



POWER OF *A*TTRACTION

BLACKSTONE HAVEN

TAIGE CRENSHAW

A Total-E-Bound Publication



www.total-e-bound.com

Power of Attraction

ISBN #978-0-85715-451-4

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Edited by Andrea Grimm

Total-E-Bound Publishing

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Published in 2011 by Total-E-Bound Publishing, Think Tank, Ruston Way, Lincoln, LN6 7FL, United Kingdom.

Warning: This book contains sexually explicit content which is only suitable for mature readers. This story has been rated *Total-e-burning*.

Blackstone Haven

POWER OF ATTRACTION

Taige Crenshaw

Dedication

To my mother who has always been my number one fan; although you are no longer with me I know you are smiling down at me getting published. To Marilyn my sister and second mother who has always believed in me. To my lunch buddies who listen to me ramble on about my writing ideas.

Chapter One

Fear swamped Wesley McCarty as he looked at the date on the newspaper in disbelief.
January twelfth.

He had lost six months of time and had no idea of what he had done. Swearing viciously, he leant back against the couch. He ran his hand over his head. The last thing he remembered was going to bed early. When he woke he was so relived, hell thankful, he hadn't dreamed.

Wesley looked down at his hands and breathed a sigh of relief.

"Thank God, no blood, cuts, or markings. You're doing okay, Wes."

Even as he said it, he knew it was a lie. It was just the beginning of summer when he went to sleep yet when he woke there was snow on the ground. He tried to remember what had happened.

Black waves of pain hammered in his head. He swallowed the nausea bubbling in the back of his throat. He breathed rapidly in and out. The feeling passed. After some time, the pain lessened and he could think.

Oh God, what is happening to me? I'm losing my –

Wesley cut off the thought before it could form. No. *There is a reasonable explanation. There has to be one.*

Wesley sat up and pushed the button for the answering machine on the table next to the couch. As the many messages played, he started to shake. By the last one he knew that one of his vague explanations weren't going to fix this. His friends who were also his business partners would want an explanation. Besides this one, there were times before that he had disappeared for a few hours, or days, and he had easily explained them away. This last disappearance of so many months would only make them question all the other times he had been gone before. He wasn't ready to answer any questions. He had no clue himself what was going on.

"What am I going to do?"

He slumped deeper into the couch and closed his eyes while he thought up various explanations for his disappearance. None sounded believable enough for his partners to buy.

With a sigh, he opened his eyes. His gaze landed on the tapestry over the fireplace. The profusion of colours of the scenic mountains, waters, and beautiful landscapes was a backdrop to a woman seemingly in the shadows. He couldn't make out her features, but still got a sense of her happiness and sultry beauty. Her head was tilting back, and she held her body as if waiting for something. When he had received the piece from his friend Ian McIntyre, the note had said it was called Prophecy. Although it should have seemed like a weird name, it somehow seemed to fit.

He remembered the note had also extended an invitation to come to Blackstone Haven.

With a sense of purpose, he stood. He knew where he was going.

You're running away. He ignored the voice in his head and continued to look at the tapestry.

The scene called to him.

In a swift motion, he picked up the letter opener from the table, turned, and threw it. It quivered, embedded into the wall behind him.

Shocked, Wesley stared at it. Slowly, he made his way over to it. A feeling of unease swept him as he saw the bug pinned to the wall with the opener. He curled his hand over the handle and tried to pull it out. He couldn't.

Tugging hard with both hands, he was able to release it. Wesley looked at the letter opener, then at the mark it in the wall.

"What the hell?"

His voice echoed in the emptiness. He glanced around the room that usually gave him comfort. The long, dark brown couches, chairs, and other items he had chosen years ago when he had bought the house seemed to not be the same. The walls were closing in on him.

"I've got to get out of here." Wesley turned quickly and made his way back upstairs.

Three hours later, he was shifting gears in his SUV. The tension in his shoulders and the closed in feeling had eased as he put the city behind him. He patted the head resting against his thigh. A tongue licked his hand.

"Newt, you're not getting any steak for dinner, no matter how nice you try to act," Wesley said.

A bark sounded, and he glanced at his copper-red and white Siberian husky, who had sat up beside him. Newton barked again. Her parti-coloured eyes—one brown, the other blue—twinkled with mischief.

“Don’t give me that look.” Wesley returned his attention to the road.

He had swung by Pan’s—one of his business partners—house to get Newton on his way out of town. He was grateful that Pan was out of town, too, or he would never have got away without questions. At least this time, they would know where he was. He had sent them all emails.

Newton barked.

“I’m not a coward. It is better not to talk to them right now,” Wesley defended.

Until he could figure out what was going on, it was best he went somewhere he could think and not have too many questions. He glanced at Newton.

She whined, as if sensing his distress. She curled against his leg and put her foot on his thigh. Newton whined again.

He glanced at her, running his hand over her thick coat. “It’s okay. We’ll figure out what’s happening.”

Wesley glanced back at the road.

A man stepped in front of the car.

Wesley hit the brake. The seatbelt jerked him. The car hit the man and he went flying, landing a distance away.

“Oh, God.” Shaking, Wesley unhooked his seatbelt.

He glanced at Newton. She barked. His hands pulled open the door and he quickly got out. He ran to the man.

“Are you okay?” Wesley asked as he skidded to a stop beside him. He leaned over to help him, and the man’s hand flashed out.

The man turned to him, mirrored glasses hiding his eyes. His strong jaw and features seemed familiar, as did the long raven hair that shifted around his face as he turned his head and tightened his hold on Wesley’s arm.

Wesley brought up his other hand, but the man blocked it effortlessly. A small, cruel grin curved his lips.

An image of eyes almost translucent grey flashed in Wesley's mind, and a sting on his arm made him jerk back. The man released his hold. Wesley's head swam. A growl sounded behind him. He turned. Newton flew across the road towards them. He saw her stumble and fall.

"No!" Wesley screamed.

It came out instead as a weak murmur. He stumbled to Newton, but his knees buckled. Nausea swamped him. Blackness clouded his vision.

The man walked into his line of sight and knelt next to Newton. He ran his hand, seemingly gently, across her fur then looked at Wesley, a malevolent smile on his face. Then darkness swallowed Wesley, and everything went black.

Wesley jerked awake and looked around frantically, his heart pounding. The room he was in was unfamiliar. He swung his legs out of bed, and his foot touched fur. He looked down and saw Newton by the bed. She barked weakly and tried to stand, but couldn't. Shifting his legs, he got down by her side and searched her for marks. He felt none. She licked his hand then laid her head back on her paws.

Cautiously, he got up and walked to the windows by the door. He stood to one side and looked out. His dark red SUV was parked in front of the door. He tested the door and it opened. Quickly, he stepped outside onto the porch and glanced around.

A little distance away he saw a house. He continued to glance around and realised there were a bunch of them. Confused, he turned and went back inside. A paper on the table caught his attention. Going over to it, he picked it up.

Blackstone Bungalows. Check in February first at 8:15 p.m.

His legs wobbled as he saw the date and his signature on the bottom. Wesley reached for a chair, pulled it out, and sat.

"Three weeks. I've lost almost three weeks." Wesley stopped, considering. "Or have I? What is real? What's happening to me? I was in my house, and I went for Newton to get out of town. We were driving, then—"

He stopped, trying to remember how he had got here, but couldn't.

Fear coated his skin, and he breathed rapidly. "Did any of it happen? Is any of this real? It has to be. I'm here. Newton is with me. How did we get here?"

A weak bark grabbed his attention. Newton was dragging herself on the floor towards him. Getting up, he ran to her.

"Newton, what's wrong with you?" He leaned over her and felt her pulse. It was weak and thready. Her eyes were unfocused. Quickly, he stood, lifting her in his arms. Frantic, he looked around the room for his keys. Spotting them on the table by the bed, he went and grabbed them. Slipping his feet into his loafers, he ran out the door to his car. He put her on the passenger seat, then ran around to the driver's side and got in.

"Hold on, Newt." Wesley turned on the car and drove down the road.

He tapped a key in his dash, and his computer slid out from its compartment. Silently, he thanked Pan for insisting they all have their cars outfitted with the special computers so they could work from anywhere. He rapidly punched in a request for the nearest veterinarian. Within seconds, the screen displayed the address with directions.

"We'll be there in ten minutes, Newt. Hold on." He touched Newton.

Her breathing was laboured. Wesley pressed down on the gas and roared past the office where a sign read *Blackstone Bungalows*. In minutes, he spotted what he was looking for. He screeched to a halt and jumped out of the car, going to the passenger side. Picking up Newton, he ran to the door, pushing it open with his hip and continuing inside.

"I need some help!" Wesley called.

He looked around the empty waiting area frantically. Spotting a door, he headed for it.

The door opened, and a woman stepped out. She looked at him, then at Newton. A frown filled her café au lait face, while her amber coloured eyes blazed with anger.

"What have you done to that dog?"

The fierceness of her question made Wesley's fear increase.

"Please, help me. I don't know what's wrong with her."

"Give her to me," the woman demanded.

Wesley tightened his grip on Newton. The woman's eyes narrowed as she sensed he wasn't letting her go. She held open the door, then gestured.

"Fine. Bring her back here."

Wesley walked through the door and waited for the woman to pass him. He followed her down a long hallway and into a room. Putting Newton down on the table, he watched

her every move closely. The woman quickly hooked Newton up to a machine to monitor her pulse, then took a blood sample.

The woman looked at him. "Wait here while I check this."

Wesley nodded. The woman left. He leaned over Newton. She opened her eyes and barked weakly. Tears burned Wesley's eyes.

"I don't know what I would do if anything happened to you." He touched her muzzle.

Newton butted his hand and licked his arm. Wesley hugged her. Newton sighed and snuggled into him. He listened to her breathing as she slept. A sound made him look back.

The woman stood in the doorway looking at him. "It's as I suspected. Your dog has been drugged."

"Drugged?"

"Drugged. Now we need to know, Mr. McCarty, is how."

The fierce tone she used captured his attention. Then it registered what she had said.

Wesley stood slowly. "How do you know my name?"

The woman arched an eyebrow at his question. Wesley moved subtly and waited to see what she would do.

"We knew the moment you arrived in Blackstone, Mr. McCarty."

Wesley tensed at her statement.

The woman continued. "Besides, my sister owns Blackstone Bungalows."

Wesley tried to remember how they had ended up there. Nothing came to him. He didn't even remember checking in.

"My sister mentioned that your dog looked sick. I was on my way to check on her."

"Why would you come to check on my dog? You don't even know me." Wesley frowned.

"All animals in these parts are my responsibility." The woman got an unfathomable look on her face.

Wesley didn't understand what was going on.

The woman put out her hand. "I'm Dr. Grayson."

Wesley took her hand and shook it. A weird look came over her face, then was gone. He blinked, wondering if he imagined it.

Dr. Grayson walked over to Newton and hung the bag she held. Wesley hadn't seen it in her hand. A feeling of unease filled him as he watched the doctor.

"What's that?"

"Saline to help flush the chemicals out of her system. There is nothing else we can do. She'll have to sleep it off. How did she get drugged, Mr. McCarty?"

She slipped in the question so easily, Wesley answered automatically.

"I don't know. I don't even kn—" He cut himself off, realising what he had almost said.

"You 'don't even know' what?" Dr. Grayson turned and looked at him, her eyes intense.

Wesley tried to pull himself out of her compelling gaze.

Dr. Grayson gasped, then stumbled back.

Wesley reached for her.

She put up a shaking hand and waved away his help. "I'm fine. Focus on Newton."

Newton barked and he looked at her. He glanced up and saw Dr. Grayson was gone.

"Let that run for a few hours then you can take Newton and go." Dr. Grayson said.

He looked at the door and saw her standing there watching him. Wesley narrowed his eyes. "That's it? What kind of vet are you? You don't even know if I was the one who hurt her, and you're letting me take her."

"You're not the one who drugged her." Dr. Grayson got the same fathomless look on her face then turned to leave.

"How do you know that?" Wesley took a step towards her.

She turned, a serene look on her face, and gestured at Newton. "She would have told me." Her face went cold. "And if you had been the one, then you would answer to me."

Speechless, Wesley watched her leave. Newton barked, and he went over to her. He patted her and looked at the empty doorway.

"She's one spooky lady."

Newton barked in agreement.

Wesley glanced at her and frowned. "Am I losing my mind? What's happening to me?" There was anguish in his tone.

Newton licked his hand and whined.

Wesley gripped her fur. "First we take care of you. Then we head over to Ian's."

He pulled his chair closer and watched her.

Newton watched him in return.

"Let her sleep it off and she should be fine."

Wesley looked at the nurse who had unhooked Newton and brought him the bill for her care. She smiled at him.

"Where's Dr. Grayson?"

Surprise filled her eyes, and she replied, "She was called away on a case."

Wesley frowned. Her statement seemed false.

The nurse patted Newton and left.

He picked up Newton and walked down the hall where the nurse held the door open for him. "Thanks." Wesley mumbled as he went out.

"You're welcome, Mr. McCarty, and welcome to Blackstone Haven. We hope you enjoy your stay," the nurse replied.

There was a twinkle in her eye he didn't understand. She closed the door.

He walked across the waiting area and pushed open the outer door. Wesley stopped and looked up at the clear night sky. The full moon was partially obstructed by a dark cloud. The cloud funnelled and was gone.

Wesley shook his head. He had to have imagined it. Striding to his SUV, he hit the switch to unlock it, then opened the door and placed Newton on the seat. He patted her. She sighed and went back to sleep. Wesley went and got into the car. He tapped in Ian's address into the computer for directions. Reading them, he pulled out. A little over two hours later, he continued driving up the winding roads. He had passed the road that led to Ian's house a while back, but continued driving. The crisp air of the mountains soothed him.

He pulled the car over to the side of the road. The wheels bumped along the rough ground. Stopping, he turned off the car. He knew it was foolish to stop. He glanced at the sleeping Newton then got out. Wesley stood and looked at the area before him, awash in moonlight. The moon cast an eerie glow around the trees and flowers. He could hear the sound of water somewhere. He took a deep breath. A sense of anticipation filled him. With a laugh, he walked towards the wood.

Reaching the trees, he started to run. Effortlessly, he shifted on the path, avoiding logs, rocks, or anything that might stop him.

How am I doing this? he wondered.

The sense of exhilaration washed away all the questions forming in his mind. The wind rushed past him as he picked up speed.

Suddenly, he stopped then cocked his head to listen. The sweet, sensual sound came again. The laughter was husky and made his cock harden. Drawn to it, Wesley padded on silent feet towards the sound.

Standing in the shadow of the trees, he stared at the beautiful ebony nymph. She twirled under the moon. Her laughter spilled over the clearing, drawing him. Wesley took a step towards her. The woman turned and looked at him.

A sense of urgency filled Peyton Blackstone. She didn't notice the lengthening shadows coming through the floor-to-ceiling windows. In a movement she had done millions of times before, she moved the flying shuttle along the cloth and used her other hand to comb it down. Jazz, her favourite music, played softly in the background. Her hands flew over the task. The sound of the shunt along the cloth didn't give her the sense of calmness it usually did. There was a feeling in the pit of her stomach she couldn't define.

Suddenly, she stopped and stilled. Peyton turned to look blindly out of the window. She closed her eyes and tilted her head to the side. After a few moments, she felt it; a sense of expectation was in the air. In a fluid, graceful motion, she stood. She didn't look at Zuri, her favourite loom, as she usually did after working on a tapestry. With quick steps, she went across the massive room, never sparing a glance for her huge variety of looms. She continued without pause out the door, then down the three staircases to the ground floor. Unerringly, she went through her darkened, generous living room, down the hall, and to the front door.

At the door, she took a breath before opening it. The feeling she had upstairs came at her with a power that almost made her stagger. Peyton locked her knees so she wouldn't fall. She murmured softly, and the feeling lessened. She rushed outside, then down the stairs. With a turn to the left, she continued on, past her house and around the corner. The sense of urgency spurred her on. Although her thoughts urged caution, Peyton couldn't seem to stop or slow down. She hadn't felt a sense of evil when she opened the door, but even so, she

would usually be more cautious. No matter how safe they felt in their hometown of Blackstone Haven, she and her family had learned to always be on guard.

All thoughts of being on guard seemed muffled as she went rapidly around the corner of her house; the open area lay before her, beckoning. She reached the clearing between her house and the woods. With a burst of movement, she started to run. The wind tickled along her face like a lover's caress. Her hair whipped behind her as she ran. The ground was soft against her bare feet, while the scent of the air was sweet and lush. Reaching the trees, Peyton didn't slow. She dodged to the side and continued on. A laugh of joy bubbled up inside her, releasing a canopy of sound. Her laugh broke the silence. The forest echoed with the sound and gave it back. She changed course to the right then burst through the cover of trees into another clearing. Abruptly, she stopped in the centre, glancing around. The moon bathed the verdant beauty of foliage and the gentle sway of trees in an eerie glow.

With another laugh, she spun in a circle, then stopped and swayed in time with the music of the forest. Peyton turned, then stilled. Captivated, she took in the sleek movement of his hard body.

Chapter Two

He came at her with gracefulness and purpose in each step. His sun-kissed face was carved planes and angles put together by a master artisan. It enthralled and compelled. The fullness of his mouth made her mouth ache to take a nibble, then suck his lips gently into hers. As he got closer, Peyton was arrested by his ice blue gaze, which was surrounded by curling lashes. A shudder of longing raced through her. Peyton licked her lips. His eyes followed the movement. A decadent smile curved his lips.

He reached her and pulled her against his heated body. A moan spilled from her lips. A sensual laugh rumbled from him. His arms banded around her. Peyton looked up at his face. The hunger in his gaze made the breath in her lungs stall. He lowered his head. His lips covered hers as if she were his. She melted into his body and let him take her. He nipped her lips gently. At her gasp, he took advantage and delved his tongue inside of her mouth. With a firm stroke, he licked along the side of her tongue then hummed. Her nipples pebbled, while wetness drenched her aching slit.

A weakness filled her, making her knees buckle. His arms held her up for his taking. With another flick of his tongue, he licked along the roof of her mouth. Fire raced along its path, then down her throat and straight to her clit. Wild moans bubbled from her. He swallowed them as he continued to master her with his kiss. Peyton tried to think clearly, but only thoughts of wanton need filled her. His hands lifted her. Instinctively, Peyton wrapped her legs around his waist. A whimper broke through her moans at the sensation of his hardened shaft pressing against her skirt-clad mound. Distantly, she felt his hands scorching a path along her right leg, and in its wake, cool air touched her skin.

She locked her legs tighter around him, grinding against his cock, trying to get some relief for the ache she needed filled. He shifted. Peyton moaned as his heated shaft rubbed along her silk-clad pussy. With a glide of her hips, she rubbed against him. He growled deep in his throat and bit her. Peyton gasped and reality intruded.

She stiffened in shock and tried to get away. The man trapped her arms and increased the pressure of his kiss. Her mind went fuzzy with desire. His tongue plunged in and out of her mouth, mimicking thrusts. Her pussy flooded even more. The man chuckled in her

mouth. It made her slit clench in reaction. At that, Peyton came to her senses. She wrenched her lips away from his. Wide eyed, she looked at the man who held her effortlessly against him. His ice blue gaze was hungry and slumberous. He lowered his head.

“Yioules,” Peyton whispered huskily.

She felt herself start to fade and watched his shock. As she went into nothingness, she heard his roar.

“No!”

In moments, she came back to her form. Peyton staggered. With a shaky hand, she reached for something to hold onto. Her fingers brushed smooth wood. Grabbing it firmly, she held herself upright, breathing harshly and shuddering uncontrollably while her heart beat a wild tattoo. When she was sure she could finally stand on her own, Peyton staggered forward. She glanced absently at her weaving room and various looms. With a turn, she faced Zuri, her favourite loom, and looked up. She reached out to touch the images she had created.

The tapestry rose from halfway up the floor-to-ceiling loom. The vivid richness of colours tantalised the eyes. Yet Peyton was transfixed by the face staring back at her. It was the man she had been kissing. She had captured him perfectly, right down to the slight scar over his right eyebrow. Peyton staggered back and dropped to her knees. Fear filled her. She had never seen him before. He was a stranger. A stranger she had almost fucked blind without them ever exchanging a word. She raised a shaking hand and pushed back her kinky, curly hair from her face.

Peyton knew in her world, there was no such thing as coincidence. Everything happened at a time and place for a reason. The ramifications of what happened tonight could mean so many things. She closed her eyes, dropping her head. She wasn’t prepared for any changes. Not now. There was too much going on in her family for any distractions. A cool wind blew against her, enveloping her in a comforting embrace.

“Oh, God. What am I going to do?”

* * * *

“No!” Wesley roared as the woman seemed to disappear.

He clenched his fist. The feel of her soft skin was still against his palms. His legs gave out and he dropped to his knees, not even feeling the hard ground against them. His breathing was ragged. Wesley didn't know what had led him to get out of his car on the deserted stretch of road and walk into the forest. He was usually a cautious man. Yet, he'd felt he *had* to go into the forest, and he could not resist the impulse. When he had stumbled onto the woman dancing in the clearing, a primal instinct had taken over.

As she turned to face him, he was stunned by her honey-skinned beauty. Wild, kinky curls framed a face of stunning, rich caramel beauty. Laughter was in her emerald green gaze. A slight flush was staining her highly carved, rich caramel cheeks and face. A slight smile had curved her full, kissable lips. Her movements were gracefully sensual. Heat had flooded his stomach, and he knew he had to have her. He had gone to her and taken her into his arms. Her scent of cinnamon and vanilla had enveloped them in a silken cocoon. The feel of her against him had made his cock harden painfully. She had sunk into him, her body fitting his six-foot-four frame as if they had known each other forever. A vice had taken hold of his heart, and he knew she was his.

He kissed her. An explosion of heated desire had coursed through him. The wild noises the woman made in the back of her throat had made him crazy to have her. Wesley clenched his fists tighter as he imagined the feel of her hot silk-clad mound against him. He had been about to rip her panties off and bury his cock inside her when she had stiffened and pulled away. The befuddled lust in her gaze had pleased him. He went to kiss her again, but she disappeared. With a sigh, Wesley looked up at the sky. The blanket of stars twinkled, while the moon shone down, seeming to mock him.

"I am losing my mind. Oh, God. What am I going to do?"

Shakily, Wesley stood, turned, and walked away. At the shade of trees, he looked back to where he had thought he had seen the woman. It was empty and calm. His shoulders slumped as he turned, dropped his head and put his hand on the tree closest to him. If he ever had doubts he needed a break from his high stress career, this had dispelled them. With slow movements, he walked through the trees.

"Fuck!"

He slammed his fist into a tree. The pain that radiated through his hand made him know he had hurt himself, yet it did not distract him from the taste of her on his lips. With a

growl, he lowered his hand and cupped it with the other. A brush of something against his leg startled him. He looked down and saw Newton leaning against him. She whined and looked back at the clearing. He glanced back. The empty area seemed to taunt him.

"Come on, Newt. Let's get out of here."

He strode forward with the scent of her still on his skin. He had to get this mythical woman out of his head. She wasn't real, and he was a man who dealt with reality.

Wesley pulled up in front of Ian's house and turned off the car. He got out, and Newton jumped down beside him. Slamming the door, he headed up the walkway. A sound made him stiffen.

"Bout time you got here. Why'd it take you three weeks?" a voice asked idly from the darkness of the porch.

Wesley winced. He wasn't falling for Ian McIntyre's tone. Ian might act like it was an idle question, but he knew it wasn't.

"We took the scenic route. How did you know I was here?"

"I just did." Ian stepped into the light.

He shrugged his broad shoulders and leaned negligently on the pillar. His steel grey eyes missed nothing. Ian's look clearly said he didn't believe Wesley had taken a scenic route. Wesley hoped Ian wouldn't question him, but he knew it was a futile wish. Ian knew Wesley too well, and besides, the others probably had already called him. Ian's next words surprised him.

"A room's ready for you. Come here, Newt baby, and give Uncle Ian a kiss."

Newton barked and ran to Ian, who went down on his knees to meet her. Newton licked Ian's face. Ian laughed and kissed her on the muzzle, then, standing, continued to pat Newton as he turned to go to the house.

When Wesley didn't move, Ian glanced back at him and asked, "You plan on sleeping out here?"

Ian went into the house with Newton on his heels. Wesley didn't know what had stopped Ian from questioning him, but he was grateful for the reprieve. He opened the back of the SUV, grabbed his duffle bag and computer then followed them into the house. Ian stood in front of the staircase. Wesley went to him, and Ian led the way upstairs.

Wesley followed him down the long hall. Ian opened the door at the end of the hallway, and Wesley stepped inside. The room was luxurious. Dark wood and heavy pieces of furniture filled it, and one wall to the right was floor-to-ceiling windows that showed a balcony. There was a door amid all the windows that led to it.

"I'll see you in the morning." Ian's tone held a warning.

Wesley looked at him and knew he had only been given a temporary reprieve from questions. Ian nodded, patted Newton, and left, closing the door behind him. Wesley cursed, then took his bag and dropped it on a dark brown chair in the sitting area. He sat down on the matching couch and looked out the windows. A head rested on his leg. Absently, he ran his hand over Newton's fur. His thoughts turned to why he had come to Blackstone Haven. He had to figure out what was wrong with him. Even as the thoughts formed, sexy emerald green eyes filled his mind, blocking them. He shifted to ease the erection pressing against his zipper.

"Was she real, or another one of my delusions?"

He didn't have an answer. Sighing, he stood and got ready for bed. Twenty minutes later, he slipped between the soft cotton sheets and faced the balcony.

"Forget about her. She wasn't real anyway."

Wesley shifted and willed himself to sleep, surrounded by the scent of cinnamon and vanilla.

Many days later, Wesley was still trying to forget about the woman. With a sigh, he leant back.

"What's your problem? All this sighing is getting on my last nerve."

Wesley looked at Ian and grinned. Although he had been here for almost two weeks, Ian hadn't pushed him for answers. It was unlike him, but Wesley was afraid to ask him what was going on. That would lead to questions to which he had no answers.

After Wesley had got some rest, he and Newton had kept close to the house, exploring the area around Ian's ten-acre home. No matter how much he walked, he still got no answers. Ian had finally badgered Wesley into driving into town with him, overriding his excuses that he didn't want to leave Newton at the house alone. After Ian had shown him the playroom he'd set up in the house for his and other visiting pets, Wesley knew it was useless

to argue. He didn't have to question why Ian had such a room. They all had various pets. But, while the rest of them had dogs, Ian preferred cats. They'd left Newton happily rolling around with Ian's cats. She hadn't even noticed when Wesley and Ian had left.

Wesley sighed again, and Ian threw him a fierce look out of the corner of his steel grey eyes. "Don't make me pull over," he said.

"Please," Wesley snorted. "What're you going to do? You're nothing but a big old tabby cat." His tone was deliberately insulting, and he made a rude kissing sound.

"You don't know the half of it." Ian laughed.

Wesley joined him and slapped him on the arm. Ian shrugged him off.

"Watch it," he warned.

With a casual twist, he put the SUV in reverse and backed into a space behind the building. Ian switched off the ignition, then opened his door and got out. He slammed the door behind him. Wesley got out, closed his door, and walked around the hood to join Ian. He put his hand on his hip and looked at the back of the building.

"I still can't believe you did it."

"I've been open for over two years. You just haven't deigned to grace me with your presence."

"Yeah, yeah, I know you missed me." Wesley followed him to the back door.

Ian stepped inside and waited for him to come in, then closed the door. Ian flipped on the lights and spread his hands wide.

"Welcome."

Wesley looked around at the gleaming countertops, refrigerators, and various tools.

"How did you give up everything for this?" He looked at Ian.

Ian smiled. His dimples winked out, casting boyishness onto his craggy face.

"It's just another lab for me to create in." He shrugged.

Wesley looked back at the room. He walked forward and picked up the beaker. He put it down and went around the room, touching items that were very familiar to him. With a laugh, he glanced at Ian, who was watching him silently.

"Dr. Abrams would have a fit if he knew you had used all his teachings to open Sinfully McIntyre."

Ian laughed. He went to the sink and washed his hands, then turned and opened one of the fridges. He pulled out a humongous bowl and walked back to the table.

"That's a side benefit." He winked. "I sent him an invite to my opening. Strangely, he didn't respond or come." Ian chuckled wickedly. "I told all of you I was going to walk away when I was ready and open my dream. It's not my fault you all chose not to believe me. Hell, I sent all of you an invite, although I knew you, Sin, and Savage couldn't attend. At least Pan came and represented for you lunkheads. But Dr. Abrams not even calling—that was just rude."

Wesley remembered, at the time, he and the rest were knee-deep in work. To be fair, as a group, they had competed to see who would go. He smiled now, thinking about it. Pan was pissed to be the one to go, not because of going, but because of losing. They all hated to lose. Pan had taken their business warming gifts to Ian.

Shaking his head, Wesley walked over to the table. Ian put down the bowl, dipped his hand into a powdery mixture, and dusted the table. He then dumped the contents of the bowl onto the table.

"What did you do?" Wesley asked.

Ian gave him an innocent look. Wesley knew Ian too well to buy it.

"I sent him a gift."

Wesley watched him silently, waiting for him to continue. Ian had a screwy sense of humour. It was what made them become friends in the first place. While Wesley was more straight-laced, Ian's more laid back attitude helped temper his intensity.

"Are you going to make me ask?"

Ian's look was bland. "Ask what?"

"Don't make me deck you," Wesley returned in a mild tone.

"Oh, I'm afraid of you." Ian put up his hands with a mock shiver.

Wesley reached over and pushed him.

"Oh, your strength! I'm so hurt!" Ian stumbled back and held his chest.

"Cut it out and tell me," Wesley replied with a laugh.

Ian straightened and came back to the table. He was silent for a few moments as he got to work. Wesley poked him again.

"Okay." Ian laughed. "I sent a cake shaped like a woman to his office."

“And...” Wesley made a ‘come on’ motion.

“It was naked, and the model used to make it was the delivery person.” Ian fell out laughing.

Wesley bit his lip, trying not to laugh. He could imagine the look of fury on Dr. Abrams’s face. Although Wesley was the most rigid of the group, and his friends often poked fun at him because of it, Dr. Abrams made Wesley look like a wild man by comparison. Wesley tried to work up some sympathy for Dr. Abrams, but couldn’t. The man had made their years of study a living hell, especially for Ian.

The five of them had met as undergraduates, although it had taken them a while to become friends. They were all used to being loners and, in Ian and Pan’s cases, also acting like bad asses. Eventually, they had realised they had a lot in common. In school, they were picked on and called ‘the five brains’. Ian and Pan were more apt to kick people’s asses, whereas Wesley, along with Sin and Savage—the twin dynamos—tended to want to let it go. They had tempered each other out. They were the most brilliant in their classes. Despite Dr. Abrams doing everything he could to fight it, they had all been chosen for the special advanced programme at the best scientific university in the world.

The years of study that followed encompassed all areas of science. They learned biology, chemistry, earth science, physics, mathematics, and computer science. The work wasn’t the problem. It was Dr. Abrams. Since it was the first time the programme had been tried, each school that had been chosen to become a part could send one teacher to represent and help students. Dr. Abrams was the one who came for their school. He rode them hard. The bond between them increased, and they were the only ones to make it through the programme. The other universities’ students had flunked out. Wesley had heard some of them had even lost touch with reality.

After they had passed, the programme had never been taught again. It was said it was too much for any student to take. Being the first and only graduates from the programme, they could write their ticket to any job in the scientific community. In agreement, they all decided to remain together and go it on their own—forming Conundrum, their company, and taking what jobs they wanted. They were in demand all over the world. Things had seemed perfect.

Uneasiness ate at Wesley. He prayed this time away would get his head clear and give him the answers he needed. Shaking off the feeling, Wesley focused back on Ian.

"I want to say you're wrong for doing such a bad thing, but I can't. Please tell me you took pictures of his face."

Ian nodded as he continued to chuckle. They looked at each other in perfect understanding and put up their hands at the same time. They clasped hands.

"Thank you."

"A small repayment for all the hell he put us through. And hell, it's the least I could do for all the times you all protected my butt." Ian slapped him on the shoulder then released his hand.

He got back to work. Wesley watched him. Ian glanced at him.

"When you're ready to tell me why you're really here, I'll be ready to listen."

The intensity in Ian's grey gaze made Wesley shift. He should have realised, although Ian hadn't said a word about him showing up on his doorstep, that Ian would know something was up. Ian had an uncanny instinct for sensing when something was wrong. Wesley wasn't even sure if the others had called Ian to see if he was there. He hadn't received any calls from them to see if he arrived. That was peculiar. They weren't known for their restraint. Especially Pan. Ian had taken him in and acted like it was normal for him to show up in the middle of the night.

Ian wasn't known for his patience. Wesley was grateful he had given him time. For the first week Wesley had slept, ate, and slept before he felt human again. He had nightmares that still plagued him, yet he also had dreams of the woman. All the dreams seemed so real, yet he knew they weren't. He shut off his thoughts before they could overcome him. He returned Ian's look.

"When I'm ready, I'll tell you."

Ian shook his head. "Tell us all."

Wesley winced. "Ah, hell. Who's been calling?"

"You really think you could just disappear for over a month and none of them would call?" Ian's look clearly said he thought Wesley had lost his mind.

A bitter smile curled Wesley's lip. If only Ian knew how close to the truth he was. Ian's gaze went sharp with speculation. Wesley tried to change the subject.

“I wonder what people would think if they knew their neighbourhood baker was one of the most brilliant scientific minds in the world.”

“The most brilliant. Flattering me won’t get me to change the subject. What is going on with you?”

“Ah, hell, Ian, gi—” Wesley stopped as he heard a noise.

A pained look filled Ian’s face. “Ah, hell. What did I tell you about breaking and entering? I’m going to shoot your ass one of these days.”

“Then I’ll have the pleasure of running you in,” a melodious voice responded.

Wesley was amused by the look of fury mixed with distress on Ian’s normally affable face. He turned, interested in seeing the person who caused such a reaction. Shocked emerald green eyes stared at him. His heart skipped a beat.

Chapter Three

Wesley hungrily took in the woman from the forest. She was real. He wasn't losing his mind. Unconsciously, he took a step towards her. She backed up a step.

Fury filled him. She had run from him once, and she wasn't doing it again. With a determined stride, he closed the space between them and grabbed her arm. She tried to shrug him off. He changed his grip and yanked her against his body. A shudder racked him as their bodies touched. The scent of cinnamon and vanilla he had thought he imagined cloyed around them. He felt her shiver in reaction. Her eyes heated then went cool.

A click sounded behind him. Absently, he looked away from her compelling gaze. He stilled at the sight of the gun trained on him. The wrath in the other woman's amber gaze let him know she was waiting for an excuse to blow him away. Her features, so much like those of the woman he held, told him they were somehow related.

The woman in his arms moved against him. The feel of her soft breasts against his chest drove all sane thought from his mind. He turned and jerked her up into his arms.

"Wrap your legs around me," Wesley growled.

The woman's eyes narrowed, but she clamped her legs around his waist.

"Don't order me around." Her husky voice stroked along his senses.

He put his face close to hers. "Don't give me reason to."

She jerked back. He clamped his hands on her ass to hold her against him. She stilled. Wesley gritted his teeth at the feel of her jean-clad mound against him. His mind flashed to the forest and their kiss. He saw the answering flare in her green gaze. The woman suddenly looked past him.

"No, Sinai. It's okay," she said.

He looked back at the woman holding the gun on him. "Either shoot me, or put it away."

The woman stared at him, her eyes cold. "Don't tempt me."

In a smooth motion, she put away her weapon.

Wesley looked at Ian.

Ian had a slight smile on his lips.

"Office," Wesley snapped.

Ian motioned down the hall.

Wesley turned and walked rapidly to where Ian had pointed. Absently, he heard them talking behind him.

"Ah, hell, Nai, leave them be."

"Don't call me that. Who is he?" Sinai hissed.

"Don't worry. He's a friend," Ian answered.

"That only makes me worry even more."

Wesley went down to the end of the hall. The woman's crotch rubbed against his erect member with every step. She held onto him silently. Wesley reached the door at the end of the corridor and looked briefly at the plaque that read 'McIntyre Sanctuary'. He pushed the door open, then closed it behind him and locked it. With a quick glance around, he took in the room. Impatient steps took him rapidly to the couch, where he stopped and leaned over. The woman pushed at him. Determination filled him. He simultaneously put her on the couch and covered her body with his. She tried to buck him off. He settled himself firmly between her thighs.

A growl tickled out of his throat at the feel of her heated mound rubbing against him. The woman stilled.

"Get off me," she demanded.

Wesley stared at her. The fury lining her face only made him want her even more. Her hand flashed out. He caught one fist, then the other, and put them over her head, pinning them there. He settled his body more firmly on her. She breathed harshly, her breasts grazing his chest.

"What's your name?"

"You want to fuck me without even knowing my name?" The woman bared her teeth.

Wesley dropped his gaze and took in her ample breasts, full hips and long legs cradling him. He looked back at the woman's face. There was an answering tinge of lust in her gaze.

"And you would let me," he purred.

She stiffened and tried to jerk away.

"Now, now. No need to get testy. I do want to screw you blind." He pinned her hands again effortlessly.

She stilled, her look vicious. Wesley couldn't imagine what had come over him. He was usually shy around women. When he did get over his shyness, he treated women more gently. Something about this woman made him want to take and woo all at once.

Struggling with his surging hormones, he said, "But I will control myself. What's your name?"

"Why should I tell you?"

"Christ, woman! Are you always so disagreeable?" he asked in exasperation.

"No. You seem to bring out that side of me." Her lips quirked.

"Join the club. You make me feel like pounding my chest and saying, 'Me caveman, and you mine'."

Her eyes crinkled and laughter spilled from her. It only made her more captivating. He swooped down and kissed her. Her laughter changed to a moan of desire. He sucked it in and mated his tongue with hers. She grunted, and he felt her legs clamp around him. With a groan, he rotated his hips against her. She bucked against him, countering his motion.

Wesley jerked his lips away. He rested his head against hers, his breath coming in gasps. The woman's harsh breath echoed his own. Her heart beat rapidly between them. Wesley tried to calm his own pounding heart. In some semblance of control, he raised his head.

"What is it about you that makes me feel this way?"

"Have you ever heard of chemistry?" The woman grinned.

"I know a little something about that." Wesley chuckled.

"Peyton Blackstone," the woman said.

"Nice to meet you, Peyton Blackstone. I'm Wesley McCarty," he replied.

"Don't we sound so formal, after all we've done with each other?" Peyton laughed.

"There's still a lot I'd like to do with you." Wesley settled himself deeper into the cradle of her legs.

"You make me forget everything." Peyton sighed, a sensuous sound.

"Good." A grin curved his lips.

Peyton shook her head. "You're a dangerous man to my senses, Wesley. Let me up."

"I'm not done yet." Wesley leaned over to kiss her.

His eyes widened as he felt a strange sensation. She got further away from him. In seconds, it registered that he was floating up away from her.

Peyton stood then murmured something too low for him to hear.

He floated back to the ground and landed gently on his feet. His eyes narrowed as he finally remembered what she had done the last time they met. Wesley walked over to her. There was a wary look in her eyes. He grabbed her and ran his hands over her body.

"Hey! What are you doing?" Peyton swatted at his hand.

He was determined. He searched her, then stepped back, crossing his arms over his chest.

"Okay. Let me have it."

"Have what?" Her look of confusion matched her tone.

"Whatever hallucinogen you're using on me. First the disappearance, and now this floating bit—it's not possible. Who put you up to this?" He looked at the closed door, then back at her. "Ian. What has he invented now? Whatever it is, it's great."

Peyton's groan interrupted him. "Ah, hell. You're a scientist, like Ian, aren't you?"

He nodded, surprised Ian had told anyone what he used to do.

"Crap. Just my luck to get involved with a scientist." Peyton closed her eyes.

Although he had no idea what relevance what he did had on anything, Wesley laughed at her disgusted tone.

Peyton's eyes flashed open, and she glared at him. "Listen closely," she said. "No one put me up to anything. And there are no drugs involved. If we're going to get involved, it's better you know now. I'm a witch. A natural born witch." She stopped then, and just stood looking at him.

Wesley stared at her, waiting for the punch line. When she said nothing else, he started to laugh. Weak from laughter, he fell against the couch. He looked at her.

She was tapping her foot with her hands crossed under her breasts. The tops of her breasts were visible in her low cut, burnt orange shirt, and his mouth watered at the sight.

Peyton growled, drawing his attention to her face. The seriousness in her gaze made him laugh again. She huffed and leaned over, smacking him on the shoulder. He caught her hand and pulled her into his lap. She struggled briefly, but he held her until she subsided.

"Come on. There's no such thing as a witch," Wesley said, the disbelief clear in his tone.

"Why?" Peyton asked.

The calm seriousness of the question stilled his laughter. She really believed she was a witch. Since he knew beliefs were hard to overcome without a sound argument, he tried logic.

"Okay, then. If you're a witch, why didn't you know what I was? Why didn't you know to avoid coming here so you wouldn't see me?" He waited for her to not have an answer.

"That's not one of my gifts. My brother and one of my sisters do get premonitions, but I don't." Peyton answered without a pause.

His mouth gaped open. Peyton smiled sweetly in return. Wesley closed his mouth and thought about another thing to ask.

"Explain this to me, Mr. Scientist," she said. "How did I disappear? How did I make you float in the air?" After firing the questions at him, Peyton regarded him with a smug expression.

Wesley opened his mouth to respond then closed it. He didn't have any explanation. A look of victory came over Peyton's face.

"Explain how, even now, we're floating in the air."

Startled, he looked around, realising she was right—they were floating several inches above the floor. He stared at her, questions flooding his mind. The ramifications of what she was saying made his heart thump with excitement.

"Stop looking at me like that," Peyton growled.

Absently, he looked at her and saw the resignation in her gaze.

"Like what?" Confusion filled him.

Her smile was bitter. "Like a science project instead of a woman."

He grinned sheepishly. "Sorry."

He turned her until she was straddling him, ignoring her resistance. Wesley lifted his hands and cupped her face. He stared into her eyes and let her see what he wanted. A flush stained her cheeks, and she breathed more rapidly. In case there was any doubt in her mind, he spoke.

"I'm a scientist second, and a man first. I want you, Peyton. Don't ever doubt that. I don't know what this is that's happening between us, but I want to find out. This is all new

to me. Be patient with me. Hell, I've never had this reaction to anyone before. That, added to the fact you're telling me you're a witch—it's a brain overload."

She looked at him a long while, and a small, sensuous grin curved her lips. His cock hardened at the look. She shifted against him. Wesley locked his hand over her curvaceous ass.

"Don't do that unless you want me to fuck you right here." His voice had a brassy growl that surprised him.

Peyton chuckled, a sinful sound. He shuddered in reaction. Her arms wrapped around his neck, and her fingers stroked along it, leaving fire in their wake. His cock lengthened and hardened even more. Another chuckle rippled from Peyton. She kissed him, nipping his lip to make his mouth open. Her tongue duelled with his lazily and thoroughly. His eyes closed at the sensuousness of her taking. As suddenly as she had kissed him, she stopped and pulled away. He closed his arms tighter. His fingers tingled, and as he opened his eyes, he saw her fade.

"Son of a bitch," he muttered. "Not again." Wesley stood in a rush.

"Seven o'clock, my house." Peyton's melodious voice drew his gaze to the door.

His heart thumped as he feared she had gone without him having a chance to see her again. But then her form materialised. She straightened from leaning on the door, opened it, and threw him a look over her shoulder as she strode out. He followed her and saw her bank the corner of the hall. With quick strides, he followed. As he stepped into the room, he saw Ian standing where he had left him. Peyton was inside the doorway. She looked back at him again.

"Seven o'clock," she repeated and went out the door.

"Wait! Where do you live?"

Wesley felt a phantom brush of fingers against his cheek.

Eight-one-three-six Blackstone Ridge. You'll find the way, Mr. Scientist. Her voice filled his mind, and a kiss brushed his lips.

Raising his hand to his lips, he watched her.

Peyton chuckled.

"If I even get a whiff that you're up to your shenanigans, I will run you in and chain you, Ian."

Wesley turned and saw the woman they had called Sinai glaring at Ian. She threw a warning glare at Wesley then strode to the door.

"Only if you let me chain you first, Sinai." Ian's tone was soft, but deadly.

Sinai stared daggers at him then slammed the door behind her.

Ian pounded his fist into the dough and started to knead. Wesley could feel the fury coming off him. He had never seen Ian this bothered. With a casual look at the time, Wesley noted that the bakery wouldn't open for two hours yet. He pushed his hands under his shirt into the pockets of his jeans. Whistling softly, he strolled over to Ian.

Ian glared at him. "What?"

"Who is she?"

Ian stopped pounding on the dough to stare at him, and his lips quirked in a devilish grin.

"What were you and Peyton up to back there? You all were so busy that she didn't tell you Sinai is her sister." Ian looked like he was trying not to laugh.

Wesley shrugged and tried to contain his blush. He could feel it spread and cursed himself.

"You still blush, even after you grabbed Peyton and took her out of here like you had a claim to her. It's amazing. Come here. Let me feel your skin. I was always curious how hot your skin got when you were so fiery red." Ian chuckled, reaching over to touch him.

Wesley slapped his hand.

Ian grinned and went back to kneading the dough. He tore off a piece, and his big hands shaped it into an intricate design. He put it on a nearly full tray, then picked it up, opened one of the ovens and slid the tray in.

Wesley looked around and realised Ian had been busy. He saw there were other trays already baking.

Ian came back to the table and made another roll. "I can't wait to tell the others."

"The hell you will. I don't want them all coming down here. Promise me you won't," Wesley demanded.

"Sure." Ian shrugged.

Suspicious, Wesley looked at Ian. The innocent look was back on his face. "Ah, hell. You called them already."

"Nope."

Wesley relaxed. He didn't need any meddling from any of them.

"I sent a message," Ian continued cheerfully.

Wesley's gaze dropped to the cell phone attached to a loop on Ian's pants. Groaning, he leaned against the table.

"Now you know I couldn't keep this to myself," Ian said. "The contained one being so out of control. It was too good not to tell." He winked. "It won't be so bad."

"I see I was wrong about Sin being the gossip in the group."

"Gossip extraordinaire, and proud of it." Ian raised his muscular arms and flexed them.

Wesley ignored his antics. He washed his hands then went to the table across from Ian. Taking another enormous bowl, he dumped the dough on the already floured counter, kneading it automatically. His mind was on Peyton and seeing her later.

"I see you remember all my teachings."

Ian's voice drew Wesley's attention. He looked down and realised he had assembled a bunch of rolls with the same intricate shape as Ian. He shrugged and went back to making bread. Something Sinai had said bothered him.

"What did Sinai mean about running you in and chaining you?" He looked up, anticipating Ian's answer.

An unfathomable look flashed across Ian's face so fast he thought he imagined it.

Ian grinned.

Wesley knew that look. "What did you do?"

"The McIntyre Theory and Krian Theory on her car." Ian's grin was unrepentant.

Wesley stopped and stared at him. "Together?"

"Yes. It was beautiful. I timed it so that she was in front of my bakery when the McIntyre Theory took effect. The balloon inflated in her car, then burst. Chocolate pudding was all over. I waved at her from the window. Her look was vicious. She had opened her door to get out when the Krian Theory levitated her car off the ground. She was swearing at me as she floated down the street." Ian chuckled and went back to making bread.

Wesley bit his lip and looked at Ian's bent head. He knew Ian could rig something with the McIntyre Theory in his sleep. Ian had, after all, developed it. The Krian Theory, which

Wesley had created, was another thing. It involved a precise mix of chemicals and other things not found in the regular places.

"How did you pull off the Krian?" He was curious.

"A little birdie sent me what I needed." Ian winked.

Wesley thought of who it could be. He could only come up with one name. "Pan."

"I have to thank you for developing the theory. It was pure genius, and it works very well." Ian chuckled.

"That still doesn't explain what she said."

"Sinai thinks because she's with the police force she can just lock me up when she feels like it."

"Doesn't your sister work for the police? When is she coming back?" Wesley frowned.

"As I've said the other fifty million times you asked – when she is finished with the special training she went to D.C. for. Yeah, Ash works for the force too, but she can't help me."

"Why not?"

"Sinai is the chief, and her boss."

Wesley stared at him, then let out a hoot of laughter. "You pissed off the head of law enforcement for the town?"

"She messed with me first," Ian griped.

"Only you, Ian. Only you would mess with the one woman who can back up her threat about putting you out of your misery."

Ian shrugged, and something dawned on Wesley.

"Blackstone. The town is named after them."

"Boy, you're slow today. What did Peyton do to you?"

He ignored Ian's question and asked one of his own. "What's the story with them, anyway?"

Ian schooled his face into a blank look. "You'll have to ask Peyton."

The non-answer surprised Wesley, but he knew from his expression that Ian wouldn't tell him anything. He started to ask Ian if he knew Peyton was a witch, then changed his mind. It wasn't his place to tell anyone. What she had told him hadn't fully sunk in. Instead, Wesley changed the subject.

"Why aren't you going after Sinai?"

"I don't know what you mean." Ian shifted, avoiding his gaze.

"Ian, this is me you're talking to. No bullshit between us. You're attracted to her. Hell, I was only in the room with you all briefly and I could feel the heat from the two of you. What's going on?"

Ian raised his face, and his expression made Wesley's breath catch. "It's complicated."

Wesley started to speak, but Ian cut him off. "Leave it alone, Wes. Leave it alone."

Ian punched the dough and went back to making bread. Wesley did the same. He watched Ian while his thoughts raced, trying to discern what was going on with his friend. He moved to put a roll on the baking tray. A scent of cinnamon and vanilla made his knees weaken with lust. Lowering his head to his shirt, he inhaled the sweet scent of her.

"Stop sniffing your shirt," Ian growled.

Guiltily, Wesley straightened. Ian watched him, an amused look on his face. Wesley grinned, then laughed.

Ian chuckled and came around the table. He slapped Wes on the shoulder, and Wesley pushed him in return.

"Do you still remember how to make an Ianis B Special?"

"Of course. I can't believe you still make them." Wesley grinned.

"It's my best seller," Ian countered.

"Are you finally going to tell me what it means?"

"No." Ian dropped a pack of pecans, strawberries, and chocolate by him and walked away.

Wesley shook his head and got to work. He picked up the knife and started to chop the pecans. Soon he had a rhythm going. He took the chocolate and cut it up, then the strawberries. He saw something out the corner of his eye. Wesley swung the knife. Ian's hand flashed out and caught his wrist. Before his mind could clear, Ian had disarmed him.

"Hey! What the hell was that?" Ian demanded.

"Nothing." Shakily, Wesley backed up.

"Nothing? I was only gone five minutes to get some flour and you already have every thing chopped up. You almost cut my throat with a knife and it's nothing?"

Wesley glanced down at the table and realised Ian was right. He tried to remember doing it, and he couldn't. Ian studied him as he put the knife on the table. Wesley forced a smile.

"I've been practicing with the knife."

Ian's look was disbelieving, and his words confirmed it. "No one is that fast, Wes, unless—" Ian cut himself off.

Wesley looked at him and saw the shadowed look in his eyes. His own eyes narrowed. "Unless what, Ian?"

"Nothing. I barely saw the knife moving. You were moving that fast. What's been going on with you, Wesley? Where have you been disappearing to all these months?" Ian waited for Wesley's reply, the look on his face clearly saying he would find out what was going on.

Wesley wanted to push Ian on his evasion but knew if he did he would have to answer Ian's questions, too. The phone rang before he could come up with an excuse.

"Aren't you going to get that?"

Ian shook his head and continued to wait for his reply. The phone stopped.

Wesley opened his mouth. The sound of drums started to play from Ian's pocket. Ian swore and snatched the phone out of his pocket. Wesley stifled a grin.

"What do you want, Pan? No...shit." Ian glared at him, walked to the back door and wrenched it open. "I...you're not the fucking boss of me... Don't make me come to New York... Yeah, I can be on a flight and there in six hours... Fuck you, Pan..." Ian slammed the door behind him.

Wesley went to the door and peaked outside.

Ian was pacing back and forth, gesturing with his hand. Suddenly, Ian looked at him and put up his middle finger, then turned his back.

Wesley stepped back from the door. He didn't know what Pan was pissed at, but was glad it gave him time to come up with an excuse. He walked back to the table and clenched his hands over the edges. The pecans, chocolate and strawberries were in neat piles on the table. As he picked up the knife, Wesley's mind flashed to the fly at his house and him throwing the knife and pinning it. Then he flashed forward to what had happened just a few moments ago with Ian. He couldn't remember even picking it up. His heart started to race, and he put the knife down. A sick feeling filled his mouth.

"What's wrong with me?" His raw voice echoed in the room.

The door opened behind him. Wesley picked up the pecans and started to put them in a bowl. Ian joined him and said nothing. He looked up, and Ian had a closed look on his face. Wesley waited for his questioning to start again.

Ian gripped his shoulder and said quietly, "I'm here when you're ready to talk." He let him go and turned to prepare the dough.

Wesley watched his good friend and ached to tell him what was going on. Fear kept him silent. He didn't want to see the pity in Ian's eyes.

You're a selfish bastard for even thinking of getting close to her. You don't know what is happening to you. How can you go and see Peyton with this hanging over you? As soon as the thought formed, Wesley dismissed it. He needed to see her. The state of his sanity might be in question, but his attraction to her wasn't. His cock hardened, imagining her lush mouth. With a look at the clock, Wesley saw it was a long way from seven. Anticipation filled him.

"Are you going to gape at the clock all day or do some work?"

Wesley turned and followed behind Ian. Seven o'clock couldn't come fast enough.

* * * *

"What's going on, Peyton?" Sinai demanded, dragging her from her thoughts.

Peyton sighed. She had known it was only a matter of time before Sinai asked her. Sinai had waited longer than Peyton thought she would have. They were already on the road leading to her house. She had absently waved as she passed the houses of various family members that littered Blackstone Mountain. Her home was the last one, at the top of the mountain.

"Don't worry. I know what I'm doing."

Sinai pulled in front of Peyton's house and slammed the car into park. "Of course I'm worried. You know who he is. March first is less than two weeks away." She turned on Peyton, fury lacing her voice.

Peyton breathed loudly. "Yes, I know my birthday is soon." She reached over and patted Sinai's hand. "There's nothing either of us can do now. It has to play out as it must."

Sinai's hand gripped hers as she went to withdraw. Peyton looked at her sister's face and saw the pain there.

"If you need us, call. Promise me." Sinai gripped her fiercely.

"I will."

Peyton knew her sister was speaking on behalf of all the family. They were strangely silent in her mind. Usually, they were constantly conversing, effortlessly with thoughts. Peyton squeezed her sister's hand in return.

Sinai sighed and let her go.

Peyton opened the door and got out, walking away from the truck then turned.

Sinai beeped her horn, then turned and drove away.

Standing in the driveway, Peyton watched her go. Then she raised her face to the sun and closed her eyes. She threw open her shields wide and felt the expectation on the air. Bringing her shields back up, Peyton turned and went into the house.

The wheels had already been set in motion, and there was nothing she could do but go where fate led. A shiver racked her. With a cautious glance around, she reached out and found nothing amiss. A feeling of unease filled her. She closed the doors and increased the wards around the house. Then Peyton glanced at all the comforts she had collected to make her home a haven. None of it mattered now.

With determined steps, she went up the stairs. She had a lot to do before tonight.

Chapter Four

Peyton took a deep breath and opened the door. Her breath stalled as she looked into Wesley's ice blue eyes. There was a look of possession in his gaze that she felt all the way to her core. A bark drew her attention. She looked down. Surprised pleasure filled her as she looked into the intelligent dual coloured gaze of the copper-red and white Siberian husky.

Peyton dropped to her knees and put out her hand. The dog came forward and licked her hand, tail wagging. Laughing, she petted the dog. The lush coat was beautiful. The lines of the body were strong.

"He's beautiful. What's his name?"

She glanced up, and her breath caught as she saw Wesley's bulging erection. Peyton licked her lips and raised her head higher. The hunger in his eyes made all thoughts empty out of her mind. She stood quickly on shaky legs. He stepped forward, closed the door, and brought his hand from behind his back. She flushed with delight as she took the bouquet of peach orchids. She buried her face in them and inhaled deeply.

With a glance at Wesley, she saw the intent on his face. He pulled her to him and kissed her hungrily. She moaned and returned his kiss. Fire licked up her veins, turning them molten. He growled then deepened the kiss. Her pussy creamed in preparation for him. Peyton clenched her fists against his shoulders and fought for control.

I have to tell him before this goes any further. The thought brought her to her senses. Slowly, she pulled away. His hands came up and framed her face. Peyton turned her face into his hand, rubbing her cheek on his palm. The calluses on his strong, masculine hand scrapped against her skin. She kissed his palm gently. His soft groan ruffled her hair. Peyton raised her hand and touched the back of his, lowering them and twining their fingers together. She led him to the living room. The clack of soft feet followed them.

When they reached the couch, she tried to let go of his hand. He wouldn't let her. Wesley took a seat and pulled her down into his lap, arranging her to straddle him. Peyton bit her lip. She was uncomfortable. With what she had to tell him, she wanted to have some space between them.

"What's bothering you?" Wesley asked softly.

Startled, she looked at him. A wet nose nudged her arm. Peyton glanced at the dog.

"Newt, off the couch," Wesley commanded. "Go find a seat over there."

The husky glanced at Peyton, a pitiful look on its face.

"You're a handsome fella." Peyton chuckled.

"She's a handful," Wesley said. "Hope you don't mind that I brought Newton. She wouldn't let me leave the house without her."

Peyton pulled her gaze away from the dog. "She? Why'd you name her Newton?" Peyton saw the devilish twinkle in his eyes and groaned. "Forget I asked. Sir Isaac Newton, right?" She glanced back at Newton. "You poor thing. Daddy gave you a weird name, but you're still beautiful."

"Hey. I resent that. Newton is a great name. At least I didn't name my cat Einstein."

Peyton laughed, having met Einstein the cat. The half-wild Ashera cat was Ian's, and it was as temperamental as its owner. Peyton studied Wesley's grin.

"You wanted to call her Einstein, didn't you?"

He shrugged. Newton barked. Peyton saw her nodding her head.

"Hey, you. None of that. It's a good name, just as Newton is. Ian won the competition on names. He plays dirty." Wesley laughed.

He looked meaningfully at Newton and pointed off the couch. Newton seemed to sigh, then got down. She padded over to the floor-to-ceiling windows and put her head on her paws, looking outside.

"Now, tell me what's bothering you," Wesley said, addressing Peyton in the same soft tone as before.

His smile was gentle and understanding. Peyton was furious at herself. She wasn't used to feeling this sense of insecurity. To have it now, when time was of the essence, was unacceptable.

"I need to tell you something, and you must promise to listen to all I have to say and not interrupt," she said.

"Okay." Wesley leant back.

Now that he had agreed, Peyton wondered where to start. Trying to make it easier for him to understand, she started from the beginning.

"I'm the eldest of seven siblings, and the oldest of all the Blackstone children. My mother had six siblings, and each had seven children. Since the beginning of our family line, each generation has been told the Blackstone family legend." She paused to collect her thoughts then continued, "The legend goes, 'With seven of seven born from seven, various choices will be made. Each child born of seven will have a choice put in their path, a choice that will lead them to salvation or extinction.' Although all Blackstone's know the legend, it wasn't until my generation that it has come to pass. With the birth of us all, we knew it was a matter of time before we had to fulfil each of our prophecies."

She brushed her hair away from her face. "Most of the family has had their destinies come to pass and fulfilled their part of the prophecy. My siblings, a few of my other cousins, and I are the only ones who haven't. We each have a prophecy to fulfil, and this is part of my own. 'A man will come to you in the darkest moon. The trees will shade and protect your union of the soul. Before the final step to merge your body is taken, a choice must be made.' From my birth, I've been told my fate."

She stopped and looked at him. His eyes clearly asked a silent question. She nodded.

"So you did know I was coming for you." Wesley grinned.

"This is not a joke," Peyton gritted out. She moved to stand.

His hands gripped her, keeping her in place. "I know it isn't. I heard all you said about the prophecy, fate, and destinies, but I didn't hear the one thing I wanted to hear."

"What?" Confused by his calmness, and what he could mean, Peyton tried to read his expression.

His face was blank, giving nothing away. "This isn't about just destiny, fate, or a prophecy. I had all day to think about you being a witch. Then I started to think of this attraction I feel for you. Nothing you said surprises me, Peyton. I'm a scientist, and we're used to unexpected things, used to going out on a limb for our experiments. Yes, this attraction is chemistry, and I know all about chemistry. This is between you and me. To hell with all the rest." He took a breath, and his intense eyes locked with hers as he continued.

"I never once heard if you burn with need to have me, or if you wanted my touch on your skin with a fierceness that was almost pain. I feel these things for you, Peyton, and so much more. Destiny doesn't matter when the scent of you makes me ache to have you. Fate

went out the window the first time our eyes met. Prophecies were the furthest thing from my mind when I felt your body pressed against mine."

The hunger in his gaze made her heart race.

"The only thing that matters to me, Peyton, is whether you want me as much as I want you."

"You're not thinking clearly," Peyton countered.

"I'm going with my gut, and my gut has never failed me."

"It's further south than your gut that you're thinking with." She looked pointedly at his erection.

The boyish grin, combined with the heated look in his eyes, made her heart race, while her body flushed with desire.

"There's that, too, but I know what I want, Peyton. I want you. All of you."

With each of his words, her pussy pulsed with need. She shivered at the touch of his lips against her cheek.

He continued in a softer tone. "I'll take everything you can give, and demand you give me more. So unless you can give me what I want, and more, then walk away." There was a challenge, and a sexual promise, in his voice.

Peyton turned her head and pressed their mouths together. His soft, sensuous groan vibrated against her lips. She opened them, taking in the sound he made and giving him one of her own. A ragged gasp ripped from her as his strong hands ran down her shoulders, then around her back. The heat his touch left in its wake made her breathless. His hold tightened around her, and he shifted her. She followed his silent demand. With a sigh, she closed the space between them and settled against his rock-hard cock. She groaned as it came to rest against her. His shiver shook her, while his harsh exhalation filled her mouth.

With a lusty sound, she withdrew from his lips. Harsh lines of passion were etched in his face. His lids were lowered, slumberous over his eyes.

Leaning into him, Peyton whispered against his lips, "Elventies yioules Crilo."

She stroked her tongue deep into the recesses of his mouth. His taste rolled over her. It was decadent and addictive. Peyton sucked on his tongue, then bit it gently. He bucked against her and fell backward. She laughed at the startled look on his face.

He glanced around then looked back at her. "Handy trick," he said.

His lips turned up into a sexy grin as he lay back against her pale yellow sheets. There was an invitation in his eyes she found irresistible. She gave in to her need to see more of him. Slowly she trailed her hands against his chest as she opened each button of his dark blue shirt. The sounds of passion he made in the back of his throat as she touched him drove her crazy. Barely halfway down his shirt, she gave an impatient tug and ripped it open. The sound of buttons flying only heightened her need.

His throaty chuckle made her ache with need. With a sensual glide, she rubbed against his hardened, jean-covered shaft. On a soft hum, she licked along his neck, down his shoulder and to his nipple. Taking it into her mouth, Peyton suckled it. The harsh sound he let out made a smile curve her lips. Licking across to the other nipple, she gave it the same attention as the first. His incoherent sounds spurred her on. Gently, she bit his nipple. She pressed down as his body bucked, almost unseating her. A gasp ripped from her as his hard, jean-clad cock rubbed against her own similarly covered mound.

Rotating her hips in a counter motion, she felt the wetness soaking her jeans. The need she felt for him took on an almost painful intensity. The thought of removing their clothing with her power filtered through her mind, but she dismissed it. She wanted to savour undressing him. Raising herself until she was sitting straight, Peyton reached for the hem of her shirt.

His hands pushed hers away and took over. His hot fingers tickled her side as he lifted her shirt away, then over her head. Her hair tumbled down around her.

A harsh groan leaked out of her as his lips closed around her nipple hungrily. Grabbing his head, she held him close as he sucked her nipple in ferocious demand. The harsh abrasion of his tongue made a painful ache of desire settle in the pit of her stomach.

“Ooo...ye...I...ne....mo...g...e...y...” Incoherent words of need tumbled from her lips.

His dark chuckle vibrated against her breast as he went to work on the other nipple. The same sensual mastery was given to it, and it drove her higher and higher. With her head thrown back, and on a harsh groan, she ground down against him. Need burned the back of her throat, a sweet, potent mix of desire and lust.

Naked. I want him naked. At the thought, she felt the velvet touch of him rubbing against her. A movement of her hips, and she felt the hard, heated head of his cock. Shifting up, then down, she impaled herself on his rampant erection.

“Ohhh...” Peyton moaned as his cock filled her up and up.

On a whimper, she rocked on him, taking all of him inside. His long, thick length filled her to overflowing. His teeth gently scraped her nipple as she rode him. Peyton widened her legs, taking more of him. Rolling her hips, she groaned at the friction it created.

Wesley growled low in his throat while his arms banded around her. His lips burned a trail against her skin as he kissed up from her nipple, along her breast and finally, to her neck.

He laid a gentle kiss on the pulse in her throat. His hands stroked up her back, then sank into her hair. He pulled hard, bending her neck back. Peyton whimpered at the firmness of his hold. He pulled harder, stretching her head back while he licked along her pulse, then set his teeth against it. The feel of his teeth on her throat made a growl bubble in her throat. He bit down, and the harsh sound broke free.

Wesley raised himself up. Peyton locked her legs around his back as he settled on his knees. He spread his legs wider, sinking deeper into her. Cream flowed out of her at the sensation of him filling her even more. Grunting, Wesley rocked his hips, impaling her on his cock. Peyton dug her fingers into his shoulders, holding on as she was swept into a vortex of unbelievable passion. He pumped hard then twisted his hips, leaving none of her untouched.

“Mine. Mine. Mine.” Wesley’s voice was harsh against her pulse.

Mine, mine, mine. Her heart beat in time while her pussy clenched in reaction. Peyton’s hands clasped around his head, holding him close as he ravished her body, claiming it for his own. The delicious pressure built inside of her, demanding release. As if realising what she needed, Wesley stroked hard and fast, pumping into her with a sensual brutality that drove her over the edge. The knot in her stomach evaporated under the power of her release.

“Y...e...s... F...u...c...k!” Her scream of release left her throat raw.

The passion did not let up, but continued on and on. Wesley pumped in and out, harder and harder, stroke by stroke, never slowing as he continued to take her body to heights of ecstasy. The sound of flesh hitting flesh filled her ears, driving her on. She countered his movements as her release flowed from her, coating his cock, making it easier for him to slide in and out of her. Another orgasm crashed over her, taking her breath away.

“Oh...shit!” Peyton screamed.

At her scream, Wesley increased his strokes, wanting all she could give and more. Her pussy clenched around him in greedy demand, milking him for his semen. Gritting his teeth, he held off his orgasm. It would not be over so soon. He wanted her etched in his skin, burned in his senses. He needed her just like his next breath.

"Give it to me," Wesley growled.

The demand in his tone was like that of a man starved. And that was what he was. He was starved for all of her. Some instinct told him she was holding something back from him. He would not have it. She was his and would give it all to him. Tightening his hand in her hair, he bit her pulse again. Her pussy spasmed as another orgasm filled her. The hot gush of her fulfillment coated him, and he slid even deeper into her. A grunt of pleasure passed his lips onto her skin. The scent of sex mixed with her scent of cinnamon and vanilla. It was a smell he would never forget—musky, sweet, and addictive.

Widening his knees, he spread her even more for his taking. Her long legs tightened around his back while her nails scored his skin. The sting of pain only made him pump harder. Her cunt clenched around him in time with the tightening of her legs. With a lick of her nipple, he took in the salty taste of her. Growling, he turned her hair loose and ran his hands to her hips. Gripping them, he pulled her back and forth against his hardened cock.

Peyton gripped him tighter with her legs. "Fuck me," she moaned.

Only too glad to oblige, Wesley continued to hold her hips, controlling her movements. She whimpered, trying to move faster, but he kept moving in and out at the pace he set. She pumped his shoulder with her fist, harsh sobs of need spilling from her throat. A grim smile curved his lips as he continued to take her. She was his, and he would make her ache for his touch.

"You're mine, Peyton, and no one will have you again but me."

Her emerald green eyes filled with need, narrowed, and a snarl bubbled from her lush lips. He stroked deep and watched her eyes go glassy with pleasure. The light sheen of sweat on her caramel skin made her glow with desire. A fierce pleasure filled him as he watched the need lining her face.

"Say it. Say it!" He punctuated each word with a hard thrust.

"W...h...a...t...?" Peyton asked breathlessly.

"You...are...mine," he demanded with each stroke of his cock into her clutching pussy.

Peyton bit her lip, her body shaking with pleasure.

"Say...it..." Grunting, he thrust again and again.

Peyton's eyes met his, and she stared at him. Then she rolled her hips in a devastating move that made his heart beat a wild tattoo. She clenched her pussy around his cock in a sensual vice. Then she dropped backward, arching her back. He slid one hand to brace her back, then moved the other right below her stomach, just over her pelvis. Her orgasms pulsed against his hand. Looking down, he watched as she enclosed him in her silken heat. The combination of seeing her engulf him and feeling it was sensory overload.

"Wesley."

Her husky voice drew his eyes to hers. The carnal decadence in her look was like a physical touch.

"I am yours, and there'll be no one else for either of us." Peyton's whisper seemed to stroke along his skin and grip his cock.

She growled, then rolled her hips and clenched around him. The pressure inside of him burst out, and his cock pulsed with his pleasure. It went on and on, filling her up and coating them both. Peyton groaned and came in a torrent of cream mixing with his own desire. He fell back, and she spread her legs, entrapping him beneath her. She bucked her hips, riding the pulse of his orgasms. Wesley countered, moving his cock in and out of her, making her peak again. It went on and on.

She collapsed against him. With barely enough energy to move, Wesley shifted to get comfortable. He moved her with him, not wanting to be parted from her.

"Give me a sec," Peyton groaned.

"Christ, woman! Are you trying to kill me?" Wesley laughed weakly.

Peyton laughed then was silent. She shifted. He held her hips against him. She settled and sighed. Sleep tugged at him, but he fought it, afraid she would be gone when he woke.

Peyton kissed him softly. "I'm not going anywhere. Sleep."

He looked at her and saw the promise in her eyes. With a soft kiss on her lips, he relaxed and held her. After a while he heard her breathing change, and a soft snore tickled his neck. Wesley stifled a grin. He couldn't wait to tease her about her snoring. Tiredness dragged him under. Tightening his arms around her, he let go and allowed himself sleep.

* * * *

Something made Peyton open her eyes. A dark, oppressive feeling cut off her breath. Gasping, she pushed it all away. Slowly, his heat reached her, pushing back the feeling further. With a glance to her left, she saw Wesley laying a little bit away from her. His soft breathing filled the silence in the room. Her eyes narrowed as she watched him. Instinct made her reach out to touch him. A black gust of smoke seemed to flow up towards her. It stopped barely a hairsbreadth from her, then funnelled and was gone.

Peyton's heart pounded, then she reached out and put her hand over his chest. She curled against him with her hand over his heart. A whisper of a sound drew her eyes to the corner of the bedroom by the door. She could barely make out the shape, but she knew it was there.

Almost soundlessly, she whispered, "It's not time yet. Be gone from here."

Mocking laughter filled the room then it went pitch black. Although she could not see anything, Peyton kept her gaze steady.

"Go back from whence ye came. Be never more on this plane."

Time stood still for an instant then it was as if a pulse of life started. The gloom lifted. Peyton held still a moment then looked out the open doors. A black cloud flowed across the balcony, up the wrought iron railing and through the air away from the house. As it disappeared from sight, Peyton shuddered with fear she could not have shown. She glanced at Wesley and saw he was undisturbed. Peyton took in his aura. A shimmer of gold surrounded him. A flash of grey came and went in the gold so fast she almost missed it. Frowning, she reached out with her senses. She felt nothing. Withdrawing, she looked at him. Whatever was mixed in his aura was something she couldn't see.

The insidious sound of laughter filled the silence, drawing her attention. She looked back at the open doors. The moon shone bright, and a word floated across it.

Soon.

The laughter came again, making ice claw up her skin, then all was silent. Peyton heard a growling sound and saw Newton standing in the open doorway. She reached for her with her thoughts.

It's okay. The threat is gone now. We'll protect him together. Come lay by the bed.

Newton's growls subsided, and she glanced at Peyton. She nodded then padded over. Newton lay down, her head turned to look out the doorway.

Peyton, too, stared out the doors long after the warning had faded.

I have to tell Wesley everything. He has the right to choose. Please don't let him get hurt. She closed her eyes and listened to his heartbeat. How will I tell him the truth?

Chapter Five

Four days later, Peyton was still trying to figure out the best way to tell Wesley the truth.

"I wish we were still in bed with me buried deep inside of you." Wesley's whisper made her shiver.

She settled deeper against him as they strolled down the sidewalk. Her hand tightened around his waist. He hugged her, and they continued to walk along. Newton kept pace with them. She barked happily and ran ahead of them, then came back.

"Me too, and I wish we were still alone," Peyton replied.

"There's no one around right now." He stopped and turned her to face him.

Lowering his head, he kissed her. The soft lusciousness of his kiss made her forget where they were. Peyton wrapped her arms around him and kissed him back. His tongue clashed wildly with hers. His hands gripped her hips and pulled her flush against his body. She shivered at the feel of his raging erection. His soft growl made her already wet pussy gush with passion.

"I want you." Wesley's tone was darkly sensual.

Peyton's knees went weak with longing. Unsteady, she held him for a moment as she tried to catch her breath. Softly, she raised her lips to his and kissed him gently.

"I want you, too, but there are too many eyes looking at us."

Wesley looked around, then back at her. "There's no one here but us and Newt, which is kind of strange, come to think of it. Although it's only seven o'clock in the morning, I would think, for a town this size, at least a few people would be out—at least the store owners getting ready for the day."

Peyton bit back a chuckle at the look on his face.

"You're so cute." She couldn't resist teasing him.

A blush stole up his face. She laughed as a sheepish grin curved his lips.

"When are you going to stop doing that?"

"What?" Peyton asked, although she knew what he meant.

The look he gave her let her know he knew what she was up to. He answered her anyway. "Complimenting me so I blush," Wesley replied in a fake displeased tone.

"Never." Laughing, Peyton touched his cheek, which was still slightly red.

Wesley growled, put his hands around her hips and picked her up. With a yelp, she grabbed his shoulders for balance. Newton yipped at them. Wesley laughed and turned around with her in his arms, then stopped and loosened his hold. She slid down his body. A shiver racked her, then him. Wesley kissed her hungrily. After some time, he pulled back, breathing harshly. Peyton's heart raced, and she tried to hear through the ringing in her ears.

"I want to ravish you." Wesley's dark, succulent tone came through the ringing.

Peyton put her hands against his passion-flushed cheeks. She leaned close to his ear. His hands tightened as he still held her off the ground.

In a conspiratorial tone, Peyton said, "People are giving us some privacy."

Wesley looked again. Peyton followed his gaze and saw the curtains closest to them twitch closed. Wesley groaned. She glanced at him and saw the blush staining his cheeks.

"You blush so ravishingly." She laughed.

"I'm shy."

"In the last few days, with all you've done with and to me, you're shy. *Right.*" The disbelief was plain in her tone.

"I'm shy, damn it, and controlled too. Don't you dare laugh at me." He rocked her, then stilled as she bit off another laugh. "You just make me forget. Hell, you make me lose control."

He wore the sheepish grin she had come love. Her heart clenched.

No. I can't love him. It's too soon. Panic filled her as she looked at the side of his face. A calm feeling of acceptance overcame her. He was looking at something across the street and, following his line of sight, she saw Ian. Newton was standing beside him. She wagged her tail and ran back to them. Ian gave a little finger wave and tapped his watch. Wesley groaned again. She turned her attention to him.

"He'll be teasing me all day," Wesley groused.

"I know."

"Some sympathy would be nice."

"You can hold your own." She kissed his nose.

Wesley caught her lips in a sizzling kiss. He pulled away, and she swayed where he had put her down. She reached out and gripped his arms for balance. She raised her eyebrow in question and licked her lips.

"Might as well make his teasing worth it." Wesley shrugged and grinned.

Peyton chuckled. They had been locked away in her house for a few days. They had planned to stay there, until an incentive to come to town came in the form of a threat.

Last night, Sinai and Ian, left messages on her answering machine that, if they didn't see them by the next day, they would be coming by to see if they were still breathing. She knew Sinai would follow through, so she thought it more prudent to at least come into town. Now she wished she had stayed at home with him and locked the door against everyone.

"We should have barred the doors and stayed at your house," Wesley grumbled.

Startled, she looked at him. He was glaring across the street. She turned absently. Ian was outside his bakery, glancing at his watch and tapping his foot. With a shake of her head, she returned her attention to Wesley. He raised his hand and pointed. She heard the tinkle of a bell and knew Ian had gone back inside.

"He acts like he's my boss or something." Wesley got a devilish twinkle in his eyes.

She knew that look. "Uh, oh. What are you going to do?"

"Nothing."

"Don't try that innocent look on me."

"Don't worry about it." He hugged her.

She slapped her hand on his chest. "I need to make sure to get money in case you get arrested."

He shrugged. "You can sweet talk your sister. And besides, she won't arrest me."

"Sinai?" She looked at him in disbelief. "She sure as hell would, and love it. I know you only met her once, but from that meeting alone, you should know she would."

"Yeah, you're right." He grimaced then a wicked grin came over his face. "Don't worry. I won't be caught. Ian thinks he's a master of tricks, but he forgot I'm the best." He winked at her.

"I thought Pan was."

"Hey, how can you say that?" Wesley wrinkled his nose.

She ran her finger down his nose. "From the adventures you've told me about all of them. Pan usually got the best of you."

"Yeah, yeah. Pan is good, but at least I can outsmart Ian."

Peyton shook her head. From all the conversations they'd had, she knew he was close to only four people whom he considered family. Together, they were usually called 'the five brains'. When he had told her who he was, then what he did, Wesley had blushed. His blush had fascinated her. He had gone so red she had thought he was overheating. He was so red, she'd asked if he was okay. The sheepish grin that curved his lips had captured her heart.

He had insisted on knowing if she understood. Peyton assured him that she did. Wesley had such an expectant look on his face, a look that puzzled her at first. Then, after a few moments, he had asked if she was turned off by him being so nerdy and rich. From being with him, she knew he wasn't bragging, but being earnest. She couldn't contain her laughter. He was like no nerd she knew. As for money, she didn't care. She had told him so and mentioned she had money of her own. She wasn't rich like him, but made enough to live comfortably.

Wesley was so relieved he had hugged her, which led to other pleasurable activities. And that was how it had gone. They made love, ate, and talked about everything and anything.

Everything except what you need to tell him. Peyton couldn't come up with a valid reason she hadn't told him everything. She selfishly wanted time with him, without legacies and prophecies hanging over them.

"What time is the family interrogation?" He coughed playfully. "I mean dinner."

Peyton smacked him lightly on the arm. "It's a family dinner. Well, actually, it's a barbecue. They want to meet you. Well, *officially* meet you. It's at six o'clock. You can bring Ian along."

"I'm looking forward to it. Do I get to see any cute naked butt baby pictures of you?"

"Nope. I burned them all."

He chuckled then said, "Thanks for keeping Newton for me. When she and Einstein get together, they wreak havoc. I don't know how they got out of the playroom. Ian's den will never be the same. "

Peyton stifled a chuckle. "I can imagine. It's okay. She can keep me company. Won't you, Newt?"

Newt barked.

"She's already attached to you. Now you behave, Newt. No wild parties," he teased, squatting to her level.

He wagged his finger at Newton. She barked and licked his hand. Wesley laughed and stood. "You're sure you don't want to take my car back to your house?"

"Nope. Newt and I will hitch a ride with someone. Probably Sinai, unless I can avoid her and the interrogation I'm sure she's planning."

He chuckled, hugged her then kissed her softly. "See you later."

He turned to leave. She smacked him on the butt. Wesley looked at her over his shoulder, then wiggled his butt and winked. He continued on his way.

In the middle of the street, he turned to look at her. "Come on, admit it. It's an interrogation."

"If that's what you want to believe."

He laughed, waved, and jogged the rest of the way to the bakery.

"Since you have so much energy, you can knead the bread," Ian shouted.

"Jealous," Wesley countered.

"Whatever," Ian replied.

The door to the bakery closed behind Wesley. Peyton shook her head as she watched Ian push Wesley. Wesley grabbed him in a headlock then flipped him. Ian was up, and they started to play box.

"Stop mooning over him already."

"He's so yummy," she replied.

A gagging sound came from behind her. Peyton looked back at Sinai, who had her finger right before her lip and made the gagging noise again. Peyton pulled Sinai's hand down then linked her arm with her sister's.

"This is Newton." She waved at Newton. "Give us a ride home?"

Sinai put her hand out to Newton, who sniffed it, then put up her paw. Sinai shook it. In silence, they walked down the sidewalk. Reaching Sinai's cruiser, they got in. Sinai drove down Tular Street, the main street of the town.

Peyton watched the usual activity of the businesses along the way. Mr. Silos was sweeping in front of the pharmacy, while Ms. Clamps put fresh flowers on her outer table for the café. As they passed, the various business owners waved. Peyton returned their greetings and tried not to blush or squirm.

She had grown up in Blackstone Haven and had run these streets. After college, she had tried to live and work somewhere else, but eventually she had returned home. From the conversations she'd had with her siblings, she knew they had done the same. They had all tried to live somewhere else, but eventually they had come back home, one by one.

Although the town had grown over the years as people came and went, there were some constants of Blackstone Haven. The activity of the main street where the businesses got ready for the day was one of them.

"Serves you right for putting on such a show for all of us." There was suppressed laughter in Sinai's voice.

Turning to her, Peyton glared. "Who called the business owners and told them to be scarce when we came through?"

Sinai gave her a look. "Who do you think? The hopeless romantic."

Peyton groaned. "Oh, crap. Not Auntie Faina?"

"Yes."

The cheerfulness in Sinai's tone grated on her nerves.

"Why are you so damn happy?"

Sinai laughed. "I can't wait for the barbecue. It will be very entertaining to see how Wesley reacts to the aunts."

Peyton's eyes widened. "They're *all* coming?"

"Oh, yeah, and they're even pulling out their sexiest clothes." Sinai nodded.

"Oh, shit. Are they at least going to have clothes *on*?"

"With Auntie Anya, who knows?" Sinai shrugged.

Peyton closed her eyes and prayed they would all at least be dressed. She had known her mom would question Wesley. Heck, she had even known her siblings and cousins would be sure to check him out. But she had never figured the aunts would be there too. The car stopped. Opening her eyes, she saw they were in front of her house. The drive that usually took half an hour had gone by fast. She reached for the door. Sinai's hand on her arm

stopped her. Peyton braced herself for the questions as she turned. The seriousness in Sinai's face gave her pause.

"You haven't told him everything."

Peyton winced at the reproach in her tone. She opened her mouth to explain. Sinai raised her hand up, stilling what she would have said.

"It's your choice when you tell him, but he needs to know, Peyton. Soon."

Fear made Peyton's heart pound at that word. She kept it behind a wall in her mind, not wanting to let any of them know. Sinai's look was probing then she nodded. Peyton touched her arm then got out of the car. She closed the door after Newton got out to join her. Peyton headed for the house.

"The uncles are sharpening their knives," Sinai called.

Peyton turned and stared at her. "What did you say?"

"The uncles are sharpening their knives. I hope Wesley can run real well." Sinai's grin was wicked.

"Tell me you're lying," Peyton demanded, taking a step towards the car.

"I'm lying." Sinai's lips twitched.

"Why don't I believe you?"

"Because you're smart," Sinai replied cheerfully.

"I can call mom and cancel. It's not too late," Peyton mused.

"Your phone's not working, and Mom won't answer you telepathically." Sinai shook her head.

Peyton narrowed her eyes. "How do you know my phone isn't working? And why would Mom be ignoring my telepathic call?"

Sinai said nothing. Instead, she waved and drove away.

Peyton heard her laughter. She stomped up the stairs of her house, took out her key and opened the door. Quickly, she went to the phone on the entryway table and picked it up. There was no dial tone. Furiously, she slammed it down. A piece of paper floated off the table. She bent, picked it up, and read it.

Just in case you try to back out and stop our fun. Sabra.

"Damn you, Sabra." Eyes narrowed, Peyton vowed to get even with her little sister.

Mom. She reached out with her mind. Blankness greeted her. Swearing loudly, she jumped as something dropped at her feet. She reached for it and winced as she saw it was a bar of soap. Throwing the soap in the air and catching it, she knew her mother could hear her but was not responding. Newton bumped her hand. She ran her fingers in the dog's fur and sighed.

"Fine. We'll be there, but tell the aunts to behave and the uncles to put away their knives." She felt a soft touch on her shoulder, then a kiss on the cheek.

She touched the spot on her cheek where she'd felt the kiss, and with a rueful smile went up the stairs to her workshop. In the doorway, she looked to the right at the finished tapestry of Wesley. It was starkly beautiful and sensual. She had finished it before she had seen him again. With impatient steps, she went to Zuri, her favourite loom, and set her up for a new tapestry.

Absently, she looked towards the doorway leading to the balcony. Newton lay with her head on her paws. The doorway had become Newton's favourite spot, no matter what room she was in. Peyton returned her attention to her loom. In moments, she was hard at work, creating.

I have to tell Wesley. The thought echoed with each pass of her flying shuttle through the threads.

* * * *

Tiredness weighed on Wesley. He ached all over. He stifled a groan. Ian had worked him hard. He shifted on the couch in Ian's office. Who would have thought baking could make him work muscles he didn't know he had. He grumbled and shifted. Ian had enjoyed making him work, claiming that, since he had come here to help Ian, then disappeared for days, he must be rested. Ian damn well knew he wasn't. Wesley didn't say anything, knowing it would open a conversation he couldn't have without blushing. That would be all he needed. Ian would only tease him more.

With a sigh, he relaxed. He knew it would be only a matter of time until Ian came and sent him back to work. The dream slid over him before he realised it.

Coldness filled him as he looked down the barrel of the gun at the man. The man faced him fearlessly. Wesley saw himself reflected in the man's eyes, and a cold smile curved his lips. With cold precision, he pulled the trigger. There was a little cough of sound from the silencer on his gun. The man's eyes went glassy, and he fell backward. Stepping closer to the man's body, he looked down at him. Blood trickled from the wound in his head.

Although he knew the man was dead, he squatted next to him and checked his pulse. It was part of the job, checking to make sure the target was dead. With a smooth motion, he stood, turned and walked away. He whistled as he went through the door.

Wesley jerked awake, his heart pounding. He hadn't dreamed in days and had thought it was gone. Straightening on the couch, he ran his hand over his sweaty face. He dropped his hands in his lap and looked at them. He expected and half hoped to see blood on them.

"God. What's happening to me? Why does it seem so real?" His voice echoed in the silent room.

"You should be working," Ian said.

Guiltily, he jerked his attention to his friend. Ian stood in the open doorway, looking at him, eyes narrowed. Ian strode over to the couch.

"I'll get back to work." Wesley stood quickly.

He tried to walk past him, but Ian's hand on his arm stopped him. Wesley took a quick breath, smiled affably, and turned to look at him.

"What? You don't want to work me like a dog?" he joked.

"What's wrong?" Ian's steel grey gaze was intent.

"Nothing. I'm just tired from you working me so hard." Wesley kept the smile on his face.

"Something's wrong, Wes. I've been waiting for you to tell me. You came here for a reason." Ian watched him, unsmiling.

"I can't tell you." He put up his hand to stop Ian as he opened his mouth to speak. "Not yet. I need to get it straight in my head first. Let it go."

"When you're ready, I'm here," Ian replied.

"Okay." Wesley cleared his throat.

He pulled away from Ian and went through the door, down the hall, and into the baking area. Ian passed him and patted him on the shoulder, then went back to making pastries.

Absently, Wesley went to the door that led to the front of the bakery. He watched as the part-time help Ian had hired served the customer. Wesley turned back and looked at Ian, who was still busy at the table. With a sigh, Wes went back to the table and picked up the pastry bag. He looked at it then dropped it back on the table.

Wesley went around the table and headed for the back door.

"Where are you going?" Ian asked.

"Peyton's." Without sparing him a glance, Wesley opened the door and continued on his way.

"Don't forget the family barbecue at six," Ian called.

Raising his hand in acknowledgement, Wesley walked rapidly outside. He turned the corner and continued down the sidewalk, distractedly acknowledging greetings from various people. Reaching his SUV, he got in, started it and pulled out. He tooted his horn and waved to the woman who let him go in front of her. A few moments passed, and when he reached the open stretch of road leading up Blackstone Mountain, he floored it. He drove the SUV around the curves and corners up the mountain. Wesley spared a glance for the various homes littering the area away from the road.

He remembered that Peyton told him her relatives lived all along Blackstone Mountain. Frowning, he tried to remember how many houses he had seen. As he continued up the mountain, he counted, and by the time he reached the turn to Peyton's house he had reached the double digits. Slowing as he went down her road, his hands were sweating. He hoped all of her family wouldn't be at the barbecue. He had assumed it would be her mom, dad, and siblings, but now he wasn't so sure. He parked his car, turned it off and got out.

The sight of her house still took his breath away. It was architecturally beautiful and breathtaking. The massive structure made of brick and glass had balconies all over, as well as turrets and lots of angles. The glass glinted in the light, while the brick shone. He strode up the stairs, glancing around at the acres of flowers and trees. When he reached the door, he realised that he had got through without Peyton. She had mentioned the house was warded.

Before, when he had touched the area in front of the stairs, it had felt like knives were trying to tear him apart. He'd had to touch Peyton to get through.

At the front door, he turned and reached out. His hand felt like it was sliding through warm honey. The air wavered, and something flowed against him, caressing his skin. Wesley jerked back, and whatever it was seemed to reluctantly let him go.

Gulping, he tried to think rationally. He had accepted she was a witch, but the ward feeling him up was a bit much. Wesley turned and reached for the doorbell. The door swung open before he could ring the bell. Frowning, he stepped inside.

"Peyton!"

He listened and heard no response. Walking deeper into the house, he jumped at the sound of the door closing. He glanced back at the closed door. He was filled with a sense that something was there with him. Cautiously, he looked around. He could see nothing. Instinct made him turn to the stairs. He went up quickly. On the first level, instead of continuing up to her bedroom, he went to his left. Slowly, he walked past the closed rooms. At the end of the hall, he reached the open door. The sound of jazz spilled out of the room.

Wesley stepped inside and stared in awe. Tapestries lined the walls. They were so life-like, he expected them to walk or jump off the walls. Going to the one closest to him, he touched the bottom of a tapestry that depicted a white tiger, its head thrown back with the moon bathing it in an eerie glow. It was soft to the touch. He stepped back and turned in a circle. Between some of the tapestries, he saw doors, and he realised they were the doors he had passed on the way to this room. He continued down, looking at each tapestry. They got better and better. Newton padded up to him. She batted her head against his hand in greeting. He patted her. Newton wagged her tail and ran back the way he had come. She disappeared through the door he had come in.

He turned a corner, and his breath stalled. With a step forward, he braced his hands on his hips and looked up at himself. He could feel a blush stealing up his cheeks. The sensuality of the tapestry made him feel like a voyeur. The emotion in it humbled him. The colours were so rich, flowing over each of his features. His ice blue eyes were luminous and seductive. He looked at the slight scar over his right eyebrow as he touched the one on his face. Peyton had mentioned she wove tapestries, but he had never expected all this.

A whisper of sound drew his attention. He turned and was captivated by the woman who had created all this beauty. On silent feet, he walked to her. The sound of a saxophone wafted into the room. He had seen the discreetly mounted speakers all over the walls. He walked behind her as she sat on a wide stool before a new tapestry. He glanced at it and saw it was of them. It was the first time they made love. Emotion welled inside his throat. Closing the distance, he sat behind her.

Peyton stiffened suddenly, then sighed and leant back into him. Curling his arms next to hers, he leaned in, nuzzling her ear. She shivered and settled into him.

“Show me,” Wesley whispered.

Chapter Six

Silently, Peyton reached for his hands and placed them on the shuttle. She rested her own hand over his and guided him. The softness of her touch almost undid Wesley. He followed her movements and watched as the image she had been creating took shape. The shuttle flew back and forth against the yarns, creating an image of dark sensuality. His cock hardened as he watched her face come to life on the tapestry. Peyton murmured softly and rubbed her ass against his raging erection.

He curled into her and spoke softly against her neck. "I love you, Peyton."

She stilled then looked at him. Her eyes were wide, tears welling in them and falling down her smooth caramel skin. He kissed away her tears, then moved his lips to hers. Peyton turned her body into his and curled her hands around his head. She ate at his lips with a hungry ferocity. After a few moments, she withdrew and looked at him, tears still swimming in her eyes.

"I love you, Wesley."

"I know." He smiled gently.

"How?" She pouted.

"They speak for you." He nodded to the tapestry in front of them then motioned to the other one on the wall. "You're very talented, Peyton. All this is so beautiful, I'm in awe."

"You're the one who's beautiful." Peyton cupped his cheeks and kissed them.

The blush heated his face. She chuckled and continued to kiss him. Her hot hands unbuttoned his shirt and slid it off his shoulders. Wesley shrugged out of it. Peyton stood and motioned for him to stand.

Not sure if his legs could support him, Wesley stood. He was thankful he didn't stumble. Peyton's look said she knew he was holding on by a thread.

She came closer, barely touching him and unbuckled his jeans, slid her hands under his boxers and around to his hips. Her slow touch caused him to shudder and his knees to weaken. Wesley took a deep breath. Her scent of cinnamon and vanilla tantalised his senses. Peyton chuckled, a wanton sound. She pushed his jeans and boxers off, all in one motion.

Wesley growled low in his throat. Hot hands stroked along his hardened cock. His vision dimmed and his breathing quickened. The tips of her fingers stroked the head of his cock, massaging in the pre-cum that was on his tip.

“Ummm...” Peyton’s sensuous sound vibrated through him as if she had tasted him.

She raised her emerald green gaze to his, a wicked promise in her eyes. In a smooth motion, she dropped to her knees. Captured, Wesley followed her downward motion. Peyton opened her lush lips and flicked her tongue out, tasting him. Visceral pleasure shot from the base of his shaft to the tip. His cock twitched in reaction. Peyton chuckled, then sucked him in. Wesley’s vision blinked out at the feel of her heated mouth around his cock. A groan ripped from him, drawing out her moan of pleasure.

His hands gripped her hair and held her as she sucked on him. He fought to clear his vision, then looked at the woman who was giving him such pleasure. The greedy delight on her face made his knees almost buckle. Reaching for something to hold onto, his fingers brushed wood. He gripped it tightly and stared as she opened her mouth and took him deeper. Her mouth worked on him as her hands caressed his sac. Wesley jumped as the tip of her nail scraped along the sensitive underside. A shudder rippled through him. Peyton rolled her eyes up to meet his. The hunger in her eyes made his cock twitch in response. She moved her mouth around him, suckling while stroking with her hands. Still watching him, she licked his cock, then deep throatied him and let out a rolling purr.

Pleasure lanced through Wesley, making him rise on his toes and grip the wood he held. Peyton’s chuckle vibrated against the head of his cock, and she purred again. Need sliced through him. He released the wood and grabbed her. Ignoring her startled exclamation, he pulled her up and lifted her into his arms.

Turning, he pressed her back against the wood and dragged her skirt up. With one hard tug, he ripped her panties off and speared her on his cock. Peyton screamed and grabbed his shoulders. Growling, Wesley tried to slow down. She rotated her hips, taking him deeper into her wetness.

“Can the loom take it?” he asked, holding onto his control by a thread.

“What?” Peyton murmured.

“*The loom.*”

Understanding flashed in her gaze, and he felt a warm trickle of current on his skin.

"Now it can." She rolled her hips again in a devastating undulation. "Fuck me, Wesley. Fuck me."

He took her at her word and fucked her. In a surge, he rocked forward hard. Her gasp filled his ears like the sweetest symphony. He pumped again, and she groaned. As he stroked again, he sealed his lips to hers, tasting the sounds of passion she made. Peyton's grip on his shoulder tightened, and her nails scored his skin. He hissed at the pain and thrust harder. The sound of her flesh hitting the wood drove him on. Her grunts of passion made his cock harden to a painful intensity. He could feel the tautness in her clutching pussy and knew she was almost there.

Increasing his thrusts, he felt her tighten around him, and her release washed over him. Peyton screamed, and her hands lifted from his shoulders. She scrambled for something to hold along the wood of the loom until finally, her hands met a piece of wood sticking out. She grabbed it.

Wesley stepped back slightly and pulled her hips forward. Peyton braced herself and pushed down to meet his forward thrust. She gasped at the deepness of it. Groaning, Wesley sank deeper into her heat. Through tears of pleasure, he looked at her. The vision of her hips cocked forward, head bowed back, and face etched in harsh lines of lust was burned into his mind. Peyton rolled her hips again. His breath stalled at the contraction of her clutching cunt against his erection. He gripped her hips firmly and stroked into her, letting her gasp of pleasure wash over them in a sexual symphony.

The head of his cock scraped along her pussy walls with a precision that was devastating and strangely tender. Peyton gripped the side of the loom for balance and pushed down. His cock sank deeper inside of her.

"Shhh...ii...tt!" she screamed.

Another orgasm rippled through her, ripping her insides with painful intensity. Wesley thrust hard and deep, then undulated his hips, creating a firestorm of sensation.

"F...yy...Pey...t...o...n!" His roar drowned out all other sound.

His cock pulsed with his release. Still he stroked, hard and sure, never slowing.

He was a sexual master who had her at his mercy. Peyton clamped her legs around him tighter and held on. His hands gripping her hips were harsh. He held her as he pummelled

her with his cock. His slide in and out of her created more orgasms until they tripped over each other in continuous pleasure.

“Oooo...mmm...g!” The scream left her throat raw.

Tightening her grip on the wood she held, she threw her head back and embraced the pleasure. Her pussy spasmed hard around his shaft. His cock pulsated within her as his release continued. He let out a harsh sound then stumbled. Her hands went weak and they slipped off the loom.

Wesley dropped to his knees, and she tumbled down with him. His hands kept her in place so he was still imbedded in her. He lifted her up and down on his shaft in urgency.

Grunting, Peyton echoed his movements. Another release blasted through her, energizing her to her very toes. His scream matched her own, and they reverberated throughout the room. He slumped forward against her, his arms holding her close. Peyton listened to the sound of his heart. She chuckled as she realised that hers was racing as fast as his. Wesley’s harsh breath tickled her hair. Turning her head, she moaned as he met her lips with his and suckled her tongue.

He withdrew slowly. “I can’t get enough of you.”

“I’m glad to oblige.”

He sighed then settled into her.

Peyton’s eyes widened. “*Wesley.*”

“I can’t get enough of you,” he repeated.

She looked at him. His blush and sheepish grin made her chuckle. His thrust made her gasp, and she locked her legs around him. Wesley murmured against her skin, making her shiver. His laugh was a devilish sound.

* * * *

“I like your man, Pey. He’s sexy and fits right in,” a melodious voice said.

“If you think that will make up for messing with my phone, you’re mistaken,” Peyton replied, not looking away from Wesley as he stood in a circle of her aunts.

“Come on. You know you can’t stay mad at me.” A shoulder pushed hers playfully.

“I’m going to succeed this time.” She looked at Sabra, her younger sister.

Sabra's green-eyed gaze, so much like her own, twinkled with mischief. Sabra pursed her lips and gave Peyton an innocent look.

"It's not going to work," Peyton warned, although she was already weakening.

"It already is." Sabra laughed.

Sighing, Peyton shook her head at her baby sister as she looked for the first time at her clothes.

"You came right from your studio."

"Yeah. When Mom and the aunts get over fawning over your beau, they won't let me hear the end of it." She rolled her eyes. "Oh, well. At least they're distracted for now."

Sabra shrugged and ran her stained hands down her paint-splotted coveralls. She glanced over at Wesley. "So why haven't you told him everything?"

"Sinai, the big mouth, told you," Peyton accused.

"Hey! If I'm to be accused of something, at least let me be here to defend myself." Sinai came up on Peyton's other side. "And no, I didn't tell Nosy."

Sinai reached over and cuffed Sabra on the back of the head. Sabra's eyes narrowed, and Peyton felt a tinge of current. Sinai yelped. Peyton stepped back out of the way and watched them. Sinai's lips curled in a snarl.

"Girls!" a husky voice called.

Peyton bit back a smile as they winced and looked across the clearing.

"Sorry, Mom," they said together.

Ilian Blackstone nodded. Looking at Peyton and winking, she went back to her conversation with Wesley. Peyton bowed her head and tried not to laugh. Her sisters each came up beside her and butted her shoulders playfully.

"You think you're slick, getting out of the way?" Sinai asked.

"Yeah. She knows how to keep her head down," Sabra replied ruefully.

"I know better than getting between you troublemakers." Peyton looked at the two of them.

"Proud of it," they said together. Sinai and Sabra high fived each other.

Peyton chuckled.

"Uh, oh. I thought you patted them down," Sabra hissed.

Not sure what she was talking about, Peyton followed her gaze. She started forward as she saw her Uncle Inus stop just outside the circle of her aunts.

"Are you ready for the challenge, boy?" Uncle Inus's voice boomed, hushing everyone.

She saw the confusion on Wesley's face. Peyton walked rapidly to head off the rest of the uncles, who were closing in. She skidded to a stop as the rest of her siblings step in front of her. She put her hands on her hips. "Get out of my way."

They shook their heads. Sinai and Sabra linked their arms with hers.

"Let them have their fun. You know if you interfere, it'll be worse. Let's see what Wesley is made of," Sinai said.

"Go, Uncle Inus!" Sabra yelled.

"Traitor." Peyton glared at her.

"What? Uncle Inus is the best." Sabra shrugged.

Ignoring them all, Peyton looked on, hoping Wesley would go along. His gentle smile made her heart race. He winked at her.

"What's up, Mr. Blackstone?"

A startled look came over Uncle Inus's face, and he laughed.

"It's Inus, boy. Come on." He slapped Wesley on the shoulder.

Peyton watched as they set up the target, and Uncle Inus explained. She was too far away to hear what they said, but the expression of amusement on Wesley's face made her relax. She watched as, one by one, her uncles performed an intricate movement, then threw their knives. A repeated thwack was all that was heard as each movement got more and more complicated.

With Uncle Inus's turn, she held her breath, knowing he liked to showboat. He grinned, then back flipped, twisted in the air, landed, slid out one leg and threw his knife. It hit dead centre on the mark. They all whooped, and Uncle Inus strutted forward. She saw him take the knife as it was returned to him and hold it out to Wesley. She waited for Wesley to turn it down. Her family went through this ritual with all newcomers.

Wesley had already won their favour by at least looking interested. Shock filled her as Wesley took the knife. The look on Uncle Inus's face was priceless. Peyton started forward to stop him from hurting himself. Wesley flashed a grin, then put the knife between his teeth.

He flipped, hand over heels over hand, in a blur of motion coming right at her. Her siblings backed away. The power she saw in his movements made her mouth water with lust.

He back flipped in front of her, coming down to face her. Wesley took the knife from between his teeth, grabbed her with one hand, kissed her, then turned and moving almost too quickly for the eye to follow, threw the knife. He turned back to her, grabbed her again, and kissed her.

Stupefied, Peyton held onto him and kissed him. The hollering of her family penetrated the sexual fog that had surrounded her, and she pulled away from him. He held her close and winked at her.

"He hit it dead centre! I'm going to adopt that boy," Uncle Inus's voice boomed.

"How did you do that?" Peyton cleared her throat.

"Science, baby. It's all science." Wesley grinned.

Peyton laughed.

"More like Sin and Savage," Ian interjected.

Peyton looked at him.

"They like anything to do with weapons. Since we were always together, we all learned. Sin and Savage are the best. Pan is better than me and Wes though. I'm better at archery." Ian smiled, then cuffed Wesley over the head.

"We're going to talk about the trick you pulled," he said.

"What trick?" Wesley's look was innocent.

Ian regarded Wesley sceptically, and was about to speak when he was interrupted.

"Why are you here?" Sinai hissed.

"I was invited," Ian retorted.

"Ian, my boy! Come on and tell me how goes the dough biz," Uncle Inus boomed.

Ian glared at Sinai, nodded mockingly and went over to Uncle Inus. Sinai turned to Peyton.

"Uh, uh. Say nothing. Go away, Sinai," Peyton said before she could speak.

Sinai huffed and stalked away. Sabra waggled her eyebrows and followed her. The rest of her siblings tapped Wesley on his shoulder and rejoined the party.

As they left, Wesley nodded at one of Peyton's sisters and said politely, "Dr. Grayson. It's nice to see you again."

Startled, Peyton waited until they'd gone before asking, "How do you know Grayson?"

"She treated Newton when I came to town." Wesley looked at her.

Peyton looked at Newton lying with the rest of the family pets. She was surrounded by Sinai's twin wolves. They each seemed to be protecting her. Newton looked at her and yawned. Peyton smiled, then returned her attention to Wesley. "What was wrong with her?"

"It was nothing." Wesley shook his head.

She was curious at the expression of guilt on his face. Peyton opened her mouth to ask, but Wesley started speaking.

"Anyway, about your sister. She acted sort of strange when we met this evening. I wonder why she acted as if we hadn't met before."

Peyton's eyes narrowed, and she looked across the clearing at Grayson. Grayson waved, a small smile on her lips. Peyton growled.

"What's wrong?"

She looked back at Wesley and cupped his cheek. "Nothing. My sister likes to interfere in business that's not her own."

Wesley looked confused. Peyton didn't want to explain.

"You've won over my family, handsome," she teased.

A flush filled his face. Laughing, she kissed him.

"Leave the woman alone, Wes, and come on over here," Uncle Inus called.

Wesley groaned and let her go. "Coming, Mr. Inus."

He turned and jogged across the clearing to Uncle Inus and the rest of the uncles.

"Call me Uncle Inus, son." Uncle Inus slapped him on the shoulder.

Wesley grinned and sat in one of the chairs. Peyton watched as Wesley chatted with her uncles. Some of her uncles took up pieces of wood and started to carve as they talked. A warm feeling filled her as she watched. She knew that by the time they left, Wesley would have a few figurines to go home with.

Suddenly, a chill stole over her. Peyton cautiously glanced around, but saw nothing. She looked back at her family, and none of them seemed aware of anything unusual. Shrugging off the feeling, she walked over to join her sisters, her mom, and her aunts.

"I need to talk to you alone, Gray."

"No," Grayson replied.

Peyton glared at her stubborn youngest sister. "Come with me, Gray."

Grayson stared at her, not moving.

"What's going on?" Peyton's mother demanded.

"Peyton has a bee up her ass because she thinks I interfered," Grayson replied, raising an eyebrow. "Except, if she was thinking, she would know I couldn't."

Peyton knew Grayson was right. She was on edge and not thinking clearly, which was dangerous at this time.

"You're right. Sorry, Gray," Peyton conceded.

"No problem. Just be cautious." Grayson waved a hand.

Peyton's gaze sharpened. Her sister had a fathomless look on her face.

"What did you see?"

"Too little and too much." Grayson answered with no hesitation.

Peyton looked to her mom for help.

"You know she can't tell you, even if she knew." Her mother shook her head.

Peyton sighed and watched Grayson. She saw the bitter smile on her face. Peyton bridged the distance between them and hugged her. Grayson stiffened, then relaxed. Peyton felt for her, knowing Grayson had it worse than the rest of them. Grayson had the gift of seeing the possible future outcomes. She had all the knowledge of what would happen, but could not tell any of them. The path they each chose would decide what would happen.

Feeling something in the air between them, Peyton stepped back and caught the white bar of soap. As one, she and Grayson turned to their mom.

"Mom!" they yelled together.

"What? I've told you about the cussing." Their mother shrugged.

"I didn't swear," Peyton protested.

"You thought about it." Her mother gave her a look.

Peyton looked at Grayson and they laughed. She linked hands with her sister.

"His ass is so firm," Auntie Anya said suddenly.

A few of her aunts agreed.

"Whose butt are you talking about?" Peyton frowned at them.

"Your young man's, of course." Auntie Anya grinned, her amber gaze twinkling with mischief.

"What?" Peyton exclaimed, drawing her arm from Grayson's.

The aunts nodded at her, while her mom stifled a grin.

"How many of you touched his butt?"

Peyton crossed her hands under her breasts. She watched in disbelief as, one by one, they all raised their hands. The last hand to be raised shocked her.

"*You too, Mom?*"

"Loosen up, honey." Her mother patted her arm.

"Wait until I tell Daddy," Peyton huffed.

Her mother winked. Peyton looked back and saw her dad blowing her mom a kiss. He saw Peyton watching him and winked. Peyton looked back at her mother.

"Forget it. I'm afraid of what he'll say."

Her mother and aunts laughed at her. Peyton ignored them, sat back, and listened as they talked.

"I like your family. It was good of Sinai to keep Newton for the night." Wesley laughed. "Although I don't think we could have got her away from the boys."

"You're right. They're possessive." Peyton laughed, agreeing. Her sister's wolves and Newton had become fast friends.

"My family liked you, too." Peyton looked at him as he rubbed her feet.

"Although my ass is sore from all the pinches." Wesley bit his lip.

"I'm sorry. My mom and aunts can be...um...exuberant." Peyton winced.

"It's okay. I only want one woman feeling me up, though." Wesley's eyes twinkled as he slid forward until he rested against her jean-clad mound.

She slid her hand down his jeans to cover his hardened cock. He kissed her, resulting in a carnal clash of tongues. With a thought, she stripped them bare. On a sigh, he slid inside of her. Murmuring, she opened to him. He thrust lazily into her. The agony of his slow thrust made the pleasure that much more intense.

She ran her hands up his shoulders and cupped his head. With a slow lick, she pulled her tongue out of his mouth. Wesley's groan vibrated against her aching breast. He dropped his head against her neck, where his hot breath tickled her sensitive skin. His hands found hers, and he twined them together. Peyton gripped his hands as he kept up the leisurely pace

he had set. Heat burned along her skin as it fused with his. She rolled her hips, taking in more of his hard cock, murmuring incoherently.

He growled, a low, brassy sound against her neck. It set off a gush of pleasure that arched right to her clit. Wesley pressed hard against her, rubbing her nub. The stroke of his body against her sensitive clit sent her over the edge. Pleasure flowed from her, and a high, wild moan erupted from her throat. He turned his head as if searching. Moving her head to meet his, she touched his lips with hers. He thrust deeply, making her gasp. His tongue stroked into her mouth. He mimicked the slow thrust he was making inside her. The deliciousness of his thrust and kiss caused her pussy to contract in response. Tightening it around his cock, she felt his hot come gush, filling her. His grunt of pleasure vibrated in her mouth. She revelled in each thrust of his hips and pulse of his release. After some time, he stilled then shifted.

"Stay." Peyton tightened her arms around him.

Wesley sighed. She held him as his breathing deepened and he went to sleep. After a few moments, she followed him.

A sound drew Peyton from her slumber. Startled, she opened her eyes while trying to place the sound. It came again. She looked down and saw sweat coating Wesley's face. He made the weird sound again. Concern filled her. Peyton touched him, and Wesley jerked away from her. His eyes flashed open. The promise of death she saw in his gaze made her heart race with fear.

Wesley's smile curled into a cold grin.

"Wesley," Peyton called softly.

Confusion clouded his eyes, and she saw the warmth she knew fill his gaze.

"Yeah, hey. Are you okay?" His hands rubbed her chilled arms.

Peyton didn't know what to say. She looked at his aura again, and the grey she had seen before was more prevalent.

"Peyton." Wesley's voice penetrated her thoughts.

"Something's wrong with your aura, Wesley."

"What're you talking about?" He grabbed her shoulders.

Peyton gripped his arms and stared into his befuddled eyes. There was something there just beyond her reach.

"In all the years Ian has been here, you've never come. Why did you come to Blackstone Haven?"

He flinched and looked away.

She grabbed his face and made him look at her. "Tell me, Wesley. Something's wrong."

The sorrow in his gaze took her breath. He straightened away from her and reached for his jeans, standing to put them on. Then he sat back down heavily. She picked up his shirt and shrugged into it. Following her instincts, she went to him. He tried to move away, but she held him. Peyton settled in his lap, straddling him. Wesley sighed and nuzzled his face against the side of her neck. Then he leant back and looked at her, his face bleak.

"I'm losing my mind."

Chapter Seven

The seriousness of his tone made her know he believed what he was saying. She didn't say anything, but waited for him to continue.

"It started over a year ago. I woke up in my house, alone, as I usually spend most of my time when I'm not working. I had a nasty headache. After I cleaned up and took something for the pain, I went to the kitchen. On my way, I walked past the TV and switched it on. When the morning show said it was Wednesday, I stopped." He wiped his hand over his face. "I remembered distinctly that, when I'd gone to sleep, it had been Friday. Yet the TV was saying it was Wednesday. I still didn't believe it. I went to the kitchen and on the way, I hit my answering machine. There were over fifty messages from my friends, each more frantic than the next. They had come by my house, but I was gone. No one had seen me for days. Long after the messages had stopped playing, I sat there, trying to remember what had happened to me. Where had I been? What I had done?" He stopped, then looked at her. "*I didn't know.*"

Abruptly, he sat forward. "I was afraid to tell anyone. What could I say? I made up some excuse to my business partners. They believed me. I don't know how, but they did." He sighed, then was silent.

After a few moments, he continued, "Then it happened again. That time, I woke up in a hotel room in Houston. I didn't remember getting there. I didn't know what I was doing there. When I returned home and went to work, my partners asked how my trip to Houston was. When I asked what they meant, they looked at me strangely and said I had called to say I was going out of town. Since they looked suspicious, I didn't ask anything further." He took a deep breath, then let it out. "It continued to happen. I figured I was having blackouts, losing time. I rationalised that I was tired, made all sorts of excuses. It became more frequent. Then the dreams started. Dreams of me murdering people, cold and precise. I didn't know what was going on. I knew I'd have to check to see what's wrong with me, but I needed time to make a choice. The time before this last time showed me my time was running out. I was gone for over six months. I went to sleep in August and woke when it was January. I don't

remember what I did during that time. I decided to take time off from work. I started my trip here, then nothing. I lost more time, almost two weeks, and woke up here in Blackstone Haven. Newton was drugged, and I had no idea how we had got here."

He paused then continued, "I knew the time had come for me to make a choice, and I decided it would be best to get away and see Ian. When I got here, for a while, the dreams stopped, and so did the lost time. But now the dreams have started again. *I don't know what's going on. Why do I keep losing time?*"

Peyton listened to the pain in his voice, and she ached for him. She reached out and took his hand. His grip was fierce. She tried to form her words carefully. "Wesley, you're not losing your mind." The surety she felt of that was in her tone.

"Oh, God. It can't be real. I can't be a murderer." Wesley stared at her, the fear in his gaze tearing at her heart.

"You're not a murderer. At least, not of your own free will." She held his hand harder as he tried to jerk away.

"What?"

"Do you trust me, Wesley? I can help you remember. Let me into your mind." Peyton watched him, waiting for his decision.

Wesley looked at her earnest face and knew he trusted her. But did he trust himself? He wasn't sure if he wanted to know what he had done. Somehow, the idea that he was losing his mind was easier to take than truly finding out if he was a murderer.

Since when is Wesley McCarty a coward? The mocking tone of his inner voice made him ashamed of his fear. Peyton squeezed his hand in support. The faith she had in him humbled him. Gulping, he nodded his head. Peyton's smile was gentle.

Open up to me, Wesley. He jerked at the sound of her voice in his mind.

She had spoken to him telepathically before, and had mentioned that her family communicated that way often, but it was still startling. He felt a brush of her finger against his skin. He gasped. Her hands were still cupped in his. The smile she gave him understood. A sensation of warmth filled his mind, engulfing him. He tensed.

Relax, Wesley. Let me in. Her voice was just as seductive telepathically.

Slowly, he relaxed. The sensation increased, and a flash filled him. Images flowed fast and furious.

He walked inside, chuckling at something funny Pan had said. He dropped his keys on the side table and went through to the kitchen. The phone rang, and he picked it up. Startled to hear the voice, he was hesitant, but agreed to a meeting. Picking up his keys, he went back out the door, grabbing an apple on the way.

He turned on the radio as he drove, singing along as he went. Backing into a parking space, he got out. Looking around, he chuckled at being back at the old stomping ground. With sure strides, he went across the lot and up to the large building. Opening the door, he walked down the empty hallway. Reaching the door he was looking for, he went inside.

"Hello?" Frowning as he got no answer, he looked around the lab.

It was empty. Pissed that he had made a useless trip, he turned to leave. He felt a slight pain, then reached for his neck. Pulling at the site of the pain, he tugged out a dart. Looking down at it, his vision blurred. Turning, he saw a nasty grin, then everything went black.

"Take him to the car," a voice said.

Hard hands lifted and carried him away.

Cold sweat broke out on his skin as he jerked awake. He grabbed his head, suffering from a vicious headache. He swallowed against the nauseous feeling that threatened to overwhelm him. Looking around, he saw his bedroom. Stumbling out of bed, he took a shower, then got dressed and went downstairs. He flipped on the TV and stopped as the newscaster said what day it was. Disbelief filled him. It couldn't be. Shaking his head, he continued to the kitchen. He touched his answering machine. The first message made him stumble. He grabbed a chair and sat. Fear filled him as he tried to remember. All he got was blankness. Time raced forward. A phone rang, and he picked up.

"Tango Wes activate Alpha."

His mind went blank, and he hung up the phone. A cold smile flashed on his face. With a cocky stride, he went down the stairs to the basement. He put his palm against the wall, which slid out to reveal a room. After pressing a code into a keypad, he watched as it slid away. Quickly stripping, he dressed in different clothing. The feel of silk brushed his skin. Picking up a holster, he shrugged it on, then took out a gun. He loaded it, then put it in the holster. Choosing a suit jacket, he shrugged into it. He slammed the door closed, then turned and went back up the stairs and outside the house.

A car waited for him. Walking rapidly to it, he opened the door and got in. The man behind the wheel looked at him from mirrored sunglasses.

"Ready?"

"Yes." His cold smile reflected back at him from the man's shades.

The man handed him a file. Taking it, he read it as the man drove. After some time, he put on his own shades and leant back as the man continued to drive. Time shifted again, and he looked down the barrel of his gun at his target. Coldness filled him as he pulled the trigger and watched the man fall back. Going to him, he checked his pulse. The man was dead. Turning, he left, whistling as he went.

Time shifted again, and he was home, then at work, joking with his partners. Another call, then the same ritual. The same man. Another mark. Over and over again, too many times to count. Time shifted, and he woke up drenched in sweat. The dreams were chasing him. He rubbed his hand over his face.

"I'm losing my mind. What's happening to me?"

Late night pacing, afraid to sleep. The decision he couldn't live like this. The sun coming up. Going to the fridge and seeing a magnet with Sinfully McIntyre on it. Taking it down, he strode to his room, packed, got in his car and drove away.

The warmth slowly receded, and Wesley blinked. The sorrow on her face was his undoing. Harsh sobs racked him. He pulled away from her. She grabbed onto his hand. He gripped hers, and he let her pull him to her. Resting his head against her breasts, hot tears flowed from his eyes. Pain filled him.

Oh, God. I'm a murderer. A murderer! The mantra echoed in his mind.

No, Wesley you're not. Someone was controlling you, her fierce tone answered.

"It doesn't matter." He jerked away from her angrily and stood. He showed her his hands. "These hands killed. I pulled the trigger. Nothing can fix that. Nothing."

"Fine. You pulled the trigger, but that was not you." She grabbed him fiercely and turned him to her. "It wasn't you. Someone was controlling you."

The tears on her cheeks and fierceness on her face calmed him.

"Did you recognise anyone?" Peyton asked.

"Yes." His heart pounded as he thought of it.

"Who?" she asked.

"I want to be sure." He shook his head, turned and went towards the door.

He ignored Peyton calling to him. Going out the door, he ran down the stairs. He got in his car and started the engine. The door wrenched open on the passenger side.

"Get out, Peyton. I have to do this."

"Not alone." The seatbelt clicked.

He looked at her, and the stubborn look on her face made him change his mind about arguing. He put the car in drive and peeled out of the driveway.

Five hours later, he pulled up to a house. He got out of the car and walked to the front door, which was surrounded by immaculate gardens. He knew Peyton was beside him all the way, but he didn't look at her. He couldn't. Wesley knocked on the door. He knew the occupant of the house looked at him through the peephole, and he heard the sound of the door opening. The man glanced at him through the partially closed door.

"Wesley McCarty. I almost didn't recognise you. What're you doing here?" The false cheer and suspicion in the man's voice was clear.

Wesley stared at the face of the man and knew he was the one. Rage slid inside of him, cold and black. The man's eyes widened, and he slammed the door shut. With a roar, Wesley stepped back and kicked in the door. The sound of splintering wood filled the air. He slammed his shoulder into it, and it gave way completely. With furious strides he walked to the now cowering man. He picked him up and shook him.

"What the fuck have you done to me, Abrams?"

Dr. Abrams's face was white with fear. Then a smug grin curled his lips. He laughed mockingly. "Ah, McCarty. You figured it out. It doesn't matter if you know. You'll soon forget. You and those four imbeciles think you're so smart. The best. The five brains. You know nothing. *Nothing!* Put me down!"

Wesley let him go, and stumbled back from the hate in his tone.

Dr. Abrams shrugged his jacket and smoothed the wrinkles. He looked at Wesley with disgust on his face. "You weren't smart enough to not be susceptible to mind control." His tone was self-satisfied.

"*What?*" Wesley was shocked. "We were trained to withstand it. It's not possible. There had to be something else." Wesley saw the sly look in Abrams's eyes. He thought about it, and he realised what he used.

"*The Klionhs.* But we destroyed it."

"You thought you did. Did you really think I would let you have the only one? I knew the moment you all had finished developing it. You kids thought you were so smart. You were so conceited."

"Why, after all these years, would you use such a thing? The side effects are deadly." Wesley's heart raced.

They had given him The Klionhs. They had signed his death warrant. The Klionhs was a gene-altering drug. It enhanced the user, who became a finely tuned assassin, one who would kill and kill well. He'd be able to live a normal life and when needed, be called upon.

Wesley frowned. The Klionhs was supposed to be a voluntary programme. At first, he and the others were all for it. The idea of discovering the untapped genetic code that could make a man more was exciting.

They had been young and foolish. When they had created it, they were ecstatic; yet, something had kept them from admitting to anyone that they had perfected it. They had substituted some of the failed batches for the real one. They had cautiously watched the side effects. When they realised that it was deadly, they had worked feverishly to come up with an antidote. When they did, they had immediately given it to the soldiers they had already used the drug on. Then they had all agreed to destroy the formula.

"What did you do?" Wesley asked through gritted teeth.

"Perfected your fuck up. I made it better, without that nasty side effect of death. I had to test it, of course, provide proof to the government it was the real thing. What better test subjects than those who made it?" Dr. Abrams's smile was noxious.

Ice coated Wesley's skin. "Who?"

"Wouldn't you like to know?"

Before Wesley could think, he grabbed Abrams by his throat. He lifted him off the floor. Abrams sputtered. Wesley squeezed and saw the man's eyes bug out. Suddenly, he let him go. He couldn't do it. Turning, he saw the softness in Peyton's gaze. He walked to her.

"Tango Wes activate Alpha," Dr. Abrams rasped.

Wesley stiffened. He waited for the blackness to take him.

Peyton stepped forward, and she looked past him at Dr. Abrams. "Your control of him is over."

"Who are you?" Dr. Abrams hissed.

Wesley looked at him. Fear dilated Dr. Abrams's eyes. Coldness filled Wesley as a menacing grin curled his lips. "Hide well, or I will kill you." The promise was clear in his tone.

Turning, he put his hand on Peyton's waist, and they walked towards the door.

"You're weak, Wesley!" Dr. Abrams called. "That's why I was able to take you so easily. You can't even kill me. That's how weak you are."

Wesley stood on the top of the stairs and looked back at the shell of a man he had always hated.

"Weakness would be killing you. You're not worth any more blood on my hands."

A sound made him shift, pulling Peyton with him. Dr. Abrams's eyes widened, and a hole appeared in the centre of his forehead. He fell back, and his eyes went glassy. Wesley glanced to his right and froze as he looked down the barrel of the gun.

Chapter Eight

The coldness in those pale lavender eyes was chilling. Wesley pushed Peyton behind him and going on instinct, he walked forward.

Peyton stared at the ravishing, caramel-skinned woman. Her dark auburn hair was in a high ponytail, which added definition to her finely carved cheeks. Thick lashes surrounded her startling eyes. The coldness in her gaze and the blankness on her face made fear clog Peyton's throat. She was looking at death, and she knew it. The woman looked at her, those eyes slicing through her.

The woman staggered, then dropped to her knees.

"Pan!" Wesley screamed.

Shocked, Peyton looked at the woman. In all their conversations, Wesley had never let on that Pan was a woman.

Pan was looking at Wesley now, the coldness leaking out of her eyes. Sorrow filled her lavender gaze. She put up a hand that shook. "No, Wesley. Don't touch me. You could let him live, but I couldn't. Not after what he's done to me. To us."

"Let me help you, Pan." Wesley stopped just before touching her.

Pan shook her head, using the wall as leverage to pull herself up. Shakily, she stood.

"Your woman can help me, once she decides if she wants to scratch my eyes out or not." Pan looked at Peyton in a challenge.

"Pan," Wesley hissed.

"What? It's true." Pan shrugged, a graceful movement of her shoulders. "So, are you going to help me, Peyton?" Pan waited.

Peyton stepped forward. Taking Pan's hand, Peyton gasped as a sizzle of power went up her arm. Pan gasped and held Peyton's hand as she tried to jerk away. Looking at Pan, Peyton saw her unfocused gaze. Pan shuddered, then her eyes focused.

"You need to tell him," Pan said, leaning into Peyton.

"You have no right reading me!" Furious, Peyton jerked away from her.

"You should guard your thoughts better than that," Pan countered.

"What's going on?" Wesley demanded.

Peyton looked at him. "Your friend rudely probed my thoughts."

Shock filled Wesley's face.

Peyton looked back at Pan. "I'm not the only one who has secrets, eh Pandora?"

Pandora's eyes narrowed, and she barred her teeth. Peyton did the same and stepped further away from her.

"What's going on, Pan?" Wesley asked again.

"I'm a seer, a touch telepath, and an empath. Now, will someone help me?" Pandora waved her hand.

Wesley stepped forward.

"No, not you, Wesley. I'm too weak to block the rage coming off you." Pandora recoiled.

Wesley stepped back, his face blank. Pandora made a soft sound and reached for him. He stepped further back and turned away. Pandora stumbled forward and made a sound. Wesley turned and caught her before she fell.

"Oh, Wesley. What has he done to us?" Pandora gripped his shoulder.

Wesley hugged her tighter and rocked her.

Peyton felt like an intruder as she watched them. Their pain was private and intimate. Jealously ate at her as she watched Wesley touch Pandora's hair. She turned away and looked at Abrams. Rage filled her. Raising her hand, she whispered, "Vlietes."

The air sizzled then Abrams's body wavered and was gone. The silence caught her attention. Turning, she saw them watching her. Pandora's look was speculative. Wesley's was enigmatic.

"I knew you were a witch, but not that you were so powerful," Pandora said.

Peyton stared at her hand on Wesley's thigh. Pandora raised her hand and smiled.

"Wes, tell your lady that you're like my brother, before she decides to send me somewhere else."

Peyton stared at Pandora. The devilish sparkle in her gaze showed she wasn't worried. She nodded at her, and Pandora returned her nod. Putting out her hand, Peyton waited. Pandora clasped her hand and pulled herself up. Peyton shielded her thoughts, thinking of emptiness. Pandora's look was grateful. She could feel how much being so close to Wesley's

rage was draining Pandora. Her eyes warned Peyton to be silent. A grudging respect for Pandora grew.

Pandora turned and looked at Wesley. She put out her hand to help him up. Wesley grabbed her hand. Peyton felt the slight shudder that racked Pandora. She infused Pandora with some power, and Pan gave Peyton a smile of gratitude.

Wesley walked towards the door. Walking beside Pandora, Peyton watched him as they followed.

"He needs to know." Pandora spoke quietly.

"I know, but I can't now, not right after this," Peyton replied.

They reached the doorway, went outside, and down the stairs.

Pan stopped next to a gleaming motorcycle. She threw a leg over and straddled it, then looked at Peyton. "I've known Wes a long time. He'll want to withdraw. Fight for him. Don't let him. Promise me," Pandora insisted.

"I will. Why do I suddenly seem to like you, when at first I wanted to rip your face off?"

"I have that effect on people." Pandora laughed.

Peyton waved, then walked to the SUV and got in. Wesley honked the horn and pulled out. Peyton looked back at Pandora on her bike until she was out of view. Then she turned forward and settled in for the ride.

As their taillights faded, Pandora lazily started her bike. Revving it for a moment, she let it idle. "You can stop lurking around."

"Pandora." A man detached from the shadows.

"How do you know my name? Who the hell are you?" She turned and looked at him.

His face was partially in the shadows. He stepped into the light. His features and long raven hair hinted at his Latin heritage. His eyes flashed an almost translucent grey. His smile was arrogant. "Now, you know I won't answer your questions. Where is Abrams?"

"Like I would really answer your question," she countered.

The man chuckled.

Pandora shuddered at the kissable sound.

He glanced at the retreating car. "Who was the woman with Wesley McCarty?"

"Go near them and I will kill you." Coldness filled Pandora.

"It would be almost worth it to see if you would." The man looked back at her.

Pandora stilled a shudder at the look of hunger on his face. The man nodded at her, then placed mirrored sunglasses on his eyes and stepped back into the shadows. After a few moments, she knew she was alone. Staring at where the man had been, Pandora turned and let off the brakes. She roared down the driveway. Tapping the button on the handle of her bike, she placed a call. When the call was answered, she said one word. "Go."

Clicking off, she opened up the throttle as she hit open road.

A few hours later, Wesley pulled into Peyton's driveway. He had driven the whole way in silence. There was nothing he could say to her. It was still too fresh. He was an assassin, supposedly working for the government. Still silent, he got out of the car. They walked up the stairs, she opened the door, and they went into the house.

He went down the hall into the living room. Going to the window, he looked out. The inky black night matched his mood.

"Wes, you're not to blame for this. You didn't know," Peyton said softly.

"I can't talk about this now. Look, I have to go." He needed to get away to deal with this.

"You can't run from this, Wes." Peyton grabbed him and turned him to face her.

"What the fuck do you know? My identity was taken away, and I was nothing but a weapon used by some unknown master! All you know is life here in the perfect world of Blackstone Haven!" Uncontrollable rage filled him.

"Be careful what you say, Wes. I will only give you so much." Peyton's voice was soft and deadly.

The rage drained out of him. "Look, I have to go."

Peyton reached for him. He jerked away, and could see the pain it caused her in her eyes. Sorrow filled him, but he couldn't say anything. He turned and walked to the door.

"I'll give you some time, Wesley, but only so much." The warning was clear in her voice.

He reached the front door and looked back. Peyton stood in the living room by the window, watching him. He wanted to go and hold her, but he couldn't.

"If you don't come to me, I'll come for you." Peyton's look was fierce.

She walked away from the window and out of view. He heard her steps going up the stairs. He opened the door and went outside to his car. Getting in, he sat for a while in her driveway, trying to decide what he would do. After some time, he put the SUV in drive and just drove into the night.

How am I going to face being a killer?

Days later, the question chased him as he ran through the woods. Newton ran beside him, offering her silent support. He took the paths that were now so familiar to him. He changed his pace as he came into view of the house. Slowing, he thought for a moment of going for another run. The muscles in his legs ached. Newton barked. He glanced down at her and saw she was breathing harshly. Guilt flashed through him. Newton nudged his leg and sat back, waiting to see what he wanted to do.

Clenching his fists, he winced at the soreness of his knuckles. At first, he had taken out his frustrations on the punching bag in Ian's home gym. After he had broken it from its chain, he had taken to running.

You can't run from your problems.

He didn't need his conscience to tell him that. There was no escape from it. He jogged up the path slowly to cool down. He ran his hand over his sweaty face. A grim smile curved his lips at the pain in his knuckles. The feel of his fist hitting something had given him a small sense of satisfaction. There was no way of knowing who he had worked for in the time he lost. It was the one thing that bugged him most, not knowing what side he was on.

His thoughts turned to Peyton, as they usually did when he thought of everything. At least he didn't have to worry about whoever had helped Abrams being able to use him anymore. Peyton had taken care of that, making sure no one could take him over again. He ached to call her, yet he didn't. He didn't know what he was, and he didn't want to put her at risk.

Pushing his thoughts to the back of his mind, he opened the side door to the kitchen and stepped inside. He stopped as he saw Ian sitting at the table. Tightness filled his chest. Newton barked a greeting and padded out of the room. He heard a yowl as Einstein greeted her.

Ian clasped a steaming cup between his hands.

He wasn't ready to talk about anything.

Ian looked at Wesley, and leant back. "What are you going to do about Conundrum?"

"What about it? I'll go back to work when I'm ready." The tightness in his chest eased.

"You should read your mail instead of wallowing." Ian made a tsk sound.

"They're fine without me."

"Yep, so fine that they're moving headquarters to Blackstone Haven," Ian said smugly.

"What? Since when?"

"If you would read your mail, you would know. We voted, and the majority decided."

Wesley clenched his fist at the gleeful expression on Ian's face. "I didn't vote."

"You were sent the information. If you didn't read it, that's your fault." Ian shrugged.

"We'll see about this. It'll be undone."

"Too late. They already started building."

"That's not possible." Disbelief filled Wesley.

"It's done." Ian shrugged again.

"No—"

Ian cut him off. "Stop being an ass, Wes, and call Peyton."

Pain lanced through him. Ignoring Ian, Wesley went to get a bottle of water from the fridge. Taking one out, he twisted off the cap and took a swallow. He lowered the bottle and saw Ian was not going anywhere. Turning, he headed for the door.

"Sit down, Wesley." The quiet warning in Ian's tone made him stop.

He had only heard him use that tone once before. Wesley remembered the cleanup afterward. Although he was itching for a fight, Wesley wasn't sure what he could do. He didn't want to hurt Ian. Stiffly, he turned and went back to lean against the counter. Crossing his arms over his chest, he waited for Ian to speak.

Ian stared at him a while.

Wesley didn't move, just returned his look.

"What are you doing, Wesley? Trying to run yourself into the ground? You barely eat unless food is shoved in your face. You don't sleep."

He was shocked that Ian knew.

"Yeah, I know about that. Hell, all you do is run. The answers you're looking for aren't out there." Ian gestured outside. "They're all in here." He tapped his head. "The Wesley I

know would have been doing his research and getting the answers to what the hell was done to him, not hiding out like some punk.”

Wesley stood and took a step towards Ian.

Ian stood to meet him, his expression clearly saying he welcomed a fight.

Wesley bit back the rage that seemed always just below the surface. Cautiously, he leant back against the counter again. Wesley should have known it was coming. Ian had said very little after he had told him what had happened. For Ian to be so quiet should have been a warning in itself. But he'd been so grateful Ian didn't push that he'd been oblivious to the signs.

“I'm not going to do this, Ian,” Wesley warned.

Ian turned, picked up something, then threw it on the table.

Wesley saw it was a file. The symbol on it was familiar. His heart raced and his palms went sweaty. Wesley looked back at Ian.

“I had this information the day after you told me all that happened. There's a file for each of us. Yes, all of us,” he repeated, taking in Wesley's stunned expression.

“Each of us has our file, and will choose what we want to do with it,” Ian continued. “We figured you would look for this yourself. It would give you a focus. But I'm tired of waiting for you to come to your senses and research.” Ian slammed his hand on the table. “You can either fucking mope around the house, or read what you're so afraid of facing.”

Ian turned and strode to the door. Shame coated Wesley's throat as he watched him go.

“Ian, wait. Thank you.” Wesley's voice was hoarse.

“We all have secrets, Wesley. Some we can't even share with our closest friends.” Ian looked back at him. “It isn't me you should thank.”

His confusion must have shown on his face, because Ian answered his question without him asking. “Peyton had delivered the files to each of us. She gave me yours and made me promise to give it to you when you were ready for it. We still can't figure out how she got the info. It's highly classified.” Ian shook his head. The awe was clear in his voice. “I've known her for years, and I knew she had power. But man, she is one frightening lady. I'm glad she's on our side. The day after she gave me the files, some government drone called Conundrum asking us to take over Project Klionhs. It seems they can't find Dr. Abrams, or anything about

the project. Pan is still working out the details." Ian glared at him. "You better treat that lady well."

Wesley was speechless. Peyton hadn't contacted him since they last spoke. She had given him space.

Ian left without another word.

Wesley stared at the file, afraid to touch it. Then, stepping forward, he picked it up, went down the hall, and up the stairs to his room. He dropped it on the desk by the door. As he stared at it, he made a decision he didn't want to know what it said. At least not yet. He opened a desk drawer and put the file inside. He closed the drawer, then strode across the room and into the bathroom.

Stripping, he got into the shower. After lathering up, he stepped under the hot spray. Closing his eyes, he tried to clear his mind. Images of Peyton filled his thoughts. He shook his head and got out. Wiping off, he rubbed the towel in his hair. Then putting it over his shoulders, he glanced at his face in the mirror. There were harsh lines in his face and pain in his eyes.

Turning, he went into the bedroom and lay on the bed. Wesley put his hand behind his head and stared at the ceiling. A sound caught his attention. He shifted his gaze to the door. His breath stalled at the anger tempered with hunger in her emerald green gaze.

Peyton stalked into the room, her boots resounding against the hardwood floors. She stopped at the foot of the bed and put her hands on her bare waist. Hungrily, his eyes took in her short, pale green vest that left the top part of her stomach bare. The hunter green pants had a sharp V in front and hugged her curves lovingly. Her black boots rose above her knees.

"I'm tired of waiting, Wesley." She hopped onto the bed.

He felt a trickle of electricity against his skin and knew she used her power. She walked over his body and straddled him. At the feel of her body against his, a surge of need filled him. His cock hardened painfully.

Peyton put her hand on his chest. "Talk to me, Wesley." There was an order in her tone.

"Get off me." He bristled.

Peyton put her face close to his. "No."

"Don't push me, Peyton."

"I'll do more than push." Her voice was silken steel.

Wesley glared at her. He softened as he saw the uncertainty in her gaze. In a blink, it was gone and her eyes were steely.

"You have run from me long enough. Talk to me, Wesley."

He looked at her silently. She thumped his chest in frustration. Wesley grabbed her fist to stop her. Her fingers curled into his. He jerked away.

"You don't want me to even touch you." The pain shimmered in her gaze. In an agile move, she rolled off him and stood next to the bed, ramrod straight.

He sat and put his hands up. "No. *I* can't touch *you*. Not with these," he rasped.

Peyton grabbed his hands. "These, which touched me so tenderly."

He pulled away. "I feel the blood on my hands. I can't touch you with them."

"You're being an ass."

"I know." His laugh was bitter.

"Then stop."

"I can't." He ran his hands over his face.

Exhaustion ate at him. He looked at her. Desire filled him, but he held back. He couldn't be with her, not until he could deal with what he had done. Tightness clogged his throat as he tried to form the words to let her go. "I can't promise —"

She put her finger over his lip. "If you're trying to be a martyr and dumping me, Wesley, you're going to piss me off."

She took his hands and pulled him to stand. Peyton's look of understanding was almost his undoing. She cupped his face and pulled him to her. The tenderness of her kiss humbled him. The tears he had not shed burned his eyes. They fell, mixing with their kiss. Sweeping his tongue into her mouth, he tasted her, soaking in all of her. With a slow lick, he withdrew. The hot wash of his tears ran down his cheeks. He saw the tears on her face.

Peyton ran her hand against his cheek. He turned his face into her touch. She withdrew her hand and stepped back. Without a backward glance, she went to the door, stopping just before she opened it.

"I love you, Wesley, and that won't change, no matter what you believe. Come for me when you're ready." She continued out the door, closing it behind her.

Knees weak, Wesley sat on the edge of the bed. He took a deep breath. Peyton's scent of cinnamon and vanilla filled his senses. Leaning back against the bed, he stared off into space. Sleep claimed him without his even knowing it.

A while later, he jerked awake. Sitting up, he rose, dressed quickly, and went to the desk. Opening the drawer, he took out the file and looked at it. Newton's tail thumped as she looked up at him. With sure strides, he went out the door.

A half hour later, he got out of the car and climbed the stairs to Peyton's door. Newton matched him step for step. It opened as he reached it. With sure strides, he went quickly through the living room, down the hall, and up the stairs. He turned left on the third floor landing and continued down the hall. Reaching the open doorway, he watched her as she worked. He knew the second she realised he was there.

She tensed, then relaxed, and continued to run the shuttle across the fabric. "Are you through being an ass?" her languid voice asked.

"Yeah." He chuckled.

He walked over to her. Newton went to take her place by the door leading to the balcony. Peyton turned to look at him, then glanced at the folder he held in his hand.

"I want us to read this together." As he raised the folder, he held out his other hand to her.

She stood, taking his hand in hers. The touch of her fingers made the turmoil he was feeling settle. He pulled her close.

"I love you, Peyton," he whispered, the emotion raw in his voice.

"I love you, Wesley." Tears welled in her eyes, and she placed her hand on his chest over his heart.

Pulling away, he took her hand in his and walked to the open door leading to the balcony. Newton barked then got up and walked back towards the other side of the room. He sat in a chair in front of a plain table, then pulled her into his lap. Peyton settled against him. She squeezed his hand. Wesley opened the file and started to read.

As he read, his hands clenched on the pages. Peyton stroked his hands. Her comforting silence got him through the entire file. Closing it after reading the last page, he dropped the folder on the table. Leaning back, he hugged her to him.

Peyton turned and touched him on his face. "Would you kill any of those people if you weren't under mind control?"

"No," he replied instinctively. Then he thought about it and amended his answer. "Not unless they tried to hurt someone I love, or if it was life or death."

"Exactly. They used you, Wesley. The man in there was just a weapon, not you." She placed her hand over his heart. "Not the man I know and love, the man who has such a devilish sense of humour, who is so giving, who is so loyal to his friends." Peyton grimaced as she added, "Although I'm still not sure about Pan."

"You'll love her." Wesley chuckled.

Peyton rolled her eyes, and her expression turned serious. "Whatever happens, we'll deal with it together."

Wesley smiled and linked his fingers with hers. "Together."

He cupped her face with his other hand and drew her to him. "I've missed you," he said against her lips.

"Whose fault was that?" Peyton challenged.

"Mine."

"I've missed you too. I want you." Peyton's smile was wanton and inviting.

Tightening his arms around her, he stood. He took her lips in a hungry kiss. Gently, he laid her on the chaise lounge. She impatiently stripped off his clothes. He reached for her and unbuttoned her shirt, running his hands along the top of her full breasts. She shivered then moaned.

He leant down and licked along the sweet globes. Unhooking the front clasp of her bra, he bared her to his hungry gaze. His mouth watered for a taste of her hard, pebbled, dark chocolate nipples. Ravenously, he sucked them. Peyton gripped his head. More than willing to accommodate her, he treated her other nipple to the same lavish attention. Intense need licked along his skin. His cock stood to rigid attention. In rough, impatient movements, he finished undressing her.

Wesley ran his hand up her legs, and she parted them in a sensuous movement. He trailed his fingers along her cleft. Her shiver racked him while her cream coated his fingers. He plunged his finger inside of her. Peyton's back bowed off the chaise as she screamed. He continued stroking her while her pussy undulated around his finger. He added another and

covered her mouth with his, swallowing the sounds of pleasure she made. Peyton gripped his head, sucking on his tongue. Her touch was wild and demanding. She pulled him over her. Following her urgings, Wesley climbed between her parted thighs, her hot skin sliding along his. Fisting his cock, he rubbed it against her soaked slit. Pumping his hips forward, he sank into her. Her pussy clutched at him greedily.

A harsh groan ripped from him. The wet lushness of her engulfed him. He thrust hard and fast, driving them both into a sensual frenzy. Peyton wrapped her legs around him, her hands gripping his ass, urging him on. His release washed over him with the force of liquid fire. Peyton's pussy contracted wildly as she joined him. Her scream mingled with his roar of completion. He licked the side of her neck and up to her mouth, swallowing the guttural noise she made. She pumped in countermotion to his thrust, taking all he could give and demanding more.

Spent, he collapsed against her. Her arms curled around him, holding him close against her breasts. Their harsh breathing filled the air. Wesley felt a sense of movement, then he settled. Shifting, he felt softness against his skin. Groggily, he looked around and saw they were in her bedroom.

"Sleep." Peyton's hands cupped his head, pulling him back against her.

Wesley sighed and settled next to her. Listening to her heartbeat, he fell asleep.

A shifting of the bed woke him. He rolled over and saw she was dressing. "Where are you going?"

"I didn't mean to wake you. I'm going to do some weaving. Go back to sleep." Peyton glanced at him and came back to the bed.

She kissed him. Her arms came around him fiercely. Holding her to him, he returned her kiss. She withdrew slowly.

"Come back to bed." He ran his hands up her cloth-covered back.

"No. Get some rest. Newton will keep you company." She kissed him, a quick peck on the lips, and stood.

He watched her walk to the door. She looked back at him, her face partially in the shadows. "I love you, Wesley." Her tone was strangely muffled.

"What's wrong, Peyton?" Concern filled him.

"Nothing. Go back to sleep. You'll need the rest for later." She laughed, a silvery seductive sound, then walked out the door, leaving it open behind her. He stared after her, a grin on his face. He glanced at the clock and saw it was a little after five. He would give her some time to work, then go and seduce her. He had plans for her. Settling against the bed, he yawned. A cold wind blew across him, making him shiver. Newton growled. He looked and saw the balcony door and windows were closed. Confused, he glanced around, trying to see where the breeze was coming from. He could see nothing.

"Hush, Newt."

Newton looked at him, her eyes gleaming. She yipped, then laid by the door. Shrugging, he pulled the sheet over him, relaxed, and went back to sleep.

* * * *

Peyton entered her workroom and went to the window. It was still slightly dark outside. She could see the streaks of sun starting to light the sky. She sighed and dropped her head against the cool glass of the window.

"I can't put him in danger." Her voice echoed in the empty room. Straightening, she went to her tapestry and picked up the shuttle. Soon she lost herself on the movement of her weaving.

"Peyton," a sharp voice called, startling her.

Peyton ignored her and continued to weave. The sound of footfalls against the floorboards reached her ears, and she felt the presence behind her.

"What're you doing, Peyton? I saw Wesley's car outside. Did you —"

"Stop, Sinai. I don't want to discuss it," Peyton said, without looking away from her work.

"You didn't tell him. Why?"

Silently, she continued to work.

Sinai made a frustrated sound as her footsteps paced back and forth behind Peyton.

Suddenly, a hard hand grabbed her and spun her around.

"Stop being a fucking martyr and go tell him!" Sinai yelled.

Hearing those words, Peyton stifled a bitter laugh. She had said the same thing to Wesley. Jerking away from Sinai, she strode away. She glanced out the floor-to-ceiling windows. She was surprised to see the sun bright outside. A glance at the crystal clock imbedded in the wall showed her it was already after ten a.m. She had worked for hours and not realised it. Her shoulders were suddenly stiff. Rolling them to get rid of the stiffness, she wrapped her arms around her stomach.

Sinai came to stand next to her. "You're running out of time. Your birthday is tomorrow. He needs to know. Go—"

"I won't." Peyton interrupted her.

"What?" Sinai was shocked. "Why?"

"I can't tell him."

"Why not?" Sinai grabbed her.

"I couldn't, not with all he's going through." Peyton shrugged her sister off.

"What about what you're about to go through?" Sinai asked.

"I'll be fine. I'm prepared," Peyton said firmly.

"You are not. Stop being so self-sacrificing and go to him. When my time comes, I won't be so accommodating."

Peyton stared at her sister. When Sinai was in her place, only then could she know how Peyton felt. Fear she could not afford to show filled her. Shutting it away, she answered Sinai.

"You can do what you want when it's your time. I'll do as I please. I'll be fine."

"You know it doesn't work that way. You're vulnerable without him. If you don't tell him, I will." Sinai stomped out of the room.

"It won't matter." Peyton watched her go, a bitter smile on her face.

A cold wind blew against her skin. She turned her head and saw the black cloud funnelling towards her. Turning fully, she stared at it and raised her fist.

"Bring it on, you fucking bastard!" she screamed.

Chilling laughter echoed in the room, and the cloud twined around, enveloping her. Hearing the sound of rushing footsteps, Peyton used her power to enclose herself and the cloud in a shield.

Sinai flew into the room. She bounced off the shield Peyton had put up, then pounded against it.

Peyton saw the tears in her eyes. "I'll be fine," she said, trying to sound reassuring.

The shield she had erected weakened. Fear and frustration filled Sinai's face. The shield shattered, and Sinai rushed forward, reaching out. Peyton pushed her hand straight out and infused it with power. Sinai flew backward, away from her, hitting the wall.

Sinai staggered to her feet. "No!" Her scream ripped through the room.

The cloud covered Peyton totally, and she felt herself fade. In moments, she came back to form. Peyton staggered, and only by will did she stay on her feet. She glanced around at the inky blackness around her. Wind whistled eerily, rattling trees she could not see. The chill of frost coated her skin, making goosebumps rise. A slithering sound came from in front of her. Ignoring all the sounds, Peyton focused on the inky blackness. Suddenly, a shape seemed to flow from it.

The shape slowly solidified, turning, and Peyton's breath caught at the sight of the man. His skin was all onyx, while his hair and eyes glowed silver. His cheeks were sharp angles, while his lips were lush and full. He hissed, and she saw his fangs. She thought of weapons and felt the cold touch of steel in her hands. Raising the swords over her head, she looked at the being that had come to claim her.

"Peyton Blackstone, you are mine," it hissed, an insidious sound.

"I will never give you my power!" Peyton countered.

He laughed. "You have no choice."

In blur of motion, he attacked. Peyton held her sword steady, ready to fight for her life.

* * * *

Waking, Wesley stretched and rolled over. Surprised, he sat up as he saw the brightness of the sun. He glanced at the clock and noted the time. Yawning, he got out of bed and pulled on his jeans. Newton looked at him. He grabbed his shirt on the way to the door and shrugged into it. He couldn't believe he overslept. Peyton had been working long enough. He walked down the hall.

"No!" A scream of anguish reverberated through the house.

Quickly, Wesley ran down the hall and to the stairs.

"Peyton!"

An ominous feeling engulfed him, making it hard for him to breathe. Newton growled loudly and ran past him. He heard her barks as she ran down the stairs. Wesley weakened as he fought for breath. Urgency filled him, and he pushed aside his discomfort and went down the stairs. He staggered and had to grab the rail. With laboured steps, he went down. Reaching the third floor landing, he turned to his left.

"Peyton!" he yelled.

A whirling sound filled his ears. Newton growled and barked. Urgency propelled him forward. Stumbling, he held onto the wall for support. He reached the door to the weaving room, and his hand felt heavy as he pushed the door open. He fell inside on his knees, and struggled to lift his head up.

The vivid images in front of him hurt Wesley's eyes. The tapestry seemed to shift, showing Peyton locked with a black being. They danced in movements of fighting across the tapestry. Peyton slashed at the being, then he decked her. She flew across the tapestry and disappeared. The being looked at Wesley, its silver gaze flashing.

"She is mine," it hissed.

It flew off the tapestry and was gone. Wesley stood and ran to the tapestry. He touched it, drawing back as frost coated his fingers.

"She's gone?" a voice rasped behind him.

He turned, startled to see Sinai.

Newton stood growling at the tapestry.

"What's going on? Where is she?" he demanded.

"He has her," Sinai replied, anguish dripping from her voice.

"Who?"

"Lethra – the death demon."

Chapter Nine

Fear seized him. He grabbed Sinai and shook her. "Where did he take her?"

Sinai kicked him away from her.

Wesley fell back on his ass.

She stood over him and glared.

"Tell me, Sinai. Where is Peyton?" he demanded as he stood.

"In the in-between. We can't reach her." Pain washed over her face, and she continued, "Peyton didn't tell you because of all you were going through." Her laugh was bitter. "She was protecting you."

"From what?"

"Lethra and the Blackstone Legacy."

"Peyton mentioned something about a prophecy, but nothing about a Blackstone Legacy."

"She told you only part of her prophecy. We each have our own prophecy. The Blackstone Legacy is something we each must face." Sinai looked at him. "Her birthday isn't until tomorrow. The bastard came early."

"What does her birthday have to do with it?"

Wesley tried to remember what day it was. He had been so locked in his misery he had forgotten about her birthday.

Sinai's voice flowed in an almost musical chant. "After the year of five and twenty of your birth can Lethra come, if he so chooses, to claim you. He will taunt you with his power. Fear is his pleasure, uncertainty his drug. Be ever vigilant with your every thought and deed." Sinai stopped, then continued in a normal voice. "What I told you is all I know. All we know of the Blackstone Legacy is that we must each fight Lethra until one of us kills him. Our ancestors fought him, and some got away, but no one knows why he stalks us. We are all taught from birth that after our twenty-fifth birthday, we have to be careful of him on our birthdays. We are most vulnerable on that day. He should not have been able to take her. Her birthday isn't until tomorrow, March first. She had another day, damn it!"

"No, today is Peyton's birthday." Wesley shook his head.

"I know when my sister's birthday is, Wesley." Sinai glared at him.

"Peyton celebrates her birthday on March first, but she was born in a leap year. This is a leap year, so today, February twenty-nine, would be the official day of her birth."

"Oh, God, you're right." Realization dawned on Sinai, and her expression turned grim. "She knew. Peyton knew he would come for her today, and she said nothing to correct us. Whenever we mentioned her birthday, she always said she couldn't wait until March first." She paced away, fury bubbling off her.

"How do we get to her?"

"We can't." She turned to face him.

His breath caught at the hopelessness and pain in her gaze. Wesley refused to believe it. Determination filled him. He would not lose Peyton. "Tell me the whole legacy and prophecy."

"I've told you all I know of the Blackstone Legacy. We each have our own individual prophecies. We have no knowledge of each other's. Even if we do, we forget what is told about anyone else's except our own." She shook her head.

"You have to know something," Wesley insisted.

Suddenly, a familiar touch brushed his mind. Peyton's voice flowed inside his head.

A man will come to you in the darkest moon.

The trees will shade and protect your union of the soul.

Before the final step to merge your body is taken, a choice must be made.

Have care what you choose, for it can mean your life and, ultimately, your soul.

Death stalks you, waiting for the weakness to strike and take what you hold most dear.

A light will shine to guide you on the right path.

Do not falter or fear.

The man of shadows will be yours for all time,

The light to hold back the dark.

You are my light, Wesley. I love you with all my heart.

Her voice seemed to fade.

"Wesley, Wesley! Are you okay?" Sinai's voice penetrated.

"Yes." Blinking, he opened eyes he didn't know he had closed.

"I felt Peyton, but couldn't hear her. What did she say?" Sinai demanded.

He shook his head to clear a buzzing in his ears.

Absently, he heard Sinai speak, "What is that sound?"

He felt her move away. With a glance to the right, he noted that she was by the window. He turned his head, and his attention was arrested by the blank tapestry. Instinct drove him forward. He ran for the tapestry. A bubble formed in front of him, and without hesitating, he ran through. A roaring filled his ears, then silence. Suddenly, colour rushed back to him. Fur brushed his hand. He looked down and realised Newton was with him. Frantically, he looked around and, seeing the familiar surroundings, he started to run. He burst into the clearing, stopping as he saw Peyton swinging a sword at the advancing being.

He ran to them. Newton growled, streaked past him, and leapt. The being caught her and pitched her to the other side of the clearing. Newton twitched and went still. The being grabbed Peyton's sword as it came down, then backhanded her. Wesley reached it and it turned, grabbing him by the throat. It hissed at him and laughed. With a flick of its wrist, it threw him across the clearing. Dirt and rocks scrapped his skin as he skidded across the forest floor. Dazed, Wesley tried to relearn to breathe. Distantly, he felt frantic hands grabbing him.

"Wesley!"

Opening his eyes, he looked into Peyton's fear-filled gaze. "I'm okay." He narrowed his eyes. "I thought we were in this together."

"I'm sorry. I couldn't tell you." Peyton shook her head.

"How touching." The sound of mocking laughter cut in.

Wesley glanced across the clearing and saw the demon. He couldn't look at Newton, who he knew was dead. Pain blossomed in his chest. He glanced back at Peyton. "A demon?"

She nodded.

"Can we kill it?"

"You can try." Lethra laughed, an ugly sound. "Isn't it ironic that you will both die here, where you first met?" Lethra gestured at the clearing. "It's really touching and poetic, if you think about it." Lethra raised his hand, and fire flew from his fingers.

Peyton grabbed Wesley and rolled. Wesley hung on and tried to shield her. They glanced back at the burning grass where they had been.

"Whoops, I missed," Lethra said matter-of-factly. He swirled, and his coat flapped around him. A maniacal grin curved his lips, and he did another spin.

"He likes to play games," Peyton advised.

"I don't play, Peyton Blackstone. This is very real." Lethra stilled and looked at her. "Your ancestors locked me in this in-between place, this hell of not being able to touch or taste people. Each time I get to bring one of you here with me, I enjoy it."

His attention turned to Wesley, and the grin the demon gave him made his skin crawl.

"This is the first time I've got near enough to enjoy a totally human being. Their fear is especially delicious." Lethra licked his lips.

A switch seemed to flip inside Wesley, and he felt a calmness come over him.

Confusion raced across Lethra's face. "Your smell has changed." He sniffed the air, then looked at Wesley again. "You smell of death."

Give me a knife, Wesley thought, hoping Peyton heard him.

The touch of cold metal against his hand let him know that she had. He looked at Lethra and smiled. "You feed on fear, so I refuse to give you what you need. You're weak, Lethra, a shell of your former self," Wesley taunted.

Peyton was stunned. Although confused by Wesley's request, she had done as he asked and thought of a knife. At Wesley's words to Lethra, she prepared to protect them from his anger. But in a blur of motion, Wesley's hand came up, and he threw the knife. Lethra dodged.

Peyton gasped as she saw the knife had still hit its mark. She realised Wesley had thrown it where he knew Lethra would move to. Blood bloomed on Lethra's shoulder. Shock filled Peyton as she saw Lethra stumble back.

"Who are you?" Lethra hissed.

"A human, and a scientist," Wesley replied coolly.

"No human can injure me!" Lethra roared.

"In here I can."

Lethra's eyes widened, and he stumbled back.

Wesley looked at her. "The reason your family doesn't remember when they fight Lethra is because he goes to the real plane to ensure it. He uses the fear to beat you." Wesley waved his hand. "He didn't miss hitting us. It was an illusion, used to feed our fear. In here, everything is the opposite. He is as easy to kill as I am. You're the one who wields all the power."

"How did you know?" Lethra backed away.

"Didn't you hear me? I'm a scientist. Taking the obscure theory and proving it is what we do best. The odds of you being as powerful in here as out there are less than one percent." Wesley smiled, a cold grin. "Your fear only confirms it."

"He can be killed." Peyton stared at Wesley.

"Yes."

She looked at Lethra. He was backing away. Suddenly, he shifted to smoke. Throwing her hand out in front of her, she caught him in her power. His roar filled the air. With her thoughts, she called him back to form. Slowly, he rematerialized until he was his true shape. She bound him where he stood with her will. Then Peyton strode across the clearing to him. Fear dilated Lethra's eyes.

"For all the centuries you have tormented the Blackstones, and for all the deaths of any in my family line, and the terror you caused." With a swing of her sword, she cut off his head.

A loud boom rent the air, making the ground shake. The vibration made Peyton stumble back. Hard arms grabbed her. The earth quaked, and they fell to their knees. Smoke poured from Lethra, then he was gone. Wesley walked over to Newton and lifted her in his arms. He gripped her still body to him. Peyton went to him and touched his back. He turned tear-filled eyes to her.

Wesley's eyes widened as Newton's body shuddered, and she barked. Shocked, he looked at Newton as she rose up to lick his face. Joy filled him. He looked at Peyton. "Thank you."

Peyton shook her head, silently telling him that as much as she loved Newton, this wasn't her doing. Then a voice filled her mind and his.

All animals within Blackstone Haven are under my protection.

"Thank you, Grayson," Wesley said.

Yeah, whatever. Just take care of my sister. Her warning was clear.

Grayson, Peyton said.

What? He better know how to treat you, Grayson countered.

"Am I going to ever know how to send my thoughts like you all do?" Wesley asked.

"Eventually," Peyton answered.

Grayson snorted, then withdrew.

Peyton turned to Wesley. The smile on his face was tender. Newton squirmed and ran off.

"I love you, Wesley McCarty."

Wesley replied, "Of course you do."

She punched him on the arm. He grabbed her and kissed her. She sank into him. Suddenly, hands grabbed her.

"Peyton, are you okay?" Sinai cried.

Blearily, Peyton pulled back from Wesley. "I'm fine. What the hell happened to you?"

Peyton stared at the black eye, swollen lip, and various cuts on Sinai's face.

"They showed up." Sinai's eyes narrowed, and she glared past Peyton and Wesley.

Following her gaze, Peyton saw similar bruises and the defiant look on Pandora's face, and that Ian was with her. But it was the other two males accompanying them who caught Peyton's attention.

"Wha--? Oh, my..." Peyton's eyes widened, and she trailed off.

"Exactly," Sinai purred.

Peyton couldn't speak. The men were devastating examples of maleness. She tried to take a breath and found she couldn't. A hand turned her face. She looked into Wesley's eyes.

"Remember me, the man you claimed to love?" There was a look of outrage on his face.

"I do love you, Wesley, but I'm not dead." She patted his cheek. "Which is Sin, and which is Savage?" Peyton checked them out from the corner of her eye.

Wesley growled.

"I'll head off the family and give you some time alone," Sinai said as she walked away.

Peyton nodded absently, still staring at the men.

Sinai walked over to them. Ignoring Pan, she hooked arms with Sin and Savage.

"So, how long are you in town for?" Sinai asked.

They walked away before she could hear them speak. Ian's narrowed eyes followed Sinai. He strode after them. Pandora grabbed his hand. Ian glanced at her, nodded abruptly, and continued slowly after them.

"What is it about them?" Wesley's tone was disgruntled.

Peyton dragged her eyes away from their retreating forms and looked at him. The expression of disgust on his face was comical. "It's a female thing."

He rolled his eyes and pulled her to him. "You're only supposed to look at me like that."

Peyton grinned up at him and waved her hand after them. "That's primal."

"And what do we have?" Wesley narrowed his eyes.

Peyton put her hand over his heart. His heart rate increased, and she felt warmth fill her. "This is chemistry, all chemistry, an attraction between me and you that will never go away." Peyton pulled him to her and kissed him.

Wesley chuckled and clamped his arms around her.

About the Author

Taige Crenshaw has been enthralled with the written word from the time she picked up her first book. It wasn't long before she started to make up her own tales of romance.

Her novels are set in the modern day between people who know what they want and how to get it. Taige also sets her stories in the future with vast universes between beautiful, strange and unique beings with lots of spice and sensuality added to her work.

Always hard at work creating new and exciting places Taige can be found curled up with a hot novel with exciting characters when she is not creating her own. Join her in the fun and frolic, with interesting people and far reaches of the world in her novels.

Email: www.taigecrenshaw.com

Taige Crenshaw loves to hear from readers. You can find her contact information, website and author biography at <http://www.total-e-bound.com>

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