You shouldn't be on your knees, barring your neck to me."

"Yes, I should." Caleb could see the confusion in Grayson's eyes. He knew Grayson didn't understand, but he could also see the arousal his position at Grayson's feet brought to the man. Every alpha desired being on top. "You know that *catch* you mentioned before, the council's stipulation to our being together?"

"Yes."

"This is it." Caleb chuckled lightly, not really feeling amused but more self depreciating. "I think they were testing me, wanting to

know how serious I really was about wanting this mate covenant. Maybe they thought I wouldn't go through with it if I needed to agree to their stipulations."

"What stipulations?" The way Grayson arched his eyebrow was graceful and stunning all at the same time. Any normal man would have been brought to his knees just from that intimidating stare. Caleb thought it was a good thing he was already on his knees.

"I must be submissive to you in all things. Our packs will be banded together but under your rule, with me as your second. In our mating, I must be submissive to you also, allowing you to mark me as your mate."

Caleb heard Grayson's sharp inhale, but he watched the man closely enough that he didn't miss the quick flicker of flame that ignited in Grayson's eyes at his words. Caleb knew the thought of leaving a mating mark on him excited Grayson.

All alphas left a mating mark on their mates. It was a sign of ownership in the old times, a sign to be wary in present times. Alphas were innately territorial, even more so over their mates.

Caleb also knew that no alpha in recorded history had ever been given a mating mark. Alphas didn't submit. Others submitted to them. By yielding to Grayson, Caleb was allowing the man's ownership of him to be visible for all to see.

Strangely enough, the very idea sent a tremble of anticipation through Caleb. He wanted everyone to know he belonged to Grayson. He wanted to wear the man's mark. He just mourned the idea that he would never be able to leave his own mating mark on Grayson. He wanted everyone to know that the big alpha belonged to him.

"You agreed to this?" Grayson sounded so astounded that Caleb had to smile. He was pretty sure Grayson never thought he would agree to anything that took away his alpha status, but for Caleb, it was merely a word.

"Yes, and quite willingly actually. I'm sure I shocked the Council of Elders at how quickly I agreed to their stipulations. But I would

have agreed to anything to get us back together. If having you as my alpha is what it takes, then consider me your servant, Alpha Cane."

"Fuck, Caleb, you..." Grayson shook his head as he rubbed his hand over his face.

Caleb could see the deep desire to mark him in the strained lines of Grayson's face. He knew the man was fighting with everything in him to keep from attacking. Already, Grayson's canines had dropped down. Caleb could see the tips sticking out below his lip.

"Do you not want to mark me, Grayson?" Caleb dropped his head down, afraid of what Grayson's answer might be. They had been attached at the hip twenty years ago. That didn't mean Grayson still felt the same way, especially after everything that had happened between their two clans since then.

Caleb began to feel uncomfortable with the silence that filled the room after his question. Grayson wasn't answering one way or the other. He wasn't saying anything. He didn't even sound like he was breathing.

Caleb chanced a small peek through the fall of his hair. His mouth dropped open at the fierce glare on Grayson's face. Had he been wrong in his assumption that Grayson would want them back together? The words Grayson spoke this evening said no. Caleb's heart said he had no clue.

Caleb clenched his fists and tried to suppress his need to insist on a reply. He knew giving up his alpha tendencies and deferring to Grayson would not be an easy feat for him. He was alpha born, meant to lead, not follow.

He wanted this mate covenant so bad, wanted Grayson. He just had to remember that and stay on his knees instead of leaping to his feet to demand an answer like his instincts told him to do.

"Is this what you want, Caleb?" Grayson finally asked after what seemed like hours. Caleb let out a relieved sigh and nodded his head. He wanted this more than anything he could think of.

"I know it won't be easy submitting to you, but I would do anything if it meant we could be together again."

"You know we are not the same people we were twenty years ago." Grayson dramatically rolled his eyes. "Hell, we might not even like each other anymore. How do you know this will work?"

"I don't, but I also don't believe you could change that much in twenty years. Even if you could, you have always dealt honorably in your interactions between our clans, no matter what the situation. I have to believe that means you are still the man I knew all of those years ago."

"Christ, could you at least look at me, Caleb? I don't like looking at the top of your head while we're talking."

Caleb pressed his lips together, an angry retort simmering just behind his lips as he tilted his head back. He knew it would be hard to submit, but he didn't know it would be this hard. "Is this better?"

Grayson stared down at him for a moment then let out a shaky chuckle. "No, not really, but I suppose it will have to do." Grayson suddenly squatted down in front of Caleb until they were eye to eye. "Are you really going to submit to me? Seriously?"

"That is the plan."

"And you think you can?" Grayson asked. "You're an alpha, Caleb. How do you plan on suppressing all of your alpha tendencies with me? I can already see your hands clenching into fists. You either want to grab me or deck me."

"A little of both, I think." Caleb chuckled nervously.

"And how do you think you're going to keep from doing that for the rest of our lives? There are sure to be times when being an alpha becomes more intense. What if you don't like the way I deal with your clan members or if I do something you don't like? How are you going to keep yourself under control then?"

"I guess I'll have to deal with that when the times comes." Caleb didn't have all the answers. Even now, kneeling on the ground at Grayson's feet was one of the hardest things he'd ever done. He hadn't

been subservient to anyone since his father died and he became the alpha of his clan.

On the other hand, kneeling on the ground gave him the perfect opportunity to get a long look at the sexy man Grayson had become. And he liked what he saw, so much so that his cock throbbed.

Caleb's eyes almost crossed when Grayson stood to his feet and the man's bulging crotch became eye level with Caleb's face. In all of the years they'd been apart, Caleb had yet to meet anyone that filled out a pair of jeans the way Grayson did. The man was a work of art.

The sound of Grayson's zipper slowly coming down drew Caleb's gaze. His heart stuttered in his chest. The breath caught in his throat as he watched dark, hard flesh become visible to his hungry eyes.

Suddenly, Grayson's cock stood out long, wide, and proudly before Caleb. He licked his lips, remembering how that thick shaft felt in his mouth twenty years ago. And damned if Grayson hadn't grown here, too. Caleb wasn't sure he could actually get his mouth around Grayson's girth, but he sure wanted to try.

Caleb almost wept when Grayson grabbed the base of his cock and tapped the tip against his lips. "Prove you can be submissive to me, Caleb," the man whispered hoarsely. "Suck my cock."

Caleb readily opened his mouth and allowed Grayson to push his hard length inside. He doubted Grayson knew how much Caleb really wanted this. It had nothing to do with being submissive. He craved the feeling of Grayson's cock in his mouth.

Caleb groaned as drops of pre-cum exploded across his tongue. The taste of the man hadn't changed in twenty years, that was for sure. Caleb remembered it like it was yesterday, sweet, tangy, and entirely too addictive.

Caleb closed his lips around Grayson's cock and sucked as much of the man's length into his mouth as he could. No matter how much he swallowed, Caleb was pretty sure a couple of inches remained.

He did his best to make up for that by pulling off the man and licking the sides. He even went as far as to bend down and suck

Grayson's balls into his mouth before moving back to the tip of his cock again.

"Oh yeah, just like that." Grayson groaned. "Fuck, your mouth feels like heaven, Caleb."

Caleb grinned around the shaft in his mouth then went back to the job at hand. The small slit on the head of Grayson's cock intrigued Caleb, especially the small drops of pre-cum that seemed to be constantly leaking from there.

Caleb gripped the base of the hard organ and licked at the slit like an ice cream cone. He could feel Grayson's body shudder with each swipe of his tongue and hoped he was arousing Grayson as much as he was aroused.

"Enough!" Grayson suddenly growled as he pushed Caleb away.

Caleb sat back on his heels and looked up at Grayson as he licked his lips. He bemoaned the loss of the man's cock in his mouth, but he was pretty sure it was going to be somewhere else real soon if the pinched look on Grayson's face was anything to go by.

"Get rid of your clothes," Grayson ordered.

Caleb felt his legs shake as he stood up and moved over to his pile of clothes. He turned to face Grayson as he undid his jeans and pushed them down his legs. He couldn't help but smile when he heard Grayson's deep inhale as his naked body was revealed. Caleb hadn't bothered with underwear.

Still, Grayson's biggest surprise was yet to come. Caleb came to the peace meeting with a plan in mind. He knew if Grayson agreed to the mate covenant, he'd end up getting fucked at some point. He was prepared and then some.

Caleb cocked an eyebrow at Grayson. "Where would you like me, Alpha Cane?"

Grayson's upper lip curled as he growled, the sound rumbling through the quiet chamber. Caleb felt pretty sure that Grayson was nearing the end of his control. Part of him thrilled at the prospect, his skin tingling with anticipation.

Another part of Caleb had to be tamped down. The alpha wolf in Caleb demanded that he attack and make Grayson submit to him, that he should be the top wolf. It would be a battle of wills to see if Caleb could control that instinctual part of himself.

Grayson pointed to the bed of blankets he'd made. Caleb could feel Grayson's eyes follow him across the room almost like a caress along his naked skin. Caleb almost stumbled as he stepped onto the blankets and knelt down on his hands and knees, the desire to grab Grayson and wrestling him down to the bed almost more than he could take.

Caleb didn't remember this need to dominate Grayson when they were together all those years ago, but they weren't alphas then. That must be why the need was there now and not then. Caleb gritted his teeth as he lowered himself down onto the blankets. He needed to maintain control at least until Grayson claimed him. He could deal with the fallout after that, when he was alone.

"Fuck, I figured out your plan, Alpha Redding," Grayson said. "You're going to kill me and take over both clans."

Caleb wiggled his ass, knowing without a doubt that Grayson's eyes were on the black butt plug in his ass. "I wanted to make sure I was prepared to submit to you, Alpha Cane. I'm your second-in-command now, and I'm supposed to anticipate your needs before you have them."

Grayson's response was a cross between a chuckle and a snort. "I think you'll make a very able second-in-command."

Caleb yelped when Grayson's hand came down on his ass then quickly turned red with embarrassment. He couldn't ever remember anyone smacking his ass. He certainly never heard a yelp come out of his mouth before.

Grayson was going to think he'd turned into a weenie in the last twenty years. Caleb was sure of it. The trembling of his body didn't help any, but Caleb couldn't seem to stop. He almost slanted his ass

up to receive another smack just so he could feel Grayson's hand on his body.

He got his wish when Grayson's hand stroked down the middle of his back to where the butt plug sat. Caleb's head reared back, and a strangled moan slipped past his gritted teeth when Grayson began fiddling with the plug, wiggling it.

"Grayson!"

"Do you like that, Caleb?" Grayson asked. Caleb was mollified by the fact that Grayson's voice didn't sound too steady. He didn't want to be the only one feeling out of control right now.

"Wish it was you," he said instead, because he did. As much as he needed to dominate Grayson, he also needed to feel the man's cock pound him into the blankets below. Caleb had been planning for years to be exactly where he was right now.

"It's the alpha's duty to see to the needs of his clan members."

Caleb knew that and was grateful for that fact when he felt Grayson pull the plug out. A moment later, the hot, hard head of Grayson's cock pressed against him. Caleb pressed his lips together and dug his fingers into the blanket as Grayson started to push in.

He had been in this position with Grayson before, and this time should be no different, but it was, and he knew it was. This time it wasn't two horny teenagers playing around. It was one alpha claiming another.

Besides, Grayson was much bigger this time. Caleb winced as the man pushed home, suddenly knowing that he needed to get a bigger butt plug. Grayson was even bigger than the hard piece of rubber.

When Grayson finally stopped moving, a deep sigh coming from him, Caleb let out the breath he'd been holding. "Damn, you grew, Grayson," he gasped as the man filled him.

"And your ass still feels as fantastic now as it did twenty years ago." Grayson groaned as he moved just a little, two small jabs of his cock. "You're still as tight and hot as you were back then."

"I was an alpha. I topped, remember? I haven't had someone inside of me since the last time you were there." Caleb dug his fingers into the blanket and imposed an iron control on himself to keep from turning over and tossing Grayson down to the ground beneath him.

Grayson's hand caressed the curve of his ass. He seemed to understand exactly what Caleb felt. "You're still an alpha, Caleb. You always will be no matter what role you decide to take in our clan."

He thought he had matured enough to not fall under Grayson's spell anymore. He was wrong. He could feel Grayson's words resonating inside of him like a tidal wave. Caleb was unable to stop himself from pressing back against Grayson, pushing the man's cock further inside of his ass.

"Fuck," Grayson growled as his fingers dug into Caleb's hips. "I really wish you hadn't done that. I was trying to go slow, Caleb."

"Don't want slow."

"Even if you did, it's too late now," Grayson said as he started moving.

Caleb was unprepared for Grayson's reaction to his movements or his words. He hadn't wanted slow, but he wasn't ready for the intensity of Grayson's thrusts as the man pounded into his ass.

Caleb had to lock his arms in place as he was pushed forward by the power behind Grayson's thrusts. His chest felt like it would burst as Grayson took him, claimed him, and marked him from the inside out. It was a raw act of possession, and Caleb couldn't control the trembling in his body as he readily accepted Grayson.

Caleb could feel the intense pressure building in his body as Grayson's cock moved in and out with exquisite precision. Grayson was made to fuck. Every line of his gorgeous body was meant to entice others. Every movement was meant to elicit a response that Caleb was unable to deny.

He heard small whimpers fill the room, but it took a moment for him to realize that they fell from his lips. He briefly considered biting his lip to keep his silence but then decided he was beyond that. He

needed to let Grayson know how much he wanted what was happening between them.

Caleb opened his mouth, panting heavily as he let each and every moan fall from his lips until they became cries of pleading. "Grayson, please," Caleb begged as he arched his back and dropped his head down, barring his neck.

"You know I have to shift, Caleb."

"Yes."

Even though he spoke the words, nothing could have prepared Caleb for the feeling of Grayson shifting into his werewolf form. His breath hitched in his throat as the hands holding his hips grew larger, claws growing from the tips.

Caleb suddenly felt surrounded as Grayson's body grew until the man hovered over him. He knew without looking that Grayson would be nearly seven feet tall if he stood. His body would look more muscular, stronger. He was in his most powerful form.

Electricity seemed to arc through Caleb's body as the cock pounding into his ass grew larger, longer, until Grayson could barely move. Pain mingled with pleasure until Caleb didn't know which one he liked more.

"Caleb." Grayson's voice was rough and gravelly and burned Caleb down to his toes. His body began to vibrate, anticipating Grayson's next move. To mark him, Grayson had to claim him in werewolf form. It was the only way the mating mark would remain when Grayson was done.

Strong, furry arms suddenly wrapped around Caleb's chest. He was pulled up and back until his back was pressed against Grayson's muscular chest. Caleb cried out, his head dropping back to Grayson's chest as the man pushed even further inside of him. Caleb didn't think he had ever been filled so much.

His legs were spread apart so far as they rested on each side of Grayson's thighs, they actually ached. When Grayson planted a hand on his chest, it covered him almost from breast to groin.

Caleb sighed deeply, surrendering to Grayson's masterful seduction. Caleb was a big man, standing at nearly six and a half feet tall. Being held by Grayson as he was made him feel smaller than he ever remembered feeling, but Grayson's touch was gentle, almost as if he knew he was larger and could harm Caleb.

"Mine!" Grayson growled in a deep, rumbled voice.

Caleb was drawn to the height of passion as Grayson's hand wrapped around his aching cock and he began stroking Caleb. The other hand held him still as Grayson's hips pumped into him. Each movement was slow and measured, Grayson drawing out until just the head of his cock remained inside of Caleb's ass, then thrusting back in until nothing remained between them, not even air.

"Always been mine!"

"Yes!"

"Give me what I want," Grayson demanded. "Come for me."

Caleb could no more deny Grayson's demand than he could deny the hand stroking him or the cock thrusting into his ass. He cried out as he fragmented, exploding into a million glowing stars.

The growl building in his ear increased as he spurted out all over the hand wrapped around his cock. Caleb bucked against Grayson, his skin becoming sensitive and achy. His cries turned to winded groans when Grayson refused to stop stroking him.

"Submit to me."

"Grayson," Caleb whispered hoarsely. He dropped his head forward until his chin rested on his chest. He felt Grayson's heavy breath blow across his neck a moment before pain exploded in his body as the man bit into his skin.

Caleb thought for a moment that the claiming would be all pain until he felt Grayson's tongue move across the skin of his neck as the man bit him. The pain combined with a sudden pleasure that was so intense, spots swam in Caleb's eyes.

Caleb's world exploded as a hot tide of passion raged through both of them, connecting them. Heat rippled across his skin at the loud roar

Grayson released in his ear as he came, filling Caleb's ass with hot seed. Grayson's hand tightened around Caleb, sending him into another orgasm, this one stealing the very breath from Caleb's lungs.

Caleb felt achy and exhausted as Grayson nuzzled his throat. His body felt liquid, lethargic. Grayson's hands gently stroked Caleb's body as if the man wanted to sooth him.

Caleb sighed deeply. The back of his neck ached from Grayson's bite. He knew it would take a little while to heal, but when it was done, he would have a mating mark that would last for his entire life. Everyone would know that he belonged to Grayson. That was enough for Caleb.

He closed his eyes and gave in to the exhaustion plaguing his body. Just before sleep claimed him, Caleb heard Grayson speak one word that made him smile, that made his life complete, because it was whispered in his mind through their telepathic link.

"Mine."

Chapter 5

Joel's thoughts scampered wildly around as he woke. He was puzzled and more than a little nervous about his strange surroundings, but most of all, he was hungry, bone-deep, starving, hungry. He felt like his innards were shrinking from lack of food.

Sheer black fright filled him as he looked around his surroundings, not recognizing where he was beyond knowing he was inside of some sort of cave. He did recognize the scent of wolf, though, and it raised his hackles.

He was in danger, a warning voice whispered in his head, but the hunger he felt created a red haze in his mind, overcoming his need to reach safety. His need to feed was overcoming everything.

Joel rolled to his hands and knees and looked around the large rock room. His eyes immediately fell on the two men sleeping off in one corner of the room. Joel's upper lip curled as he allowed his fangs to drop down.

Blood.

He could smell blood in the air. It was mixed with the intoxicating scent of sex. Joel was suddenly as much aroused as he was hungry. He wanted blood, and he wanted to take it while fucking something.

Joel's fingers dug into the dirt as he clawed his way to his feet. He swayed, feeling dizzy, and knew he had just minutes to ingest blood or he would turn more animal than man. He was nearly there as it was.

Joel staggered across the room until he stood over the two sleeping men. He sniffed the air again and followed the scent of blood

right back to the two men at his feet. Blood had been shed between the men and recently.

His claws extended even more, his fangs tingling in anticipation as he cited the recent wound on the back of the neck of the light brown-haired man. He could see specks of dried blood on the man's neck almost as if they taunted him, dared him.

Joel hissed, the last of his control slipping away in a blinding flash as the scent of blood and sex filled his senses. He dropped to his knees and reached for the light brown-haired man, sinking his teeth into his flesh before the man even knew what hit him.

Joel distantly heard someone cry out then a loud growl filled the cavern before pain radiated across his back and arms. He refused to let go of his prey even as he was pulled away.

When his mouth was ripped away from the bite mark he'd been sucking at, Joel turned on the man holding him. He sank his teeth into the nearest piece of flesh he could reach and swallowed the blood that filled his mouth in great gulps. A sudden pounding began to throb in his head. His cock hardened to an almost painful stiffness.

Joel snarled, his mind a haze of pain and need. He clawed and fought to keep the blood flowing, knowing it would heal him. Not even the wolf teeth he felt cutting into his back and arms could make him willingly release his prize.

Hot, succulent blood filled his mouth again, making his cock harden even more. Blinding hot agony struck Joel. His heart hammered. His breathing turned ragged. A long, mournful groan fell from his lips as a bloodlust orgasm was ripped from his body.

The sudden blinding pain in his head threatened to make him pass out. He grabbed his head as flash after flash of white light shot through him. Joel opened his mouth and screamed as the agony filling his body overcame even his need to feed.

He felt like he was being bombarded. Pain and agony filled every cell in his body. Joel knew he was going to fragment at any second if

he didn't die first. His skin heated to the point that it seemed like it was being flayed from his body with a hot poker.

Joel collapsed on the floor and curled into the fetal position. He felt hands run over his body but had no energy to lift his head and see who touched him. He wasn't sure he cared.

Something was growing in his head, a pressure that caused every nerve ending in his body to short circuit. His body wouldn't do what he wanted, wouldn't move the way he wanted. It betrayed him on every level.

Even now, with pain filling every pore of his being, Joel could feel his cock harden again as the scent of the two men surrounding him filled his senses. Joel's entire body arched, becoming bow string tight as he exploded into a mind-numbing orgasm for the second time in so many minutes.

A bloody wrist was suddenly shoved in front of his face. Joel latched on, the sweet taste of wolf blood filling his mouth even as he sank his fangs into the soft flesh. The pain radiating throughout his body started to fade until the scent of the second man's blood filled his nose.

Joel groaned as his cock grew hard again. He throbbed, ached. He never in his life felt this level of need, not even for blood. Blood red tears blinded Joel as he tore at his pants, anxious to alleviate the agony in his engorged shaft. He clawed at his pants until another hand brushed his away.

Joel cried out, his hips bucking as he felt a stranger's hand wrap around his aching cock. The blood rushing through his body thundered in his ears, drowning out every other sound until he could hear nothing but the beating of his own heart.

His world narrowed down to the hand around his cock and the wrist in his mouth, providing him with life-giving blood. Nothing else mattered, not even drawing air into his lungs.

Just as the lights around him began to dim, Joel felt the hand around his cock give him an extra squeeze, a thumb stroking across

the small slit at the head of his cock. Joel cried out, his voice hoarse from screaming as another orgasm raged through him, this one stealing the very world around him until nothing else was left but blackness, then nothing was left at all.

* * * *

Joel groaned as he slowly opened his eyes. He blinked several times until the room came into focus, little stray spots of red filling his eyes. When his vision finally cleared, he frowned at the wall he faced.

He had no idea where he was, but he was obviously inside of some sort of rock room, maybe a cavern, and he was lying on his side. Joel tried to sit up only to find himself tied up, his wrists bound behind him.

Joel's heart started to race as he tried to remember how he ended up in this position, but his mind was blank. He remembered driving on his way to negotiate a peace treaty between two wolf clans but nothing beyond that.

Joel wondered if the talks had gone bad. Was he even now being held by one of the factions he'd been sent to mediate between? Joel closed his eyes and opened his senses.

His heart pounded faster when he heard two distinct breathing patterns behind him. He also smelled wolves, sex, and blood, a lot of blood. That disturbed him but not as much as the scent of wolves did.

Vampires and wolves were not usually on friendly terms. Joel had agreed to mediate between the two clans as a favor for a friend that served on the werewolf Council of Elders. He had no idea it would end him up knee deep in shit.

The scent of sex mystified Joel to no end but mostly because he could smell his own scent mixed in with that of the two other men in the room. Considering they were wolves, Joel had no idea how *that* had happened.

Joel rolled to his stomach then slowly inched his way up until he could push himself to his knees. Sitting back on his heels, he glanced around the cavern, and it was a cavern. Joel noticed that right off. The rock walls and dirt floor were a dead giveaway.

He also noticed two sets of angry eyes watching his every move from several feet away. The men watching him didn't seem to be in very good shape, cuts and abrasions and teeth marks marring their tanned skin.

"Did I do that?" Joel asked softly, wondering why his throat felt sore and scratchy. Both men nodded, their faces looking thunderous. Joel was pretty sure he was in a whole lot of trouble. "I apologize."

"And you think your apology is enough after we tried to save your sorry ass?" the darker haired of the two men snapped. Clearly the man was angry. "You attacked us for no reason."

"Grayson!" the other man admonished. "He obviously doesn't remember attacking us. Maybe we should ask him what he does remember before we jump to conclusions."

"Fine!" Grayson snapped. "You ask him, but if he tries anything, I will rip his entrails out and use them as shoes laces."

"Graphic, but effective." The other man snickered. "Besides, he's tied up. I doubt he can do anything but kneel there."

"He's a bloodsucker. I don't trust him."

Joel wanted desperately to roll his eyes. He'd been called a bloodsucker so many times in his life that he'd grown immune to the idle insult, and he knew that was exactly what it was, an insult. Grayson was obviously trying to get a reaction out of him. It wasn't going to happen. Joel was known for his calm patience.

"My name is Alejandro Xavier Fernan—"

"We already decided on Joel." Grayson growled. "Your name is just too fucking long. Why can't you guys pick something simple like *Bob*? Do you think it makes you sound more important to have six names?"

Oh, this man was obviously looking for a fight. Joel clenched his fists behind his back and swore he wouldn't give him one. "Joel? And how did we come to this name?"

Grayson rolled his eyes and gestured toward him with a big sweep of his hand. "Duh! Your bracelet? You know, J.O.E.L.? Justice, Order, Ethics, Law?"

"Oh, yes, that does make sense," Joel agreed. "And you are?"

"I am Alpha Grayson Cane, and this is Alpha Caleb Redding. I believe you were sent by our Council of Elders to mediate the peace agreement between our clans?"

"Yes."

Joel was a little confused. The two men sitting before him didn't seem like the mortal enemies he'd read up on to prepare himself for the peace meeting. In fact, if he had to hazard a guess, he would say that they were mated to each other.

Something about that thought sent a cord of alarm through Joel's body. He wasn't sure he liked the idea or not. He tried to mask it by looking around the large rock room they were in. "And where are we?"

"Where we are doesn't concern you, bloodsucker," Grayson snapped. "If you think I'm going to give you the location of our lair, you're sadly mistaken. I wouldn't give you the location of hell."

Joel's eyebrows shot up. "I'm beginning to see why you might have needed a mediator."

"We didn't need a mediator to solve our problems, Joel. We did that all on our own while you were unconscious. Grayson didn't have anger like this until you attacked us without provocation."

"Again, I apologize for that. I do not at this time understand why I attacked you. Maybe you can fill me in on the events that led up to it."

"What's the last thing you remember?" Caleb asked. He seemed the calmer of the two men.

"I was in my car on the way to mediate the peace meeting between your two clans. We arrived at the drop-off spot between the

two clan territories, and my driver let me out. I don't remember anything after that until I woke up here."

"Well, fuck, you have missed a lot then." Grayson chuckled. "That was two days ago."

"Two days?" Joel gasped in shock. "I've been here for two days?"

"We arrived at the meeting circle between the two clans the night before last. When you didn't arrive, we went in search of you. Grayson and I tracked you here, an old hideout of ours from our younger years."

"Why didn't I arrive on time?"

"From what we understood from you," Caleb said, "you had been attacked."

"And we don't know who did it," Grayson added. "We felt it was better to keep you here where you could heal, where we could insure your safety. If the Council of Elders thought we had attacked you, all the negotiations would be called off, and we couldn't have that."

"And that's when I attacked you?"

"No." Grayson shook his head. "We treated your wounds that evening and talked briefly. You attacked us the next morning."

Joel suddenly felt a chill run up his back as he looked into the cautious eyes of both men. He had a feeling he knew exactly why he might have attacked them. If he was right, he was in a lot of trouble.

"Did you give me your blood?" Joel whispered, crossing his fingers as he prayed they hadn't. The results could be disastrous if they did.

"Yes, of course. Your wounds were not healing properly, and we didn't know of any other way to treat you. Your fangs wouldn't drop, so we dribbled blood into your wounds. They healed right up after that."

"Bo-both of you?" Joel choked out past the lump that formed in his throat.

"No," Caleb said, frowning. "Just Grayson."

Joel groaned. He was fucked! "Did either of you drink any of my blood?" he asked quickly.

"We might have," Caleb said, shrugging. "The fight between us was pretty intense. I know there was a lot of biting involved on all sides."

"Why is that an issue?" Grayson asked. "We share blood between us all of the time."

"Because you're werewolves, damn it!" Joel shouted, finally letting his anger free. "I'm a fucking vampire. Vampires and werewolves do not mix."

"You seem to be breathing just fine to me," Grayson snapped back.

"And now you know why I attacked you."

Caleb glanced away from Joel to look at Grayson. His eyebrows were drawn together in a confused frown when he looked back. "I don't understand. You're alive, your wounds are healed. What does that have to do with you attacking us?"

"Could you untie me, please," Joel spit out. "I won't be attacking you again."

"Why should we believe you?" Grayson asked.

"Please?" Joel said again. "This is going to take a little explaining, and I'd prefer to do it on an even footing."

Caleb smacked Grayson's arm when the man didn't move. "Go untie him. It'll be fine. Besides, there are two of us and only one of him. If he tries anything, you can eat him."

Grayson rolled his eyes but climbed to his feet and walked closer. He squatted down next to Joel and flicked a small knife through the ropes binding Joel's arms. Just before he got up, Grayson leaned in and hissed in Joel's ear.

"Step in Caleb's direction or threaten him in any way and I will slit your throat without a hint of remorse. Understood?"

Joel swallowed hard. "Understood." The moment Grayson stood up and stepped back to stand next to Caleb, Joel brought his hands around to the front of his body and started rubbing his sore wrists.

He kept a careful eye on both men, watching them and learning them. He knew without a doubt that his previous assessment was correct. These two men were mated. Which begged the question of why he was brought in to mediate a peace treaty between them?

"How much do you know about vampires?" he asked after a few moments of silence.

"What's to know?" Grayson asked. "You drink blood to survive. You can't go out in sunlight. And you can't be trusted."

"Are you like this all of the time?" Joel asked. Joel wasn't a shrimp by any means. He was in fact, one of the tallest members of his coven, but standing next to Grayson made him feel almost dainty. He refused to back down or show any hint of fear when Grayson took a menacing step toward him.

"I'm like this when people attack me!"

"I didn't mean to attack you," Joel countered loudly. "I was in bloodlust, out of my mind. I had no control of my actions."

Grayson opened his mouth, but Joel waved him away as he rolled his eyes. "I know, that doesn't excuse me, and I don't expect it to, but I truly did not have control of myself. That is what happens when you mix werewolf and vampire blood."

"Vampires and werewolves have been fighting for centuries," Caleb said as he stood to his feet. He crossed his arms over his chest and regarded Joel as if almost curious. "Yet, I've never seen someone react the way you did."

And there was the issue at heart, Joel thought to himself as he gazed around the cavern. "What do you know of the history between vampires and werewolves?"

"What does this have to do with our present situation?" Grayson asked.

"More than you know." Joel chuckled nervously. It was times like this that he wished he had something strong to drink, like a truck load of rock gut bourbon. "What you've probably been taught is not necessarily the truth."

"What do you mean?"

Joel smirked at Grayson's growled words. The man was quick to temper, but he seemed to have a rigid control on acting on his anger. Joel hoped that boded well for the future, especially after the man heard about what he had to say.

"In centuries past, vampires and werewolves worked side by side. We had a symbiotic relationship, complimenting each other. Vampires provided a mired of abilities to werewolves, and in exchange, werewolves provided vampires with blood and protection, especially in the daytime."

"What sort of abilities?" Caleb asked.

"Symbiotic relationship? Are you nuts?" Grayson asked at the same time.

Joel decided to ignore Grayson and instead turned to answer Caleb. "We provided longer life to werewolves. Our blood gave them better night sight, a better sense of smell, and better hearing."

"And in exchange, all we had to do was be your milk cow." Grayson snorted.

"Grayson!" Caleb exclaimed.

"No, no, he's correct. In exchange for these abilities, werewolves provided us with blood and protection." Joel gestured to both men with his hand. "You have to admit, you are both much bigger than me. In a fight to the death, you are more likely to come out the winner."

"You seemed to do pretty well for yourself."

He glanced over at Grayson, somehow not surprised to see teeth marks on the arms the man had crossed over his chest. Joel's heart thundered at the visible proof that he'd taken blood from Grayson.

"I bit you, didn't I, Alpha Cane?" Joel knew the answer before Grayson nodded. He closed his eyes briefly and sighed. "And you drank my blood?" he asked when he opened his eyes again. He knew he'd asked the question before, but the answer somehow hadn't reached his brain.

"It was kind of hard not to when I was fighting you," Grayson snapped.

Joel wrapped his arms around himself and rubbed his hands up and down them, feeling suddenly chilled. He glanced toward the small, dark tunnel he could see off to one side of the cave, wishing for a way out of the situation he was in.

"Is it daylight out?"

"Yes, it's about another three hours until dark," Caleb answered. "Why?"

"I need to go," Joel said, his words making his heart lurch. "I'm sure my people will be looking for me."

"No, we called them and told them that we were working on the peace treaty in private. We didn't think it was a good idea at the time to let anyone know you'd been attacked."

Joel nodded, resigned to not being able to leave for awhile. As much as it pained him, it looked like he was stuck inside the cavern with the two alphas for the next few hours. His life was hell.

"You still haven't explained why my blood sent you into bloodlust," Grayson said.

Joel took a deep breath and let it out slowly. The next few minutes could change the course of his life, or end it. "You two have obviously settled your differences. Why does it matter now?"

"Because I want to know why you attacked us, damn it," Grayson snapped. "Should I expect this from all vampires, or are you just a special case?"

Joel laughed snidely. "Oh, I think you can safely assume I'm a special case."

Joel squeaked when Grayson leapt across the space between him and grabbed his arms, giving him a shake hard enough to make his teeth rattle in his head.

"Look, you little bloodsucker, I'm tired of you beating around the bush. I want to know what in the hell is going on. Why did you attack

us? And don't give me some shit about you losing your mind due to blood lust, because I don't buy it."

The tight control Joel held over his temper slipped away in the blink of an eye. He shook Grayson's hands off him and shoved the man across the room until he had him pinned against the wall. He delighted in the shock he could see in the man's features, the dropped open mouth, the raised eyebrows, the pale skin.

"Don't push me, furball," Joel snapped. "I'm trying to be diplomatic here."

Joel growled loudly when he felt Caleb grab him from behind. He twisted around and grabbed Caleb by the throat with one hand, slamming him into the wall next to Grayson.

"Don't ever underestimate a vampire," he snarled. He could see the shock in both men's faces as he held them to the wall by their throats. He knew his eyes glowed red with anger. "You will lose every time."

Flicking his wrist, Joel tossed both men to the floor and stepped back. "You may think you have the upper hand because you are werewolves and there are two of you. You'd be wrong."

Caleb coughed as he rubbed his throat. His face was pale as he looked up at Joel. "If you're so strong, why didn't you kill us before? You obviously see us as some sort of threat."

"I didn't want to kill you." Joel snorted. "And you are no threat to me."

Joel's eyes snapped to Grayson when the man climbed to a crouch and his muscles tensed as if he was getting ready to attack. "Do you really want to go there, furball?" he asked.

Caleb's arm immediately came out and slapped across Grayson's chest. Joel knew the man's grasp wasn't strong enough to hold Grayson back if he really wanted to attack, but the mere touch of Caleb's hand seemed to do the trick. Grayson drew in a deep breath and settled back, his body partially covering Caleb's.

"I do not want to fight you, but I will if you force me to."

"Considering your earlier actions," Grayson said, "I find that very hard to believe."

"Believe what you wish." Joel brushed an imaginary piece of lint off of his shoulder. "It is of no consequence to me."

"God, you are a smug bastard."

"Very true," Joel answered honestly as he folded his arms over his chest. He was a coven leader and one of the oldest of his kind. He had a right to be smug.

Joel could see the cautious way that Caleb and Grayson watched him as he strolled around the cavern. He didn't want to look at them, but he couldn't seem to stop himself. He was intrigued.

A part of Joel rationalized that he was supposed to be intrigued. He knew what exchanging blood with Grayson meant even if they did not. Another part wanted to deny the bond that had formed between him and Grayson and run back to the safety of his coven.

Joel wondered if he ignored the bond if it would just go away. Even as he had the thought, he dismissed it. As much as he hated the idea, he would lose what remained of his control if he was separated from Grayson, and didn't that just bite?

Caleb and Grayson had no idea what started when Grayson gave Joel his blood, and Joel didn't want to explain it to them. He wasn't even sure they would believe him even if he did.

His little act of losing his temper hadn't helped the situation either. Both Caleb and Grayson watched him warily now as if they were afraid he would lose his mind and attack at any moment. Joel didn't like the idea that he would spend the rest of his life in this manner.

"You could have saved us all a lot of trouble if you'd just left me alone."

"Well, forgive the shit out of me," Grayson barked. "You were dying. I didn't think it was in our best interest to let that happen."

"I would have healed eventually," Joel insisted, but he wasn't so sure his words were true. He had no idea how bad his injuries really

were. They could have been life threatening for all he knew. He just didn't want Caleb or Grayson to know he didn't know.

"You would have died!"

Okay, they did know.

Shit!

"It still would have been easier if you'd just left me alone, even if I had died."

"You keep saying that," Caleb said, a peculiar frown crossing his face, one that Joel couldn't quite pin down, and he was pretty good at deciphering people's expressions. It was one of the things that made him such a good mediator. "But I don't believe letting you die would have helped our peace talks any. Do you?"

"According to you, you've solved your problems without me, so I don't see how I would have been able assist you. My dying would have had no bearing on your situation."

"A dead vampire mediator sent by the Council of Elders would have had no bearing on our situation?" Grayson snapped. "And how did you come to that expert conclusion?"

Joel pressed his lips together and turned away from the two men. They were right, and he knew it. That knowledge didn't make him feel any better. A dead vampire mediator would have caused tensions between the vampires and werewolves, if not an all-out war.

"You've obviously settled your differences, and I'm still alive," Joel said again. "It would seem to me that your problems are solved."

"I don't care who in the hell you think you are," Grayson shouted. Joel swung around when he heard the man cross the room, jumping a little when he found Grayson standing right behind him. "I want to know what in the hell is going on. Why did you attack us?"

"Because you gave me your blood, you moron," Joel shouted right back. "You gave me your blood, and you took mine. The scent of the sex you had was in the air. It sent me into bloodlust."

"And that means what exactly?"

"That means you fucked us, furball," Joel snapped. "You mated us."

Chapter 6

Grayson reared back in shock at Joel's words. He stumbled a few steps away from the vampire and reached for Caleb's hand, grateful when he felt the man's touch against his skin.

"Could you say that again?" Grayson asked softly, the anger suddenly leaving him to be replaced by horror. What Joel was saying had to be impossible. It just had to be. Caleb was supposed to be his mate, not some vampire he'd never met before.

Joel heaved a huge sigh, and Grayson suddenly knew the man was as upset about this situation as he was. There was something about the man's demeanor that told Grayson Joel told the truth.

"When a vampire and werewolf exchange blood during a sexual encounter, it bonds them together." Joel grimaced. "And it's for eternity, boys."

"Sexual enc—" Grayson stopped speaking, suddenly remembering jerking the man off during the attack. It wasn't that he usually grabbed a man's cock when he was fighting him, but Joel had seemed to be in so much pain, clawing at his groin until he started to draw blood. Grayson had just been trying to help. "Oh my god!"

"Yeah, pretty much," Joel said. His lips twisted together for a moment then he arched an eyebrow. "I assume I had sex with one of you?"

"In a manner of speaking," Grayson replied. "After you attacked us, you fell to the ground and started writhing around as if you were in a lot of pain. You kept clawing at your pants, making yourself bleed."

"We were just trying to help," Caleb added as he came to stand next to Grayson. "You really were in a lot of pain. You were even crying blood tears."

Joel's eyes widened. Grayson knew Joel really must have been in a lot of pain if he was crying blood tears. Vampires only shed blood tears when they were either on the edge of death or they had lost total control.

"So, who did I have sex with?"

Grayson's face flushed as he remembered holding the man's cock in his hand, the multitude of orgasms that seemed to rock his body. Grayson had never seen anything like it. He wasn't sure wanted to again. While they were orgasms that Joel experienced, they hadn't looked that fun, more like they had been forced from Joel's body.

"I jerked you off."

Grayson watched Joel's eyes close for a moment. The man wrapped his arms tight around his waist and dropped his head back on his shoulders. Grayson didn't think the man was happy with the news that had just been delivered.

"Well, I guess that settles it then," Joel finally said.

"Settles what exactly?" Caleb asked. Grayson nodded, wanting to know the answer to that question himself.

"Like I said before, if we exchanged blood during a sexual situation, then Grayson and I are bonded."

"I don't understand that. Vampires and werewolves have exchanged blood hundreds of times, if not millions. We've been battling each other for centuries." Caleb waved his hand in the air between them. "Hell, we've only had a peace agreement between our kind for the last hundred years or so. How can that make you bonded?"

"When a vampire is aroused, he releases a hormone that causes the bond to form. By itself, the hormone is purely an aphrodisiac that lulls the person into a sense of serenity. If blood is exchanged, it

activates the hormone on a completely different level, creating a bond."

"So you mate with every poor sucker that donates blood to you?" Grayson asked. He couldn't explain the sudden bout of jealousy he felt at the idea of Joel mating with anyone except him. It just didn't make sense, but it made Grayson clench his fists, wanting to pound something into the ground.

"No, luckily for you, we have to actually exchange blood while I'm aroused for the hormone to work properly. Apparently, waking up already infected by your blood and then smelling the after scent of you two fucking each other did the job."

"Infected?" Grayson shouted as he pointed his finger at Joel. "Oh no, you're not going to blame this shit on us. You did this."

"Grayson, that's enough!"

Grayson swung around, his eyebrows shooting up nearly to his hairline at the steel-hard tone in Caleb's voice. He was under the impression that once they mated, he was the alpha in their relationship. Caleb was talking to him as if he were a misbehaving five year old.

"You have something to say, Alpha Redding?"

"Yes, I do." Caleb thrust his hand through his light brown hair. "Look, this was just an unfortunate set of circumstances. We didn't attack Joel, but we created the situation that caused him to attack us and by turn, forced us to protect ourselves by attacking him. This is no one's fault."

Grayson wanted to roll his eyes, or at least stomp his foot in frustration, but he had to admit that Caleb was right. He was taking his confusion and uncertainty about the situation out on Joel. It wasn't fair to Joel, and it demeaned Grayson.

"I apologize, Joel," Grayson said. "Caleb is correct. This is no one's fault. We all had a hand in it. I'm just not sure what to do about it."

Joel shrugged his shoulders. "Well, I have no fucking idea."

"And here I thought you had all the answers." Grayson smirked.

"Grayson!"

This time, Grayson did roll his eyes. He couldn't help it. He suddenly saw Caleb's role in their relationship. He might not be an alpha anymore, but he seemed to have become Grayson's conscience.

"If I'm supposed to be top dog around here, Caleb, you really have to stop reprimanding me."

"I said that the Council of Elders ordered me to be submissive to you, and I will be," Caleb replied. "That doesn't mean I'm going to let you walk all over me or anyone else. You're a better alpha than that. Act like it."

Grayson grinned. He just couldn't help it. Caleb's defiance, even under council mandate, was the sexiest damn thing he ever heard. Caleb was about as submissive as a box of rocks.

"I think figuring out who attacked me in the first place would be a good start," Joel said. "It has to be either the vampires, the werewolves, or the human hunters. Regular humans wouldn't have attacked me like this."

"You were bitten," Caleb said. "I'm pretty sure that you were attacked by werewolves."

"That may be, but it doesn't mean that vampires or human hunters didn't plan it."

"True." Caleb nodded. He rubbed his chin as he began to pace around the room. "I think we can rule out the human hunters, though. They are not likely to work with werewolves. They'd rather just kill us all."

Caleb had a point. Grayson was impressed and proud at Caleb's rationalization. It seemed his mate wasn't just a pretty face after all. Caleb had some smarts and knew what to do with them.

"So, that leaves us with the vampires and the werewolves," Joel said. "Why would either of them attack me? I'm a council-sanctioned mediator. I have permission to be in clan territory. Everyone knows that."

"But not everyone may have approved," Grayson said. "The war between our kinds might have ended over a hundred years ago, but you know the animosity still exists."

"Your mouth has certainly proven that." Joel smirked.

"Touché." Grayson nodded his head. "I hope you understand that my hostility is not necessarily against vampires."

"Just me?"

"My concern was for Caleb's safety. Until you attacked us, I treated you as I would anyone else, vampire or werewolf."

"And if I hadn't attacked you?"

"Then we wouldn't be having this conversation."

The little all-knowing smirk that lifted the corners of Joel's mouth sent Grayson's temper soaring. He had no idea what it was about the man that made his blood boil, but it was all Grayson could do not to punch Joel right in the mouth. He even took a step in Joel's direction before he felt Caleb's hand on his arm.

"You probably don't want to do that," Caleb said softly. "You do remember that he held both of us against the wall, right?"

Grayson's chest rumbled with a suppressed growl when Caleb stepped between him and Joel. He didn't understand why it bothered him, but it did. Grayson just knew he didn't like the two men standing so close together.

"Okay, I think it's safe to assume that someone is after Joel," Caleb said, "but we also need to consider the fact that they might be after him just because he's the council-sanctioned mediator. Being a vampire might have nothing to do with it."

Joel's dark eyebrows drew together as he frowned. "What do you mean? What does my being a mediator have to do with anything?"

"There are going to be a lot of people that won't like our clans finding peace. If Grayson and I combine our clans according to the council's plan, then we will become one of the strongest clans in the territory. That makes us a threat to just about everyone."

"You mean there will be a lot of people that don't want us together, don't you?" Grayson asked. "I'm not sure the clans actually have anything to do with it."

"You have to admit that it makes more sense," Caleb said. Grayson rolled his eyes when Caleb ignored his words. "What better way to end the peace talks than to take the mediator out of the picture? Without Joel there, he can't give his approval on the peace treaty. And Joel did say that werewolves attacked him."

"I assume the peace treaty is in place?" Joel asked.

"You smelled it, didn't you?" Grayson asked.

"Oh, now you're just being an ass, Grayson."

Grayson grinned at Caleb's words. He felt no embarrassment whatsoever at the fact that they had filled the cavern with the scent of their mating. He'd bottle the damn scent if he could. There was nothing on the planet more stimulating than the scent of Caleb's arousal.

Grayson frowned as a small voice at the back his head said he was lying to himself. There was another scent that was just as arousing, one that Grayson wanted more of. Grayson pressed his lips together and tried to ignore the voice. He finally had Caleb in his life again and needed to ignore the pangs of desire he felt for Joel. They were wrong.

"So, basically, since things have been settled between the two of you, I am no longer needed," Joel said. "Am I correct?"

"Oh, I..." Caleb glanced back at Grayson.

"Your services as a mediator have been fulfilled, that is true." Grayson wanted to say that they no longer needed Joel in any capacity, but the words just wouldn't come out of his mouth.

Grayson especially didn't like the saddened look on Joel's face as the man turned away from him. It made the pit of his stomach clench like it did only when he saw Caleb and couldn't be with him. Grayson always knew Caleb was the man for him. He'd known it since the first moment he met the guy when they were just kids.

Joel, on the other hand... Grayson knew there was something intriguing about the man, but he couldn't quite place it. Grayson didn't understand how things were done in the vampire world, but he would know if Joel was supposed to be his, too, wouldn't he?

"I guess the only thing to do now is call my lieutenant," Joel said. He glanced over his shoulder and shot both Grayson and Caleb a small, resigned smile. "I will, of course, report to the Council of Elders that you have settled your differences. There should be no more problems with the peace treaty."

"Unless the council takes issue with you being attacked," Caleb added. "Just because we've settled our differences doesn't mean the council will support us once they find out people are so against our mating."

Joel shook his head. "No, I was given full assurances that if the peace treaty went through, it would be supported by the council." Joel shrugged. "Besides, my coven will back you up."

"Why in the hell would they do that?" Grayson asked. "It's not like we're on friendly terms here. I would think that the combining of two clans would be more of a threat to you than anything."

"Because I am the coven leader and I say so."

Grayson's eyebrows shot up when Caleb began to laugh. It was a full-blown belly laugh that filled the cavern. Grayson had a hard time keeping the answering grin off of his face as he stared at the man.

"What's so funny?"

"Well, according to Joel, you two are mated together now... two alpha males." Caleb wiped a stray tear of laughter from his eye. "Can you imagine how interesting that is going to make things? Who the fuck is going to be on top?"

The smile quickly fell from Grayson's lips. He did not see the humor in the situation. He cast a sly look at Joel out of the corner of his eye, surprised to find the man with his mouth hanging open.

"You have something to add, bloodsucker?"

"Geez, Grayson, you have got to stop calling him that," Caleb said. "We're on the same side here."

Grayson couldn't explain why he was so angry, but he could feel it moving through him like ants crawling across his skin. And part of that freaked him out. Grayson was always in control of his emotions, until Joel.

Joel made him feel out of control, fragmented. His emotions were all over the board, going from pure blinding rage to a need so great it almost brought him to his knees. Grayson truly didn't know which way was up.

Feeling like he was about to lose it, Grayson decided to concentrate on his anger, and he aimed it at Joel, the man who seemed to be responsible for the ever-changing emotions raging through his body.

"Are we?" Grayson countered. "We just have his word for it. How do we know Joel didn't set this all up to keep us from being together? Vampires have been known to do much more in pursuit of their own best interests."

"And you think it's in my best interest to be mated to a werewolf?" Joel shouted, his face turning red with anger. "I'm going to be the laughing stock of the entire vampire world when this gets out."

"Too good for us, are you?" Grayson shouted. "Is mating a werewolf beneath you, bloodsucker?"

"Grayson, have you lost your mind?" Caleb snapped. "Why would Joel let himself be attacked by werewolves? That just doesn't make sense."

"Ask him." Grayson gestured to Joel. "He seems to have all the answers."

Grayson grunted when Caleb's hands slammed into his chest, and he was pushed back until he was leaning against the wall. Caleb stepped up until they were nearly nose to nose.

"What the fuck is wrong with you?"

Grayson sighed and tried to reign in his anger. It wasn't directed at Caleb. Hell, it shouldn't have even been directed at Joel. "I don't know," he admitted honestly as he rolled his head back against the rock wall behind him.

"Well, you need to get control of yourself. Joel isn't here to hurt us. He's as much a victim in all of this as we are." Caleb's hand was gentle against Grayson's cheek, calming him. "We need to figure out who's trying to stop us from being together, not fight with the one man that can help us."

Grayson knew Caleb was right, and he had no way to explain his hostility toward Joel. He just knew it was there. Maybe his issue was because Joel was an alpha male in his own right.

The council decreed that Caleb had to submit to Grayson, to be his second-in-command and subject to Grayson's will. The same couldn't be said for Joel. He didn't have to submit to Grayson which made him dangerous.

Still wary, Grayson looked past Caleb to the man standing several feet away. Joel was watching him but not in a predatory way. He seemed to be trying to read Grayson in some manner. Grayson wondered how the man would react if he figured out whatever it was he was trying to figure out.

"I apologize, Joel," Grayson said. "I have no excuse for my behavior other than the situation we're in."

"I understand." Grayson wondered if Joel truly did understand, especially when he saw the small, pained look on Joel's face that the man tried to hide by looking away. "And Caleb is correct. It makes more sense that someone is trying to prevent your clans from joining than just taking me out. I may be the leader of my coven, but we're a pretty peaceful people."

"Yeah, I noticed." Grayson snorted. The moment Joel and Caleb opened his mouth to reprimand him, Grayson held up his hand. "Please, I wasn't making another snide remark. I was just making a

comment about the war between werewolves and vampires. That's all."

Both men watched him for a moment then Joel nodded. "Right, so I need to contact my people. Do we have a way to do that?" Grayson pulled his phone out of his pocket and tossed it across to Joel. The man caught it without blinking an eye. "I assume we have reception inside of here because going outside to make this phone call is not an option."

"Just stand by the tunnel entrance," Caleb said. "The reception isn't the best, but you can get through."

Grayson felt Caleb come to stand next to him as he watched Joel walk over to the tunnel to make his phone call. The presence of Caleb at his side seemed to calm Grayson, sending a ripple of peace through him, especially when the man's shoulder brushed his.

Still, Grayson felt something shift inside of him, protesting, when Joel snapped the cell phone closed and nodded his head. "My people will be here at nightfall."

Chapter 7

Caleb watched Joel and Grayson talking, his gaze bouncing back and forth between the two men like a yoyo. He didn't understand why the two men couldn't see the attraction simmering between them.

Caleb could see it. He'd noticed it almost from the very beginning. It took Caleb awhile to figure out that the desire Grayson felt for Joel was what made the man so edgy. When Caleb did, he wondered how he hadn't seen it at first glance. It was almost a tangible, living thing between the two men.

But so was the animosity between the two men. Grayson and Joel practically vibrated with repressed need, but Caleb didn't know if they were going to attack each other or kiss each other. Both were a strong possibility.

Grayson suddenly grabbed Joel and shoved him against the wall, his hand at Joel's throat. Caleb leapt to his feet and started to race across the room but came to a sudden halt when, instead of hitting Joel, Grayson leaned in and kissed him.

Caleb's eyes widened, a soft gasp falling from his lips as he watched Joel's hand curl around Grayson's neck, not pushing him away or fighting him, but pulling Grayson closer.

There was definitely still a fight going on, but it seemed to be about who would dominate the kiss between the two men. Caleb heard a low groan fill the room then felt his face flush when he realized it didn't come from the two men kissing but from his own lips.

He didn't know until that moment that he was aroused by the thought of Joel and Grayson being together. That shocked Caleb more

than watching Grayson and Joel kissing, but he couldn't seem to look away from the display of passion playing out before his eyes.

Grayson was a ruggedly handsome man. Women wanted him, and men wanted to be him. He was, without a doubt, a man that drew attention every time he walked into a room.

Joel, on the other hand, had the classic good looks of a vampire, long black hair, fangs, porcelain skin. The only thing that made him different was his deep blue eyes, and those seemed to see right into a person's soul, divining their every thought.

Together, Grayson and Joel made a stunning couple, one tall and menacing, the other delicate and lethal. Caleb wondered where he fit into the equation or if he even did at all.

Caleb suddenly felt out of place and not needed. He could stand there and watch the two men kiss, getting more aroused by the second or he could leave. As the kiss deepened and Grayson and Joel's hands started roaming over each other, leaving looked better and better.

Caleb tore his gaze away from Grayson and Joel and made his way to the tunnel. He refused to let himself look back, even when he heard a loud groan fill the room behind him. He didn't want see something he couldn't be a part of.

Getting to his hands and knees, Caleb crawled through the tunnel until he reached the small ledge right outside. He didn't really have any place to go, but at least he couldn't hear the men inside the cavern anymore.

Caleb sat down on the ledge and leaned back against the rock cliff. He drew his knees up to his chest and wrapped his arms around them. Caleb tried to blank his mind and not think about what was happening inside the cave. He didn't have much luck.

There was a part of Caleb that was raging with anger that Grayson would touch anyone now that they were together. He'd worked for years to bring them back together. Grayson should want only him.

There was another part of Caleb that knew Joel would now be a part of their little intimate circle, and that part of him didn't mind it.

Joel was gorgeous. He was smart. He would be a great addition to Grayson and Caleb's lives. As long as Caleb wasn't left out in the cold, like he was now.

He knew he was supposed to be some big, macho alpha and not the scared teenage boy he felt like now. But he'd always been terrified that Grayson would find someone he wanted more and leave. Caleb had always felt that way.

Sitting outside a cave on a hard rock ledge while Grayson and Joel fooled around inside didn't reassure Caleb that Grayson wanted him. Hell, he didn't even know if Joel wanted him. For all Caleb knew, Joel could only want Grayson, and maybe vice versa.

Caleb didn't know how long he sat there, his thoughts twirling around in his head in a maelstrom of chaos before he felt someone sit down next to him. Caleb closed his eyes and almost whimpered when the smell of sex floated around him.

When he opened his eyes and glanced over at Grayson, the man was twisting his fingers together. Caleb's first thought was what did Grayson have to be nervous about? Joel was his mate, and Grayson was the alpha. He could have sex with whoever he wanted to, no matter how much Caleb didn't like it.

His next thought was what was going to happen now?

"Did you have sex with him?" Caleb whispered, looking out over the forest below them because he couldn't stand to look Grayson in the face as he asked the question that had the power to destroy him.

"Yes."

Caleb's breath stuttered in his throat as he tried to inhale. He felt a sudden deep, stabbing pain in his chest. The blood began to pound in his temples at the acute sense of loss he felt.

"Did... did you claim him?"

"Yes."

A raw and primitive grief overwhelmed Caleb at Grayson's simple answer. He gave a choked, desperate laugh. "I guess you don't need

me anymore then, do you? You've mated a coven leader. That has to be bigger than bringing our two clans together."

"Caleb—"

Caleb held up his hand to stop Grayson from saying anymore. He couldn't accept the dull ache of foreboding he felt. Grayson was now mated to a coven leader. Caleb had submitted to him. Grayson had it all.

And Caleb had nothing.

Caleb's legs trembled as he climbed to his feet. A suffocating sensation tightened his throat. His mouth opened in dismay, but no sound came out. He didn't know what to say. What could he say?

Shaking his head vehemently, Caleb launched himself off the side of the ledge, shifting before he even landed on the ground. He started running the moment his paws touched down. Caleb kept on running, ignoring Grayson's alarmed shout until he couldn't hear anything except his own ragged breathing.

A bitter jealousy warred inside of him with the ache of Grayson's betrayal, only, it wasn't a betrayal. Joel was Grayson's mate every bit as much as Caleb was. He had every right to claim the man.

So, why did Caleb feel like his heart was being ripped out of his chest? Why did he feel like something had been irreparably changed in his relationship with Grayson? That what he dreamed they would have together, they never would?

Caleb finally slowed down when the ache in his legs told him he had run several miles. He dropped down onto a small patch of grass and panted, his breathing ragged from running so far, so fast.

A flash of loneliness stabbed at Caleb. His life had very nearly been destroyed when he'd been forced to leave Grayson twenty years ago. Caleb slowly built it back up with one thought in mind, getting Grayson back. It had been the driving force in his life.

And it all seemed to be for naught.

Unless...

Giving Grayson up wasn't an option. He had fought too hard and too long to let the man go. He'd also agreed to submit to the man, allowing Grayson to be his alpha. That meant he was subject to Grayson's wants and needs, even if that need came in the form of another man.

Caleb didn't have anything against Joel personally. His resentment came from Joel taking a part of Grayson Caleb wanted all to himself. Caleb swallowed hard and bit back tears as he realized in order to have Grayson, he would have to accept Joel.

Caleb took deep breathes until he was strong enough to raise his head. Climbing to his feet, he slowly started back toward the cavern, a new determination making his steps quick and steady. Little by little, warmth crept back in his body as he ran back through the woods.

Darkness had fallen, making the woods around Caleb seem eerily quiet. Caleb quickened his steps, determined to reach the cave before Joel's people arrived. He felt he needed to let Grayson and Joel know he wouldn't stand in their way. He needed to let them know Joel didn't need to leave. He didn't want to be the reason Grayson was separated from his mate.

Caleb suddenly stopped running so fast that his paws skidded in the dirt. He lifted his snout into the air and sniffed, his eyes narrowing when he smelled something out of place. Caleb couldn't quite put his finger on the scent, but he knew it shouldn't be here in the forest.

Caleb's movements were slow and measured as he took a few more steps then crouched down low and crept slowly through the thick underbrush. Whatever he smelled was close.

Caleb held his breath then tilted his head slightly, opening his senses. At first, he didn't hear anything, absolutely nothing. That in itself concerned Caleb. The forest should have sounds, the wind blowing, crickets, even small animals walking around. It should not be silent.

Before Caleb heard anything, he saw them, four men creeping through the woods toward the cave where Grayson and Joel were. Caleb was barely able to suppress his growl at the threat he detected.

The four men were dressed all in black even to the point of having black paint on their faces. They carried large semi-automatic weapons in their hands. The only color on their entire bodies gave Caleb a clear idea of what they were. Their eyes glowed red.

Vampires!

Caleb didn't understand why vampires would be creeping through the woods when Joel had called them. He stayed crouched under some brush as the four men walked past him, hoping he stayed hidden from their superior night sight.

He didn't want to start an incident if they were just here for Joel, but he couldn't shake the idea that they were here for more nefarious purposes. There was something about the whole situation that just felt wrong to Caleb.

Once the four men passed him by, Caleb crawled out from beneath the bush he was hiding under and took off to one side of the four men. He wanted to reach Grayson and Joel before the four men did.

Caleb also didn't like the idea that anyone knew about their hidden lair except the three of them. He vaguely remembered Joel telling his men the general area where he was, but Joel hadn't given away the cave's exact location, so how did they know?

Caleb reached the small open area surrounding the base of the rocky cliff where the cave was located just as a large black SUV pulled up. Caleb instantly dropped to the ground and watched.

Four more heavily armed men climbed from the vehicle. They were dressed similar to the four men in the woods with the exception of the face paint. They spanned out, surrounding the vehicle.

After a nod from one of the men, the door to the backseat opened and another man stepped out. He was dressed all in black but looked more like he was prepared to attend a cocktail party than rescue

someone lost in the woods. He wore black slacks, a dinner jacket, and a dark purple shirt.

"Alejandro," the man called out. "We're here. Alejandro?"

Caleb expected Grayson and Joel to walk out of the cave, so he was surprised when he saw them step out from behind a few trees. Joel walked close to Grayson but not close enough that anyone would know they were mated.

Something about that bothered Caleb, but he forgot what when he heard rustling behind him. Caleb's head snapped around and he sniffed, panic racing through him when he scented the four men from the forest.

Caleb swung back around to look at Grayson and Joel. His heart thundered with fear. Something was seriously wrong here, but Caleb couldn't figure it out. His hackles raised as the feeling of deep foreboding filled him.

Forgetting his need to hide, Caleb jumped to his feet and started racing across the clearing toward Grayson and Joel, howling as loudly as he could manage while running.

Caleb saw Grayson's head snap in his direction just as something hard and painful hit his back leg. Caleb faltered, the pain bringing him down to his knees. Caleb tried to get to his feet, stumbling several times before he was able to do so.

He started to head toward Grayson and Joel again when another slug of pain hit him, this time in his front leg. Caleb went down, whimpering as the agony threatened to blur his vision.

"Caleb!"

Caleb lifted his head to see Grayson and Joel racing toward him. He tried to bark, growl, anything to warn Grayson and Joel of the men coming out of the forest behind them. All that came out was a low growl that neither man heard.

Hell came to earth before Caleb's eyes, and he was helpless to do anything about it as he watched the men from the woods converge on

Grayson and Joel. Grayson was shot just as Caleb was, falling to the ground. He didn't move.

Joel put up a valiant fight, clawing and biting anything that came near him or Grayson, but it was no good. The men from the SUV joined the men from the woods. Within a matter of moments, Joel was unconscious and being carried to the waiting vehicle.

Caleb whimpered as he watched one of the men walk up to Grayson's fallen body, a gun in his hand. He pointed the gun at Grayson's head. Caleb wanted to close his eyes, to deny what he knew was about to happen, but looking away was impossible.

Time seemed to slow. Caleb could almost see the man start to pull the trigger. He braced himself, ready to die right along with Grayson. Because whether the man came over and shot him or not, Caleb would die when Grayson did, even if he had to kill himself.

He'd just have to wait until he killed whoever took his heart away from him. Just as Caleb felt the last of his hope slip away, he heard a loud howl come from the woods, followed by several more howls.

Caleb's heart started beating faster at the beloved sound of wolves in the forest. He'd never heard a more wonderful sound in all of his life, especially when the man about to shoot Grayson in the head started running toward the SUV before he could pull the trigger.

Caleb lifted his head enough to see the vampires jump into the SUV, the vehicle's tires spinning as it drove away. His heart ached for Joel, not knowing if the man was alive or dead.

And it ached for Grayson, knowing that the man was injured and one of his mates had been taken from him. But mostly, Caleb's heart ached for himself. He'd lost the opportunity to tell Joel he accepted him.

The darkness around Caleb suddenly took form, and he recognized his brother, Keenan, as well as several other wolves from his clan. There were a few that he didn't recognize, but they went toward Grayson.

"Can you shift, Caleb?"

Caleb whimpered and tried to shake his head, but the movement sent shards of pain blasting through his head.

"Okay, don't worry about it. Just stay still while I take a look at your injuries."

Caleb felt Keenan's hands moving down his body. He winced when Keenan reached the injury in his front leg. A moment later, he felt another hand probe the wound in his hind leg.

"You must live a charmed life, Caleb," Keenan said as he moved back to kneel by Caleb's head. "You've been shot in two legs with silver bullets, but both wounds are a through and through. If those silver bullets had stayed in your body, I doubt we'd be talking right now."

Silver bullets... well, that explained why they hurt so much. Not only was he shot with a bullet, which hurt a lot, but it was a silver bullet. It started burning the moment it entered his body. Eventually, it would kill him, if the bullets didn't.

Caleb suddenly remembered Grayson going down. He knew the man had been shot, but he had no idea where. For all he knew, Grayson could have received a fatal wound.

Caleb tried to struggle to his feet, the need to get to get to Grayson outweighing even the pain racking his body. He snapped at the hands holding him down with his teeth, growling low in his throat.

"Caleb!" Keenan shouted. "What the fuck is wrong with you?"

Caleb ignored his brother and staggered across the ground to fall down beside Grayson. He pushed his snout against Grayson, nuzzling the man's neck as he tried to find a pulse or some sign of life.

Caleb whimpered, distressed by the lack of movement in the man on the ground next to him. He could hear the pensive breathing of those standing around them and knew they didn't understand Caleb's need to be near Grayson. They didn't know that Caleb and Grayson were mates.

He was just thankful no one tried to pull him away from Grayson. As weak as he was, Caleb wasn't sure he could stop them, but he'd

sure the fuck try, and he didn't want to hurt anyone, at least, not anyone that presently stood around him.

The men that did this, that shot Grayson and took Joel, were walking dead men. They just didn't know it yet. Caleb knew Grayson wouldn't rest until he had Joel back, and Caleb wouldn't rest until Grayson was happy.

Caleb whimpered again and pushed his muzzle closer to Grayson. When he received no response, he glanced up at the men standing around and staring down at him in confusion... and growled.

One man, a dark brown-haired man that Caleb recognized as one of the men Grayson brought to the peace meeting, Duncan, crouched down near Grayson's head. "He's going to be fine, Alpha Redding. His wound isn't serious. It just needs time to heal."

Caleb grunted and dropped his head back down to the ground next to Grayson's. He took several deep breaths, not releasing them until he felt a hand clench in his fur. Caleb's heart stuttered. He lifted his head and saw hazel eyes staring back at him. Caleb whined, wishing he could shift, to tell Grayson how sorry he was that he hadn't been able to save Joel.

Caleb knew it was his fault. If he'd just run faster, if he'd made more noise. Hell, if he'd attacked the vampires instead of trying to save Grayson, who clearly could take care of himself, then Caleb might have been able to save Joel.

Now, Grayson might hate him forever, and Caleb didn't know if he could live with that. Caleb tried not to whimper, but his distress was so high, he couldn't prevent it. He felt Grayson stroke his fur and knew the man was trying to reassure him. It just made Caleb feel guiltier than he already did.

"It's going to be okay, Caleb."

But it wasn't. Caleb doubted things would be okay again until he brought Joel back, and he had no clue how to do that. Overwhelmed and in agony from his wounds, Caleb closed his eyes and let the

blackness take him, wondering if it would be better if he never woke up again.

Chapter 8

Grayson watched Caleb sleep, unable to take his eyes off the man. He'd shifted back to human form several hours ago, but he'd yet to open his eyes. Logically, Grayson knew that was due to Caleb's injuries.

Still, he wouldn't be satisfied until Caleb opened his eyes. Grayson knew he almost lost Caleb the night before. It made his heart ache every time he thought about watching Caleb get shot as he ran across the clearing then going down.

Grayson had never been so scared in his life, or so enraged. He didn't know who had shot them or taken Joel, but he would find out, and then they would die, slowly, if Grayson had anything to do about it.

They took what belonged to him, and Grayson had every intention of getting Joel back. He wouldn't allow anyone to stop him. He just needed to wait until Caleb was rested and healed, and then they could both go after Joel.

Grayson turned away from the man on the bed and walked over to the window. He lifted the white lace curtain and looked out, surprised by how many people walked about outside.

Even though he'd demanded to be brought back to his clan home, several members of Caleb's clan insisted on coming with them. From all the people milling about outside, Grayson guessed that more had arrived as well.

Grayson had to admit, Caleb's clan seemed to be very protective of him. He wondered if they would feel the same when they found out

about the mate covenant. He was pretty sure he knew how his clan would react.

Those close to him would accept it and be happy for him and Caleb. Those not so close, especially the clan members that wanted his rank, would hem and haw and possibly challenge him for his position. They wouldn't care that the mate covenant had been approved by the Council of Elders.

Then, of course, there were those that wouldn't want Grayson and Caleb to be together because they were two men. It had only been recently that the mating between two men was even allowed in the werewolf community. In years past, a hunt to the death would have been ordered.

All in all, Grayson and Caleb had a long road ahead of them despite the council's approval of their mating. They needed to find Joel, and then they needed to bring all of their people together, and wouldn't that be a pickle?

Combining two werewolf clans might be one thing, but bringing in a vampire coven was sure to send a ripple of shock through both societies that would be felt for decades to come. Grayson chuckled lightly as he let the curtain drop back into place. It would be interesting if nothing else.

"What are you laughing at?"

Grayson jumped and whipped around to find moss green eyes staring at him from across the room. He hurried over to sit on the side of the bed. A stray lock of light brown hair fell over Caleb's forehead as the man frowned up at him. Grayson reached up and brushed it back as he smiled.

"Hey, how are you feeling?"

"Like I got shot!" Caleb snorted.

"Well, you did, and I would be very pleased if you would refrain from letting it happen again." Grayson arched an eyebrow at Caleb's soft laugh. *"I prefer not to see my mate lying on the ground with bleeding holes in him."*

Grayson was confused when the smile fell off of Caleb's face, but he chalked it up to their recent fight. When Caleb began to speak, Grayson's mouth dropped open in shock.

"Am I still your mate?"

"Of course you are," Grayson replied sharply. Was Caleb rethinking them being together? "Why would you think any differently?"

Caleb's shoulders moved under the blankets as he shrugged and glanced away. "I don't know. I just kind of figured after I let Joel get kidnapped and all that—"

"Wait, wait, what do you mean you let get Joel get kidnapped? You had nothing to do with that. Even I know that." Grayson reached under the covers and grabbed Caleb's hand in his. "Hell, Caleb, you got shot trying to save both of us."

Grayson inhaled sharply when he saw tears on Caleb's face. "But, if I had run faster or—"

"Or nothing!" Grayson snapped. "Did you mean for Joel to be kidnapped? I know you don't like the fact that I had sex with him and claimed him, but would you really plan for him to be kidnapped and both of us be shot?"

"No!" Caleb exclaimed, his hand squeezing Grayson's tightly. "No, I swear, I had nothing to do with those men taking Joel. I was on my way back to tell you both that I understood the bond you had with Joel and that I was okay with him being with us."

Grayson cocked his head to one side in surprise. "Really?" Caleb nodded, and Grayson didn't know what to think. "You're not bothered by Joel and me being together?"

Caleb took a deep breath, and Grayson knew whatever he said, Caleb was bothered by it. His heart ached a little, but Grayson didn't know what to do about it. He was mated to both men. He couldn't give either of them up.

"I'm sorry, Caleb, I wish things could be different. I never meant to bond with Joel, but I couldn't stop it once it started. I don't know if it was the blood I exchanged with Joel or what, but—"

"I'll admit I'm jealous," Caleb said quietly. His eyes darted around as if he couldn't stand to look Grayson in the face. "I kind of thought I'd have you all to myself, you know? I guess I had these grand plans for us, and I didn't expect to have to share you with someone else."

"Caleb, I didn't plan on being with Joel. It just happened. You know that, right?"

Caleb nodded, but he still wouldn't look Grayson in the face. Grayson finally had enough. They were talking, but they weren't communicating. He grabbed Caleb by his chin and forced the man's gaze to his.

"I wanted you twenty years ago. I want you now. Joel being in our lives is not going to change that, ever. You need to know that."

Caleb looked edgy, almost like he was about to fragment into a thousand tiny pieces. His face was pale, his hands trembling a little even though he tried to hide it by clenching his hands into fists. But, Grayson knew. He'd always been able to read Caleb.

Grayson stretched out on the bed next to Caleb and drew the man into his arms until they were face to face, chest to chest. He could feel Caleb's heart pounding. Grayson smiled and stroked Caleb's face, hoping to calm him.

"I'm not giving you up, Caleb, not even for Joel. You submitted to me and allowed me to claim you." Grayson tapped his finger against the tip of Caleb's Roman nose. "And that means you belong to me."

"Always the alpha, aren't you?" Caleb chuckled nervously.

"Always."

Caleb's fingers pulled at the edge of Grayson's collar, his eyes watching what he did. "So, what now?"

"Now," Grayson said as he rolled over on top of Caleb, pinning the man to the bed, "I claim you again so that you know who you belong to."

"What about Joel?" Caleb seemed shocked by Grayson's amorous movement. "Shouldn't we be going after him?"

"We will. I already have people working on it as we speak. As soon as they find anything out, they will let us know. Until then, there's not much we can do besides wait."

"He was taken by vampires, Grayson. You do know that, don't you?"

Grayson nodded as he started slowly pulling the blanket down Caleb's chest. "Yeah, the red glowing eyes were kind of a dead giveaway. I don't know if they had anything to do with Joel being attacked by wolves, but I suspect that they did."

"But they were vampires," Caleb protested, grabbing at the blankets before Grayson could pull them all of the way off his body. He held them tightly in his hand, covering his groin. "Maybe they thought we were harming Joel or holding him prisoner. They could have just been rescuing him. "

"It doesn't matter. Joel and I were just walking, no animosity between us when they attacked us. Even if they did think they were rescuing Joel, they shouldn't have attacked us. That alone gives us reason to go after them."

Grayson tugged on the blanket until Caleb rolled his eyes and released his grip. "How can you think about sex when Joel could be lying somewhere dead or injured?" Caleb's voice was sharp, strained. His stare was even more intense.

"Because, damn it, if I think about it too much I will lose my mind. The thought of Joel being in danger makes me so angry I can barely see straight, and if fucking you into the mattress gets my mind off of it for a little while, well..."

Caleb's brown eyebrows shot up. "You're using me?"

Grayson pushed himself away from Caleb, shocked by his words and maybe just a little hurt, too. He couldn't believe that Caleb would think he would ever use him. Caleb was his mate, precious to him.

"I would never *use* you, Caleb." Grayson stood up and walked over to stare out the window again. He knew his relationship with both Caleb and Joel would be precarious. He just never thought he would feel like he was stuck in the middle between the two men.

Frustrated, Grayson pushed his hand through his hair then turned back to face Caleb, planting his hand on his hip. "I thought I was coming to my mate for comfort. I thought we could find solace in each other's arms. Was I wrong?"

Caleb moved to sit on the side of the bed, sliding the blankets over his legs before patting the mattress beside him. Grayson walked over and sat down, surprised when Caleb took his hand, clasping them together, their fingers entwined.

"No, you weren't wrong, and I'm sorry I doubted you." Caleb's shoulders rose and fell as he shrugged. "I guess this whole situation is just going to take me a little time to get used to. I wasn't expecting to have to share you."

"I'm sorry." There didn't seem to be anything else Grayson could say. It was too late to take back his mating with either man, and he wouldn't even if he could. The moment he claimed Caleb and Joel, they became the most important people in his life.

Caleb squeezed Grayson's hand. "Don't be. Life doesn't always turn out like we want, but it doesn't necessarily mean it will turn out bad. Who knows, maybe this is the best thing for us. Joel is certainly tenacious enough to keep you on your toes."

"He does do that, true." Grayson chuckled. "I've never met another man that pisses me off as fast as Joel does, not even you, and you've been driving me crazy for years."

"I won't be submissive to Joel. You do know that, right?"

"I never expected you to, baby. You submit to me and only to me." Grayson could feel his hackles rising just thinking about Caleb submitting to anyone else, even Joel. Caleb was his submissive.

"You... I haven't heard that word out of your mouth in twenty years."

Grayson frowned. "What word?"

"Baby," Caleb said as his face flushed.

Grayson wrapped his free hand around Caleb's neck, taking a moment to run his fingers over the bite mark on the nape of Caleb's neck. He loved the knowledge that his bite mark would be on Caleb's neck for the rest of their lives, for all to see. Anyone that looked at Caleb would know the man had been claimed.

Grayson pulled Caleb closer and stroked his tongue across the mark. He could feel Caleb shudder against him. The man's long groan filled the room and shot straight to Grayson's cock.

"Are you sure you don't want to fool around?" Grayson whispered against Caleb's hot skin.

"I'd consider it."

Grayson grinned and tugged the blanket off of Caleb, barring the naked man from his toes to the tip of his head. Caleb started panting when Grayson dropped down to his knees between Caleb's legs.

"Grayson, what—"

Grayson grinned up at Caleb as he reached over and stroked the man's suddenly very interested cock. "Submissive does not mean you do everything for me and I don't return the favor. Besides, this is too nice of a cock to waste."

Grayson enjoyed the long groan that fell from Caleb's lips as he leaned in and licked across the head of the engorged shaft. Caleb's legs trembled under his hand, delighting him even more. Grayson liked knowing he could get to his mate in such a way that the man couldn't control his reactions.

"Don't ever hide your reactions from me, Caleb."

"No, no," Caleb panted as he fell back on the bed. "Would never hide from you."

"I want to hear every moan, every groan. I want to know if I do something you like and even when I do something you don't like."

"Li-like it all."

"Yeah?" Grayson raked his tongue across the head of Caleb's cock again. Drops of tangy, sweet pre-cum exploded on his tongue. "Even this?"

"Oh yeah, especially that."

"How about this?" Grayson asked right before he swallowed Caleb's shaft all of the way down until his nose was buried in the man's pubic hair.

"Oh fuck, yes!" Caleb's hands clenched in Grayson's hair, gently tugging then smoothing then tugging again, as if Caleb couldn't decide what he wanted to do.

Grayson kept his mouth on Caleb's cock as he grabbed the man's ankles and lifted them up onto the bed. Caleb's legs naturally fell apart. Grayson bobbed up and down on Caleb's cock several times before lifting his head, grinning when Caleb whined in protest.

"Do you like that, baby?" Caleb's dazed green eyes blinked down at him as the man nodded rapidly. Grayson grinned then reached up and gripped Caleb's thighs with his hand. "How about this?"

Grayson started licking at the puckered pink hole that twinkled up at him and stroked his tongue up over Caleb's balls to his cock then all the way to the tip. Caleb's body went stiff for a moment, his thigh muscles going rock hard, then the man trembled almost uncontrollably.

"Gray-Grayson!" Caleb wailed.

The sound of Caleb shouting out his name sent chills down Grayson's spine in a way that didn't even come close to making him cold. His body was so hot he was about to combust. Caleb was the most arousing man Grayson had ever met.

Grayson was nearly out of his mind. His cock pressed against the zipper of his jeans so hard that he thought they might actually rip apart. Grayson stood up and whipped his cotton shirt over his head, tossing it to the floor.

His eyes drank in the naked body displayed so beautifully on the bed before him as he quickly shed his shoes and jeans, pushing them away before kneeling back on the floor again.

There was a part of Grayson that was thrilled his mate was so well endowed. Caleb was a big fucker, probably nine inches long and very thick. He was definitely longer than Grayson but not quite as wide. Another part was a little intimidated because of the sudden desire he had to feel that big boy pound into his own ass.

It was almost a need, one that Grayson was unable to deny. He didn't give a shit who was supposed to submit to who. He wanted to feel Caleb fuck him. It had been twenty years since anyone had been inside of his ass.

He reached over to the nightstand and grabbed the lube, spreading the liquid up over his fingers then rubbed it over the crack of his ass. The special lube would heat up the more it was spread around, driving both him and Caleb crazy. It wouldn't hurt, just make things more interesting. Grayson couldn't wait to see what Caleb's reaction would be though.

Grayson started licking Caleb's cock again, sucking it deep into his mouth as he reached around behind his body and started stretching his ass, readying himself for Caleb's possession.

The first finger burned for a moment, his ass unused to having anything inside of it. Grayson used the pain, putting more effort into sucking the large shaft in his mouth. With each thrust of his fingers into his ass, Grayson swallowed Caleb's cock.

As he moved down to lick at Caleb's balls again, Grayson saw the man's puckered hole twitching as if it needed to be filled. He stroked his tongue across the tight entrance several times, noticing it loosen with each swipe.

Grayson grinned. He'd learned a lot since the last time he and Caleb were together. He had just the thing to make the man's ass feel full and satisfied. Grayson reached over into the second drawer of his

nightstand and pulled out a butt plug. He lubed it up with lots of the special lube then placed the tip against Caleb's hole.

Grayson couldn't stop himself from watching Caleb's face for his reaction as he began gently pushing and prodding the hard rubber against the man's tight entrance. Grayson groaned as Caleb's body instantly started to loosen up, allowing him to push the plug deeper and deeper with each push. Caleb was made to be fucked, no doubt about it. The man's body ached to be filled.

"Do you like that, baby?" Grayson nearly swallowed his tongue when Caleb didn't do anything more than moan and lift his legs up to his chest. "You do, don't you? One of these days I'm going to fuck you with a dildo, Caleb, maybe even one that vibrates. Would you like that?"

Grayson had a sudden image of Joel fucking Caleb while Caleb fucked him. The picture was so clear in his head that Grayson closed his eyes for a moment and leaned his head against Caleb's thigh, dizzy with the thought of how hot that would be. Maybe Joel would fuck Caleb while Grayson fucked Joel?

Grayson stopped pushing the plug into Caleb's ass and leaned up, opening his eyes to look at his mate. "Caleb, look at me."

Caleb looked confused and a little flushed, but he opened his eyes to look down at him. Grayson held his breath, unsure of what exactly he was going to ask until he opened his mouth.

"Would you ever let Joel fuck you?"

"Wha—"

"I mean if it was okay between the three of us?"

"You want me to submit to Joel?" Caleb sounded outraged which was exactly the reaction Grayson didn't want. "I thought we already talked about this?"

"No, baby, I'm not talking about you submitting to Joel. I'm asking if you would ever let him fuck you. Or would you be willing to fuck him?" Grayson felt his face heat up as he tried to explain the

image in his head. "I was thinking more along the lines of me fucking Joel and Joel fucking you or Joel fucking me and me fucking you."

"Why am I always the one being fucked? Do I seem that submissive to you?"

"No." Grayson snorted. "You could be at the back of the line if that's what you wanted. You could fuck Joel and he could fuck me, or you could fuck me while I'm fucking Joel. Take your pick."

Caleb leaned up on his elbows as he seemed to consider the idea. "So, you're basically asking me if I'd be willing to be in a threesome with you and Joel?"

"Yeah, I suppose I am," Grayson said hesitantly.

"We'd have to discuss it with Joel first."

Grayson felt his eyes widen. "You'd be willing to talk to him about it?"

Caleb shrugged. "Well, it would make sense if you're mated to the both of us, doesn't it? It's either that or you're going to be doing a lot of bed hopping."

Grayson grinned and pushed the butt plug against Caleb's sensitive entrance. The man groaned and fell back against the mattress, grabbing his legs and pulling them back up to his chest.

"Fuck, we can do anything you want if you promise to never stop doing that."

Grayson was in heaven, not because Caleb agreed to consider having Joel in their bed but because he knew Caleb didn't have a clue about what was coming his way in a few minutes. Grayson couldn't wait.

Caleb's entire body went stiff when the plug finally slipped all of the way inside his ass. Grayson pushed and pulled on the rubber device then twisted it around until a long wail fell from Caleb's lips.

Knowing he'd found Caleb's sweet spot, Grayson concentrated on pushing the plug in that direction, rubbing the hard rubber tip against the walnut-sized gland over and over again.

With his other hand, he pressed his fingers into his ass again, riding them as he stimulated Caleb's ass. Caleb's moans filled the room around him, drowning out every other sound. A bomb could have exploded outside their room, and Grayson wouldn't have cared.

When Caleb started to reach for his cock, Grayson blocked him, swallowing the hard shaft down until the head hit the back of his throat. He suddenly wished he had a third hand so that he could grab his own aching cock, but that would have to wait until he was riding the thick cock in his mouth.

"Grayson," Caleb cried out, "I'm not going to last much longer."

Grayson knew that was his cue. He pushed the rubber plug deep into Caleb's ass then stood to his feet, his legs shaking with the intensity of the desire he felt for the man blinking up at him.

"Scoot up to the head of the bed."

Caleb looked confused but did as Grayson ordered. Grayson climbed up onto the bed, kneeling between Caleb's legs. He checked to make sure the plug was still seated nicely then pushed Caleb's legs together.

Grayson couldn't keep the grin off his face at Caleb's shocked look as he straddled the man and slowly sank down on his cock. There was burning and twinges of pain as Caleb's massive length filled his ass, but the pleasure shooting through his body far outweighed any discomfort he felt.

By the time Grayson sat all of the way down on Caleb, he felt fuller than he could ever remember feeling. There wasn't an inch of space left empty in his ass. He would feel Caleb's cock move inside him with every thrust.

"Damn, you've grown bigger."

"And you're tighter than a fucking virgin."

Grayson chuckled. "That's because you were the last person to have my ass. I haven't let anyone in there in all the years we've been apart."

Caleb's shocked face was priceless and something Grayson would always remember. He knew from the sudden glint of tears in Caleb's eyes that he had given him a gift that the man would never forget.

Grayson moved up until just the tip of Caleb's cock remained inside of his tight hole. He slowly lowered himself down, testing the angle, the fit, and his ability to think clearly. The moment Caleb groaned, Grayson knew that thinking was something of the past.

"Fuck me, Caleb." Grayson hissed. "I want to feel your cock pound my ass."

Grayson had no idea when he spoke the words that Caleb would do exactly what he demanded. He just wanted to see the man's reaction.

Damn submissive!

Caleb's hands gripped Grayson's hips as he thrust up. Grayson cried out, a sound that was normally foreign to him, as Caleb's cock rubbed against his prostate the entire time.

Each thrust was powerful, pushing Grayson forward until he had to plant his hands on the mattress on both sides of Caleb's head to keep from crashing into the headboard. Caleb was strong, powerful, and able to lift Grayson up and down on his cock as he lifted his own body to meet Grayson's.

It was heaven and it was hell, exquisite in its intensity and painful in its strength. Grayson felt like he was paralyzed to do anything but hover over Caleb as his the man used his body for his own pleasure.

It would have truly been hell if Grayson's lust didn't burn hotter with each thrust of Caleb's cock into his ass. Every inch of Grayson's body felt alive, on fire from the look in Caleb's eyes. The burning desire he could see made his very skin tingle.

When Caleb leaned up and bit down on Grayson's nipple, that was all it took. Without his cock being stimulated in any way, Grayson cried out, filling the space between them with his seed.

He felt his inner muscles clamp down on Caleb's body, squeezing the man's cock in a death grip. If Grayson didn't know better, he

would have thought his body was trying to hold Caleb inside, not wanting to let him go when the man started to pull away.

Grayson moaned as Caleb pulled free, not understanding what the man was doing until he scooted out from under Grayson and moved behind him. Before Grayson could even brace himself, Caleb sank back into his ass.

Caleb's fingers dug into Grayson's hips as he pounded into him, hitting Grayson's sweet spot with every thrust. Grayson didn't even have time to grow soft after his last orgasm before he felt himself moving quickly toward another one. He was astounded. No one had ever brought him to two orgasms before.

Grayson's mind reeled. His entire body rattled with electrical shocks as Caleb nailed his prostate over and over again. The man knew the right angle to hit, and he used it, driving Grayson out of his mind with lust.

"Ca-Caleb! Please!" Grayson finally pleaded, giving up control for the first time in twenty years. That seemed to be all Caleb was waiting for, his submission. A hand suddenly wrapped around Grayson's cock, stroking him just as quickly as Caleb pounded into his ass.

Grayson's mind fragmented when he felt Caleb's cock swell in his ass, filling him to the point where the man could barely move. Caleb's mouth nuzzled the back of Grayson's neck, but his teeth didn't sink in. Grayson knew Caleb couldn't as he was the alpha and Caleb was his submissive.

Or could he?

"Do it, Caleb, bite me. Give me your mark."

Grayson's breathe hissed out of him as he felt Caleb's body suddenly shift, becoming larger, furrier. Sharp canine teeth sank into the nap of Grayson's neck. He cried out as pain flooded his body. At the exact same time, Caleb's thumb brushed across the small slit at the head of Grayson's cock, and he exploded.

The pain filling Grayson's body mixed with the intense pleasure Caleb created until he couldn't tell which was stronger. When Caleb roared in his ear and wet heat filled his ass, Grayson knew only pleasure as if his body craved the seed filling him.

Grayson collapsed down onto the mattress, grunting when Caleb's larger body blanketed him from behind. He moaned, his skin tingling as Caleb gently stroked him from chest to hip then back up again.

"Are you doing okay?" Caleb whispered into his ear after he shifted back to his human form.

"You mean besides the two by four in my ass?" Grayson chuckled as he wiggled his butt just a little. He didn't want to move too much. He wasn't quite ready to let go of the cock seated deep inside of him. When Caleb started to pull out of him, Grayson groaned in protest and reached back to hold the man inside of him. "Not yet."

Caleb settled against Grayson, wrapping an arm around his waist. Grayson, in turn, wrapped his arms around Caleb's arm, holding the man to him. He felt content for the first time in years, and that confused him. He should have felt content to just claim Caleb, but maybe he needed to be claimed to.

"*Thank you,*" Caleb whispered through their bond.

Grayson turned his head enough to be able to see into Caleb's eyes. "Thank you for giving me what I needed."

"Did I, give you what you needed, I mean?"

Grayson smiled and leaned up to plant a gentle kiss on Caleb's lips. "You gave me exactly what I needed, Caleb. You gave me a part of you."

"Does that mean you're not mad I gave you the mating mark?"

"No, I'm not angry. I asked for it, didn't I?"

Caleb nodded. "Yeah, but I thought it might have been the heat of the moment."

"No, Caleb, I will wear your mating mark as proudly as you wear mine."

"I do wear it proudly."

Grayson chuckled. "You'd better. You're stuck with it."

Chapter 9

Caleb buttoned up his shirt as he watched Grayson standing across the room staring out the window. He was still totally stunned that Grayson allowed the mating mark. It was unheard of in an alpha, but Caleb couldn't help but think of how happy the gesture made him. Grayson would be his forever, even if he had to share him with Joel.

And after Grayson's little comments while they were having sex, the thought of having Joel in their lives was a little less daunting. Joel was a handsome man for a vampire. Caleb could see the three of them being together.

He just wondered how he would handle watching Grayson and Joel being together. Caleb knew he had hang-ups where Grayson was concerned. He'd loved the guy for more years than he could remember.

But Caleb wasn't fooling himself. Watching someone else receive Grayson's love and affection wouldn't be easy. Caleb just hoped he could hold it together long enough to become comfortable with Joel because it was obvious that the man wasn't going anywhere.

Now that his mind was no longer on sex, Grayson was becoming unglued. Caleb could see it in the way the man's hands clenched and unclenched as he watched out the window.

"Grayson?"

Grayson's head turned toward him, and Caleb finally got a glimpse of the hell the man was going through. His face looked almost ravaged, tight lines of worry etching his forehead and making the dark circles under his eyes seem more prominent. Grayson's hazel

eyes had paled, turning almost milky. His lips were pressed tightly together.

"We'll find him, Grayson."

"Will we? How can you know that? At the moment, we don't even know who took him. He could be dead for all we know."

Caleb didn't have the connection to Joel that Grayson did, but his heart still ached at the loss of the man. Caleb chalked it up to his feelings for Grayson and decided to concentrate on helping his mate.

"So, let's go find him then."

Grayson snorted and rolled his eyes as he turned back to the window. "And how in the hell are we going to do that? Like I said, we don't have a fucking clue where he is or who took him."

"So, what do we know?"

"We know he's gone!" Grayson snapped as he swung around to glare at Caleb. He waved his hand angrily through the air. "We know he isn't here where he should be."

Caleb quickly crossed the floor to stand in front of the man. "Grayson, look at me," he said when Grayson turned his head away. When he wouldn't, Caleb grabbed Grayson's face and forced him back. "We will find Joel. I promise you."

The misery in Grayson's eyes sent a shard of pain through Caleb's heart. He briefly wondered if Grayson would feel the same if he were missing, and he felt guilty for wondering.

"You can't promise that, Caleb."

"For you, I'd promise anything."

Grayson inhaled so deeply, his chest rose up under his shirt. He leaned his forehead against Caleb's. "I guess I'm being a little crazy, huh?"

Caleb smiled. "No, you're not. Your mate is missing. I understand that. I'd feel exactly the same way if something happened to you."

"This can't be easy for you."

Caleb dropped his eyes for a moment and took a deep breath before looking back into Grayson's inquisitive gaze. He wondered if

honesty was the best thing right now, but even as he thought that, he dismissed the idea. He didn't want to start out his relationship with Grayson by lying to him.

"No, it's not. But part of what makes it hard for me is because of what this is doing to you. I can't stand seeing you this way. It makes my heart ache."

"And the other part?"

"Having to share you with someone else." Grayson opened his mouth to speak, but Caleb pressed his finger against the man's lips to stop him. "Yes, it's hard, but no, I won't let it affect things between us, even if that *us* includes Joel."

"Can you seriously do that?"

"Honestly?" Caleb chuckled. "I have no fucking clue, but I'm sure going to try. I don't see that I have any other choice. I can accept Joel in our lives, or I can lose you, and that's not an option for me."

Grayson's forehead creased as he frowned. "Why are you being so accepting of all of this, Caleb? We barely had a few hours together before another man came into our lives. Why—" Grayson cleared his throat as if a lump had formed. "Why are you not angry with me?"

Caleb could hear the uncertainty and confusion in Grayson's voice, making it unsteady and thick. If not for that, he would have brushed Grayson's question aside with some little off handed comment.

"I love you," he said simply. "I've loved you since we were teenagers. I've spent years fighting obstacle after obstacle to bring us back together. I'm not going to let another man being mated to you stand in my way, not now."

Grayson's eyes widened. The hazel brown color turned so dark brown that Caleb almost started panting. Grayson's eyes only turned dark brown when he was feeling his emotions deeply... or aroused.

"I don't deserve you."

"No, you don't, but you have me anyway." Caleb chuckled as he patted Grayson's chest. "Now, how about we track down your wayward mate?"

Caleb could feel Grayson staring at him as he walked toward the bedroom door. He knew his mate had to be confused by his words because he sure was. By all rights, he should be screaming and yelling, throwing the temper tantrums of all temper tantrums. He wasn't.

For some odd reason that Caleb had yet to understand, he accepted Joel into the tight intimate circle formed when Grayson claimed him. Figuring out why seemed too confusing, so Caleb just decided to accept it.

"Are you coming?" Caleb asked as he glanced over his shoulder at Grayson. "I haven't been here in years and have absolutely no idea where I'm going."

"Yeah," Grayson said as he walked over to join him. When he started to reach for the door handle, Caleb laid a hand on his arm.

"How do you want to handle the whole mate covenant thing?" he asked. "Do we tell people now or later because you know it's going to come up the moment someone spots the mating mark on my neck?"

"I'll shout it from the rooftops if I have to." Grayson smirked. "Besides, I think the word has already gotten out. Have you seen the amount of people meandering about outside? I'd say close to half your clan is out there."

"What?" Caleb started to walk to the window when he felt Grayson grab his arm. He paused, looking at the man.

"Let's just go downstairs. I'm sure that everyone from both of our clans is waiting for our announcement. They may not all know about the mate covenant, but they do know that their alpha has been injured. They need to see you standing on your own two feet to relieve their minds."

Caleb nodded and allowed Grayson to open the door and lead him out. He could feel his heart pounding in his chest the closer they

walked to the stairs leading downstairs. Caleb could hear the noise created from all of the people he could see gathering below the balcony.

The noise started to die down as Caleb and Grayson walked down the stairs. They stopped about half way down, and Grayson raised his hand in the air to get everyone to quiet down.

"I know you've all been concerned about Alpha Redding's injuries, but as you can see, he is fine." Caleb didn't say anything, just stood there, feeling the stares of all those gathered below.

It was no longer his place to speak unless Grayson gave him permission to address the masses. It wasn't that he needed permission exactly. More like it would be disrespectful to Grayson if he tried to talk over the man's words.

Besides, Caleb really didn't want to be the one to drop the big bomb on the two clans. He knew it would come up, especially when everyone realized that the two clans were now one, but he'd rather let Grayson be the one to mention it.

"The Council of Elders wanted a peace treaty between our clans. With the hard work of Alpha Redding, that has been accomplished. There will be peace between our clans."

The roar of applause thundered through the large room. Caleb was actually a little surprised at how excited everyone seemed to be. He knew they were all tired of the dissention between the two packs, but he hadn't realized how enthusiastic they would be at the idea of a peace agreement.

"The Council of Elders has approved a mate covenant between our two clans, combining us together into one clan," Grayson continued. "We will be the biggest, strongest clan in all the territory."

Again, thunderous applause filled the room. Caleb held his breath and gripped the stair banister next to him so tightly his knuckles turned white. He knew Grayson's next words could make or break their new clan.

Grayson gripped his other hand and held it in the air. "I'd like to introduce you to the new alpha mate, Caleb Redding."

Caleb expected the sudden silence that fell over the room. He didn't expect to hear someone start to clap, followed by several others until the room was once again filled with applause.

As Grayson pulled him down the stairs into the throng of clan members, Caleb was shocked by the number of people that came up to them and congratulated them on their newly mated status. He hadn't expected it.

There were several people that stood off to the sides, not coming forward to offer their well wishes. Caleb knew that not everyone would agree with the mate covenant, but there seemed to be more people happy for them than not.

"So, you've mated my brother, huh?"

Caleb swung around to find Taylor Cane, Grayson's brother and second-in-command, standing behind him. He wasn't sure the man was one of the people wishing him and Grayson well when he noted the frown on Taylor's face and the way his arms were crossed over his chest.

"Yes, I have."

"Does that mean I have to answer to you as well as Grayson?"

"It is the mandate of the Council of Elders that I be placed second-in-command to your brother. He will continue to be alpha here."

"For your clan as well or will Grayson be second-in-command for them?"

"As of this mating, our clans become one clan, just as Grayson said. He will be alpha of both clans."

"And you're okay with that?" Taylor sounded shocked.

"I'm okay with having Grayson in my life and combining our clans. It's for the good of everyone." Caleb really didn't want to say more, not at the moment and certainly not without talking to Grayson first.

"Is it for the good of Grayson, too?" Taylor countered, and Caleb suddenly understood that Taylor was concerned for his brother's welfare.

"It will be." Caleb smiled, not really feeling joyful but wanting to put Taylor at ease. "I worked a long time to be with Grayson. I will do everything in my power to make him happy."

"Our clans have been at war for years. Your father killed mine." There was venom and hate in Taylor's voice. Caleb wondered if the man held him responsible for the death of his father. "Why should I believe you?"

"You don't have to believe me, but this mate covenant has been sanctioned by the Council of Elders. Even if you don't agree with it, you have to accept it. It's done. Grayson has already claimed me. There is no taking it back. Even you have to know that."

Taylor's lip curled and a distasteful sneer came over his face. "You let him mark you?"

Before Caleb could reply, Grayson had a hand wrapped around Taylor's throat, holding him a few inches off the floor. "Never, ever, speak to my mate in such a tone again. He has sacrificed more than you could ever imagine to bring peace to our clans."

"Gray-Grayson," Taylor choked as he struggled. "I can-can't breathe."

"Be lucky you're not dead," Grayson snapped. "You know the laws. You know you are not allowed to touch Caleb or speak to him in such a manner. He is the alpha mate. He is also my second-in-command as of now."

Taylor staggered as Grayson released him. He rubbed his throat, his face looking pale and stricken. "You've replaced me with him?"

Caleb's eyebrow arched at the disgust packed into that one little word...*him*. He instantly knew that whatever else happened, he would have problems with Taylor Cane. The man hated him.

"The Council of Elders replaced you with Caleb. He will be my second-in-command at their direction. He is doing as the Council

mandated. He submitted to me as my mate, he has given up his alpha status and his clan, all so that the war would end between us." Grayson spit out. "You will not disrespect him, or I will consider it a personal insult and deal with it accordingly. If there's anything left of you when I'm done, I will hand you over to the council."

Taylor's mouth remained closed as he nodded to Grayson, but Caleb could still feel the hatred burning in the man's eyes and knew things were not over between them. At some point, Caleb would have to face Taylor, and maybe even challenge him. The very idea of hurting Grayson's brother made Caleb's stomach clench.

"Congratulations, Caleb."

Caleb turned to find his brother, Keenan, standing behind him. He waited for the words of recrimination that he'd heard from Taylor, but when he only received a smile, he let out a sigh of relief.

"Thank you, brother."

"I guess this means I'm not the second-in-command of the Redding Clan anymore, huh?"

Caleb grimaced. "Uh, not exactly."

"Do I have any duties?"

Caleb glanced at Grayson, an eyebrow arched. "*Grayson?*"

"*Do you trust him?*" Grayson asked silently.

"*With your life,*" Caleb answered simply.

"That's quite a recommendation." Grayson chuckled. "Very well, Keenan, as Caleb has so much trust in you, then I am sure I can find a position for you in the clan. Would you be satisfied being my third?"

"Your third?" Keenan choked. "You would allow me to be your third?"

"If Caleb trusts you, then I do, too."

"Grayson!" Taylor snapped. He waved his hand between Caleb and Keenan. "We've been at war with these people for years. How can you trust them so easily? They killed our father."

"Our father killed himself when he challenged their father," Grayson suddenly shouted. "Caleb and Keenan had nothing to do with it. They were just children."

"Everyone knows that if you had been able to keep your dick in your pants that our father never would have needed to challenge theirs," Taylor shouted right back, his face flushing red. He pointed to Caleb, the sneer back on his face. "He is the reason our father is dead, and now you've brought him into our home? Have you forgotten everything our father taught you?"

Grayson reacted before Caleb could stop him, his hand swinging out, claws extended. They raked across Taylor's chest, leaving long, bloody gashes. The crowd around them gasped, several people jumping back out of harm's way.

Caleb scrambled to grab Grayson's arm before he could do something he would regret later. He knew Grayson was angry, but he would hate himself if he really harmed his brother.

"Grayson, stop!" Grayson growled, barring his teeth. Caleb rolled his eyes, not in the least bit intimidated. "Knock it off, Grayson. I understand you are angry at Taylor, but this is neither the time nor the place to handle it. We have bigger fish to fry, remember?"

Grayson's eyes clouded for a moment then cleared as he nodded, the tension releasing from his shoulders. "You're right, and I apologize for growling at you. It was uncalled for."

"You're apologizing to him?" Taylor snapped. He waved his hand in an exasperated motion. "Oh, now I've seen everything. Once again, your hormones have led you to turn your back on your clan just like they did all those years ago."

"Taylor!"

"Fuck you, Grayson. I refuse to be a part of this. You're betraying our father's memory by even allowing this dog to live, let alone be inside of our father's house. Father is probably rolling over in his grave right now."

"That's enough!" Caleb shouted when he saw Grayson's face turn pale white. "Grayson is your alpha. You don't have to like the decisions he makes, but you do have to follow them."

"The hell I do," Taylor yelled. "I'm going to the Council of Elders. I'm sure they will reverse their decision to support this mate covenant once they find out how you two have betrayed your clans."

Caleb cocked his head to one side. Something about Taylor's words didn't ring true in his head. They just didn't sound right. The Council of Elders not only supported their decision, they added to the agreement. What part of what Grayson and Caleb did was a betrayal?

Before Caleb could stop him, Grayson grabbed Taylor by his shirt and shoved him toward the front door. "Get out!" Grayson snapped. "I've had enough of your disrespect. You will leave this clan and not come back."

"You're kicking me out because of him?" Taylor asked as he pointed to Caleb. "Now I know you've lost your mind."

"No, I think I've finally found it." Grayson pushed Taylor a little further out the door by slamming the flat of his hand into his brother's chest. "Caleb is my mate. I will not have him disrespected by you or anyone else."

"Disrespected?" Taylor gasped. "He's lucky I haven't killed him before now."

Caleb stood there, watching with dawning horror as Grayson snarled and leapt toward his brother, attacking him with teeth and claws. He knew from the ferocity of the fight that if he didn't stop it, someone was going to die.

Caleb jumped into the fray, pulling at Grayson's arm. He felt Grayson resist, swinging the other clawed hand at Taylor. The only thing he could think to do was step between the two men. He did, planting his hands on Grayson's chest and pushing him back from his brother then turned to face Taylor.

He ducked when he saw Taylor turn his anger in his direction, barely missing a sharp claw aimed at his throat. When he looked up

Grayson had Taylor pinned against the wall by his throat. Taylor's face was turning purple.

"I will not kill you as you deserve. You will be turned over to the Council of Elders to face charges of attacking my alpha mate." Grayson gestured with his other hand to some men standing off to one side of the room. He didn't release Taylor until the men stepped forward and grabbed him. "Take him to the Council. Let them deal with him."

Caleb's mouth dropped open as Grayson walked back to him, wrapping an arm around Caleb's waist. He glanced around the room at all the people that remained, giving them what Caleb knew was his most intimidating glare.

"Caleb Redding is my mate. Our mate covenant has been approved by the Council of Elders. If any of you have issue with our mating or cannot accept Caleb as my mate and second-in-command, if you cannot accept the combining of our two clans as a new start for all of us, you are free to leave."

Caleb wasn't surprised when several people walked out the front door. He expected that. He was surprised at how many people stayed. That, he hadn't expected. Maybe they had a less hard road to travel than he thought.

Then he remembered that he wasn't Grayson's only mate.

"Grayson, what about Joel?"

Chapter 10

Grayson's breathe shuddered from his chest as he suddenly remembered that one of his mates was out there somewhere, missing and possibly dead. He couldn't understand how he could possibly forget that and was assailed with guilt.

Maybe it was the sudden situation he found himself in or his anger at his brother's hatred. Grayson still couldn't believe that Taylor held such hatred toward Caleb and he hadn't seen it.

Their father challenged Caleb's because Grayson and Caleb had been found in a compromising position. Hell, they got caught making out. Grayson suddenly remembered that it was his brother Taylor that caught him and Caleb together. A young boy at the time, Taylor had gone running to their father.

When Grayson and Caleb tried to play it off as teenage curiosity, words started between their fathers. Those words had quickly turned to anger then finally a challenge to the death.

Grayson remembered standing across a small clearing from Caleb as they both watched their fathers fight, wondering if that would be the last time he ever saw the man. His heart nearly broke when both alphas died of their injuries, and he and Caleb were declared the new alphas.

Grayson remembered the heartache he could see on Caleb's face as they looked at each other one last time then turned and went to their perspective clans. Until a couple of days ago, that had been the closest he'd been to Caleb in years.

And now the man stood by his side. Grayson felt a sudden need to be closer to Caleb in case this, too, was the last time they might be

together. He couldn't seem to shake the feeling something horrible would happen to Caleb.

"I want to speak to you alone for a moment," Grayson snapped through clenched teeth. He didn't even wait to see if Caleb heard his words before he turned away and stalked across the room to his study, leaving the door open for his mate.

A moment later, he heard the door shut quietly behind him. Grayson turned, grabbed Caleb by his arms, then slammed him against the wall. He could see Caleb's eyes widen, his mouth dropping open in shock as he leaned in close.

"Don't ever put yourself between me and an adversary again. Do you understand me? Your first duty to me is to keep yourself safe at all times. I demand it as your alpha."

Caleb blinked several times as if stunned beyond speech. His mouth opened and closed like a fish. "Grayson, I—"

Grayson shook him again. He couldn't explain his sudden need to have Caleb safe other than the fact that Joel wasn't, and he needed to keep his remaining mate wrapped in cotton wool.

"If you fail to follow my command, I will lock you in a room where you will be safe and never let you out. Do I make myself crystal clear?"

"Grayson, I've been the alpha of my own clan for nearly twenty years. I can take care of myself. I promise."

"I don't fucking care what you've been. You belong to me now, and I will not let anything happen to you."

"Grayson." The way Caleb's features suddenly softened and his voice mellowed made Grayson nervous. The man had way too much control over him. "Nothing is going to happen to me."

"You can't promise that," Grayson said desperately.

"No, I can't, but I can promise to be careful." Grayson leaned into the hand Caleb cupped against his cheek. "I'm a big boy, Grayson, and I've been doing this on my own for a very long time. Besides, now I have you to keep watch over me."

"I'm assigning you a bodyguard," Grayson said, determined to keep Caleb safe at all costs. He didn't care that Caleb had been an alpha for years. He didn't care that the man was bigger than him. "Who do you trust?"

"Uh, Keenan, I guess but, Grayson, I don't—"

"It's not up for debate. As the alpha mate, you will have a bodyguard. You are forbidden to go anywhere without one except for when you are with me. Is that understood?"

"Don't you trust me?"

"Yes, I trust you. I trust you with my life, which is what you are to me. I might have already lost Joel. I won't survive losing you, too."

Caleb drew in a deep breath. "Okay, I will allow you to—"

"Hey, I thought I was the alpha here. There's no *allow* about it. I get to make the decisions."

Caleb's lips twisted together as a small smirk came across his lips. Grayson was suddenly left to wonder who dominated who because he was pretty sure he was about to have his high-handed words handed right back to him.

"Very true, but agreeing to your orders is a lot different than going along with them." Caleb patted Grayson's chest, almost as if patting a small child on the head. "Now, you can compromise, assign me a bodyguard with the understanding that I am still my own person and have a brain, or not, in which case, I dare you to try and lock me up. Your bed would get awfully cold awfully fast."

Grayson's eyebrows shot up. "You would deny me my right to my mate?"

"In a heartbeat."

Grayson's mouth started to drop open then he laughed. Grayson laughed until tears slid down his cheeks. He wrapped a hand around Caleb's neck and pulled the man close, turning his face to nuzzle the skin of Caleb's neck.

"I pray to the gods that you always stand up to me this way. You'll keep me on my toes." Grayson opened his mouth and nipped the edge

of Caleb's ear before soothing the small bite with his tongue. He delighted in the small shiver he felt go through Caleb's body. "And I'll let you in on a little secret. It's also sexy as hell."

"Yeah?"

"Wouldn't you be turned on if you had six-foot-five of gorgeous male submitting to you?"

Caleb frowned. "But you just said you thought me not submitting to you was sexy. You can't have it both ways, Grayson."

"The hell I can't." Grayson chuckled. He gripped a handful of Caleb's hair and yanked his head back. "You submit to me and only me. Everyone else must submit to you. Do you know how arousing it is to know I am the only person on earth you will be submissive with?"

Grayson pulled on Caleb's hair with one hand and pushed on the man's shoulder with the other one until Caleb dropped to his knees. He nearly growled at the intoxicating sight of Caleb at his feet.

"You look so fucking amazing this way." Caleb's head tilted back. Grayson inhaled deeply at the sudden fire he could see burning in the man's moss green eyes. "And you willingly do this for me, don't you?"

"I do."

"And that's what makes this so damn perfect. You'd no more kneel before another man than you would chop off your head." Grayson caressed the side of Caleb's upturned face. "Yet you freely submit to me."

Caleb grinned then leaned in to rub his face over Grayson's jean-covered groin. "I'd willingly do anything for you."

"Then do as I ask, Caleb, and let me assign you a bodyguard. Please. I need to know that you're safe."

Caleb rolled his eyes but nodded. "Fine, assign me a bodyguard, but he sleeps outside the bedroom, got it?"

"Agreed."

Grayson almost swallowed his tongue when Caleb looked down to stare at the bulge growing in Grayson's pants. Having Caleb at his feet was too intoxicating for him not to get aroused.

"Anything else you'd like from me?"

Grayson could think of a million things starting with Caleb's lips wrapped around his cock, but at the moment, he had more pressing needs. Joel was still missing, and he needed to find him.

Grayson grabbed Caleb's hand and pulled him to his feet. He stroked his hand down the man's face to lesson his words, knowing they might hurt Caleb. "I want a lot of things from you, but right now we need to locate Joel."

"As much as I disagree with your timing, you're right." Caleb lifted a finger and wagged it in Grayson's face. "But the moment we do, your ass is mine."

Grayson couldn't disagree with that statement. He had no problem with Caleb taking his ass. It seemed to him that the submissive nature of his relationship with Caleb only existed outside of the bedroom. Strangely enough, Grayson was okay with that.

"So, who do you think attacked us and took Joel?" Grayson asked as he reluctantly stepped back from Caleb.

"Honestly?"

"Yes, of course."

"Your brother."

"Taylor?" Grayson frowned as he considered the possibility. "You know, if you had said that an hour ago, I would have thought you were nuts, but after his little display when I announced our mate covenant, I'm not too sure."

"I'm sorry." Caleb's hand wavered in the air for a moment as if he wanted to say something but didn't know quite how to say it.

"Caleb?"

"Do you blame me for your father's death?" Caleb's brows were drawn together in an agonized expression. Grayson suddenly realized

that Taylor's words had gotten to his mate, made him feel responsible for something he had no control over.

"No, I blame my father. Well, I blame both our fathers but not you. What happened between us was between us. It was no one else's business but ours. They chose to make it an issue, not us." Grayson shrugged and glanced around the room. "I think that's why Taylor is so angry. You do remember that he's the one that caught us, don't you?"

"How could I forget?" Caleb laughed nervously as he pushed a hand through his hair. "I was never so embarrassed in my life."

"What you probably don't know is that Taylor was also the one that went to my father and told him what he saw. It was then that my father confronted your father. We both know what happened after that."

"My worst nightmare came to life," Caleb whispered. "They took you away from me."

"I believe Taylor feels guilty, that if he never said anything our fathers might not have fought. Because he was so young, he couldn't handle that guilt, so he transferred it to you and me and our relationship."

"But it wasn't his fault," Caleb insisted. "He was just a child."

"I agree, but—" Before Grayson could finish speaking, a loud knock came at the door. He walked over and opened it to find Duncan standing there. "What?"

"Taylor escaped." Duncan glanced past Grayson to Caleb then back. "He killed the two men you had escorting him to the Council of Elders."

"Damn!"

"Do they have families?" Caleb asked quietly. "Have they been informed?"

Grayson turned to look at his mate in surprise. He was impressed that Caleb's first concern was for the families that might have lost one of the two men. He never really considered Caleb's role in the clan,

but he suddenly knew the man would be a great asset. He really did care.

"Thomas has..." Grayson grimaced, "he had a wife and small child, but Derek was a single male in the clan."

"Has his wife been informed? Is there anyone to go sit with her?"

"I'll see that it is arranged, Alpha Redding," Duncan said solemnly.

"Caleb will do just fine." Caleb smiled almost sadly. "I'm no longer an alpha."

"Alpha mate then," Duncan said respectfully.

Caleb chuckled. "Caleb will do."

Duncan nodded.

"Is there any sign of Taylor?" Grayson asked, not comfortable with the way that Duncan stared at his mate. His eyes seemed to look just a little too long, take in a little too much. Grayson growled, and Duncan's face flushed as he quickly looked at him.

"We tracked him as far as the end of the driveway, but he got into a car there. We haven't been able to track the car."

"He had someone waiting for him?" Caleb asked.

"Unknown. There didn't seem to be any sign of a struggle, so we assume whoever picked him up did so willingly. Whether that person was waiting for him or just passing by, we don't know."

"Grayson, you should go down there and see if you can smell anything. Your sense of smell is far superior to any of ours. You might pick something up that everyone else missed."

Grayson nodded at Caleb's words. "Duncan, would you please ask Keenan to join us?" Duncan nodded and walked away. Grayson turned toward Caleb, meeting his arched eyebrow with a grin. "I'll go down and sniff things out, but I'm assigning you a bodyguard first. I won't leave you here unprotected."

Caleb rolled his eyes and raised his middle finger.

Grayson was still chuckling when Duncan came back with Keenan. He waited until they both walked into the room and shut the

door behind them before speaking. What he had to say was for their ears only.

"I believe Caleb's life may be in danger," he began, ignoring the shocked looks on both men's faces. "As such, I am assigning both of you as his personal guards."

"Grayson!" Caleb exclaimed. "You said one guard, not two."

"One from each of our clans."

Caleb's eyes narrowed. "That was not part of our agreement."

"It is now." Grayson grinned. Caleb looked like he wanted to deck him. He knew the man wouldn't do anything in front of others, but Grayson was pretty sure he'd get an earful when they were alone.

He turned back to Duncan and Keenan, the smile falling from his face. "His life is yours, understood?"

Both men paled as they nodded.

"Nothing will happen to your mate, Alpha Cane," Duncan stated as he folded his arms behind his back. "I will see to it personally."

"Which is exactly why I am assigning Keenan to guard Caleb as well." Grayson wagged his finger at his clan member. "I know you just a little too well, my friend. Keep your paws off my mate."

Grayson almost wiped the knowing smirk off of Duncan's face with the back of his hand. Only the restraining touch of his mate's hand wrapping around his arm kept him in place.

When it came to clan matters, Grayson trusted Duncan more than almost anyone else on earth. The man had been at his side from nearly the beginning and had proven his worth more than once.

When it came to men, however, Duncan was a loose cannon. He loved men, all men. He wasn't very particular either. If a guy was interested, Duncan didn't let a little thing like being mated stop him from giving chase. Grayson couldn't count the number of scrapes he'd drug Duncan out of because of the man's libido. He wasn't about to let Duncan loose on his mate.

"All right, I'm going to head on down the driveway and see what I can pick up. Duncan, it's been several years since Caleb has been

here. Why don't you give him and Keenan a tour of the place while I'm gone?"

"I can do that."

"Duncan!"

"Relax, Grayson." Duncan chuckled. "Your mate is perfectly safe with me."

"He'd better be." Grayson growled.

"Am I missing something here?" Caleb asked as he looked between Grayson and Duncan.

"No, sweetie." Duncan chuckled. "Grayson is just exerting his dominance."

Grayson's jaw dropped as he watched Caleb leap across the room and grab Duncan around the throat. A moment later, he had the man pinned to the wall, his face a mere inch from Duncan's.

"Then let me exert mine." Caleb growled. "No one has the right to call me sweetie, sweetheart, baby, darling, or any other intimate term except my mate. You are not that person."

Caleb pulled Duncan away from the wall just far enough to jar the man when he slammed him back against it. "I am the alpha mate but don't ever think that makes me less than I am. Wave your dick in my direction and I will rip it off and feed it to you. Do I make myself perfectly clear?"

Duncan and Caleb were nearly matched in height and weight, so Grayson was a little shocked to see fear flash in Duncan's eyes as the man quickly nodded. "Yes, alpha mate," Duncan choked out.

Caleb grunted and dropped Duncan, turning to walk back to Grayson's side. It was a testament to Caleb's belief in himself that he turned his back on Duncan after pinning the man to the wall. It also let Duncan know that Caleb didn't see him as a threat. Grayson wasn't sure if that was a good thing or not.

When Duncan stepped away from the wall, his hand rubbing his throat, Grayson thought he might have detected a hint of respect in the man's eyes before he quickly lowered his gaze.

"My apology, alpha mate," Duncan said. "I will not make that mistake again."

"See that you don't," Caleb said. "I didn't work twenty years to get Grayson back just to fall into your bed."

"Okay," Grayson said, "if we're done with that little bit of drama, I'd like to find out what happened with Taylor. Duncan, after you show Caleb the house, please help him log into the clan computer. He needs to do some research."

"I do?"

Grayson grinned. "Yes, I want you to discover everything you can on the mediator that was sent by the Council of Elders. The more we know, the better we stand, and you know what we are looking for."

Caleb looked surprised but nodded. "Of course."

Grayson leaned over and gave Caleb a quick peck on the lips then headed for the door. He was concerned with Taylor's actions and what they might mean to the clan. Grayson had obviously missed something in Taylor's demeanor that could come back to harm the clan. He just had to figure out what.

Grayson opened the study door and started to step out, stopping suddenly when he found one of his clans members standing on the other side, his hand raised as if to knock on the door.

"Yes?"

"Alpha Garret Silvanus is asking to see you," Owen said.

Grayson frowned. "Alpha Silvanus? Of the Redtail Clan?"

"Yes."

"Why on earth would Alpha Silvanus be here to see me? I've never even met the man."

Owen shrugged. "He said something about being here to witness some sort of ceremony."

"Ceremony?" Grayson frowned. "What ceremony?"

Chapter 11

Caleb frowned when he saw Grayson's shoulders stiffen. He walked across the room and laid his hand on Grayson's shoulder, his only concern to give comfort to his mate. Something was upsetting Grayson, and Caleb wanted to make it go away.

"Grayson, is there a problem?"

"No, Caleb." Grayson smiled over his shoulder. "It seems Alpha Garret Silvanus is here to see me, something about witnessing some sort of ceremony."

"What ceremony?"

"I don't know, but I kind of wondered that myself. Why don't we go ask?"

Caleb shrugged and followed Grayson out to the main foyer. Four men stood in the entrance. It was immediately apparent who the alpha in the group was. Garret Silvanus was huge...and intimidating.

"Alpha Silvanus?" Caleb stood silently beside Grayson as his mate greeted the alpha, holding his hand out. "I'm Alpha Grayson Cane. This is my alpha mate, Caleb Redding."

"My alpha mate, Dean Stone," Garret said as he gestured to a tall, black-haired man standing next to him. Caleb felt Garret's curious gaze even as the man shook Grayson's hand. "I was under the understanding that I was here to witness the mating ceremony of Alpha Cane and Alejandro Xav—"

"You know Joel?" Grayson asked quickly.

"Joel?"

"Alejandro," Caleb supplied as he stepped forward, curiosity eating away at him. "We call him Joel."

"Yes, I know him." Garret looked suspicious as he glanced between Caleb and Grayson. "May I speak with him?"

Caleb glanced at Grayson at the same time the man looked at him. He didn't quite know what to say to the alpha. He wasn't sure who the man was exactly or why he was here. And he had no idea what a mating ceremony was or how Garret even knew Grayson and Joel had mated.

"Maybe we could take this into Grayson's study?" What they might have to say to Alpha Garret wasn't for public ears. Caleb didn't think Grayson was quite ready to let their clans know that there was now a vampire in their mixed lot.

"That's a good idea, Caleb," Grayson said. "Alpha Garret, would you consent to join Caleb and me without your men? I will guarantee your safety, but I believe what we have to discuss should be kept between the three of us for the time being."

"I won't go without my alpha mate."

"And I wouldn't expect you to," Grayson said, nodding to Dean. "He is welcomed as well."

Garret looked skeptical but nodded, turning to his men and ordering them to stay behind. Caleb didn't breathe a sigh of relief until the study door shut behind the four of them.

"Alpha Cane, I mean no disrespect, but I would very much like to speak to Alejandro."

"Please, call me Grayson, and this is Caleb."

"Very well, please call me Garret, and this is Dean." The man nodded, but the frown on his face didn't reassure Caleb a bit. The man's posture was stiff as if he expected an attack at any moment. His mate stood next to him, just as stiff.

"How do you know Joel?"

Garret chuckled a little. "Joel...that will take some getting used to."

"How do you know him?" Grayson asked again.

"I've known him a long time. You might say we're old friends."

Garret was hiding something, Caleb could tell. He just didn't know what it was. He stepped closer to Grayson, feeling a sudden need to protect the man. "How did you know to come here?"

"Ale—Joel called me and asked me to come."

Caleb barely restrained Grayson when he started to leap across the room at the other alpha. He could feel the tension in the strong bunch of Grayson's muscles, the rage and anger.

"When did he call you?" Grayson snapped.

Garret's eyebrows shot up to his hairline at Grayson's menacing stance. "He called me yesterday and asked me to come witness his mating ceremony with you but..." Garret glanced between Grayson and Caleb, confusion written all over his face. "You said that Caleb was your alpha mate, so I'm a little puzzled."

"Caleb is my alpha mate," Grayson said as he raked his hand through his hair and walked over to sit down in the chair behind his desk, "but I'm also mated to Joel. It's a long story."

"Where is Joel?"

"That, too, is a long story." Grayson grimaced. "A very long, drawn-out story."

"It seems I have the time to hear it." Garret's eyebrow arched as he crossed his arms over his chest and leaned back on the edge of Grayson's desk.

His mate Dean walked over to stand behind him, and Caleb knew the man was giving the same comfort and support to Garret that he was giving to Grayson. Somehow that made Caleb feel both happy and anxious at the same time.

Caleb walked over and joined Grayson, resting his hand on his mate's shoulder. He knew how hard this was for Grayson. Having to explain it would just make it that much worse.

"Joel was taken," Grayson said slowly. He clasped his hands together and rested his elbows on the cherry-wood desk. "We don't know who took him or why he was taken, but whoever did it tried to kill us when they did it."

"He was taken?" Garret gasped. "How long ago did this happen?"

"Last night."

"And you haven't done anything about it yet?" Garret's voice started to rise as he stood and paced in front of the desk. "I thought he was your mate. Why aren't you out looking for him?"

"Garret!" Dean exclaimed. "Give him a chance to explain."

Garret's entire head moved as he rolled his eyes.

"Well, excuse the fuck out of me," Grayson snapped as he shot to his feet. "I was a little busy bleeding from a silver bullet, as was Caleb. He didn't even regain consciousness until this morning. Besides, we don't have a fucking clue where to start looking for Joel. Like I said, we don't know who took him."

"Gggaaww!" Garret groaned loudly as he rubbed his hands over his face. He finally dropped his hands to his sides and looked back over at Grayson and Caleb. "Okay, tell me exactly what happened in detail. I might be able to figure something out."

"Joel was taken," Grayson said sharply, his hands clenching into fists. "What more do you need to know?"

"What did the men look like that took him? What time of day was it? Did Joel recognize any of them? Did he go with them willingly?" Garret slammed his hands down on the table. "Think of something. Use that brain of yours."

"Okay, that's enough," Caleb said, stepping forward to put himself between the two men. "We're not going to accomplish anything if the two of you start fighting. You can measure the size of your dicks *after* we get Joel back."

Garret gapped. Grayson gently smacked Caleb on the back of the head. "Knock it off. I'm the alpha, remember?"

"Prove it." Caleb smirked as he crossed his arms over his chest. Under any other circumstance, he would have delighted in the darkening of Grayson's eyes. Currently, though, he knew they needed to discuss things with Garret. The man might be their only lead to rescuing Joel.

"I thought you were both alphas."

"Caleb agreed to give up his status as alpha in order to meet the mandates of the Council of Elders. They required it as proof that he truly wanted peace between our clans. In exchange, he became my alpha mate and second-in-command."

Garret whistled low under his breath.

Dean, on the other hand, chuckled. "Dude!"

"It's not that weird," Caleb said, suddenly feeling like he'd done something wrong in the eyes of those in his midst. "You submitted to Garret, did you not?"

"Yeah, but I'm just a beta," Dean replied. "I would have submitted to him anyway. You were an alpha."

"And a good one, from what I hear," Garret added.

Caleb turned to look at the man, his upset lessening when he detected a hint of respect in the man's gaze. Caleb shrugged. "I tried to be. Now that we've settled our differences, my clan will join with Grayson's. As his second-in-command, I hope to still have a hand in how they are treated."

"You will," Grayson assured him. Caleb smiled over at his mate, warmed by his words. It was hard to give up control after having it for so many years, but Caleb couldn't think of anyone he'd rather give it to.

"So, tell me about these men that took Joel," Garret said, bringing the conversation back to the issue at hand. "What did they look like? You, me, what? Would you recognize them again if you saw them?"

"I don't think I could ever forget them." Caleb snorted.

Grayson's eyes narrowed on Caleb for a moment before he turned to look at Garret. "I didn't get much of a chance to see the men that took Joel before they shot me, so I can't tell you much."

"I can," Caleb said as he raised his hand. "I saw them in the woods before I reached the clearing. That's what I was trying to tell you last night. I went for a run, and I heard them in the forest when I was on

my way back. I tried to reach you first to warn you, but by then the SUV had arrived."

"Wait!" Garret said. "What SUV?"

Caleb frowned. "Your garden-variety black SUV."

"Tell me about the men you saw in the woods."

"They wore all black, their clothes, black gunk on their faces, and they had really big fucking guns. And I'm pretty damn sure they were vampires. Their eyes glowed red."

"And you said that they shot you both?"

Caleb nodded. "Yes, they shot me and Grayson both, and I didn't get the impression that they were just trying to slow us down. They meant to kill us."

"Could they have been protecting Joel?"

"I don't think so. After they shot us, knocked Joel out, and took him to the car, one of the men pointed a gun at Grayson's head like he was about to kill him or make sure he was dead, but our clan arrived. He ran back to the car, and they all took off."

"Shit!" Garret exclaimed. "That's not good."

"Why?" Caleb asked.

"If vampires took Joel and tried to kill you at the same time, then you can bet they weren't there to escort him back to his coven. They were there to take him, and most likely, kill him."

"Joel was attacked before by what we think were werewolves," Grayson added. "That's how we met in fact. Joel came to mediate a peace treaty between our clans, but he never arrived, so we went looking. When we found him, he was in pretty bad shape."

"Could vampires be working with werewolves?" Caleb asked, a sudden chill making him shiver. It wasn't that he minded vampires and werewolves working together exactly, more like he didn't like it when they were up to no good. Apart, they were dangerous, together, they could be lethal.

"Anything is possible," Garret said.

"But why?" Caleb asked. "Does Joel have a lot of enemies?"

"He's the leader of his coven, one of the oldest of his kind. I imagine he's stacked up quite a list of enemies over the years, but most are too scared of him to do anything about it." Garret chuckled, much to Caleb's surprise. "He can be a scary fucker when he wants to be."

"Just how well do you know Joel?" Grayson asked.

When Caleb glanced over at him, he noticed that Grayson's eyes were narrowed, his lips pressed tightly together. Caleb also noticed how strained his muscles were under his white shirt.

"Grayson, don't," he whispered.

It didn't seem possible, but Grayson's lips thinned out even more. *"I just want to know how he knows so much about Joel. I'm not going to do anything."*

Like Caleb believed that. Grayson was wound so tightly right now he was about to spin like a top. Caleb was afraid one wrong word or move from Garret and his mate would attack the man.

"How much do *you* actually know about Joel?" Garret asked.

"Obviously not nearly enough," Grayson replied. He slumped as he sat back down in his chair, his shoulders hunched. "We didn't really have that much time together before he was taken."

Garret frowned as he rubbed his fingers over his chin. "Just exactly how did you end up mated to Joel?"

"It wasn't intended," Grayson said, "but I'm not sorry that it happened."

Caleb waited for the sharp twinge of pain he expected from Grayson's words. He held his breath, knowing the anguish would come. His mate was admitting that he wasn't upset he'd been mated to another man. Surely, the pain would be agonizing?

When the pain didn't come, he slowly released his breath and squeezed his hand on Grayson's shoulder. "Joel was severely injured. We didn't know that sharing our blood with him would send him into a blood lust."

"You both shared your blood with him?"

Caleb shook his head. "No, just Grayson."

"And the bond? How did that happen?"

"The usual way, I guess." Grayson shrugged. "I gave Joel my blood to save him. He smelled Caleb and I have sex. The combination of the two things sent Joel into a blood lust, and he attacked us. During the process, we exchanged blood and—" Grayson stopped speaking and shook his head.

"One thing led to another and Grayson and Joel were bonded," Caleb continued for his mate. "A little while later, Grayson claimed Joel in the way of our people, marking him."

"Oh man, you sure fucked things up, didn't you?" Garret snickered. "And now your mate is missing."

"Yes." Grayson's hands were clasped together so tightly his knuckles were white. Caleb could feel the man's misery in the bunched muscles under his hand and wished he could do anything to take it away.

"So, let's find him."

Grayson's head snapped up. "How? We don't even know who took him. Hell, I don't even know if he's alive or dead. They could have shot him just like they shot us for all I know."

"You'd know," Garret said. "You'd feel it if your mate was dead. That's part of the bond you have with him."

Caleb somehow knew that Garret spoke the truth. He knew for a fact that he'd know if something happened to Grayson. Over the years that they were separated, he'd felt things about Grayson on more than one occasion. It would be all he could do to wait until the yearly Lyken Gathering to see if the man was okay.

"How do you know all of this?" Caleb asked as he waved his hand in the air in a wide gesture. "You're a werewolf, not a vampire. How do you know so much about vampire bonding?"

Garret's grin seemed strange, almost self depreciating. "Appearances can sometimes be deceiving, Caleb, and often are."

"Could you just once answer a question with a straight answer?"
Grayson snapped. "How do you know so much about Joel?"
"He's my father."

Chapter 12

Joel knew his head was going to explode when he started to open his eyes. The pain racking his body made even the dim light in the room feel like he was standing directly under the sun.

He cracked his eyes open a little more and looked around, confusion assailing him as he tried to figure out where he was and what happened. He also wanted to know why he was tied to a chair.

The room was about as inviting as a root canal, dark grey cement walls but no windows.

Well, at least I know I won't burn to death in the sunlight, Joel chuckled softly to himself. He quickly stopped when he realized his laugh was a little hysterical in nature. He was in deep shit, and he knew it.

Joel racked his brain and tried to remember what happened to him and why he was being held captive. He finally settled on the memory of Caleb running toward him and Grayson.

Joel had felt concern at first, not knowing if the man was running toward them to kill him or for another reason. He had just bonded with Caleb's mate. The man was sure to be pissed. Joel knew he would have been.

It wasn't until Caleb and Grayson went down that Joel realized they were in serious trouble. He crouched over the top of Grayson, unable to reach Caleb, and fought off their attackers until he, too, was taken down. He didn't remember anything else after that until waking up in the room he presently sat in.

This was not how he wanted to spend the afterglow of being bonded. He'd much rather be sharing the moment with Grayson. He

didn't even know where Grayson was or even if he was alive. Whoever had him could be holding Grayson in another room for all he knew.

Joel tried to force his confused emotions into some semblance of order. He needed to think, to be in control, if he was going to get out of here and save Grayson. Hell, for all he knew, he needed to save Caleb, too. He had no idea what happened to that man, either.

Joel's heart stuttered a little as he thought about Caleb being injured, and that confused Joel almost as much as being held captive. He knew basically nothing about that man except that he was a good diplomat and seemed to have some sort of calming effect on Grayson. He shouldn't be feeling anything toward Caleb. He had no bond with him except of that through Grayson.

Joel wasn't sure how he felt about that. He knew the two men had a history, one he didn't share with either of them. Joel had come into the situation not knowing much about Grayson and Caleb beyond what the Council of Elders had told him.

Grayson and Caleb knew each other years ago but went their separate ways when their fathers both died in a challenge to the death. Both men were instantly thrust into the role of alpha for their clans.

According to the file the Council of Elders supplied to him, Grayson and Caleb hadn't been in each other's company in the twenty years since. Their two clans were at odds with each other, and a peace treaty had been requested.

Joel also knew that Caleb had worked hard to bring the peace treaty about. He'd even been the one to suggest the mate covenant, even agreeing to the stipulations of the Council of Elders.

Joel wasn't sure he would have agreed to submit himself to another alpha in order to have a peace treaty settled, but he wasn't Caleb. On the other hand, he'd done exactly that with Grayson.

Just the thought of how eagerly he'd submitted to Grayson made Joel groan. One minute he wanted to punch the guy's lights out, and the next he was thrusting his tongue into the man's mouth.

And damned if Grayson didn't kiss better than anyone Joel ever met. Joel wasn't an innocent by any means. He was one of the oldest of his kind, having lived hundreds of years. In that time, he knew a lot of lovers, both men and women, but none of them kissed with the expertise of Alpha Cane.

Not one of them made Joel feel the need to submit the way Grayson did. It was maddening. Joel had the equivalent rank of an alpha in his world. He was a coven leader. He should not be submitting to anyone. If anything, others should be submitting to him.

None of which explained the mating mark Joel could feel healing on the back of his neck. He'd allowed Grayson not only to fuck him, but to leave a mating mark on him as was custom with werewolves.

Joel wasn't sure if it was because a bond already existed between them or because the man was so intimidating, and he was. Joel usually wasn't unsettled by anyone. He was stronger than most everyone he knew. He could take care of himself.

But one touch of Grayson's lips against his, and Joel had melted all over the guy. He was pathetic...and horny. Just thinking about the things Grayson had done to him, the way the man touched him, made Joel hard, and that wasn't good in his current situation.

Joel wasn't sure it was good in any situation. Grayson Cane had the ability to bring Joel to his knees and do things he never would have previously done. The man was dangerous, and despite that, Joel wanted him more than he ever wanted anyone.

Just being separated from Grayson made Joel feel needy and achy and all kinds of things he couldn't process right now. Maybe he wouldn't ever be able to process them.

There were just too many, like affection he never felt before, an obsessive need to be near Grayson, and most confusing of all, his puzzling heartache at being separated from both Grayson and Caleb.

Joel shook his head to clear his thoughts then winced when shards of pain stabbed him behind his eyes. Maybe he shouldn't have done

that. He'd love nothing more right now than a stiff drink and a large bottle of aspirin... maybe a kiss or two, too.

Joel's head snapped up when he heard the door open. Normally in full control of his emotions and what he allowed other people to see on his face, Joel couldn't help it when his mouth dropped open in shock when his lieutenant and second-in-command, Jericho, walked into the room.

Two armed men dressed in black stood quietly in the doorway behind him as Jericho strolled into the room as if casually greeting a long-lost friend. The amused smirk on Jericho's face said otherwise.

"Hello, Alejandro."

At first, Joel didn't think Jericho was talking to him. Then he suddenly realized that he had grown used to being called *Joel* by Grayson and Caleb when he figured out he was the object of Jericho's greeting. He didn't even feel like Alejandro anymore.

Joel stared at Jericho as the man grabbed another chair and brought it over to sit right in front of him. They could have been sitting down for tea...if Joel wasn't tied down to the chair he sat in.

"What the hell is going on, Jericho? Why am I tied up?"

"Because you're a moron, Alejandro."

Joel's eyebrows shot up. "Excuse me?"

Jericho snickered. "You're a moron, and you've always been a moron."

"Would you care to explain what you mean by that statement?"

Jericho's entire head moved as he rolled his eyes dramatically. "You had so much potential, and you've wasted it on two flea-bitten dogs."

Joel bristled under Jericho's words. He didn't like anyone referring to Grayson and Caleb as flea-bitten dogs. Both men were strong, intelligent leaders of their clans. They deserved more respect.

"I beg your pardon."

"We could have had the entire world in the palm of our hands, and you had to go and fuck it up by bonding with those two alphas."

Jericho shook his head. "I just don't get you. They're dogs. You've bonded with dogs."

The sneer on Jericho's face was one that Joel had seen often when discussing werewolves. He always knew that Jericho didn't like werewolves. The man had voiced his opinions often enough. Joel just hadn't realized how much Jericho really hated them until now.

"Who I bond with is none of your concern, Jericho."

"They're mongrels," Jericho shouted as he jumped to his feet. "They mate in the dirt with any bitch that lifts her ass in the air. They crawl on their bellies. They have fleas."

Okay, maybe he didn't have a clue how much Jericho really hated werewolves. The man was obviously obsessed with them. Joel just wondered why he hadn't seen this level of hatred before.

"Why do you hate them so much?"

"They're dogs!"

"They are werewolves, big difference."

Joel winced, his head ringing as Jericho slapped him across the face. He licked a small dribble of blood from the corner of his mouth as he glared up at Jericho. "That was a very bad choice."

A chill ran down Joel's spine when Jericho's hysterical laughter filled the room. There was something in the man's black eyes that told Joel Jericho wasn't quite sane anymore. Joel wondered if he'd ever been sane.

"What is this all about, Jericho?" Joel asked cautiously. "Why do you have me tied up?"

"You're going to die, Alejandro." Jericho spoke so casually they could have been talking about anything besides his imminent death. "Oh, it will all be very sad. The coven will mourn your loss. Their need to seek revenge on those that killed you will be strong."

Jericho walked over to a mirror that hung on the wall and smoothed back his straight black hair. When he turned back to Joel, his face was serene and just a bit eerie looking.

"As your second-in-command, and your friend, I will, of course, be here to lead our coven into the future. I will sacrifice myself for the greater good of our clan, mourning the loss of our great coven leader as I take the mantle of leadership and seek retribution on those that took you from us."

"You're crazy!"

"Not at all," Jericho said. "It's actually quite a brilliant plan. The peace between the werewolf clans is tentative at best. The slightest little thing could set off an all-out war between them."

"And us," Joel snapped. "What possible reason could you have for starting a war between the clans?"

"It's simple, really. If they are not fighting each other, they will begin to look for new targets, and I will not allow our people to become the victims of a werewolf attack. The best way to prevent that is to keep them fighting between themselves."

"It will never work. Alpha Asher Stone worked too hard to bring peace between the clans. He would never allow them to start fighting again over something as trivial as a vampire dying."

"Ah, but you see, that is where the brilliance of my plan comes in to play." Jericho's smirk was scary. "With the deaths of Alpha Cane and Alpha Redding at a peace meeting, the war will start between their clans, and I won't even have to lift a finger."

Joel's heart stuttered in his chest at Jericho's words. He remembered seeing both men go down, falling to the ground. He hadn't known until this moment they might be dead. Were they dead?

"Did you kill them?" he whispered, his heart suddenly pounding frantically.

Jericho shrugged. "It's more than likely that they are both dead by now. If not, they soon will be."

Joel growled and started to struggle against the ropes tying him to the chair. He wanted nothing more in that moment than to rip Jericho's throat out for killing Grayson and Caleb. The rage racing through his body was almost blinding in its intensity.

Jericho laughed and jumped out of the way as Joel tried to bite him. Joel snarled and struggled more. He could feel a sticky wet substance drip down his wrists at the same time that Jericho inhaled deeply.

Joel knew his struggle against the ropes caused his wrists to bleed, especially with the way that Jericho suddenly stared so intently at him. The man looked ready to pounce. Joel grimaced as the pit of his stomach started to roll with nausea.

"Don't even think about it."

"You, my dear friend, are no longer in charge. You don't get a choice in what I do or don't do." Jericho suddenly turned toward the two men standing in the doorway and nodded before looking back. "However, in this instance, you are correct. I have other means of getting what I need."

Joel let out a sigh of relief that Jericho wouldn't be drinking his blood. His relief instantly turned to horror as another man rushed into the room and immediately walked over to kneel at Jericho's feet, bowing his head forward in a submissive gesture.

Joe knew he recognized the man, but he couldn't quite place where from. He could be wrong, but he didn't think so. The man looked too familiar. Certainly the submissive way he knelt at Jericho's feet was familiar. It was a classic submissive gesture of a werewolf.

"A friend of yours?"

Jericho reached down and threaded his fingers through the man's short brown hair before bunching a fistful in his hand and yanking the man's head back. Joel could swear he heard a small rumble of satisfaction come from the man and was once again sickened.

"Do you like my little pet, Alejandro?"

Joel grimaced. He couldn't be more disgusted by both Jericho's phrasing and the reaction of the man at his feet. The guy was on his knees, but he was practically humping Jericho's leg.

"I have found that there is a certain delight for me in this pet." Jericho continued to stroke his fingers through man's hair as he spoke. "He is so obedient, and all it takes is a little blood sharing."

Joel inhaled sharply as he watched Jericho stretch his hand down to allow the man to bite into his wrist. The man growled, the sound low and rumbling, but Joel heard it echo through the room as if it came through a bullhorn.

"My god, what have you done, Jericho?" Joel hissed. It was instantly apparent to Joel that the two men were connected just as he was with Grayson. The vibe threading through the air was almost tangible.

"It's a simple exchange, Alejandro." Jericho chuckled. "I've shared my blood with my pet, prolonging his life span, and in exchange he does as he is ordered. It's the perfect arrangement."

"You idiot," Joel shouted. "You've bonded with him."

"As you are fully aware, my dear friend, in order for a bond to take effect, there needs to be an exchange of blood while involved in a sexual situation. It is the only way for the hormone to take effect."

Joel nodded to the bulge he could see growing behind the zipper of Jericho's slacks. It was obvious that Jericho was aroused by giving blood to his pet. "And that's not a sexual situation?"

Jericho glanced down almost as if he hadn't known he was growing hard. The look on his face would have been comical if the situation hadn't been so dire. Jericho had unwittingly bonded himself to a werewolf, and he hadn't even known.

"It looks to me like your hormones are raging right now." Joel glanced down at the man and saw a mirrored bulge in his pants. The small groans falling from the man's lips only added to Joel's conclusion. "And it appears he's not unaffected, either."

Jericho roared and shoved the man away, ripping his wrist out of his mouth. He fell back on the floor for a moment then scurried back on his hands and knees, reaching for Jericho's wrist again.

Jericho smacked the man across the face. Blood dribbled from his lip, but it did nothing to keep him from trying to go after Jericho again. It was like he was obsessed. Joel could relate. He was obsessed with Grayson.

Joel knew he had to get to Grayson before the need to be with his mate overcame his better judgment. No vampire could be separated from their bonded mate for long periods of time without going crazy.

However, getting out of a windowless room when he didn't know where he was could be problematic. Especially when there were two armed guards and the winners of the idiot of the century contest standing between Joel and the door.

"Get the hell away from me before I rip your throat out!" Jericho shouted.

"That probably wouldn't be your best choice, Jericho." Joel chuckled when the hilarity of the situation hit him. "He's your bonded mate. Kill him and you kill yourself."

"I will not be bonded to a mongrel."

"Maybe you should have thought about that before you got aroused from giving him your blood."

Jericho's face turned red as he growled. Joel had a hard time keeping a grin off his face. He understood that Jericho betrayed him. He even knew he might not make it out of this situation alive. But knowing Jericho had screwed himself at the very same time was a source of great amusement to Joel.

In all rights, he probably shouldn't feel that way. He should be afraid for his life at the moment or at the very least trying to figure out how to get out of the mess he'd found himself in. He just didn't have a clue how to do it.

Suddenly, Jericho stood straighter. He smoothed his hair back and straightened his clothes. His face became jarringly calmer. "It is of no consequence," Jericho said. "It will not interfere with my plans."

"And just what plans would those be, Jericho?" Joel didn't expect an honest answer from Jericho, so he was in no way surprised when Jericho let out a harsh chuckle that sent a chill down his spine.

"Ah, didn't I tell you, Alejandro?" Jericho asked as he sank his hand into the hair of the man once again kneeling at his feet. "I'm going to take over the world, and you're going to help me do it."

Chapter 13

Grayson tried desperately to separate the scents of the people standing behind him and those coming from the area he was slowly walking through. He could smell something, but he wasn't exactly sure what it was. So many scents filled him, some strong, some just barely there.

"Grayson?"

Grayson waved his hand for Caleb to remain quiet. He needed to concentrate, to single out the different scents. Grayson didn't know if Taylor had anything to do with Joel's disappearance, but he was beginning to suspect that he did.

Grayson shook his head, more confused than he could ever remember being. He couldn't understand how he hadn't seen the hatred brewing in his brother's heart. Taylor hated vampires, but to the degree that he'd actually try and kill one? It just didn't make sense.

And the more and more Grayson talked to Caleb and Garret, the more he was beginning to suspect that Taylor had something to do with Joel's disappearance. Taylor was one of the few people that knew where they were before Joel was taken.

Keegan was the other one, and Caleb still professed to trust his brother. Grayson would reserve judgment until he knew the man more. In the meantime, he would have Duncan keep an eye on the man's every move.

The scent of cinnamon suddenly filled the air. Grayson lifted his nose into the air and inhaled deeply. He took a couple of steps in every direction until he figured out where the scent came from.

Taylor always smelled of cinnamon. Grayson thought it had something to do with the cinnamon Taylor always put in his coffee. It made the man easy to track because it permeated his skin. Grayson did just that, following the scent to the edge of the road before coming to a stop when the scent faded.

"His scent stops here but..."

"But?" Caleb asked as he stepped up next to him.

Grayson shook his head. "I don't know exactly. There's something else here, something I can't quite put my finger on, some other scent. It smells familiar but not." Grayson looked over at Caleb. "Does that make sense?"

"I'd say you've probably smelled it somewhere before but don't remember where."

Grayson nodded as he looked back out over the road again. "You're probably right, but that would mean that whoever picked Taylor up knew him."

"Well, from his reaction, Taylor obviously didn't know you'd kick him out in favor of me, so how did whoever picked him up know to be here?"

"Maybe he called them?"

"Before or after he killed two of his clan members?" Caleb snapped.

Grayson glanced over at his mate, shocked at the anger he could hear in Caleb's voice. The lines of tension on Caleb's forehead spoke volumes. The man was livid and rightly so. Taylor had a lot to answer for.

"Garret, what's west of here?"

"Excuse me?"

"Caleb's clan territory is east of us. Taylor went west, away from Caleb's land. Is there anything west of here that might have significant to Joel or any other vampire? Someplace they could be hiding him?"

"There are a couple of small towns but nothing distinctly vampiric."

"Anything else?"

"A couple of farms, a canyon or two." Garret shrugged. "The usual country stuff."

"Fuck!" Grayson exclaimed. "There has to be something."

"I do have a suggestion," Garret said.

Grayson whipped his head around to stare at the other alpha, hope filling him. At this point, he'd take anything. He knew Joel was in trouble, but he didn't have a single lead to follow.

"What?"

"Let's head to Joel's stronghold. It's a good a starting point as any other, and we might find a clue or two there. We can at least speak with his second-in-command and find out if he's heard anything."

Grayson's mouth dropped open. "Joel's stronghold? Are you serious? How in the hell do you expect us to get inside?"

"I am his son." Garret smirked. "They can't deny me entrance."

"Great, that takes care of you, but how the hell do you expect to get me inside?"

"And me," Caleb added.

Grayson turned to tell Caleb he would stay behind where he would be safe, but the arched eyebrow and determined glint in his eyes told Grayson he would just be talking to himself.

"And Caleb." Grayson felt like punching Garret when the man chuckled at him. He sincerely hoped that Dean caused him as much trouble as Caleb did. It was only fair after all.

"I am also half werewolf. It wouldn't be strange to have other werewolves accompany me to Joel's home, especially if I needed to discuss clan business with my father. He is a mediator after all. No one needs to know more than that."

"Fuck, I hope we're never on opposing sides," Grayson snickered. "You're one conniving fucker."

"I inherited it from my father." Garret shook his finger at Grayson. "You might want to remember that when dealing with him."

"What's that supposed to mean?" Grayson snapped, suddenly pissed on his mate's behalf. Joel had shown himself to be an honest, trustworthy man. He didn't like anyone saying differently.

"Nothing," Garret said, holding his hands up. "Just remember that my father is not a stupid man by any means. Don't put him in the same category as other vampires because believe me, he's nothing like them."

Grayson's anger fled as quickly as it came. He heaved a sigh of relief before speaking. "Yes, I've come to see that in just the time we had together. His actions thus far have been nothing except honorable."

"Do you believe that even with him going into blood lust and attacking you?"

"Yes, I do. Joel was very clear that he had no control over his actions when he attacked us. The scent of sex in the air combined with the blood we shared sent him over the edge."

"And you believe him?" Garret asked.

Grayson frowned, wondering what Garret's purpose was with his words. He seemed to be trying to get Grayson to question Joel's words and actions. Grayson would have thought Garret would be more supportive of the man that fathered him.

"Do you not like Joel for some reason?" Grayson asked, suddenly on alert. "Do you have something against him?"

"Not at all," Garret said. "What makes you think that?"

"I get the feeling you want me to question my bond with him."

Garret chuckled. "No, I want to make sure that you believe in your bond with him. Despite my birth, my father has been alone a long time. He's had many lovers, including my mother, but none of them bonded with him. I just don't want to see him get hurt."

"I'm not going to hurt him," Grayson spit out.

"Before I agree to help you go after him, I need to know that. I refuse to add to the years of misery he's already suffered."

"He's my mate!" Grayson clenched his fists, ready to plow them into Garret's face. He didn't give a fuck who the man was. He had no right to question the bond Grayson had with Joel.

"Well, I can see the future with you two is going to be one big pissing contest."

Grayson turned to glare at Caleb, not amused by the little smirk he could see on the man's face. His head snapped around in the other direction when he heard someone start laughing.

"And just what do you find so funny, beta?"

Dean snickered as he waved his hand between Grayson and Garret. "Get two alphas in the same space, and their egos come out. Maybe both of you need to spend some time being betas. You'll learn a lot about holding your tongue."

"I don't see how," Grayson said. "You obviously didn't."

"Want to bet?" Dean countered. "The two of you are so busy trying to see whose dick is bigger that you're forgetting the larger picture here. Someone has taken the man you both care about. Maybe you should spend a little more time trying to figure out how to get him back rather than butting heads?"

Caleb stepped over to stand next to Dean, pointing at the man. "I'm with him."

Grayson glanced over at Garret to see his reaction to their betas' defiant words only to find the man's shoulders shaking with silent laughter. Grayson rolled his eyes. "Oh, you're no help."

"No, but you have to admit, they both have a point," Garret said.

"I don't have to admit anything."

"Oh come on, it's obvious to everyone that you care about Joel," Garret said. "Why not just admit it? It's all I wanted to know anyway."

"Yes, fine!" Grayson slashed his hand down through the air. "I care about Joel, all right? He's my mate, and the thought that someone has him right now, that someone might be hurting him or worse, is just about to kill me. I can't stand it. Happy?"

"Perfectly." Garret smirked as he crossed his arms.

Grayson rolled his eyes. "Can we just go?"

He felt Caleb's arm wrap around his waist as they all walked back up to the house. He knew the man was trying to reassure him, and to a point, it did. On the other hand, the gesture made Joel's absence all that much harder.

"We'll find him, Grayson," Caleb whispered silently, "I promise."

"Will we? What if we're too late? What if he gets hurt before we reach him? What if it's already too late?"

"Garret said you'd know if something happened to Joel, and I believe him. I'd know if something happened to you."

"How?"

Caleb smiled almost as if remembering something. *"I've always known, every time something good happened to you and even when something bad happened to you. I just felt it."*

"Yeah?" Grayson hadn't known that.

"Yeah, I've always known, and that alone tells me that you'd know if something happened to Joel. If I could tell what happened to you before we mated, can you imagine what it will be like now that we are?"

The implications of Caleb's words were staggering. They also warmed Grayson's heart in a way he could never have imagined and took some of the weight of despair off of him. He wrapped his arm around Caleb and pulled him closer.

"You will insure that you stay safe, correct?" Grayson asked out loud. "I would be very upset if you allowed anything to happen to you now that I have you by my side."

"Would you punish me?"

Grayson stumbled as he looked over at Caleb in shock. Had he heard what he thought he heard come out of Caleb's mouth? And why did the idea of smacking Caleb's ass arouse him so much?

"Did you just—"

Caleb blinked at him innocently. "Did I just what?"

"Never mind," Grayson said as he shook his head. No matter how much he might be turned on by the thought of paddling Caleb's ass, he knew he had to have misunderstood. No alpha, previous or not, would give up control enough to allow someone to spank them.

"Does that mean you don't want to spank me?"

Grayson's mouth dropped open. Speech seemed to be momentarily beyond his ability. Images of Caleb bent over the side of the bed as Grayson spanked his naked ass filled his head. The desk in his study would do in a pinch.

Grayson groaned and closed his eyes, his hand tightening around Caleb's waist until his fingers dug into the man's side. The cool, clear scent of his mate filled his senses until Grayson's cock was so hard he thought it might shatter if he moved.

Grayson's eyes snapped open when he felt Caleb turn him, the man's hand covertly covering his hard cock. "Caleb," he hissed. Now was not the time and certainly not the place for them to get frisky. The entire clan could see them out the front windows of the house.

"Not to worry, Grayson, no one can see anything other than us talking." Grayson groaned when Caleb's hand tightened around him. "I just wanted to remind you that stress relief is good for the body."

Grayson couldn't stand it anymore. He gritted his teeth and growled at his mate. "I'm going to paddle your ass until it's so red, you won't be able to sit down for a week, then I'm going to fuck it. You'll be feeling me every time you sit down for days."

"Promise?" Caleb's eyebrow arched.

Grayson just about came in his pants. No one had been able to get to Grayson the way Caleb did, not in twenty years. The man simply had to look in his direction, and Grayson was panting.

Caleb in a playful mood was even worse. If Grayson didn't know for sure that they were being watched by just about everyone at that moment, he would have already wrestled Caleb to the ground and had his dick half way up the man's ass.

"You know where the bedroom is," Grayson said as he gently cuffed Caleb on the side of the head. "I suggest you get there and get naked, now. I'll be right behind you, and I won't wait for you to prepare yourself, so you'd better do it before I get there. The minute I step inside that room, I'm going to be balls-deep inside your ass."

Caleb chuckled but hurried away. Grayson planted his hands on his hips and took several deep breathes to clear his mind and give him some semblance of control. It wouldn't do for their entire clan to see how hot he was because of his mate, even if it was the truth.

After several moments, Grayson turned toward the house. He could see Garret waiting on the front steps and hoped the man wouldn't keep him from Caleb. He wouldn't need long with his mate, but five minutes could mean the difference between having control and losing his mind.

"Dean needs a few minutes to clean up, and then we can be on our way," the alpha said as Grayson reached him.

Grayson doubted the man's words when he saw the flush on his face. He nodded anyway. "Very good. Caleb has run upstairs to change. If you and Dean would like to wait in my study, we'll be just a few minutes."

"Huh..." If anything, the flush on Garret's face deepened even more.

"There's a bathroom just inside. Your alpha mate can clean up there if you so wish." Grayson smirked. "The study door also locks from the inside."

Garret chuckled. "Thanks."

Grayson nodded then quickly moved past the man, walking inside. He had a mate to fuck, then a mate to rescue... and in that order. He paused in the entryway when he spotted Duncan. He could see Keenan standing just outside his bedroom door when he glanced upstairs.

Satisfied that his mate was being guarded, Grayson motioned for Duncan to step closer. "Alpha Silvanus and his mate will be waiting

in my study. Caleb is changing his clothes, and then we will be heading out."

Duncan nodded. "Of course, alpha. Should I wait here?"

"Bring the car around. We won't be long."

Grayson didn't wait for Duncan to reply. He knew the man would do as instructed. With one last nod to Garret, Grayson climbed the stairs as slowly as his waning control would allow him. He needed to fuck his mate and now!

Grayson nodded to Keenan when he reached his bedroom door. He opened it and quickly stepped inside before shutting it behind him. He didn't even get a chance to really get the door shut all of the way before the air in his lungs disappeared.

"Fuck me!" Grayson hissed as he took in the most arousing sight he'd ever seen. Caleb was naked from the top of his head to the tips of his toes. His legs were spread wide as he leaned over the side of the bed. Grayson could just see the man's balls hanging between his legs, his hard cock pressing into the mattress.

"I thought you were supposed to fuck me."

Grayson had his pants unbuttoned and pushed down before he even reached the bed. He smoothed his hand down the hard, muscled skin of Caleb's ass then trailed his fingers between the two glorious mounds.

Caleb squirmed on the bed when Grayson pushed his fingers into the man's tight ass. Apparently, Caleb had taken Grayson's words to heart. The man's hole was stretched and lubed, just waiting for Grayson's cock.

Grayson wasted no time, knowing he didn't have any. In another few minutes, Duncan would be knocking on the door. If he was really lucky, he would have just enough time to relieve the stress both he and Caleb were feeling, get cleaned up, and be ready to go before then.

Grayson pulled his finger free and replaced it with the head of his cock. He didn't even warn Caleb before he thrust forward. The

surprised moan that fell from the man's lips as his fingers curled into the blankets just spurred Grayson on.

He began a punishing rhythm, feeling out of control with the need flowing through him. He couldn't get deep enough, feel Caleb's body wrap around his cock tight enough. He needed more.

"Get on your hands and knees on the mattress," Grayson growled. "Spread your legs as far as they will go."

Grayson held on to Caleb as the man did as he ordered, his fingers digging into the man's hips. Grayson could feel every movement Caleb made and each of them were glorious.

Once Caleb was kneeling, his legs spread wide, Grayson gripped his hips tighter and pulled his ass back closer to him until the man's ass almost hung off the side of the bed. The angle changed things, made Caleb's ass grip Grayson's cock tighter, almost as if it were afraid to let go.

Grayson could feel each thrust of his body smack against Caleb's balls. He knew from the angle Caleb was in that the tip of his mate's cock was pressed into the mattress. Grayson knew it would stimulate the man. He also knew Caleb needed more.

Grayson reached up and grabbed a pillow off the top of the bed and shoved it under Caleb's body, making sure that Caleb's cock was pressed firmly into the soft material of the silk pillowcase.

Caleb's long, drawn-out groan told Grayson he'd hit pay dirt. Every time he thrust forward, it pushed Caleb's cock into the silky material. Grayson hoped it drove the man crazy. The tight muscles gripping his cock certainly did the same to Grayson.

Grayson glanced down to where his cock impaled Caleb. The sight was breathtaking, Caleb's pink, puckered hole stretched around his dark shaft. He could see every inch rapidly sink in and pull out as he pounded into the man.

Just out of curiosity, Grayson brought his hand down on Caleb's ass cheek. He watched the man's response carefully, going slack jawed when Caleb groaned and his entire body shuddered. He

smacked the other cheek, stunned when Caleb's groans became louder.

"Harder, Grayson, fuck me harder."

Grayson just about lost his mind at Caleb's harshly spoken words. He thrust harder, nearly driving Caleb across the bed. Caleb reached back and grabbed the edge of the mattress, holding himself in place, which was just fine with Grayson. It gave him better leverage.

He continued to pound into Caleb, smacking his ass again and again until the tight, little rounded globes blazed rosy red. Caleb began to shake. His head reared back as a loud cry fell from his lips.

Grayson groaned, shuddering when Caleb's inner muscles tightened down on his cock. Caleb's grip was so tight Grayson could barely move. The sensation was intense, filling Grayson up. He felt his balls tighten, his cock throb.

Grayson's entire body stiffened as he exploded, filling Caleb's with his release. Pulse after pulse of hot seed shot from his cock until he could feel it seep out the sides of Caleb's ass and trickle along his balls.

Grayson groaned and thrust once more, burying himself as deeply inside of Caleb as he could go. He swore he could feel himself move inside of the man as the last of his orgasm shuddered through his body.

Dragging in a deep breath, Grayson leaned over Caleb's back, making sure he pressed his body against the man's fire-hot ass. He nuzzled his face into Caleb's neck, licking along the mating mark at the nape of his neck until he felt Caleb tremble.

"*You're mine,*" he murmured to Caleb through their bond. "*You'll always be mine. You were even mine when we were separated, weren't you?*"

"Grayson," Caleb groaned.

"*I'm never letting you go, Caleb. I've claimed you. I've marked you. And now I've fucked you. I will continue to fuck you, mark you, spank you, and whatever else I feel like for the rest of our lives.*"

The feeling of such a big, strong man shuddering underneath him made Grayson wish they had more time together. He'd fuck Caleb again. "Say it, Caleb, say you belong to me," Grayson demanded out loud as he thrust his cock into the man again. He was softening, but there was still enough hardness in his cock to make Caleb groan.

"Yes, I belong to you," Caleb cried out.

Grayson nuzzled the side of Caleb's head again. "Good boy." He patted the side of Caleb's hip then pushed himself back until he could stand up. Grayson almost groaned in regret when he pulled free of Caleb's body until he heard the man whimper. The small sound made him feel better.

"We'll play again when we get home, baby."

Caleb groaned. "*Promises, promises.*"

Chapter 14

Caleb sat gingerly in the front seat next to Grayson as they drove toward Joel's home. He turned his head to look out the window when he couldn't contain his grin at why he was sitting so carefully.

Grayson had fucked him good. The paddling had only added to the experience. Caleb had never been spanked before. He also had never allowed anyone except Grayson to fuck him. Both were unique experiences, ones he wasn't averse to trying again.

He never would have guessed he liked having his ass smacked. He had been trying to get Grayson's mind off of things when the idea had suddenly struck him. Until he actually felt Grayson's hand come down on his ass and experienced the thrill of pleasure that smack gave him, he hadn't known how he'd react.

Who knew?

Now, he couldn't wait for it to happen again. What did that say about him? Was he always meant to be a submissive, or was it just being a submissive under Grayson's hand that turned him on so much?

Would he feel the same way if it was Joel paddling his bare ass? Caleb chuckled silently to himself and glanced down at his lap when he felt his cock twitch at the idea. Guess so. That thought was going to take Caleb some time to wrap his mind around.

"How much farther?"

Caleb glanced over at Grayson's question, noting the tension in the tight lines around the man's face. He may have been able to relieve Grayson's stress for a little while, but it looked like it was back in full force.

"Joel's stronghold is just a few more miles up the road," Garret answered from the backseat.

"And you're sure they will let us in?"

Caleb turned to look in the backseat just in time to see Garret nod his head. "I'm sure. The entire coven is under command to admit me whenever I show up."

"They know you are Joel's son?" Caleb asked.

Garret smiled. "Some do, most don't. It's not something we advertise."

"Are you ashamed of being Joel's son?" Grayson demanded, a hard edge to his voice.

"Hell no, but you can imagine the problems I would have if everyone knew I was half vampire and half werewolf? And I'm not just talking about my clan. The Council of Elders would have a shit fit."

Caleb shuddered as he thought about how upset the council would be. Things had changed a lot in the last few years, especially with Alpha Asher Stone bringing about a peace treaty between most of the clans, but they were still precarious.

A sudden odd thought filled Caleb's head. He glanced over at the dark-haired man sitting next to Garret. "Are you any relation to Alpha Asher Stone?"

Dean chuckled as he nodded his head. "He's my brother."

"He's quite the advocate for peace between the clans." Caleb had to admit he was impressed.

"Don't let that fool you. While he does desire peace between all the clans, the only reason Asher advocated for peace so strongly was so he would have safe place to bring his alpha mate home to. Darren is human."

"Really?"

"Asher was one of the premier instigators in getting the Council of Elders to pass the mate law. He knew several years ago that Darren was his mate, but at the time, hunts were ordered for any same-sex

mating." Dean's lips turned down as the man grimaced. "He didn't feel it would be safe to bring Darren home until he changed that."

"How does Darren feel about this?"

"He's crazy about Asher, so it all works out pretty well."

"After what he's done for all of us, I wish him all the happiness in the world with his alpha mate. He deserves it. He paved the way for the rest of us to be with the mate destined for us."

"I'll be sure to pass your well wishes on to him."

"Uh, guys, I don't mean to break in to this tender moment, but I think we're here."

Caleb turned around in his seat to look back out the front window. Grayson was right. The car slowed to a stop outside a large, black iron gate. Two men with guns hanging off their shoulders approached the car.

Garret rolled his window down when one of the men stepped up to the front driver's side window. "Garret Silvanus here to see Alejandro. I have some council business to discuss with him."

Caleb's heart pounded as the man seemed to stare intently at Garret for several moments before he finally nodded his head and motioned for the gate to be opened. As soon as it was, Grayson drove through.

Caleb glanced in his side mirror and watched the gate close behind him. A small chill ran down his back as he wondered if they would ever make it out of the vampire coven stronghold. The odds were not in their favor.

"So, what now, Garret?" Grayson asked. "We're inside the gates, but how do you plan to get us inside the house? They are only going to buy our story for so long."

"Just stick to the plan. I often come to converse with my father about council matters. He's been around a long time and has a unique prospective. No one will think anything of me being here."

"And what about us?" Caleb asked. "Do you usually bring other alphas and their mates with you?"

"I've brought Asher and Darren here before."

"You're also related to them through Dean," Grayson insisted. "You're not related to us."

"No, but you have to admit, the fact that Caleb gave up his alpha status to mate with you is enough for me to want to discuss the situation with my father. It's even better if I bring you along for him to meet in person."

Caleb couldn't help snorting. He didn't like the idea that his ranking or lack of ranking was any reason to meet anyone. It certainly wasn't something he wanted broadcasted to the masses.

He didn't mind giving up his clan ranking for Grayson. He'd do anything for the man. He just didn't think it needed to be advertised. He'd already seen the reactions it received from Taylor and didn't want a repeat performance.

"Let's just not spread it around, okay?"

"I promise not to say anything unless absolutely necessary," Garret promised, holding up his hand as he made his promise. "But if need be, I think it would be an easy explanation as to why we are here."

"I agree," Caleb said, grimacing. "I just prefer to keep it between us."

"You don't think word of your new ranking won't spread through our society like a wild fire?" Grayson snorted.

"I'll take my chances."

"I'd say by now that you were out of luck," Grayson said. "I suspect that word went out the moment we announced our mating before our clans. If you wanted to hide it, it's a little too late."

Caleb looked at Grayson in curiosity. The man's voice sounded stiff but not nearly as stiff as his shoulders looked. Caleb reached over and patted Grayson's thigh until his mate looked at him.

"I'm not ashamed of my new ranking when it means I have you. I don't want you ever to think that. It's just a little strange going from

being an alpha for nearly twenty years to suddenly being a beta. It will take some time to get used to."

"I'm sorry."

Caleb grinned. *"I'm not."*

Grayson smiled. Caleb felt the man's hand cover his. Satisfied that his message got across to Grayson, he turned back to look out the front window, and his mouth dropped open. "Joel lives here?"

The car slowed to a stop in front of a huge mansion, complete with large colonial style columns across the front. It was like a southern plantation house, black shutters on each side of every window, a porch that went the length of the front of the building, and a second floor balcony that did the same.

"Joel spent several decades in Louisiana in the 1800s and liked the architecture there. When he moved here, he commissioned a house built to mirror the one he lived in down there."

"Damn, there is so much we don't know about him," Grayson said. Caleb could hear the sadness in his mate's voice and felt an answering flicker in his own heart. He just hoped they got a chance to learn everything about Joel that there was to know.

As Grayson turned off the engine, the large front door opened and two armed men stepped out. Something about them prickled the back of Caleb's mind, but he couldn't figure out what it was beyond the fact that armed guards were walking toward them.

"Show's on, guys," Garret said as he opened the door and started to climb out.

Caleb heard Dean climb out, so he did, too, walking around the front of the vehicle to join them. A moment later, Grayson walked over to stand next to him. Caleb felt a little crowded with the way Grayson stood so close to him, but he suspected Grayson felt the need to be overprotective considering the situation, so he ignored it.

"I'd like to see Alejandro," Garret said to the guards.

Caleb wasn't reassured when the two men glanced between themselves before one moved off to the side and started speaking into

a walkie-talkie. Caleb pushed the hair back and tucked it behind his ear, honing his hearing in on the conversation.

"The half blood is here to see Alejandro. He's brought friends, other werewolves," the guard said softly. "What do you want us to do with them?"

"Take them to the study," a voice replied. "I'll be there in a moment."

"Very good."

"Under no circumstances is he to discover Alejandro's disappearance. I will take care of it when I arrive. And don't let them leave until I get there."

"Understood."

Caleb tried to look calm as the guard walked back over to them, but considering how fast his heart was beating, it wasn't an easy feat. They already knew that Joel was missing, and they were trying to hide it. That couldn't be good. And there was no sense giving away what they already knew about Joel's disappearance.

"If you will follow me?" the guard asked as he turned to walk back inside the house.

Caleb reached over and grabbed Grayson's hand as they followed. When Grayson looked at him, one eyebrow arched, Caleb gave a slight negative shake of his head then nodded toward the guards.

"They know something is up but I'd prefer to discuss it when we're alone with Garret," he said through their bond. *"Just keep your eyes open."*

Grayson quickly glanced at the two guards then nodded slightly, telling Caleb that he understood. Caleb knew the man would be on alert now more so than he would have been. That was enough for now.

Caleb couldn't keep a slight gasp from falling from his lips as they walked into the mansion. If he thought the outside was spectacular, the inside was even more so. Opulent didn't even begin to describe the look of the place.

The first thing he noticed was the large crystal chandelier hanging from the middle of the ceiling over the large entryway. It only slightly overshadowed the huge mahogany staircase that was situated in the middle of the wall directly in front of them.

Colorful oil paintings hung on the walls. Vases of fresh-cut flowers sat on wooden tables in several places throughout the room. And chairs that looked decades old sat beside the tables.

"I don't understand," Caleb whispered to Garret. "I thought vampire covens lived in darker settings than this. Where's all the black?"

Garret chuckled. "Many do live in darker settings, but it's really a stereotype. Joel has been around long enough to outgrow that phase. He prefers lighter colors. He says black is boring and cliché."

Caleb grinned, suddenly liking Joel all that much more. The bright room they stood in, even with its opulent features, was much better than what Caleb had imagined he'd see when coming to a vampire oven stronghold. He felt relieved.

A throat clearing reminded Caleb that they were being watched. He felt his face flush a little when one of the guards looked at him peculiarly and quickly caught up with the rest of the group as they were led into a room off to the side of the foyer.

The study they walked into wasn't much different than the rest of the place. Large mahogany floor-to-ceiling bookcases lined one entire wall. A large fireplace sat in the middle of another wall. Black leather couches surrounded the fireplace.

A large wood desk that looked to be at least a hundred years old sat directly between the two windows on the far wall. Caleb frowned when he saw the windows. This was obviously Joel's study, but the two windows were at odds with the room belonging to a vampire.

"How does he use this room with windows in it? I thought vampires couldn't handle sunlight?"

"They can't," Garret said. "Joel had specially made windows put in to every window and door in the house. They keep the UV rays that

kill vampires out and just let in the light. It allows Joel and the rest of the coven to move throughout the house even in the daytime."

"That's amazing," Caleb said as he walked over to press his hand against the window glass. It was only as he stood there that Caleb was actually able to see the small sliver of shading in the glass. He glanced back over his shoulder. "This is great."

"I'm sure you will find many things in this house that you never expected," Garret said. "Joel may be a vampire, but he doesn't believe he has to live like one. If he did, it would be like saying you have to be dipped in a flea bath because you're a werewolf."

Caleb chuckled, amused by one of the main insults werewolves received from others. He understood what Garret was telling him and agreed with it, but he still felt amazed. Joel had prepared his house to be a home and not a daytime prison. The man was smart as well as sexy, a nice combination.

As the study door shut, Caleb was suddenly reminded of the conversation the guard had with some unknown man on the walkie-talkie. He didn't know if they were being monitored, but considering the situation, he wouldn't put it past anyone. He stepped closer to Grayson, acting as if he was nuzzling his mate's neck.

"They know Joel is missing." He knew he didn't need to make a sound and Grayson would still hear him. *"They don't want us to know. The guards were ordered not to say anything to us and to keep us here until someone arrives to talk to us. They also referred to Garret as the half blood."*

Grayson nuzzled back, his mouth hovering over Caleb's ear, making him shiver. *"Thank you, Caleb. Keep your ears open for anything else we may need to know."*

Caleb and Grayson jumped apart when the door opened and a black-haired man walked in. He was dressed all in black except for a purple ruffled shirt, which Caleb thought was very gaudy.

Something about the way the man looked rode the back of his mind, especially the purple shirt. Caleb decided that this guy needed

Careful watching, at least until Caleb knew why the guy looked so familiar.

"Garret, so good to see you," the man said as he stepped forward to shake Garret's hand. The man seemed smarmy, creepy. Caleb didn't believe a word that came out of his mouth.

"Jericho, how are you?"

"I'm doing very well, thank you." Jericho turned to look at Grayson and Caleb. The look was intense, as if Jericho was trying to see some weakness he could exploit. Then he smiled, and Caleb was creeped out all over again. "And who are your friends?"

"This is Alpha Grayson Cane and his alpha mate, Caleb."

Caleb saw a slight stiffening in Jericho's shoulders and wondered if anyone else saw it. Jericho knew more than he was letting on. Caleb glanced past Jericho to see Garret's narrowed gaze on the man and knew at least one person saw the change in the man's demeanor.

"Ah, yes, I remember now," Jericho said. "Alejandro was mediating a peace agreement between your two clans. How did that go?"

"As you can see," Grayson said as he gestured to Caleb, "it went very well."

"Yes."

"I was hoping to meet with Alejandro and thank him for his assistance."

"I'm afraid that will not be possible at this moment. Alejandro has been detained with some coven business and is not available at this time, but I would be happy to pass on your message."

"When will he be back?" Garret asked.

Jericho glanced over at Garret. He clasped his hands together in front of him as he smiled. "I'm afraid I do not have that information. You more than anyone know how quickly your father's schedule changes."

"Then we'll wait. Please see that accommodations are prepared for Alpha Cane and his mate. Give them the suite next to my father's rooms. They will be more comfortable there."

"Oh, but—"

"Dean and I will give Alpha Cane and his mate a tour of the place while you make arrangements." Garret started for the door, pausing to look at Jericho again. "Oh, and make sure that the steaks are rare this time. I felt like I was eating shoe leather the last time we were here."

Caleb bit his lip to hide his grin as Jericho sputtered. "I don't care if you are Alejandro's son. You can't just come in here and start issuing orders."

Caleb blinked with the quickness of Garret's actions as the man spun around and grabbed Jericho, slamming him into the nearest wall. "And I don't give a fuck who you are. This is my father's house, not yours. It doesn't even belong to the coven. It belongs to my father, and thus, it belongs to me if anything should happen to him. I am his sole heir, not you."

Garret stepped back and pushed Jericho away. "Don't forget that I have more right to be here than you do. I was raised in this house."

"This is a coven stronghold," Jericho said as he straightened his clothes then smoothed down his hair. "It belongs to the coven."

"Check your facts, Jericho. This is my father's house, built with his money, not coven money. It belongs to the Silvanus family. Just because my father conducts his business here in no way makes it coven property."

Caleb's eyebrow peeked when he saw the look of disdain that crossed Garret's face as the man looked Jericho up and down. "You are here at the whim of me and my father. Don't ever forget that I could have you removed in a flat second if I so chose."

"The Vampire Council will hear about this."

"The Vampire Council is fully aware of who this property belongs to. My father made sure of it. He gave papers to the council that stated

in the event of his death, everything he owns reverts to me, not you or the coven. Me!"

Caleb could see from Jericho's shocked expression that he hadn't expected that bit of information. He cocked his head to the side as he considered everything he knew about Joel's abduction. The conclusion he drew didn't make him feel any better.

Joel was attacked going to mediate a peace meeting between two warring werewolf clans. He was attacked again by vampires, both Caleb and Grayson being shot with the intention of killing them.

And now, Jericho was having a conniption fit because Joel's fancy house wouldn't revert back to the coven. Or was his issue with a werewolf coming and telling him what to do? Both were possible scenarios, and both put Jericho in the psycho seat.

Caleb didn't know whether to say something or not. If he confronted Jericho, and the man did indeed have Joel hidden away somewhere, they might not be able to save the man in time.

On the other hand, if he didn't confront Jericho with what he suspected, he might not get another chance. Caleb wished he had just a few moments alone with Grayson to tell his mate what he suspected. He trusted that Grayson would know what to do because he didn't have a clue.

"Come on," Garret said as he started toward the door again, "I'll give you a tour while Jericho gets our rooms ready and tries to track down my father. I'm sure he'd like us gone as fast as possible."

"Would you mind if I used the bathroom first?" There was something in the air, something that intrigued Caleb enough to want to follow it. He just didn't understand how Grayson couldn't smell it, too.

"Certainly," Garret said, "it's right down the hallway."

Caleb swore he heard Jericho snicker when he walked by him. It wasn't until he was almost to the door that he realized Grayson wasn't with him. Caleb glanced back, confusion filling him when he saw Grayson standing beside Jericho, staring intently down at the man.

"Why do I smell cinnamon?"

Chapter 15

Joel could feel that his mate was close by. He didn't know where Grayson was exactly. Hell, he didn't even know where he was, but he knew Grayson was close. Joel just didn't know if Grayson would rescue him in time.

Already, blood was slowly dripping from his arms, lethargy setting in and making his limbs feel heavy. Jericho had made small cuts across Joel's wrists before he left. The blood loss would not kill Joel if stopped in time. It would just leave him unable to fight or escape. One the other hand, if left to bleed, it would be a slow, agonizing death, one drop at a time. It would probably take hours if not days to die.

Joel felt positive that was exactly what Jericho intended when he did it. The man had some serious anger issues that needed to be dealt with. Joel never would have chosen Jericho as his second-in-command if he'd known about the man's psychotic nature. He just didn't understand how Jericho had hidden it from him for so many years.

Until today, Joel trusted Jericho more than he trusted almost anyone. Jericho's betrayal cut deep. Joel began to question his previously held ability to read people. Maybe he sucked at it? Maybe he couldn't really see people for what they truly were? Maybe he just saw what he wanted to see?

And if that was true, everything he saw when he looked into Grayson's eyes could be a lie. For all he knew, Grayson could be part of all of this, orchestrating the whole situation to take out a coven leader.

Joel sighed deeply and let his head fall back on his shoulders as he stared up at the grey cement ceiling. Was he just a pawn in Grayson's game plan or did the man really want him? Joel just didn't know. He hadn't spent enough time with the man before he was taken to be sure.

Joel wanted to believe that Grayson, and Caleb, too, were both being truthful in the things Joel saw in their eyes. He wanted to believe in the dream he built in his head of the three of them being together. He just didn't know if he could, not after Jericho's betrayal. And he didn't know if he'd survive to find out.

The sound of the door opening sent Joel's pulse soaring. He looked up through the fall of his long hair so he could see who was walking in. He might die, but he would face death head on. He was not a coward. He was...

"Caleb?" he whispered when he spotted a man with short, light brown hair sneaking a peak around the edge of the door. "Oh my god, Caleb, what are you doing here? You have to leave before they come back."

"Ssshh," Caleb said, holding his finger up to his lips. He smiled, looking relieved and just a tad scared and quietly shut the door. The moment the door closed, Caleb raced across the room to fall to his knees beside Joel. "Geez, what in the fuck did they do to you?"

"Where's Grayson?" Joel desperately wanted to know where his mate was. He felt tears prick the corners of his eyes as he wondered if he would survive long enough to see the man again.

"He's safe, Joel, I promise."

Joel winced in pain when he felt Caleb's hands moving over the ropes tying him down to the chair. He knew the man was trying to free him. He just didn't care. He wanted to see Grayson.

"We need to get you out of here before that jackass Jericho comes down here."

"Jericho?" Joel hissed. "He's... you need to stay away from him, Caleb. He's dangerous. He did this."

"Yeah, I suspected as much when I recognized him from when we got shot. He was there. It took me a little while to recognize him but..." Caleb chuckled and shook his head, which Joel thought was a little strange considering the situation. "Man, you should have seen Grayson when he made the connection between Jericho and your kidnapping. I thought he was going to kill the guy."

Joel opened his mouth to demand to know what happened when the ropes around his wrists suddenly snapped. Joel fell forward, unable to stop his body's momentum as he started to fall off the chair.

Caleb caught him and slowly lowered him to the floor, cradling his head and upper shoulders with his arm. Caleb's other hand gently roamed over Joel's body. Joel almost laughed at the grimace that covered Caleb's face.

"That bad, huh?"

"It's not good, Joel. You look almost as bad as you did the first time I met you." Caleb's head turned as he looked down Joel's body then back up. "Are you going to need blood to replace what you've lost?"

"It wouldn't hurt." Joel blinked when Caleb's neck suddenly appeared in front of his mouth as the man tilted his head. He started to shake his head when he saw Caleb roll his eyes.

"Damn it, Joel, stop being so fucking noble and take the damn blood."

"Caleb, I can't—"

"You can."

Joel wanted to smack Caleb on the man's thick head for being so stubborn. He only had two problems. One, he didn't have the strength. Two, Joel wasn't sure it would do any good.

Joel leaned up and licked the soft skin right below Caleb's ear. He could hear the small pulse in Caleb's neck speed up, the blood flowing through the man's veins. Strong arms tightened around Joel, pulling him closer and giving him better access to the soft flesh.

Joel closed his eyes and sank his teeth into Caleb's neck. He felt the man stiffen beneath him and almost withdrew his teeth. Only the sweet flavor of Caleb's blood flowing into his mouth stopped him. Joel reached up and gripped Caleb, holding him in place. He didn't want to lose connection with the ambrosia filling him.

He moved against Caleb, trying to get even closer. He could feel his body taking in Caleb's life-giving essence, his cells soaking up the nourishing blood. He could feel his body mending itself with every drop he swallowed.

"Fuck, Joel, you have to stop." Caleb groaned. "I can't...I can't..."

Joel's eyes popped open in surprise when he was suddenly lifted and swung around until he sat on Caleb's lap. His legs were pulled tightly around Caleb's waist. Large hands clenched on his ass and pressed him against the hard shaft of Caleb's cock.

Joel extracted his teeth and tilted his head back to look up into Caleb's face as the man started humping against him. His eyes widened at the feral lust in Caleb's green eyes.

He went from wounded and adrift to blindingly aroused and needy in the blink of an eye. Joel pressed himself closer to Caleb as he slammed his mouth over the man's plush lips. He couldn't even use what brain power he had left and pull away when he felt Caleb's sharp canine split his lip. He needed too much.

Caleb's hard length pressed against his. The man's hands gripped Joel's ass, clenching and unclenching. Caleb's lips moved over Joel's mouth, their tongues stroking each other. It was heaven, but it wasn't enough.

Joel had a sudden overwhelming need for more. He pulled his mouth away from Caleb's and tilted his head back, guiding Caleb's face into the crook of his neck. Joel shuddered when Caleb's tongue stroked across his skin.

Yep, that was what he needed...almost.

"Caleb," Joel groaned. "I need, Caleb."

He ached.

Caleb's body stilled. It was the only thing that got through Joel's lust-fogged mind. He wanted, needed, the man to touch him and caress him. Who was he kidding? He needed Caleb to fuck him. He didn't care that they were in a life or death situation. He just needed!

"Joel, you know what will happen if I take your blood. You've already taken mine, and that's fine. I was more than willing to give it to you but..." Caleb leaned back and gestured between them by nodding his head a little. "If we do this..."

Joel knew what Caleb was trying to say. Not even his lust-soaked brain could keep out the knowledge that if he allowed Caleb to take his blood, they would be bound together just as he was with Grayson.

He knew he should think about it and logically consider the ramifications of such a move. Being bonded to one werewolf was one thing. Being bonded to two was all together different.

But did he care?

"If we do this, we'll be bonded just as Grayson and I are," Joel finished for Caleb.

Caleb nodded.

"Would that be such a bad thing?"

Joel had just a moment to watch stunned amazement fill Caleb's eyes before the man's head fell forward to rest against him. Joel could feel Caleb's soft pants of breath blow across the naked skin at the crook of his neck.

"No, but..." Caleb raised his head. His eyes looked a little agonized. "You belong to Grayson."

"So do you."

"True." Caleb chuckled nervously. His head fell back on his shoulders, and he seemed to be staring intently at the ceiling. "That man has no clue what kind of hell you're going to bring into his life."

"Hell?" Joel wasn't sure he liked the way Caleb phrased that. "What do you mean?"

"Do you plan on submitting to Grayson or me?"

Joel's eyebrows furrowed in confusion. "Uh, no."

"Well, I have to submit to Grayson, but I have no intention of submitting to you." Caleb grinned. "That means you, and I, are going to make life very interesting for Grayson. He is the big, bad alpha, remember? He's going to shit kittens when you don't do what he wants."

"Does that mean you want me to do what you want?"

"No, I have my hands full keeping Grayson in line." Caleb chuckled as he looked back down at Joel. "You do remember his temper, right?"

"So, you don't want to dominate me?" That was Joel's biggest worry where the former alpha was concerned. Grayson's domineering attitude would be hard enough to deal with. Joel didn't want to throw Caleb's in, too.

"I'd be lying if I said I didn't. I may have stepped down as alpha of my clan, but I am still alpha born. I always will be." Caleb looked a little uncomfortable, his face flushing. "It's in my nature to dominate."

"Mine, too," Joel replied. "Don't forget, I am also *alpha born*."

Caleb arched an eyebrow. "Does that mean you want to dominate me?"

"I've thought about it."

Joel winced when Caleb's arms tightened around him at a sound outside the door. He was a little stunned by the combat protective mode Caleb seemed to go into almost instantly.

There was a low growl, a rumbling in Caleb's chest as he glanced over at the door. His larger body seemed to wrap around Joel, protecting him. Joel couldn't remember the last time someone tried to protect him from harm...if ever.

"Caleb." Joel grabbed the man's jaw and pulled his head around. "We need to go."

"I'm supposed to be in the upstairs bathroom right now." Caleb smiled and shrugged his shoulders. "I guess I was confused as to where it was exactly and got lost. This is a pretty big place."

"Upstairs in the bathroom? You know where we are?"

"Yeah, don't you?" Caleb frowned.

"No."

"We're in the basement of your house."

"My house!" Joel shouted. "We're in *my* house?"

"Yes, I thought you knew that."

"No, I've never been in this room in my life, and I had this damn house custom built." Joel could feel Caleb's hands holding him tighter when he started to struggle. "Knock it off. I want to get out of here."

"And we will get out of here, Joel, but you need to calm down and use your head. If you don't know about this room then it is most likely that someone with some power in your coven had it built for dubious intentions. I suspect your little buddy, Jericho."

Joel growled and bared his fangs at Caleb, who simply laughed. "Are you trying to turn me on, Joel?"

Joel rolled his eyes. "Can we just go?"

Caleb's lips stuck out as he stood up and helped Joel to his feet. "Does that mean no biting?"

Joel opened his mouth to make some snappy comeback, but the moment he stood up, his legs folded under him and he started to go down. Caleb's arms instantly wrapped around Joel, catching him before he hit the floor.

"Whoa, babe, I don't think you have your sea legs yet. Just hold on to me, okay?"

Joel nodded. He felt Caleb's arm move down to hold him around the waist as they started for the door. Joel knew they were moving slow for his sake and hoped that he wasn't endangering the man.

Joel didn't like the feeling he got inside at the thought of something happening to Caleb. It made his stomach churn and clench. His heart pounded just a little faster. Joel wasn't sure how he'd react if it actually happened.

Maybe he needed just a little more blood to bolster himself. He'd have to ask Caleb for just a bit more as soon as they found Grayson or got somewhere safe. Standing right inside the door of a windowless

room, not knowing who might be on the other side, didn't seem like the right time.

Still...

"Caleb, I'm going to need more blood before we confront Jericho. I don't know what that man has planned, but none of it is good. He has armed guards and some werewolf that is exchanging blood with him."

"Some guy?"

"Jericho accidentally bonded with the man. I don't know why Jericho even brought him in considering how much he hates werewolves, but he did, and the asshole ended up bonding with the dude."

"Could he have been one of the werewolves that attacked you?"

Joel stumbled as Caleb's words washed over him. "Uh, I don't know. I don't remember much about the werewolves that attacked me, but I suppose so."

"What's this werewolf look like?"

"He was a little taller than me, brown hair and brown eyes." Joel shrugged. "He was just a guy. I wasn't really paying much attention beyond the fact that Jericho didn't know he had bonded with the guy until I said something. I have to admit I enjoyed that maybe just a little too much."

Caleb snorted as he reached for the door. "I would have enjoyed the hell out of it."

Joel held a breath as Caleb eased the door open. The hallway appeared clear. Joel stepped forward and looked one way and then the other. The hallway was long and made of grey cement just as the small room was that he had been held in. Both were dismal.

"Which way?" Joel asked because he had no clue.

"I came from the right. There's a small staircase around the corner that leads to a closet near the bathroom I'm supposed to be in right now."

"Just how did you find me?" Joel asked as they made their way down the hallway to the right.

"I smelled you."

Joel wrinkled his nose. "I smell that bad?"

"No." Caleb chuckled. "You smell that good."

That perked Joel right up. He couldn't stop grinning as Caleb led the way around the corner to a set of stairs with walls on either side. They were steep and narrow enough that Caleb and Joel had to climb them single file. Caleb went first.

"Ssshh," Caleb whispered when he got to the top of the stairs.

Joel nodded and watched as Caleb listened at the door for a moment then gently eased it open. He gestured to Joel and held out his arm. Joel stepped up and grabbed Caleb's arm.

Together, they moved into the closet and then out to the hallway. Caleb sniffed the air around them then quickly shut the door and led Joel to the bathroom. Joel was shoved inside, Caleb crowding in behind him as he shut the door.

Caleb clicked the lock then leaned back against the door. He chuckled quietly. "Not a bad bathroom if I do say so myself."

"I'm so glad you think so."

Okay, Caleb was strange, but he was amusing. Joel shook his head, chuckling softly to himself as he turned toward the sink and turned on the water. He was a mess, and he knew it. The scent of the blood on his clothes alone would draw anyone in the vicinity to their location.

"That's not going to work, Joel," Caleb said as Joel dabbed at his clothes with a wet washcloth. "Your wrists are still bleeding. You're just getting blood all over wherever you wipe."

"Fuck." Joel growled and threw the washcloth against the mirror, watching dispassionately as it hit then plopped to the counter with a dull thud. "What in the hell are we going to do? The first person that walks past the bathroom door is going to smell it, and I don't know who I can trust."

"Well, we know it's not Jericho."

"But how many others of my coven has he involved in his little bid for power?" Joel snapped as he looked at Caleb in the mirror. "You do know he's trying to take over the world, right?"

"I figured it had to be something like that when he involved the werewolves. Although, taking over the world is a bit of a stretch even then."

"No, but he could certainly build his way up to dominating the world we live in."

"So, how do we stop him? You're the brains of this outfit, babe. What do we need to do?"

Joel's lips twisted in a small smirk as he tried to develop a plan that would keep them safe and put Jericho where he belonged...in hell.

"Where's Grayson now?"

"Last time I saw him he was in the study with your son."

"Garret is here?"

"And his alpha mate plus three others from his clan."

Joel grinned. "Then we just might have a chance of pulling this off."

"You have a plan then?"

Joel turned around to face Caleb, a grin on his lips. He had a plan all right. Joel reached for the edge of his shirt and started pulling it off his shoulders. "Oh, I have a plan in mind. You can start by helping me get rid of this blood."

Caleb's eyebrow arched, but the corner of his lips started to turn up as he stepped closer and reached for Joel's shirt. "I think I can help you with that."

Joel shivered when Caleb grabbed the washcloth and started wiping his chest and arms down. When he reached the end of Joel's wrist, Caleb paused. Joel met Caleb's eyes when the man looked up at him. Their gazes held as time seemed to stand still.

Caleb was going to bind them together.

Joel didn't protest when Caleb slowly lowered his lips and licked away the small trickle of blood dripping from his wrist. Joel inhaled sharply at the feeling of Caleb's tongue delicately caressing his skin.

Joel tried to breathe, to regain some of the breath that seemed to be missing from his chest no matter how many times he inhaled. But with every swipe of Caleb's tongue, the harder Joel panted.

"Caleb," he finally whispered desperately. He had no idea why the sight of Caleb licking away his blood was so intoxicating, but he was past trying to fight it. He wanted Caleb as much as he wanted Grayson.

As Joel watched Caleb's eyes close, a blissful look on the man's flushed face, Joel realized that he needed both men as well. He didn't know why he hadn't seen it from the very beginning.

Grayson and Caleb were distinct individuals, but they came as a set. By accepting Grayson, Joel accepted Caleb, too. Maybe that was why he was no longer bothered by the fact that Grayson and Caleb mated before he was fully aware of them. It just didn't seem important to Joel when he bonded with them or when they bonded with each other. It just mattered that it happened.

Believing that down to the depths of his soul, Joel leaned forward and sank his fangs into the soft skin of Caleb's neck. He felt the man jerk under him then a low growl sounded in the room, growing louder with every second.

At the same time, Joel's hands fumbled with his zipper, trying anxiously to lower it. He needed the sexual release he knew he wasn't far from to bind Caleb to him. He also needed Caleb to find his own climax.

Joel pulled his aching cock out of his pants then reached for Caleb's. The bulge behind Caleb's zipper was big enough to make Joel inhale sharply. The all-over body shudder that went through Caleb when Joel's hand brushed against him didn't help.

Joel's hands shook as he lowered Caleb's zipper and fished his cock out, wrapping his hand around the hard shaft. Caleb's hips

snapped forward. The deep, rumbling growl that fell from his lips sent a thrill of excitement through Joel.

Caleb suddenly stepped closer and picked Joel up then set him on the edge of the countertop. His body crowded Joel, pressing close against him. Joel loved every little touch. His head dropped back when Caleb lowered his face and nuzzled at his neck.

Joel grabbed their cocks, pressing them together and wrapping both of his hands around their combined shafts. He stroked them frantically, desperately. Joel could feel Caleb's hands clench on his hips before moving down to grip his ass cheeks. Caleb began lifting him, pressing their bodies together with each stroke of Joel's hands.

"Caleb," Joel groaned, his orgasm almost upon him. Sharp canines sinking into the soft skin of his throat sent Joel flying over the edge into oblivion. He cried out as his orgasm exploded through him, spurts of hot cream shooting between them.

Thick fingers were pressed into Joel's mouth. Joel jerked, not understanding for a moment until he tasted a trickle of blood on the long digits. He shuddered as hot, sweet blood trickled down his throat and closed his lips around Caleb's fingers.

Caleb bucked heavily against Joel then another hot spurt of liquid splashed between them. Joel's motions slowed, but he kept his hand wrapped around their cocks. It just felt too good to let go. Even the slightest stroke of his hand made him tremble as did the low growl that shook Caleb's chest.

Caleb leaned back and looked into Joel's face. Joel frowned at the tight features that he saw. He would have thought Caleb would be thrilled that they had finally bonded. Even now he could feel the connection between them settling into place. Caleb didn't look happy at all.

"Ca-Caleb?" Joel swallowed, wondering he had just made the biggest mistake of his life. Would Caleb hate him now? Would he spend the rest of his life living with animosity in his relationship with his mates?

Joel's eyes widened when Caleb's hand gripped the nape of his neck. "One of these days I will mark you here." Caleb leaned in closer until they were nose to nose. "You are mine every bit as much as you are Grayson's. Don't forget that."

Joel's breath stuttered out of him, part relieved chuckle, part thankfulness that Caleb wasn't pissed at him. "And one of these days I might let you mark me."

Caleb snorted, his facial features softening as a slow, easy grin broke out over his lips. "Like you have a choice in the matter."

"You don't think I do?" Joel arched an eyebrow. The tight, little smirk of Caleb's lips sent a thrill of excitement through Joel. His chest rose and fell as he inhaled deeply, the scent of blood and sex and pure masculine lust spiraled through, threatening to harden Joel's cock again.

"Trust me, babe," Caleb said as he stepped back and reached for his jeans, "you're going to beg me to mark you."

Joel snorted as he quickly cleaned himself up then did up his own pants, but it was a half-hearted noise. He wasn't so sure Caleb was wrong. The thought of Caleb adding his mark to Grayson's intrigued him enough that he had to zip up his pants over a semi-hard cock.

"What is Grayson going to think of us bonding?" Joel asked, voicing one of his biggest fears.

"I think he'll be thrilled. He likes the idea of a three-way between us."

Joel stilled for a moment as that tidbit of information soaked into his brain then he slowly started to laugh. "He would."

"The man is...uh..."

"Perpetually horny?"

Caleb chuckled. "Yeah."

Joel grinned and rearranged his cock in his pants. "Well, at least he'll be in good company."

Chapter 16

Grayson paced back and forth in the study. Every step he made either took him closer to Jericho or away from him. Every time he stepped toward Jericho, Garret and Dean stepped between them as if they knew he wanted to rip the man apart.

Grayson didn't quite understand what Jericho's connection to Joel's disappearance was, but he knew the man was involved. It had taken him a moment to associate the scent of cinnamon surrounding Jericho with his brother, but the second he did, Grayson knew both men had helped take his mate away from him.

He wanted to rip Jericho limb from limb then find his brother and repeat the process. The ache of betrayal Grayson felt at his brother's actions was like a hole in his heart.

He knew Taylor felt anger over the loss of their father and his part in that loss, but that act of betraying all that they were, their clan, the peace that held on between the werewolves and the vampires by a thread...that was beyond Grayson's capacity to understand.

The welfare of their clan, their safety and ability to live in peace to raise their families...that was of the utmost importance. It was only circumvented by the wellbeing of a mate, or mates in Grayson's case.

Grayson clenched his fists as he looked over at Jericho again. His upper lip curled into a growl. Grayson knew he was close to losing it. Joel was missing. Caleb had been gone to the bathroom way too long. And they were sitting in the middle of a nest of vipers as far as Grayson was concerned. He didn't have a clue who he could trust.

And that made Grayson a very unhappy alpha.

He stepped toward Jericho only to be brought up short by Garret stepping between them once again. Grayson growled then rolled his eyes when Garret simply arched an eyebrow at him. It was quickly becoming apparent to Grayson that Garret wasn't in the least bit intimidated by him.

"Not a good choice, Grayson."

"Funny, I think it's a very good choice."

"Grayson, this isn't—"

Grayson whipped around when the study door opened. The air rushed from his lungs when he spotted first Caleb, then Joel walking through the door. He bounded across the room, dragging both men into his arms before they even got the door closed.

The small whimper that fell from Joel's lips made Grayson lesson his tight grip on the man but just a little. He cupped the side of Caleb's face, looking the man up and down to assure himself that his mate wasn't injured.

Once he knew Caleb was safe, Grayson turned his attention to Joel. The man looked pale, his skin almost translucent, but the smile on his lips belied the nature of his condition.

"How are you, mate?"

"Better, thanks to Caleb." Joel smiled over at the other man. "He saved me."

"He does that a lot." Grayson swallowed past the lump in his throat. "I think he has a knight in shining armor complex."

Joel's eyes sparkled as he looked past Grayson to Caleb. Grayson could see the happiness in Joel's face as he gazed at Caleb and wondered what he'd missed. "I think he's pretty good at it."

"He is, the best in fact." Grayson smiled at Caleb over his shoulder and felt the man's hand stroke the middle of his back. "He saved me, too."

"He did more than that."

Grayson looked back own at Joel to see an anxious frown on his face. A quick look back at Caleb showed the same look on his face. Grayson frowned, watching the two nervous men.

Grayson started to put two and two together when Caleb and Joel kept avoiding each other's gaze. He expected to feel angry, upset, and possessive. He wasn't. In fact, all he felt was overwhelming joy that these two special men had found each other.

"Did you mark him?"

Caleb's head snapped up, and his face paled. *"No."*

"Are you going to?"

"I...er...yes?"

"You don't sound very sure. Don't you want to mark Joel?"

"Don't you want to punch me for bonding with him?" Caleb countered. *"He belongs to you."*

"He belongs to us."

"I belong to myself," Joel snapped, surprising Grayson because he hadn't heard the man's voice in his head before. He'd forgotten that he would be able to communicate with Joel mentally just as he did with Caleb.

Suddenly, all of the anger and anxiousness Grayson had felt since Joel disappeared snapped the tight rein he had on his control. Grayson swung around and grabbed Joel, pulling the man into his arms. One hand wrapped around Joel's waist. The other hand gripped the hair at the nap of Joel's neck, right over Grayson's mating mark.

His lips covered Joel's hungrily. It was punishing and angry and desperate. And it filled Grayson's soul. He felt Joel shudder against him and finally raised his head to look down into the vampire's eyes.

"You belong to me, me and Caleb. You will always belong to us. Don't think your status as a coven leader will keep us from you because it won't. I don't give a fuck how old you are, who you know, or what your status is. You belong to us."

Joel blinked. *"Um... okay."*

Knowing by the stunned look on Joel's face that he had gotten his point across, Grayson released his tight grip on Joel's neck and turned to pull Caleb into the circle of his arms.

"We'll figure out the dynamics of all of this after we deal with your coven member, Joel. Jericho hasn't been very forthcoming about what he's doing, and Garret won't let me close enough to him to get it out of the slime ball."

"Good choice." Caleb chuckled.

"I wouldn't have hurt him...much." Grayson shrugged. "He would still be breathing."

"Yeah." Caleb snorted. "But would he be able to talk?"

Grayson turned to glare across the room at Jericho. "Does it matter?"

"Well..." Joel said as he patted Grayson's chest, "I would like to know why he tried to kill me."

"And why he brought werewolves into this mess," Caleb added.

"That part is obvious," Grayson said, "to kill Joel."

"Uh, Grayson, that might not be so obvious," Caleb said almost hesitantly. "The werewolf Jericho brought in is your brother, and Jericho bonded with him."

"Taylor?" Surprisingly, that made sense to Grayson. The cinnamon smell his brother gave off was a dead giveaway. And Grayson now knew why he smelled it on Jericho. He'd known Taylor was involved. He was just shocked to learn the two men had bonded. "Where is Taylor?"

"I haven't seen Taylor since Jericho left the room downstairs with him." Joel left Grayson's arms to walk over and stand in front of Jericho. "It seems my second-in-command had a windowless room built in the basement without my knowledge. It kind of makes you wonder how long he's been planning this little fiasco."

Grayson saw Jericho's body tense. He jumped, racing across the room and grabbing the man before he could attack Joel. He grabbed

him by the neck and slammed him into the nearest wall, growling deeply.

"Touch him and die!"

"Grayson!"

Grayson ignored the voices behind him shouting out his name and stared intently at Jericho's ashen face. "I have no problem ripping you limb from limb, bloodsucker. In fact, I'd prefer it."

"Grayson, this behavior won't solve anyone's problems."

"It'll solve mine."

"Grayson, babe," Caleb said silently as he suddenly pulled on the hand that Grayson had wrapped around Jericho's throat, *"come on, let him go. We need to ask him some questions, and we can't do that if you kill him."*

Grayson wanted to refuse. He wanted to kill Jericho for the pain the man caused Joel, but he knew Caleb was right. Jericho had answers that they needed. He leaned in close to Jericho. "You live by Joel's grace. Do not forget that, bloodsucker. One wrong move and not even he can keep me from ripping your throat out."

Grayson dropped Jericho where he stood and turned away. He took great satisfaction in the sudden coughing and strangled breathing he could hear behind him as he walked back over to stand next to Joel. His point had been made. Whether Jericho took it for what it meant was another story.

A part of Grayson was amused by the number of people that moved to stand between him and Jericho. It was nearly every man in the room. Only Joel stayed at his side, a comforting hand on his arm.

"Ask him where Taylor is," Grayson suggested.

"You're dreaming if you expect me to tell you anything," Jericho spit out.

Grayson could see the man's anger-filled eyes glare at him from across the room. He smirked and arched an eyebrow at the man. "Then maybe Taylor will talk. Should I go find him?"

Grayson took no more than two steps toward the study door when a heavy weight crashed into him from behind. He grunted from the impact then shouted out his rage and pain as sharp claws dug into his chest and shoulders.

He reached over his shoulders and tried to grab at the man hanging on his back all the while trying to dodge the sharp teeth snapping at his neck. The shouts of the others in the room seemed distant and shallow. The snarling in his ear was louder.

Grayson howled as pain exploded in his head when one lucky swipe caught him across the face. His vision blurred. Grayson's entire face hurt, so he couldn't tell if Jericho had damaged his eyes or if the blood dripping down his face obscured his eyes.

He swiped at his eyes, trying to clear them when he suddenly felt the weight on his back lessen. Grayson quickly stepped away and sank to the floor. He jerked when he felt arms wrap around him, not knowing who was touching him until he smelled Caleb's distinctive scent.

"Caleb," he whispered in relief as he reached for his mate.

"Just hold still, Grayson. I need to see how much damage there is. With all the blood on your face, I can't tell where it's coming from."

Grayson nodded and settled down, leaning against the larger man. He felt a warm, wet cloth press against his face as Caleb gently wiped the blood away. Little by little, Grayson's vision began to clear until he could finally see the entire room.

What he saw surprised him. Jericho lay on the floor several feet away from him pinned to the floor by Joel, who sat on top of him. Garret and Dean knelt on the floor on either side of Jericho, pinning his arms to the floor as the man struggled to get away.

"Fuck!" Grayson exclaimed. He was shocked at the rage coloring Jericho's face red. For a man that professed to hate werewolves, Jericho was giving a good imitation of someone fighting to protect his mate.

"Yeah, that was a little unexpected."

Grayson glanced up at Caleb. "You think?"

"Do you think Taylor will feel the same?"

"I think Taylor would lick the bottoms of Jericho's feet if he told him to." Grayson looked over at Joel in shock, his mouth falling open. "You don't believe me? You should have seen him humping Jericho's leg earlier. He looked like an overzealous poodle."

"He is my brother."

"He's also bonded to Jericho." Joel smirked. "That trumps your relationship with Taylor."

Okay, Grayson knew he couldn't argue with that. The moment he bonded with Caleb and Joel, they became the most important people in his life. He could understand the bond between Taylor and Jericho.

That didn't mean he didn't want to see both of them punished for what they did to Joel. They didn't bond because there was a need between them to be mated. They bonded by accident, after the plans to hurt Joel had been put into action.

"So, what do you suggest we do with him?" Grayson asked as he gestured to Jericho.

"Turn him and Taylor over to both councils," Joel said simply. "None of us are in a position to judge either of them. We're too connected to what they have done. The councils can make an unbiased decision concerning their crimes."

"The Vampire Council *and* the Council of Elders?" Grayson whistled low in his throat. "You don't fuck around, do you?"

"No."

Grayson blinked, his eyebrows shooting up. Apparently, his little mate was a no fuss, no muss type of guy. "Okay, and in the meantime?"

"Well, our first order of business should be to locate Taylor." Joel yelped and grabbed on when Jericho suddenly jerked, struggling even harder at the mention of Taylor's name. "Whoa, guess he didn't like that too much."

Grayson muffled a laugh when Joel smacked Jericho on the head. "I'll tell you what, Jericho, in deference to your newly bonded status, if you call your mate in here nice and peaceful like, we won't kill him."

Grayson tensed, ready to defend his brother. It wasn't that he didn't think Taylor needed to be punished in some manner, just that he shouldn't be put to death. Taylor was still his brother.

He let out a relieved sigh when he saw Joel look over at him and wink. Apparently Joel didn't have plans on killing his brother, but they didn't need to let Jericho know that. Getting Jericho's cooperation was essential.

"After what he's done, he needs to be put to death." Grayson growled. "I still think I should go find him and—"

"Grayson, that's enough." Joel's lips twisted together as he tried not to laugh. "If Jericho agrees to bring Taylor in so we can all talk this over, then you need to control yourself, give them a chance to speak."

"And they would say what?" Grayson snapped. He was quickly tiring of this little game. He wanted it finished so he could take his mates home. "That they want to take over the world? We already know that."

"What we don't know is how Jericho got a bunch of werewolves to help him out." Joel pushed himself off of Jericho's back and stepped away from the man. "We don't know if the attack is against you and Caleb or just me. And we don't know how many people are involved."

Grayson got to his feet and stormed across the room to stand in front of Joel. "And you really think that Jericho is just going to hand this information over to us? Or his mate? Are you out of your mind?"

"If we promise not to kill Taylor?" Joel snapped, his voice rising to meet the level of Grayson's. "Jericho knows he's caught. The only thing he can do is get Taylor to turn himself in before he gets killed."

"He's not going to do it!"

"He will if he knows what's good for him."

Grayson gestured toward Jericho, who now sat on the floor between Garret and Dean. "Does he look like a man that is playing with a full deck? Do any of his actions say *I have all my marbles*? Or am I right in thinking he's insane?"

"He's just a little—"

"Uh, guys?"

"What?" Joel and Grayson shouted at the same time as they both turned to look at Caleb, who stood by the window looking outside.

"I think I found Taylor."

Grayson raced over to the window Caleb pointed out of. Sure enough, he could see his brother and several other men standing near the driveway. The men with Taylor were dressed all in black, much like the guys that kidnapped Joel, and they looked like they were getting ready to attack the house.

"I think we might be in a tad bit of trouble." Grayson glanced over his shoulder to Joel. "Do you have any weapons that can kill vampires *and* werewolves?"

Chapter 17

"Uh, no," Joel said, "but I do have an escape route."

"Does he know about it?" Grayson pointed to Jericho. "Because if he does, we're fucked."

"I've shared a lot of things with Jericho. He was my second-in-command after all." Joel snickered down at Jericho. "But I didn't get to be this old by sharing everything."

"Just how old are you?"

"Old enough to know better and young enough to want to do it anyway."

Joel was amused by the animated roll of Grayson's eyes at his comment. He chuckled softly to himself as he walked over to the wall next to the floor-to-ceiling bookshelf and pressed a series of panels.

Pushing just one panel, or even two, wouldn't do anything. Several had to be pushed in sequence for the hidden lock to open. Once that was completed, the wall swung inward, opening into a small room behind the bookcase.

Joel glanced over his shoulder at the stunned looks of those in the room. "Coming?"

"Should we bring Jericho or leave him here?" Caleb asked.

"I vote for leaving him here," Grayson said.

"And if we do that, we have no leverage." Joel shook his head. "No, he goes with us. I want him turned over to the Vampire Council. I want him to be held accountable for what he has done."

"Fine," Grayson snapped. "Caleb, find something to tie him up with. I may have to put up with the shithead going with us but damned if I have to do it while waiting for him to attack me again."

"Grayson, if you were any more diplomatic, you'd be cute." Joel laughed as Grayson flipped him off. The man just wasn't a tactful type of person. He was a bold, in your face, type of guy. And Joel loved that about him.

Joel was pretty sure he knew exactly where he stood with Grayson. He turned when he heard a ripping sound to see Caleb pulling the cording off one of the overstuffed chairs. His newly bonded mate then walked toward Jericho and started tying him up.

Garret stuck his fingers in his mouth and whistled. The study door opened, and two men Joel recognized from Garret's pack stepped in. "Time to bail before we have company."

"You lead, we follow, alpha," one of the men said and nodded at Joel's son. He smiled at Garret, proud of the type of leader his son had become. Only a truly great leader would have that type of devotion from his men. Is that where Joel had gone wrong? Was he a bad coven leader and that was why Jericho had betrayed him?

"Stop thinking so hard, Joel," Grayson said as he wrapped an arm around Joel. "We'll figure this all out, but not this second. Right now, we have to get the hell out of dodge."

"Good point," Joel answered as he reached inside the passage and grabbed the flashlights he stored there. "Follow me." As great as their night vision was, pitch-black darkness was still pitch black. He handed a few back as he started down the dark corridor.

When he had designed the house, Joel made sure there was a large gap between the walls of several of the rooms in the house. Joel never expected to need the escape route, but he was glad he had it built now. Having memorized the map of the tunnels, Joel knew exactly which turns to take to get them to safety.

Several moments later, they were at the panels that opened into his private garage. Everyone followed Joel through as he went over to the workbench where he hid the spare keys for his cars. He turned and just about plowed into Caleb.

"Smart is so damn sexy," Caleb murmured.

"Glad you think so, big guy." Joel just about purred. Did he really just purr? He was a coven leader for crying out loud. These two alpha males made Joel want to do things he never thought he'd do or feel.

"Hey, focus, horn dogs," Garret grumbled as he and Dean dragged Jericho along, none too gently either as they banged the man's head on the corner of the workbench. "Whoops."

"Oh darn, did we hurt you, Jericho?" Dean asked with mock concern at Jericho's muffled cry. "Should I kiss it and make it better?"

"Touch him and I'll fucking rip you a new one." Someone growled from the corner of the garage.

"And that would be why I said to leave the asshole behind." Grayson snarled as he moved in front of Caleb and Joel. "If I could sense you in the house, Joel, then Taylor could tell where we were taking Jericho."

"Why didn't you say that before?" Garret asked as he threw Jericho effortlessly against the wall, knocking the man out.

"You guys said we needed to bring him with us so we could take him before the council." Grayson shrugged. "It didn't seem like a point to bring it up at the time."

"Can we argue about this later?" Caleb hissed under his breath. "I think our problems are a lot bigger than sniffing a mate scent or not."

Joel glanced over to where Caleb was pointing and watched in horror as Taylor opened the garage doors to show eight other men at his back. Great, they were in a three-car garage which was too small for a fight between sixteen men.

Dean was the first to move, grabbing a larger jack that had wheels and throwing it at the head of the nearest man. The vampire went down with a thud. Well, that was one less to deal with. After that, everyone sprang into action.

Taylor looked frantic as he made his way across the garage. He shifted into a wolf on the fly and was headed straight for Joel. A blurred figure hit Taylor in the shoulders before he could reach Joel,

and they rolled to the floor. Joel had only a moment to realize it was Grayson in wolf form before another wolf was on him.

He saw what he needed out of the corner of his eye and grabbed it. Seconds before the wolf hit him, Joel swung the crowbar toward the shifter's head with all of his strength. He felt and heard the satisfying crunch as his weapon hit his intended target. The werewolf crumpled to the ground, covered in blood and head hanging askew.

Looking to his left, Joel saw Garret, Dean, and the two other men from his son's pack trying to hold their own against three vampires and another werewolf. Taylor and Grayson were on his right fighting it out. Caleb was caught between the cars fighting with another two wolves. Making a split second decision, Joel decided Grayson was in a better position than Caleb.

Leaping high in the air, Joel landed hard on his beloved BMW Z4, setting off its alarm. That was the momentary distraction he needed. Both wolves turned toward him, and Joel lunged forward, grabbing on the nearest wolf's windpipe and tore it out. The man helplessly tried to hold his throat together as he gurgled and slumped to the floor.

Caleb held the other wolf off the floor by the throat. With everything he had, Joel punched an arm right through the wolf's midsection. Caleb stared at him, eyes wide, as Joel worked his arm up into the wolf's ribcage and yanked out his heart.

"I don't fuck around when my mates' lives are threatened." Joel growled as he threw the dead man's heart across the room. Before he could say anything else, he heard more than saw Garret scream out as one of the vampires clawed him across the face. "Help Grayson. I'm going for Garret."

Caleb smiled at him then he raced in one direction, and Joel headed in the other. Not slowing down as he entered the fight, Joel gave a full-body tackle to the vampire about to strike his fallen son.

He let the momentum carry them until they abruptly stopped. Glancing around the very dead vampire, Joel saw he had launched the man into a chainsaw hanging from the wall of the garage.

That worked.

Joel sank down to his knees by his son as Dean did the same on the other side. Looking up, he saw that the two men from Garret's pack were taking care of the last vampire. It seems they had won the fight, but at what cost?

"Stay with me, baby," Dean said to Garret as he wiped blood off Garret's face.

"He'll be fine." Garret had to be fine. The werewolf might be a 137-year-old alpha, but he was still Joel's son...his only son. Joel pushed back a lock of deep auburn hair from Garret's face. "He's been hurt worse than this before."

Dean shook his head as he continued to wipe the blood away from Garret's wounded face. He looked like he was going to fall apart at any moment. Joel reached over and laid a reassuring hand on Dean's arm.

"He won't leave you, Dean. You have to believe that. Garret has waited for you all of his life. He's not going to let a little thing like a few vampire bites take him away from you."

"There's just so much blood," Dean murmured.

"But, he's alive and that's what counts." Joel grabbed Dean's wrist and held it up before the man's face. "Give him some of your blood, Dean. It will help heal the wounds faster. But be prepared for his reaction when he comes to."

Dean's brow furrowed. "Do you think he would be mad at me?"

"No." Joel snickered. "I think he will be as horny as hell and nail your ass to the nearest wall."

Dean looked stunned for a moment then his face colored fiercely. "I guess that isn't so bad."

Joel released Dean's wrist then patted him on the shoulder as he climbed to his knees. "Just remember to brace yourself. Garret is half vampire. He will want to reassert his claim over you the moment he awakens, especially with your blood in his wounds. It will increase his need to connect with you."

Joel felt the same intense need to connect with his own mates. He glanced around the room, taking in the destruction and mass of bodies and blood. The cost of winning was high on both sides.

The men Garret brought with him were alive but wounded. They stood off to one side of the room guarding Jericho, who seemed to just now be coming around. Joel didn't know how fair it was in the grand scheme of things that Jericho missed out on the battle. The man started it.

"Joel."

Joel whipped around to see Caleb leaning against the wall holding his bloody arm. Beyond that and a few bruises, he seemed unhurt. Grayson had several more marks on him, but it was hard to tell if he was more seriously injured because he was currently dragging Taylor across the room, dumping him on the floor next to Jericho.

"What did you do to him?" Jericho shouted as he moved toward his mate.

"Nothing he didn't deserve." Grayson growled. "He's lucky he's still breathing."

"I'd say they were both lucky to still be alive," Joel said as he walked over to stand next to Grayson. He felt his mate's intense gaze move up and down his body, then saw a slight nod from the man as if he were satisfied that Joel was okay.

"I will kill you for this," Jericho hissed.

"You and what army, Jericho?" Joel waved to the dead bodies littering the garage. "They're all dead, and your mate is injured. Just what army are you talking about?"

Jericho just glared.

Joel shook his head and squatted down in front of a man he had trusted for decades. The hurt he felt at Jericho's betrayal went deep. Joel imagined he'd continue to feel it for quite some time. But it would lesson with time.

"You need to stop this, Jericho. You have a mate now. He needs to be your first priority like Grayson and Caleb are mine. Stop this... this crazy plan of yours before you lose what you already have."

"I didn't ask for a mate."

"No, but you have one now, and you can feel the bond between you, can't you? The need to be with Taylor, the ache. You can feel it like a living, breathing thing inside of you. It won't ever go away, Jericho. You will be bonded to Taylor until one of you dies."

Jericho's face paled with every word Joel spoke. He started shaking, his bound hands clutching at Taylor's shirt. "No," he whimpered.

"Yes."

Jericho looked like he wanted to push Taylor away from him almost as much as he wanted to pull the man closer. Joel knew that Jericho needed to make a decision where his mate was concerned. He needed to stop denying that Taylor was his.

"Grayson." Joel turned and glanced up at his mate. "I know Taylor is your brother, so I'm asking you to step outside for a few moments while I take care of something. I don't want you to see this."

Grayson stared down at Joel for several moments before nodding. He turned and walked away, Caleb stepping into the space Grayson vacated. "What can I do to help?"

"Hold Jericho back if he tries to attack me."

Caleb nodded and walked around to stand behind Jericho, his hands coming down to hold onto Jericho's shoulders. Joel grimaced as he grabbed Taylor and pulled him into a sitting position right in front of Jericho. Taylor's head aimlessly rolled back on his shoulders.

"Do you accept that Taylor Cane is your true mate, Jericho?"

"I will not have a mongrel as a mate," Jericho spit out, but Joel noticed that his eyes kept going back to Taylor's face between glares sent in his direction.

"Fine, then I'll take care of this little problem for you," Joel said as he extended one claw and sliced it across Taylor's throat. He didn't cut

very deep, just enough to draw a sufficient amount blood that it dripped down Taylor's throat.

Jericho screamed and went wild, only Caleb's hands on his shoulders keeping the man in place. Joel wiped two fingers through the blood trickling down Taylor's neck then held them out. Jericho stilled and growled deeply, barring his fangs.

"You said you didn't want to be mated to a mongrel, Jericho, so the sight of his blood should be of no consequence to you." Joel moved his clawed finger back to Taylor's throat. "If I cut him some more and possibly kill him, it will free you. Isn't that what you want, Jericho?"

Jericho bared his teeth and growled, lunging at Joel.

"Was I wrong, Jericho?"

"Touch him and I will skin you alive while you watch, and then I'll go after your mates."

"Then you don't want me to kill Taylor?"

"No," Jericho spit out between gritted teeth.

Joel used the arm of his shirt to wipe the blood from Taylor's neck then moved the man over to lean against Jericho. Surprisingly, Jericho started to nuzzle Taylor's neck, licking at the slight wound.

"Why, Jericho?"

"Why?" Jericho snapped as he turned a hate-filled gaze at Joel. "Because you didn't deserve to have all of this. You fluttered away the power you could have had. You mated with dogs. You even gave your seed to one of them, creating an abomination."

"So, you're mad at me because I had what you didn't?"

"This all belongs to the coven. Instead, you used it to fund your little pity parties for the werewolves. They don't deserve any of it."

"It's my money, Jericho, not the coven's. I made this money, every damn last cent of it. The coven has its own money."

"You mated with a dog. You can't explain that. The living proof of that still breathes. You should have strangled him when he was born."

"Why do you hate my son so much? What has Garret ever done to you that could cause this?" Joel was shocked by the vehemence in Jericho's voice.

"He took what was mine!" Jericho shouted.

Joel stared at Jericho trying to figure out what in the hell Jericho was talking about. He just didn't understand it. Garret never took anything that didn't belong to him, that Joel hadn't given him. He'd even refused all of Joel's help since the moment he became an alpha.

"He's talking about you, Joel."

"Me?" Joel looked up at Grayson, suddenly realizing that the man stood next to him. "I never belonged to Jericho. We're not mates."

"No, but after so many years of waiting to find me and Caleb, you might have given up the search and been with Jericho. I think that was what he was hoping for."

"But what does that have to do with Garret?"

"Garret is living proof that you've been with someone else. If Jericho is obsessed with you, as I suspect he is, it would be a stab in the heart every time he looked at Garret."

"Then why not go after Garret? Why try to kill me?"

"I don't think you were supposed to die, Joel." Grayson squatted down next to Joel and looked across to Jericho. "Was he, Jericho? How exactly did the plan go wrong? I've already figured out that you meant to drive a wedge between the vampires and the werewolves."

"Why?" Joel asked. He was having a really hard time following Grayson's logic. None of this made sense to him.

"If werewolves attacked you, Jericho could accomplish several things at the same time. He could come to your rescue, earning your gratitude. He would drive a wedge between werewolves and vampires, and he would stop you from feeling sorry for us."

"I never felt sorry for you!" Joel snapped, jumping to his feet.

"No, babe, that's not what I meant." Grayson stood up and gestured to Jericho. "In his mind, every dime you spent trying to keep

the peace between us was a dime wasted. Every time you mediated between our clans, you were adding to the problem."

"But—"

"Somehow the plan went wrong, didn't it, Jericho?" Grayson turned to look back down at the man. "Were your werewolves too vigorous in their attack on Joel? Is that why you came in with your strike team?"

"My plan would have worked, too, if they had done what they were supposed to do."

"Kill Caleb and myself?" Grayson snickered. "You must have shit kittens when we showed up at the gate wanting to see Joel."

Again, Jericho just glared.

"And Taylor's anger at me and Caleb played right into your hand, didn't it? It seems kind of ironic to me that Taylor hated my being mated to a man so much that he betrayed his clan only to find himself mated to one. I wonder how he will feel about you once the haze clears?"

That, at least, seemed to get more than a glare out of Jericho. He gazed down at Taylor and tightened the grip he had on the man's shirt. Joel felt sorry for Jericho because he knew the man's crimes might very well take from him what Joel prized so much.

Joel sighed heavily and squatted down in front of Jericho again. He still didn't understand it. He never once gave Jericho any indication that there could be something between them. Jericho wasn't his type at all. Maybe that was why Jericho hated Garret so much. Joel preferred werewolves to vampires.

"I wish you hadn't done all of this, Jericho," Joel said, feeling a heavy sadness in his heart at his friend's treachery. "It's more than likely the councils will separate the two of you as punishment for your crimes. This may be your last chance with your mate."

"It is against council law to keep mates from each other."

"No, it's against council law to keep mates from bonding. It is not against the law to separate them as punishment."

"You can't do this!"

"I won't, but you and Taylor tried not only to kill me but the alphas of two clans. You know you can't escape punishment for that. Your bid for power has condemned not only you, but your mate as well." Joel glanced down at the unconscious man leaning against Jericho and frowned. "Maybe it would have been kinder to kill him."

Chapter 18

"I just spoke with the Vampire Council," Joel said as he walked into the bedroom he now shared with Caleb and Grayson. "They've conferred with the Council of Elders and come to an agreement on the sentence for Jericho and Taylor."

"Oh?" Caleb asked as he looked up from the pile of clothes he was putting away in the dresser. He felt like he had been unpacking for days, having brought all of his belongings from his clan compound to Grayson's. "And what did they decide?"

"They are not going to separate Jericho and Taylor. Both councils feel that would be too cruel considering their newly mated status. However, they will be placed in solitary confinement together in a coven stronghold of the council's choosing. They will also be under guard twenty-four hours a day."

"For how long?"

"The councils both decided on a hundred years of confinement."

Caleb whistled.

Joel nodded as he walked over to the bed and fell back across it, arms spread wide. "Yeah, I kind of thought the same thing. I mean, I want them punished, but a hundred years is a long time."

"Well, at least they're not being separated. That's something, isn't it?" Caleb walked over to sit on the bed next to Joel. He knew the waiting to find out what happened to Jericho and Taylor weighed heavily on the man. "I can't think of a harsher punishment than that. I know I'd lose my mind if I was separated from you or Grayson."

The smile that came across Joel's lips slowly slipped away to be replaced with a frown. Joel leaned up on his elbows and glanced around the bedroom. "Just where is our wayward mate, anyway?"

Caleb chuckled. "He's dealing with the Council of Elders right now. They sent a contingent to talk to him about mating with a vampire. It seems that has never happened before, and they are none too happy about it."

"Oh." Joel's lips pulled down in a deep grimace. "Do you think we should join him?"

"No, he told me to stay upstairs until they were gone."

Joel rolled his eyes. "He didn't tell me shit. Besides, if he had, I wouldn't have to do what he said anyway. I didn't agree to submit to him."

"I distinctly remember saying something about you making Grayson's life hell." Caleb chuckled as he rolled onto his back next to Joel. "Trying to prove me right?"

Joel suddenly moved, swinging a leg over Caleb and straddling him. Caleb reached up and grabbed Joel's hips, helping the man settle against him. "I'm not trying to prove anything. I'm just reminding."

"Right, I'm the alpha bitch."

"So, if Grayson is the alpha and you are the alpha mate, what does that make me?"

"Sexy?"

Joel laughed outright, his face lighting up. "I think I can handle that."

"Do you think you can handle my cock in your ass?"

Joel lay down over the top of Caleb until they were pressed chest to chest. "It's a strong possibility."

"Well." Caleb grinned. "My alpha did order me to stay upstairs and keep myself occupied. He just wasn't specific as to how I should do that, though."

"Not interested in putting the rest of your clothes away?" Joel whistled as he turned his head to look at the stack of boxes by the

dresser. "You have so much stuff to put away. Wouldn't it be a better use of your time to unpack?"

"Packing can wait. I think it would be a better use of my time getting you out of your clothes." Caleb grinned when he heard a small hitch in Joel's breathing. "Besides, we want to be all primed up for when Grayson comes for us, don't we? He'll need the distraction."

"Good point." Joel grinned.

Caleb watched with apt fascination as Joel pushed himself up into a sitting position then reached for the hem of his shirt. He pulled it over his head and tossed it behind him.

"Want to help me with these?" Joel asked as he reached for the buttons of his slacks. Caleb was all too willing to help. He reached down and grabbed the edges of the slacks as Joel stood up, pulling them down the man's legs.

Joel stepped out of each leg then Caleb tossed the slacks across the room. He didn't much care where they landed. He was much more interested in the hard cock jutting out from Joel's body.

"Now *that* is a work of art." Caleb reached up and wrapped his hand around Joel's hard cock. "Do you know what to do with this bad boy, or is it just for decoration?"

"Do you?"

Caleb glanced up at Joel to see the man's eyebrow arched in what he could only see as a challenging gesture, and Caleb was never one to turn down a dare. He was alpha born after all.

Caleb scooted back until he could sit up then grabbed Joel's hips. He kept his eyes locked with Joel's as he leaned forward and took the head of Joel's cock into his mouth. The shudder that rocked Joel's body matched the deep sigh that fell from his lips.

Caleb winced when Joel's hands clenched in his hair, but he didn't break contact with Joel's eyes until the man's head fell back on his shoulders. Joel seemed to be using his grip on Caleb's hair more for leverage than to direct the show.

Caleb decided to let the dominant gesture go and concentrate on giving Joel the time of his life. He started by sucking as much of Joel's long length into his mouth. He swallowed several times to keep from gagging when the head hit the back of his throat, smiling when the gesture seemed to just arouse Joel more.

"Fuck, Caleb, suck it harder."

Caleb sucked harder for several moments then he started bobbing his head, moving down to give the small slit in the head a swipe of his tongue before sucking the long shaft back into his mouth.

Joel's fingers tightened in his hair. The body underneath Caleb's hands trembled. Caleb felt a deep sense of satisfaction that he could drive his mate to such heights of ecstasy.

"I need lube, babe," Caleb said through their link.

Joel groaned and released the tight grip he had on Caleb's hair. The next thing Caleb knew, Joel was bending over, pressing Caleb back against the mattress as he reached over him for the bottle of lube in the nightstand.

When Joel came back up, he was on his knees, straddling Caleb's face. He started to move off, but Caleb reached up and grabbed his hips, keeping Joel in place as he wrapped his lips back around the cock hanging in front of him.

Not being able to see what he was doing, Caleb squirted a huge amount of lube onto his fingers. He rolled his eyes, knowing Joel couldn't see him do it. The man's eyes were closed, and his mouth hung open, little moans falling from his lips.

Caleb dropped the bottle of lube on his chest and reached up to press his slick fingers between Joel's ass cheeks. Joel bucked when Caleb's fingers grazed his puckered hole then the man pushed back against them.

Caleb took his time, alternating his attention between licking Joel's cock and pushing his fingers into the man's tight ass one finger at a time. Joel didn't seem to know what he wanted. He'd thrust his

hips forward and shove his cock into Caleb's mouth then pull back, impaling himself on Caleb's fingers.

Caleb loved every second of it. His cock felt so hard he was pretty sure he could have cut granite with it. Every tremble, every soft moan, all aroused him to higher and higher levels of delight.

"Caleb!"

Caleb knew that was his signal that Joel was close. It was what he had been waiting for. He grabbed Joel by his hips and pulled the man down onto his lap, impaling Joel on his hard cock in one fluid motion.

Joel yelled. He arched back, and his body stiffened. Caleb's mouth dropped open in amazement as ropes of pearly white seed shot out of Joel's cock to land all over Caleb. Joel sat there for a long moment as if suspended then collapsed down on Caleb's chest, his spunk smearing between the two of them.

"Fuck," Joel whispered against Caleb's neck, "I wasn't expecting that."

"I was." Caleb chuckled. "In fact, I was counting on it."

"Yeah?"

"I just wanted to get you primed and ready."

"Ready?" Joel lifted his head to look down at Caleb in confusion. "Ready for what?"

Caleb grinned and thrust up into Joel's over sensitive body. He groaned as Joel's warm body gripped his cock, the silky inner muscles holding him tightly. There wasn't much in this world Caleb enjoyed more than the feeling of sinking into one of his mates.

Well...

"Grayson, you better get your ass up here and now," Caleb sent down to his mate. *"I'm balls deep inside of Joel's ass, and I don't know how long I can hold off."*

"I'm dealing with a room full of elders, and you have to go and tell me that?"

"I thought you might like to be here when I claim Joel and give him the mating mark," Caleb countered. "Didn't you say something about fucking my ass while I fucked Joel's?"

"Hell, I'll be there as soon as I can. Don't do anything until I get there."

"I'm not promising anything."

"Fuck!"

Caleb looked up into the deep blue eyes staring down at him with a twinkle of wonder in them and grinned. "I don't suppose you can find the lube while you're bouncing on my dick, can you? Grayson should be joining us any minute."

Joel's eyes widened right before he glanced over at the door. When he looked back, he had a grin on his face. "Yeah? I thought he had a meeting with the Council of Elders."

"He does."

"Oh, you're a bad, bad man, Caleb Redding."

"Does that mean you don't want to find the lube and help me get ready for Grayson?"

"Do I look stupid?" Joel snorted as he started searching around for the lube. A moment later, he let out an exclamation of victory and held the bottle up. A small frown fell over his face as he glanced between Caleb and the bottle. "Huh, how do we do this? I kind of like your cock right where it is."

"Well, you're going to have to get off of me at some point. I need to be behind you in order to give you the mating mark. It's the only way I can reach the nape of your neck. So, you might as well help me get ready for Grayson real quick then get on your hands and knees. We can take things from there."

"I thought I was supposed to be the logical one in this three-way?" Joel asked as he climbed off of Caleb. Caleb pulled his shirt over his head and tossed it while Joel unbuttoned his pants then started pulling them down his legs. Caleb laughed as Joel tossed the pants and moved

to sit between his spread legs, shaking his head as he did. "You so owe me for this."

"And I'll take care of that just as soon as Grayson gets here."

"Damn alpha born males," Joel grumbled as he squirted lube on his fingers. "Always thinking they know what's best."

Caleb started to chuckle until he felt Joel's fingers brush against his puckered hole. Any words he would have spoken were quickly turned to a long groan of pleasure at the soft caress.

In the days since their battle with Jericho and Taylor, they had fooled around a bit, but there really hadn't been a lot of alone time for any of them. It seemed like there was always someone coming or going, someone needing help adjusting to the two clans and Joel's coven becoming one clan.

The first thing that had fallen by the wayside was a full night's sleep. The second to see a strong lacking was their sex lives. Caleb knew it would all even out after everyone became settled, but in the meantime, he had missed being with his mates.

A few quick rub offs, an astounding number of blow jobs, and one hot and heavy session with Grayson in the shower didn't replace spending hours fucking and getting fucked by his mates. Caleb wasn't sure anything would.

Having Joel stretch him out in anticipation of Grayson joining them was almost more than Caleb could take. His level of arousal was already heightened by bringing Joel to climax then being inside of the man's ass, even if it was just for a few moments.

"You're really good at that, babe," Caleb groaned when Joel added a third finger to the first two. He felt full...and achy. Hell, who was he kidding? He needed and in a bad way. "You...you about done down there?"

"What's your hurry?" Joel chuckled as he pushed his fingers rapidly in and out of Caleb's tight ass. "I'm having fun."

Caleb growled and lunged. Joel might be having fun, but he was losing his mind. He didn't care if Grayson made it in time. He needed

to sink his dick into Joel's body and claim the man before he lost what was left of his control. And he didn't have long.

Joel's laughter filled the room as Caleb grabbed him around the waist and tossed him down on the bed. Caleb grabbed Joel's hips and pulled him back onto his knees. Joel's chuckles barely cleared the room before Caleb was sinking his cock back into the man's ass.

"Caleb!" Joel shouted.

Caleb couldn't have strung two words together if he tried. He was too busy gritting his teeth together to keep from sinking them into the nape of Joel's neck. He really wanted to wait for Grayson, really.

"*Grayson!*" Caleb shouted as loud as he could through their link. "*Hurry, please.*"

The answer to Caleb's plea came in the form of the bedroom door slamming open. Caleb jumped and started to pull away from Joel, the need to protect his mate instantly outweighing the desire filling him, only to see Grayson standing there.

His fists were clenched, his chest rising and falling with his heavy breathing. Grayson slammed the door closed and turned the lock. His clothes fell to the floor as he walked across the room. By the time he reached the bed and climbed on, Grayson was naked...and gloriously hard.

"You bellowed?"

"Christ, Grayson, you'd better..." Caleb couldn't even finish. He could feel the shift upon him, the need to mark his mate overwhelming him. His claws extended, his canines dropping down in anticipation.

Caleb's body grew larger, furrier. He could feel his cock thicken inside of Joel until he almost couldn't move. He would have felt weird being the only huge body between his two mates if he didn't feel Grayson shifting at the very same time.

Large clawed hands gripped his hips as Grayson's massive cock started pushing into him. Caleb groaned, the intensity of being

impaled by Grayson while he did the same to Joel something he never thought he'd feel. And he wasn't sure he'd survive it.

"That's it, baby, fuck him hard." Grayson growled into his ear. "Make Joel feel every damn inch of that beautiful cock."

Caleb happily did just as his alpha ordered. He pounded into Joel, giving the man all that he had. He could feel every long thrust as Joel's body gripped him every time he pulled nearly all of the way out.

Caleb could feel his own body doing much the same with Grayson's large cock. The pleasure he felt was twofold as he pushed forward into Joel then pulled back only to shove Grayson's cock into his own ass. One wasn't better than the other, and both were amazing.

"It's time, Caleb." Grayson growled in his ear.

Caleb knew it was. He could feel his balls drawing up tight against his body. Caleb leaned down and sank his teeth into the nap of Joel's neck. Hot, sweet blood filled his mouth as Joel's loud cry filled his ears.

Caleb felt Joel's climax in the inner muscles that clamped down around his throbbing cock. He groaned without releasing Joel's flesh from his mouth, his body shuddering as he filled Joel's body with his release.

Sharp canines bit into his skin and pain exploded in his neck as Grayson claimed him once again. Pleasure and pain combined as the hard cock thrusting into him stilled, pulsed, then exploded and filled him with Grayson's hot seed.

Caleb didn't think he could feel any more pleasure until he felt Joel's fangs sink into his wrist. The suction of Joel's mouth combined with the teeth marking his neck overwhelmed Caleb, pulling yet another orgasm from his hypersensitive body.

Caleb's vision began to blur, but he wasn't sure if came from the pleasure coursing through his body or the tears of happiness building in his eyes. He blinked several times as he pulled his teeth free and

licked at the wound on Joel's neck, knowing it would always be there for everyone to see.

He started to shift as he felt Grayson withdraw from him. He bemoaned the loss of the man's impressive cock but knew it would happen anyway when Grayson shifted back to his human form. Besides, Caleb was tired. He just wanted a cuddle with his mates.

"Fuck a duck." Joel groaned as he collapsed down on the mattress. "Is it always like that?"

Caleb couldn't control his laughter as he pulled free of Joel's body and fell down beside Joel. Grayson stretched out on the other side of Joel, his arm resting on Joel's stomach. His hand softly stroked Caleb's arm as he chuckled.

"Fuck a duck? Had much practice with birds?"

"I seem to be attracted to wildlife." Joel laughed. "Furry ones at least."

"I'll give you furry." Grayson growled as he started to tickle Joel. Delightful laughter filled the room, making Caleb smile. He felt better than he could remember feeling in years.

He had Grayson, the man he'd loved since he was a teenage boy. And he had Joel, a man he was just coming to love. Caleb no longer cared if he wasn't an alpha anymore. What he did have was so much more important.

"So, what did the council say about Joel's coven joining our clan?" Caleb asked, breaking into the little tickle fest Grayson had going on with Joel. Caleb still felt some concern that the council wouldn't allow it. He refused to be separated from Joel now that they mated.

Grayson rolled his eyes and moved to lie on his side, leaning his head on his elbow. "I don't think they quite know what to do with us. A werewolf clan hasn't joined a vampire coven in so long, no one alive remembers it."

"I do," Joel said. "A clan and a coven joining together is actually the norm, mates, not the other way around. We were meant to be

together, to help each other. This separation is wrong and shouldn't have happened."

"So," Caleb said as he slowly stroked his finger down Joel's chest, "maybe you should show us how it's done."

Joel grinned. "I can do that. I am alpha born, after all. I'm used to leading the way."

"So am I," Grayson chuckled.

"And me," Caleb added.

"We have two werewolf clans and a vampire coven that are going to need each one of us to help them with the transition, but I suspect, when it's all said and done, we'll be stronger for it."

"You know it won't be easy, Joel."

"Caleb, nothing good is ever easy."

"I don't know," Caleb said. "I think once we stopped butting our alpha heads together, our being mated seems pretty easy to me."

"You're biased, Caleb," Grayson said.

"And?"

"And...nothing, you're right," Grayson grinned. "Each one of us is alpha born. We all have dominant personalities. Due to the nature of our mating, I believe I've found a solution that will work for all of us and keep us happy."

"And what would that be, oh wise one?" Joel asked.

"Just do as I say, and we'll all get along fine."

Caleb's jaw dropped. He couldn't believe Grayson said what he did, and with a straight face. He watched as Joel suddenly moved with lightening speed, climbing on top of Grayson and pinning the man's arms over his head.

Grayson looked shocked when he couldn't get away from Joel's strong grip, and Caleb was gratified to know that their smaller mate was no pushover. Joel was stronger than both him and Grayson. He just didn't show it often.

Caleb moved closer, and he trailed his fingers down Grayson's chest to grab his cock. He wasn't surprised to find the man hard.

Grayson was turned on by strength, whether physical or mental. It was probably why he liked having him and Joel as mates. They wouldn't put up with his shit, but they would always stand beside him.

"You were saying, alpha?"

THE END

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Stormy believes the only thing sexier than a man in cowboy boots is two or three men in cowboy boots. She also believes in love at first sight, soul Mates, true love, and happy endings.

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You can usually find her cuddled in bed with a book in her hand and a puppy in her lap, or on her laptop, creating the next sexy man for one of her stories. Stormy welcomes comments from readers. You can find her website at www.stormyglenn.com

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