



STACEY
KENNEDY

Silent Howl

THE BLUE BLOODS BOOK TWO

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The Blue Bloods Series, Book Two

Stacey Kennedy

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Blurb

Rynn Murphy's a werewolf and she's in a state of bliss—her junkie parents are in recovery for their drug addiction. Her Grandfather, Pops, who has Alzheimer's is settled into a nursing home in Utah. She's just witnessed the bonding ceremony of her friends, Nexi and Kyden from the Otherworld. With her mate, Briggs by her side, life can't get any better.

That is, until Rynn is brought to Philadelphia. As a Blue Blood werewolf, she's been given a special gift to possess a strong scent. After horrific murders take place in the Pennsylvania territory, Rynn must use this ability to seek the killer.

The task does not come easily and Rynn struggles. The human in her flees from danger. The wolf in her is desperate to end the killer's murderous rampage. Rynn must reconcile the two halves while these murders begin to cross State lines. Soon, danger is all around them. Rynn will have to decide what is more important—the human who remains in her or the wolves she has sworn to protect...

Dedication

To my readers, who are as smitten as I am over the Beta, Briggs.

Chapter One

Twelve Steps by Narcotics Anonymous:

1. Admit we were *powerless* over drug abuse—that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Come to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Make a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God *as we understood Him*.
4. Make a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admit to God, ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Be entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of *character*.
7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed and be willing to make *amends* to them.
9. Make direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continue to take personal inventory and when we are wrong promptly admit it.
11. Seek through *prayer* and *meditation* to improve our conscious contact with God, *as we understand Him*, pray only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics and practice these principles in all our affairs.

*

Plymouth, Minnesota may have been voted America's best place to live by *Money Magazine*, but Briggs would argue that point. It's really a vague memory now. Such a short time ago, his mate had walked home from a long shift with sore feet and a deep ache to her back. What she hadn't known at the time was that walk would change her life forever. Attacked, bitten and then transformed into a werewolf—it was of no surprise to him that she was still trying to adjust to the horrors of that night.

He looked to Rynn as she sat next him in a hard chair that was not made for comfort. Her long brown hair cradled her face as her deep silver eyes penetrated his soul. How he craved to reach out, touch her creamy skin, kiss those soft lips of hers. But when a chair shifted in front of him, the present situation drew him back to where they were and why they were here. Rynn's parents, Warwick and Tarina Murphy.

Just a few short days ago, Briggs had forced them into drug rehab treatment at *On Belay House* in Plymouth, Minnesota—Rynn's hometown. Now, her parents were in the recovery process. As he knew it, they were on still on stage one and needed to admit their lives had become unmanageable. Which is exactly why they were here now, sitting in these chairs and staring into the faces of people Briggs wished had no part of her life.

The room had soft pale yellow paint on the walls, simple office chairs with even a fake plant in the center of the coffee table—classic therapy room—to avoid distraction for the reason they were here. Briggs glanced away from the room and back to an old guy with glasses sitting low on his nose in a proper office chair as he spoke. "We are here today for Warwick and Tarina to share with you the process that they've been through

these last few days here and to speak from their hearts. We're not here to judge, only listen."

Briggs' anger grew in strides. What a ridiculous display this was. No conversation would fix what they had done. He came here for Rynn, and her alone. He hoped this meeting would give her a sense of peace. Resolve this situation in her heart. Yet, he doubted that was possible. Knowing that his emotions were running away with him, he tried his best to close off his feelings so Rynn wouldn't sense them. He wanted her to deal with her own emotions, not his. Usually, he enjoyed the intense connection they shared as werewolf mates. Now, she needed him to lean on for support and he did his best to remember that.

But tonight, he could sense her unstable emotions. Clearly, she wasn't sure how to feel about this meeting with her parents. They looked great, probably because they continually washed. When Briggs discovered them, they'd resorted to living on the streets, caring for nothing and no one except drugs. Pathetic couldn't even explain how unclean and disgusting they had looked when he'd first laid eyes on them.

The Doctor's gaze left Briggs and he gestured toward Tarina to start.

"Rynn," Tarina said, her voice soft and reserved.

Briggs could immediately sense Rynn's emotions crumble. This wasn't going to be easy for her. He could feel the anger within her that they'd chosen drugs over her but there was also sadness that they had abandoned her so young.

He could throttle the two people sitting before him. They were only lucky they had gotten this far. His resolve to this problem was to see the end of them, but his mate wouldn't have that. For her, he would sit through this ridiculous display and listen to the two individuals who had caused her a lifetime of pain. He doubted anything they said would change his opinion of them.

Tarina cleared her throat softly before she continued. "There is nothing I can say to change what has happened in the past. Nothing that will forgive what I have done."

"You're bloody right about that," Briggs interjected.

Rynn squeezed his thigh, drew his gaze down and into her pleading eyes. He took a deep breath and settled back to listen. She needed his support and he would give her that. Again, he reminded himself to rein it in. But it didn't change the underlying truth that these two sods could rot in hell as far as he was concerned.

Tarina started crying.

Briggs snorted. Her mother knew how to put on a show. How many tears had Rynn shed for them? The woman's sadness did only one thing...pissed him off more. She was not going to earn his sympathy.

"Go on, Mom," Rynn said and frowned at Briggs.

It only amused him and eased a bit of the tension along his shoulders. His soft mate looked so lovely when she was angry. Such a little ball of fire she was. He'd piss her off at times just to see that look, it enthralled him.

Tarina sniffed a couple times. Her look was so similar to Rynn, brown hair the exact shade, except Tarina's was cut at her chin. Even her silver eyes were nearly identical in color and held the same round shape to them.

Yet, her eyes didn't hold the sweet soul that belonged to his mate. That could never be duplicated. "We were never there for you growing up. Never saw you or cared for you, and that is what I'm so very sorry about. You didn't have a family."

“Yes I did,” Rynn retorted without a moment’s hesitation. “I had Pops and he was all I ever needed.”

If it wasn’t for Rynn’s grandfather who had taken her in when she was four, Briggs couldn’t even imagine what would have happened to her. His heart clenched just thinking about it. Now, her grandfather was sick with Alzheimer’s and couldn’t remember her.

Briggs knew the pain it caused her daily. She hadn’t been able to go and visit him since her transformation. Without the control over her wolf, she couldn’t risk shifting in front of him. Just because his mind was gone, didn’t mean that seeing a human morph into a wolf wouldn’t be shocking. No need to make his situation worse.

Soon, she would see him again and Briggs eagerly wanted to take her. She’d only been released from the hospital earlier tonight. It took a little while to recover from her recent injuries.

Injuries sustained by Danika, a wolf determined to see the end of Rynn so her daughter could bond with Briggs. The plan was so unbelievable no one had put it together. It consisted of the fake kidnapping of her own daughter, Kali, bring Rynn out into the wolf world to expose her, then have hired goons kill her.

Luckily, Danika failed, but it wasn’t without injury. Grazed by a bullet and nearly blown to pieces, Rynn was lucky to be alive. In the end, Danika was dead, killed by her mate for her acts of betrayal. Briggs was certainly glad for that. Rynn had a hard time accepting her fate and although he understood that, he wouldn’t have wanted any other outcome.

Briggs drew back from his thoughts when Warwick reached out to take Rynn’s hand. His growl came immediate. No, the man was not allowed to touch her. Warwick wasn’t as stupid as Briggs thought, he instantly placed his hand back on his lap.

Her father looked much older than his forty years. Briggs suspected this was from prolonged drug use. Deep crow’s feet that seemed to create crevasses along his face surrounded dark eyes. His hair, recently cut, had salt and pepper coloring. The man looked worn.

Warwick’s gaze left Briggs and fell to Rynn. “We’re sorry that we let our disease rule us and made us forget everything that was important. We’re grateful that Pops knew just how special you really are.”

Rynn’s eyes began to well up and tumultuous emotions ran through her. Briggs tensed and she reacted to it instantly. She reached out and ran her fingers along his tight fist. Her emotions told him that she was okay—overwhelmed—but okay.

“You have turned out to be a fine lady and are a better person than your mother and I will ever become. We owe Pops a great deal for raising you so well.” Warwick turned his gaze to Briggs. “I respect the loyalty you have to her and if I was sitting in your position, I’d be looking at me like you are now.”

Briggs arched a brow. “Would you now?”

Warwick nodded, his tone full of disgrace. “We have failed her and if you held us in high regard, I suppose that would say you don’t deserve her.”

“And do you think you are worthy of her?” The accusation from Briggs held heavy in the air.

Warwick’s head hung in shame. “No. I do not think I am.”

“Then we do agree on something.”

Dr. Wanker cut in. “We are not here to judge, only to listen.”

Briggs steeled him with a hard look. “Best we direct the conversation away from me then. I have nothing to say here that’s not judgmental.”

“We are here to help in their recovery,” the Doctor chastised.

“No, I am here because my wife wants to be here.” Briggs corrected him quickly.

Rynn stiffened at the word *wife*. Briggs understood why she felt uncomfortable with the title. She was his mate. The two seemed worlds apart. She gave her head a shake, then looked to Briggs. “Can we just move on please?”

Dr. Wanker pushed his glasses further onto his nose. “Yes.” He nodded at Warwick to continue.

Warwick’s gaze focused, unwavering, on Briggs. “We will make right what we have done wrong to her. We see now what our disease has done to us. We can gain her trust back.”

Briggs’ tension multiplied. He was doing his best to shield his emotions from Rynn, but suspected she could sense that he felt they could never nullify what had been done.

She ran her fingers softly against his hand to gain his attention. When he glanced at her, she gave him a little smile. It said it all. She didn’t mind his protectiveness, but she wanted her parents to get well, needed them to.

He reached up and brushed his fingers along her sweet soft cheek and Rynn leaned into his fingers. No matter what his feelings were on the matter she was his only priority.

Tarina sniffed loudly. “You seem so happy.”

Rynn moved away from Briggs’ hand and glanced at her mother. “I am, very happy.”

“Thank you for taking care of her,” Warwick said to Briggs.

Briggs thought he was in control of himself. Apparently, he wasn’t and had reached the end of his tolerance. He forced himself to keep the glare from showing on his face, but was unable to control the anger in his voice. “Your daughter needs to be taken care of by no one. If you hadn’t spent the last years out of your mind, you would know that. She’s kind, generous, loving and strong—all qualities that obviously came from neither of you.”

Briggs raised his hand to stop Dr. Wanker when he was about to speak, his scowl prevalent. “And what you should all realize is that this ridiculous session has nothing to do with you. It’s not about you.” He pointed to Rynn who had a tear falling down her cheek. He could feel the swell of love course through their bond. “It’s about her—her healing. Your words will fix nothing. Hearing you apologize is meaningless. If you want to make it up to her, get well, and begin to restore the betrayal she suffers. Show her. Not until then should you speak a word of your happiness because we all know, your word means jack shit.”

Silence filled the room. Rynn looked at her hands as she cried.

Dr. Wanker cleared his throat loudly. “I believe Tarina and Warwick have spoken what needed to be said here.”

Briggs was still furious. What had been said really? That they now realized they made mistakes? Well, it was too late for that. The damage was irreversible. The future would be what determined their fate in his eyes.

Tarina stood and went to hug her daughter, but Briggs stood quickly and stepped in front of her. “Embracing her is something you must earn and you have not even come close to that, woman.”

Tarnia dropped her arms and sobbed again, but said nothing. Warwick still sat in his

chair, gaze on the floor. Dr. Wanker just looked pissed.

Briggs turned and helped Rynn to her feet. When she glanced at him, her eyes tearful, all he felt was a feeling of security. She seemed to understand what it cost him to be here. He wanted to kill them. It may be violent, but that's just the wolf's way. His only thought was of her, to shield her, and she was humbled by that.

He also sensed that she craved to go into her mother's arms and tell her that she forgave her. She wanted her to know that it was all right and that she understood, but also understood why Briggs had done it. He was doing this to protect her. If she allowed herself to open up to them, they could hurt her and that was one thing he couldn't allow. Not ever. She had already had her fair share of that. He wouldn't see her hurt again.

With a final look at her parents, seeing them in all their misery, he pulled on Rynn's hand and led her from the room. Just as the door closed behind them, Briggs' phone rang. He reached into his pocket and flipped it open.

"Aye." He listened for a few moments, then he smiled as he met Rynn's gaze, happiness flaring through him. This call was just what they needed after this ordeal.

Rynn's gaze turned curious. When he closed the phone, she asked, "What?"

"We have somewhere to go."

"Already?" A little pout rose to her darling face. "We can't go home?"

He shook his head, grinning. "Not yet, darlin'."

Chapter Two

The Witches' Meadow in the Otherworld was as beautiful as Rynn remembered—rolling hills of plush grass and trees in abundance. Tonight, it was even prettier. White flowers decorated the trees around them and candles lit the night beautifully.

Going home would have been nice, but this was something Rynn wouldn't have missed for the world. Their friends, Kyden and Nexi, were just bonded. Not by the moon, like werewolves, but a magical bond she knew ran just as deep.

The ceremony was emotional and Rynn still wiped tears from her eyes as she looked at Briggs. His chocolate spiked hair, piercing yellow eyes, plush lips, and sculpted everything else, reminded her just how lucky she was. He was all hers, every last delicious bit of him.

Being here, reminded of love, she felt it even more.

Briggs and Kyden shared a man hug. Kyden was the typical Guardian, strong cut features, thick muscular body and captivating green eyes. Rynn could sense the strong bond between the men. It wasn't just respect but a love between men, never spoken, but entirely obvious.

"Did you enjoy the ceremony?" Valor asked Rynn.

As the ruler over the Alphas, the man exuded power. It wasn't just his strong appearance, short dark cropped hair, handsome wolfish features, it was just his aura—his presence.

If Rynn's heart didn't belong elsewhere, she might be attracted to the powerful wolf. His manly cut features were hard not to notice. Rynn thought of him more as a father figure than anything else, and even more than that, a leader. He was someone to respect and look up to.

"It was so lovely," Rynn answered.

Valor nodded with a smile. "Very beautiful indeed."

They probably all needed this happy occasion, especially after what they'd all been through lately, just a night to believe in the goodness in the world. Rynn suspected she needed it the most. All of this, her new life, the event with Danika, her parents—it'd all been a struggle.

Not that she'd ever complain about her life, just more of an adjustment. Living as a human was far different from the life of a werewolf. One day she believed she'd find peace in all this craziness, just not yet. That didn't change the fact that being here was a much needed break. "It's nice, you know, to have normal stuff going on."

Valor placed his hand on her shoulder. "You've had a rough go of things, but life will settle, Rynn. It won't always be as hard as you've seen it."

She wanted to believe that, she just wasn't sure she could. "Well, I'll take this night off from the dangerous stuff."

"We all need more nights like this." Valor's smile was genuine.

Rynn understood. He didn't only mean that they were away from anything dangerous. It was because he was not only close to Kyden, but also to Nexi. Being that she wasn't a werewolf it came as a surprise to her that he held Nexi in such high regard. Yet, she could understand it. Nexi was some you just loved. "Let's just hope it stays this

way for a while.”

He winked. “My wish is the same.” Then, his gaze filled with concern. “How are you feeling, today?”

Rynn reached up to touch the wound on her scalp. “A little sore, but it could be worse.”

“Indeed.” Valor’s jaw worked and the muscles in his cheeks clenched. “We haven’t had a chance to talk much alone, but I wanted to make sure you were dealing with everything all right?”

Wasn’t that the question? To even process it all in her mind was hard. The attack, the rape, two near-death experiences, her parents—how was she dealing with it all? After a moment of processing, she gave him the only answer she could come up with. “I’m still here and not committable?”

Those dark eyes softened and Valor’s hand lowered from her shoulder to grasp onto her hand. “Be proud of how strong you have been, Rynn. Others would not have come through what you have with such grace.”

She laughed. “Graceful, oh yes, that’s exactly how I’d describe me.”

“Have I ever lied to you?” His gaze was firm and rooted her to the spot.

Normally, she could come up with some sort of retort to get out of this, to skip past the compliment, but her Alpha asked a direct question. It couldn’t be ignored or dodged. “No,” Rynn responded instantly.

Valor gave an unyielding nod. “Then take what I say as the truth. You’ve done very well, regardless of the fact of how difficult these last couple weeks have been. I know you don’t agree with our ways, yet.” He hadn’t missed to leave out the *yet* part. “But you are still the wonderful young woman I met when you first came to us.” He gave her hand a firm squeeze. “Don’t forget yourself along the road ahead.”

Rynn smiled, Valor always knew what to say and when to say it to make her feel warm all over. “Thank you, Valor.”

“No thanks required.” He released her hand and grabbed onto her chin, gave it a little pinch. “You make our pack stronger, and even though it is hard for you at times...” He winked, a clear statement that everyone knew just how hard of a time she had accepting how werewolves dealt with things. No jail, only death. “You’re handling yourself with an elegance most would aspire to. If you have times when things are dark, remind yourself of that.”

Before Rynn had a chance to hug him as he deserved, she heard her name being called. She glanced toward the voice to see Nexi approaching her.

A Guardian and Witch, Nexi was the first friend Rynn met on this strange journey of hers. She’d helped ease Rynn into this new life, shared the story of her own. Both were normal girls turned supernatural.

The connection was exactly what Rynn needed to keep herself out of the funny farm. Rynn still owed her for that and she could only hope to one day repay her.

Once Nexi reached her, they shared a warm and tight embrace. There were so many reasons for this hug. A thank you for Nexi for sure, but she was also glad that this night even happened. A week ago, this seemed impossible. Nexi had discovered her destined mate was in fact Magnus, the Lord of the Underworld. From what Rynn knew, she and Kyden had fought to break that bond somehow. For obvious reasons, Nexi wanted no part of Magnus and furthermore her heart lay with Kyden.

Rynn knew how strong the soul bond was, had experienced it with Briggs. It elated her to see that whatever had happened, which she didn't know the full details about yet, they had come out okay. Nexi was kind and completely selfless. Someone like that had to have an angel resting on their shoulders. "I'm so glad everything worked out for you."

Nexi laughed quietly as she backed away. "Well, it worked out for Kyden and I, but the mess still continues." She glanced over to the demon who smiled at her.

Rynn could only chuckle nervously in response. When she heard of demons, she expected something out of a horror flick, not your everyday Miss Sunshine, but that's exactly what she found here. Rynn searched the woman's sparkling baby blue eyes, stunned to see no darkness lying in them. Evil working at its best, anyone would have been fooled.

Rynn had a little Black Magic wrapped around her past too, but it was a long story for another time and she had moved on. She wasn't about to delve deeper into the realm of the Underworld. Better to be stupid than scared.

She left the demon's gaze to look back at Nexi. "You look so beautiful." Her long, dirty blonde hair pulled back in two French braids that ran along her scalp, loose messy curls flowed down her body. Her ivory dress fit snug, tight at the empire waist and draped down over her.

"Haven's doing." Nexi leaned in and whispered. "Trust me—none of this was my choice."

Rynn laughed.

Just then, Haven popped her head between theirs. A ball of cuteness with curly bouncy brown hair and big blue eyes, she had the energy of someone who consumed way too much caffeine. "Rynn, how are you? You haven't been here for so long. What have you been up to? How do you like being a wolf?"

Rynn smiled, witnessing Haven's motor mouth as Nexi laughed quietly. "I've been well."

Haven wrapped her arm in Rynn's. "Come on, let's get some grub. I'm famished!" She glanced over her shoulder. "Finn."

Rynn glanced over her shoulder and saw Finn. Baywatch was missing their new stud—Guardians definitely didn't come ugly. He let out a deep sigh and rolled his crystal blues at his demanding girl. Rynn assumed he was told, more than asked, what to do most of the time. But how could anyone refuse Haven? She wasn't pushy or mean about it, it was just her way. Since Finn followed behind without argument, clearly she had the same effect on him.

"So, we heard you were almost killed?" Haven asked, drawing Rynn's gaze back to her as she pulled her along.

Rynn nodded somberly. "Just a couple times."

"Ha!" Nexi barked loudly behind them. "Now someone knows how I feel." She smiled softly. "Er...not that I'm glad you were almost killed, but..." she shrugged, "just nice not to feel alone."

Rynn sympathized. Nexi had her share of dangerous moments. But Rynn wasn't strong like Nexi. In fact, she was the complete opposite. "It isn't a good feeling and one I hope to never feel again."

"Keep dreaming!" Haven giggled. "You're a supernatural—danger is our middle name."

This was true. They were creatures that nightmares are made out of. Of course, danger was constantly present. Rynn could only hope it wasn't directed at her. She'd had enough of that in these past few weeks. Her body still ached from the wounds inflicted by Danika, which actually brought to mind a favour she wanted to ask.

"Hey, Nexi, you can heal wounds right?" Nexi had healed Rynn when she first transformed into a werewolf. A memory she tried her best to forget. She had moved on, sometimes leaving such things in the past was just better. Not that she hadn't dealt with it all. She'd accepted the attack against her, but now, it was just one of the memories she tried to put behind her.

"Still in pain?" Nexi asked.

"Yes," Rynn replied. The wound on her head was healing, but still ached. Before she could say any more on the matter, Nexi took her hand and a sharp pain shot through the side of her head where the stitches were. A moment later, the pain vanished.

"Better?" Nexi smiled.

"Much, thank you!"

Haven continued to pull Rynn along, all the way to the buffet table. Filled to capacity with food, it was something a King would be proud of.

Rynn's excitement built. She adored food, which was why her body was always a little curvy. Being stick thin and starving held no interest to her. She loved to eat. Now she could indulge in it as much as she liked. Being a werewolf did have its perks. Their metabolism ran a little higher than normal and burned food off faster. Putting on weight was a worry of the past.

Briggs chuckled as he stepped up close behind her and rested his hands on her shoulders. "See something you like, darlin'?" Amusement was clear in his voice.

"Do I ever." A whole bunch of goodies looked delicious and ready to delight her tastebuds. Maybe she was more eager than most when it came to food, but she still hadn't gotten used to being spoiled with anything that didn't equal macaroni and cheese. Before, food like this wasn't in her budget. It always surprised her how nonchalant everyone was when it came to food around here. To her, it was like Christmas every day.

Briggs laughed, stepped around her, grabbed a plate and handed it to her. Rynn snatched it up and got right down to business, scooping as much on her plate as possible.

With her plate toppling over with yummy goodness, Briggs ushered her over to a table where Nexi and Haven waited.

As Rynn approached, Kyden stared wide-eyed at the food on her plate. "You're going to eat all that, are you?" Not only was he amused, which sent a tinge of annoyance through Rynn, but he clearly looked shocked.

Rynn glanced down at her plate, tried to understand why he looked so surprised. Okay, sure, it overflowed with food, but she was likely to go back for seconds. 'Down the hatch', her Pops always told her. She wouldn't waste a single drop. "I may even lick the plate."

Kyden grinned, his gaze flicked to Briggs. "The woman can eat."

"Aye that she can," Briggs responded, and she could feel his amusement course through their bond.

Rynn grinned at him as she sat down and dug in, but just as she did Nexi's exquisite wedding ring caught her eye and momentarily shocked her. She and Briggs were bonded but she had never received a ring. It wasn't a normal thing for supernatural beings to do

that.

She glanced down at her hand with a sense of longing. That would have been nice. She always liked that part of being human, to have that visible representation of your love for everyone to see.

A flicker of curiosity shot through her, she looked to the source to find Briggs studying her. She shook away the longing, unwilling to hurt his feelings. This whole bonding thing was something she still had to get used to. More than once, she forgot he would sense those feelings within her. He was perfect. She wouldn't change a thing about him and was definitely not going without. Something so material would make her look needy, which she wasn't.

Briggs stared at her intently for a moment and she did her best to ignore his look, chastised herself for letting those feelings dip into their bond. Hoping to move along, she addressed Nexi. "So, tell us what happened?"

Kyden took a seat beside Nexi as she said, "The quick version?"

"That'll do," Rynn responded, before taking a bite of her warmed dinner roll.

"Being the overprotective fool he is, Kyden issued a challenge to Magnus," Nexi answered.

Briggs gave a firm nod. "Right thing to do."

Of course, Briggs would think that. Clearly, he would have done the same for Rynn. Their mates were for them to protect and anyone who tried to take her from him would suffer, with his life. She believed that.

Nexi gave Briggs a chastising look. "It was stupid."

"It was my duty to do so," Kyden declared.

Nexi rolled her eyes before she continued. "Anyhoo, Kyden was this close," she showed the emphasis with a pinch of her fingers, "to death, but Misa and Azar intervened." She gestured to the left.

Rynn glanced to where Nexi indicated. A white-haired Warlock and the woman demon stood speaking to Valor. Rynn's attention returned to Nexi when Briggs asked, "They assisted you?" His awe was prevalent in both their bond and in his voice.

"Sure did!" Nexi nodded and shoved a spoonful of mashed potatoes into her mouth.

"That's a surprise." Briggs chuckled.

Rynn was a little lost. It was hard to understand all the different mythical creatures. She really had no experience with it all and getting used to the idea that there was even such a thing as the Underworld was still hard to swallow. Warlocks, demons and such. But to believe in the Underworld, meant she had to accept that evil lived there too. It did seem feasible that having anyone help Nexi there was far from normal.

Nexi swallowed her food then laughed. "A damn good surprise. We wouldn't be here if it weren't for them."

Rynn was still busy filling her face, but she was curious too. "By intervening, what do you mean?"

"They withdrew the hold Magnus' bond had over me."

Rynn's eyes went wide, shocked. "How did they do that?" As much as her mind tried to process and come up with a way they could have helped, she just couldn't find a logical reason. The more she tried to find reason, the more her head hurt.

Nexi laughed loudly. "Oooh...that's funny, that's what I must look like when I learn about all this crazy stuff."

“Yup, shocked silly.” Haven giggled. “That’s exactly what you look like, isn’t it funny?”

Nexi nodded and continued to laugh.

Rynn laughed too, she must have looked a bit ridiculous. Embarrassed, she filled in the missing piece. “Something magical then?”

“Yep!” Nexi responded. “Hocus pocus and poof Nexi is back.”

Even that did little to ease Rynn’s confusion. What kind of magic would release a soul bond? And could such a thing be done on her bond? Whatever it was, she didn’t want to continue with that train of thought. To have no bond with Briggs was horrible in every sense. She didn’t even want to go there.

Briggs patted her leg, obviously sensing her distress, then focused back on Nexi. “Once the bond was severed you destroyed Magnus then?”

She gave a feeble shrug. “It wasn’t completely severed, but it definitely wasn’t as strong. Destroying him was the only choice.” She glanced at Kyden with adoring eyes. “Magnus’ hold didn’t stand a chance.”

Kyden leaned in and kissed her lips. “Of course it didn’t.”

“And now you’re to lead the Underworld?” Briggs asked, disbelief and amusement in his tone.

Rynn understood his amusement. Nexi was a spitfire, but nothing of her lived within the darkness. The idea of her ruling such a world was beyond hilarious, and never in her life would she have imagined that Kyden would be Lord of the Underworld. They fought against the dark arts. In truth, though, it didn’t matter. Kyden and Nexi were together, nothing else was as important as that. Besides, these two would see to change what the realm was. Dark it would be no more.

Nexi scowled at Briggs’ laughter and slapped his arm. “It’s not funny—not at all.” She glanced around at the creatures of the Underworld. “They have all lost it. As if I can do this!”

Kyden leaned back in his chair, stretched his legs out and crossed his arms. “You’ll do fine.”

Nexi snorted, aimed an annoyed look his way. “Sure I will. Soon, they’re all going to realize what a big mistake this is.”

Rynn held back her own laugh. Nexi was part sass, part complete smart ass. Put her with a strong Guardian and they always gave a good show. She could understand Nexi’s reluctance, though this was just absurd, even if Rynn didn’t really understand what all this Underworld business entailed.

Kyden’s eyes smiled at Nexi, then looked back at Briggs. “The goal is to find a way out of this of course, but for now, we’ll take it night by night.”

Briggs gave a soldier’s salute. “Aye, Lord Kyden.”

A slow smile spread across Kyden’s face and then he tackled Briggs to the ground where the two wrestled like silly boys. As much as it was inappropriate at this type of thing, it was nice to see Briggs relaxed. So much had happened lately, he was always so tense and worried for Rynn. Seeing him happy, wrestling around with his best bud, and doing things that had nothing to do with duty was a nice thing to watch.

This was really the first time she’d ever seen him so at ease. Maybe Valor was right. Perhaps the hard times ahead were behind them. Her gaze returned to Nexi and she smiled. “Are they always like this?”

“Stupid?” Nexi glanced at the men rolling around, laughing and beating each other.
“Yes, they’re always that.”

Chapter Three

Thump. Thump. Thump—*ouch!* Rynn's hands tightened around her head as the pain seemed to intensify with each breath. Everything was a little off balance and she wasn't even sure her eyes were open, though she could see—sort of.

She was definitely rethinking the four glasses of wine she enjoyed last night. Although, part of it was just tiredness, the Otherworld kept Vampires hours, which meant they ran at night.

Rynn glanced at the clock, *nine-oh-two a.m.* She'd only been asleep for a total of five hours—definitely not enough to cure the haze of a hangover, and could have stayed like this for hours, if soft whispers from the living room hadn't interrupted her. She lowered her hands and glanced out toward the voices.

Wasn't really a stretch to see who was out there. The home she and Briggs shared was a quaint log cottage nestled in a thick patch of trees in Cache Valley, Utah. Quite a spectacular sight, but it wasn't the home that made it so. They were completely secluded from the outside world and with the million-dollar Utah view, Rynn took to the place with ease.

There wasn't much to the makeup of the home. Large logs surrounded the square living room with oversized chocolate brown couches. A mini-kitchen consisted of a small stove and fridge, with little-to-no counter space and only a few cabinets. The king-size bed sat at the back of the room and the only thing blocking Rynn's view right now was the large wood stove that sat in the middle of the room with a stone chimney that reached up to the ceiling.

Briggs leaned against the chimney, chatting with someone in the living room. But who? After a moment of trying to identify the woman's soft voice, Rynn gave up and groaned as she rolled out of bed. Her feet dragged along the floor as she walked toward the living room.

When she cleared the fireplace, she found a familiar face. If she had it in her to smile at such an early hour, she would have. "Nera." Her voice rough and groggy. "How are you?"

Nera's glanced away from Briggs as he moved toward the kitchen, her shining blue eyes met Rynn's gaze. "Better than you obviously." She laughed.

Before Rynn could respond, Briggs returned, handed her a couple pills and a glass of water. She took the items with thanks and smiled softly. "My head is killing me."

Briggs kissed the top of said throbbing head. "That will fix you up, darlin'."

Rynn downed the pills, then headed over to Nera and took a seat beside her on the couch. The two women had had a rough start. Rynn being a *made* wolf and not born as one but bitten and transformed, Nera had been less than pleased to have her mated to such a powerful mate as Briggs. The relationship took a turn for the better, when they had saved each other's lives not long ago. The animosity between them was gone replaced by a new friendship.

"I must apologize..." Rynn glanced down to her wrinkled pajamas, patted her bed-head hair and could only imagine the mascara beneath her eyes. "I'm not a little more presentable."

Nera laughed. "Briggs said you were at a bonding ceremony last night."

"The wine was good," Rynn replied. "Too good."

Nera fiddled with her spiky short brown hair as she laughed boisterously. "It appears so."

Rynn took another big sip of water then placed the glass on the coffee table. She was curious about why Nera was here. "I wasn't expecting to see you so soon."

"Yeah, me neither."

She waited for Nera to say more, but she didn't. Rynn finally got frustrated with the wait and asked, "Where's Rainer?" Mates rarely went anywhere without each other. Nera's presence without him was odd.

"Since we were away for a few days, he needed to catch up on pack business." Nera smiled slyly. "He wasn't pleased I was leaving since we just returned yesterday."

Rynn reached forward, grabbed the glass of water again and took another sip as the silence passed, then returned it to the table. Her curiosity got the better of her. "So, you're here to see Valor then?"

Nera shook her head. "No, I came because your mate has a request of me."

"And the request is?" One thing Rynn didn't appreciate was being kept out of the loop. What did Briggs have to ask Nera? Why didn't she know about it? More than that, she got the feeling that whatever it was had to do with her. Even more reasons to feel unsettled at this moment.

Her gaze fell to Briggs for clarification. He only smiled at her, eyes twinkling. "You're a Blue Blood," was all he said.

Rynn rolled her eyes. She still didn't understand what that meant exactly. It'd been discovered that Rynn held special abilities as a wolf and her scent ability was strong. Even stronger than Valor's, which had never been heard of before.

As Patriarch to the Wolves, Valor was gifted with a higher level of sensitivity, which meant Rynn had been truly blessed. What all this nonsense was about being a Blue Blood, she wasn't sure. "And...your point being?"

Briggs' smile grew and it irked Rynn a little to know just how much amusement he got out of her snappiness. It never had the right effect. She aimed to state her point but it always backfired. He let his smile drift away as his expression became serious.

"As you know, some men have Alpha blood running through them. It makes them more dominant and powerful. It's what makes us good leaders. Some of our women have special blood too. It gives them enhanced abilities such as yours with your scent. We call these women Blue Bloods."

"Yeah, yeah." Rynn waved those words away and hoped he'd just get on with it. "You already told me that, but what request of Nera do you have?" She felt annoyed with her charming mate, and the more she did, his amusement increased, which was even more annoying.

"I'm a Blue Blood too." Nera interjected.

Rynn sighed, rubbed her temples in hopes to relieve some of her headache and closed her eyes for a little relief. "Yes, I know this too."

Just as Rynn had been gifted with impeccable scent, Nera's hearing was intensified. Why were they repeating themselves? She already knew all this. She had a headache and they were making this hard for her, she didn't appreciate that.

"I'm here to train you," Nera answered.

Rynn eyes snapped open and she dropped her hands. “What?” Oh no, she couldn’t have heard her right. Train her to do what?

Nera’s expression sparkled with amusement. “You’re worth more now so you need to be able to defend yourself.”

“Excuse me?” Rynn’s tone was clear with accusation. Was Nera reverting to her old ways of disliking her for her heritage?

Nera recovered quickly. “No, I don’t mean it how you’re taking it. What I mean to say is that you will be more useful to your pack and Valor now. You won’t be able to hide on the sidelines since they’ll probably need to use your developed skills. Blue Bloods are rare and we’re often called upon if our abilities can help.” She took a deep breath before she continued. “Therefore, you will likely be in danger more often.”

Well wasn’t that fantastic news! Rynn had actually hoped that this was all behind them. Last night, she let herself believe that was the truth and Valor had almost confirmed it. But she knew by his word choice, that wishing for something wasn’t going to make it come true. This worried her. She was really not cut out for all this danger stuff.

Did they seriously think that she was going to have to fight anyone? It was one thing to stand on the sidelines, but for her to dogfight with someone. No, she wasn’t comfortable with this at all.

Briggs cleared his throat and her gaze flicked to him. “Not to fret, love. I’ll always be there to keep you safe, but it’s important that you have the skills to take care of yourself if we are ever separated.”

Oh yes, Rynn got the implication of all of this. Concern sliced through their bond, which only told her that what they wanted from her was something far worse than just fighting someone. “Are you suggesting that I have to learn to kill a wolf?”

“I know it troubles you, darlin’,” Briggs’ tone was full of understanding. “But I can’t shield you from danger and you need to be prepared. I won’t leave you defenseless.”

Troubled her? That was putting it lightly. This was terrifying to her. She was still adjusting to having four paws, let alone to actually defending herself as a wolf. Was she even capable of this? She doubted it. Maybe that’s what bothered her, she didn’t want to disappoint him. She knew Briggs though, understood that he would only do this if he thought it most important. He would never ask anything of her that he thought she couldn’t handle. One thing just didn’t make sense though. “Why can’t you train me?”

“Nera is a woman. Small like you. She has skills that I cannot teach you. She’s the best to do this.”

Rynn sighed. She avoided confrontation and never had any brothers or sisters to fight with. She was a wimp and it would take courage to fight against Nera. Even more guts to hide that she was very unsure. One thing Rynn never did was appear afraid. Looking weak was not within her personality traits. A hard life had taught her that. Her only choice was to dive in, paws first. “Are you going to stay around for this?”

“Nah, darlin’, I’ve got somewhere to go.” He approached her. Once in front of her, he knelt down and took her hand in his. “I’ll be along shortly.” He laid a sweet kiss along her lips.

Her mouth melted against his. The man kissed like there was no tomorrow and swept her thoughts away. She felt a smile spread across his face. She wanted more of those lips and he knew it. A low sigh escaped her lips as he backed away. To focus away from those types of thoughts, her gaze immediately fell to Nera’s. “All right, let me shower

first so I can get this stink off me.”

“Of course,” Nera answered with a nod.

Rynn stood and Briggs gave her a little wink. She thought to give him a firm look to stop it, but knew that would only amuse him. Instead, she just waved goodbye and headed for the bathroom, when a thought suddenly occurred to her. She turned back around. “Hey, Nera.”

“Hmm?”

A thousand questions ran through her mind, but only one stood out as most important. “How hard is this going to be?”

Nera smiled, a knowing look on her face. “Your hangover will seem like heavenly bliss when I’m done with you.”

Briggs’ smile, probably meant to be reassuring, did nothing for her. Really, all she wanted was her bed and maybe some hot chocolate with marshmallows on top.

Instead of whining like a kid, she tried to focus on the fact that Briggs wouldn’t suggest it if it didn’t think it necessary. It was probably a good idea for her to know how to keep away from sharp teeth. That didn’t mean she didn’t doubt herself though. What could little ole’ her possibly do? She knew the answer to that, run and cower in fear.

Briggs laughed, clearly knowing what she just realized in her mind. “You’ll do fine, love.”

She scoffed at him. “Keep dreaming wolf.” With that, she spun on her heels and entered the bathroom, Briggs’ laughter continued behind her.

Chapter Four

After a quick shower, the painkillers had taken effect and Rynn was ready to go. Well, sort of. The entire time in the bathroom, she tried to hype herself up and thought she had. But now, staring at Nera as they stood behind the house, knowing she was about to fight a wolf, shook her confidence.

"You smell absolutely terrified." Nera laughed.

Rynn snorted at the obviousness of that statement. "I've never fought anything in my life."

Nera shook her head, continued to laugh as she approached Rynn and rested her hands on her shoulders. "I'm not going to hurt you. I'm just going to show you ways to maneuver around someone trying to kill you and the best way to kill your opponent."

Rynn let out a deep breath. Truth be told, she hadn't quite known exactly what they meant by *training* her. She was glad to know it wasn't what her mind had concocted. No blood would be shed and that only pleased her. "Thank God!"

Nera laughed again, then squeezed Rynn's shoulders tight. "The woman standing before me isn't a fighter nor does she have the roar to kill. It's your human roots that cause this." She cocked her head. "But the wolf that lies within you is anything but compliant. She will stop at nothing to protect herself or her mate. You just need to find this wolf."

Rynn snorted again. "You talk about it as if it's two different things."

"It is," Nera replied with no hesitation. "Well, with you anyway."

For a moment, Rynn thought it over. What was this, some therapy session? She began to feel like she had a multiple personality disorder that Nera had noticed. Instead of believing herself nuts, she sought out clarification. "What does that mean?"

Nera released her shoulders and stepped back. "Use me for example. I was raised to follow the way of the wolves. We are proud pack creatures and use violence to solve our disputes. We are dominant over the ones we love, and as women, we are submissive to our Alphas." She smiled softly. "But you were not raised with wolf cultures. Your human and wolf entities battle against each other to find what is right."

"Guess that makes sense," Rynn said with a little shrug.

"You need to reconcile the wolf within you. She wouldn't be afraid to fight if someone attacked her or hesitate to rip apart an enemy trying to harm her."

Well, what she should be and what she was is just as Nera said...two different things. Rynn was afraid. Everyone kept saying that she needed to find the wolf within and when she did, all this would become normal for her. She still doubted that. These were her values, morals she'd be raised with. They couldn't be ignored. "I don't like the violence."

"Your human doesn't like the violence," Nera countered. "The wolf in you recognizes the necessity of such a thing."

This simply confused her. Who was she if she wasn't her human self? If she ignored the values she was raised with, everything that made her...her, who would she be? "I just...don't know how to let that part of me go." Rynn heard the sadness in her own voice.

"I am sure," Nera hesitated for a moment and her expression softened. "This is all very hard for you, but honestly, Rynn, this is who you are now. The human life you once had is gone and if you don't discover the wolf within you, free her to become a part of you, you will always be seen as different to the other wolves. You'll never be accepted because they'll believe that you don't want to belong and Briggs will have to constantly defend you. Is that what you want?"

"No."

Nera nodded firmly. "Good." She began to back away. "The two important things to know are, one, never get caught and always dodge their attack against you. This will always buy you time and it is likely that Briggs will come to you quickly when he knows you're in danger. So, go ahead and shift."

Rynn sucked in a deep breath and called on the shift. Before she could even draw in another breath, she was on all fours and blasted with the strong, familiar scent of the world around her. The best part was her clothes magically disappeared with the shift and somehow came right back later. Rynn had yet to figure that one out, but sometimes acceptance was easier than processing.

Even now, though, she knew how much she had changed. Not long ago this part was hard. Gaining the control of her wolf was a problem all in itself. She felt proud that she'd at least gotten this far. The shift now came quick and without struggle.

Nera smiled down at her. "I have to stay in human form for now so we can communicate."

Rynn nodded her head in understanding. Only mates had the ability to talk to each other in their minds as wolves, it was the magic part of the bond. She sat back on her hind legs and waited for instruction.

Nera walked around, circled her body. "Now let your mind settle. Know nothing but the wolf you are. Let your human mind and thoughts go. Be a wolf, breathe her, feel the nature of what you are."

Rynn closed her eyes and quieted her mind. She focused on her paws as they squished into the mud beneath her, the way her ears could turn any way and pick up crisp sounds. The way her fur felt comfortable and the thousand scents that blasted through her wet nose.

Yes, she could feel the wolf within her. The predator. The powerful part of her soul that wasn't afraid of the violence, only thrived on it. Wolves were proud creatures, territorial, fierce, and those feelings began to run through her.

She listened harder, searched deeper and knew nothing but what she was right at this very moment. After some time, the wolf began to overtake her soul.

Her mind swam with realizations, spoken deep within her. *Rely on the pack. Protect them. Defend what is yours. Stop at nothing to ensure the safety of you and your mate.*

Rynn opened her eyes to see Nera smiling softly at her. "Ladies and gentlemen, she finally makes an appearance."

It wasn't hard to understand what Nera saw. The wolf that lay dormant within her wanted to come out and play. The wolf demanded to be heard. Rynn just hadn't listened nor accepted what she was now.

She was no longer just Rynn Murphy. She was Rynn, Wolf of Utah and mate to the Beta. The realization of that made her wolf want to raise her head and howl.

"Now then," Nera explained. "As women, we are small. We don't have the strength

behind us to overpower someone like our Alphas, but we are quicker. This is what you need to use as your advantage over someone.”

Rynn comprehended this. Not long ago when she and Briggs played as wolves, she did notice that she could move quicker than he could. Not in a flat out run but she spun away faster. It made sense that this could be an advantage in a fight. She could maneuver her way to avoid attack.

“Do whatever you have to do to get away and be wise. Always keep moving and never let them get a hold of you. If you do, you’ll be dead. Always keep moving.” Nera’s voice began to fill with excitement. “Not until you have them in the right position do you attack. Never until then and when you do, go for the throat. Find the jugular and tear like there is no tomorrow.” Suddenly, Nera shifted and backed away from Rynn.

Rynn had to wonder if she would know when that time came. Would she know the ideal opportune moment to strike? In response to that, confidence filled her. This was something engrained in her. Her wolf instincts would know when it was time to attack. She trusted in that.

She jumped to her feet and readied herself. With her wolf unleashed, Rynn’s fear had washed away to acceptance—this was her life now. The violence within the wolves wasn’t something she could fight against and the wolf’s values within her told her this was right. No one hurt a member of the pack or her mate and got away with it. The consequences of such an act could only have one result—death.

Nera lowered her head, ears pulled back and a snarl prevalent on her face, teeth exposed. Rynn expected to be fearful when presented with such a threat but she wasn’t. In fact, she mirrored the advance and fury enveloped her.

With a loud growl, Nera pounced forward slightly, stomped her paws against the ground, urged Rynn to come forward. Rynn’s instincts said to wait, circle her, wait for the attack.

Growls between the two grew louder. Before Rynn could blink again, Nera acted so quickly, she barely saw her move. Nera bolted forward and pinned Rynn on her side, throat in Nera’s mouth. She struggled, tried to get out of her grasp, but it was useless. Nera had her pinned to the ground.

Dang it!

If this was a real battle, Rynn would’ve been pushing daisies.

Nera released her teeth from around Rynn’s throat and leapt backwards, continued her threatening posture.

Rynn growled, hopped to her feet and began to circle in again. The wolf that lay quiet inside her roared to take control. Let instinct and wolf impulse guide her. The Blue Blood heritage ran within her. They were fierce women, noble fighters and she was one of them now. She just had to believe in it.

It was then that Rynn succumbed to the new sense of freedom within her and lost herself in her fur. She gave the wolf the power to overtake her and control every part of her. She told the wolf to fight.

Nera punched forward again, but this time Rynn was ready and in a quick move, leapt and spun out of the way. The wolf instincts came to life within her and she no longer thought of anything, only acted. Shockingly, it seemed more natural than Rynn expected.

As Rynn spun around to find Nera a foot away, Nera gave an approving bark and

came again.

Over and over again, Nera lunged and Rynn stayed untouched and clear of the teeth snapping at her body. But how to overpower and attack Nera? It was one thing to get out of her way but another entirely too actually take her down.

As the fight continued, the wolf within Rynn screamed at her to defend herself, chastised her with a loud roar. She had the power to overtake the wolf in front of her, but she doubted herself and that made fury rise up in loud growls from her throat.

Rynn released the last tenors of her human self, the morals that told her not to injure or cause pain. When Nera came at her again, Rynn didn't pounce but lunged. Nera wouldn't go down without a fight and came at her teeth barred, eyes burning with fire. Rynn was not afraid. On the contrary, she enjoyed the challenge.

With Nera only a hairsbreadth away, Rynn twisted her flank to avoid her sharp incisors. Then, she dropped her head and sank her teeth into Nera's front leg, followed with a blow to her chest.

Nera didn't stand a chance.

With a loud yelp, she flew backward and landed on her hind-end. Rynn was immediately on Nera, her teeth latched around her throat. Her fur felt ticklish along her tongue and she could feel Nera's heartbeat pound against her neck.

Seconds later, Nera shifted and beamed with pride. "Way to go, girl!" She squirmed a bit as Rynn's teeth were now around warm skin. "Ahh...mind letting go of my throat?"

Rynn wanted more, to be victorious but the thought of killing Nera made her human instincts explode immediately and caused her shift. She went flying back on her butt, panting. "Oh God, no."

Nera rushed forward on her knees and grabbed Rynn's arms. "What is it? What's wrong?" Worry etched into every part of her expression.

"I wanted to kill you." Tears welled up in Rynn's eyes. What had she just done?

Nera burst out laughing and released her arms, settled back on her legs. "Of course you did."

Nothing about this was funny. With her wolf calmed and her human form surrounding her, she was horrified at the feelings she just experienced. "That's sick, horrible. What does that make me?"

Nera wore a shit-eating grin. "A wolf."

Chapter Five

Briggs berated himself as he drove on the windy road, the motorcycle roaring beneath him. How did he miss it? How did he not see what his mate was longing for at the bonding ceremony?

He'd awakened early this morning and it was then that sense filtered through. He wasn't used to being around anyone who had so much human running through their blood. But she had lived as a human for twenty-four years. Her values were imbedded into her soul.

Just as Nexi needed a ring exchange to affirm her and Kyden's bond, so did his mate. He felt foolish he hadn't considered any of this on his own. He should know all her wants and desires.

The air was warm as he whipped through the streets of Cache Valley. His need to get back to Rynn gripped him. Being away from her was not something he liked, but Nera was with her and that eased his concerns slightly.

He slowed the bike as he approached the mall and pulled into a parking spot. He turned off the ignition and the sound of young giggles immediately drew his gaze to the left.

Everything in him smiled. A group of young girls watched him, eyes ogled at him on his bike. He began to walk toward them and they all batted their lashes and smiled with interest. As he strode by, he gave them a nod. "Hello there."

They shrieked louder and their circle drew in closer as they discussed to whom he was talking. Briggs chuckled to himself. Young human girls were so different from wolves. They would be throttled if they were seen behaving in such a way. He thought it sweet.

He only had to walk a short distance once he entered the mall before he came upon *Schubachs*. When he stepped into the shop, an aged but very presentable woman approached him.

"Having a nice day?" she asked.

"Aye," Briggs responded as he glanced around at the glass enclosures. Everything sparkled but none of it was what he wanted. He wanted something that no other would ever wear. He glanced at the saleswoman. "I need something custom, do you provide that?"

The woman's eyes beamed. Briggs suspected she was imagining her commission. "We have many custom pieces in the back." She spun on her heels. "Let me go and get them."

Briggs watched her walk off, then glanced through the rings before him. He hadn't expected this to be hard, but there was just so many. Square diamonds, round diamonds...he had no idea what Rynn would like.

The saleswoman returned with a black velvet case holding a dozen rings. "Some of these are new pieces, but some are old and date back to the eighteen hundreds."

Briggs leaned in and ran his gaze over them. One immediately popped out at him. He reached for it and lifted it from the case.

"A wonderful choice that one is," the saleswoman said. "It was designed by one of

our custom jewelers. An interesting design isn't it?"

Briggs laughed. "Aye, I would say that it is."

It wasn't the large three diamonds that sat along the top or the beautiful leaf looking designs on the sides of the platinum band that caught his eye. The two paw prints on either side of the last diamond captured him completely.

"This ring can be put on credit to help with the cost," the saleswoman said.

Briggs waved the thought away. When it came to his mate, a number value meant nothing. Besides, being the Beta came with a heavy paycheck. Whenever they assisted with a matter between the Alphas, he and Valor took an equal cut of the profit. One that usually consisted of many zeros, but didn't hurt an Alpha in any way. Old money was common within werewolf packs. "The cost is of no concern."

The woman's eyes glowed with delight. Briggs would probably be helping the woman pay off her credit card with this one sale. He looked back at the ring and examined it further, tried to imagine it on his mate's finger. Would this make her happy? Is this what she would want, had dreamed of when she was young like the girls he saw earlier?

"Does your lady like wolves?" The woman asked.

Briggs glanced up at her, a hint of a smile on his face. "I would say that she does."

"Well this is the perfect ring for her then. It's nothing but quality. The diamonds combined are over three carats and the cut of them is flawless—a perfect cut." She picked up a ring next to it. "The jeweler made a matching man's ring." She held it out to him. It was a thick band with similar leafy designs and a matching paw print on the top.

Briggs glanced back to the ring in his hand. It was dainty enough not to overpower Rynn's small hands, but it spoke of one thing...she was a treasure and deserved to have such riches on her hand.

It was perfect.

"I'll take it," he finally said. "The other as well."

"Wonderful. Your lady will be so happy with your choice." She practically ran over to the cash register. Briggs could only assume she was thinking he would change his mind and she wanted to make the sale quickly.

The woman placed the rings in black velvet boxes then rang in the total. Briggs hadn't even heard the amount. His thoughts were only of his mate. He found himself excited to see her reaction. He guessed she had never received anything this pricey. It pleased him to know he was capable of giving her such things.

After the bill was paid, he placed the rings in his pocket and thanked the woman for her help then headed back out of the mall.

With that out of the way, he felt even more urgency to return to Rynn. How was his mate handling her training with Nera? He assumed it wouldn't be an easy thing for her to do. Allowing the wolf to come forth was something she struggled with. It was those reasons why Briggs contacted Nera. He counted on the fact that since both of the women were Blue Bloods, Rynn would feel more comfortable with her than any other. Besides, he trusted Nera to provide her with the skills she would need to defend herself. Rainer had trained her well.

Briggs would have trained her himself. In fact, he wanted to do just that but he believed what he told Rynn—Nera could teach her things that he couldn't. He fought with brute strength. Rynn didn't have that and Nera's skills were what would help her

most if she were in danger, which if Briggs had anything to say about it, would never happen. He would never leave her helpless, not in the violent world that surrounded them.

He reached his bike and within moments was driving back down the road. The ride down was leisurely, the ride home was anything but. He felt hurried to get back to Rynn and see that all was well.

A drive that took a half an hour there, took fifteen minutes now. When he saw his cabin appear before him, he let out a deep breath that he felt he'd held the entire way. He slowed the bike, settled the roar of the engine and pulled up in front of the house.

Immediately, his nose told him the women were behind the house. Briggs launched himself off the bike and started around the back. When he cleared the house, he saw Rynn and Nera sitting in the Adirondack Chairs facing out toward the water.

He approached them, knew Rynn could sense his nearness. She exhaled deeply and by the look of her body softening, it appeared she was happy he was home.

Just as he reached them, she glanced over her shoulder, a pretty smile on her face. "That didn't take you long."

Briggs shook his head and returned the smile. He knelt before her and immediately sensed a difference in her. Something about her had changed. He cocked his head to the side and examined her for a moment.

Rynn laughed. "Why are you looking at me like that?"

It took him a moment to understand the difference but once he did, it was clear. He looked at Nera. "It went well I see."

Nera nodded. "She did great."

Briggs' gaze swept over Rynn, marveling. "I see that she did."

She had finally reconciled that she was indeed a wolf. For the first time ever, he saw that the woman before him had found peace. That elated him. This had been a strain on her and something he didn't know if she'd ever accept completely. Here she was, her wolf shining strong within her.

"What are you babbling about?" Rynn accused.

Briggs reached up and touched her cheek. "Your wolf is there in you now. I could never see her before. She was disconnected. Hidden." He smiled softly, caressed just below her eye. Never had he seen his mate look so beautiful. "But there she is. I see her."

Rynn blinked a few times. "My eyes aren't wolfish are they?"

Briggs laughed, as did Nera. "No, love. It's just when I look at you I can see the wolf within you. You hadn't acknowledged her before, allowed her to become a part of you while you stayed in human form. You always forced her away, only called on her if you had shifted. You never allowed her in." He touched her face again with soft strokes, unable to stop himself. "Now, you have."

Rynn let out a deep breath and shrugged. "I guess it's coming."

He believed she'd already discovered all that was necessary, but of course, it would take some time for her realize that. He'd never see the disconnect before or the battle she suffered against her wolf since most wolves were born into this life. It was a natural thing. For Rynn, though, it wasn't and the human in her was determined to stay true to herself. It made his Alpha roar that she had accomplished this and he could see it in every part of her. She was accepting this life. It made him blissfully happy.

He leaned in, cupped her face and shared that happiness with her mouth. Rynn

sighed against him as he parted her lips and basked her mouth with his tongue. He could have kissed her longer, drank in her pleasure for hours, if Nera hadn't cleared her throat to distract him.

Briggs groaned and released Rynn's face. He glanced at Nera, annoyed for the interruption.

Nera laughed and stood. "I better get going, I have...there is...I'm just going." She laughed harder.

Rynn blushed, but she couldn't hide her other reaction from Briggs. She wanted more of his lips and of what his body had to offer her. However, she did her best to hide her reaction and kept her voice void of the lust flowing through her body. "Thank you for coming, Nera. I really appreciate it."

"It's my pleasure."

Briggs thanked her too and then she was heading off, but just as she reached the house, she turned around. "Oh and Rynn?"

Rynn glanced away from Briggs. "Yeah?"

"When I knew I was coming here I called a gathering of the Blue Bloods so that I could initiate you with the others."

Instantly a rush of confusion flashed through their bond. Briggs had to wonder what had his mate so baffled. Was it the word gathering? As Rynn knew it, gatherings were a place where the Alphas came together to discuss business and wolf matters.

"Initiate?" Confusion laced her words.

She looked back at Briggs for an answer. He shook his head, unable to withhold his grin. She thought she was going to be put through the wringer like a sorority sister. "It's not what you think. You won't have to do anything foolish."

Relief softened her expression and she focused back on Nera. "What do you do then?"

"Lunch and drinks." Nera smiled.

"Well that doesn't sound too bad," Rynn replied with a shrug. "That is, the lunch bit, the drinks I'll stay away from. One night of drinking is manageable. Two in a row, that calls for a day spent in bed."

Briggs chuckled. His mate was so darling last night. It was the first time he'd ever seen her warmed with alcohol. Getting drunk wasn't easy for a werewolf and the fact that Rynn only had four glasses showed him how easy of a drunk she was. He'd need to down over twenty to be as shit-faced as she was last night. He'd enjoyed it nonetheless. Seeing his mate a slurring mess amused him.

Rynn flashed him a grin, clearly sensing the amusement he was reliving, then asked Nera, "Where do you meet?"

"Wolf Creek Lodge, of course."

The place was a perfect location for them, Briggs thought. Owned by Valor and run by his son Dante, it is a beautiful lodge resort that was anyone's dream getaway in Utah. Irony to know a place filled with werewolves to actually be called *Wolf Creek Lodge*. Werewolves never hid what they were mainly because humans are unbelievers and couldn't see into the supernatural without fear, so anything they did see, they ignored.

It always worked to their advantage.

Rynn glanced at Briggs and he gave her an encouraging look. This was something she needed to do, but he'd never ask it of her. He wanted her to do these things at her own

stride and never rush her. Her hesitation only came for a moment before she looked back to Nera. “Sure, I’ll come. What time?”

“Noon.” Nera spun on her heels and gave a wave goodbye. “See ya then.”

Briggs reached up, cupped Rynn’s chin to drag her gaze back to his. “Come with me, darlin’.” He nodded out to the wide lake. “You’ve been itching for a ride.”

In truth, so had he. With all that had happened, he had yet to take her out on the water and it’d been killing him not to share this with her. His love of the open seas was a part of him that he wanted her to know.

“Ooo...now that sounds like fun.” She jumped up, took his hand and they made their way toward the dock. Of course, anything would sound like more fun to her than what she just experienced. Briggs was glad that she got the experience, it was a skill she needed to learn, but was glad it was over. He knew it wasn’t easy for her to fight against Nera and he didn’t like putting her in that position. Regardless of how important it was.

He kept her hand in his as they headed down to the boat, and for the first time since he discovered her, he felt relaxed. So much had happened in such a short time. He always wondered if and when he would discover his mate. He never expected to find her in such traumatic circumstances. They had a lot to sort through over these past weeks. The incident with Danika only added to their strain. It felt wonderful just to be with her—no danger, no emotional turmoil—only the afternoon sun high above them. He exhaled a long deep breath then inhaled quickly to breathe in the warm fresh air around him.

As they approached, his boat came into view. *Hurricane SunDeck 1900* was written on the side of the white speedboat with *Silent Howl* written in black calligraphy beneath it that he added not long ago. He bought the boat years back with his first paycheck from Valor. Money well spent. Any free time he had, he spent here.

At the dock, Briggs took Rynn’s hand and assisted her into the boat. Once she was settled on her feet, she asked, “Why *Silent Howl*?”

He began to remove the rope from the wooden dock and glanced up at her, smiling. “It’s you.”

This was the other reason he wanted to share this boat with her. He was anxious for her reaction when she learned the name he gave it. He couldn’t deny his excitement now. Probably because it meant just as much to him. His boat meant the world to him. Having Rynn attached to it somehow made it all the more special.

She gave him a speculative glare. “Me?”

His gaze stayed on her, ready to gauge her reaction. “It’s how I saw you when we first met. Your wolf, the roar within you...” he hesitated a moment then, shrugged, “...was silent.” He took his seat in the white Captain’s swivel chair knowing just how taken Rynn was by his declaration. The swell of love, protection and happiness, coursed through their bond built up all those feelings in him as well.

He suspected having something like, *My Rynn* would have touched her deeply, but *Silent Howl* was so personal—so deep. He could feel that her heart had just leapt into her throat through their bond. The exact reaction he wanted. Briggs grabbed her around the waist and propelled her onto his lap.

She immediately wrapped her arms around his neck and hugged him. He welcomed the hug, softly caressed her back. Nothing needed to be said between them. She was appreciative and he knew it. The way she melted against him, hugged him tight, the way her breath caught in her throat. It all said what words could not.

When she backed away, Briggs ran his finger along her soft cheek. “Off we go then?” He wasn’t opposed to staying here with her in his arms, but he did want to show her the water. He knew she longed to be out there too and couldn’t deny that he wasn’t thrilled she had an interest in this regard.

She smiled, lowered her hands from his neck and nodded. “This boat is amazing.”

Briggs started up the engine and a purr spread across the air. He enjoyed that sound every time. Going out on the water was his little piece of serenity—from the responsibility, the constant danger that seemed to surround his life. Here he could have a moment’s peace. Now sharing it with his mate, life couldn’t have been better. “Are you ready?”

Rynn gave a hurried nod.

Briggs didn’t need any further encouragement and slammed the boat into gear. With a loud roar, they were off. Rynn’s body slammed back into his tight embrace as the boat sped forward.

The warm summer wind blasted across his face as the water beneath them crashed around the hull of the boat. It only took minutes for the small lake to break open to the sea and soon the trees surrounding them vanished to nothing more than water and clear blue sky.

As the world faded behind them, Briggs slowed the boat steadily. This was just the place he wanted to be, the one that probably meant the most to him. Where there were no distractions. No world. Just him and his mate.

When the boat came to a halt, Rynn glanced at Briggs. “Okay, so the boat is built for speed.”

Briggs smacked the steering wheel. “Aye, she is that.” He helped her off his lap, took her hand and pulled her out onto the bow.

As she sat, she exhaled deeply and met his gaze. “Did you do this often before we met?”

They knew so little about each other, which was an odd thing, really. Their souls were so connected and his love for her was without bounds, when in truth they had so much to learn of each other still. They hadn’t found all that much time to know one another completely. As little as nothing besides the adventures they’d been on.

“I did, indeed.”

Rynn’s expression became slightly perplexed. “I thought wolves hate water?”

Of course they did. She experienced that the first time she dove into the water in wolf form. Nothing about it was comfortable and he did not enjoy it.

He glanced out at the water, marvelled at its beauty. “I enjoy the silence. The world is quiet here. Even birds do not stray out this far.” He smiled. “It’s a nice peace.”

“It really is,” Rynn agreed. “I’ve only been a part of this world for such a short time, and from what I’ve been through, it causes migraines. You’ve been involved in all this since you were young. If I were you, the migraines might turn into an aneurysm.”

Briggs laughed loudly.

Rynn eventually lay back, her gaze on the clouds above her. Briggs understood the need for quiet solitude. He always watched the clouds too. How they floated past like time meant nothing at all.

Really, what was time to them? With werewolves being immortal, it just wasn’t something that came to mind. To plan future events or focus on things that needed doing

now, no longer mattered. When all of eternity is ahead, why worry.

Just as that thought quieted from his mind, he also knew that as much as that was a perk, it also meant that Rynn would have a life time of danger, as the past few weeks had shown them. He resolved to settle that thought and focus back on the present. "Does it make you feel good to defend yourself now?"

"I guess it does." She shrugged. "But I doubt I'll ever need to, I've got you." That she did, in spades. "You know I was wondering something though..." she trailed off.

He waited, not wanting to interrupt and allow her to assimilate her thoughts on her own.

Finally after a few minutes she continued, "Both you and Nera said I wasn't acknowledging my wolf. I can see now just how much I resisted it." She drew in a long deep breath. "I just wondered what I looked like...you know to the others?"

A hard question, but keeping it simple was the best choice. "You looked like a human."

"And that's why before...some of the wolves had trouble accepting me?"

Briggs nodded. "They don't think in terms of humans nor do they think of themselves as one. Before, you kept the wolf hidden. Whenever anyone would look at you, they'd only see you fighting against it, unable to accept it."

"Well, I guess that's all in the past then. I do feel more...more together, if that makes any sense at all. It's like the two parts of me that were fighting against each other became one."

She completely captivated him. The way truth just poured from her mouth. No matter how much beauty was around them right now, she was all his sight could focus on. She was coming into her own and that filled his heart with joy. "That makes perfect sense."

Her smile was sweet before she looked back to the sky.

Briggs could count the breaths his mate had taken as she drifted away into her own thoughts and watched the sky move above her. There were times he wished he could see into her mind and read her thoughts. But it wasn't a gift he was given. Of course, he could sense her emotions so he could usually understand what was going on. She was just so quiet, still. Her eyes blinked slowly as the sun basked across her face and made a glow, which to him, mirrored the sight of angel.

It wasn't only the calmness in her eyes, the relaxation of every muscle in her body or the eased emotions exuded from her that created a swell of happiness within him. It was the knowledge that she was as happy as he was.

The only job he had, the only reason he truly lived was exactly as it should be. He was doing right by her. That gave him a peace that he wondered if he'd ever find.

He brushed a finger across her lips and she slowly turned her head to meet his gaze. He never needed to say a word and she didn't need to hear any. She gave him a smile that if he had any less control of himself, he would have broken down and cried. Instead of humiliating himself, he cupped her face and brought her lips to his.

The moment their lips connected, Rynn sighed as if she'd waited a year for his touch. He pulled her closer, wrapped her in his arms and lay back so she could rest on top of him. There was nothing restrained in her. She was completely relaxed while he indulged himself in her mouth.

He couldn't get enough of her. Feel enough of her. He had no control and had to

touch every part of her. His hands glided from her neck to her face and cupped the back of her head while his tongue lapped hers.

His hands slowly found their way down to her hips where he gently held them and circled her body on top of his. God, it felt good. His groin was full of greed with no interest to wait. He wouldn't ruin the tenderness of this moment with his quick impulses.

Rynn obviously had impulses that matched his since she spread her legs to straddle his waist. When she drew away from his lips, Briggs' groin throbbed at him to get on with it as he watched his mate smile in a way meant to seduce him.

She flipped her hair behind her shoulder, grabbed the hem of her shirt and yanked it over her head, only to snap her bra away quickly. Briggs had a moment of pure gratitude that she was his. She squirmed in circular movements above him, teased, and made him aware of what was to come.

How could he forget? Seeing her above him with the sun beaming against her body, gave her porcelain skin a golden glow, her long brown hair framing her body with only a few strands to drape along her breasts. He was captivated.

Briggs reached up and gently swept the hair away from his impeccable view. The graze across her skin made her shudder. He took it as an invitation that her breasts were ready for his attention. "You are so stunning, darlin'."

He ran his hand along the middle of her chest until it reached her curved stomach. He raised a hand to his mouth, gave a light lick to his thumb, which made her eyes burn, begged him to do as he planned. He was pleased to see her excitement as he brought his damp thumb back to her swollen breast. The moment the moisture made contact with her tight bud, she threw her head back and moaned.

With each flick and pinch of his fingers, her moans deepened. By the time her gaze returned to his, he knew she would take what she was after.

And that is exactly what she did. She leaned forward, gazed heavily into his eyes as she manipulated his pants to find what her body demanded, hungered for. "I cannot wait for you," she purred.

"Then don't," he growled.

In moments, he was free of his pants and his erection only grew when her tiny hand wrapped around him. With her free hand, she pulled up the cotton skirt she wore, moved her panties to the side and positioned herself above him.

He'd never seen her so enthralled or powerful. He liked it. In fact, he loved it.

She gently lowered herself onto him. Briggs would have liked to close his eyes at the satisfaction of it, but he couldn't stop looking at her. There was nothing hesitant or unsure about her. This was a woman seeking her pleasure. Who used him as an outlet to ease the stirring within her and she was welcome to work him like this as often as she like as far as he was concerned.

He couldn't keep his hands off her. Not with her so lovely above him, rocking back and forth, and tight small breasts giving him a perfect image of what a woman should be. He ran his hands along her body to increase her sensitivity but not in a way to give aid to her movements. He wanted her to control this. He wanted her to learn how to take pleasure for herself. And she was learning just fine—spectacular.

Rynn was trying all sorts of movement at various speeds. It was miraculous. When she wanted to go slow, she did, but then, she would rock harder against him as her eyes burned with heat.

Briggs offered his hands to her and she took them without hesitation. He gripped them tight as she rose to her feet and slammed down hard against him.

Only a few minutes later, he released her hand to get a finger free, where he set his surprise into motion. For a moment, she lost her balance, but as quickly as she did, he grabbed onto it again and allowed her to transfer her weight so that she could reach her end.

She was right there—hanging. She continued to ride him, hit against his body with loud slaps, but she couldn't reach it and Briggs could see her growing frustration.

He had never seen anything so beautiful as his mate using his body to bring her to climax the way she wanted it—needed it. He could read her strain, see it in the tension he felt all around him. Her moans stopped, her breath caught, and as much as he would have let her ride this out, he couldn't see her suffer. Before she came down on him again, he met her with a hard thrust that she didn't expect. It did just what Briggs thought it would—blasted her into orgasm.

Her eyes went wide, she screamed, and shuddered. The sound of her release from such a building climax made him spill himself inside her. As her body convulsed, his release was equally as intense. He was squeezed so hard, he prayed her body would release enough to allow his fluids to pass.

Luckily, it did.

Chapter Six

By the time Rynn returned to any sense of reality, she was slumped over Briggs, felt him breathing heavily beneath her, as was she. She tried to move but her whole body was exhausted. First, she started with her toes, wiggled and the numbness seemed to subside, then, she blinked. Yes, her eyes had recovered. Even her lips could produce a little lick to recover from the dryness in her mouth.

She moved a couple fingers but something restricted her. She glanced toward her hand and a flash of light made her eyes squint. She immediately forgot about her numbness, shot straight up and examined her hand.

Yes, it was what she suspected. On her left finger was a ring. A perfect, spectacular ring. She glanced at Briggs, who smiled. "So," she wiggled her finger. "This is what you were out doing this morning."

Briggs took her finger and kissed it. "I can only hope this makes up for my error in not realizing you needed this."

Rynn looked at the ring, saw the diamonds that made rainbows sparkle before her eyes and laughed. "I think something like this may keep you out of the doghouse for a while." Her gaze locked with his. "You didn't really have to do this."

"I did." He gave a firm nod, raised a hand to her face. "To you this is right."

Rynn smiled as she saw the matching ring on his finger. She did need this, had wanted it. It meant forever to her. The fact that he would do this for her made her heart clench. Being that this was out of the norm for wolves to do, she knew as much as he was happy to see that she embraced the wolf within her, he loved the human part of her too.

What it made her realize was that she would never have to let herself go completely. She wouldn't have to be something else or different because Briggs didn't want it. She was a werewolf. Yes, this was true, but she was also Rynn—just a plain old human. As much as Nera couldn't comprehend the need for her to stay true to herself, Briggs did.

"I...I..." she stuttered, unsure if she had the right words.

"I love you too, darlin'." He laid a soft kiss on her lips. Just then, his phone rang. He groaned, backed away and flipped it open. "Aye...mmhmm...got it."

"Anything up?" Rynn asked when he hung up.

Briggs shook his head and gave her a quick kiss. "As much as I'd love to stay here with you like this, you've got somewhere to be."

"Right." Rynn sighed. The gathering. The initiation. Whatever it was, she wasn't sure how excited to be about it. What would the other Blue Bloods be like? Would they accept her?

She shifted off Briggs and they dressed quickly. Within minutes, he was back in the Captain's seat, her on his lap, speeding toward home with the water crashing around them. Rynn felt happy from her toes all the way up to the new diamond on her finger. She doubted this contentment was going to leave her anytime soon. Her glass certainly was filled to the rim.

A quarter of an hour later, Rynn was back at the house in the bathroom and just finished adding a little blusher on her cheeks when Briggs cleared his throat from the doorway. She glanced at him in the mirror, his eyes dancing.

“Pretty,” he said. He stepped forward, swept her hair across one shoulder and laid sweet butterfly kisses along her neck.

She laughed softly. “Don’t we have somewhere to be?”

He smiled against her skin. “Aye, we do.” His tone didn’t sound all that confident, but he did back away, only to wrap his arms around her waist. “Best we be off then?”

Rynn nodded, threw the blush back in her makeup bag and sealed it up. Briggs still hadn’t released her. “You know it might be a bit hard to leave if you don’t let go.”

Briggs inhaled deeply and kissed her shoulder one last time. “I’m just getting my fill of you.”

She spun around and leaned up to kiss his mouth. If he wanted his fill, she’d give it to him. She sank against him and stole his breath with her mouth. He followed her movements as she put every ounce of womanly persuasion she had into the kiss.

When she backed away, she felt entirely proud as she witnessed the smoldering in his eyes.

He closed his eyes from a moment and groaned deeply. Then, his eyes opened and glanced down to the hard bulge in his pants as he backed away. “Woman, you are going to be the death of me.”

Rynn leaned up again and kissed his lips quickly. “At least it’ll be a death worth talking about.” She laughed, then pushed him away and headed out of the bathroom. Oh yeah, she felt his gaze glued on her ass as she moved. Just to punish him she added a little extra wiggle. His deep groan was heavy behind her and she grinned in response.

As she exited the house, Briggs’ black sleek motorcycle waited for her and she felt a little annoyed for spending so much time on her hair. She wanted to impress the Blue Bloods and look her best, but truthfully, she had forgotten how she’d get there.

The lodge was quite a distance away and by the time she arrived, her hair would resemble a rat’s nest. Oh well, what’s done is done. She pushed the annoyance away and as Briggs launched himself onto the bike, she nestled in behind him.

Within moments, they were speeding down the country streets. Rynn settled against Briggs’ back as she appreciated the warm wind against her skin. She enjoyed the ride *almost* as much as she knew he did. The speed, the sense of flying was a thrill she liked.

Just as that thought lifted from her mind, more came to occupy her thoughts. She wasn’t sure what to expect at the gathering of the Blue Bloods. First, she wondered how they would take to her. With her not being born a werewolf, would they welcome her? She was becoming more and more curious about what was ahead. What was this initiation business? The fact that Briggs allowed her to do this was the only reason she wasn’t worried. If there were a risk here, he wouldn’t allow her to go. She took solace in that.

When the bike began to slow, Rynn lifted her head from where it rested against Briggs’ back and saw they approached Valor’s home. The home, if you could even call it that, was more of a billionaire’s dream spot. With the endless Utah beauty that surrounded it, the part log, part stone home resembled a backcountry marvel. But why were they here?

When the bike stopped, Rynn jumped off and looked at Briggs, befuddled. “Is Valor coming too?”

Briggs shook his head and threw out the kickstand. He jumped off and brushed his curled fingers along her cheek. “No, he’s not and neither am I.”

“You’re not coming with me?” Rynn’s confusion grew deeper.

Briggs chuckled, leaned in and kissed beneath her squinted eyes. “Valor needs me to join him. There’s a situation going on in Philadelphia.”

Rynn felt restless. “A dangerous situation?”

“Not to worry, love. The Alpha there is having issues with some of his pack. It won’t take long. I’ll be home before you will.”

She sighed, hoping it would reassure her. It didn’t. “Promise?”

“Of course.”

Suddenly, a thought came to her and she glanced at the bike in horror. Briggs didn’t think she was going to ride that thing by herself, did he? Just as her mind was busy with how ridiculous that idea was, Briggs let out a loud sharp bark of laughter. “Come on, I’ve got something to show you.”

Rynn followed behind as Briggs led her behind the house. Within moments, they were at the garage and he typed in a code to open the garage door.

When it opened, Rynn’s eyes went wide. What sat before her was a spanking brand new, white, *Porsche Boxster Spyder*.

It couldn’t be! She glanced back at Briggs for clarification and he held out the keys in his hand with a grin that equaled no others. He shook the keys and inclined his head toward the car. “Go on, get in.”

“That’s mine?” she whispered, completely shocked and utterly thrilled.

He nodded, his grin increased in tandem. “Do you like it?”

Rynn didn’t hesitate just in case it was a dream she was about to wake up from. She grabbed the keys from his hand, opened the door and slid into the black leather seat. The convertible was as pretty inside as outside, and Lord, did she feel damn good in it.

She put the key in the ignition and started it; a low purr filled the garage. She ran her hands along the steering wheel and glanced up at Briggs. “Wow,” was all she could come up with.

“You can drive stick, I hope?” Briggs asked.

She nodded quickly. “Pops made me learn.”

“Ah, I see your mate has been given her new toy.” Valor’s deep laugh filled the garage.

Rynn beamed at him as she held his gaze. She’d been working at this. As a wolf, she was subordinate to her leaders and it was always instinct that she look away from Valor’s deep penetrating gaze. As Briggs’ mate, she was directed to do no such thing. So, as Valor’s big framed and powerful body walked toward her, she kept her eyes glued to that handsome face of his.

“She’s going to meet the Blue Bloods,” Briggs told him.

Valor gave an approving nod. “That’s good to hear. It’s time you join the others and get to know your fellow pack.”

“Pack?” Rynn questioned. “But they don’t belong to the Utah pack?”

“You’re right,” Valor agreed, “they don’t. As a Blue Blood, they’ll become your pack too. You’ll become bonded to them just as you have the Utah pack.”

Now she understood what this all meant. “The initiation?” she asked Briggs.

He nodded and leaned into the car, reached over to the GPS system on the dash. He hit a few buttons, then moved back until he rested along the opened window. “Follow the map, it’ll get you there.”

“Modern technology is a Godsend.” Considering she knew Utah like she knew Europe, such devices sure came in handy.

“Your phone.” Briggs pointed to a button on the dashboard. “Any numbers you need are pre-programmed. Just say the name and it will call whoever you need.” He reached into his pocket and handed her a cell. “Just in case you’re not by the car and need help.”

Rynn laughed as she took the phone from his hand. “Worry much?”

“When it comes to you, yes.” He leaned down and kissed that worry against her lips. Rynn felt every part of it. He was tense. It was there in every part of him but she sensed it within herself too. He didn’t like her going off on her own and she wasn’t so sure she liked it either.

“Please send my regards to the other Blue Bloods.” Valor said, a smile hidden behind those powerful eyes when Briggs backed away.

“Will do.”

Briggs patted the headrest of her seat. “Go on then.”

Oh, she felt giddy. She threw the car in first, released the clutch and gave the gas pedal a stomp. The tires screeched loudly as the car jumped forward. She immediately slammed on the brakes, laughing. “Oh, this is going to be fun.” She heard the men’s boisterous laughter behind her.

“All right, darlin’?” Briggs yelled out.

She never answered. Instead, she gave them a wave as she tore a strip off Valor’s gravel driveway.

Chapter Seven

The drive went as Rynn expected, quickly. The little Porsche hung tight against the road and she took advantage of how easy it was to maneuver. Driving at these speeds was probably a dangerous and stupid thing to do, but with such a car, it was difficult not to indulge in the freedom.

The trees whipped by as she punched forward. She took a glance at the speedometer, surprised to see that it was much higher than she thought. It was such a smooth drive she felt as if she was driving at the city limits, but apparently not.

To confirm it, the sounds of sirens were suddenly loud around her. She flicked her gaze to the rearview mirror to see red and blue flashing brightly. “Shit.” She eased her foot off the accelerator, down shifted and brought the car to a halt on the side of the road.

Before the Deputy could even approach her, she grabbed her purse and dug for her driver’s license. When she pulled it from her wallet, the deputy was standing by the door.

“Do you have any idea of how fast you were driving?” he asked her in proper cop fashion—all business, curt tone that said he was not impressed. Intimidating to say the least. He was worn from hard times, deep lines spread across his face and his eyes were cold enough that Rynn swore they were black.

Rynn flashed a smile she hoped would save her. “Fast.”

Nope, it didn’t work. He frowned at her. “License and registration.”

Rynn handed him the license, but suddenly realized she had no idea where the registration was. She glanced around the car, felt the cop’s stare. After a quick look, the glove compartment seemed like the appropriate spot.

She opened it, pleased to see that the little slip resting inside. She quickly yanked it out and handed it to him.

He looked at the documents then looked back at her. “Wait here.” He sauntered back toward his car and Rynn followed his movements in the rearview mirror.

Just as he got in, the phone on her dashboard rang. *Briggs* showed on the screen. She leaned forward and pressed the answer button. “What is it?” His voice came out briskly. “What’s wrong?”

“Excuse me?” Rynn questioned. How did he know something was going on?

“Why have you stopped?” he demanded.

Rynn glanced around looking for some sort of surveillance equipment, but found none. She felt ridiculous for even thinking such a thing. “How do you know I’ve stopped?”

Briggs’ deep sigh was loud and clear. “Your car is equipped with a tracking device.”

“You bugged my car?” Rynn accused.

“Rynn, we can discuss this later.” He sighed again, which sounded more like a growl. “What is going on?”

She glanced in the rearview mirror to see the cop typing on his computer. She groaned low, not at all happy that she had to admit this. “I’ve been pulled over.”

“By a cop?” The worry in Briggs’ tone was no longer there. He sounded nothing short of amused.

She nodded, then realized he couldn’t see her and answered out loud. “Yes.”

“What for?” he asked with a little chuckle.

Oh, his amusement only made this harder. Of course, he’d just get so much satisfaction out of this. She twirled her hair, more than embarrassed. “I was speeding.”

Briggs laughed aloud. “Maybe the Boxster wasn’t the smartest choice for you.”

She rubbed the steering wheel, absorbed the smoothness of such beauty beneath her hands. “Oh no, you can’t take it back now. It’s mine.”

“Just take the ticket, I’ll deal with it later,” Briggs said, humor still evident in his voice.

“And just how will you deal with it?” Rynn began, but then, the deputy got out and started back toward her. “He’s coming back, I gotta go.” She clicked the phone off and smiled up at the cop approaching her.

He glanced at the car and she could see his awe toward it. “Your information checks out, ma’am.”

It was pretty clear he was surprised by this. Rynn realized then that he had suspected she had stolen it or maybe that it belonged to her rich Dad. She could understand that. In truth, she didn’t quite believe it either. He handed her documents back to her and then took out a notepad, obviously about to write her a ticket.

Rynn groaned internally. At least she could afford the ticket now. She’d have to do something to pay Briggs’ back though. She didn’t mind his help but when she was being stupid he shouldn’t have to pay for that.

After a moment, the deputy glanced up for his notepad. “I’m letting you off easy here.” He handed her the ticket.

Easy! Was he insane? The number on the damned piece of paper didn’t look easy to her.

“It’s in my right to charge you with aggressive and reckless driving, but I’m taking into account this car is new to you.” He gave the car an admiring look once more, then his gaze went hard again. “Do not let me catch you going that speed again.”

Rynn nodded. “Yes, sir.”

He tipped his hat. “Good day to you.”

Rynn snorted as he walked away. A good day didn’t come with a speeding ticket. She threw it into her purse, started the car, checked her side mirror then pulled back out onto the road.

Another annoyance in all this was that the lodge was just up ahead. Of course, there is always a cop around when you don’t want one and when you do, they’re nowhere to be found. Surprise, surprise!

Rynn pulled into Wolf Creek Utah and she sighed at the sight of it nestled deep into the valleys of Utah, surrounded by sweet mountain bliss. The Red Moose Lodge was the main resort and today it happened to be full of visitors. As Rynn glanced around, she was surprised to see that most of them were human.

She shook her head, laughing. The last time she was here, it was empty of guests and only had Alphas and their mates. Since this wasn’t a gathering, such vacancies weren’t a necessity. This was first and foremost, a resort.

As she drove toward the country-style building, Dante appeared. Rynn was torn between pleasure to see him and annoyance that he waited for her. Could she do nothing alone?

He waved her over to a parking spot and she pulled in. She turned off the engine. “Is

it a coincidence you are waiting for me?" she asked, a snip in her tone.

Dante looked amused. His smile could drop thousands of women to their knees with his gorgeous and soft dark eyes, big burly thick body and lips—oh his lips. She shook away the thought, no need to ogle.

He cocked a brow and chuckled. "Doubtful."

Rynn unbuckled the seat belt as Dante opened the door for her. "I think I can walk into the lodge by myself."

He shut the door behind her after she exited. "I'm sure you're quite capable of that but get used to it. Briggs is a little..." he showed the display with his fingers. "concerned when he's not around."

Rynn rolled her eyes and laughed. It was pointless to talk about it. Well, with Dante anyway. He was just following orders. Briggs, on the other hand, would get an earful when she saw him again. "So, how are things anyway?" she asked, moving along.

He winked at her quick change in subject but indulged her. "Business is booming."

Rynn glanced around at the hoard of people. Some were going off in golf carts, others lounging by the pool. "I see that."

They entered the resort and it was almost as busy inside. Rynn could see werewolves among the bunch. Wolves just had a real outdoorsy scent to them, she could always spot one a mile away. As she passed by, every werewolf gave her a nod of acknowledgment and lowered their eyes in respect. She couldn't recall meeting any of them before. "Do I know them?" she asked Dante.

He shook his head. "No. They're not from our territory."

"Then, why are they acknowledging me?"

He tapped his nose. "Briggs."

Rynn caught his meaning quickly. They could smell Briggs on her, which meant they knew she was his mate. As mate to the Beta she was due respect. Weird, but that's the way things worked. She tried to appear respectful back. Not because she felt it was right, but she wanted to make sure Briggs remained in a good light.

Dante led her to a room that was just beside the Grand Hall, a main dining area where the gatherings took place. It always appeared more of a banquet hall than anything else but as Rynn walked by she glanced through the French doors to see that today it was set up with a buffet lunch and the hungry were there in abundance. It didn't resemble the elegance she'd once seen here, just normal cedar tables set up like a restaurant.

When they came to the end of the hallway, Dante opened the door and nodded for her to enter. "I'll come and get you in a while."

She scowled at him. "I *can* leave by myself."

He gave her that luscious grin. "I'm sure you can, but you won't. I enjoy my head being right where it is." With that, he headed off down the hall.

"Rynn," Nera's voice came from beside her.

She glanced away from Dante's retreat and erased the scowl that had formed on her face as she met Nera's gaze. "Hi."

"We expected you sooner," Nera said.

Rynn smiled, feeling more than stupid. "Sorry, I had a...situation." If that's what it could even be called.

"Nothing serious?" A woman from the room said.

Rynn glanced over Nera's shoulder to see that the room held only two other woman

besides Nera and herself.

The one speaking to her was a proud-looking woman. She held herself high, her shoulders strong and her rounded chin lifted. Luckily, the woman's eyes were kind and had a softness to her with a bob-cut to her chocolate brown hair.

"I got pulled over," Rynn answered.

The woman laughed, sending those kind green beauties to squint until all she could see was the black to her irises. "A human cop?"

"Yup." A surprising thing, but it was in fact true. Werewolves and just about everything else that went bump in the night were part of the police force.

"Did he fine you?" The other woman in the room asked. She wasn't pretty in the normal sense, but she wasn't beaten with an ugly stick either. She just looked like an average gal. Her dull brown hair was cut short, black circles laid beneath her gray eyes. She looked awkward and nervous, which was settling for Rynn. At least someone appeared more nervous than she was.

"He took it easy on me, which means a ridiculously expensive ticket." Rynn rolled her eyes and the women laughed. She was kinda shocked that there were only four of them. She was expecting more. "Is anyone else coming?" she asked Nera.

"No." Nera waved out to the others. "These are the Blue Bloods." Then, she pointed to the proud woman. "Tayla." Then, to the other. "Maddie."

"There are only three of you?" Rynn asked.

They all nodded.

"As I said before, we're rare." Nera nodded toward the circular table that sat in the middle of the room. As she sat down, a waiter appeared, holding a tray of four glasses of blush wine with some spring salads.

Rynn smiled, she forgotten she'd get to eat and the food here was simply bliss.

The waiter reached for her napkin, but Rynn grabbed it from his hands. This was one wolf she didn't have to listen to and could place the damn thing on her own lap, thank you very much. He just smiled at her in response.

She waited until everyone else was served and for them to start eating before she began. She didn't want to be rude. Nera gave her a little smile and began eating. She knew of Rynn's love for food and could probably guess that the wait was difficult, which it was.

The moment Rynn lifted the forkful of salad greens, blueberries, nuts with raspberry dressing into her mouth, she groaned. Her eyes closed as the fresh, crisp tastes delighted her. When she opened her eyes again, the others laughed at her. She laughed too. "It's good."

"We've heard of your adoration for food," Tayla said.

Rynn nodded through a full mouth. Of course, they all heard. Why they all found such things so interesting about her, she didn't know. It's not like it was anything bad, it is food. Jeez.

"I'm so glad to have you're here with us," Maddie said softly.

Rynn swallowed. "Well, thank you. I can't deny that it's a pretty big change to hear someone happy to have me." Normally, whenever she met new werewolves they snarled at her. She had to admit it was really nice to be surrounded by women who appeared completely thrilled to meet her.

Maddie smiled shyly. "It's just really tiring..."

“Maddie is like you, Rynn,” Tayla interjected. “Her gift is scent.”

“Oh.” Rynn took a sip of wine to wash down the food. Not quite sure if she liked where this conversation was headed. Instead, of focusing on the reasons why Maddie was not only too happy to have her join them or why she looked so tired she moved on. “What’s your talent?” she asked Tayla. She already knew that Nera’s was hearing so she didn’t ask.

“I’m like Nera. My strength is in my ears.”

Rynn glanced back at Maddie, who watched her with grateful eyes. Her intrigue was piqued. Maddie just seemed too thrilled, too elated Rynn was now joining them.

“So...why are you so happy?”

“Having a strong scent is obviously something used often. Having you join us, Maddie might actually have a life again.” Nera responded.

Rynn looked at Maddie, surprised to see a tear trickle down her cheek. She realized now why the woman looked so worn, she was being worked to death. Rynn wasn’t sure how she felt about that. Sure, she was happy to help if someone needed it, but she hadn’t expected to be in such high demand. Judging by the exhaustion on Maddie’s face, she was going to be busy.

But in the end, this was Rynn’s life now and she’d do what she could to help, especially if she could help ease some of Maddie’s exhaustion. She smiled softly. “Well, I’m happy then too.”

Maddie glanced up from her hands, wiped a tear from her eye and returned the kind smile. Never had anyone looked at Rynn like this. Even if she had any hesitation in helping out, she wouldn’t have now. This woman wasn’t demanding for her life, she was pleading. If anything, it actually made Rynn feel good. At least, she was making life easier for the Blue Bloods. Feeling useful just...well...felt good.

Tayla brushed a caring hand across Maddie’s back. “It has been hard for her but things will get better now that there are two of you.”

Rynn was relieved by that. Maddie seemed sweet, kind and she could see that this was all very true. The woman probably had no life. Couldn’t enjoy it because she was too busy helping others. As good as that must feel, after a while, experiencing nothing else would wear on anyone.

The meals all came one after another, a perfectly cut charbroiled steak with country veggies. Then, to top off the meal was a chocolate lava cake. If Rynn had been alone, she would’ve licked the plate, but doing such a thing in front of these women was far from appropriate. She nonchalantly scraped the plate with her fork.

Nera gave her a wide grin. “Would you like another?”

Would she ever, but being a piglet wouldn’t make her look proper. She shook her head. Nera’s smile widened, clearly she knew Rynn restrained herself. She leaned over and whispered in her ear, “I’ll get you one to go.”

Rynn grinned and rubbed her tummy. “Great idea!”

After the waiter cleared the plates, Nera closed the door behind him and locked it. She turned back to the group. “Now, down to business.” She pulled Rynn up from her seat as the other two women moved the chairs and table off to the side.

When done, Nera pulled Rynn into the center of the room and yanked her down to the floor. They sat crossed-legged in a circle and held hands.

Oh geesh, here came the initiating bit. Rynn couldn’t deny some nerves had settled

in. She hadn't a clue what was going to take place, but again, remembered that Briggs allowed her to come. Nothing was dangerous. She had no reason to be fearful.

Tayla began. "Rynn, Wolf to the Beta, will you join us as the pack of Blue Bloods? Will you do what you can to use your talents to help your fellow wolves?"

Rynn nodded. She understood that to join them she would have to declare herself. It was like a marriage, vows were your bond. "I will."

All three women smiled, then, Tayla continued. "As a Blue Blood, I welcome you."

"As a Blue Blood, I welcome you." Nera said.

"As a Blue Blood, I welcome you." Maddie finished, her voice barely made a sound.

Suddenly, Rynn felt a warm light surround her. The pack magic sent trickles of energy all through her. It wasn't a bond she'd felt before, maybe because it was so personal between women. A sisterhood. Nothing like the mate bond she had with Briggs.

This was a uniting between souls with the same purpose to help and see to the survival of the wolves around them. These women would have her back. She didn't doubt that for a single moment.

They released hands and Rynn glanced between them. "Well this is certainly nice."

"It is," Nera replied. "We're bound together in a union that makes us entirely special in the werewolf community. Remember to keep that in mind." She glanced around at the others, who each had a smile shining on their faces. Pride and satisfaction filled her face. "And now there are four."

Chapter Eight

The mid-afternoon sun was hot against Rynn's skin and felt glorious as she drove toward home. A good dose of Vitamin D always refueled the soul. Her aggravation that Dante had made good on his word to walk her to her car had begun to wear off. Not to say that she and Briggs weren't going to have a chat about this later because she was going to make it quite clear how ridiculous he was being. She understood his need to be worried but come on, at a family resort! What kind of danger would be there? A golf ball to the head would probably be the biggest concern.

Leaning back against the headrest, she sighed. The whole event with the Blue Bloods went better than expected. They were all nice enough, which came as a relief. She couldn't deny that it felt good to have some time alone. The last time she had a moment like this was before she ever knew werewolves existed.

It gave a certain peace that wasn't found any other way. To be left alone in her own thoughts just to process. She figured moments like these would come few and far between seeing how Briggs was being as of late, so she relished in this moment of serenity.

The longer she drove, the more her mind drifted and contemplated just how much things had changed. The person she was a few months back, the struggles she went through, the need to push on...

The need to push on...

Her foot left the gas pedal and slammed down on the brake. Quickly, she looked in the rearview mirror, relieved no one was behind her. She glanced at the clock. It was only two in the afternoon. Briggs wouldn't be back anytime soon. The need to go somewhere stole her thoughts.

Without wasting a second, she typed the address on the GPS, surprised that she actually managed to work the thing. Briggs was considerate of her. He must have installed the GPS for Dummies.

With the location set, as she pressed back on the gas, she eased off the clutch, and followed the annoying computer voice telling her the way.

A few miles down the road, she found a store. Rynn smiled and pulled off to the small country store. Now, that she had a plan she wanted to be quick. She hurried from the car and when she entered the store, a pleasant man acknowledged her with a small nod.

She searched the small grocery store, scanned the aisles, but what she needed most she couldn't find. Instead of wasting more time, she approached the man at the counter. "Excuse me, do you have cashews?"

"Second aisle."

Rynn spun, annoyed to say the least that she had missed them the first time. But three small containers wasn't enough. "Do you have any more?" she called out.

"Got some in the back," the store clerk replied. "How many do ya want?"

After snatching up the containers off the shelf, she made her way back up to the counter. Money wasn't a concern anymore and as far as she was concerned, this was money well spent. At the counter, she smiled at him. "I'll take all of it."

The guy hurried off, and was back a short time later carrying a couple medium-sized boxes. "You really want all of this?"

Rynn nodded without hesitation, paid, then led the guy out to her car. By the time the trunk was full, she had wasted ten minutes and it was time she could have spent elsewhere. Besides, she already had one ticket, she didn't need two.

As much as she wanted to hurry, she didn't and it almost killed her. Her fingers tapped against the steering wheel and to remain still in her seat was impossible.

When the voice from the GPS told her it was the next left, her heart began to pound in her chest. As she turned the corner, it only thumped harder as she read the sign, *Cache Valley Assisted Living Center*.

She pulled in past the stone gates, a little taken aback. Valor had said that they had moved her grandfather somewhere nicer, but really, this place was amazing. She couldn't even begin to imagine what the costs were to put Pops here.

It appeared more like upper-class bungalows than anything that resembled an old folks home. That wasn't the only thing that caught her eye. As she pulled into the main parking lot there was something else that was all too familiar.

A black motorcycle sat in one of the parking spots. It wasn't just the bike she recognized, it was the man who leaned against it.

Rynn pulled into the parking spot next to Briggs. "Fancy meeting you here." She laughed as she cut the ignition.

He leaned down into the car and came close to her face with a grin of his own. "I did say I would return before you." Then, he kissed her mouth.

She accepted the familiarity of his lips and when he backed away, she couldn't hide her smile that he was here. It made this moment better, helped her settle a little. It'd been so long since she'd seen Pops, too long.

Briggs opened the door and she stepped out. "How did you know I was coming here?" she asked, but then realized she already knew the answer to that question. "The tracking thing you were talking about, right?"

He nodded.

"So that has one?" She pointed to the bike. This, she was going to get to the bottom of.

Briggs reached back into her car, hit a couple buttons and then a red light blinked on a map right beside another. "See, there we are. It's just a security precaution that Valor implemented. In case anything ever came up." He gave her bottom a little smack. "Not to worry, love, I'm not keeping tabs on you."

Okay, that eased and extinguished her annoyance. Thankfully there was some reason for it and not because he wanted to spy on her. That just ran into stalker territory, no matter what his thoughts behind it were.

Interrupting her thoughts, he asked, "Ready to go in?"

She gave a little nod, then stepped around to her trunk. After she hit the button on the key, the trunk opened and she attempted to lift one of the boxes out. Briggs gently moved her aside and took care of the boxes as he gave her a curious look.

"It's cashews," she answered his unasked question. "Pops' favorite."

"Aye, apparently so." He grinned as he shifted the boxes in his hands. "Did you buy out the store?"

"I did." Her voice was totally unashamed. The man had raised and saved her from

what could have been a horrible life. Even though he couldn't remember her anymore, he still remembered his love of cashews. It was really the only thing left of the man she knew and adored.

If this was all she could give to him, then that was enough.

*

Briggs groaned as quietly as he could when he felt his mate reminisce in her mind. He could sense her sadness, longing and that was nothing he wanted her to feel. He wished he could help with this. Fix her grandfather, but nothing could be done. Even werewolves have their limits and saving a man from Alzheimer's wasn't something he had the power to do.

He was drawn out of his thoughts when Rynn placed a hand on his forearm to stop him as they walked along. "Listen, I should tell you some things before we meet him," she said.

Shifting the boxes onto his hip to support the weight, he turned to look at her better. "Go on."

"I act like I'm a nurse." She glanced at the ground and sadness filled their bond to steal Briggs' breath. "So, it doesn't scare him." When she glanced back up, Briggs' heart broke for her. The sorrow that lay in her eyes crippled him. "If we talk about things he can't remember, it really freaks him out."

The boxes began to annoy him. All he wanted to do was take his mate in his arms and free her from this pain. Since he couldn't, he acknowledged her with a firm nod of support. "Not a problem, darlin'."

Rynn took in a deep breath that even if Briggs couldn't sense, he would see on her face that she was gathering courage. She headed inside and he kept in stride with her as they entered the main building and met a nurse at the front desk.

"Here to see Martin Murphy," Rynn said.

The nurse, wearing a classic baby blue nurse's uniform with shoulder-length, curly blonde hair, glanced up from her paperwork. Her hazel eyes did not look as soft as Briggs would expect to see in a nurse. "We wondered when someone was going to come and see him." Her tone was curt and chastising.

Guilt washed through Briggs and he fought the urge to throttle the woman. Yes, it had been a long time since Rynn had seen her grandfather but she didn't need to feel guilty about that. She wasn't able to come until she gained control of her wolf, not that the nurse knew that. No one was going to make Rynn feel shameful for it though. "Did we ask for your two cents?" he spat.

Rynn's gaze shot to Briggs. "No, no it's fine. She makes a valid point. I actually appreciate the fact that she cares enough to voice the point."

Briggs felt entirely different on the matter. His glare stayed glued on the nurse who may have been brave a moment ago, but now with his eyes on her, she squirmed in her seat. Damn right she should too.

The nurse finally cleared her throat a little then planted a happy face on. "He's in apartment twenty. Scoot outside then down the path. You'll see it."

"Thank you," Rynn said softly.

Briggs wanted to say something else to this woman, but he doubted his mate would be pleased with him, so he let it go and followed behind her. The establishment was beautiful and he would remember to thank Valor later for setting Rynn's grandfather up

in such a place. Not that he paid for it anymore. Briggs had taken over that bill immediately once things settled and he could focus on such matters. To him, the man who loved Rynn so wonderfully was worth every penny. He was glad that he was enjoying his days in a place like this.

Once outside, they headed down the path. The entire way, Briggs felt the emotions that rushed through his mate. Excitement mixed with nerves. He silently cursed the boxes in his hands, wanted nothing more than to hold her hand while she suffered.

After a couple more steps, the counting down stopped and they rounded on a door that had the number twenty resting above the peephole. Rynn glanced back at Briggs who gave her a reassuring nod. As much as he could see excitement in her eyes, there was nervousness too. She raised her hand and knocked twice.

“You may enter,” a deep, proper voice said from behind the door.

She opened the door and Briggs gripped the boxes in his hands, unsure what to expect. What he did see was a healthy looking elderly gentleman with kindness in his eyes. His lacked experience with Alzheimer’s, but it wasn’t a frail man before him. No, he was strong and appeared very happy.

“Are you up for visitors today, Mr. Murphy?” Rynn asked.

Her grandfather nodded and waved them in from the recliner he sat in. “By all means.” He glanced to the boxes in Briggs’ hands. “What is that you have there, son?”

Rynn interjected, “I’m a nurse here and know that you enjoy cashews. So, we thought it would be nice to bring you some.”

“I do.” Her grandfather’s eyes lit up. “Bring those over here, my dear.”

Rynn approached Briggs. He smiled at her as she grabbed one of the boxes from him, took it over to her grandfather and placed it in his lap. As she did, Briggs immediately realized why she brought them.

It wasn’t only that they were his favorite, it was the reaction she saw, his happiness. She drew on the only thing she could to get that love from him. If he was any less of a man, he might burst into a blubbing mess in front of both of them. But he was trained in containing his emotions and did his best to do so now.

Briggs stepped forward and placed the other box at her grandfather’s feet. When he stood, Rynn stared at him with tears rimming her eyes. She wasn’t capable of such matters as to withhold what she felt because she never had to be. Obviously, she had felt his heartbreak over this whole situation.

He went to her quickly and wrapped an arm around her. Fuck his feelings. He shouldn’t have done that and immediately sucked back any other emotions he might feel about this. She needed him to be strong and not add to her dismay. He gave her shoulder a quick squeeze and then kissed the top of her head.

“Are you two married?” Pops asked as he opened the box to take out a carton of cashews.

Briggs nodded and met his gaze. “Aye, we are.”

“Young and in love—how wonderful.” He opened the container, reached in and took out a handful of cashews. “Marjorie and I are talking about getting married.”

“What?” Rynn gasped, then gave her head a shake. “I mean to say, you’re getting married?”

Just then, the toilet flushed and a lovely looking elderly woman came out. Very well put together in violet cotton slacks, flowered blouse and even had the bluish-gray curled

hair expected on a typical grandmother like. “We have visitors, Marty?”

Briggs held back his laughter. His mate was floored at the moment and the look on her face was somewhere between awed and horrified. “It’s a pleasure to meet you, Marjorie.” Briggs held out his hand. “I’m Briggs and this is Rynn.” He nodded toward his stunned mate.

“Welcome to our home,” she answered, shaking his hand.

“You live here?” Rynn whispered.

Briggs gave her shoulders a squeeze. Rynn was the one that reminded him to keep this impersonal. She was going to give herself away if she didn’t reign in her shock.

Marjorie smiled. “Yes, dear.” Then she went over to *Marty* and sat on his lap. “For what now, Marty?” When he just gave her a confused look, she laughed quietly and went on. “For a little while now.”

Rynn’s eyes grew wide and bewildered.

Briggs couldn’t help himself and chuckled. “It’s a lovely home.”

It delighted him to know that he had settled in so much to find a woman to spend his time with. Nothing but happiness ran through him now.

Rynn sputtered a few times before she found her voice. “But how does he remember you?”

Pops glanced at Marjorie, confused. She laughed and gave his leg a pat. “It’s the darnedest thing really, but he seems to know who I am. Every day he wakes up and he gives me that handsome smile. That’s how we knew it was true love.” She gave his cheek a rub and he smiled in return.

Rynn still looked totally stunned. Briggs could understand it. She thought it was a damn miracle that he remembered anything. She had told him once every day was like a new day for him. So, this was wonderful news.

Marty glanced back at Rynn and Briggs. “It was really nice of you all to visit, but it’s games this afternoon and we must head off.”

“You want us to leave?” Rynn gasped. Then she turned her eyes on Marjorie. Briggs felt frustration run through her. Oh yes, she was curious about who this Marjorie was and wanted to know more.

“I thank you for the cashews.” Marty smiled kindly. “They’re delicious and you were right, they’re my favorite.”

Briggs took in Rynn’s shocked face. He chuckled and leaned in to kiss her cheek. “It’s time for us to leave, love.”

“But...but...” Rynn stammered.

Briggs lowered his arm from her shoulder and took her hand, pulled her along gently. “It was a pleasure to meet you both.”

“You as well,” Marjorie said and then she nestled into Marty, giving his face little kisses, causing him to laugh. Just as Briggs opened the door, Marjorie called out. “Oh, and Rynn, do come back another day when we have more time to talk.”

A smile crossed Briggs’ face. So, Marjorie knew who Rynn was. Clearly, the nurses had said that Martin had a granddaughter. She must have put two-and-two together. He was pleased Marjorie had restrained herself and said nothing in front of Martin. He suspected he was going to get along just fine with this Marjorie.

Rynn still said nothing as Briggs closed the door. When he turned around, Rynn stood frozen, staring at him. He stayed quiet while she processed, but his smile was clear

as day. He felt her emotions shift as the ordeal sank in and when sense came to her, she burst out laughing. "Oh my god, the old fart is getting married and he remembers her."

Briggs scooped her up in his arms and hugged her. He nestled his head into her neck and inhaled deeply. Her scent, like fresh flowers on a warm summer day, was heaven to him.

When he set her back down, her eyes were brighter than he had ever seen them. "He's happy," she said.

"Aye, love. He is that." He could see a peace within his mate, one that reconciled part of her past. She'd longed for this day to see him, and now, he saw she was all right. It settled a little dark spot in her soul, which only made him happy.

She gave her head a bewildered shake as she sighed away her laughter. "I never would've been able to have dreamed this one up."

Nor could he, but it didn't change the fact of just how amazing this truly was, for everyone involved. "Good thing, no?"

"It's a great thing! As much as I may be a little jealous that he doesn't remember me, I'm just as happy that he remembers someone. I'll come back soon and speak with Marjorie alone, tell her about my family."

"A good choice, darlin'."

He brought her back against him and hugged her a little while longer, just to share this happiness with her. None of this was expected and he couldn't put into words how pleased he was that she found this peace here. That her grandfather was better than any of them expected and she didn't have to worry any longer about this aspect of her life.

Slowly, she backed away from him and sighed. "What a day! I know what I want right now."

He nuzzled her nose with his. "What do you want?"

"Home."

"Well...there might be a little problem with that." Briggs bit his lip in uncertainty. He doubted Rynn was going to be happy with what he had to tell her next.

Her unhappy look proved him right. "What problem would that be?"

"Well..." he hesitated.

She groaned, the deepest guttural sound he'd ever heard come from her. "And just where am I off to now?"

"Philadelphia."

Chapter Nine

“Urgh,” Rynn groaned as they teleported into Philadelphia, her hands on her knees as she took a deep breath. Briggs couldn’t help but chuckle as she glanced up at him and looked slightly ill. “I seriously hate that thing.”

It had taken her a bit to get used to the portals that Valor was able to use for quick travel from the Otherworld and within the Earthworld. Even Briggs had needed to get used to it at first, so he could understand why it unsettled her stomach a little. Nevertheless, it was the fastest way to travel. “Saves time, darlin’.”

Before Rynn could respond, Valor’s voice called to them. “Briggs.”

Briggs raised his gaze to see Valor step out of the house they stood in front of and quickly approach them. As he drew closer, he smiled at Rynn. “Pale again I see.”

She snorted as both men shared a laugh. “Be happy I haven’t barfed yet using that damn thing.”

“It will come more natural in time,” Valor reassured her.

The soft tone Valor used seemed to settle over her. He understood it. Valor was a kind, considerate leader and was due much respect. All the reasons why Briggs chose to work for him. He’d never led him wrong nor did he do anything Briggs questioned. He’s as solid as werewolves came.

But Briggs also doubted that she’d ever adjust to teleporting. Rynn and portals just didn’t intermix well. He glanced at the home in front of him. A mansion of all mansions stood before him. Made of red brick and thick oak trim—there was nothing that didn’t scream rich.

As he turned back to Rynn, he could see her surprise at the sight of this home. Alphas didn’t come poor, that he knew, and she was clearly just beginning to understand how rich they really were. Not that the home wasn’t beautiful, but this wasn’t his thing. Simple suited him more. He was only too glad that Rynn held an equal regard for simple things. If this was his home, he suspected he might get lost in it. He took her hand and gave a little tug. “Come on, love.”

She followed behind him as they started up the driveway. Halfway there, she pulled on his hand to stop him. His gaze fell back to hers as she asked, “Anyone going to tell me what’s going on?”

Briggs had kept this from her intentionally, hesitant that she would be unwilling to join him. What was taking place here was about as serious as he’d seen in a long time. He wasn’t about to frighten her before she even got here.

In truth, he’d been running the situation over in his head since they left her grandfather and he wasn’t quite sure how to put this. She was nervous when it came to all things dangerous and he wanted to protect her from that. At the same time, this was her life and she needed to embrace it. He was torn.

Valor clearly did not hold his hesitation since he answered her. “There have been murders here.”

“Murders?” Rynn’s eyes went wide, before she turned an accusing gaze on Briggs. “I thought you said it wasn’t dangerous.”

He grinned mischievously, rethinking just how he went about this. Maybe he should

have been forthright with her. Yet again, he did like seeing her all fired up. “Well, about that, love...” She tapped her foot, waiting. His smile grew at seeing the burn in her. Not that he liked to upset her but he sure enjoyed her reactions.

Rynn clearly saw his amusement, huffed at him and looked back at Valor. “How many?”

“Four.”

She appeared to ponder that a moment and Briggs wished he could see what ran through her mind. He couldn’t sense much from her expect fear, which he expected, and a bit of confusion. Finally, after a moment or so, she voiced her thoughts. “And I am here because...”

Briggs sighed realizing now what the problem was. She didn’t fully understand what was going on here or what was expected of her. He thought that maybe since she connected with the wolf part of herself that this would be clearer to her but obviously not.

Her human roots triggered it because as wolves, finding one who killed another wolf in cold blood left them eager to hunt them. Which is exactly where Briggs’ mind was now, but Rynn was his priority and he would try to help her through this process as softly as he could.

“This killer has avoided us.” He gave her hand a reassuring squeeze, then with the other tapped her nose. “You’ll be able to find him.

Her eyes went a little wide as the truth began to settle into her mind. Tension immediately swept through their bond and Briggs could only respond by letting out a soft groan. “But what if he doesn’t want to be found?” she asked.

Briggs brushed a finger across her cheek, unhappy to put her in this situation. But just as he had a duty, so did she and hiding her away would do her no good. She needed to find her place in this new world of hers and accept her talents.

“I’m sure he’s not going to want that, love. He has killed four wolves here for no apparent reason at all. Do you want him to get away with that?”

Rynn mulled that for a moment, then let out a long, deep breath. “Of course I don’t. It’s just...”

Briggs took her in his arms, embraced her as he glanced down at her. “I won’t let harm come to you.”

“You say that, but last time...” Her words cut off instantly and she gave an apologetic look. “I’m sorry.” She reached up to touch his jaw with her gentle hands. “I didn’t mean that.”

Briggs took her face firmly in his hands. He would never forgive himself that she’d been endangered when Danika took a shot at her. At the same time, he knew what she was saying was in fact the truth. No matter how much he might want to keep her safe, he wasn’t always able to keep that promise.

“I will stop at nothing to keep you safe. Yes, you’re right, these situations are dangerous, but I will do my best to protect you from it. Do you trust in that?”

Without hesitation, she nodded. “I do.”

“Good.” He took her hand again as he led her forward. He could only hope that in time this wouldn’t be so difficult for her. He wasn’t pleased that she suffered such unhappiness that she had to help the wolves. He hoped she’d discover the sense of honor and the feeling of pride that came from it.

Valor must have been thinking the same thing and added, “Wolves to us are pack,

even if it's not from our territory. When one is hurting, we all are. And you are quite useful to the packs now. It's a duty to them."

"Right, a duty," she grumbled in response. "A duty to hunt a killer—one I doubt will be very happy when I find him."

Briggs knew this was the hard part for her. She liked her bubble of happiness and wanted to stay in that little circle of protection forever. However, he could also tell she liked feeling useful. He knew she wished for that feeling without being involved with anything violent.

Her gaze turned curious as they approached the house. "Why are we dealing with this?"

"Didn't we already answer that, love?" Briggs asked.

She waved a dismissive hand at him. "No, I mean, if a human has been murdered why is the Otherworld not handling this? Don't they always handle this?"

Briggs could see the hopeful glint in her eye, but he was sad to know he was going to disappoint her. "You're right, the Otherworld does deal with human deaths, but this death is of werewolves. We deal with these matters personally."

She let out a sound that came pretty close to a pout, but Valor interjected. "It is our place to help our wolves. The Otherworld is there to offer further help if we need it, but if we can deal with this on our own then we will do so. Our wolves, our problem."

"Really?" Her voice and eyes pleaded.

Valor's nod was firm.

"Fine." She sighed heavily. "Let's go then."

She was about to walk off, but Valor latched onto her arm to stop her. "Before we go in here I want you to tell me if you are all right with this?"

"Do I have a choice?" she countered.

"You always have choices, Rynn. Neither I, nor Briggs, will push you. This is your decision to walk through that door and I don't want you to do it if you feel pressured. No good can come from that."

"I'm..."

Valor interjected. "Scared?"

She nodded ever so slightly. "A thousand times that."

"That is completely understandable. Scared is good, it makes you cautious. But this matter is serious and you will see things that you couldn't even imagine in your nightmares. If you do not wish to do this willingly, Briggs can take you home and that will be the end of it."

She went quiet, obviously considering everything.

Briggs understood her hesitation, why she might look for a way out. This situation wasn't one he wanted her in either, but shielding her from this wasn't going to help her any. As his mate, they held a responsibility to the wolves around them. They couldn't depend on the Otherworld to solve their problems. This was something they had worked out with the Council. Any problems with Alphas involved became their problem.

She was involved in this whether she liked it or not. But he appreciated Valor's consideration of her. In truth, it wasn't really a choice. Briggs knew that and so did Valor. However, he was counting on Rynn's heart that she'd come to the decision on her own. He wanted her to feel in control.

"Okay," she finally said. "I'm not saying this is going to be easy for me, and that I'm

not really scared about this all, but if I can help then I will.”

Briggs gave her a little tap on her rump. “That’s my girl.”

They entered the house. It was as spectacular in as it was out. Thick, soft beige carpet, rich colored walls and paintings appeared more abstract than anything else.

Valor waved them into a sitting room where Tiago already sat on the couch. Briggs was less than pleased to see him here. He was the one who forced the issue that Rynn and Briggs seal their bond and mate a while back. With Rynn’s rape, Briggs would have waited a lifetime until she was ready, but Tiago took that away. Since the mate bond could be forced, Tiago had his sights on her. In the end, it all worked out fine, but it didn’t change Briggs’ feelings toward the sod.

Tiago’s looks had changed slightly since the last time he saw him. His teal eyes were the same but his honey hair that was once chin-length was now shaggy cut to the ears. As all Alphas did, he exuded strength and power.

When he caught sight of them, he stood. “Pleasure to see you again, Rynn.” He turned toward Briggs and nodded. “Briggs.”

Briggs returned it but had nothing to say to him. Rynn clearly felt different. “So, you’re the Pennsylvania Alpha?”

“I am,” Tiago replied and gestured for them to take a seat. When they sat comfortably, he continued. “I appreciate you coming here to assist with this.”

Rynn smiled kindly, even though Briggs could feel hesitation coursing through her blood.

He felt like pointing out they weren’t here for Tiago and didn’t need his thanks. The Alpha in him was barely holding it together. Briggs might have claimed Rynn as his mate and had no worries of Tiago’s interest in her, but he would rather the man not say a word to her. He didn’t like the fact that she even spoke to him.

Just then, Valor gave Briggs a knock on his back and laughed. “We should tell Rynn about what has taken place.”

Of course, Valor would understand his mental state. Briggs quickly looked at him. The amusement resting in his eyes made him draw back a bit. He was letting his Alpha get a hold of him again. He wasn’t used to feeling so protective and threatened. Being bonded was new to him too and he was still adjusting to the emotions that came with it.

“Aye, you’re right.” He gave his boss a small smile in acknowledgment of how ludicrous he was being then gave Tiago a nod. “Go on and tell her.”

Tiago sighed, stretched out his legs and laced his fingers behind his head. “A week ago, I was contacted by a pack member who said they had come across a dead body. When I went to investigate, it was obvious the man was killed in an apparent fit of rage.”

“Why did you think that?” Rynn asked, and Briggs didn’t need to sense that she couldn’t even imagine what that would look like. The confusion sat equally heavy on her face.

“He was completely torn to pieces,” Tiago answered.

Rynn gulped deeply, her face a mirror of imagined horror. “Why would someone do that to him?”

“I had thought it was personal from the manner of death. But then, two more killings came directly after.”

Rynn seemed to ponder everything for a moment or so and Briggs had to wonder what was on his mate’s mind. He didn’t sense any apprehension in her, only curiosity.

Finally, she spoke up. "They were killed all in the same way?"

Tiago nodded. "The last was just the other day."

Again, Rynn appeared to process what she heard, then asked, "And you still haven't figured out why?"

"No."

Briggs could understand Rynn's concerns. He too had to question how so many murders had taken place and no one had discovered who was responsible. They were clearly at a dead end here, which was the exact reason why Rynn being here was so important. He felt the need to fill her in more with the few details he had. "Nothing ties these killings together. Yes, they're all from the Philadelphia pack, but none of them personally know each other."

"I have spoken with many of their families and they have had no trouble in their lives that would result in a death such as this." Valor added.

"Another mystery," Rynn grumbled.

Briggs brushed his thumb against her finger to offer a little support before he hit her with the next bombshell he knew would cause a reaction. "One of the victims was a young pup."

"How old?" she whispered.

"Ten." Tiago answered, sadness washed across his features. "He was the son of a very good friend."

Briggs gulped as he felt deep sadness within his mate, her eyes sank and he saw the compassion in her expression. As much as he wanted to offer her comfort, she needed to understand what was going on and why they needed her so much. "You see the importance here."

Rynn nodded softly. "Yes, I do."

Tiago cleared his throat and Rynn's gaze fell on him. "Once you find the man who has done this, I don't expect you to stay around to see his punishment."

"Well that's a relief," Rynn exclaimed.

Briggs patted her thigh and gave her a smile when she looked at him. His mate was the kindest and softest hearted woman alive. It's a trait not found among the wolves. Most would be more than willing to assist in the punishment of anyone who had killed a young wolf. As much as Tiago stirred the Alpha in him, he respected the man for being considerate of her feelings. He was telling her this so she could leave at the time without it appearing disrespectful. He met Tiago's gaze and gave him a firm nod of appreciation, which Tiago reciprocated.

Valor stood then, apparently satisfied she knew enough to begin. "We should take you to the first scene to see if you can scent him out."

Briggs wasn't so sure she truly understood what she was about to face. But he was glad to see that she realized that they needed her and why she had to do this.

They stood, but before she walked away, she looked back at Tiago. "How do you know it's another wolf doing this?"

"There's a witness," Tiago answered, dismayed. "The boy's sister was with him when he died."

Rynn gasped as her hand covered her mouth. "She saw the wolf kill her brother?"

"Aye." Briggs answered her, wrapped her hand in his and offered support in the only way he knew how—understanding just where his mate's thoughts lingered now. He

couldn't imagine this young girl having to watch as her brother was mauled to death. On Valor's orders, the girl was sedated. She wasn't in a good condition right now. Briggs had to wonder if she'd ever be.

Confusion flashed across Rynn's face and that feeling soared through their bond. "He left her alive?"

Briggs nodded, his gaze knowing as she thought the same thing he had. It was very strange for such a thing to happen. "She was completely unharmed."

"Don't you think that is kinda strange? To kill someone so brutally and leave a witness behind."

Valor placed a hand on her shoulder, his expression said she was dead right about that. "Everything about this is strange, sweetling."

Rynn sighed deep as she looked back up at Briggs. "Strange equals danger. Danger equals violence. The combination of the two—is one very worried Rynn."

Briggs' protective instincts roared at him to get her away from this. Her hand trembled in his. He would never have chosen this life for her. Of course, he was pleased that she was a Blue Blood. It did make him proud to be granted such a special mate. At the same time, it was almost a curse. If she didn't hold this ability, she wouldn't face matters like these.

His loyalty to the wolves meant he could not hinder her. She had been given a gift for a reason and no matter his wants, she needed to use them. He could only hope to provide what she needed to get through this.

He knew the scene was going to be a cold, hard truth of what werewolves were capable of and was one truth he wanted to shield her from forever.

But just as she couldn't hide from her new gifts, he couldn't bury reality from her.

Chapter Ten

The drive was silent while Rynn anticipated what she was about to face. The only consolation was that the body of the victim would be gone, but she assumed she'd still smell the death that happened there. The blood, bodily fluids, fear, and being that this had happened just the other day, the scents would still be strong. None of which she looked forward to.

Tiago drove quickly down a country road. His Hummer was big enough to provide lots of space, which was a blessing since three large Alphas surrounded her. But even though it was spacious, the strength that radiated in this truck was welcoming.

He began to slow and Rynn glanced away from her hands she'd been concentrating on the past hour to see they approached a corn field. She had to wonder if it was by chance that the killer stumbled across the kids. She suspected that might be the case. It wasn't likely that the wolf had followed them here, which just made the situation worse. For someone to die for nothing, just being at the wrong place at the wrong time, was a hard truth to swallow.

As they slowly drove down the side of the cornfield, scents began to drift through the window and Rynn tensed. She knew her nervousness created a high-energy, lush scent through the car.

Valor hadn't missed it and glanced back from the front seat. "Do not fear, Rynn. We'll be here with you to do this."

"You all keep saying that, but it isn't making me feel any better. It's me that has to do it."

"Small steps, love." Briggs gave her a soft smile that did take away a smidgen of the tension. "We'll see what you find here and go from there."

Small steps sounded all too good to her. Take a step out, scent him, and get the heck back in the car and go home. It was ideal and what she hoped for, but she doubted it would be that easy. Nothing ever was.

The car stopped and everyone piled out with Rynn hesitantly following behind. She held her breath, prepared herself, but the moment she stepped out and inhaled the warm wind, she froze.

Briggs took her hand and turned her to face him. His gaze intent and concerned. "What do you catch?"

Rynn thought of that for a moment. There were so many smells, but the one that caught her most was blood and decaying blood at that. It wasn't pleasant. "Blood," she whispered.

Protective feelings coursed through her as Briggs clearly wanted her to be as far away from this as possible. Instead of acting on them, he pulled on her hand a little, forced her to step away from the car.

It was then that she caught sight of the gruesome murder scene. The corn was crushed down and blood was everywhere. She gasped and leaned into Briggs for support.

"Oh God." Her voice shook as her gaze fell to Tiago.

"I'm so sorry that you have to see this." He knew this boy. This was hard for her to witness and she hadn't even known him. She could only imagine what he was feeling.

Her gaze fell to Tiago. "I'm so sorry that you have to see this." He knew this boy. This was hard for her to witness and she didn't even know him. She could only imagine what he was feeling.

Tiago appeared shocked by her kindness. Then, he regained himself and gave a soft nod. "My duty to my friend is to find the one who did this. Nothing I feel can amount to what they have suffered by losing a son and more than likely a daughter who will never recover from this."

Her heart sank for this family. To bury a child is something Rynn couldn't even comprehend. They faced losing their daughter too because she would be forever traumatized by what she'd seen. It couldn't get any worse.

Valor interrupted her thoughts as he stepped next to her. "Go ahead and shift, let's see what you find."

Rynn understood why he suggested it. Yes, as a human, she could catch stronger scents, but it was nothing compared to what she could do in wolf form. It was more powerful when she was on all fours.

Briggs released her hand and took a step back. "We'll be here with you. There's nothing here that will harm you."

She snorted slightly. "Easy for you to say, you don't have to smell this like I do." Not waiting for his response, she closed her eyes, sucked in a deep breath and welcomed the magic that came with the shift. She focused on the wolf that lived within and called on her to come forward.

It only took seconds before she stood on all fours. Instantly, the air became thick with death. The blood was stronger now and it smelled wretched. She never imagined blood having a smell like this. Normally, it seemed metallic, but since this blood was a few days old, it just smelled rotten—exactly what is expected with a decaying person.

She opened her eyes to find the men had shifted with her. She understood. They were preparing to go on a hunt. None of which she wanted to be a part of. But she did feel a sense of duty toward this family. She felt hesitant, that was undeniable. This was a child though and that was what made her act now. This she had to do for the family.

Shifting her paws, she positioned herself in a more comfortable position before she settled into the scents around her. Just as she did, Briggs' voice came in her mind. "*Have you got anything, love?*"

The ability to converse in their minds came in handy at times like these. Having to shift back and forth to tell Briggs and the others what was going on would be tiresome. She inhaled deeply to sort through the different smells. The scent of death was just so strong, it was hard to get past. She closed her eyes just to allow the scents to overtake her. The others breathed deeply around her, but no one moved or made a single sound while she concentrated.

She couldn't focus on one smell alone or nothing else would filter through. Ignoring the blood around her, she focused her concentration on the other scents that lingered here. A moment later, she was pleased to find it was working.

There were three wolves, each so different, she couldn't place them, decipher their ages, sex or anything like that. "*I can smell three,*" she told Briggs as she opened her eyes.

He nodded his fluffy head and she was momentarily caught up by the sight of him. He's such a beautiful wolf, his fur a blend of colors, black, gray and white with his ears,

eyes and muzzle all defined by dark black fur. Rynn, her soft brown fur and four white paws, was tiny in comparison. Up beside three strong Alphas, she looked like a cub.

Chastising herself for letting her mind wander, she focused back on the matter at hand. She inhaled again, all eyes on her. Yes, she smelled three distinct wolves, all with their own characteristics, and each with a trail they could follow.

After some time though, she knew she was at a loss. Immediately, she called on the shift. The men followed right behind her. Tiago didn't waste a second. "What is it?" he asked in a hurried tone.

"I have to meet the girl," Rynn responded. It was the only thing she could come up with. The only viable solution to the problem she currently found herself in.

Her statement got a curious gaze from each of the men, but Valor was the one to voice it. "Why must you do that?" Intrigue clear in his tone.

"I can't identify whose scent is whose, they all blend together. There's no sense in us following each trail, it'll take too long." That was something she definitely didn't want. The sooner this was over, the quicker she could go home.

Tiago immediately spun on his heels and started back toward the Hummer. "I will take you there now."

Briggs clasped Rynn's hand, leaned in and whispered, "Feeling all right, darlin'?"

"Yeah, I'm okay."

It was such a weird thing for her. At first, she always felt so scared but when she finally got into the deep of it, it was as if she found strength. Strength of what she didn't know, but a pull to find answers. A need in her that screamed that she use these gifts of hers to find out who did this to this boy.

She hadn't had a full grasp for just what happened here and couldn't deny it was horrific. She wanted to see this killer caught. Right now all she felt was determined.

Briggs brushed a finger along her cheek and gave her a proud smile. "It's coming."

She studied him a moment, not quite sure what he meant. The hunt? "What's coming?"

"Your wolf is becoming more dominant in you."

Her laugh was loud, even though it wasn't at all appropriate to hear at this time. What he said just made no sense at all. "What do you mean?"

"She's coming out quicker." His eyes held no amusement. "Normally, you wouldn't feel so determined, but I can sense that's all that lies within you."

"Maybe it's just because seeing things are different than hearing them." That is all she could amount this to and nothing more. Seeing was believing after all.

He shook his head slowly. "No, love, it's because your wolf is feeling her rightful place in our world. She knows that whoever did this, should pay."

She wasn't about to disagree with him. Not that she agreed whomever did this should pay with how werewolves dealt with killers, but she did believe that the one responsible for this cruel act needed to face some sort of punishment. "I think the human in me feels the same way."

"Of course, but that's not really what I mean. You're not shying away, are you?"

Okay, so he made her think a little. She had been nervous and scared before she stepped out of the car. Was it the wolf coming out in her that made her want to do this? She wasn't sure. "If you say so."

He leaned in and whispered against her lips. "It's not what I say, it's what I know,

darlin’.”

Chapter Eleven

A simple country home rested atop of a hill complete with a picket fence and all. Tiago sped up the driveway like a madman, and once there, he cut the engine and jumped out.

Rynn followed behind, uncertain of what to expect. She knew she'd meet two grieving parents and none of that would be enjoyable. But she was having a hard time imagining exactly what this moment would entail. Briggs kept her hand in his as they made their way up the front porch steps.

At the door, Tiago knocked. When it opened, her imagination couldn't even come up with what she found. She could only sink deeper against Briggs' side. Everything of the woman standing before her was heartbroken. Never had Rynn seen such pain in anyone's eyes before, but there it was, raw and exposed. It was nothing she wanted to see again. She assumed with this new life of hers, she get better accustomed to these kinds of things and witnessing such despair.

She couldn't help but think about how police did this all the time. How they kept the distance from emotional involvement. Rynn wasn't capable of this. The moment she made contact with the woman's gaze, she was connected.

At one time, the woman was probably very pretty, but now, she was just a mess. Her sandy colored hair was in an unruly ponytail that was tucked into an elastic band leaving it to look ratted. Her soft brown eyes were bloodshot in the very worst sense. Even her skin was gray and her body that appeared to be in top shape looked frail.

"Tiago," the woman whispered, meeting his gaze as if it took her a moment to realize who he was.

"May we come in, Sadie?" Tiago asked her in a gentle tone.

It took another moment for her to process that, but then, she did step back and opened the door wider.

When Rynn stepped into the house, she noticed it was a complete disaster. Once a home she suspected was filled with happy memories was now anything but. Holes lined the walls, furniture was overturned and nothing appeared in order.

Tiago's thoughts obviously mirrored Rynn's as he glanced around the room, confused. "What happened here?"

"Karson was upset," Sadie murmured.

Just as her words ended, grief roared through their bond. Rynn glanced to the reason and while nothing showed on Briggs' face, it was understood between them all. The father was well beyond upset if he destroyed his home in this manner. And that was understandable too. Rynn assumed that was where Briggs' compassion and sadness came in. It was more of sympathetic knowledge of what the father must be suffering.

As she glanced back at Sadie, a man, whom she assumed was Karson entered the living room. Everything in her wanted to fade away. His mate looked terrible, but he looked utterly spent. His dark eyes showed no life in them whatsoever and his face was tight with every emotion possible. The most obvious being anger.

"Tiago." His tone was firm and tight as he approached. "Have you come to tell us you found the wolf that killed Jordy?"

Tiago waved out to the couch and everyone followed his unspoken suggestion. “No, Karson, I’m sorry to say that we have not located him yet.”

Karson trembled as he sat. Rynn knew one thing—Tiago believed that he would deal with this wolf, but she doubted he’d get the chance. The wolf that killed Jordy would be Karson’s to take out—his to kill.

“Then why are you here?” Karson growled. Sadie touched her mate’s hand and he glanced at her. He sighed deeply and every ounce of anger left his body. “My apologies, my friend.” He looked back to Tiago. “I’m not myself.”

Tiago dismissed his remark with a wave of his hand. “It’s fine.” His soft tone showed that he understood the reasons his friend had lashed out.

Sadie glanced away from her mate and looked at each of their faces, finally landing on Rynn. “What can we do for you?”

“Rynn needs to see Cassia,” Tiago replied.

“Why?” Sadie’s voice rushed out in a soft, worried whisper.

“I just need to catch her scent.” Rynn hoped her words came out compassionate. She didn’t want to be intrusive while they were in such turmoil and she wanted them to agree to this on their own terms. “It’s a bit confusing with all the different smells...there. I hope that by narrowing them down, I’ll be able to find him faster.”

“You are the Blue Blood?” Karson asked.

“I am.”

Sadie glanced at her with gracious eyes and relief flooded her face. “We appreciate...”

Rynn stopped her by raising her hand. “Please, don’t.” Sadie closed her mouth, looking slightly confused. “You don’t need to do that. I don’t want thanks for doing what I can here. I’m sorry that this has happened to your family and anything I can do to help I’ll gladly do.”

Sadie glanced at Karson, who nodded. She took in a long deep breath before she returned her gaze to Rynn’s. “You may go up and see her, but she is sedated. Whenever she wakes, she starts screaming...” Sadie’s words fell away when she burst into tears.

Karson gathered her up in his arms and hugged her. He glanced over her head, tears in his eyes. “Jordy’s room is on the left. Please scent him out too. It should make it easier to find the fucker who did this.”

Rynn hoped her expression showed her gratefulness in his offer. She’d never have asked to do that. Mentioning Jordy wasn’t on her to-do-list, but scenting him would make this easier. Having both scents exposed would leave the killer’s scent strong and allow her to find him sooner. These parents needed some kind of closure and revenge—if that was even possible.

Briggs stood and pulled Rynn with him. He immediately headed for the stairs with Valor close behind. Obviously, Tiago felt it necessary to stay back with his friends and console them. Rynn could understand that.

They reached the top of the stairs and moved to the left. When they entered Jordy’s room, it was full of things that showed a happy normal kid. Sports heroes’ posters lined the walls with figurines and memorabilia everywhere. For Rynn, it only held sadness.

Maybe it was just the energy that was felt in the house at this time, but she could only assume that most of the tears shed recently had been here. The smell of despair was heavy. It overwhelmed her senses and even breathing was difficult.

Briggs moaned, clearly he could smell it too. He headed toward the closet, opened the door, leaned down and picked up a t-shirt. "Here, darlin', this carries his scent."

She stepped forward and took it, raised it to her nose and inhaled deeply. Immediately, she recognized a distinct soapy smell. Jordy was a kid who showered daily, if not twice a day, and obviously used the same soap because even on his shirt, Rynn clearly identified it.

After a few deep inhales, she handed it to Valor. "I'm good, here."

Valor raised it to his nose and took a big sniff. He handed it off to Briggs. "I doubt I will be of any help here. The blood at that scene was all I could smell when I was there."

Rynn was still getting used to that. The idea that her scent was stronger than their leader was a bit hard to swallow. Just didn't all jive with her yet.

After Briggs took a whiff, he threw the shirt back in the closet and closed the door, leaving the room just as it was. "Nor will I be of any help. Too much blood there—it reeked of death." He took Rynn's hand again and led her out of the room.

Just down the hall, Rynn saw ballerina pink walls. When they entered the bedroom, it was obvious a teen lived here judging by the Justin Bieber and Twilight posters that littered the walls.

Rynn stepped closer to the bed and the young girl with brown ringlets cradling her face, lay sound asleep. She looked so little, probably around thirteen and so peaceful. It was hard to imagine that this girl witnessed something so horrific.

As she drew nearer, she inhaled deeply, immediately hit with the girl's scent. She suspected at the time this was the scent she had experienced, it was very flowery, but she needed to be sure. The killer could be some kind of metrosexual for all she knew. When she reached Cassia, she sat down on the bed next to her. "It's so sad."

Briggs' misery coursed through her as well. "Quite sad indeed."

Rynn glanced up, knew her eyes pleaded with him. "I wish there was something we could do to help her."

"I as well."

Valor brushed the hair trailing across Cassia's face, then placed his hand on her face. "Poor sweetling."

Silence grew around them while they all sat and watched this pained wolf breathe deep in sleep. Rynn felt helpless. If only there was something she could do, some way to help her.

As the minutes passed, she thought of ideas and then dismissed them. But one started to surface. One she couldn't just push away. And just like that, she found the answer she was looking for. Like a light bulb going off in her head, a memory flittered through. She jumped up, her heart pounded in her ears. Yes, this was one solution she couldn't believe she hadn't thought of before. "Zia."

Both, Valor and Briggs gave her a curious look at her outburst, but it only took one gesture to get them to understand. She raised her finger to her temple and tapped her head.

Valor's eyes grew wide, his hands dropped to his sides as his face filled with hope. "I hadn't even considered it. I will go now and get her." He spun on his heels and rushed from the room.

When Rynn glanced at Briggs, optimism lived in the depths of his eyes. This had to work.

As her smile grew, the memory of Zia's words to her once echoed in her mind. "*As a Spirit Witch, I can erase memories from your mind.*"

Chapter Twelve

The sun began to settle into the middle of the sky when a scuffle came from the doorway. Briggs turned away from the window to see Valor enter, Zia following behind.

As she stepped into the bedroom, he greeted her. "Doing well?" he asked as he examined her. He'd never seen the woman look so disheveled and if this situation wasn't so serious, he might have laughed.

Zia was normally put together in every sense. Being the Master of Witches, one of the leaders of the Otherworld, she was always presentable. This evening, however, her long strawberry blonde hair was pulled back in loose bun. She wore jeans and a t-shirt, which was definitely not what Briggs had ever seen her in before and dark circles sat beneath her knowledgeable baby blues.

Last night at the bonding ceremony, she had obviously had one too many and stayed up until the sun came up, if not longer. Briggs had a hard time wrapping his mind around the fact that the ceremony was only last night. It also explained why he suddenly felt very tired. He was running on only a few hours of sleep himself and since Zia was used to going to sleep when the sun came up, she wasn't doing so well herself.

She waved away his concern. "The night was long." She gave him a soft smile, which he returned. Then, she sighed deeply, closed her eyes and immediately health was restored to her. "I was in such a hurry I didn't have time to do that." Clearly, she had just used her magic to give herself a boost. "Much better." Then, she focused on Cassia who still slept soundly with her parents now around her. "So, let's see what we've got here." She stepped around Briggs and walked toward the bed.

Karson looked wound up and immediately stood when she came closer. "You're not going to hurt her, right?"

Zia smiled reassuringly. "She's sedated, so no, she'll feel nothing." She reached out and touched Karson's shoulder. Briggs saw the tension leave Karson in a second. It was as if a wave of peace washed over him. Obviously, Zia had just used her magic to ease him. "Your daughter will be well after I'm done." She gestured toward the bed beside Cassia. "May I sit with her?"

Sadie nodded immediately and moved aside. "Yes, please help her."

Zia sat on the bed, took Cassia's hand and closed her eyes. Then, she went completely quiet.

Briggs was relieved this was taking place. He was so proud of Rynn. Why he nor Valor hadn't thought of this as an option was beyond him, but the truth was, they just never went to the Otherworld for much unless they needed to.

There was respect between them, a camaraderie that built over time, but the two were worlds apart. They tried not to involve each other with personal matters. But this was one of those times that Briggs was glad they had this allegiance with them. This young girl would be better off dead than what would come of her life if she remembered what happened to her brother. That he was sure of. She could never recover from seeing such an incident.

Many minutes passed before Zia gasped and slowly opened her eyes to glance at Valor. "In a bit of a mess, aren't you?"

Apparently, she had just witnessed the moment this young girl's life took a deadly turn. Zia's magic abilities to read into a mind gave her insight that just saved a very long and tiresome conversation. With the parents around, Briggs was happy they didn't have to make them relive the event to bring her up to speed.

Valor nodded and gave a slight snort in response to her. "You could say that."

Zia glanced back at Cassia and gave her head a dismayed shake. "Very troubling. Such a traumatic thing to witness, no wonder she has been distraught."

Briggs didn't need her to voice just how bad the memory she witnessed was. It was obvious on Zia's face. Her eyes immediately saddened and she even paled a little. The room was silent as Zia closed her eyes again. Her face grew serious as her body trembled a little.

After a few moments, she opened her eyes and gave a smile that said all that needed to be said. Cassia was well now. "She won't remember any of that experience now."

Sadie had tears in her eyes and her voice came out between sobs when she spoke. "None of it?"

Zia shook her head and took Sadie's hand in a gesture so kind and caring. "No, it's gone." Then, her gaze fell to Karson. "I am sorrier for your loss than I can put into words, but may I offer you something from what I saw that will give you peace?"

Karson nodded without hesitation. "Please, whatever you know."

"Your boy didn't suffer."

Rage immediately filled Karson's face, his fists clenched to the point where his knuckles went white. "I saw the scene, why are you telling me lies?"

Briggs stepped in a little closer just in case Karson acted on his anger. Not that he didn't understand, but Zia was a friend, and if Karson went to attack her he would be stopped. Judging by the look of his house, he had no control over himself now.

Zia raised her hand to Briggs to stop him. He stood in his place, protective next to her as she continued, "You saw the remainder of what happened, yes this is true, but I'm not lying when I tell you he didn't suffer. He died the exact moment he was attacked."

Karson's feet gave out and Tiago immediately reached for him, helped him into a chair. "Is that true?" he cried.

Zia nodded, her eyes sad and very heartfelt. "I doubt he even knew what was happening before it was too late."

Briggs actually felt sorry for Zia with the things she witnessed. He too had only seen the aftermath of what had occurred, he didn't have to see the boy being murdered. Zia did and he had to wonder how she dealt with seeing such terrible things. How she could remain so caring when she witnessed evil at its best. He wondered how it didn't wear on her.

He was glad for her abilities as a Spirit Witch and would be grateful to her that she came here to do this. His only hope was that he could return the favor. Do something for her that would be warranted as an equal kind gesture.

Sadie's sobs drew him back to the present. "Thank you, God." She glanced up to the ceiling. "Thank you for taking him quickly."

Zia released Sadie's hand and she went directly into Karson's arms. Both sobbed heavily.

Briggs drew in a deep breath in an attempt to hold back his own tears. He could see the heaviness of their shoulders lifted off. It wasn't only that they had lost a son, but the

manner he had died and hearing that he went quickly, saved them from the horror engulfing their minds. Plus, their daughter had been returned to them as well. Their heavy hearts were snapping back from the grave position they had been in. Not that their loss would ever completely heal, but now, at least their daughter had a future ahead of her.

Tears spilled from Rynn's eyes. He wrapped an arm around her waist to draw her close and she sank in against him. He loved that his mate was so emotionally bonded to others around her. That she could never witness anything of sadness and not respond. If he didn't have the strength he did, he could waver watching Karson and his mate sob. To suffer such a loss, Briggs couldn't even understand the depth of despair they must feel. It was why he chose the job he did with Valor, his duty to stop this violence so no one else was left in this state.

This was a very sad moment and it tugged at his heart.

Zia sighed and glanced at the two parents falling apart around her, then stood. "They have her heavily sedated, it will take some time for her to wake up, but when she does they'll have to tell her that her brother has died. I did not replace the memory, only erased it. She won't remember anything of it."

Valor rested a hand on Zia's shoulder, gave her a look of great gratitude that Briggs had seen a thousand times. "My thanks are not enough here."

She leaned in and kissed his cheek. "Peace to this family is all the thanks I need." Backing away from him, her expression turned firm. "You need to be careful here. Something is not right with the wolf that did this."

Briggs gave her a curious look. "What did you see?"

"It was a very brutal way of death." She glanced at the weeping couple and then back at Briggs. "Just be glad for that poor boy that the first bite killed him. If it hadn't, it would have been a very long, agonizing death. The wolf isn't right." When she saw Briggs' next question, she raised her hand. "I can't tell you anything else, he just didn't look right to me."

Wonderful, Briggs thought. He glanced at his mate as she looked up at him with sad eyes. He forced a small smile in hopes to ease a bit of her sadness. "Hope you like the outdoors, love. Cause we are about to go in the back country, wolf style."

Chapter Thirteen

On the drive back to the cornfield, Rynn glanced around and all of the men looked ready to burst with adrenaline. What she craved was a bed, a warm comfy one in fact, but that was wishful thinking on her part. They were about to hunt. She drank the coffee in her hands quickly in hopes the boost would give her just the juice she needed to get through this. It hadn't clued into her to ask Zia to spare a little magic to energize her, but she hadn't been thinking about herself back at the house.

Tiago drove like a crazy man down the streets. Rynn was squished in the back between Valor and Briggs.

"Do you smell anything?" Karson asked urgently from the front seat as he looked back at her.

Rynn shook her head. "No nothing yet."

His control barely held together and his need to see this through had him on pins and needles. He had asked that very question every few minutes now. She wasn't getting annoyed, simply answered the same each time. She understood his anxiety. If the situation were reversed, she'd do the same.

At the cornfield, Tiago turned the Hummer back onto the path and they quickly made their way down. Within minutes, he stopped and cut the engine. They all exited the truck in a flash.

Immediately, Rynn's senses were assaulted with the scent of death around her, which only seemed to intensify the longer it sat here. It had grown considerably in these last few hours and the scent of decay was enough to make her eyes water and her stomach turn.

"Do you smell him?" Karson reached out, grabbed Rynn's arm and yanked her forward. She squealed at his tight grip.

Briggs growled, "Remove your hands from her, now."

Karson instantly responded, gave her an apologetic look and sighed deeply. "Forgive me, I hadn't meant to manhandle you like that."

Rynn reached up and placed her hand on Karson's tense arm. "It's okay, really. I know this is important."

After removing her hand from Karson, she placed it on Briggs' forearm. His anger created a little buzz through her mind. Oh yes, he didn't like Karson's reaction, and he never even looked at her. His gaze was stuck on Karson.

As of late, she'd seen little flickers of this real strength come from Briggs. It was as much protective as it was territorial. He'd never really acted like that before and she heard Valor joke about it, saying his Alpha was controlling him. Not that she really understood what it all meant, but she did know that the tension needed to end.

To settle things and just get this over with, she withdrew her hand, and stepped back to call on the shift. The men followed right behind without a word said. With them around her, she wasn't at all worried about being unprotected. She sat on her hind legs, closed her eyes and just inhaled.

Thousands of scents caught her. The blood was consuming but she focused away from it and drew on the three lingering wolf scents. She could immediately distinguish between them. Two came in one direction, which she now knew were the kids. Cassia's

scent went off in another direction, obviously, when she ran off for help. Jordy's had ended here, which wasn't a surprise.

She released those scents from her mind and focused on the last one. The man who had done this and his scent were all wrong. When she first came here, she thought this might have been Jordy's scent because he was so fearful, but now knew it wasn't.

This wolf smelled of disease. That was the only way to describe it. It was a wolf, of course, but it wasn't a healthy smell. It smelled of sickness—rotten and ill. She raised her nose high to the sky and let the scent guide her, focused on it alone. Her nose snorted momentarily as the smell engulfed her. It was horrible.

"*What is it, love?*" Briggs asked in her mind.

She opened her eyes and looked at him. "*He smells sick.*" It was useless to try to explain it any other way. This was no scent she'd ever smelled before and trying to place it was impossible.

"*Sick?*" Briggs repeated and even in his wolf form, Rynn saw the confusion in his eyes.

She nodded her fluffy head in response.

Briggs shifted and the other men followed immediately. Before Rynn could do the same, Briggs placed his hand on her back and forced the shift within her.

Annoyance roared into every pore of her body. When she stood on two legs, she glared at him. "What did you do that for?"

The move completely enraged her. It never made her happy when he took control over her body. The bond between mates allowed them to do such a thing and being out of control wasn't something she liked. She'd done well with her shift before and didn't need his guidance. Her glare deepened as another memory came to mind. "And speaking of that, I don't need others to walk me into a building."

Briggs' confused expression only deepened. "To walk you where?"

She stepped forward and poked his chest. "I don't need Dante walking me in and out of buildings. I can do that myself, you know." Valor cleared his throat loudly and Rynn snapped her irritated gaze to him. "What?"

He chuckled softly and waved at the bloody scene before him.

Rynn sighed. Oh right, this wasn't the time for such a conversation. She glanced over to Briggs giving him *the look*. "Don't force the shift on me like that again, no matter how urgent you are. Got it?"

Briggs winked, a smile in his gaze. "Heard loud and clear."

Damn him, he looked more amused than anything else, which only irritated her. He always did enjoy when she got tough with him. Instead of fuelling his amusement, she let it go knowing now was not the place to voice that irritation. Besides, she also knew that he'd never do it again. As much as he enjoyed when she got all spunky on him, he always respected what she said.

That she could count on and the heat that burned her blood began to settle.

Just as the last remnants of her aggravation fluttered away, Karson asked, "Did you catch the trail?" Clearly, by his curt tone, he was completely infuriated at the change in conversation.

Rynn nodded, feeling momentarily stupid for her reaction when they were dealing with this, but it irked her when Briggs took control like that. He never used to do that. And it coincided with this Alpha nonsense that had found its way into the soft mate she

loved. But now was not the time for that. She quickly forgot that whole business and moved on. "He smells diseased."

"Diseased?" Valor repeated.

"Yeah, it's like he's sick or something." She shrugged. "That's all I can explain it as. He seems like he is very ill."

"That's odd," Tiago said to Valor, incredulous.

Valor nodded, equally as taken back. "Indeed very odd."

Apparently, Rynn missed something. She couldn't quite figure out if they meant it was odd that he was sick or odd that she scented it. "Sorry, what's odd?"

Valor waved out to the scene and gave her a knowing look. "If this wolf is sick he shouldn't have the strength to do this." He cocked his head, curious. "Can you try and explain more in-depth what it smelled like?"

Rynn internally groaned. She was still discovering what different scents there were. Putting them into words was going to be difficult. Taking a deep breath, she focused back on the scents, tried to make sense of out of them. After a moment, there was only one thing she could come up with. "He smells dirty."

"Dirty like mud?" Briggs asked.

"No, it's like..." She sighed deeper, frustrated. "I can't explain it. It's just like when I smell you all," She waved out to the men around her. "You smell like wolves. A doggyish smell, trees, fur—all of that kinda stuff. With him, he has all those smells, but he carries an odour that is so pungent and just wrong. Like the wolf that lives within him isn't right, just like Zia said." She huffed, let out a bit of that frustration. "Does that make any sense?"

Briggs brushed his knuckles against her cheek, gave her that sweet smile that always stole her breath. "Aye, love, it does."

Rynn knew he was only placating her because the others still looked confused. She was half-annoyed, half-peevish and more than ready to get this show on the road. If they got closer, Valor would scent it himself. He'd do a better job at explaining this. "All that matters right now is I've caught his trail. Let's go, then you will see for yourself."

They didn't need another invitation. A split second passed before they all shifted. Once on all fours, Rynn put her nose to the ground and started toward the scent, Briggs flanking her side. It was his position to be directly beside her to keep her safe. In normal procedures, the roles would be reversed, but she needed to stay in front to follow the path.

Two hours later, their paws continued to slam against the ground as they hunted this killer. Suddenly though, the scent was lost. She raised her nose to the air and couldn't locate it anywhere. It just up and vanished.

"*What is it, love?*"

"*Just wait a sec,*" She raised her head to the sky again but the scent had completely gone astray. Immediately, she stuck her nose to the ground and started off in circles. After a few minutes, she caught the scent and punched forward. "*It's this way.*" Briggs was instantly beside her with the others right on their heels.

Miles passed beneath their paws as they continued. The sky was dark now and if Rynn's tired body had anything to say about it, it was well into the night.

Just as that tiredness began to sink deeper, a nip came at her side. When she slowed, she stumbled a little. With the loss of footing, she began to fall, only to be grasped

immediately in strong arms.

“Gotcha darlin’.” Briggs’ voice was powerful around her. She looked up to him and he smiled down to her. “May I help you here?” he asked gently.

She nodded without thought. Yes, she told him she didn’t want his help and she was grateful that he asked instead of just acting. But she was exhausted and doubted she would have the strength to shift herself. He pulled on their bond and within seconds, her human body was wrapped in his arms.

Briggs gave her a concerned look, brushed his finger under her tired eyes then glanced at the others. “We will stop here for the night.”

Valor nodded, breathing heavily, as was the entire group. “I hadn’t anticipated that he would be this far.”

Tiago bent over at the waist, hands on knees, and tried to steady his breathing. “Nor did I.”

Karson didn’t look winded at all. He was full of energy and ready to go for as many hours as it took to find him. “If we wait, he could get away.”

Briggs glared at the man before him. Rynn felt his anger burn through her blood. “My mate is exhausted. We are not going to push her.”

“But...” Karson started.

Briggs instantly tensed. Rynn felt a fight stirring. In hopes to stop it, she intervened, “Listen, the scent is getting stronger. It won’t be gone by morning and honestly, I can’t go further. I’m not used to running like this and I’m sorry I have to stop, but really...I’m just so tired.” She truly was. Now that she stopped, her eyes were heavy, her limbs complete jelly. Her body refused to take another step.

Karson examined her a moment, then resigned. “You do look worn. I apologize for seeming unkind, it’s just...”

Valor patted Karson on the back with a loud thump. “We understand your need here, but Rynn is our priority and we will see her well.”

Karson wouldn’t dare argue with him. No one questioned Valor’s orders without severe repercussions. Instead of saying anything, he shifted and settled himself on the ground, his head on his paws.

Briggs glanced down at Rynn. “Let’s shift, darlin’. It will keep you warm as we sleep. I ask again, do you need my help?”

The twinkle in his eyes couldn’t be ignored. If she wasn’t as exhausted, she was sure he would tease her now. At the same time, she did see concern there. He didn’t want her to strain herself. She nodded and let him control her. She was beyond tired and her entire body trembled with exhaustion. Her muscles felt tight and her lungs physically hurt from the run.

After he placed her on her feet, drew on their bond and forced the shift on both of them, Briggs laid down first and rested on his side. “*Come in close, love.*”

Rynn immediately responded, snuggled into his side and he tightened his legs around her. She tucked her snout into his front legs and let out a long deep sigh. The last thing she heard was Briggs’ low rumble of a growl soothing her off to sleep.

Chapter Fourteen

The air around Rynn felt cool when she awoke. Her fur brushed with the wind. She stirred a moment wondering where the feeling of cold came from. She was in such a deep sleep she questioned if she was dreaming. As another chill ran through her, she realized she wasn't.

With a groan, she forced herself to awake completely. Another ten hours of sleep would have been good. As the world restored itself, she suddenly became aware of noises around her. A loud growl came right near her. Instantly, she opened her eyes to a scene she had to wonder again if she was dreaming it. Within the lightened sky were wolves attacking each other viciously. Nothing made sense.

They lunged and snapped out at each other in an attempt to force the other to give in, but no one relented. She looked around quickly, tried to ascertain if these were werewolves or just a pack that happened to stumble across them and attacked to maintain their territory.

It only took a moment for her to see that they were Weres. All of them much bigger than any ordinary wolves she saw in the zoo. But why were they attacking them? She lifted her nose and smelled the air. They didn't have the scent of the killer they had been stalking. So, what had pissed them off?

Suddenly though her thoughts froze as a wolf stalked toward her. "*Briggs!*" she screamed out in her mind.

"*Get back,*" he roared and lunged himself at the wolf in front of her which sent them to roll around with loud growls.

Still in wolf form, she ran backwards and sank behind a tree. She wasn't really afraid not with Briggs, Valor and Tiago with her. She doubted any wolf would overpower them. All that filled her was confusion. Her sleepy reminder told her that her brain just wasn't able to comprehend all this at the moment.

Right then, a loud yelp echoed through the sky and Valor's voice came out in a roar. "Stop this immediately."

Instantly, the growls got quiet and when Rynn glanced out from around the tree, she saw that three men had joined their group. "My apologizes, Valor. I didn't recognize you until you spoke," one of the men said.

Rynn focused on Briggs, immediately shifted then ran toward him. He held his arms open and she snuggled into him when she reached him.

Valor's voice came deep with unhappiness. "Who are you? And why have you attacked us?"

The man who spoke earlier stepped forward. He had been injured in the fight and his shoulder oozed blood. Considering he seemed so violent, the soft look about him now was puzzling. Everything about him seemed kind, right down to his soft grayish eyes and sandy-coloured hair.

"I'm Nolan." He glanced to the other two with him. "Leo and Percy." Both men nodded a hello. Typical beach bums they were, blond hair, mesmerizing eyes and bronzed skin that Rynn was instantly jealous of.

"You have entered the Maryland territory." Nolan stated.

“Maryland,” Rynn gasped. They had run so far that they entered a new state. No wonder she’d been so tired.

“Baltimore to be exact,” Nolan added.

Valor ignored the pleasantries and continued in a curt tone. “And I ask again why have you attacked us? I’m sure that Micah would not have approved this order.”

“In fact, it was a direct order from him to attack anyone not from our territory and to disable them until we could question them,” Nolan replied.

Briggs looked completely taken back, his shocked filled Rynn. “Why would he issue that?”

“We’ve had murders here,” Nolan responded, quite serious. “Micah is on full alert.”

Rynn exchanged a knowing look with the others of her group. They were definitely on the right path and this killer apparently was continuing with his rampage. For a small moment, she felt ashamed that she’d needed to rest. Had her sleep caused another life to be taken?

Briggs gave her side a little pinch and she glanced up at him. “None of that, now.” His eyes said it all—she had needed the rest and was being silly to think otherwise.

Before she could respond to him, Valor cut in. “Take us to Micah now.”

Nolan nodded to Percy and Leo and they led the way. “We have some cars not far from here.”

As they followed in behind Nolan, Rynn still felt tired and wondered how no one else did. Briggs seemed a little sluggish, but not like her, the way she dragged her feet along the way, she felt a thousand pounds. Briggs kept an arm around her waist and bared most of her weight, which she was undeniably grateful for.

When she stepped out of the deep forest they’d been in, Rynn immediately saw a sign, *Interstate 83*. She almost laughed. It was amazing how she thought they were so lost deep in the woods but in actuality were quite close to civilization. To her, she felt deep in the outback, not only a few miles from downtown Baltimore.

The others approached the two black sedans that sat on the side of the road. Valor gave them a curious glance as he stopped by the cars. “How did you know we came here?”

“We have scouts looking out for intruders. They saw you come through and when you slept, we were called.” Nolan gave Valor a stern glance. “I’ll make sure the wolf who called me gets what’s coming to him for not looking closer and realizing it was you.”

Valor waved it away with a sharp move of his hand. “It was dark. He did his duty well.”

Nolan didn’t look impressed. But the words were said. The wolf couldn’t be punished, there was nothing he could say or do to him. Rynn had to agree with Valor, it was so dark out how could anyone see clearly.

They piled into the cars with Rynn resting on Briggs’ lap. She shifted to look at him better. “Do you think it’s the same guy?”

Briggs pondered that for a moment then looked at Nolan. “When did your murders take place?”

Nolan glanced at Briggs in the rearview mirror. “The one was a week ago. The other was just the other day.” His gaze turned speculative. “You have an interest in these murders?”

“We were in Philadelphia for the same reason,” Valor answered.

Nolan's eyes went wide. "And the reason you came here..."

"Our Blue Blood followed his scent here."

Nolan now turned around fully and eyed Rynn. "This is the new Blue Blood?"

Briggs growled a little and Rynn felt those protective feelings spark a bit of heat to rise in her body. He didn't like the tone Nolan used or that he was even looking at her. Again, his Alpha had the hairs on his neck standing upright.

His voice was gravelly as his eyes narrowed. "She is that and you can turn around now and keep your eyes on the road."

Rynn may have laughed at his ball-bashing behaviour if she wasn't so damn tired. It wasn't like Briggs to seem possessive, but every once in a while, she caught him acting this way. She was only glad he had enough sense to reign his Alpha when it controlled him. That was an argument she didn't want to have.

Nolan did what he was asked but laughed it off. "She tracked his scent all the way from Philli to Baltimore?"

Valor nodded.

Nolan sighed, but said nothing more on the matter.

The silence spoke volumes. Nolan obviously worked directly for Micah, which meant he felt a responsibility for the wolves around him. Right now, they were all in danger.

The wilderness soon faded away to busy city. High skyscrapers filled a pretty spectacular sky line. Nolan drove through the packed streets until they left the business district and entered the residential side of town.

Classic row houses lined the streets—all similar with limestone brick and marble stairs leading up to thick dark oak doors. Some were painted while others had a natural look.

A few minutes later, Nolan pulled off to the side. "We're here."

After he cut the engine, they exited the car. When Rynn stepped out it was a bit of a surprise to know an Alpha lived here. From what she'd seen so far of an Alphas living quarters, they were always so luxurious. Mansions the size of a mini mall, this place seemed small and simple in comparison.

Valor headed up the stairs with the group trailing behind. After he gave the door a firm knock, it opened to a powerful looking fellow with long smoky hair pulled back in a tight ponytail, dark eyes that held immense strength and a hardened look to his lips that showed he suffered from serious tension. "Valor." His gaze widened with curiosity.

Valor held out his hand and he shook it. "We need to talk, Micah."

"Of course," Micah responded. "Please come in." He opened the door wider and behind him stood Maddie, the Blue Blood that Rynn met not long ago. She looked as she did the last time, exhausted.

Rynn stepped past Micah, not caring about introductions or the fact that she just sideswiped an Alpha. "Hi, Maddie."

She smiled very shyly. "Hello again."

Rynn glanced around a little. The illusion that this house was small was just that, an illusion. Yes, it was thin from the outside but it went back an entire block. Very huge and with marble on just about everything, she couldn't deny the cost of this home was upwards of a few million. She forcefully stopped her ogling of the home and glanced back at Maddie. "Do you belong to this pack?"

Maddie nodded. "Maryland is home."

Rynn couldn't help but notice that Maddie looked even more tired since the last time she saw her. She looked frail and unwell, and that didn't sit right with her. Now that she was bonded to the Blue Bloods, it was as if she could sense her tiredness and it cut in deep within her.

"Why have you come?" Micah asked. Rynn turned around to see that he had directed the question to Valor.

"May we go and sit? It's been a long night," Valor replied.

Micah nodded toward a sitting room and they followed him in. Rynn waited for Maddie to go first and she noticed how her feet dragged along the floor. She was being worked to death and Rynn was eager to throw a serious hissy fit directed at Micah. Maddie was his to look after and he was doing a piss-poor job at it.

She could feel Briggs' stare on her, clearly he sensed what she was feeling and tried to figure it out. As much as she wanted to tell him, this situation took precedent and she would have to wait to do that.

They all took seats in the sandy leather couches around a large mahogany coffee table resting in the center of the room. She wasn't at all surprised to find rich furniture surrounded by deep burgundy painted walls. Every Alpha had homes made for movie stars.

As Micah sat, he asked, "What's going on?"

Valor gave the skinny version of all that had taken place, including their following the wolf's scent into Baltimore. Really, it was such a condensed version, Rynn thought it didn't sound nearly as scary as it actually was. But Valor just had the sense of calm about him. Whenever he spoke, he always made stuff seem better than it was. She usually appreciated that about him, but now, she felt like jumping up and screaming, 'there is a crazed killer on the loose.' Not that she would. Instead, she sat and kept her mouth closed tight.

By the end of Valor's recap, Micah leaned forward with interest. "Our deaths are a mirror image of yours. The manner of death is the same, the victims all being male, even the way female witnesses were left untouched."

Valor sighed and that left the group pondering this coincidence.

Finally, Rynn broke the silence, unable to keep her thoughts to herself. "So there are two of them?" She assumed this back in the car when Briggs had asked this same question. Considering no one had further mentioned it, she thought it a good point to bring up.

"I suppose there must be," Valor replied with a slight nod of his head. "Since the killings here occurred around the same time in Philadelphia, it's the logical assumption."

It took all of a second for Micah to respond. He stood, determined, from his chair and his harsh gaze landed on Maddie. "You must get back out there and find them before more of our wolves are destroyed."

Maddie didn't even look from her hands to nod.

That was enough for Rynn. She was about to lose control. Maddie didn't belong to Micah as a mate, she could tell because if she did, he'd never put her through this. What kind of man worked a woman like this? Briggs or Valor would never send her out in the state Maddie was, ever. Her health always came first. Rynn couldn't stand the sight of Micah ordering her around and not taking her feelings into account. Couldn't he see how

tired she was?

Briggs nudged her leg with his finger, concerned. "Doing okay, love?" Clearly, he could sense the anger that was burning her blood.

She turned her gaze toward him, completely burning with rage. "No." she said through gritted teeth.

Briggs brows came together and just as his mouth parted to speak, Valor cut in. "You have something to add?"

Rynn had been in this situation once before when she opened her big mouth. It wasn't a comfortable feeling but she couldn't let this continue. She was part of the Blue Bloods now. They were her pack. If she didn't look out for the soft-spoken Maddie, who would? She pointed to Maddie, determined. "Do you not see her?" she demanded of Micah.

Micah glanced at Maddie who stared at Rynn with wide eyes. "Yes, I see her, she is sitting right there." Clearly, he was confused.

"No I don't think you truly see her," Rynn snapped. "If you did, you would see that she is totally exhausted. So, I ask again, do you see her?"

Micah returned his gaze to Maddie, frowned slightly, then looked back to Rynn. "It's her duty to help with these matters."

Rynn's breath drew back into her body with a loud whoosh. What she was about to do would no doubt have consequences. The truth of the matter, though, she didn't give a rat's ass. She shot up from her seat, glared a hard look at Micah. "It's your duty as her Alpha to see to her well-being."

Slowly, but surely, Micah's powerful gaze shifted from confusion to scary as hell. Rynn nearly backed down but the challenge in his eyes did only one thing...made her wolf go bitch.

Chapter Fifteen

The clock ticked by as Micah had a stare-down contest with Rynn. She could barely breathe, the air stifled. It was clear what she had done was something Micah wasn't used to. Even more, he didn't appreciate it one bit.

Micah took a step forward and growled at her. "Are you implying that I do not care for my pack?"

"Yes, that's exactly what I'm implying." Rynn's enraged tone never wavered. She could sense that Briggs held himself back from jumping up and throttling Micah for speaking to her in that tone, but she knew he was pleased to see that she showed some authority. He'd been encouraging her to speak her mind. "Even if I wasn't bonded to her, which I am, I would see how exhausted she is just by looking at her."

Micah snorted a resigned sound. "What are you getting at?"

"She needs a break, that's what I'm getting at."

Micah examined Rynn a moment, then a slow grin spread across his face. "Is that an order?"

Rynn was momentarily stunned. Her position within the wolves meant she held authority over them but she never used it, until now. Nor ever thought she was entitled to do so. Micah must have heard this about her. He thought she wouldn't step up and prove herself. For a moment, she doubted that she would either, but something rose up within her that demanded she do this.

Maddie, as a pack member was hers to look after. A responsibility that was buried deep within her and Rynn knew it was the wolf instincts coming through. Briggs was right, she was accepting more of this in her and not until this moment did she see it. Did she acknowledge that there were definitely two sides to her that were fighting against each other? She'd never before stood up to a man like Micah, but now, with the power she felt within her, he was a significant thing.

"Yes, that's an order, she needs a week." She hesitated a moment. "No, make that a month off. We'll just have to do this without her and everyone can just deal with it."

Valor gave her a curious look and a small smile turned up the corner of his mouth. "You do realize that will make you quite busy."

Okay, she hadn't thought about that, but it didn't matter, Maddie needed time off. "Well...everyone will just have to wait. I'm only one person." She pointed between herself and Maddie. "We can only do so much. Working us to death isn't right. We can't be everywhere all the time. They will just have to hold their horses." She ended her little rant with a sharp nod.

Pride resonated off Valor, especially in his eyes. "You heard the Beta's mate, a month it is."

Rynn sucked in a breath, quite proud of herself. Letting the wolf within her out to play every once in a while might not be such a bad thing. She would have to remember that and trust herself more. It was more than a proud feeling, she felt right where she belonged. She was part of the Blue Blood pack. They were hers to look after as they would do the same for her in return. She just proved that she belonged with them. That gave her an empowerment that overwhelmed her.

Micah's expression was slightly annoyed when he looked toward Nolan and gestured toward the door. "Take her wherever she wants to go."

Nolan approached Maddie and helped her up. Instantly, Rynn noticed the love between them. They were mated. It was there in the way he held her so gently and the soft, relieved expression on his face. He was equally as worried for her. But of course said nothing to his Alpha on the matter. Being mated to the Beta suddenly showed her just how much freedom she had. Not everyone had the control she did.

That got Rynn thinking, and before it was too late, she snapped out her next order. "Nolan too."

Micah's gaze flicked back to Rynn and he looked nothing short of royally pissed. "You're taking Nolan from me too?"

Rynn nodded firmly, maybe even lifted her chin in superiority a bit. "She needs him." Then, she placed her hands on her hips. "That is an order too, by the way." She was getting the hang of this and it felt good to boss people around who had no other choice than to listen to her. Not like she'd abuse it, that just wasn't her, but still this was a little fun.

Micah huffed as he glanced at Nolan. "Fine, you're relieved of duty for a month—no longer."

Maddie and Nolan met Rynn's gaze and expressed how grateful they were to her, but she didn't need a thank you. It was the right thing to do. Truthfully, she suspected that this moment gave more to her than it did them. She was feeling the wolf, the power of it, the responsibility she had as the Beta's mate and that would have an everlasting effect. She couldn't doubt that. "Come stop by sometime when you're all rested up."

Maddie stepped forward, wrapped her arms around Rynn's waist and hugged her so tight. "Thank you," she whispered in her ear.

Nolan pulled her a little, which drew Maddie away from Rynn. He kept his arm around her waist as they left the room.

Micah watched them leave, then let out an annoyed breath as he glanced to Valor. "I'll need to call in others." He spun on his heels and as he headed out the door he said, "Make yourselves comfortable, this could take a while. Percy, Leo, with me now," he called out and then they left.

The moment the room cleared, Valor turned to Rynn. "Well done!" His voice showed his happiness as he gave her a pat on the back. "Coming more natural now, isn't it?"

Rynn shrugged. He was right, but she'd never point out how stubborn she had been. They told her over and over again that she'd eventually discover this strength within her, but she never believed it to be true. She wasn't about to state that she'd been wrong. "I'm just happy they listened. Did you see her?"

Valor's tight mouth declared that he did. "This will be a good break for her. I have not seen Maddie in a while, I'll be sure to keep a closer eye on her."

Rynn was smiling on the inside and out. Feeling empowered was just a complete state of bliss. She glanced over at Briggs who still sat on the couch. When she met his gaze, that happy feeling quickly washed away to a complete confused state.

He sat with a stern expression on his face—everything tense with emotion. She had upset him that much was quite clear. "What's wrong?" Had she screwed up? Valor seemed pleased with her, why wasn't Briggs?

He stood and nodded toward the hall. "Come with me. Now."

Rynn glanced around, confused. She had done a good thing here. Briggs had been relentless about her power over the Alphas, always insisted that she speak her mind. Now that she had, he was pissed. Nothing made sense.

Briggs expression was unyielding. "You may give orders, love, but so can I." He pointed to the hall. "Get your sweet ass moving."

A smart retort was on her tongue, but quickly died as she thought this over. Darn it, she couldn't have it both ways. She couldn't give orders and expect others to listen and not give the same respect back. Briggs outranked her not only as her mate but also as the Beta. Even though she didn't want to, she went.

The second they were out in the hall, Briggs grabbed her around the arm and not in a gentle way either. She squealed as he pulled her into a bathroom. He pushed her through the door and slammed it behind him. Then, he turned his severe gaze on hers and began to approach her in long strides.

Rynn had never seen him so intense, so furious with her. The only way she could respond was to back away from him and pray he wasn't about to unleash his wrath on her. "Listen...I..." she started.

He raised his finger to his lips, silencing her. She slowly closed her mouth but never stopped backing away from him. He was so angry with her, yes, but it was more than that. He was stalking her and the fierceness that lay in his eyes stole her breath. Never had she seen this predatorily look from him before. She hadn't quite decided if she was scared or not, but knew that she was uncomfortable. When her back hit the wall, she glanced around for an escape. She didn't find one.

Briggs closed the distance between them and wrapped his hand around her throat, pushed her hard against the wall. She gasped from the strength of it, but as his mouth claimed hers, she melted right into him.

Relief washed through her that it wasn't anger that oozed from his pores. His body trembled and arousal burned through him. She'd misread his look and it dawned on her why it made her uncomfortable. It wasn't of fear that he was angry at her, but of giving complete control to another.

This was the first time that her human didn't stand a chance against the wolf that rose within her. He demanded she submit to him and she wanted to. His lips were sharp against hers with harsh demand. She opened her mouth to allow him entry and swirled her tongue with his as he tightened his hand around her throat. It wasn't constricting or painful. It dominated her and aroused her to a place she'd never gone.

The Rynn who lived in her before would never have stood for this. To be held so firmly without the chance to move. It would've frightened her too much, considering what she'd been through in her past. But the wolf in her knew he wouldn't hurt her. He craved to dominate her and nothing in her would refuse him that right. He deserved that sense of strength. He tore his lips from hers to slide kisses along her cheek over to her ear, where she could hear his rough breath of urgency. Her eyes closed and she moaned the need to be taken in the way he offered.

Keeping his hand on her throat, he used the other to lift her shirt then push up her bra so her breasts became exposed. As he trailed his hand along them, her nipples hardened, ready for him. She arched her body in anticipation and he hesitated as if he was going to be cruel and make her beg and writhe for him, but apparently, he needed her just as

much.

He lowered his head and licked the little knot and she let out a loud, shuddering moan that sounded slightly strangled since his hand was at her throat. He drew away and bit the other nipple and a deep quiver went straight through her. She expected something like this to be painful but it was a type of pleasure-pain that aroused her more. She had never wanted him as much as she did now. This strong side of him compelled her to lose herself completely.

She wiggled beneath his hand and his head snapped up. “Do. Not. Move,” he growled.

Without even thinking of it, she froze, stone solid. His power over her demanded it and in this moment, he was the one who would decide the plan of action. She let the little flickers of control leave her mind and gave him what he craved—the authority over her body. The choice to do as he pleased because as a wolf his ranking declared he be listened to and not be questioned. If he wanted something, it was his to take and right now, all he wanted was her.

With his hand still at her throat, he used the other to undo her jeans, pull them off and then yanked her panties down quickly.

His gaze stayed glued to hers and she was stunned by what lay in them. They were filled with an intensity that she didn’t know existed in the man she had grown to love. It didn’t mean she wasn’t happy to see this side of him. The way he held her, attacked her body with force, made the wetness between her thighs feel uncomfortable. The throb of her sensitive flesh was the only thing hurting her here.

She wouldn’t dare move or show him the need she had. The wolf within her told her to stay put and listen to her Alpha. Just so happened, the human part of her agreed.

He grabbed the belt of his jeans, snapped them open and within seconds they hit the floor. He kicked them away then nudged her legs open with his knee, took one of her legs and raised it up onto his hip. In a move so quick and forceful, he plunged himself deep inside her.

Rynn gasped at the initial stretch. She had been so aroused and craved this from him that it came with a pleasurable relief to feel him slide in deep. He kept his hand at her throat, his face just millimetres from hers and began to thrust upwards—powerful, hard strokes that were so deep she’d swear he was stomach bound.

She could only close her eyes from the strength of it. Nothing was gentle about him and that made her realize that before this moment, he had been very careful with her. Probably because she had been violated by another not long ago. He obviously took care not to be rough with her because he thought it might scare her. Now, that didn’t apply. His hard length inside her was meant to prove his point, and it was one she heard clearly. He could dominate her if he chose, but he never did.

Except for now.

Chapter Sixteen

At first, Briggs was proud of Rynn. He had waited for her to become more confident and take her place among the wolves. But the more she spoke, the more the Alpha in him roared to demolish that dominance within her. The wolf within her shone through and even though she didn't know it, she'd caused his Alpha to stand up and take notice.

It willed something in him he had never felt before. The moment he saw her dominance over Micah, his Alpha demanded that she recognize who held the power in their bond. A need that filled him to a point of insanity—one that he couldn't control and one he wouldn't deny.

When he first approached her in the bathroom, Rynn backed away from him and his Alpha wanted to howl at the sight of it. She knew he was stronger, more powerful than she was and that was exactly as it should be. His Alpha burned to take her.

Now that he was, he let the Alpha take over. He moved harder, slammed against her in the most dominant way to satisfy her. He'd never felt the need to pull the climax out of her. He always worked her gently toward it. Now, he couldn't find it in himself to do that. He demanded that it come because he wanted to see it, feel it and most of all hear it.

He pushed her harder against the wall and she was pinned, helpless. He knew if she asked him to let go, he wouldn't. Not now. Not with his Alpha exposed and ready to take his woman in this fashion.

She gasped in loud short breaths.

He stared into her wide eyes. Not from fear, he was glad to see. They were taken by the pleasure she was suffering. Water dripped out of the corner of her eyes and his Alpha roared when he saw it. He was driving her to tears from the overwhelming sensations she was experiencing. He wanted to see more. He lifted her leg that sat on his hip and raised it higher so it stretched across his shoulder.

It gave her the extra edge she needed. He could feel her tighten around him in a way she'd never had before. He knew exactly what that meant. He thrust harder, needed her to give him this—aroused by the fact that she was capable of such a thing.

He gripped her thigh and went at her with every ounce of strength that lived in his body. She might have been screaming but so was he. His moans were deep and echoed in the large bathroom while he gritted his teeth and demanded she release to him.

Briggs could feel the wetness of her grow immeasurable and felt the trickle run down his thighs. He waited until the rush of liquid along his body had faded and gave in to his own climax. He grunted loud and with a final hard thrust, his release washed over him. His muscles contracted and his entire body went rigid as his groin throbbed with each pulse.

When the hold forgave him, his forehead rested against hers, he took several shuddering breaths. As each breath passed through his lungs, clarity began to return to him and he realized what he'd just done. Now that the Alpha had been sated, he was more aware of himself and horrified at the way he'd just taken his sweet mate. He immediately gasped, withdrew his hand from her throat and released her leg. "I'm sorry." He quickly stepped away.

With the release of his hands, Rynn melted to floor in a swift movement. Her head

bowed to the ground and her body sat lifeless.

Briggs immediately reacted, lunged forward and grasped her by the arms. He had knocked her unconscious and shame swept through him. "Forgive me. I've hurt you."

Slowly, she raised her gaze to his and when they connected, she looked sleepy. Briggs sighed in relief to see that he had not strangled the poor woman. "What?" she exhaled.

"Darlin', are you all right?" He shook her a little.

Her entire body moved like a doll, no muscle strength to her body whatsoever. "No."

Disgrace sank deep. What had he done? He let his Alpha control him and now he had hurt her. He began to back away, ready to get as far away from her as he could.

Obviously, he couldn't trust himself.

"Just where are you going?" She gripped his arms, stopping him.

He couldn't even meet her gaze, thoroughly ashamed of himself. "I'm sorry for what I've done here."

"You're sorry?"

He nodded.

She laughed quietly. "You think I'm angry at you?"

Briggs still couldn't meet her gaze. He'd always been so careful with her. Fuck, she'd been raped not that long ago. She shouldn't have been handled in such a way by anyone, especially her mate who had promised to always protect her.

"When you showed yourself as dominant, the Alpha in me took over. I've never experienced that. I'm sorry that I couldn't control it. It won't happen again, I promise you."

She grabbed his face, drew his gaze to hers. He was surprised to see amusement dance along her face and her pretty eyes twinkled at him. "You know, you really shouldn't doubt the wolf in you. You two are joined." She kissed him below his eye. "I saw him there in you." Wasn't she clever, throwing his words back at him. "I've never seen that before."

He laughed, shook his head at her. She was smart, he gave her that. He just did what he'd been telling her that she needed to get past. The Alpha was a part of him. Therefore, if the need to show himself took Briggs, he couldn't refuse it. Nothing felt worse than eating his own words, but he'd eat them daily if it meant that she had accepted her wolf enough to understand why the need had taken him. Even more so, that she enjoyed it.

She withdrew her hands from his face and glanced down. She frowned slightly as she reached out to touch her thighs. "What is this?" She examined the shiny liquid on her finger.

Briggs took her chin, brought her gaze back to his. "It's just the evidence of a completely spectacular night."

"Huh?" She looked back at the shiny liquid again, completely perplexed. Then her eyes went wide in understanding. Quickly, she jumped up and went to the sink. She turned on the water, grabbed a cloth, added soap and got to work. "Eww..."

Briggs forced his laugh back, stepped forward and took the cloth from her hands and got on his knees to clean her. "I have my release, you have yours." He said wiping her thigh and her lovely feminine part. The Alpha in him roared to life again knowing that he gave his mate satisfaction she'd never known was possible.

But seeing her horrified expression, it took everything in him not to laugh at this, but

he wouldn't embarrass her. Apparently, no one ever told her about a G-spot orgasm, and he wasn't going to make her feel mortified because of that. She blushed a little and shrugged. "Well, that's okay then, I guess."

"Better than okay, love." His voice grew deeper with a husky edge. "That was the sexiest damn thing I've ever seen."

She giggled, then got serious as she crossed her legs. "Now I need some alone time for girly things." She threw his jeans at him. "Out you go." He quickly stepped into his jeans, picked up his shirt off the floor as she pushed him toward the door.

Briggs buttoned his jeans and buckled his belt. He ran his fingers through his hair to remove some of the sweat and then threw his shirt on. He re-entered the sitting room and the moment he did laughter erupted around him. His laugh came loud too. "Not quiet then I take it?"

Valor was bent over, red-faced from laughing so hard. "Quiet? I doubt you both understand what that even means. Is she still alive?"

"By the sounds of it I would say that she isn't."

Briggs just huffed at Tiago and slumped down on the couch beside Valor.

As he did, Valor slapped him on the back. "To see your Alpha come out never ceases to amuse me."

Briggs snorted a laugh. "It may amuse you but I'm just glad I didn't hurt her." He very well could have, but his pleasure remained that she had in fact liked that. He hadn't known she liked it rough, but now that he did, he would indulge in that more often. Especially considering how her body responded to him. Of course, she'd had climaxes before, but apparently, she needed a little force to bring her to total fulfillment. Something he wouldn't mind entertaining once in a while.

Valor reigned his laughter and gave him a stern look. "She did well though, no?"

"Aye. Her wolf stood strong tonight. I'm quite proud of her." He truly was. Finally, she was taking steps to be the woman that she was now. Not only was she commanding respect from the Alphas, she also looked out for her fellow Blue Bloods. He couldn't have been happier in this regard.

Karson cleared his throat, a sound that seemed forced to stop his laughter. "So that is why you nearly killed the woman?"

Briggs ran a hand through his hair again and sweat clung to his fingers. "The man was thrilled with her. The Alpha didn't like it and wanted her to know her place."

"Know my place?" Rynn said, her tone sly. "And what exactly is that supposed to mean?"

Briggs was too tired to move, his eyes strained to the side to see her in the doorway. "Just a statement of truth, love." He hadn't meant for her to hear that, but he wasn't withholding it from her either. It was the power he felt within him at that time, she needed to know that he could and would dominate her if he chose to.

He expected her to lash out at such a comment, but she didn't, she smiled a sexy grin, walked over to him and sank down onto his lap.

"A truth I enjoyed," she whispered in his ear.

Chapter Seventeen

Normally hearing such a thing from Briggs' mouth would have Rynn raising hell. But she understood it now, which she hadn't before. The truth was that he could completely overpower her if he chose to. Not only was he physically stronger and could pin her, but the power of the bond they shared created a way for him to use it to disable her.

Knowing it made her blissfully happy. He could do it, but he never did. It made her appreciate just how much he loved her. He didn't want to control her or be voiceless. He wanted her to show her strength, voice her opinions, and if he gave that to her, then she could let him have control sometimes too.

Just then, Micah re-entered the sitting room with Leo and Percy following behind. "We can go. I have some of my pack meeting us at the last scene."

Rynn hesitantly got to her feet. She wobbled and laughed. "Wow, it's like I've got no bones."

Briggs laughed with her and grabbed her around the waist as he stood. "I've got you, darlin'."

She smiled up at him. "Yes, you surely do." Then, she leaned up to kiss his lips. Sometimes the words *I love you* can get old, but the way they said it, just like this—it never did.

Valor nudged Rynn on her shoulder to push her forward. "You'd think after that escapade you would've had enough of each other."

Rynn giggled. Briggs just grinned at his boss.

Valor laughed with a shake of his head and walked by as Briggs took Rynn's hand to follow behind him. As they stepped out of the house, Rynn took in the gloomy skies. Obviously, a storm was brewing and she just hoped they found the trail of these wolves quickly. Being out in the woods in the middle of a thunderstorm held no appeal to her.

Micah got into a truck and waved them over. Valor took the passenger seat, Briggs and Rynn scooted in the back.

Once settled into the seats, Micah started the engine and glanced at Valor. "The scenes have been of a horrific nature, is that what you experienced in Philli?"

Valor nodded, solemnly. "Extremely."

"Maddie spoke of a sickness shrouding him." Micah put the truck in gear and drove off down the road. He looked in the rear-view mirror at Rynn. "Did you catch that also?"

"I did. It's like he's ill or something." She was pleasantly pleased to know that Maddie had experienced the same thing. At least, she hadn't been wrong.

Micah's brows drew together in frustration before he looked at Valor. "What could cause such a thing?"

Valor shrugged. "Your guess is as good as mine. Without scenting it for myself, I can't say what it is."

Micah just sighed and returned his gaze to the road. "Let's just hope we catch them soon. This is all very unsettling."

No one needed to respond to that. Not just one sick wolf was on a killing rampage, but two—yes, very unsettling.

Micah drove a while longer, left the booming city behind and headed back into the country. Within minutes trees surrounded them. He pulled off onto the gravel side of the road, cut the ignition and they all exited the truck as Micah led the way. The others climbed out of the car behind them, Tiago and Karson rushed up to walk beside Briggs and Rynn.

She could only guess it was because they wanted to get to the wolves first. If they were close to Rynn the moment she scented them, they could act. Karson still raged over the loss of his son and she doubted he'd let any of the men here kill the one responsible for Jordy's death.

Even though Micah led the way, he didn't need to. The moment she got out of the car, the scent was heavy around her and the closer they got, the stronger it came. The same stench of death that was impossible to breathe in. The idea of shifting right now didn't appeal to her. The fact that a grown man had died here, the amount of blood was staggering and the scent was incapacitating. If it was this bad in human form, she could only imagine what it would be like as a wolf.

None of which she had any interest in indulging in.

Only minutes into the forest, Micah stopped and glanced back at Rynn. "This is where the man was killed."

She nodded grimly. "Yes, I know." The blood still sparkled on the grass. Her gaze cut to Briggs' and he gave her a nod to shift. She sighed deeply before doing so. Then, reconciled if she did this, it meant this would end. That's the only reason she acted now. Quickly, she called on the magic and let her wolf overtake her soul.

On all fours, she closed her eyes and inhaled deeply. The scent of death immediately overwhelmed her and the urge to vomit pushed her. She gulped back the bile that lingered in her throat and demanded her mind focus elsewhere.

It took a few moments to shove it away, but she eventually got there, concentrated only on the scent of the wolves. There were only two wolves here and now that she knew had the sickness scent, it wasn't hard to place the wolf that had done this. The scent of the victim smelled rancid, but his wolf scent was clean, yet strange.

"*Find it love?*" Briggs asked, nudged her side with his nose.

She opened her eyes to see that all the men around her had shifted. Before she could answer a group of four more wolves ran toward them. She glanced back at Briggs quickly. He didn't look tense.

She stepped closer toward him and he looked back at her. "*Micah's pack.*"

A sigh of relief came from her mouth before she inhaled again deeply. What she didn't want was any more unwanted wolves here. This was enough to deal with. It only took three more deep breaths before she had locked on the killer's trail. She glanced at Briggs, feeling confident she could do her duty. "*Ready?*"

He nodded his powerful head, ears alert and his amber eyes glowed with adrenaline. "*Go on darlin', I'll be right with you.*"

Without another word said, she lunged forward, followed the scent that drifted along the ground. With each step, she attempted to place what the illness was. She tried to concentrate on the way a disease might smell. Like cancer would smell consuming and lethal. To her this just smelled so wrong. There wasn't a logical answer for it.

They kept on and she knew at any moment the others could outrun her. Her strength was not in speed, but none of them overtook her. Briggs stayed by her flank and Valor on

the other side of her. Protected from danger, she was relaxed as much as she could have in such a situation. The others simply stayed back and allowed her to lead the way.

With each pound of her paws into the ground, the scent grew stronger. Briggs and the group behind her increased with tension. She could not only sense it in them, but smelled it across the air. It was exactly what one would smell when men hunted a predator—thick, rich and full of testosterone.

The killer's scent was stronger now and drifted along the air, horribly consuming. She couldn't get away from it no matter which direction she placed her nose, the scent engulfed her. She sneezed a couple times, tried to get the sickened smells out of her nose, but it was pointless. The scent was too strong, which meant only one thing—these wolves were close.

Just as they cleared a small stream that ran through the forest, the smell became too pungent, too near and Rynn slowed.

Immediately, all of the men shifted around her and she followed suit. She glanced around a couple times. "They're here, both of them."

Briggs took a protective stance closer to her, as did Valor. "Can you tell where, love?"

She shook her head and glanced around. "No. It's like the smell is everywhere—unsettled. They can't seem to stay in one place for long, so they move around and leave their scent everywhere." She looked back at Briggs, knew he was as worried as she felt. "I can't say exactly where."

Briggs took her hand, jaw clenched as his eyes scanned the forest. "Don't worry, we'll all protect you."

One by one, the others all nodded his words as true. She took relief in that. She wasn't a killer and even though Nera had taught her to defend herself, she doubted she had the skills to do anything here. She knew what these two wolves were capable of. If they came at her, she wouldn't survive.

Valor inhaled deep and looked at Rynn. "I understand what you're saying. It's as if they only stay in one place for a few minutes and then move on quickly. Their scent is completely surrounds us." He wrinkled his nose a little. "This smell though, I have smelled this before."

"You have?" Rynn gasped, relieved that Valor would make sense out of it all. Since she couldn't find a reason for why they smelled the way they did. It was nice to know that someone could.

He nodded, tension rippled through him. "They're not ill, they're crazed."

The others seemed to know what he was saying, but Rynn didn't. Needing clarification, she asked, "Crazed by what?"

Valor's voice came out gentle when he responded. "Don't you remember what I told you when you came to join us? If you could not shift and gain control of yourself you would go mad."

Rynn thought back to what felt like years ago and the memory of the conversation settled in her mind. It was why meeting Nexi was so important at the time. Her friendship had saved her life. If a person didn't gain control over the wolf within them, it would take over and that person would be lost forever. "So, that's what has happened here?"

"Yes."

"How can that be?" Karson suddenly spoke up. "No one hearing of it or Alphas

dealing with it.”

Valor shook his head looking completely at a loss. “I have no idea why these two wolves have become lost in themselves. If they belonged to an Alpha, he would have dealt with it. These are grown wolves doing this, which means they had to be part of a pack at some time. The bond to their Alpha as we know it would have come through if they had been lost and he would have known.”

“Might be rogues.” Briggs interjected.

Valor pondered that, his brows furrowed in thought. After a long moment, he finally said, “I suppose that’s the only assumption as to why an Alpha didn’t know of this.”

Rynn felt silly, but she didn’t understand this conversation. Everyone else nodded in agreement. Instead of feeling like a fool, she voiced her confusion. “Why do you assume that?”

“When a wolf leaves a pack the bond created is severed.” Briggs replied.

Now that she was bonded to not only one pack, but two, she couldn’t even imagine losing the connection and shuddered in response. He gave her a knowing look as he replied. “Exactly. It’s not a desirable state.”

“Why would someone want that?” Rynn whispered.

Briggs shook his head slowly. “That I cannot answer, love.”

“Even rogues wouldn’t take to their wolf form long enough to completely lose themselves. They would have no reason to. Something doesn’t add up here.”

Valor huffed a sound of frustration. “This is quite a dangerous situation but at least, we now have answers for why they are killing in the manner that they are.”

Rynn glanced from face to face and all that she found was gloomy expressions filled with understanding. She still felt at a complete loss with all of this and needed to understand. Again, she didn’t care that she wasn’t up to par with everyone else and stated her questions. “Sorry, what answers would that be?”

Valor, as always, gave her a steady glance and didn’t appear at all put off by her questions. He never seemed frustrated with her and answered her without pause. “It’s why these wolves are killing the males and not the females. They’re taking out the threats so they can start a pack of their own.”

Rynn couldn’t believe that to be true. “Are you serious?”

“They live as wolves,” Briggs replied in earnest. “They think and act like them. This is a natural thing for them to do.”

Rynn gave her head a little shake at the outcome of this. It wasn’t at all what she thought, but now that it was said, it kinda made sense. The smell she scented was a werewolf who had been stuck in his wolf form. That was why he smelled ill. He wasn’t a natural being. He had been alerted and that’s why it smelled wrong. At least that part made sense.

Valor ran a hand over his face, which he always did when he had hit a rough spot. “We’ll not find them here and I doubt they’ll come out with this many of us threatening their territory.” He glanced at Briggs. “I think it’s in our best interest to contact Nera. Being that they’re obviously close, she might hear them and be able to pinpoint their exact location.”

Briggs nodded. “Aye.”

Rynn could see sense in that too. If these wolves were crazed, they would hide in fear from this many Alphas near them. While Rynn could track them, with their scent so

scattered, they were at a dead end.

Valor shifted and the others followed suit then ran the same path they came in on.

As they sprinted back through the forest, Rynn's mind swirled with questions.

Needing more answers, she asked Briggs, *"So these wolves can't be helped?"*

"No, darlin'." His amber wolf eyes met hers as they punched through the forest.

"Once lost, they are gone forever."

Sad, really. *"Why would that happen to them?"*

"As you heard there are only two reasons. One, they have taken to their wolf form and stayed in it too long and it has overtaken them. They've lost the human that lives within them. The second is what you could have seen in yourself. If you transform into werewolf and do not control it, it will consume you."

Rynn thought of that for a moment while she manoeuvred her way around a couple trees. *"Which do you think is happening here?"*

"Whatever it is, it's dangerous and not something I want you a part of."

"You and me both," she replied and pushed herself faster to get the heck out of this dark forest and away from these stinkin' wolves.

Chapter Eighteen

Briggs glanced down at Rynn, her head in his lap as she slept. These past couple of days had caught up with her and he could feel just how tired she was. He only wished she had longer than the couple hours of sleep she had so far. As Nera's voice came from the hallway, he knew her time to sleep was over.

He nudged her arm a little and she immediately stirred. "Sorry love, but rest time is over."

She groaned and rubbed her eyes, just as Nera's laugh came loud. They glanced up at a smiling Nera. "Comfortable?" she asked.

Rynn nodded. "Too much so." She glanced outside and Briggs followed her gaze to see it was pitch-black out. "What time is it?" she asked, glancing back at him.

"Three in the morning,"

Suddenly, a flash of lightning followed by a loud bang of thunder echoed in the room. She sat up a little, hesitation on her face. "We're going out in that?"

"Time is our enemy. We cannot wait."

Rynn groaned, looked unhappy as she met Nera's gaze. "What took you so long to get here?"

"I was doing a job for Sayer."

Rynn sat up completely, her eyes widened. "Echo's Sayer?" Nera nodded, confirmed that she was in fact talking of the mate of Minnesota pack. "How is she? I've been meaning to call her, but things have been..."

Nera laughed. "Crazy."

"Exactly." Rynn smiled.

"Echo told me to tell you hello and that when you are all done here, she wants you and Briggs to come up for a visit."

Rynn bounced with excitement, which caused the couch to squeak beneath Briggs. He understood her reaction. Echo was the first wolf who befriended her. "Has she healed nicely?"

Nera nodded. "She showed me the scar." She shuddered a little. "Not a good memory to go back to."

Rynn laughed quietly.

Briggs cringed. Yes, the memory of a woman trying to take Rynn's life but hitting Echo instead, wasn't really a memory he'd like to go back to either.

"I'm glad she's doing better." Rynn looked at him. "Can we go see them after this?"

Briggs brushed his knuckles across her cheek, enjoyed her soft skin under his touch. "Aye, we can."

Nera barked out a loud shout of laughter. "You know, it's been years since you lived in Europe, you think you'd kill the slang."

Tension hit Briggs tenfold, which Rynn noticed. She studied him intently. "You lived in Europe?"

He nodded, but definitely didn't want to get into it especially in front of Nera. He and his mate knew so little of each other and in truth, most of their conversations centered on her. The day would come when he would tell her everything but they were

short on time. "I did live in England for a short time."

"I didn't know that."

He smiled in hope that it would settle her questions to put off this conversation for another time. "There is a lot we don't know about each other. But we have time to discuss all this...just not now."

Her gaze examined him closely, her mouth parted as if she was about to ask him more when Valor interrupted them. "You all ready?" he asked when he came through the door.

Rynn gave Briggs another look and he did his best to stay emotionless. He wanted to keep this part of his past from her, uncertain what her reaction would be. He had secrets, ones that he wanted to remain that way, but he owed her truth. If the topic came up again, which the intrigued look in her eye said it would, he would tell her of his time there. More importantly, the *who* he went there for.

She sat a moment longer before her eyes cleared of questions and she looked at Valor. "Yeah, we can go."

As Briggs stood, Nera flashed him an apologetic look. Clearly, she realized she'd put her foot in her mouth. Briggs shook his head to relieve her of any guilt. The conversation was long due. She hadn't mentioned it to out him, only to joke about the language he still used from there. It was true, the time had made an imprint on his life, and he hadn't realized until now that he still hadn't let it go.

While he followed behind Rynn, he heard the rain pound against the roof and the loud rumbles of thunder. Going out in this wasn't going to be enjoyable in any sense.

Tiago waited from them by the door. He gestured down the hall while he looked at Rynn. "Mind coming this way first?"

"What's going on?" She eyed him curiously. Tiago said nothing, only smiled at her. Her gaze fell on Briggs. "What's going on?"

He put his hand on the small of her back and gave a little push. "Just go, darlin'."

She grumbled something he thought might be a curse word but since his mate never used foul language unless she was really upset, he figured he heard her wrong.

Briggs followed her down the hall. When she stepped into the room, a loud gasp escaped her mouth. Briggs could understand why. A large wooden table was full of food—salad to roast beef to chocolate cake—a feast indeed. His mate would think it was heaven.

"We wanted to repay you for your help," Tiago told her. "I assumed this is what you would ask for."

Rynn's eyes were alight with happiness. "Yum, yum, yum." She licked her lips and her fingers twitched with delight.

Briggs laughed softly as did the others. His mate's payment for her help was always in the food department. He thought this side of her entirely sweet. She never wanted anything valuable and to the others he could tell they didn't understand this about her, but he did. She loved food as others loved material possessions. Due to the hard times in her past, he knew she never got treated to good food, just cheap meals. To her, this was all she needed.

Rynn immediately pushed past them, grabbed a plate and got to work.

Briggs gestured to Nera to follow Rynn's lead. "Ladies first."

"Do you think she'll leave anything for us?" Nera laughed.

He winked and leaned toward her. "Better go quick. The woman can eat like twenty full grown men."

Percy and Leo heard the conversation, looked at each other and immediately sprang forward to help themselves before it was gone.

Briggs could only laugh.

When Rynn finished scooping the food onto her plate, she came back to Briggs and Micah, who stood beside him.

"You're going to eat all that?" Micah stared at her wide-eyed, his voice incredulous.

"Good grief, I really don't understand why you're all so shocked. Your women must not eat enough." With that, she raised her chin proudly and headed off to the living room.

The second she cleared the hall, Micah chuckled and looked at Briggs. "Where does she fit it?"

Briggs shrugged, unknowing. "I haven't a clue."

Valor grabbed a plate and waved to Briggs and Micah. "Come on, eat up, we'll need our strength."

By the time the men got through with the food, there wasn't even a potato left. Briggs threw his plate in the dishwasher and wiped his face on a napkin before he tossed it in the trash.

He made his way back to Rynn, found her on the couch in conversation with Nera. He laughed quietly seeing her flushed cheeks. He might be jealous of the impact food had on her, if he hadn't done better a short time ago. "Ready to head off, darlin'?"

She glanced up and rubbed her belly, which was slightly rounded. "Yes I am." Her voice sounded lethargic.

Briggs knew she was fully stuffed.

Tiago and Micah pushed through the doorway, past Briggs to kneel before Rynn and Nera. "Have you accepted our payment for your help in this regard?"

Rynn nodded. "Yes, it was scrumptious."

Tiago and Micah both laughed then looked at Nera. She held up her hand. "If it was good for Rynn, it's good for me."

Micah burst out laughing. "Rynn, you are saving us all millions."

Briggs, however, knew she was doing more than that.

She was saving lives.

Chapter Nineteen

Wolves are just so peculiar. Rynn contemplated as she stood in front of Micah and Tiago, her belly full and happy.

“Well if you’ve got money to spare, donate it to a charity.” That only made them laugh harder. Wolves were not givers, which she learned. Valor and Briggs were definitely exceptions to the rule. “You know, whatever happened to helping people out of the goodness of your heart?”

The men looked to each other and the laughter continued.

Rynn just shook her head at them. Geez, with all their money they could save a small village or at least build a couple schools. But she knew it wasn’t her place to suggest a thing. Their money, their business. Didn’t mean she wouldn’t offer the suggestion every now and again.

“Let’s go,” Karson demanded from the doorway. He was obviously anxious to get out there and seek his revenge.

Rynn wasn’t nearly as enthusiastic.

Nera stepped up beside Rynn, gave her a stern look. “Just remember what I taught you. I doubt Briggs will allow you to be in danger, but let that little wolf in you out. She’ll protect you.”

Rynn laughed, nerves rioting within her. “My plan is to hide and cower behind a tree until it’s over.”

“A good plan.” Briggs smacked her on the butt, caused her to jump and squeal and only made him laugh at her as he walked by toward the front door.

Rubbing her tush, she followed him. The moment she stepped outside the rain got louder. Rynn sighed miserably and ran as fast as she could to the truck. Really, not only did she have to go and find some crazy ass werewolves, but she had to do it in the rain. Nothing about this made her happy.

Quickly, she got in the truck, sat between Nera and Briggs. Within seconds, they were driving back to the place that Rynn would just as well avoid. It was hard for her to grasp what crazed wolves would be like. Would they appear rabid? Foam at the mouth or just look normal? Instead of mulling it over, she voiced her concern. “What should I be expecting from these wolves?”

Briggs’ lips formed a tight line and his brows drew together. “I’m sure what you having running through your mind at the moment is probably an accurate assumption.”

She groaned. “Wonderful.”

“Ahh...don’t worry about it Rynn,” Nera added. “If Rainer thought this was truly that serious he would have come. That makes you feel better, right?”

Rynn eyed her suspiciously. She could smell a fib a mile away. “You’re lying to me.”

Nera’s eyes widened and she raised her hands in shock. “I would never lie.”

Yeah right, the guilt was obvious on her face. “Stretch the truth then.”

Nera laughed. “Okay, well, maybe a little bit. Rainer couldn’t get away and Valor swore to protect me.” She shrugged, dismissingly. “What would you rather me say, that we’re about to face two very crazed wolves who will stop at nothing than to see us

dead?”

“Oh yes.” Rynn snorted. “That does sound much better.”

Just as the words left her mouth, a wave of protection washed over her—a very warm feeling of security. She glanced at the source just as Briggs said, “No one will get close to you, darlin’.”

Valor turned around in the front seat and gave them all a stern look. “Quiet now. Gather your thoughts and prepare yourself.”

Rynn sighed and glanced out the window as trees whipped by. Gather and prepare herself, just how was she supposed to do that? Instead of concentrating on that bit of fear, she focused on the windshield wipers that moved quickly and washed the rain away. She counted the swipes and by the time she counted fifty, the truck slowed as Micah pulled off to the side of the road.

Rynn drew in a deep breath as Briggs opened the door. He helped her out with Nera following closely behind.

She didn’t wait for the invitation to get started. More afraid if she did, she wouldn’t press on. Immediately, she drew on the magic, shifted and the others did the same.

Once in her shaggy form, she punched through the same path she’d run not long ago. Not only could she smell the wolves, but she could also scent the path they had followed not long ago.

She ran as quickly as she could since the others followed her short stride. She felt their urgency all around her. She needed to get there and do it now. The rain beat against her fur, but luckily, her thick coat provided a shield against it. She had no doubt that if she gave herself a shake she’d be dry. At least, she wouldn’t get too cold.

When they crossed the stream they had before, she slowed and stopped. The rain poured down her snout and she had to blink a couple times to keep the water out of her eyes.

“Any change?” Briggs asked.

“No. The rain has caused it to decrease, but I can still smell them all around here.”

It hindered the scent a little, but her abilities didn’t seem at all disturbed by it. However, she suspected no one here would be able to smell them now since the rain had washed the scent away.

Suddenly, Briggs shifted and focused on Nera. “You have anything?”

Of course, he couldn’t talk to her telepathically and Rynn almost felt bad for her mate. Without the fur around him, he would get cold from the rain and she could see goose bumps rising across his arms already.

Nera sat back on her haunches and closed her eyes. They all sat that way for well over five minutes. The tension built around the men and created a wave of thick air to fill Rynn’s nostrils. No one could stay in one spot. Karson was the most restless as he paced back and forth around them.

Suddenly, Nera’s eyes snapped open and she shifted. “I hear low growls coming from that way.” She nodded to her left, rain dripped off her nose. “I cannot tell if it is them or not, but I assume the sound is them breathing.”

Briggs gave her a firm nod and shifted. “*I would tell you to stay here,*” he said to Rynn. “*But I don’t trust you will be safe if I do.*”

Rynn glanced around, surrounded by darkness and scary shadows. “*If you think I would be okay to stay here alone, think again.*” Stay in a dark forest with who knows

what around her...no thank you.

Briggs smiled his wolfish mouth, which barred his teeth. "*Ahh...my little fireball returns.*"

Rynn returned the smile, even though she suspected it looked as nervous as she felt. Loud howls of the men filled the air around her. She blinked as water dripped in her eyes just as the sky lit up with lightning then followed up with a loud bang of thunder.

Quickly, the group was off, Valor in the lead and the others right on his tracks. Briggs was on Rynn's right, while she followed behind Nera toward unknown danger.

As they pushed forward, the only sound that came was echoing howls from a mile away.

Chapter Twenty

The rain continued to pour down around them. The sound of it hit the trees and bounced off to hit the ground hard. It was all Rynn could hear as she tried not to focus on the fact that they were about to approach some crazy-assed wolves.

Briggs stayed back with her while Nera led the way. It pleased her to be at the back of the pack and since so many strong wolves were ahead of her while she nestled against Briggs' flank was just fine with her.

She inhaled deeply. Yes, they were on the right track. The more they pushed on, the stronger the scent came. Her lungs burned as they pushed through the thick bush and her muscles tightened from the impact of each contact with the lush ground below.

Just as the forest began to open, the scent became strong—too strong. She skidded to a halt and Briggs let out a low growl. The others immediately stopped and ran back to where Rynn stood.

"They're here," she told Briggs, quickly.

Immediately, she recognized the others had caught the scent of them too. Low deep growls resonated around them. Teeth bared, tails raised high and bodies low to the ground and prepared for the fight.

The problem was that this area was not as secluded as Rynn would have liked. She stood in a clearing that lay between the thick forest with no cover. She saw Briggs glance around quickly, looking for a place to hide her. Just as lightning shot across the sky, a black wolf appeared on a large rock formation that overlooked the open space.

"Go now," Briggs roared to Rynn.

She didn't waste a second. She lunged forward and grabbed Nera's tail with her teeth. Nera let out a bark of pain and pulled away from her. Rynn persisted, never stopped pulling until Nera willingly came with her. She may want to fight, she always was a fighter in nature, but Rynn didn't want to see her hurt.

Rynn glanced a few feet behind her and saw the perfect spot. She punched forward, dragged Nera backwards by the tail. She didn't care that Nera stumbled along the way. She needed to get them to safety. As they ran across the opened space, the growls of the men grew louder.

She continued and ran as if her life depended on it. Not until they came upon the large rock did she stop. She immediately met Nera's gaze, which was less than pleased to be pulled away from the fight. But Nera was pack to Rynn. There was no reason for her to fight here. She could just stay mad and that was that.

Rynn kept Nera's tail between her teeth and pulled herself up close against her. After a moment, the pissed off look in Nera's eyes vanished and she sighed in resignation. When Rynn knew Nera had given up on getting away, she released her tail and glanced around the boulder. No one had moved yet. They all just growled at the wolf on the large rocky cliff. The rain was so heavy it was hard to see everyone clearly—impossible to tell who was who.

Everything in Rynn wanted to scream out to Briggs, tell him to be safe, but she knew better. He needed to focus. If she distracted him by entering his thoughts, she would break that concentration and endanger him. That she wouldn't do.

The wolf within her began to rise with vengeance. The knowledge of what these wolves had done started to consume her. Not only had they killed, but their victim was a young boy.

They should suffer—pay for their cruelty.

Feeling like this surprised her. Never had she been one to promote or condone violence, but right now, it wasn't going to upset her to see them destroyed. In fact, it astounded her to feel that she might enjoy watching it.

She gave her head a shake. Those were Briggs' feelings, had to be. She didn't like this part of the wolves—the violence and danger. It never sat well. How could she even think such a thing?

A loud growl made her snap away from her thoughts. It sounded Alpha. She focused her eyes on the group again. Valor had stepped away from the others and his growl rang loud with authority.

He was calling the wolf out to fight—to challenge his position.

The black wolf howled loudly and suddenly six more wolves moved up beside him. All males, Rynn knew that. They were large and strong-looking. Females just looked dainty next to the big males.

Fear stole her breath. She glanced at Nera worriedly and she returned the look. There were so many of them. Two scared her, seven sent terror right down to her whiskers.

Abruptly through the fright, strength poured through her. Briggs was preparing himself and Rynn felt it course through their bond. She tried to push away the fear stealing her breath and attempted to show her trust in him. If she was feeling him, he would be as well. She didn't want to hinder him by being afraid.

A crack of lightning followed by a horribly loud bang of thunder rang around them. Only seconds later, the wolves above attacked. Just as they did, Nera ran out from behind the rock, but Rynn bit onto her leg and pulled her back.

Nera barked and growled at her. Rynn never let go, couldn't allow her to be involved with this. Not with so many crazed wolves around them. The possibility of Nera getting hurt or even dying was high and Rynn wouldn't lose her. They shared a bond now. She needed Nera, and if anything happened to her, the void would never be filled.

Sounds of bodies bashing, teeth snapping and loud howls of pain echoed through the wide-open space. Rynn tried to watch but the wolves moved so quickly, it was impossible. She could only pray that Briggs was safe.

As her glance shifted from wolf to wolf, she saw that two of them drew closer. They fought so intensely, hit and took bites off each other, that even where Rynn hid she could see the blood fly through the air.

Rynn quickly pulled on Nera's unwilling leg and brought her back behind the rock. She didn't dare raise her head. Not wanting to see what was happening on the other side of the rock. She couldn't watch as someone died, the sounds of a weakening growl said that was exactly what was happening.

Just as the growls grew into whispers, a crack against the rock startled her. She glanced up and resting on the rock was a dead wolf. It looked down at her, eyes wide open as if staring right at her.

She recognized him immediately. *Percy*. He held the same soft blue eyes that she'd seen before in his human form. She gasped a breath and flew backwards and released Nera's leg. The moment she did, Nera was off like a bat out of hell toward the fight.

Rynn shot forward in an attempt to stop her but it was futile, she was already way out of reach. The attempt also left Rynn exposed and completely out in the open. There were bodies lying on the ground. Quickly, she searched for Briggs. She couldn't see him, but felt him still with her. She didn't trust herself, though, her fear was incapable of understanding anything. Was he one of the lifeless wolves on the ground? Urgency to find him took hold of her and logic left her mind.

Without thought, she pounced forward and the second she got closer, the scene was worse than she thought. If they weren't dead, they were close to it. They all had nasty bites, blood ran off with the rain. Some missed paws, others had gouges out of their sides. She couldn't tell if the wolves that were injured were part of her group or not.

And still, she couldn't find Briggs. She stepped in closer, glanced from wolf to wolf on the ground, but they all looked so similar. Where was he?

"Briggs!" she screamed in her mind.

He didn't answer her. She heard nothing but the fight around her. Fear consumed her. She ran closer, searched, prayed, but with the chaos around her, she couldn't make sense out of anything. *"Briggs!"* she screamed again.

Just as she finished shouting his name, a low angry growl came from behind her. She spun around to see the black wolf stalking her—closer with each step. Bared teeth, his lips pulled back in the cruellest of ways, nothing in his eyes spoke of the honour that lived in werewolves. Then she saw it, the way they were different. It wasn't their appearance that was different when crazed, but what lived inside of them. There was no compassion, no kindness—just raw animal.

It scared her.

She started to back away, her breath caught in her throat as the large wolf closed in. She glanced around quickly but everyone was fighting, everyone lost in the battle around them. She didn't have help.

"Briggs." Her voice came out as a loud cry from her wolf form. A sound only heard when faced in the moment of seeing one's own death.

The black wolf growled a final time, then he lunged. Just as he did, a flash of something swept before her eyes and she immediately recognized it.

Briggs.

He lunged at the wolf and tore at his throat. But the wolf wasn't incapable. He twisted his way out of Briggs' tight grip and responded by bashing his body against Briggs'.

Rynn gasped and jumped forward but stopped herself. What was she going to do? How could she have been so stupid as to stand out in the open like this? She could do nothing but sit and watch her mate go at this wolf and hope that he made it out of this safely.

She crouched low to the ground, kept her eyes fixed on the fight before her. She'd never witnessed him in a fight before and was awed at how powerful he was. He avoided the attacks thrown at him and quickly counter-attacked relentlessly.

Pride filled her.

He was incredible and made her realize her doubts were meaningless. He wouldn't get hurt here. His power couldn't be equalled and the wolf fighting him was going to die.

She blinked the rain from her eyes and just as she did, something at the corner of her eye caught her attention. Another wolf approached Briggs. He couldn't see this wolf

coming. He'd be taken off guard.

Rynn jumped to her feet and tried to speak, tried to tell him but all she could do was scream in her mind and that only resulted in loud barks from her mouth.

Briggs was so focused on the fight he never looked back—never caught her concern.

He doesn't see you. Go. Go now. Her mind screamed, but her fear couldn't hear it—wouldn't listen to it.

He's yours.

The roar within her came louder. She struggled against herself. The terror in her wouldn't let her move and as the wolf drew closer to Briggs, she continued to scream at him but he was so intent. He couldn't hear outside of the fight.

You're failing him.

The words became all consuming. The wolf within her was angry that she wasn't doing anything. That she was going to sit by and watch her mate die in front of her.

Protect him.

With that final roar, Rynn gave up the last remnants of her humanity. It couldn't remain in her any longer because what she was about to do defied everything she once believed in.

She dug her claws into the ground and pushed off, lunging forward. The wolf just rounded on Briggs and he was unaware that Rynn began her approach. She was going to surprise him and knew it was her only advantage. Compared to his size, she was tiny, but she remembered Nera's words.

"Do whatever you have to get away and be wise. Always keep moving and never let them get a hold of you. If you do, you'll be dead. Keep moving, always. Do not attack until you have them in the right position. Never until then, and when you do, go for the throat. Find the jugular and tear like no tomorrow."

Just as the wolf reached Briggs, Rynn flew into the air. She ploughed into him and didn't waste a single second. She wrapped her mouth around his throat and bit down with every ounce of wolf that lived in her.

The wolf immediately fell to the ground and slid against the slick grass. Rynn positioned herself on top of him. Maybe it was Nera's teaching or just instinct but her incisors went directly into the wolf's jugular. Immediately, he was rendered useless. He squirmed a bit beneath her, but he wasn't able to get away.

His blood poured into her mouth as she tore at his neck. The taste was salty and warm, but something inside of her enjoyed it—his death upon her tongue.

A loud crack came around her and with her mouth still on the wolf's neck, she glanced up to see that Briggs had his wolf up in the air by the neck and with a quick snap of his head, the wolf went completely limp.

Rynn returned her focus on the wolf beneath her. He was still moving and let out low whimpers. She continued to bite and tear, needed to put an end to the horror that these wolves caused.

She couldn't even tell how much time had passed when strong arms wrapped around her and pulled at her. "He's dead, darlin'. You can let go," Briggs said in a soft tone.

As he pulled a little harder, her teeth continued to snap as she growled and tried to lunge forward wanting to cause more pain.

Briggs held her body tight and grabbed onto her face, brought her gaze to his. "It's over," he whispered. "Come back to me now, love."

His soft voice and kind eyes instantly washed away the rage consuming her. Rynn lowered her lip from baring her teeth and breathed in heavily. The stench of blood was heavy in the air. Even worse than that, she could taste the blood lingering in her mouth.

She immediately shifted and as Briggs held her threw up violently. Horrified to see that what was coming out of her was in fact blood mixed with other horrible bits and the wonderful dinner she had earlier. The sight of it only made her retch harder.

Even though, the wolf rejoiced in the kill.

Chapter Twenty-One

Briggs continued to whisper soft words to Rynn as he rubbed her back. He could hardly believe that when he finished off the wolf, he found his mate killing another one. He wasn't sure if he should be proud of her or throttle her for putting herself in danger. Right now, all he felt was the need to comfort her.

Never had he expected her to kill except if it was to protect herself but judging by the way she trembled in his arms, she had made that choice to act. Now she tried to reconcile that in her mind.

The emotions that ran through his mate were enough to create a knot in his stomach. She was torn, horrified, but also settled. He couldn't make sense out of any of it.

After her stomach emptied, Briggs grasped her face and brought her gaze to his. "Better, love?" He wouldn't discuss the feelings overwhelming her unless she brought it up. She needed to deal with this on her own, come to terms with it in her own way. He wouldn't state his opinion and confuse her further.

She glanced around a little as she wiped her mouth, then back to him. "Are they all gone?"

"Aye, they are."

"Did we..." she couldn't even finish the words.

Briggs understood why. He sighed as he brushed the hair away from her face. "We lost Percy." Neither he nor his mate really knew Percy or even had a conversation with him, but he probably had a family who loved him, and knew that is what was on his mate's mind now.

"Well, look at you," Nera's amused voice came above him. "Here we all believe you are this soft little thing and you just ripped into the guy like you eat a chocolate fudge sundae."

Briggs gave the woman a stern look, but Nera simply smiled at him in return.

Rynn glanced down and Briggs followed her gaze to see that the wolf she had killed was in fact very dead. "His throat, it's gone?" she whispered.

"Ya think?" Nera laughed.

Rynn shuddered in Briggs arms and he tightened around her to give her comfort. "The blood..." she started.

Nera interjected. "You'll get used to it. Maybe one day you could make a blood pie out of it."

Briggs shot his gaze to Nera, what in the hell was she doing? "Nera," his tone held no misunderstanding in his displeasure of how she talked to his mate.

"Doesn't that sound appealing?" Rynn laughed quietly.

With Rynn's sweet chuckle, he realized why Nera was acting this way and knew he needed to regain himself. She wanted to lighten the mood from a very dark moment. Maybe he needed to take a few lessons from her on how to deal with his mate in regards to this. Maybe she didn't need to be coddled so much, just guided away from what had taken place. He would remember that.

Resolved she was all right, he took her chin in his hand to bring her focus back to him. "Are you all right with this then, darlin'?"

Her gaze fell as she pondered that a moment. Finally, she looked back at him. “Normally something like this would sicken me and I would be horrified and distraught by all this, but I can’t seem to find any of that in myself now. It was just the blood.” She shuddered. “Yuck! Very disgusting.”

Briggs could understand that.

Suddenly, however, all the tension around his mate left her as she smiled a proud smile at him that was a little mischievous too. “Little ole’ me saved your big Alpha ass.”

He laughed boisterously. As much as she’d been avoiding this part of what she was now, there was nothing in her that wasn’t proud. She did right by her mate and killed a wolf to save him. Briggs felt the same sense of pride within himself. He cupped her face in his hands and knew she could not only see the happiness on his face, but feel it as well.

“I suppose I’ll need to show you my thanks and shower you with rewards for coming to my rescue.”

She grinned. “You suppose right. And since Nera brought it up, I’ll start with a chocolate fudge sundae.”

Epilogue

Soft music filtered through the air as Rynn stood huddled around a coffin surrounded by flowers and green Astroturf, as well as many other wolves.

The sound of Sadie's cries circled around her as the woman nestled her daughter, Cassia, in her arms.

Rynn glanced away from them to the coffin, then at Briggs. "What did they end up telling Cassia?" she whispered.

"Car accident."

Rynn looked back at Cassia, relieved. Still, she knew this would have an everlasting effect on her. To lose a brother, no she couldn't imagine that. She could only hope that this family could salvage what they had left, recover to have a happy life.

This had been the second funeral she and Briggs attended tonight.

The first being Percy's. Rynn still felt so sad from that. After meeting his family, she wished she had more time to know him. From all she had learned, he was a person worth missing, but without truly knowing him, it was hard to do that.

Regardless, she felt horrible that he was taken from those who loved him. It only made her snuggle into Briggs more, a good hard reminder that life was valuable and never to take a moment of it for granted.

"For all who knew Jordy," Karson said from beside the coffin, drawing Rynn's thoughts back to the ceremony. "They knew he was a boy of free will. Full of life, zest and without him in this world—we are all at a loss."

Rynn gulped deeply. The pain in his voice was something that cut right through her. Knowing the boy or not, it was painful to watch and hear. She glanced up at Briggs with teary eyes and he met her gaze with equal sadness.

"I love you, boy," Karson shouted in a deep tone. "We all love you and there will not be a day that I do not think of you and miss you."

Rynn dropped her gaze from Briggs' as Karson lowered his head, sighed and then went over to the coffin and placed his hand on it. "Your body might not rest here, since I have no doubt the angels have taken you under their wing, but I will come every day to see you. If you need me, come here, boy. Daddy will find you."

Rynn burst into tears. She couldn't hold it in any longer. It wasn't just her either, everyone cried. Karson's words were so true to his heart and seeing a man pour his heart out and say exactly what he thought was humbling.

Karson went over to Sadie, kissed her cheek and then grabbed his daughter in a tight embrace. Then, he looked back to the crowd. "I thank you all for coming. Now, we must go home. Please give us the time to grieve and find peace."

Everyone nodded.

Tiago stepped forward and hugged Karson. "Whatever you need, you come to me."

Karson nodded, then left with Sadie, who walked with her head bowed behind him.

Rynn's heart ached. She didn't know what the future held for them, but she was glad that she was part of this. Glad to see that the one responsible for causing so much pain in these people's life was brought to justice. They could rest knowing that the wolf that took their boy wouldn't hurt another. When Karson helped his daughter into the car, Rynn

glanced up Briggs and he wiped her tears from her face. "It's so sad."

He nodded. "It's very sad, love." A few more tears escaped her eyes and he caught them with his thumb. "But this is why we do what we do. It's to see that this doesn't happen again."

She wanted to believe that, really she did, but she doubted what he just said was even possible. "But can it ever be stopped?"

Briggs sighed, deeply. "We are only two people." He grinned, even though his eyes still held sadness. "We can only do what we can."

She laughed quietly as he used her words back on her. "I suppose that's true."

The crowd began to thin and Briggs took her hand to lead her toward Tiago's car. She drew in a deep breath to send some of the sadness away. What was done was done. She'd never forget the people she met here, the lives that were lost, but she also knew she couldn't focus on the pain.

This was her life. She knew she'd have many moments in her life just like this one. The pain needed to remain here for her to move on and keep going. With a final look at the coffin as it began its descent into the ground, she gazed back at her mate. "So, what adventures are we in for now?"

Briggs smiled down at her, this time there was more truth to his smile. Apparently, he was doing the same with his emotions and she sensed that. "No adventures, love. It's time to go home."

"Well thank goodness..."

Before she could finish, Valor interrupted. "No time for home."

Rynn glanced at him as he sidled up beside them. "We're needed. We have to leave now."

Rynn's irritation flashed. She'd hoped to have a break between all this crazy stuff but that was obviously wishful thinking. Not that she'd ever stop hoping for that, but it was becoming apparent that it was a wish that would never come true. "What now?"

Valor looked from Rynn to Briggs and back again, tension radiated from him. "It's Nexi."

Briggs took a step forward, released Rynn's hand as his expression turned serious. "What's happened?"

Valor's expression mirrored his. "A revolution in the Underworld."

The Underworld equaled demons, danger, and the combination of the two scared Rynn.

Her lips slowly parted as Briggs and Valor turned toward her. The only sound in the air was the soft, frightened wail that came from her mouth.

The End

About the Author:

Stacey Kennedy is an avid lover of the paranormal romance and urban fantasy genres. If she isn't plugging away at her next novel, tending to her two little ones, she's got her nose deep in a good book. She lives in Ontario, Canada with her husband. Be sure to drop her a line at www.staceykennedy.com, she loves to hear from her readers.

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