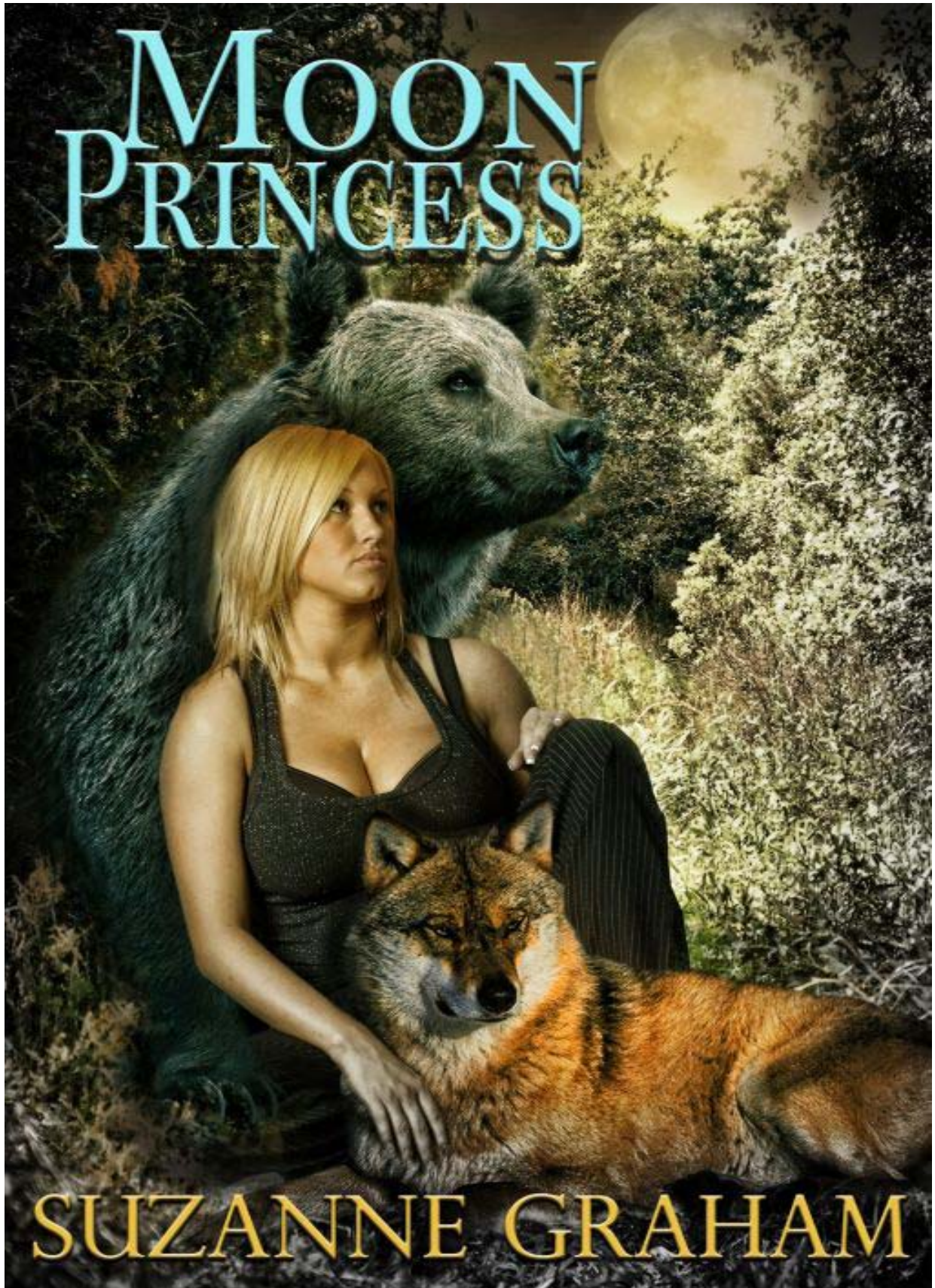


MOON PRINCESS

SUZANNE GRAHAM



Moon Princess

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This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and occurrences are a product of the author's imagination. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, places or occurrences, is purely coincidental.

To my darling hubby, thanks for coming along on this ride with me.

Chapter One

Flinging back the black silk sheet of his lover's bed, Barrett Osborn sat up and swung his legs over the edge of the mattress. Before he could get to his feet, Stan's hand grabbed Barrett's morning erection.

"Going somewhere?" Stan asked, his voice rough with sleep.

"Yeah, work." Barrett shoved his fingers through his hair, getting it out of his eyes.

"Not until we take care of this." Stan stroked his callused hand up and down Barrett's penis, the texture of Stan's palm adding to his pleasure.

Even as the owner of a successful construction company, Stan Varka liked to get his hands on his building projects. Swinging a hammer and lifting two-by-fours might make his hands rough, but it also kept his body tight and fit, which Barrett greatly appreciated.

Barrett looked down and admired the contrast of Stan's dark skin against his own dusky cream. His butt clenched as he thrust into the strokes.

Stan knelt behind him on the bed and wrapped his other hand around Barrett to pinch his nipple. The pleasure-pain shot through him, making his cock ache. But he wasn't going to shoot his wad with Stan's hand wrapped around him. He would be fully seated in Stan's ass when he came.

He twisted in Stan's arms and pushed him down onto the bed. "You know where I want to be," he growled, lying over Stan's long, lean body.

"Oh, yeah." Stan grinned and shimmied down to place his head under Barrett's cock. He licked his length before sucking Barrett deep in his throat.

He moaned as Stan's mouth pushed him closer to the edge with his tongue slipping around the ridge of his head. He pumped his hips, nearing the point of his climax.

He pulled out of Stan's mouth and grabbed the white tube from the bedside table. Stan slid back up the mattress while Barrett slicked lube over his own cock. Then with his left hand he shoved Stan's thigh up to his chest and slipped his fingers into Stan's tight hole.

When his lover was ready, he shoved Stan's other thigh up and paused with his dick resting at Stan's opening. He looked into the hazel eyes of the man who'd been his best friend since college ten years ago and his lover for more than a year.

"You're good for me," he said.

Stan flashed him a grin. "It'd be good for both of us if you'd shove your dick up my ass and get on with it."

Barrett leaned over and nipped the inside of Stan's thigh, making Stan yelp. Then he plunged into his lover and drove them to their orgasms with hard, forceful lunges of his hips.

Stan let loose first. His hot cream shot across Barrett's chest, sending Barrett careening over the edge. His hips jerked twice more before he collapsed next to Stan on the bed. He pulled Stan into his arms and kissed his full lips with playful bites while his breath came in pants.

"Now I'm really going to be late for work," he said when his breath stabilized.

"But it was worth it, wasn't it?" Stan asked.

He rubbed Stan's short-cropped, black hair. "Yeah, you're always worth it."

"Gee, thanks, hon," Stan quipped.

He slapped Stan's butt cheek and leapt off the bed before Stan could retaliate. He really needed to get in the shower then out the door to work—to another day of mind-numbing tedium copyediting at the graphic design company called Trident. Regardless, it kept him close to his assignment.

Three more minutes and Celina Maddock could get the heck out of dodge. The ticking seconds of the wall clock behind her head grated on her nerves as they counted down to the end of the work week.

It was seriously time to find a new job. She hadn't imagined she'd be stuck in a cubicle doing layouts for real estate brochures when she'd majored in graphic design in college. She'd always pictured herself living a bohemian life in New York City with her work showing in an edgy art house.

She blew her bangs out of her eyes and let out a huge sigh. Why had she let her hairdresser talk her into bangs? The blunt-cut layer across her forehead really didn't do any favors for her round face. Now she had to grow them back out, which always took forever.

"You still here? I thought you'd have hit the door two point nine seconds ago." Barrett, affectionately known in the office as Bear, propped his muscular arms on the top edge of her cubicle wall. His walnut brown eyes lit with amusement under his shaggy, black hair.

A tingle quivered at the apex of her thighs, sending a shiver up her back.

His lips quirked up at the corners. "Are you cold?"

Damn. Was her shudder that obvious? "Uh, no. Just excited to get out of here for the weekend." And growing more excited each time he came around. Lately, it seemed like her hormones were out of control whenever Bear walked by.

He was a tall, good-looking guy with a muscular body, who could have his pick of women. She didn't think he was the type to be interested in her full-figured self. She considered herself attractive; but from her experience, she found that guys with bodies like Bear tended to go for women half her size.

"Are you ready to go? I can walk with you to your car," he offered.

"Thanks. I appreciate that." She grabbed her purse from her bottom desk drawer. A woman had been attacked last month in a nearby parking lot, which made Celina nervous going out to her car alone at night after work.

She walked ahead of Bear down the aisle between the cubicles to the front door. Her spine tingled with her awareness of his large frame just a few feet behind her. She giggled to herself as she played with the idea of stopping suddenly in the aisle so he'd run into her from behind. She wondered if his package befitted his large size.

She rolled her eyes at herself. She was acting like a hormonal twenty-year-old rather than the nearly thirty that she was. What was wrong with her?

Bear slid in front of her and opened the door before she reached it. He laid his large hand against her lower back as she walked through the doorway. Her skin absorbed the heat from his palm through her blouse, and her cheeks flushed as her nipples pebbled against her bra.

Whoa, that was some reaction from a single touch. She'd probably soak her panties instantly if they ever kissed. She moaned softly at the thought.

“Are you okay?” Bear asked, slipping his arm around her as if to steady her while they walked towards the parking lot.

“Yeah, I’m fine.” She was *oh, so fine* with his hot bod pressed against hers. She waited for him to drop his arm, but he kept it in place even after they reached her car. She turned toward him to thank him for the escort, but the sight of his full lips made her breath catch.

“Something wrong?” He leaned his head closer to her.

Feeling as if she were possessed by her suddenly ramped up hormones, she reached up and grabbed his head. She pulled him down to meet her mouth and ran her tongue along the seam of his lips. He tasted like coffee and peppermint.

Her head swam as her knees threatened to buckle. She moaned as she tried to suck his tongue into her mouth and crushed her breasts against his hard chest. His arms were around her waist. His fingertips were flexing at the top of her buttocks, sending heat spiraling through her.

She broke the kiss for a brief moment to take a breath, then reality crashed into her thick skull. She dropped her hands to her sides.

“Hot damn... I mean... I’m sorry,” she stuttered, backing into the side of her car. She stared at his face with lust-dazed eyes. She’d never in her life done something so brazen before, never given in to that impulse. Her cheeks flamed with embarrassment. How was she going to face him everyday in the office after humiliating herself like this?

Barrett stepped back to put more distance between Celina and himself.

Shit. He’d almost blown his assignment. He was supposed to protect her, not surrender to his animalistic desires. If he gave in to his need for her, his senses would be blocked to any danger around them. Faulty evolution that one was.

He had to say something that could get them back to friendship status without hurting her feelings. However, if this had been a normal situation, he’d be in her car and halfway to her apartment by now, anticipating a night—no, a weekend—of intense sex, preferably with Stan joining them. But she was an assignment and a vitally important one at that.

She stared at him with hope in her bright blue eyes, waiting for something from him.

He needed a redirect. “Do you have any special plans for this weekend?” he asked.

Her lips parted. Then her tongue moistened her pouty lower lip.

Man, he'd like to nibble on that lip all night. She'd almost had him losing control with that incredibly sexy kiss. He forced his eyes back to hers.

"Ah, nothing special planned. How about you?" she asked.

This was his chance to get back on track with her. "Nope, nothing special. Just shopping for some furniture. I've decided it's time to let go of some of my second-hand wonders. You wouldn't be interested in helping me shop tomorrow, would you? I could really use your artistic eye."

"I'd be happy to help you."

"Great, I'll pick you up at your place at ten tomorrow. You're on Clover Street?"

"Yeah, how'd you know that?"

"Uh, I overheard you giving a lead to one of the visiting agents in the office about your neighbor who's moving. What's your house number?" He'd nearly slipped again. He was being way too sloppy on this assignment.

"Eleven forty-two."

"Okay, I'll see you tomorrow." He stepped back further and waited for her to get into her car. With a wave, he turned and walked across the lot to his own car, cursing himself for his amateurish behavior.

He'd always managed to keep a respectful distance between himself and his jobs. But then he'd never found himself as attracted to any of his previous assignments. The tribal council had given him this critical duty. It was his chance to redeem himself for failing his most important assignment two years ago.

In his peripheral vision, he caught sight of three shadows separating from the side of the office building heading for Celina's car, which still sat in its parking space.

Damn, they were coming for her early. He spun on his heel and ran to her passenger door.

Why hadn't she left yet? He tried the handle, and thankfully it was unlocked. Glancing over his shoulder, he checked the location of the quickly approaching Shadows and dove into Celina's compact car.

"Step on it, Celina. We've got to get out of here. Now!" he barked at her as he hit the automatic locks on the doors. Not that that would keep them safe for very long.

She stared at him with wide eyes and gaping mouth. "What?"

"We have to move. Now. I don't have time for explanations. Let's go!"

She still stared at him.

“Do you trust me?”

She hesitated. Then she nodded her head slightly.

“Good. Then please pull out of this parking space and hit the gas. Now!” He checked for the Shadows. They were only two car-lengths away.

She pulled her gaze off him and backed up the car. When she put the car in drive, she took off like a rocket. The engine in her little, red Corolla had pep. If only it had a little more leg room for his six and a half foot frame.

She screeched the tires as she turned out of the parking lot on to the access road next to the highway. Looking over his shoulder, he saw the Shadows still following them.

“Get on the highway,” he ordered Celina.

She swung the car suddenly in a left turn to take the ramp. He grunted as he banged his shoulder into the door.

She cast a quick look at him. “Sorry. Are you okay?”

“Yeah. Get in the left lane and get us away from here.”

She sped across the two lanes of traffic and cut in front of a black Corvette as she slid into the far lane. He had to admire her handling of the car. She drove like a stock car professional.

“Where are we going? My house is in the other direction,” she said, glancing in her mirrors as she darted into the middle lane to pass a slower car in the left lane.

“We can’t go to your place or mine.”

“So, where are we going?” She slipped back into the left lane.

“To a friend’s house.”

She looked at him again. “What’s this about? What are we running from?”

He looked back through the rear window just in time to see the Shadows falling away. They’d stopped their pursuit. They were giving up too easily, and he didn’t like it. Why would they come after Celina early, and then let her go without pursuing?

“Shit!” He slammed his palm on his thigh.

“What?!” Celina startled.

“We’ve got to ditch this car.”

“Why? You still haven’t told me what’s going on, Barrett. I swear I’m going to pull over and put this car in park until you start explaining things to me,” she threatened.

“I will, I promise. But we’ve got to find another ride and get some more distance first.” He unclipped his phone from his belt and dialed Stan’s number.

“Yo, Bear. What you up to?” his friend answered.

“Hey, Stan. I need a favor.”

“Of course. What can I do for you?”

“I’ve got Celina with me. They came for her early, but they didn’t bother pursuing us when we slipped out of their grasp, so they must have a tag on her car.” Not unlike the tag Barrett had placed inside her cell phone to help him keep tabs on her.

“Crap, Bear. Where are you now? I’ll pick you up.”

“Meet us at the Park ‘n Ride on Table Mesa Drive in South Boulder. Can you get there in twenty minutes?”

“No problem. Be safe, Bear.”

“Thanks. See you soon.” He flipped his phone closed and clipped it back to his belt. When he lifted his head, Celina gave him a hard stare.

“Now. Barrett. You better tell me what’s going on. Who’s Stan? How does he know who I am? Why are we ditching my car? And who the hell is after us?” Her voice rose to the stratosphere on the last question.

He could tell she was near her breaking point. He’d better start explaining or she was going to go ballistic on him. He could see it in the wild shine in her deep blue eyes and the tightness in her shoulders as she gripped the steering wheel. She had a hot temper, and she was about ready to scorch him with it.

“The ones that were after us are called Shadows,” he said. “It’s one of the shifts a werewolf can make.”

“Excuse me. Did you just say werewolf?” She let out a short, derisive laugh. “You know, Halloween’s not for another five months.”

“Yeah, werewolf, and they don’t just come out for Halloween.”

“Just full moons?”

“Actually, they can change anytime of the month.”

“Riii-ight,” she said.

He blew out his breath in a huff. She wasn't making this easy to explain.

"So what do the werewolves want with me? To make me one of them because they think I'll look good covered in fur?" she asked sarcastically.

He decided to get directly to the core issue. "They want you to mate with their alpha male."

"Yuck! Sex with a werewolf? You've got to be kidding." Her lips turned down in a grimace.

"Sex with a werewolf in human form." He chuckled, glad to see her earlier anger at him cooling as her curiosity grew.

"So, the werewolves think they can just kidnap me and force me to mate with their alpha?"

"No, they would treat you like royalty and hope you would come around to their side. Besides, it is rumored that the alpha male is very desirable."

"Right, if you like a man who can truly become a beast." She glanced at him. "But, why me?"

"Because by becoming the life mate of the alpha, you will strengthen the leadership of the werewolves, which they hope will enable them to eliminate the werebears."

"Werebears?" She giggled. "I used to sleep with a Care Bear when I was a kid, but I've never heard of a werebear."

"It's another type of shape shifter." He held back on identifying himself as one of the species. They were on the highway doing eighty miles per hour, and he didn't relish the idea of crashing into the guardrail when she reacted to his declaration.

"But why would mating me to the alpha give them strength?" she asked.

"It will add to the current alpha's credibility, which will strengthen his leadership."

"How?"

"Do you know the meaning of your name?"

"Yeah, I had a hippie mother who named me after the moon."

He chuckled, but stopped abruptly when she shot him a frown. "She also gave you her last name, Maddock, an Anglicized version Mahdokht, which is Persian for daughter of the moon."

“Wow, she really was hung up on the moon thing,” she said with a slight bite in her words.

“What do you know about your father?” he asked.

“He left my mother pregnant and alone. She never told me his name.”

“Thanos Aretino,” he said.

She looked at him sharply before returning her attention to the road. “How do you know?”

“Because I was fortunate to have worked for your father.”

“Lucky you.” Disdain thickly coated each word.

“I *was* lucky. He saved me from my own stupidity about six years ago.”

“How do you know he’s my father?”

“You are the daughter of the legendary leader of my tribe. Your story is known to all my people.”

“What people?”

“The tribe of the black bear.”

“So you are Native American?”

“No, not that kind of tribe.”

“Then please tell me, what are you talking about?” Her voice carried a strong note of exasperation.

“Take this exit. We’re almost at the parking garage where we’re meeting Stan.”

“Who’s Stan? Is he in your tribe, too? This non-Native American tribe.”

“No, he’s a close friend. Turn left here and pull into the garage. Find a spot on the second level.”

When she’d parked and turned off the engine, she spun in her seat and narrowed her eyes at him. “Okay, Barrett, enough of your fairy tales about werewolves and werebears. What the hell is going on here?”

“Your mother never told you anything about your father, did she?” He shook his head.

“Obviously not. Do you care to fill me in on the details that you seem to be privileged to?”

He paused before telling her a true fairy tale that would undoubtedly change her view of the world. “Your father was the leader of my tribe until two years ago.”

“What happened two years ago?”

“I’m sorry, Celina.” He paused before delivering the hurtful words. “He died.”

“Oh...well. It’s not like I ever knew him.” The corners of her mouth fell.

He wanted to pull her into his arms to lend her a comforting shoulder, but he held himself back. She looked too on edge to receive any consolation from him. He could see the questions accumulating in her eyes. He risked a hand on her arm and a gentle squeeze. She didn’t shake him off, which he took as a good sign.

“What did he die from? A vampire bite?” she said sarcastically.

“No, vampires are rare in Colorado.”

“Gee, that’s good to know. What else is living around here that I’m unaware of?”

“That’s not important right now. The only thing we need to concentrate on at the moment is keeping you out of the hands of the werewolves.”

“Don’t you mean out of their paws?”

His lips twitched into a grin. She was having a hard time accepting his words, but she hadn’t lost her sense of humor.

“Right. C’mon. We’ve got to find Stan and get out of here.” He shoved his door open and uninked his limbs as he stood. Scanning the parking level with his eyes, ears, and nose, he found no sight, sound, or smell of werewolf.

After Celina grabbed her purse and locked her car doors, Barrett grabbed her hand and hurried to the stairwell. Her grip was firm, and her skin was smooth and soft as they rushed down the stairs. A flash of heat flared through him as he imagined her hands wrapped around his cock. He met her gaze and saw his own heat mirrored in her eyes.

He stopped on the landing a step below her and tugged her body against his. Her full, soft breasts pressed into his chest. He wrapped an arm around her waist and pulled their hips together. His semi-erect cock pushed into her round, yielding belly. She gasped and wrapped her arms around his neck.

Even on a step above him, she was still shorter than him. He lowered his head and sucked her bottom lip into his mouth. She moaned and wriggled her body against his growing erection. He bit her lip then eased the hurt with his lapping tongue. She hummed deep in her throat and melted into his arms, her body growing languid with her arousal.

He slipped his hand under her blouse then up her back. Her silky skin burned beneath his touch. The blood pounded in his ears, blocking his senses from his surroundings, which is why he was surprised by the sound of a car horn when Celina broke their kiss.

“Hey, man! Save it for later. We gotta get outta here!” Stan called out to Barrett through the open doorway of the stairwell from his black Suburban.

Barrett took a moment to check Celina. “Are you okay?”

“Yeah,” she breathed out. “As long as you tell me that later we’re going to finish what we started.”

He grinned. “Hell, yes.”

“Then let’s get out of here before the furry beast men arrive.” She grabbed his hand and scooted out to Stan’s waiting SUV.

Some of Barrett’s good feelings washed away. He still hadn’t told her what he was. Would she still want him when she found out? And what would Stan say about sharing Barrett with Celina?

Chapter Two

“Thanks,” Celina said when Bear helped her up into the back seat of the big SUV.

He gently shut her door then climbed into the front passenger seat. “Celina, this is Stan. Stan, meet Celina.”

Stan half-turned in the driver’s seat and looked over his shoulder at her. His skin was a beautiful shade of rich chocolate, and his eyes were a startlingly green with brown flecks. His wide nose balanced his thick lips.

Celina’s mouth went dry as her body reacted as strongly to him as she had to Bear. She must be in the frisky part of her monthly cycle. Her hormones were coursing through her system at warp speed.

“Hi, Celina.” His deep voice thrummed through her.

“Hi.” Her voice came out on a whisper.

“Thanks for coming to get us, Stan,” Bear said.

“Hey, I can’t let just anyone get their hands on you. Can I?” Stan shot Bear a lopsided grin before pulling out of the parking garage.

Celina’s stomach did a little flip flop. What were the implications behind those words? Were the two men lovers? And if so, how did Stan feel about seeing her and Bear making out in the stairwell?

Bear glanced over his shoulder at her. Then he said to Stan, “She’s not just anyone.”

“I know. I can see that.” Stan met her eyes in the rearview mirror, and an electric charge shot through her veins. “She looks exactly the way the Moon Princess should.”

“Moon Princess?” she said. “Excuse me, would someone please fill me in on what you’re talking about?”

“She doesn’t know?” Stan asked Bear.

“Grrrr,” she growled. “Would you please stop talking about me like I’m not here?”

Stan chuckled. “She sounds like you when she gets mad. I can see she shares at least one of your werebear traits.”

“*What?* Are you saying Barrett is a werebear?” she shrieked at Stan. Then she stared at Barrett, trying to see any trace of animal in him. Other than his large size and shaggy black hair, he didn’t look like a bear.

“You haven’t told her?” Stan said.

“The timing hasn’t been right,” Bear said.

Bear. Yeah, his nickname was Bear, but that didn’t make him a werebear. The world tilted around her as her head spun.

“You managed to find the time to lick her tonsils,” Stan said.

“Jealous?” Bear asked.

“Not if I get to watch.”

Celina’s cheeks heated, and at the same time, she saturated her panties. She’d never considered herself an exhibitionist, but the thought of Stan watching her and Bear sent her pulse racing. Maybe he’d even want to participate. She shivered as she imagined herself pressed between their hot, hard bodies.

Bear looked back at her again. He must have caught something in her eyes because he sent her a sexy-as-sin grin. “Can you get us to your place any faster?” he asked Stan.

She was thrown back against the seat as Stan stepped on the accelerator. “Wait a second! You still haven’t told me what’s going on here?” she shouted at the two men in the front seat.

“Damn it, Barrett! Are you a werebear?”

The men glanced at each other.

“Yeah,” Bear finally looked back at her and answered. “I’m a member of the tribe of black bear, which is not a Native American tribe, but a tribe of the werebear.”

“You said my father was the leader of that tribe. He was a werebear?”

“Yeah.”

“And my mother? Was she a werebear, too?”

“Nope, she was a descendant of the ruling family of werewolves.”

“A werewolf? My father was a werebear, and my mother was a werewolf? What does that make me...? A freak?”

“No, you are the Moon Princess,” Bear said.

“Right. That’s me. I’m *such* princess material.” She didn’t know if she wanted to laugh or cry at the outrageous story Bear was telling her. Why would he make up this story about her parents? And why would he lie about knowing her father?

“You have no idea what you are made of. You’ve been kept in the dark by parents who never bothered to tell you your ancestry,” Bear said hotly. His eyes blazed at her.

Stan placed a hand on Bear’s shoulder. “Easy, Bear. This is all new to her. Give her a chance to digest.”

“You are the heir of both the werebear and the werewolf people,” Bear continued in his intense voice. “You have the ability to lead either people to victory over the other.”

“Or bring them to everlasting peace,” Stan said quietly.

Bear glanced at him. “Peace? That’s a child’s dream.”

“What if it’s possible?” Stan asked.

“You’re not werebear. You don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“Careful, Bear. Don’t say something you’ll regret later,” Stan warned softly.

Bear drew in a deep breath and turned back to the front of the car. “I need to blow off some steam. Running from the Shadows got my adrenaline spiking.”

“We’re almost to my house, where I’d be more than willing to help you blow off steam,” Stan said, turning right onto a narrow and twisting gated drive in the mountains west of Boulder.

The tree-lined drive must have been nearly a mile long. At the end, a large, stone-sided house stood among tall pine trees at the top of a breathtaking view of a deep valley.

Celina felt like she really had stepped into a fairytale. The house was unbelievably gorgeous—a true mountain-top paradise.

“Do you share your house with a wife and passel of kids?” she asked Stan.

He chuckled. “Nope, just me. And Bear when he spends the night.”

“It’s beautiful.”

“Thanks. Let’s go in, and I’ll pour us some drinks. You both look like you could use one.”

Celina followed Stan up the front stone steps with Bear walking behind her. She was already living out part of her sexual fantasy, sandwiched between the two men. Now if she could get all their clothes off and get them to stand much closer to her...

God, where was her head? She'd never been so quick to consider jumping into bed with a guy before—let alone two of them—and she didn't even know Stan yet. How could she be thinking about turning this into a sexual encounter?

Yeah, that one was easy to answer as she stared at Stan's perfectly formed ass as she followed him up the steps to the house.

"Ouch!" She fell forward as her toe caught the top edge of the last step.

Bear grabbed her around the waist from behind and Stan spun around to catch her from the front before she splattered face first on the walkway.

And that was how she managed to succeed in creating the Celina sandwich with two, incredibly sexy men...but they still had all their clothes on.

She sighed. "Thanks for catching me, guys. You can see I'm not a very graceful princess."

Both men still had their arms around her, and Stan looked down into her eyes. "But you more than make up for it in sex appeal," he whispered against her lips as he leaned down.

Her breath caught in her throat as she froze staring into his powerful green eyes. He brushed his lips across hers, and her breath came back with a gasp as a delicious tremor ran through her. She leaned toward him and ran the tip of her tongue over his full lower lip. He tasted smoky, like from a fire. And he was definitely creating a flame inside of her.

She wrapped her arms around his neck to gain better access to his mouth. He lowered his head further and deepened his kiss, running his tongue along the edges of her lips before delving into her mouth. She moaned and melted against him.

From behind her, Bear pushed aside her hair and nuzzled the side of her neck. He trailed warm, wet kisses up behind her ear sending shivers along her skin.

An owl hooted from a nearby tree and Celina started.

"My neighbors think it's time for us to take this inside," Stan said.

Celina giggled, then squealed as Bear swept her up into his arms. "What are you doing?" she asked.

“We can’t have you tripping and falling again, can we?” he said, carrying her the final feet up the walkway into the house.

The man was strong! He showed no outward signs of the effort it took to carry her so-not-petite body.

“Um, I think I’m safe here inside the house, Bear. I’m sure you can put me down now.” She really didn’t want him hurting himself.

“Nope, I think I want to carry you all the way to the bedroom. What do you think, Stan?”

“I say I’m right behind you with the drinks.”

“How about you, Celina? Are you ready to take this party to the bedroom?” Bear asked.

Hot damn! She really was going to get all the parts of her fantasy working at the same time. Now she knew she had to be dreaming. How else could she explain Bear’s strange story about werewolves and Shadows, werebears and a moon princess? And this part about being invited into the bedroom of two hot men.

“Celina?” Bear’s forehead creased when she didn’t respond immediately.

“Oh, yes. I’m in the mood for this party,” she reassured him. And she never, ever, *ever* wanted to wake up from this dream.

His face split into a grin. “Then let me show you the way.” He carried her through the front hall and up a curved stairway.

He wasn’t even breathing hard when they reached the upstairs hallway—another sign that she was sound asleep in her bed alone, having the best dream of her life.

“You know, I’m pretty sure I’m in no danger of falling on my face. I think I can walk from here,” she said.

“Nope, must be my inner bear’s need to carry you off to my den. I’m not letting you go until we get to the bedroom.”

“I must be getting too heavy by now. I don’t want you to hurt yourself.” She didn’t want to take any chances with his wellbeing, just in case this wasn’t a dream.

He stopped walking and stared at her. “You know, there are two ways I could take that statement. Either you don’t think I’m strong enough to carry you, in which case you are insulting me. Or you think you are too much woman for *any* man to carry, in which case you are insulting yourself. I’m not going to ask you which it is because I have a fairly good idea I know what you meant.”

“I would never insult you, Bear.” She felt sick that he may have thought that.

“I know, Celina. I also know that I hate this human culture we live in that measures women’s desirability by the size of their body. It doesn’t work that way for me. When I look at you, I see curves and softness and flesh that I want to lose myself in.”

“Me, too,” Stan said from over Bear’s shoulder.

“Oh, no.” She turned to hide her face in Bear’s shoulder. “Can we move on to another topic? I can’t discuss this right now with both of you.”

She felt Stan move to stand in front of her. His fingers tugged at her chin until she faced him. “Don’t try to hide what you are feeling from us, Celina,” he said softly. “This will never work between the three of us if you hide from us.”

She lost herself in his gaze. It was like there was magic in his eyes—a secret power to enchant her.

“Do you still want us?” he asked her.

She nodded. “Yes,” she breathed out as the reality of the situation pressed down on her. She really was in this man’s house about to go to bed with him and Bear.

“I’m so glad.” He leaned over and lightly brushed a kiss across her mouth. Then he reached for Bear and brushed his lips across Bear’s mouth.

Celina soaked her already wet panties as she watched the two men kissing as Stan leaned over her body in Bear’s arms. A moan slipped out between her lips, and the men stopped kissing to look at her.

Bear grinned. “I’m glad you liked that, because there’s a lot more we can show you.”

She merely stared at him while he carried her into a large, corner bedroom with white walls and warm-toned wood furniture and set her on the king-sized bed. Across the room from her, two brown leather easy chairs faced the western window. The setting sun lit the room with blazing red and orange light.

She got to her knees on the bed. “This view is amazing.”

“I completely agree,” Stan said, looking at her, not the sunset. He unbuttoned his twill shirt and slowly pulled it down off his arms.

Celina stared at his chiseled pecs and abdominal muscles. His dark skin shimmered in the fading light of the day. “Hot damn,” she whispered under her breath.

He chuckled and walked toward her. “Whatever you want you can have, Celina.”

She reached up and smoothed her palm over his hot, firm skin. His muscles were as hard as steel under a layer of satiny perfection. She lifted her mouth to his dark nipple and laved it with her tongue. She used her left hand to pinch his other nipple into a tight peak.

His hands slid over her shoulders and down to the buttons at the front of her blouse. “May I help you with this?” he asked.

“Please do,” she said. From the corner of her eye, she caught sight of Bear stripping off his clothes. He stood gloriously naked and fully aroused. Oh yeah, his package definitely befitted his large frame. Her pussy clenched with anticipation for him to fill her.

Stan slipped her blouse off her shoulders. Once her arms were free, she unbuttoned his jeans and slid her hand inside the waistband of his silk boxers. He was thick and ready. She pushed his jeans and boxers over his hips and watched as he shoved them down to his feet and stepped out of them.

Bear stood next to Stan at the edge of the bed, and Celina’s gaze darted between the two magnificent penises in front of her. With one hand on each man, she ran her palms up and down their long shafts.

“You know, Bear, even with her blouse off, I still think Miss Celina here is wearing too much clothing,” Stan said.

“I couldn’t agree more,” Bear said, smiling at her.

Before she could respond, the men jumped on the bed on either side of her and began to tickle her.

“No, please,” she gasped for breath. “You...can’t tickle...me.”

“Oh, but I think we already are.” Stan laughed.

She tried to wiggle out of their reach, but they each grabbed a wrist and held her down to the bed. “Okay, uncle! I give up! Take my damn clothes off already.”

Stan grinned at Bear. “Let’s not keep the lady waiting.” He flipped open the slide on her slacks, had the zipper down and the pants off her legs before she caught her next breath.

She lay on her back on the bed in her black lace bra and matching black thong.

“Shit, Bear. She totally had me fooled with that schoolmarm outfit she was wearing,” Stan said.

Bear released her wrist and ran his fingertips over the swell of her breasts. “Now that’s what I call princess material,” he said.

She laughed and swatted him on the butt with her palm.

“She’s a frisky one. Maybe we should teach her who’s in charge here,” Bear said.

Celina’s clit throbbed in time with her pulse. She desperately wanted these men to dominate her. Maybe she could push them towards it.

“Well, you did say I am the princess, right? So that would mean I’m in charge,” she said. “And my first decree shall be to have you two men—”

She was cut off from finishing her sentence by Stan’s hot, wet mouth pressed firmly to hers. He drove his tongue between her lips with hard thrusts. She gasped as her body craved the same hard thrusts in her slick sex.

“Yeah, we definitely need to show her who’s in charge around here,” Bear said as he unclasped her bra and pulled it off. Then he skimmed her panties down her legs and free of her feet.

“Mmmm,” she moaned into Stan’s kiss as Bear spread her legs and covered her mound with his mouth, breathing hot air over her sensitized clit.

Stan pinched and twisted her nipples, sending an electric current coursing down to her pussy, where Bear was delving between her folds with his tongue. Bear slid a finger into her channel and stroked the inner walls as he teased her clit with his mouth. Her back arched off the mattress as the multiple points of pleasure drove her over the edge to her climax. She cried out as her muscles contracted, and she rode the waves of her release.

She sank back into the mattress with her eyes closed, panting to catch her breath. Hot damn, this was way better than any fantasy she could ever have envisioned.

Stan trailed kisses along her jaw and down her neck to her breast. He pulled one nipple into a hot, wet kiss. She pushed herself up further into his mouth.

Bear slid up the mattress to lie next to her side, kissing her throat and the shell of her ear. He kept one finger on her clit, making lazy circles. Her next climax was already building.

“You...Bear. I need you...inside me,” she gasped as Stan worked her nipples into tighter buds.

“As you wish, my princess.”

She could feel his mouth turn up into a grin where it was pressed to her neck.

A moment of clarity flickered through her mind. “Condom?”

“Already got it covered,” Bear answered and positioned himself between her legs.

The tip of his large cock brushed up and down her folds as she tried to press her hips toward him, but he teased her by staying out of her grasp.

She moaned. "Come on, Bear. Now...please."

Stan lifted his head from her right nipple. "God, I love to hear you beg. It makes me harder than ever."

"Come up here and let me see," she said, raising her head off the mattress to look down at him.

He scooted up the bed to kneel next to her head. She wrapped her hand around his long cock and stroked as his head fell back on his shoulders. Then she leaned over and swiped her tongue over the tip, catching a taste of his salty essence.

"Oh, shit. That's hot," Bear said and thrust into her. "You look beautiful kissing him like that."

"Ah," she gasped as he filled her deep and wide.

"Take him in your mouth," Bear demanded.

She tilted her head to reach Stan while he bent over her. Slowly, she swirled her tongue along the ridge of his cock before sliding him deeply into her mouth.

"Oh, yes," he hissed. "Your mouth is so hot and tight."

"Just like her pussy," Bear said, thrusting harder and faster into her.

She moaned her pleasure at the double penetration, feeling wanton and extremely desirable. The sexual power from knowing these two studs wanted her was intoxicating. Her building climax pulsed through her veins and throbbed in her inner muscles around Bear's cock.

"Yes, baby," he panted. "Squeeze me just like that."

She tightened her core muscles and felt her orgasm slam into her. Her vaginal muscles clenched Bear tightly as she cried out her release with her hand wrapped around Stan's cock.

Bear rammed into her forcefully and sent another orgasm rocking through her as he reached his climax. Stan sat back on his heels next to Celina's side with his head thrown back and stroked himself to completion, cupping his hand over the end of his cock to keep from coming on her.

As she floated back to her body, she kind of wished she could have felt his hot splash over her breasts and belly. Maybe she could get that to work out the next time...if they wanted a next time.

Bear rolled over to her side as Stan stretched out on her other side. She shivered slightly as a breeze drifted in through the open window.

Bear pulled back the blankets and the three of them rolled under the covers, curled up in a tangle of arms and legs and broad chests.

Celina kissed one neck and then the other, wanting to keep them as close to her as possible. She'd never felt as treasured as this before, laying in the arms of two incredibly handsome men who'd seemingly wanted her as much as she'd wanted them.

Oh, God, would this be awkward when they all woke up from their evening nap? She started fretting and wiggling in the close space between their two hulking bodies.

Maybe she should get up now and get dressed. She could find another bedroom to sleep in. They were definitely a couple, and she was a third wheel. Maybe they were just being polite by inviting her to join them this one time.

"Shhhh," Bear whispered, stroking her back.

"Go to sleep, beauty. We'll get to it again in a little while," Stan murmured and rubbed her hip.

"Am I in the way?" she asked, trying to push herself up into a sitting position.

"Of what?" Bear asked, placing a giant hand on her shoulder to keep her lying down.

"Of you two being together," she said.

"We are together," Stan said. "The three of us are together now."

"You belong with us, Celina," Bear said. "You are right where you're supposed to be."

"Now take a nap because Bear has a hearty appetite for sex, and I suggest you get some rest while you can," Stan said and gently massaged her hip and thigh with his strong hand.

"Sleep, my princess," he whispered.

She relaxed in their combined embrace, and her muscles grew heavy with fatigue. With a brief thought about what a great weekend this was going to be, she fell into a deep sleep.

Chapter Three

The bed under Barrett shifted as Stan got to his feet. “Where are you going?” he whispered as Celina lay curled asleep on his chest.

“I’ve got to make a phone call,” Stan said. “I’ll be back in a few. Keep the bed warm for me.”

Barrett grinned. “Make it fast, or I’ll have to come find you.”

Stan pulled on a pair of sweatpants from his dresser drawer. “It shouldn’t take long,” he said and left the bedroom. His bare feet hardly made a sound through the hallway or on the stairs as he made his way to the downstairs office.

Barrett pulled Celina closer into his body and buried his nose in her hair. She smelled like floral shampoo, a nice compliment to Stan’s preferred spicy body wash.

He dozed off and when he awoke, Stan still had not returned. He’d warned the man, now he was going to find him and bring him back. Whatever work Stan had could wait. His lovers needed him tonight.

Barrett carefully removed his arm from under Celina’s head and set her gently on the pillow. Making sure he didn’t pull the covers off her, he climbed out of bed then grabbed his underwear off the floor. While he pulled them on, Celina opened an eye and peered up at him.

“Where’s everyone going?” she asked.

“I’m going to fetch Stan,” he said. “Stay there. We’ll be right back.”

“M-kay,” she murmured and closed her eyes, nestling back under the covers.

Barrett crept down the stairs, hoping to catch Stan off guard. He liked using the other man’s fight or flight instincts against him. It never failed to heat up their sexual play.

In the front foyer, Barrett paused outside the partially opened door to Stan's office and listened for a break in the conversation to make his move.

"Who ordered the early retrieval?" Stan asked, then waited for a response. "Why wasn't I informed?"

Another pause and Barrett waited to hear more of Stan's side of what sounded like an intense conversation.

"Shit! Klivor is going to screw this whole thing up. The damn man is too impatient. We've got to tread carefully here or we're going to put both nations at risk for extinction...Because we are destroying ourselves with our need to destroy the bears."

The blood pounded in Barrett's temples as he pieced together Stan's words. If Stan was trying to destroy the bears, then he had to be wolf. But that couldn't be possible because Stan had no wolf scent.

"But there *is* another way. Not everything we believe about the bears is correct... Because I have firsthand knowledge that many of the things we thought we knew are wrong. They *are* capable of deep emotional connections and can contain their promiscuity."

Damn! Was their relationship some kind of experiment for the wolf? Or a way to get insider information from the bear nation?

"Obviously Klivor thought he could get his hands on Celina and use her to unseat me to become the next alpha."

Alpha? Fuck! He'd been bedding the alpha wolf for the past year and didn't know it? He was going to lose everything he'd been working for when the council found this out, but first he had to get Celina out of here. He couldn't believe he'd actually brought her straight to the enemy.

He spun around to the stairs and took them three at a time. In the bedroom, he threw Celina's clothes at her prone position on the bed.

"Wake up, Celina," he demanded.

"What's going on?" she asked.

"Get your clothes on. We have to get out of here." He jammed his legs into his pants and tugged his shirt over his head.

"Are the Shadows here?" She sat up, clutching the blankets to her naked torso.

"Not yet. But soon. Move it."

She threw down the blankets, quickly buttoned her blouse, and scrambled into her slacks without taking the time to put on her underwear first.

He grabbed her hand and strode down the hallway, half-dragging her behind him. Stan had better not get between him and the door because he would go right through the other ma—wolf.

Only the memory of the love he'd had for the man kept Stan, the *wolf*, alive.

"Hey, where are you going in such a hurry?" Stan asked, coming out of his office into the foyer as Barrett gripped the front door knob.

"Far away from you," Barrett growled.

"I step out to make one phone call, and you decide to leave me? What's going on?" Stan said.

"You should know better than I do what's going on, Mister Alpha Wolf," Barrett said.

Celina's hand clenched in his. "He's the alpha wolf?" she asked. Her voice trembled as she stared with wide eyes at Stan.

Barrett watched Stan and waited for his reply. Would he try to lie his way out of this?

Stan's eyes darted from Barrett to Celina, and his relaxed posture shifted as he drew himself more upright. "Yes, Celina. I am Alpha, and you are my one true mate."

Pain stabbed Barrett's chest at the phrase 'one true mate'. Damn Stan, and damn himself for being weak. Of everything that was wrong with this situation, why did that hurt the most?

He growled and tugged Celina closer to his body. "You're not getting her. Not while I'm still breathing."

Stan turned his eyes to Barrett. "This doesn't have to be played out with a winner and a loser. There is another way."

"You're delusional. There will always be a victor, and it will be the bears when Celina is installed in her rightful place as the leader of our nation."

"I can't be your leader," she said to Barrett. "I don't know anything about your...people."

"I'll teach you. They're your people too. But right now, we have to get you to safety."

"She's more safe here than out there," Stan said.

"Yeah, you'd like to keep her here, wouldn't you? That would fit nicely in your plans. Sorry to disappoint, *Wolfman*, but she's never going to lead the wolf against the bear."

"I don't want her to lead us against you. I want her to bring peace between the nations."

“Peace,” Barrett scoffed. “Peace is a dream for pups. Wolf and bear can never live peacefully together.”

“Really?” Stan said, raising an eyebrow. “Didn’t we manage to live quite peaceably for the ten years we’ve known each other? And more than that, didn’t we love each other?”

A vise squeezed Barrett’s heart. “Like I would believe you really felt anything for me, now that I know that you’ve been lying to me all these years about who you are.”

“Yes, I withheld a vital piece of myself from you by keeping my identity a secret, but that doesn’t negate the feelings I have for you. I love you, Barrett. That has never been a lie.”

But Barrett would be usurped by Celina now that Stan had found his ‘one true mate’.

Damn, he couldn’t let his personal feelings get in the way of doing his job. His first priority had to be keeping Celina out of the hands of the wolves and get her to the tribe’s ranch. That’s where he should have taken her to begin with, instead of taking this side trip to the alpha wolf’s lair.

“How the hell did you keep your scent from me all this time?” he demanded of Stan.

“The expression of a latent gene,” Stan said. “I have a human ancestor in my DNA pool. My scent glands didn’t mature as I grew through adolescence. Some of the wolves saw it as a sign that I wasn’t supposed to be alpha, even though it is my birthright. I’ve had to work twice as hard to prove myself capable of holding my position.”

“But Bear said the alpha wanted to mate me so I would become his lifetime partner,” Celina said. “We just had sex. Does this mean we’re married now or something?” she asked Stan.

“No!” Barrett roared. “He never penetrated you.”

“Why didn’t you?” she asked Stan. “Why would you get so close and not take advantage?”

“Because I’m an idealistic fool,” Stan said. “I wanted you to know who I was before I claimed you. And not just my title. I wanted you to know me as a man.”

“When were you going to tell me?” she asked, echoing Barrett’s thoughts.

“I hadn’t thought it all out yet. I was hoping once we got to know each other, I would find a good way of telling you and you’d accept me for who I am. All of me. Man, wolf, lover of Barrett, your lover, and finally alpha wolf.”

“That’s a lot to get to know, Stan. How long did you think it was going to take?” she asked.

He shook his head. “I don’t know, but I’ve obviously screwed up with the two most important people in my life.”

“You aren’t anything like I pictured a werewolf would be,” she said, taking a step away from Barrett toward Stan.

Barrett tugged her arm to keep her next to him, but she turned on him.

“Let me go, Bear,” she said. “You’ve trusted this man for ten years. There must be good in him.”

Reluctantly, he let go of her hand, but he stepped up close behind her, ready to haul her out of the house at any sign of a threat from Stan.

She approached Stan hesitantly. When she was within a foot of him, she stopped and looked up into his face. “Do you really believe in peace?” she asked.

Stan stared at her with soft eyes, with a look that Barrett had received in their moments of deepest feeling. Now Stan looked at Celina that way, and Barrett wanted to strike out in jealousy.

“I believe in peace with all my heart,” Stan said. “It is the only way to ensure the survival of both species.” He looked up at Barrett. “And it is the only way I can stay with the man I love.”

Barrett froze. He couldn’t let his feelings rule his rational mind, but he wanted so badly to believe Stan’s words. “But I’ve delivered your ‘one true mate’ right to you. What else do you need from me?”

“Your love and respect,” Stan said. “No matter how it looks, I didn’t use you to get to Celina.”

“What did you want from me then?”

“I fell in love with you years before we became lovers, way before I knew you were bear. Not only are my scent glands disabled, but I also have the limited nose of a human. I can’t smell bear. I didn’t know who you were until you showed yourself to me this past year after we became lovers. No matter how it must seem to you, I didn’t have an ulterior motive for befriending you. I fell in love with the man long before I knew the bear.”

Bear’s pride wanted to believe Stan, but he had to keep his head about him. The future of his nation rested on his next decision. “I want to believe you, Stan.”

“You’ve known him for ten years, Bear,” Celina said. “Do you really think Stan could have been stringing you along all that time without you suspecting he had ulterior motives?”

He looked from Celina to Stan. “No, he’s never been able to lie to me. Except this time. How the hell did you keep the truth about being the alpha from me?”

“It wasn’t an issue in our relationship until I learned you were bear. Before that, we were just two men who met in college and became good friends. Do you tell all your human friends about your true nature?”

“No, but what about after I told you I was bear?”

“I realized you would dump me on my ass faster than I could blink. And I realized that most of what I’d been raised to believe about bear was wrong. I saw it as an opportunity to study in person how we could end the war between the species. If you and I could fall in love, why couldn’t our nations work out a peace agreement?”

Barrett’s throat closed as he choked back his emotions. “You’ve always been such a dreamer.”

“And it’s one of the things you always said you loved about me,” Stan said.

“Yeah, I do,” he said.

Stan stepped around Celina and pulled Barrett into his strong embrace. Squeezing Barrett in his arms, Stan whispered in his ear, “I love you, now and forever.”

Barrett drew his arms around Stan and clung to his lover and best friend. “Me, too,” he said, his words coming out thickly. “But I’m still mad at you.”

“I’ll let you take it out on my ass,” Stan said.

Barrett growled. “Yes, you will.” And he took Stan’s mouth hard against his own, showing his dominance with his thrusting tongue and nipping teeth.

A small moan from neither him nor Stan had him breaking off the kiss. He looked over and found Celina standing at the side of the foyer with her arms wrapped around her middle and the saddest expression on her face.

When she realized he was watching her, she made a move for the hallway leading to the kitchen. “I’ll give you guys some privacy,” she said as she began to walk away with her head bent down.

Barrett met Stan’s gaze, and they leapt after Celina at the same time. She let out a shriek as they trapped her within their arms.

“What are you doing?” she yelped as they pressed her between their two large bodies.

“Keeping you safe,” Barrett said. “Isn’t that what I promised I’d do?”

“This feels like a little more than keeping me safe.”

“Yeah, it kind of feels like making love, doesn’t it?” Stan wriggled his hips against Celina’s bottom half.

“But you two seem to have something you need to work out.”

“Yes, we do, but that doesn’t mean we’re going to ignore you.” Barrett pulled her closer to his body.

She reached up and stroked his cheek, then stroked Stan’s. “I get to watch?”

“You get to participate.” Barrett rose harder behind the zipper in his slacks and pressed himself into her soft belly.

She turned within the confines of their arms to face Stan. “Are you going to mate with me?”

“Only when you’re ready,” Stan reassured her. “I will never force anything on you that you don’t want.”

“What if I’m never ready to become the alpha wolf’s life mate, but I want to become your lover?”

“As long as I don’t penetrate you, we can be lovers without being life mates.”

Her brow creased as she studied him. “Would you be satisfied with that?”

“Satisfied?” he repeated. “I don’t think I would use that word, but I will do whatever it takes to make you happy. You are the Moon Princess. You are royalty, and I would be honored to serve you.”

“The alpha isn’t royalty?” she asked.

Stan shook his head. “Royalty can only be traced through the female line.”

Her eyes widened. “A matriarchal society with an alpha male serving the female royalty?”

Stan nodded. “Yes, Your Highness.”

She turned to look at Barrett. “What does this mean for us?”

Barrett tightened his hold on her. “I’m never letting go of you. So this means you are stuck with both of us.”

A slow smile spread across her face. "I don't ever want to wake up from this dream." Then her stomach growled loudly and she giggled. "But can we stop in the kitchen before we go back to bed?"

"Whatever your heart desires, Your Highness." Stan bowed his head with a pleased grin on his face.

"Oh, good grief," Celina groaned. "Knock off the princess crap, please."

Barrett chuckled at Stan's look of surprise.

"I thought all women desired to be treated as a princess," Stan said.

Celina rolled her eyes. "Not this one. Just treat me like a woman who wants to be made love to."

"My pleasure," Stan said.

"And mine, too," Barrett agreed.

"Great," she said. "You got any food in this beautiful house, Stan?"

"Yeah, and even better," he said, "we've got Barrett to cook it for us. Have you ever eaten his cooking?"

It was Celina's turn to look surprised. "You cook?"

"Yeah, don't insult me with your shocked look," he grumbled. "I'm an excellent chef."

"I'm sorry," she said. "This is not a look of disbelief. This is a look of having another fantasy come true."

"Fantasy, huh?"

"Oh, yeah. I love to eat, and I hate to cook. Now you're telling me you want to be my lover and my chef? I don't think I'm dreaming, I think I've died and gone to heaven."

Stan laughed and swept her off her feet. "Come on. Enough talk. Let's go get this food fest started."

Chapter Four

After stuffing themselves with Bear's cooking—filet mignon, twice-baked potatoes, green beans almandine, and fudge brownies—the three of them lay sprawled together on the sofa in the living room watching the flames in the fireplace with Celina in the middle.

“That was unbelievably good,” she said, rubbing her full stomach. “Thank you, Bear.”

He grinned. “You're welcome, and I know how you can really show your appreciation.”

She groaned. “Uh, you're going to have to let me digest first.”

“Then I challenge you to a game of pool,” Stan said, jumping up from the couch. His bare chest reflected the light from the fire.

“What?” she said. “Where'd you get your energy from? I thought you were as stuffed as me.”

“I was, but domesticated beef doesn't stick with me very long.”

“Oh, shit. I never asked. Do you prey on humans and turn them into werewolves?”

Stan laughed so hard he had to sit back down on the couch as Bear hunched over roaring while holding his stomach. The longer they laughed at her expense, the angrier she grew.

“All right!” she shouted. “Knock it off and tell me what's so damn funny.”

“No...no preying...on humans,” Stan gasped. Then he cracked up anew.

“Why is that so hilarious?” she demanded.

“It's those stupid movies Hollywood keeps making about shape shifters,” Bear said.

“Stan and I used to watch them and laugh our asses off at the stupid myths they perpetuated.”

“Okay, so you don't prey on people,” she said. “Is there anything you do eat that's considered out of the ordinary for a human diet?”

Stan finally sobered up enough to answer in complete sentences. “Yeah, we prefer wild game to domesticated meat. That’s one of the reasons the bears and wolves have been turning against each other more in the last thirty years. Our wild game supply has diminished severely, while at the same time our population has increased. There’s too much pressure on the limited natural resources.”

“Why is wild game preferred?”

“Do you have any idea what they do to get the meat supply that fills the grocery store shelves?” Stan asked.

“Not really, and I probably prefer not to know the details.”

“Then I’ll just tell you that the meat isn’t nearly as nutritious as wild game, and it contains lots of man-made ingredients that are harmful to your body,” Stan said.

“Celina, you may find once you switch to wild game that your metabolism and everything about your body changes,” Bear said. “Not that I would like to see anything on you change. I love every curve on you.”

“Why would my metabolism or anything else change?” she asked.

“Because you’re half bear and half wolf.”

“But I feel all human.”

“That’s because you’ve never been taught to shift,” Bear explained.

“I can shift?” She giggled. “That sounds ridiculous.”

“It’s one of the reasons you were assigned my protection this past year.” Bear wrapped his arm around her shoulders.

“What are you talking about?”

“I’ve been your bodyguard as you approach your thirtieth birthday because that’s when you will reach full maturity. If you haven’t learned to shift by choice before then, your body will shift involuntarily on the first full moon after your thirtieth birthday.”

“Shit, that would freak me out.”

“That’s why I will be with you.” Bear squeezed her shoulder.

“As will I.” Stan grabbed her hand.

Bear looked at Stan. “Yeah, we don’t know which will be the dominate shift.”

“Does it matter?” she asked.

Both men looked at her.

“Only that the first time you shift,” Bear said, “you will be driven to find the mate of your shift.”

“So I will seek you if it’s bear, and I’ll seek out Stan if I go into wolf shift?”

“Yes,” Stan said. “If you haven’t mated with me by choice yet, you will lose your ability to choose.”

“And I will be driven by lust to mate with you no matter what I think rationally about you?”

“The mating drive is very strong, especially for someone who hasn’t shifted before reaching full maturity,” Stan said.

“Shit, this mess is getting bigger and bigger.”

Stan frowned. “I’m sorry you feel that way.”

“Oh no, Stan. I’m sorry.” She pulled him closer with his hand and rested her head on his chest. “I didn’t mean to hurt you. It’s just a lot of crazy stuff for me to try to understand at once.”

“We’re here to help you through it,” Bear said, including Stan in his embrace.

She yawned. “Can we go over this again in the morning? I’m really tired, and I’m sure there are a bunch of questions I forgot to ask.”

“Of course, Your Highness.” Stan winked at her. “It’s time to rest your royal head.”

She pushed herself to her feet and wobbled with fatigue.

“I believe our lady could use a helping hand to bed.” Bear swooped her into his arms.

“Are you ever going to let me walk on my own feet anywhere again?” she asked.

“Maybe. If it suits me.”

“Okay.” She curled against his chest and closed her eyes. “I’m too tired tonight to argue with you. You win this one.”

Once they’d gotten Celina undressed and tucked into their bed, she was sound asleep. Barrett motioned Stan to follow him into the hall.

“What’s up?” Stan asked, drawing the door closed softly behind him.

“Did you tell your pack mates you had Celina here?” Barrett asked, holding back the growl threatening to erupt from his chest. He was screwing up this assignment so badly. He should have asked this question hours ago. He was doing a crappy job at keeping Celina’s safety his top priority.

“No!” Stan said.

“Why not? Isn’t this what you’ve been planning for?”

Stan drew his hand down his face in a weary move. “Let’s go talk in my office. I don’t want to wake Celina.”

Barrett followed Stan down the stairs as his patience grew thin. As soon as he closed the office door, he turned on Stan. “Spill it. What’s going on with the wolf pack? Why did they come early for Celina, and why didn’t you know about it?”

Stan sunk into a leather arm chair and motioned for Barrett to take the other one. When Barrett sat, Stan said, “I’ve got a rival in the pack trying to challenge my alpha position. He’s got some followers within the pack. They view me as too pacifistic and not aggressive enough. They took it upon themselves to shorten the wait for the Moon Princess without letting me know.”

“What are you going to do about it?” Barrett asked.

“Keep Celina out of their hands, to begin with,” Stan said.

“Then what?”

Stan shook his head. “I don’t know yet. I was hoping to have enough time with Celina so she could make her own decision about whether she wanted to mate with me.”

“You wanted to romance her into accepting you.”

“Yeah.”

Barrett regarded his lover, the romantic fool. “What do you plan to do if she doesn’t accept you?”

Stan looked at him with sad eyes. “Do you think that’s a possibility?”

Barrett shrugged. “It’s always a possibility that a woman will say no. She’s not just going to have to say yes to you the man, but yes to the responsibilities of being the alpha mate.”

“But she really seems to like us, don’t you think?”

Barrett threw back his head and laughed.

At Stan’s hurt look, Barrett sobered. “C’mon, Stan. You’re so sensitive, but sometimes you completely miss the signs in front of you. Celina likes you, likes both of us. A lot.”

“Then I hope we can keep her away from the pack long enough to become my mate.”

Barrett felt an acute pain in his chest at Stan’s use of the word mate. Even though he didn’t expect his lover to shut him out, he couldn’t help feeling like he came in second place

behind Celina when it came to the alpha wolf's priorities. Of course, Barrett understood his lover's responsibilities to his pack, but it didn't make it easier for him to accept.

He must have remained silent for too long because Stan was looking at him with raised eyebrows.

"Problem?" Stan asked. "Do you doubt that we can keep her safe?"

"No, that's not it."

Stan was quiet for a moment as if he was reviewing both parts of his last statement. Then he said softly, "As far as I'm concerned, you and I are already mated. Adding Celina to our relationship doesn't change anything that we already have between the two of us, unless you want it to."

"I don't want anything to change, but it already has. How can our relationship stay the same when we've got another person involved? And now I know you're the alpha, I feel like my world has turned upside down."

"My position in the wolf pack has nothing to do with our private life. I've always considered you the alpha in our relationship, and I don't want that to change. I love being your beta man."

Barrett grew hard with the image of Stan submitting to him in his mind. His words came out with a growl. "Then come over here and show me."

Stan stood from the armchair with a grin lifting the corners of his mouth. As he took the two steps to stand in front of Barrett, he pushed off his sweatpants. His cock jutted out proud and stiff from the nest of black curls at his groin.

"On your knees," Barrett growled as he tugged off his own shirt.

Stan gracefully knelt between Barrett's legs and reached out to help him remove his slacks and briefs.

Once Barrett was naked, Stan leaned over and swallowed his cock with any preamble.

"Oh, yes," he hissed as Stan's hot mouth sucked him.

Stan held Barrett's balls in his palm and gently tugged them away from his body, pushing Barrett closer to his orgasm. With his other hand, Stan stroked Barrett's cock as his mouth slid up and down Barrett's length.

Barrett gritted his teeth, wanting to hold on to this sensation for as long as possible, but watching his lover down on his knees working him sent Barrett too quickly over the edge. With several jerks of his hips, he came in Stan's greedy mouth.

Stan sucked and licked, not losing a drop of Barrett's cum.

Barrett dropped his head back against the chair as his breathing returned to normal. He ran his hands over Stan's short-cropped hair while Stan rested his head against Barrett's thigh.

"Mmmm, that feels good," Stan murmured with his eyes closed.

"Hey, you can't fall asleep here. It's late. Time for bed," Barrett said, gently pushing Stan's head off his lap so he could stand. "Come on, my beta alpha wolf. Let's get in bed with our woman."

Stan rose to his feet and wrapped an arm around Barrett's waist. "This has been an amazing day."

"This has been an amazingly long day," Barrett added.

Chapter Five

Celina awoke to a bright, sunny day shining through the curtainless windows and a throbbing headache. Too much food eaten too late at night always made her feel wretched the next morning, like a hangover.

She glanced from side to side in the massive bed and found herself alone.

Regret and self-recriminations for finding herself in a “morning after” situation filled her mind as she eased out of bed and searched for her clothes. Her blouse and slacks were missing, but a large pair of men’s sweatpants and a long-sleeve T-shirt were folded neatly at the foot of the bed.

After a quick trip to the adjoining master bathroom, she pulled on the clothes as she looked around for a phone to call a cab. Maybe she could slip out of the house and be gone before the men noticed.

She wasn’t very experienced with one night stands, especially of this magnitude. She couldn’t imagine facing the two of them this morning in the harsh light of day. Seeing Bear in the office on Monday was going to be hard enough.

She was embarrassed she’d gotten so caught up in their whole story about bears and wolves last night. Whatever game they’d been playing with her, she hoped they wouldn’t laugh too much at her today for going along with the ruse. Another reason to make her escape without them seeing her.

Glancing around, she couldn’t locate a phone or her shoes. She took a quick peek into Stan’s walk-in closet and spotted her shoes neatly lined up on a shelf filled with men’s footwear. Her black flats looked out of place next to the extra long men’s shoes. She snatched hers up and

tucked them under her arm before heading for the door, hoping she could move more stealthily barefoot.

She looked around the room again and saw her purse lying on the dresser with her cell phone inside. She decided not to take the time to call a cab from here. She would use her cell once she walked out to the main road.

Slinging the strap over her shoulder, she strode to the door with false dignity, determined to carry herself with a poised demeanor if she encountered the men on her way out of the house.

She opened the bedroom door and waited, listening for sounds of the men in the house. The clanging of pots indicated someone, hopefully both of them, was in the kitchen. She hurried through the hallway and down the stairs and had her hand on the front door knob when Stan emerged from his office in a replay of last night's attempted escape from the house with Bear.

"Good morning, beauty. Where are you rushing off to?" Stan asked in his deep voice that sent hormones speeding through her bloodstream, making her momentarily light-headed.

She paused with her back to him to throw an imaginary cloak of composure around her shoulders. Then she turned to him with a pleasant smile pasted on her face.

"Good morning, Stan. Thank you for a wonderful evening in your beautiful house. I've really got to get home now. I've got plants to water and Saturday errands to run, you know," she said, sounding like a ditz. She snapped her mouth closed and spun back around to the door.

Stan remained silent and didn't move any closer as she got the door open after twisting the deadbolt. Her mood fell further when she realized he wasn't going to ask her to stay.

Squinting at the bright sunlight, she stepped out of the house with a sinking heart because she'd half-hoped he'd protest her leaving this way.

"Barrett!" Stan called out, making Celina freeze in her tracks.

Was Stan going to send Bear out to fetch her back?

"Come say goodbye to our guest," Stan continued to call to the back of the house.

Her shoulders slumped as she walked down the front steps. He wasn't going to insist she stay. He was probably grateful she wasn't making a scene this morning.

The loose stones on the front walkway dug into the bottom of her bare feet. She stopped to brush them off and slide on her flats. Just as she resumed her "walk of shame" out to the long driveway, her feet were swept out from under her and she was caught in Bear's arms.

"Taking a little nature walk this morning without me?" he murmured low into her ear.

Goosebumps danced along her arms as his breath tickled the side of her neck. How had he moved so quickly and quietly?

“Bear, put me down,” she said, tired of being carried around by him and having her control taken away.

“Not until you’re in the bedroom.”

“Put me down right here, right now. You can’t keep me confined to your bed,” she said, even though a ripple of pleasure rolled through her at the thought.

“Sure, I can.” The words rumbled up from deep in his chest.

“She’s right, Barrett,” Stan called from the open doorway of the house. “Put her down.”

Bear looked up at the other man. “She can’t leave by herself.”

“Then you’d better invite her back inside so we can explain the situation,” Stan said.

Bear set her on her feet. “We told you last night who you are and what you mean to us. Why are you trying to run away?”

She pulled herself up to her full five feet six inches, but she was still a foot shorter than him. “I’m not running away. I’m excusing myself from your hospitality and returning to my own home.”

“You can’t. I told you that yesterday when the Shadows were on our tails. You can’t go home.”

“That was a fun little adventure story to enact in order to play out a steamy fantasy, but I’m done playing games. It’s the morning after, and I want to go home now. You don’t need to drive me. I’ll call a cab to take me back to my car at the parking garage.”

“No,” Bear growled, and for the first time Celina realized she might really be in danger. Not from any made-up Shadow creatures, but from the real-life man standing in front of her.

She cast a quick glance at Stan and found him within an arm’s reach, but was he friend or foe? She was an idiot to put herself in such a vulnerable position with two men she didn’t even know. She was stranded on top of a mountain with two large men and their bizarre sexual fantasy game. She had to get out of here.

Slipping her hand in her purse, she prayed she could dial 911 before they stopped her.

“Stop,” Stan said softly, and Bear’s growls faded.

Stan’s cool reserve was more intimidating than Bear’s outward show of emotions.

“We’ve frightened her,” Stan said, assessing her with his strange green eyes.

She had to look away before she fell under the spell of his powerful gaze. How did he do that?

“Please,” she said, taking a small step backward. “Please, let me go home.”

“Celina, you can’t go home,” Bear said, reaching out a hand to take her arm.

She spun away from his reach. “Don’t touch me!”

“Shit,” he cursed under his breath.

“Barrett,” Stan said calmly. “Go back into the house.”

“What? I can’t leave her out here alone.”

“She’s not alone. I’m here, and you’re scaring her.”

Actually, they were both scaring the crap out of her, but as they discussed who was going to stay with her, they gave her the opportunity to find her cell phone at the bottom of her purse. She drew it out slowly, trying not to attract their attention.

She held the phone down at her side as she flipped it open and felt for the numbers. She only needed to press three buttons in the right order, and she could get herself out of this mess. But as she pressed the first number, the beep of the phone sounded loudly in the silence of the isolated mountaintop.

Bear and Stan both whipped their attention back to her and narrowed in on the cell phone in her hand.

She hesitated for only a second before she took off running down the driveway. “Help!” she screamed as she ran, even though she knew there was no one around to hear her.

Bear grabbed her around the waist and hauled her back against his body.

Screaming, she beat his arms with her fists and kicked at his shins, but he remained a solid, unyielding wall behind her. “Let me go! Help!” She twisted her body, but couldn’t break free from his secure hold.

“Celina, I’m not going to hurt you,” Bear said.

“Let me go!” she screamed.

“I can’t,” he said.

Oh, God. What was he going to do to her when he took her back inside? What had she gotten herself into by playing along with their crazy sex game?

“Please, let me go!” Tears ran down her cheeks as her heart pounded in her chest, and her throat grew raw from her screams. Nothing she did loosened his grip on her, and finally she gave up. Covering her face with her hands, she cried as her body shook with terror.

The hurt in Barrett’s eyes filled Stan with sorrow. He wanted to take his big bear of a lover into his arms and make him forget about his pain.

“How did this go so wrong? How did I make such a mess of this too?” Barrett whispered with gut-wrenching remorse as he held Celina in his arms.

Stan knew Barrett was reliving his failure to protect Celina’s father two years ago. At the time, they hadn’t been lovers yet, and Stan hadn’t known anything about Barrett’s secret life. He’d only known his good friend had been grieving over the loss of a distant relative.

Stan shook his head. “We did the best we could. Now we have to pick up the pieces.”

Curled down into herself, Celina stood within Barrett’s hold, strangling on her sobs.

“Let’s take her inside and try to get her to calm down so we can explain again,” Stan said.

With a gentleness that melted Stan’s heart, Barrett scooped Celina into his arms and carried her into the house. Her crying had reduced in volume to hiccupping breaths and the occasional sniff.

Stan grabbed a clean dish towel from the kitchen and joined Barrett on the couch in the living room overlooking the deep, green valley.

Celina lay curled against Barrett’s chest as he stroked the hair on her head and whispered soothing words.

Stan wiped gently with the towel at the tears spilling out between her fingers. Gradually, her hand moved away from her face and she reached for the cloth. Stan released it, and she used it to wipe her face dry.

She regarded him with a defeated look. “Now what are you going to do with me?” she asked in a hoarse voice.

“I’m going to get you a glass of water,” he said. “Do you want any aspirin to go with it?”

She shook her head, wincing with the movement.

“I’ll bring it anyway, in case you change your mind,” he said, standing.

He spared no movements as he retrieved a glass from the cabinet, filled it with water, and grabbed the bottle of aspirin from the drawer near the sink.

When he returned to the living room, Barrett looked ten years older as his emotions etched deep lines into his forehead and around his mouth. His eyes silently pleaded with Stan to make this better.

“It’s going to be okay,” Stan said to reassure all three of them as he sat back on the couch. “Here, take a sip of water,” he encouraged Celina.

She tentatively reached for the glass. All the life in her beautiful blue eyes was extinguished.

How could he and Barrett have done this to her? It was unforgivable, but the words spilled from his mouth anyway.

“I’m sorry for scaring you,” he said. “We never meant to scare you or harm you in anyway. We only want to keep you here so we can keep you safe. I promise you we are the good guys.”

She stared at him as if she were trying to see through his eyes to his soul. He held her gaze steadily, hoping she could see the truth behind his words.

“Then who are the bad guys?” she asked barely above a whisper.

“The men in my pack who want to use you to accelerate the war with the bears.”

“Wolf packs and bear tribes. You’re back to playing your crazy fantasy again.” She sighed and closed her eyes with her head against Barrett’s chest, as if she’d given up the fight for good.

He spoke around the lump in his throat. “I wish for your sake that it was a fantasy. Then you wouldn’t be in any danger; but unfortunately, what I’ve told you is true.”

Her eyes popped open. “Prove it,” she said in a stronger voice.

Hope flared in his chest at the sign of her spirit returning. “Prove it?” he repeated.

She nodded. “Prove to me that your tale of werewolves and werebears is real.”

He glanced at Barrett before he spoke to Celina. “I’m afraid if I shift I will frighten you further. I don’t know what else I can do to prove myself.”

“Is it gross when you shift, like in the movies?” Celina asked as her curiosity drew her out of the pit of helplessness she’d fallen into. As far-fetched as it sounded, if they really were shapeshifting men, then maybe she wasn’t being held by crazed, sex degenerates. Though the thought of being held by a werewolf and a werebear didn’t exactly calm her nerves either.

A slow smile spread across Stan's face as his eyes remained sensitive. "No, the change is nothing like the movies."

"Show me," she said, sitting upright on Bear's lap.

Stan glanced over her head, and she felt Bear nod. Then Stan stood from the couch and walked to the other side of the room. "Are you ready?"

She leaned forward. "Yes," she said. The word was barely out of her mouth before a giant red wolf stood before her.

The change happened in a blink of an eye. One moment Stan the man stood there, and the next Stan the wolf stood before her on four legs, staring at her with his same green eyes.

"Ohmigod," she whispered.

As he took a step toward her, she leaned back against Bear's body seeking his protection, but a soft, hurt-filled whine from the wolf froze her.

Slowly, the large animal walked to her and rested his muzzle on her knee, looking up at her with his potent eyes.

Hesitantly, she raised her right hand to touch the top of his head. His fur was softer than she'd expected. She rubbed the top of his head until he tilted his head for her to scratch behind his ear. He leaned into her hand as a low rumble sounded from his chest.

"Oh, you like that, don't you?" she said and used her left hand to rub behind his other ear.

His rumble grew louder as his eyes closed. Her emotional roller coaster left her giddy, and she giggled at the look of pleasure on his wolf face. His eyelids flipped open, and he looked like he was grinning up at her.

"Damn, he's a beautiful animal," Bear said behind her.

She glanced back at his face. "You've never seen him as a wolf, have you?"

"I didn't even know he was wolf until last night."

She looked at the red wolf again. "He *is* beautiful."

He nuzzled her thigh.

"Can he understand what we're saying?" she asked.

"Yeah," Bear said. "Shifters can understand speech while changed, but obviously we can't speak in our animal forms."

"How do you communicate then?"

“We rarely shift unless we’re hunting or mating. Communication needs are fairly basic at those moments. We trust our instincts.”

Following her own instincts, Celina leaned over and kissed the top of the wolf’s head. He was like a giant dog—soft and furry with expressive green eyes. Those eyes seemed to widen in surprise with her show of affection.

Bear reached around her to stroke the wolf’s fur. “Are you convin—”

He was interrupted by the phone ringing in the kitchen.

The wolf turned his head towards the sound, and as he walked away from Celina, he shifted back into human form. Suddenly, Stan was back in the room, striding on two legs to the kitchen to answer the phone. “I’ll get that. Might be news from my pack.”

Celina shook her head. “That’s hard to believe, even though I just saw it with my own eyes. Maybe I really am dreaming all this. I wonder what food and alcohol combination created this elaborate dream, because I’d really like to be prepared before it happens again.”

Bear’s chuckle rumbled from his chest against her back. “Trust me, Celina. You and I and Stan are all very much awake.”

As she shifted on his lap to face him, she felt a certain part of him that seemed more awake than usual.

“I’m so sorry I frightened you earlier,” he said quietly. “How do you feel now?”

She looked into his walnut brown eyes, searching for any sign that he meant to hurt her. All she saw was the look of a man filled with remorse. As she brushed his shaggy hair back from his forehead, a spark of hope flickered in his eyes.

“How do I feel?” she repeated his question. “Like I fell down the rabbit hole, but lucky for me, I have two incredible men to help me find my way through this alternate universe.”

“Would you be willing to kiss this man?” Bear asked, leaning toward her slightly so that his words blew gently across her lips.

She met his lips with her own, but he didn’t take control of this kiss like he had with his earlier ones. He seemed to be holding himself back, and she found herself wanting him to take charge.

She broke the kiss and studied his face. “I liked who you were before I got scared. I’m sorry if I made you doubt yourself.”

He held her face between his hands and stared into her eyes. “Don’t apologize. You have nothing to apologize for. I just want you to be comfortable with me.”

“And I want you to be yourself.”

He nodded. “I will.”

“Then change for me,” she said.

“I don’t think that’s a good idea.”

“Why? I saw Stan change and I didn’t flip out.”

“Yeah, but he’s a wolf. Kind of like a big dog, not nearly as threatening as a full-grown black bear.”

“But I want to know all of you,” she said, sliding off his lap to sit next to him on the couch.

He hesitated. “Are you sure?”

She nodded.

He stood and walked to the other side of the living room. He paused as he looked at her.

“What happens to your clothes?” she asked.

“An experienced shifter can incorporate them into the shift,” he said.

“And an inexperienced shifter?”

“It’s usually hard for a first-timer to shift to animal while wearing human clothes. They tend to think too much about being human while dressed as one. If they do manage the shift, the larger form of the animal will often shred the clothes into pieces until they learn how to incorporate the clothes into the shift.”

“If their clothes are ruined, then they’ll be naked when they return to human form?” she asked.

He nodded. “That’s why I usually suggest first-timers practice in a private location where they can be naked before and after the shift.”

“Okay, let’s see your inner animal,” she said.

He grinned. Then, just as quick as Stan had changed, Bear transformed into a giant black bear.

He dropped down to his front arms...er legs...er paws and slowly approached her.

Instinctively, she scrambled to the other side of the couch away from him, but she stopped herself when Bear tilted his head and gazed at her with his large, soulful brown eyes.

He rested his chin on her knee just as Stan had done, and she gave him the same rubbing behind the ears, which he seemed to enjoy from the sounds coming from deep in his chest.

“Hell, nobody told me the party had gone wild.” Stan’s voice from the kitchen doorway startled her.

With her hands still on Bear’s head, she said to Stan, “Do you like my new pet?”

Bear growled and poked her in the ribs with his snout. She giggled and shoved his head a few inches away.

“Yes, he’s amazing in all his forms,” Stan said, walking into the room, but his eyes didn’t match the smile on his face.

“Is something wrong?” she asked him.

Bear lifted his head from her knee and turned to look at Stan. Suddenly, he was back in human form and striding to Stan’s side.

Celina blinked her eyes several times trying to find a trace of the disappearing bear, but there were no signs of fur tufts littering the floor anywhere.

“Who was on the phone?” Bear said.

“They’ve found Celina’s car in the park ’n ride garage,” Stan said. “They followed her scent along with yours through the stairwell and know she got in someone else’s car. They figure the bears have her since you were with her.”

“What are they planning to do next?” Bear asked.

Stan looked from Bear to Celina and back to Bear. “Get her back,” he said.

Chapter Six

Stan watched Bear's reaction. The larger man narrowed his eyes and subconsciously shifted into a fighter's stance. He moved with the bearing of a natural warrior.

"They're planning an offensive move?" Barrett asked. "How big? When?"

Celina rose from the couch and walked toward them.

"In two days," Stan said. "It's big. This is what the counter-movement has been waiting for—a chance to use their aggressive instincts in a supposedly provoked encounter."

"Damn it! I've got to get to the tribe and warn them." He started to reach for Celina's hand, but then he paused. "I can't take her there. The tribe would never let her leave with me, and there's no way I'm letting her out of my sight with the wolves coming after her."

"Do you trust me?" Stan asked.

Bear turned and studied his eyes. Finally, he said, "Yes."

"Leave her here. She's safer with me than ever, now that the pack thinks she's with the bears."

Bear scrubbed the top of his head with his hand as he considered Stan's suggestion. "Shit. Can this get any more messed up? How the hell are we going to get out of this?"

"We'll come up with a plan, but first you need to warn the tribe, in case we can't stop my opponents from attacking."

"Yeah, okay. I'm outta here," Bear said before pulling Celina into his arms and dropping a fast kiss on her lips. Then he moved swiftly out of the house to deliver the information to his tribe.

Stan watched his lover's retreating back and swallowed the jealousy that rose in his throat. Was he so easily replaceable with a new lover? Or worse, had Bear developed stronger feelings for Celina than Stan, even in the short period of time they'd been lovers?

Stan looked at Celina, and he swore she must have read his mind or at least the expression on his face because she said, "He's worried. He's only thinking of my safety right now."

"Yeah," he said under his breath, looking toward the front door, "because my pack is out of control."

"What can you do?"

He rubbed the back of his neck and shook his head. "I don't know. I haven't come up with any ideas yet."

She looked past him toward the kitchen. "I smell coffee. Is there any left?"

"Oh, jeez. We haven't even fed you breakfast yet."

"We've kind of been preoccupied this morning," she said.

"Come on. Bear was going to cook us omelets. Let's see how far he got with the prep work. Then I'll cook you one."

"You cook too?" she asked.

"Not as well as Bear, but enough to get by. Do you cook at all?" he asked as they walked into the kitchen.

"I can nuke a delicious frozen dinner, and when I'm feeling really adventurous, I can make an open-faced toasted cheese sandwich in the toaster oven."

"Is it because you never learned to cook or you don't like to cook?" He poured a mug of coffee and handed it to her.

"Both. I don't like it, so I never learned. Plus, living alone doesn't inspire me to start." She helped herself to the sugar and powdered creamer sitting on the counter next to the coffee pot.

"So you think if you had someone to cook for, you would like it more?"

She shrugged. "Maybe. Maybe it would be fun to cook alongside someone, but I don't see myself ever enjoying spending hours alone in the kitchen."

"Do you want to sit and watch or jump in and help?" he asked as he took inventory of the kitchen.

The chopped onions sat waiting in a small prep bowl next to another bowl with shredded cheese. Bear had left the knife still halfway cutting through a red pepper when Stan had called him to the front of the house when Celina had tried to walk out this morning.

“Um.” She bit her bottom lip as her eyes darted around the kitchen.

He chuckled. “Okay, I get it. You sit on the stool and keep me company while I cook.”

Stan grabbed the handle of the knife and finished chopping the pepper before pulling eggs out of the fridge.

From her perch on the other side of the counter, she said, “Sorry. I should probably offer to break eggs or something, huh?”

He grinned as he placed a mixing bowl on the counter. “No, you’re fine. Besides, it’s my pleasure to serve, Your Highness,” he teased while whipping the eggs.

“Damn. I was hoping you’d forget about that.”

He sobered as he looked at her. “How can I forget that when it’s the whole reason you’re here? You can’t run away from the fact that you are the Moon Princess. Neither the bear nor the wolf in you will let you ignore your biology once you turn thirty.”

“I feel like a ticking time bomb. I’ve got less than two weeks until I explode.”

“Nah, it doesn’t feel like exploding so much as it feels like shedding your skin.” He started cooking the omelet on the countertop stove on the kitchen island.

“That’s what shifting feels like?”

“Yeah,” he said as he showed off his omelet flipping ability.

“Bravo!” she called out.

He slid the finished omelet on a plate and set it in front of her with a fork and napkin.

“You know, it’s kind of ironic. You being here with me…”

“When your pack thinks I’m with the bears,” she finished for him while picking up the fork.

“Yeah, I’ve got to figure out how to stop my pack from attacking them.”

“What can we do?” she asked.

“Like I told Bear, we need to come up with a plan. Hopefully, a plan for long-term peace.”

She took a bite of egg and closed her eyes as she let out a low hum.

“Good?” he asked, already knowing the answer.

“I love me some melted cheese.”

“Here, I’ve got extra.” He sprinkled some of the shredded cheese on top of the hot omelet and watched it slowly melt.

“Are you going to make one for yourself, or do you want to share this one? It’s plenty big enough.” She took another bite.

“No, thanks. I ate when I got up this morning. I’ll go out and grab a quick bite once Bear gets back.”

“Go out...as in go hunting?” she asked, studying him with her blue eyes.

He tried to read her reaction, but she wasn’t giving anything away with her body language. “Uh, yeah. I need to eat to keep up my strength, especially if peace no longer becomes an option.”

“Do you really think it’s possible? Long-term peace. Or are you dreaming like Bear said?”

“I know it’s possible. I just haven’t thought of the surefire way to bring it about. Now I’m afraid I’ve run out of time.”

“Oh, God. That’s horrible to think about you having to fight against Bear’s tribe and vice versa. You guys are like Romeo and Juliet.”

Stan choked on the coffee he’d been sipping. “I’d love to see Bear’s face when you tell him that. Do me a favor and tell him you think the bear tribe reminds you more of the Capulets.”

She giggled. “Because that would make him Juliet?”

“Oh, yeah. He’ll just dig that.” He shared a laugh with her.

* * * *

But when Bear returned from his meeting with his tribe shortly after noon, he looked much too serious to enjoy Celina’s teasing. The skin around his eyes and mouth was drawn tight, and he held his body stiffly as he walked into the kitchen where he grabbed a bottle of beer from the fridge.

“How did it go?” Stan asked, following his lover from the living room where he’d been sitting with Celina, working on a plan to bring about a peace treaty between the wolf and the bear.

Bear twisted the cap off the beer and drank half the bottle before answering. “They insisted on knowing where I’d hidden Celina.”

Celina joined them in the kitchen, and Stan put his arm around her waist. “Did you tell them she was here with me?”

“You mean did I tell them I’d shacked up with the alpha wolf and handed Celina to him on a silver platter? Hell, no,” he growled.

“What *did* you tell them?” Celina asked, holding tightly to Stan.

“Nothing.”

“How’d they handle that?” Stan asked.

“How do you think a room full of angry bears handled it? They demanded I return the Moon Princess to them. When I said no, they threatened to tear me apart. Then they accused me of working with the wolves, and finally they declared I was no longer a tribe member.”

“Shit. I’m sorry, Bear.”

Bear shrugged and swallowed the last of the beer. “Once we resolve this, I’m hoping they will reverse their decision. Otherwise…”

“Otherwise, you’ll have to relocate and find a new tribe of bears.”

“Yeah, bears aren’t meant to live solitary lives without a tribe.”

“That’s different from regular wild bears, isn’t it?” Celina asked. “I thought I heard on a nature show that once males mate with a female, they never see her again and they live alone.”

“That’s correct for wild bears, but werebears are a separate species. We have some similar traits, but not everything is identical.”

“Where did werebears and werewolves come from?” she asked.

“There’s no scientific proof for where we came from, but the tribe has a legend to explain our origins,” Bear said.

“What is it?” she asked.

“A love story,” Bear said.

Celina grabbed his hand. “Let’s go in the living room and you can tell me the story.”

Stan looked at Bear then eyed Celina. Was she trying to help Bear keep his stress under control because she was worried he’d do something violent?

“Yeah, I’ve never heard the full version of the legend,” Stan said. “Tell us, Bear.”

They settled on the couch and Bear propped his long legs on the coffee table. Stan sat on his left and Celina sat on Bear’s other side.

“A young male wild bear was approaching a stream to feast on the spawning salmon,” Bear began, “when he found a young Native American woman catching the fish with a net. He stopped and watched her graceful movements as she threw the net over the water and pulled on it to bring the fish ashore.

“As he fell under the spell of her beauty, he lost track of time and soon it grew dark. He knew the woman would return to the other humans, and he might never see her again because they had nomadic ways that kept them moving through a large territory throughout the year. He thought how wonderful it would be to be human so he could join her tribe and roam the countryside with her forever.

“When she gathered her fish and walked away from the stream, he followed behind her, wishing he could be human. With each step he took, the mantra repeated in his head, until he looked down at his paws and saw he had human feet. He stared at his forearms and saw human hands. He patted his head and felt human ears and eyes and nose and a mouth. He ran after the woman and caught her by the hand.”

“And she screamed and pelted him with her fish?” Celina asked.

Bear laughed. “No, this is a love story, remember? She looked at him and fell instantly in love, and they had a gazillion children who could all shift to bear when they went out to hunt and fish. The end.”

“I think you just gave us the abridged ending,” Stan said.

“No, really that’s about where the legend ends.”

“What about the wolves?” Celina asked Stan. “Where did they come from? Is it a love story too?”

“Unfortunately, not,” Stan said, shaking his head. “It’s more of a cautionary tale.”

“Tell me,” Celina said.

“The origin of the werewolves is much older than the werebears of America. We trace our beginnings to Ishtar, the goddess of fertility, love, war, and sex.”

“I don’t think I’ve ever heard of her,” Celina said.

“She’s a goddess of Mesopotamian mythology from the area of the world in modern day Iraq.”

“What did she do?”

“She was vengeful and destroyed her lovers when they displeased her. One man, who had the misfortune to become her lover, was a shepherd of a flock of sheep. When she was finished with him, she turned him into a wolf. His herd-boys hunted him, and his own hounds chased him until he fled to a new territory. He eventually fought his way into becoming the alpha of a pack of wild wolves. When his pups reached full maturity, some of them found they could turn back into humans. Some of his children left to live with the humans and maintained the ability to shift back to wolf, others remained in their wolf forms and their succeeding progeny lost the ability to shift back to human.”

“So where’s the cautionary part of this tale?” Bear asked.

Stan looked from Bear to Celina and grinned. “The shepherd knew the goddess had a bad reputation for destroying her lovers, but he still agreed to become her lover because she was so beautiful.”

“So if a man falls in love with a beautiful woman, he should watch out because she will destroy him?” Celina asked with a frown.

“Yup,” Stan said.

Celina reached over and swatted his leg. “That’s so sexist.”

Stan laughed.

“That’s not what the tale is saying,” Bear said. “It says that a man should be careful to follow his head rather than his dick when picking a lover.”

Stan nodded his head. “I know. I was just playing with Celina.”

“Well, playtime is over,” Bear said. “We’ve got to figure out how to resolve this friggin’ mess between the bears and the wolves.”

“Celina and I have come up with an idea,” Stan said.

“More peace bullshit?”

Stan refused to back down in the face of Bear’s negativity. He had to give the other man an allowance—he’d just gotten back from a hellish meeting with his tribe. “Yes, it’s about achieving peace, and it’s not bullshit.”

“It’s a good plan,” Celina said. “We can end the fighting and initiate a peace treaty.”

“You’re both too damn idealistic. It’ll never work. Other than your few loyal followers, neither side even wants peace,” Bear said to Stan.

“You haven’t even listened to our idea,” Stan said. “Give him the details, Celina.”

“If we present a united front, they can’t separate us,” she said. “We can bring the two races together through our combined mating.”

“Neither nation will accept that,” Bear said. “Especially when they discover which is your predominant shift. The dominant side will declare victory over the other.”

“Then we don’t ask for their acceptance,” Celina said. “We demand fealty. First we present a strong, joint force, then we show them their loyalty and allegiance will be respected and rewarded. We do this now before I turn thirty. We don’t have time to wait, especially with the wolves already making plans to attack.”

“But Stan’s the alpha,” Bear said. “As soon as you mate with him, the wolves will believe they have the upper hand, and they’ll try to annihilate the bears.”

“But once the Moon Princess is mated to the alpha,” Stan said, “she and I will have more control of the wolf pack. Klivor will lose his followers once they see the Princess in her rightful position.”

“What about my tribe?” Bear said. “How do you plan to make them feel like the winners in this situation if the Moon Princess is mated to a wolf?”

Celina placed her hand on Bear’s. “We tell them that my predominant shift is bear. Don’t you think they’ll appreciate having one of their own ‘ruling over’ the wolf pack?” She made finger quotes in the air with her free hand.

Bear looked at her with questioning eyes. “When did you become so calculating?”

“I’m not. I don’t want to lose you or Stan, or for either of you to lose people you love in a battle, which I’m afraid will happen if your people fight over me. I will do whatever I can to ensure that doesn’t happen. Besides, I get the added benefit of being permanently attached to two incredible men who both know how to cook.”

Bear chuckled, but not for long before he got serious again. “But this has never been done. Neither group will accept the Moon Princess taking two mates.”

“The alpha wolf often takes several mates,” Stan said.

“Several *females*,” Bear said. “Is there any precedence of an alpha including a male in his personal pack?”

“Not that has been made public,” Stan said. “But the alpha has always included men in his household as close advisors. Who’s to say those advisors weren’t also lovers?”

“But what you are proposing is to publicly announce my status, not as your advisor, but as your... What would I be? Your husband?”

“Mate,” Stan said firmly. “You and Celina are my mates, unless you aren’t willing to subjugate your natural bear instinct to be promiscuous. Is that really what you are having a problem with here?”

Bear roared and jumped off the couch. He spun around to confront Stan. “You think I don’t want this to work because I want to be free to sow my seed elsewhere? How could you not know me better than that after all our time together? Have I shown any interest in anyone other than you and Celina?”

“No. I’m sorry, Bear.” Stan stood and carefully approached the big man with his arms held out at his sides. “This is a stressful time, and I spoke out of line. I want to see stability for both nations more than anything, and this idea is our best hope. Will you forgive me?”

“You do tend to get a little emotional,” Bear said, “especially when you’re feeling insecure.”

Ouch, that hurt, but Stan let it go. He had to do what was best for the pack and put his personal feelings aside, but suddenly everything was personal.

“So are you willing to do this with us?” Celina asked, moving off the couch to join the men.

“Declare you both as my true and only mates?” Bear said. “Yes... Go before both nations and declare ourselves as the new ruling family...? I think you’re nuts, but I’ve never backed down from an impossible situation when I believed in the goal. If you think there is a shred of a chance that this will work, I’m with you one hundred and ten percent. How do we proceed?”

“We’ve got to do this fast,” Stan said. “Klivor has his followers ready to attack the day after tomorrow.”

“Who do we approach first?” Bear asked.

“We’ve got to start with the wolf pack. Because Celina’s mating with me will cement our leadership position in the wolf nation, we’ll be able to stop the immediate threat against the bears. That will give us time to sell the idea of you and me as Celina’s equal mates in the ruling family of the bear nation.”

“That’s going to be a really hard sell,” Bear said, “especially now that I’ve been kicked out of the tribe.”

“But the fact that I’m the Moon Princess should help there too, won’t it? If what you’ve said about my position in the tribe is true, then by declaring you my mate, they would have to welcome you back.”

“You might want to work on your public speaking skills,” Bear said. “The tribe won’t be easily swayed.”

“Bears have a reputation for being particularly hard-headed,” Stan explained to Celina.

Bear growled. “I don’t recall you ever complaining about that before.”

Stan grinned. “It’s one of the things I love the most about you.”

Bear turned to Celina. “Are you sure you want to go through with this? You’ve just learned who you really are, and now we’re asking you to commit to us for the rest of your life.”

“So a divorce later down the road isn’t an option?” she asked.

“I plan to make you so happy, you’ll never think about that again,” Bear said, wrapping his arm around Celina’s waist and pulling her to his side.

“There’s just one thing that bothers me,” she said.

“What is it?” Stan asked.

“I hate the idea of lying about my predominant shift.”

“We don’t know if it’s a lie,” Stan said. “You haven’t shifted yet.”

“I know, and I’m afraid to shift in case bear isn’t my predominate one. I don’t believe a good leader should ever lie to her people, but how can we persuade the bears to go along with the peace treaty if they don’t see me as being on their side?”

“The odds are in your favor,” Bear said.

“What do you mean?”

“Your father was bear. In the rare cases of interspecies mating, the children have nearly always shifted first as their paternal line. It’s some sort of evolutionary thing to create a stronger link between fathers and their offspring. At least that’s what the scientists say who’ve studied interspecies genetics.”

“I have to find out before I can face the tribe,” Celina said.

“And what if you are wolf dominant?” Stan asked. “What will you tell the tribe?”

“I don’t think I can lie. We’ll have to come up with another persuasive argument to convince the bears to support us.”

“We’re running out of time,” Bear said. “You’ll have to shift tonight, so we can use tomorrow to strategize if we need a new plan.”

“And the mating? We should do that tonight too, right?” Celina bit her lower lip as she waited for Stan to answer.

Stan walked to her other side and slid his arm around her underneath Bear’s arm. As they held her between them, he said, “Don’t be scared about the shifting. We’ll both be with you. But I want you to be one hundred percent sure you’re ready for the mating. Bear joked about divorce, but if you and I really did dissolve our union, it would tear the pack apart. I won’t risk the pack if you’re not sure you want to be mated to me.” He forced the words past the lump in his throat. He didn’t have a doubt in his mind that he would spend the rest of his life rejoicing in his mating to her, but he wanted her to be sure of herself before she made such a huge decision.

She lifted her hand and placed her palm against his cheek. “I like everything I know about you, Stan, but I’ve only known you for...a day. Oh man, have I only been here one day? That’s got to be the shortest courtship ever. Are you sure you want to be mated to me?”

“I’ve been waiting for this moment my entire adult life,” he said. “Will you be my mate, Celina?”

She stared up into his face for the longest time before answering. “Yes, I would be honored to be your mate.”

He leaned down and softly brushed his lips over hers. When he stood up, he looked at Bear, hoping to include him as much as possible in this moment. “Will you be my mate, Barrett?”

“I thought I already was,” Bear growled and grabbed Stan around the back of his head with his large hand. Pulling Stan toward him, Bear plunged his tongue into Stan’s mouth in an obviously possessive kiss.

Stan instantly rose to attention in his pants at his lover’s show of dominance. Celina pressed her soft belly against his erection as she was squeezed between the two men and moaned with her need.

When Bear released him, Stan was ready to strip naked and get it on in the kitchen.

Bear knew him too well because he ordered them, “Bedroom, now.”

Chapter Seven

Oh man, was she really going to go through with this? Not only had she agreed to marry them both, but she was also going to turn into an animal beast thingy. And if she turned into the wrong one first, she was going to have to either lie or come up with a new strategy to convince the bears to sign a peace treaty with her and the wolves.

How the hell had her life gotten so twisted in twenty-four hours? And how could her mother have kept this whole other reality from her?

“Wait a second.” She stopped mid-step in the front foyer. “My mother is still alive, why isn’t she the Moon Princess?”

“Because she gave up her inheritance when she chose to mate with your father,” Stan said.

“Oh, this plan is never going to work. If she had to give up being the Moon Princess because she mated with a bear, won’t the same thing happen to me?”

“No, you are going to mate with me first,” Stan said. “The wolves will continue to recognize you as royalty because you’ve mated with their alpha.”

“What about after I mate with Bear?”

Stan glanced at Bear. “I’m sorry. They won’t see your union as a mating.”

“What will they see it as?” she asked Stan.

He looked back at her. “They will think you’ve taken a bear as a pet or a concubine. They won’t recognize the mating as legal.”

“But didn’t you just tell us the alpha can take several women as mates?” she asked.

“The alpha can, but the Moon Princess cannot.”

“That doesn’t make any sense.”

“You mean it’s sexist,” Stan said.

“Yeah, that too,” she agreed.

“It’s to keep the lineage clear,” Stan said.

“So it’s okay for me to take Bear as a concubine, but he won’t officially be my mate as far as the wolves are concerned?”

Stan nodded. “I’m afraid so.”

“How do you feel about that?” she asked Bear.

“I don’t see myself spending a whole lot of time in the company of the wolf pack, so I can’t see as how it’s going to affect me much. I suppose I can live with the wolves calling me your pet as long as you know where we stand with each other.”

“And that would be where exactly?” she asked.

“You’ve already told me you like my naturally dominant behavior, so that would actually make you my pet.” He swiped his finger down the length of her nose. “How do *you* feel about *that*?”

She felt like she’d just wet her panties again, but then she remembered she wasn’t wearing any under the borrowed sweatpants she had on.

“I can live with that,” she repeated his phrase, but her voice sounded breathy, nothing like his deep, in-control tone.

“Then my bear has need of you in my den,” Bear said as he tossed her over his shoulder and bounded up the stairs. “Come on, Stan. Let’s show the Moon Princess how wild we can be when we mate.”

Oh, shit. Was she ready for this? But it was too late to back out now. There was no way she wanted to disappoint these two men or herself.

In Stan’s bedroom, Bear gently flipped her right side up and onto the bed.

“Shift first, right?” she asked, looking up at him from where she sat on the bed. “How do I do that?”

“Well, until you’ve gotten some practice at it, it’s easiest for a first-timer to shift when you’re experiencing a strong emotion,” Stan said.

“Like anger or happiness,” Bear said.

“What about horniness?” she asked.

Stan looked at Bear with a big grin on his face. “Yeah, that should work, don’t you think?”

Bear chuckled as he nodded. “Yeah, that should work.”

“Okay,” she said, “so once I’ve shifted, am I going to be driven to mate with the matching one of you?”

“No, that’s only if you’d waited until the first moon after your thirtieth birthday,” Bear said.

“So for now, I can become an animal, then become human without having animal sex?”

“Yes,” Stan said.

“How do I unshift?”

“You’ll think of yourself as human and become human, just as you will think of yourself as wolf and become wolf,” Stan said.

“Or bear,” Bear said.

“So I get all horny, then I think wolf or bear, but which one first?”

“It won’t matter this first time. You will have to repeat both animals in your mind until you shift. Remember your predominant shift won’t be up to you,” Stan said.

Maybe, or maybe not. She could certainly do her best to make sure it was bear by only thinking bear.

“Ready?” Stan asked.

“Yeah, she’s ready,” Bear said. “If we give her any more time to think about it, we’ll be here the rest of the afternoon answering her questions. And I can think of so many other things I would rather be doing all day and night.”

He looked at her with an intensity that made her wiggle on the bed. He really was a natural dominant, she just hoped she was a natural sub and could handle him.

“Take off your clothes, Celina,” Bear commanded in a quiet voice with a steel underlay.

Oh, yeah, there went the hormones racing through her veins. How did he do that to her with only a simple order?

She scooted to the edge of the bed and stood to take off the oversized men’s sweatpants.

“I’ll do that for you, Your Highness,” Stan said, kneeling at her feet with his hands on the waistband of her pants.

She rubbed the palms of her hands over his short-cropped hair as he slowly removed her pants. Then she lifted the T-shirt over her head and stood before the both of them naked—she hadn't been able to find her undergarments this morning before she'd gotten dressed in the men's borrowed clothes.

Stan drew in a sharp breath and leaned forward towards her cleft.

“Not yet, Stan,” Bear ordered in that voice that made Celina's legs go wobbly. “She asked for horniness. So we are going to give her what she asked for.”

“I didn't ask for it. I just wondered if it would work,” she protested.

As Bear raised a single eyebrow, he no longer resembled anyone's idea of a teddy bear, but rather the giant black bear he was capable of becoming.

“On the bed, Celina. On your back. Arms and legs spread.”

To her surprise, a whimper of need escaped from her lips as she obeyed his command.

“Tie her, Stan.”

“My pleasure,” Stan said before he reached under the bed at one of the corners and brought out a black cord with a red cuff attached.

“I guess this isn't the first time you've used these,” she said, watching Stan move around the bed to retrieve a cuff from all four corners.

“Yes, but I'm usually the lucky one in your position.” Stan winked at her.

Once she was restrained, the men stood at the side of the bed, gazing at her.

“Doesn't she look lovely?” Bear asked.

“Gorgeous,” Stan agreed.

“What do you think we should do for her now?”

For her? They were doing this for her? She supposed that was true based on the amount of moisture she could feel collecting between her legs. It was incredibly erotic to be tied to the bed at the mercy of these two men as they stared at her naked body and complimented her.

Man, she had no idea she had so much kink in her.

“Feather,” Stan said. “I bet she'd like a little tickle in all the right places.”

“Yes, I can smell her response. She agrees.”

Damn, they were talking about her like she wasn't even here, and why the hell did that make her so much hotter? Maybe after they tickled her, one of them would spank her. She'd always thought that sounded naughty and sexy, but she'd never dated anyone she could suggest it

to. Not that she could suggest it to Bear. He didn't seem in the mood to listen to anything she had to say. He was definitely in his Dom mode, and that made her the sub.

Oh, yes! A fresh wave of desire flowed through her veins.

Stan retrieved a long-handled purple feather from the bedside table drawer and danced it along the inside of her left arm from her wrist to her armpit.

She twisted to get away when the tickle grew too intense, but the restraints held too firmly to allow her any movement. She shrieked when he repeated the tickle on the inside of her other arm.

"She's very sensitive," he said.

"That's what makes her so special," Bear said, staring at her with his brown eyes.

Stan brought the feather down the center of her body and over her stomach, which quivered at the delicious tickling sensation. Then he lightly danced it over her exposed outer folds and she squealed as her hips bucked.

She was amazed at her reaction from such a light touch. Before she could dwell too much longer and worry that she was overreacting in some way, Stan dragged the feather down the inside of her right thigh to her ankle and back up her other leg to her feminine center.

"Oh, yes," she closed her eyes and hissed as he teased her sensitive skin.

"Stan, release the restraints," Bear said.

Her eyes flicked open as Stan uncuffed her wrists and ankles.

"I don't want her to hurt herself when she shifts," Bear said.

Oh, shit. That's right. She was supposed to be repeating a bear mantra. Her horniness ebbed as she began to worry about not being able to shift.

"Stand, Celina, and face the bed."

She scampered to get off the bed and follow Bear's orders.

"Now bend forward over the mattress with your arms above your head on the bed. Spread your feet, my lovely. I need to see all of you."

Hot damn! She was so wet; she could feel the moisture spreading down to her thighs.

Swat!

"Ow!" she screamed.

He'd done it. He'd spanked her.

"Ow!" she screamed again with the second slap.

He rubbed his palm over her warmed skin, and her knees nearly buckled under her.

His warm breath caressed her ear as he whispered, "Bear."

Bear, bear, bear, she repeated in her head and suddenly she was looking at two furry black claws where her hands used to be.

She pushed herself off the bed and looked down at her black furry belly and two huge bear feet. Turning her head, she found Bear grinning at her like a proud father. She took a step towards him and fell forward onto all four paws, which was okay because it made her feel more stable as she lumbered to the other side of the room and back again.

Holy shit! She'd done it! She'd shifted into a bear. How the hell had she been human one second and bear the next?

She shook her head as her vision grew fuzzy. Oh man, what was happening? She wasn't feeling too good anymore. Her head felt heavy when she tried to shake the dizziness away.

"Celina," Bear's voice called to her through the rushing in her ears. "Celina, listen to me. You're okay. You can come back now. Remember how your body felt just moments before as a human. Remember the feel of my hand on your ass. Remember the feel of the feather brushing across your skin..."

"Shit!" she breathed out as she fell on her human butt on the floor. The room seemed to be spinning around her. She put her hands to her head and lay down on the carpet with her eyes closed.

"No, honey. It's better if you sit up with your eyes open," Bear said, kneeling at her side and helping her sit.

"Here, Celina. This will help," Stan said, placing a cool, wet washcloth on her forehead.

She opened her eyes to a room that rolled from side to side like a boat riding in storm swells. "I've never had very good sea legs. You better get me to the bathroom if you don't want me to mess up your carpet," she mumbled.

Bear scooped her up and had her into the bathroom next to the toilet before she could say another word. "The first time is always the hardest. You'll feel better soon, sweetie. I swear," he murmured to her as he held her hair away from her face.

She stared into the porcelain bowl and took a few steady breaths. She hated throwing up and she hoped this nausea would go away before she tossed her breakfast.

Shit! Thinking about breakfast was the wrong thing to do as she burped up the faint taste of her egg omelet.

She swallowed and took another deep breath. She was *not* going to throw up, especially in front of these two sexy men. Was there anything less sexy than a woman heaving over a toilet bowl?

She shivered as she became aware of the cool tile floor under her naked butt.

“Here’s a blanket, honey,” Stan said as Bear lifted her slightly off the floor so Stan could slide the blanket under and around her.

“How are you doing?” Bear asked. “Do you still think you’re going to be sick?”

“No, I think it’s passing,” she said with relief. “You didn’t tell me I was going to feel like crap afterwards.” She tried to nail him with an elbow but was hampered by the blanket wrapped snugly around her.

“A few lucky souls don’t ever get sick after their first shift. I was hoping you’d be one of them, and I didn’t want to give you anything more to worry about.”

“Or ask questions about,” Stan teased.

“Can I lay down now?” she asked.

“Yeah, I’ll take you to the bed,” Bear said, “but you should be feeling normal again in a few more minutes.”

“And hungry,” Stan added, following her and Bear back into the bedroom.

“Oh, please. Don’t mention food,” she said as she rested her head on the pillow, but then she realized that her nausea really was gone. She tested it by thinking about the egg omelet and found she didn’t feel sick in the slightest. In fact, she did feel hungry.

Her face must have shown her thoughts because Bear and Stan chuckled as they stood next to the bed, staring down at her.

“Yep, she’s definitely moved to the hungry stage,” Bear said. “Get dressed, sweetie, and we’ll go get something to eat in the kitchen before we get to the mating.”

“I’ve got to run out and grab a bite too,” Stan said.

Bear grabbed the other man around the waist. “Yeah, we wouldn’t want you growing weak from hunger,” he growled before taking Stan’s mouth in a fierce kiss.

Celina pulled on the long-sleeved T-shirt and the sweatpants again, then waited for the men to stop kissing as her stomach let out a loud rumble.

Stan broke from Bear's kiss and looked at her. "Time to feed Her Highness."

She glanced at the bedside clock. "Is this late lunch or early dinner?"

"Lunch," Bear said. "You'll definitely want another meal tonight, especially to celebrate your mating with the alpha."

"And with you," she said. "You never told me what we have to do to be considered mates in the bear world. I assume it's more than have sex, since we've already done that and you haven't called me your mate yet."

"Sure, I'll tell you about that after you've eaten," Bear said.

"You're definitely going to need to keep up your strength," Stan called on his way out the door.

Chapter Eight

Bear set a sizzling skillet of steak fajitas on the kitchen table in front of Celina along with a basket of tortillas warm from the oven.

“Mmmm, this smells so good,” she said. “I’m so hungry since I shifted.”

“Yeah, that’s your metabolism shifting,” Bear said, taking the seat next to her. “Dig in.”

She grabbed a tortilla and scooped the meat and vegetables on top, then added a spoonful of sour cream. Taking a bite, she hummed with satisfaction.

“You are an incredible cook,” she said after swallowing the food.

“Thanks, but fajitas are easy,” he said.

She shook her head. “Uh, uh. Nothing that requires chopping, cooking, and seasoning is easy. At least not for me.” She took another bite of the tasty fajita and swallowed. “Aren’t you going to eat any?”

He shook his head. “No, I’ll go hunting after Stan gets back.”

“You made all this for me?” She looked at the huge skillet filled with meat and vegetables. “I can’t eat all this.”

“We can put the leftovers in the fridge for later.”

“Okay, so tell me about the bear mating thing,” she said as she reached for her glass of iced tea.

He didn’t respond immediately, and she turned to look at him. She could have sworn his ears had shaded pink with embarrassment, which seemed odd when he’d seemed so comfortable in his sexuality, so in control of his dominant side.

“Oh, God. What do we have to do?” she asked. “Hang from the chandeliers and hoot like monkeys?”

He chuckled. “Nah, that’s only for grizzly matings. Us black bears are much more refined than that.”

“Okay, then tell me what we have to do.”

“It’s nothing more than what we did on the first night. We make love.”

“Then why aren’t we mated already?” she asked.

“Because we have to make love for three days before we are considered mates,” he said.

“Three days in a row?”

“Uh, yeah.” He didn’t meet her eyes.

“More like nonstop for three days in a row,” Stan said, coming into the kitchen from the deck’s sliding glass door.

“That’s a lot of sex,” she said.

“That’s why you’ve got to eat and keep up your strength. It can be hard on females when mating with bears,” Stan said, sitting at the table on her other side. “But you and I have got to mate first and take care of the wolf pack. Once they’ve settled down, then you and Bear will have the time to properly mate.”

“What about my job?” she asked.

“I think you’re coming down with the flu, aren’t you?” Stan asked, placing his wrist to her forehead. “Yep, I definitely believe you’ll be calling in sick this week.”

“Are you okay with that?” Bear asked. “With missing work?”

“Oh, yeah. It’s not exactly my dream job.”

“What is your dream job?” Stan asked.

She stared at the drops of sour cream on her plate, not sure she was ready to expose her personal pipedream to the risk of ridicule. If her mother, who was supposed to love her unconditionally, hadn’t understood her passion, how could she ever expect these two practical strangers to get it?

After a long moment of silence, Stan stroked her cheek with the back of his fingers.

“Hey, where’d you go?”

She forced a smile and raised her face. “To la la land where all dream jobs live.”

Bear placed his large, warm hand over hers on the table. “Seems like this is important to you. Will you share it with us?”

She looked from Bear to Stan. Their eyes were so solemn, as if they could actually feel how much this meant to her. She took a big breath to prepare herself for the plunge.

The fingers of her free hand traced the condensation on her iced tea glass as she dove into the deep water. “I have these images—pictures—in my head. My fingers itch to put them on canvas. But they’re big. Really big. Too big to fit in my house. Which is what makes it ridiculous, because if they’re too big to fit in a house, then where would they ever get displayed...?”

She shook her head. “I don’t know. Maybe they could be hung in a multi-storied lobby of some big company, but that’s assuming they’d be any good and anyone would want to buy them. But it’s an impossible dream because doing layouts for real estate brochures is never going to earn me enough money to afford to rent a large enough studio, and after putting in a forty-hour week, I don’t really have the time or energy to devote to creative expression. And I just know once I started one of these projects, I wouldn’t be able to walk away and leave it for my day job. But without my day job, I’d have no money to live...”

She stared at her glass for a few seconds longer before she risked a glance at the faces of the two men sitting silently at her sides. They both looked deep in thought as if they were still trying to process her rambling monologue.

Stan’s expression changed first as a slow, wide grin filled his face. “I have the perfect mating gift for you.”

“Is that like a wedding present?” she asked.

“Yeah, but this is even better. It’s not something that sits on a shelf that you have to dust around.” He stood up and grabbed her hand. “Come on. I want to give it to you now.”

“But we’re not mated yet.”

He looked down on her with heat in his eyes. “But we will be soon.”

A shiver ran through her as she stood near his body and felt an answering heat flow through her veins.

He tugged on her hand and Bear followed them as they walked through the front foyer to the hallway next to Stan’s office. She’d not been in this part of the house before. “Where are we going?”

“You’ll see,” Stan said as he briskly pulled her along behind him to the door at the end of the hall. He stepped back and motioned to her with his hand. “Open it.”

She looked at him and back at Bear. “Um, nothing’s going to jump out at me, is it?”

They both chuckled.

“This is going to be good,” Bear said. “Open it, Celina.”

She put her hand on the knob and turned it slowly before pulling the door open to find an empty, cavernous room filled with the late afternoon sunlight. The floor was polished oak and the walls a soft white.

She walked into the center of the room and looked up at the peaked cathedral ceiling and multiple skylights as she made a slow circle. “What is this?” she asked.

“It’s the space above the garage,” Stan said.

“But this is huge.”

“Stan’s garage is huge,” Bear said. “You probably didn’t see it when you came in the front door because the driveway curves down around the side of the house. The garage under us can hold four cars, plus a lot of other stuff.”

“What’s this room for?” she asked.

“I originally planned a basketball half-court,” Stan said, “but once I realized the ceiling clearance it would require, I didn’t want to do that to the roof lines of the house. So I’ve left it empty until now.”

“Until now?” she echoed.

“Until we fill it with your canvases and paints and whatever else you need to create those pictures in your head. We can bring everything directly from outside through those doors.” He pointed to a set of arched double doors on the far wall.

Her eyes widened. “For me?”

Stan walked over and put his arms around her. Looking into her eyes, he said, “Yeah, I hope you like your mating gift.”

She wrapped her arms around his waist and hugged him. With her cheek resting against his chest, she said, “I love it. I wish I could spend all my time in here.”

With his hands on either side of her head, he tilted her face up. “You can...well, except for the time you’ll be sleeping in bed with Bear and me.”

“Or not sleeping,” Bear added, wrapping his arms around her and Stan.

“And the time I’ll be at work during the day,” she said. “I guess I’ll have the weekends.”

“And the weekdays,” Stan said. “If you really don’t like your job, there’s no reason you have to stay there.”

“Yeah, you’re going to have two husbands to support you until you start selling your paintings,” Bear said. “Then Stan and I can retire and let our famously successful wife support us.”

She shook her head.

Stan’s brow furrowed. “What’s wrong?”

“This can’t be happening. This can’t possibly be real. This has got to be the longest, craziest dream I’ve ever had. There’s no way I could be days away from becoming the wife to two men.” She raised her hands to touch each of their faces. “Two incredibly irresistible men...this has to be a dream.”

“It’s not a dream, Celina. It’s your destiny,” Stan said. “Are you ready to take the next step?”

She took a moment to study his face before answering. His features were strong and perfectly balanced, straight lines and sharp angles. His green eyes shone brightly from his dark skin. Her pale white hand, still resting on his cheek, contrasted so severely. They were opposites in looks and who knew what else. She’d barely gotten to know him in the past twenty-four hours. Was she really ready to mate with him for life?

He held her gaze as he said, “I promise I will be yours in times of plenty and in times of want, in times of sickness and in times of health, in times of joy and in times of sorrow, in times of failure and in times of triumph. I promise to cherish and respect you, to care for and protect you, to comfort and encourage you, and stay with you, for all eternity.”

Her mouth went dry as the reality sank in. He was vowing to love and keep her because he believed they were meant to be together. In the face of such unswerving devotion, something clicked into place in her mind and heart.

She swallowed hard before saying, “I take you to be my partner, loving what I know of you, and trusting what I do not yet know. I eagerly anticipate the chance to grow together, getting to know the man you are, and falling in love a little more every day. I promise to love and cherish you through whatever life may bring us.”

In a quiet, solemn voice, Bear said, “You may kiss the bride.”

Stan leaned down to meet Celina's lips in a soft, warm kiss that held a promise of the tender lovemaking yet to come.

Bear cleared his throat and said, "Celina is going to need more to wear than our sweatpants and T-shirts, and I know her place is being watched. So I thought I'd hit the mall and give you some privacy for your mating."

Celina and Stan looked at Bear, who was smiling with only a fraction of his usual wattage.

"Congratulations. I hope you have a long, prosperous life together." He turned to leave, but Stan grabbed his arm.

"You're staying," Stan said. "We've already discussed this. You've been my lover for over a year and my best friend for ten. Mating Celina is an addition to, not a replacement for, you in our relationship."

Bear looked at her. "Don't you think we should ask Celina what she wants from her relationship with you?"

"Like Stan said, I thought we'd already been through this," she said. "I thought we'd all made it clear that we wanted the three of us to be together. Under no circumstances would I ever want to come between what you and Stan already have. I'm no home wrecker."

"I thought you might feel differently when you realized that you were entering a permanent relationship with Stan, the equivalent of a marriage. I didn't know if you'd still be feeling as adventurous about being in a threesome. I wanted to give you the opportunity to mate in a more traditional way, one man and one woman."

"There's nothing that I would call traditional in any of this. But if we're really going to be a true triad, then I don't think anyone should be shut out of the bedroom when the mating occurs, both matings. Though I don't know how I'll keep up with two of you for three days."

"When it's your turn to mate with Bear, I'll only be playing a supportive role," Stan said.

"Yeah, the bear in me won't let another man touch my female during the mating."

"Okay, then it's settled," she said, looking at Bear. "Your shopping trip has been postponed. You're wanted in the bedroom."

Bear's grin returned to its full megawattage. "C'mon, Stan. It's time for you to claim your woman. I can't wait to see you two in action. It's going to be beautiful to watch."

Celina's nervousness grew as she walked with the two men back to the master bedroom. She had too much time to think and worry and question the sanity behind her decision to marry a man she'd just met.

Because this really was the equivalent of human marriage. The words she and Stan had spoken to each other in her new studio made it clear that he saw this as a lifetime commitment.

"Uh, oh," Bear said when they reached the bedroom. "Look at Celina."

"She's having second thoughts," Stan said.

She shook her head. "No...yes...maybe. Damn."

"Take your clothes off, Celina," Bear ordered.

And suddenly all the confusion in her mind disappeared. Calmness washed through her followed quickly by a wave of desire. She grinned as she stripped and climbed onto the bed.

Bear chuckled as he took off his clothes. "Definitely a natural sub."

Naked, Stan joined Celina in bed and pulled her into his arms. "I know we've only been together for a very short time, but I *do* love you, Celina. I can see that you are loving and kind, and you have a strong, courageous spirit. I am honored that you have chosen me for your mate."

"I'd have to say that I now believe in love at first sight because in a single day, I've fallen in love with you too. I admire your commitment to Bear and your loyalty to the pack. I love your sensitivity and your desire for peace. I am honored that you have chosen me for your mate."

Bear slid into bed behind Celina and wrapped his arm loosely around her and Stan. "Can I just say, ditto, and have it cover all the bases for why I love both of you?"

"If you really want to be that unromantic," she said.

"Okay, I love everything about each of you that's already been mentioned. *And* I love that you each respond to my dominance in such sweet ways. And of course, you are both beautiful and sexy and *mine*." The last word came out on a growl.

Celina cracked up. "Seriously? That's your list?"

"Yeah," Bear said, sounding slightly offended. "It's a good list. Now are you and Stan going to tell me what you love about me?"

Stan barked out a laugh. "Your humility has to be at the top of the list."

"Yes, and his dominance, of course," she added.

"And his size," Stan said.

"Definitely love his size," she said. "And he cooks."

“This doesn’t sound romantic at all,” Bear complained.

“Bear, I love everything about you,” Stan said, sobering. “You are sensitive and caring with a compassionate and expressive nature.”

“I respect and admire your sense of responsibility and your generosity,” she said. “And I’ve had a secret crush on you since you first started working at Trident.”

Bear grinned. “I’m sorry to burst your illusion, Celina. But it wasn’t such a secret.”

She groaned. “Oh, God. Who knew?”

“I don’t know about anyone else, but I knew.”

“You’ve known for six months?”

“Yeah, and trust me, if I hadn’t been assigned to protect you, I would have acted on the mutual feelings a lot sooner.”

“Okay, enough!” Stan said.

“What?” Celina and Bear asked in unison, turning to look at Stan.

“This is supposed to be my wedding night,” Stan said. “Are you two going to stop talking long enough so I can make love to my bride?”

“Go for it,” Bear said and scooted back a few inches away from Celina.

“Where are you going?” Stan asked.

“Just over here where I can get a good view of the action,” Bear said, propping himself up with several pillows against the headboard. “I want you two to do it this first time without me.”

Stan looked into Celina’s eyes as he ran his palm down her side and over her hip. “Are you ready to begin?”

Rather than delaying the action with more words, she reached up and pulled Stan’s mouth down to hers. She sucked his full lower lip and caught a taste of wild game. Instead of being disgusted, she found she enjoyed the muskiness of the flavor and she swiped her tongue into his mouth.

Groaning, he pulled her tighter to his body. His erection pressed against her belly, hot and hard. He deepened the kiss by plunging his tongue into her mouth, mimicking the action yet to come.

She reached between them to wrap her hand around his cock. The smooth outer skin slid up and down the hard inner core under her palm.

“Oh yeah, baby. That feels good,” he murmured along her neck as he trailed kisses down to her breast.

He drew her nipple into his mouth with a tight suckling causing her to gasp from the pleasure pain. With his thumb, he lightly circled her clit as he sunk a finger into her cleft.

She rocked her hips as he added another finger inside her. “Oh, yesss,” she hissed.

“Goddamn, you are so hot and responsive,” he said.

“Take me now, please,” she said. “I don’t want to wait any longer.”

He levered himself over her and met her eyes before he lowered his hips over hers.

“Ready?”

“Yes,” she said, wrapping her legs around his waist. “Please.”

He took his time sliding into her. She wiggled her hips trying to get him to increase his speed, but he merely stopped and waited for her to end her squirming before he continued to slowly fill her.

“Oh, God. You’re killing me,” she said, bouncing her heel off his tight ass.

“Yes, but such a sweet death,” he said, nibbling on the corner of her mouth.

Then without warning, he rammed his full length deep into her. She gasped and tightened her legs around his waist, but he continued to slide in and out in a slow, controlled rhythm.

Trying to shake his composure, she squeezed her inner muscles around his cock and was rewarded by his groan of pleasure.

“Damn, girl. That feels incredible.” His breathing grew irregular, and his hips moved faster.

She glanced to the side and caught Bear stroking himself as he watched them. She smiled at him and he grinned back at her. When she looked up at Stan, his eyes were tightly closed.

“Shit, I’m going to get there before you,” Stan cursed. “I need you to come with me, baby.” He rolled onto his back with her straddling him and reached for her nipples. “Lean over me, so I can pleasure these beautiful breasts.”

She leaned forward with her hands on either side of his head, and he drew her right breast into his mouth while he twisted and pulled her left nipple between his fingers. The stimulation drove a jolt of desire straight to her core. Her inner muscles clamped around him and he thrust harder into her, reaching her most sensitive spot.

“Ahh,” she gasped. “Yesss.”

He continued to suck and tweak and twist her nipples and thrust deeply inside her while she merely tried to hold her position over him.

“Yes, oh, yes,” she panted as she felt her orgasm nearing. “Just like that.”

Her breathing stopped in the calm moment before her climax crashed through her. She froze over him as her muscled locked her in place and waves of pleasure shot through her.

He drove hard up into her and she screamed as her orgasm hit a new level. He shouted as he reached his climax and jerked his release deep inside her. She held tightly to his shoulders as he finished. Then she lay with her cheek on his chest as his body shuddered beneath hers, and they both tried to catch their breath.

His heart beat fast and strong under her ear, and she nearly dozed off, wrapped in his arms.

“Congratulations,” Bear whispered, “on your mating, Alpha.”

“None of this would have happened without you,” Stan said softly, lifting one arm off Celina to reach for Bear.

Bear cuddled in next to them, warming Celina’s cooling backside with caresses from his large, hot hand.

“Mmm, hmm,” she murmured. “Thank you, Bear, for bringing me to my mate.”

“It’s my honor to serve you, Moon Princess,” he whispered as she fell asleep.

Chapter Nine

Stan hated to wake Celina. She felt so warm and soft nestled against his side, but they couldn't be late to their first meeting with the pack as the new ruling couple. "Rise and shine, princess," he whispered into her ear.

She moaned and snuggled closer into his chest.

"Time to face the day, Your Highness," he said a little louder, but she didn't respond at all this time.

"I don't think she's a morning person," Bear said from his spoon position behind Stan.

"I should be allowed to sleep in," she grumbled with her eyes closed. "It's my honeymoon, isn't it?"

"Not until we stop the pack from attacking the bear tribe," Stan said.

"Omigod," her eyes flew open, "how could I have forgotten?" She sat upright. "What am I going to wear?"

Stan and Bear chuckled at her typical female response.

She swatted each of them on a shoulder. "It's not funny. I'm going to be introduced to the pack for the first time as their princess. I can't do that wearing your old T-shirt and sweatpants."

"It's okay, Celina," Stan said. "I washed your work clothes from Friday. Your blouse and slacks are hanging in the closet."

She stared at him. "You do laundry?"

"Uh, yeah. How else would I ever get clean clothes?"

"Send it out?"

He shook his head. “Nah, too much trouble. It’s really no big deal to do it. The laundry room is just at the end of the hall.” He gave her a gentle shove on her shoulders. “Go get in the shower. We’ve got to leave in forty minutes.”

She jumped off the bed. “Forty minutes? Why didn’t you wake me up earlier? How am I supposed to dry my hair and...oh, I don’t have any makeup here.”

“Relax, Celina,” Bear said. “We’ll stop at a drugstore on the way. You can put your makeup on in the car. Now go shower.”

She dashed into the master bathroom.

After enjoying the view of her naked back departing, Stan rolled on his side to face Bear.

Bear grinned. “That gives us thirty-five minutes.”

“What about Celina?” Stan asked. “Don’t you think her feelings might be hurt if she’s not included? It *is* supposed to be her honeymoon.”

Bear’s grin faded. “Damn, you’re probably right. We better discuss with her what guidelines she wants to put in place for this relationship.”

Stan laughed. “Mr. Dominant is going to let *her* set the guidelines?”

Bear growled. “I said I’d discuss them with her.”

“Okay...in the meantime, I don’t want to do anything that might upset her.”

“Then you’d better get your sweet ass out of this bed before I take you,” Bear said.

Stan paused for a moment, enjoying the raw lust in Bear’s eyes, but he hurried off the bed when Bear looked like he was about to attack him. Bear’s fingertips brushed Stan’s backside just as he got his feet on the floor.

He turned and looked at his lover sprawled on the bed. “You know, I would love it if you could come with us...”

“Don’t sweat it, Stan. I know I’m not invited to visit the pack. I’ll act as your chauffeur and wait for you at the nearest coffee shop. You can call me to pick you up when the meeting is over.”

“Who says there’s a coffee shop nearby? What makes you think we don’t meet in the middle of the forest?”

“Because my tribe has known for three generations that the wolf pack meets in a secret room in the Wolf’s Den restaurant in downtown Boulder. But what I can’t figure out is why we’ve never caught your face on our surveillance cameras.”

“Secret entrance for the alpha,” Stan said, as the shock of Bear’s revelation hit him.

The bears had known where the wolves meet for all these years? The pack had only found the bears’ tribal land a few years ago. But it wasn’t as if the pack had any interest in the past in launching an offensive against the bear tribe. That was a much more recent desire spurred on by the poisonous influence of Klivor.

Part of the problem internally in the pack was the concentration of wolves in a relatively small region of the States. Wolves were meant to disperse and find their own territory. But with the building threat of violence through the years from the bears as both species’ populations grew, the wolves had centralized and demanded more leadership from a single alpha male. The increasing frequency of aggressive hierarchic encounters was threatening the very existence of the wolves. They needed to defuse the threat and disperse the wolves. Hopefully, he and Celina would be able to make some progress toward that at today’s meeting.

“I’m done in the shower if one of you want it next,” Celina called through the open door of the bathroom.

“I’m on my way,” Stan said.

* * * *

“That’s bullshit!” Klivor jumped to his feet on the other side of the table in the back room of the Wolf’s Den. “This is the perfect time to show those mangy beasts that they can’t keep trespassing on our territory.”

“There’s no reason to attack,” Stan said, trying to keep the anger out of his tone. “We have the Moon Princess right here,” he said, placing his hand over hers on the table, “and she has been mated with the alpha.”

“So now you think that’s it? That the bears are going to just let her go that easily?” Klivor sneered at Stan.

Maybe it was time to raise his voice after all. Stan had been sitting patiently for twenty minutes as Klivor expressed his deepest disappointment at having to put a stop to his battle plans.

Stan rose slowly from his chair and motioned Celina to join him. Together they faced the circle of ten wolves that made up the pack congress. Traditionally, they’d limited the congress to six, but as their population spread, they’d added four new positions—another symptom of their overpopulation.

“I stand before you as your alpha and the mate of your princess. By the power granted to me through our laws, I command there will be no attacks made on the bears now or in the foreseeable future,” Stan ordered the members of congress. “In addition, I am commissioning a study of our population. We’ve reached a critical size, which increases our demands on the local hunting grounds and increases our potential confrontations with the bear. I am assigning Steven, Zachary, Hilde and Jennifer to the study. I want a report on the current status and recommendations for action, including the splitting off and relocation of a segment of the pack.”

“That’s outrageous!” Klivor shouted. “You don’t like my point of view, so now you’re going to force me out of the pack?”

Stan met Klivor’s gaze without blinking. “I never indicated in any way that you would be in the part of the pack to leave, but if you disobey my orders, you and your family will be expelled from the pack and from the state of Colorado. I’ve heard there is still plenty of open space in Canada for new wolf packs.”

“Your Highness,” Klivor addressed Celina, “are you going to let the alpha do all your talking?”

Celina darted a quick glance at Stan before she adopted a serene-looking smile and spoke to the assembled congress. “I am truly honored to be among you today as your Moon Princess. Unfortunately, due to the choices of my parents, I have only learned about my identity and the existence of all of you in the past few days. I still have much to learn about the pack and our unique challenges. In the meantime, I trust in the continued leadership of my mate, our alpha, who has led this pack through many years of peace and abundance.”

Klivor lowered his head and mumbled as he settled back into his seat. “This is a joke. Our princess doesn’t know a thing about being a wolf, and our alpha is afraid to stand up and fight to protect the pack. I should be the alpha.”

“Klivor!” Celina’s voice rang out sharply, causing the man to jerk his head up and face her. “Are you throwing down a challenge to the alpha? You realize if you fail, you will immediately be expelled from the pack. Are you prepared for that?”

Stan had used the thirty minutes in the car to try to get Celina up-to-date on the workings of pack politics. Apparently, she’d assimilated everything he’d told her.

Klivor’s eyes narrowed as he looked from Celina to Stan and back to Celina. “No, Your Highness. I am not challenging the alpha.” The words sounded forced and stiff.

“Good,” Celina said. “Then perhaps you would be inclined to contribute to the population study. I should be very interested to get your opinion on the status of the pack.”

“Yes, Your Highness, it would be my honor to serve our pack in such a way,” Klivor said.

Stan’s esteem of Celina shot through the roof. She was doing brilliantly on her first day as Moon Princess. She’d met the troublemaker nose-to-nose without breaking a sweat and reminded him of his position within the pack.

She turned to Stan. “Is there anything more you need to say before we end this meeting?” she asked.

“No, Your Highness. I believe we’ve covered everything.” He faced the circle. “We’ll plan to meet again next week during our regular time. Until then, happy hunting,” Stan dismissed the congress.

As the wolves filed out of the room, they each took a moment to welcome Celina to the pack. Stan stood at her side and waited for them to be alone. Finally, Klivor was the last to leave, and as the door swung shut after him, Stan pulled Celina into his arms.

“You were incredible,” he said before dipping his head for a kiss. When he came up for air, she was studying his face with a frown line between her brows. “What’s wrong?”

“Klivor is always going to be trouble for this pack,” she said. “He’s too dominant to be happy as anything less than alpha.”

“There’s nothing he can do, other than challenge me, which I don’t see him doing.”

“Why not?” she asked.

“Because he has too much to lose.”

“What if he feels he’s going to lose it all anyway? What if he feels his back is already up against the wall with this population study?”

“I’ll keep my eyes and ears open.” He pulled her tighter to him and kissed her forehead. “Don’t worry. Now that you’re at my side, this pack is more stable than ever before.”

She nodded. “I hope so... Can we call Bear now?”

An annoying sting of jealousy bit at him, but he shook it off as he realized he was anxious to see his lover as well. “Yeah, let’s tell him we’re ready to go home.”

“I’m sorry, Alpha, but you won’t be going home,” Klivor said from the doorway to the private alpha hallway.

Stan turned around to find Klivor and several of his followers with guns pointed at Stan and Celina.

* * * *

Down the street from the Wolf's Den in a corner coffee shop, Barrett sat cursing silently over his empty paper coffee cup. He knew he wasn't a naturally patient man, but after checking his watch for the fifth time in the past thirty minutes, he couldn't ignore the feeling in his gut that something was preventing his lovers from calling him to pick them up from their meeting.

Stan had told Barrett the meeting wouldn't last much more than an hour, and he'd call as soon as it was over. Now an hour and a half later, sweat broke out along Barrett's back.

He pulled his cell phone off his belt clip and dialed Stan's number. After a single ring, he was sent to voicemail. He tried Celina's number and got the same result. They must have turned off their phones for the meeting.

Shit. If he didn't know Stan as well as he did, he would be tempted to think he and Celina had run off without him. But he knew Stan would never do that, especially after their talk in bed that morning. Which either meant the meeting was running late or things hadn't gone well with that bastard Klivor, who'd been trying to maneuver his way into the alpha position.

Barrett dialed the number of the tribe's observation room.

"Asko here."

"It's Barrett."

"Hey, man. I heard you were *persona non grata*."

"Yeah, well, the council can't kick me out of the tribe yet because I'm their only link to the Moon Princess." He pushed the hair off his forehead with his free hand.

"What can I do for you?" Asko said.

"I need a confirmation on exits from the Wolf's Den in the past hour and a half."

"Looks like they had an unscheduled meeting. Anyone in particular you're looking for?"

"Yeah, you got an I.D. on Klivor?"

"Give me a minute, let me check the log."

Barrett heard the sound of typing over the phone line before Asko spoke.

"Got him. He entered at 0853 and exited at 0957."

"Is that the same time the others left?"

"Yep, all ten members of the congress left within a fifteen minute timeframe."

“Did any of them reenter?”

“Nope, no one’s gone in for the past thirty minutes.”

“Shit,” Barrett cursed and crushed the disposable coffee cup in his hand.

“Problems?”

“Yeah, I’ve lost the Moon Princess and the alpha.”

“Oh crap, Barrett. What can we do to help?”

“I don’t have a plan yet. I’ll get back to you. Thanks for the info.”

“Yeah, sorry I don’t have better news for you. Let me know what you want us to do,”

Asko said and hung up.

If Klivor had them, then he had a half hour lead over Barrett. The question was where would he take Stan and Celina? And how the hell was Barrett going to find them?

He fingered the buttons on his cell phone and nearly slapped himself in the head. How could he have forgotten the tag in Celina’s phone?

He quickly dialed Asko back.

“I need you to set up a trace on a device key,” Barrett said as soon as the connection had been made.

“You’ve got a tag on the Moon Princess and you never told the tribal council?”

“It was to keep her protected until it was time to bring her in, and now it may save her life.”

“Okay, program’s live. Give me the number.”

Barrett recited the thirteen digits from memory and waited for Asko’s response.

“Looks like she’s heading west on 112.”

“All right, I’m heading after them. Who’s on surveillance with you?” Barrett rushed out of the coffee shop and into Stan’s Escalade.

“I’ve got Edgar here.”

“Tell him to contact the tribal council and mobilize the defense team. Get them airborne. I’m going to need lots of back up. If Klivor hasn’t killed the alpha yet, he will as soon as he can. We’ve got to stop him before he does.”

“Why? One alpha is as good as another, right?”

Barrett growled into the phone as he swung a left onto 112. “I know this alpha, and he’s willing to work with the bears. He’s worth saving.”

“All right, Barrett. Don’t get your fur in a knot. I’ve got Edgar making the calls.”

“I’m entering the National Forest now. How far ahead of me is Celina?”

“Shit, Barrett. You must be flying.”

“I would if I had wings. How far ahead of me is she?” he demanded, switching to speakerphone so he could use both hands on the wheel.

“It looks like you’ve got a sixteen minute gap between you.”

“What’s the status on the defense team?” Bear asked as he navigated the twisting mountain road.

“They’ll be within visual contact of the princess in ten minutes,” Asko reported.

Barrett tried to picture the road ahead and figure out where Klivor could be taking Stan and Celina. “What’s the deepest reservoir in this direction?” he asked Asko.

“Just a minute... Grande Lagos is two hundred twenty feet deep.”

“How close is Celina to it?”

“She just arrived.”

“Fuck!” Barrett slammed his hand against the steering wheel and pressed harder on the accelerator. “How far am I?”

“Five minutes. You’ve made incredible time.”

“Give me the directions. Where do I turn off?”

Barrett concentrated as Asko directed him to a small dirt lane off the left side of the highway. He held tightly to the wheel as the SUV bounced under him as he took the two-rutted track much too fast. He wasn’t going for stealth but rather speed. Nothing was going to get between him and his mates.

Chapter Ten

The back of Celina's head hurt like hell as she bounced around the inside of someone's car. She squinted her eyes open to find herself looking up through the windows of a sedan from her position laying on the backseat with her hands tied behind her. Stan may have started the trip on the seat with her, but now he was face down in a heap on the floor behind the front seats. She could see his hands were bound behind his back too.

She wiggled on her left side to the edge of the seat and reached out for his hands, hoping she might be able to untie him. She fumbled with the thick rope, trying to loosen the knot, but she ran out of time.

The car jerked to a stop and the two men in the front seat immediately got out of the car and opened the back doors. One of them grabbed her roughly and yanked her out, and she caught sight of the second man's face.

Her stomach churned as she watched Klivor haul a still unconscious Stan out of the back of the car and toward a cliff overlooking a huge reservoir.

"Stop, Klivor," she demanded.

He looked at her and sneered. "Or what, princess?"

"Do you really think the pack will accept you as the new alpha once they learn what you've done to Stan and me?"

"Don't worry, sweetheart. I'm not going to toss you in. Once I take care of this sorry assed, so-called alpha, you and I are going to mate."

The bile rose in the back of her throat at the thought of what that "mating" would look like. Rape would certainly be the better word choice; she had no doubt.

“The congress will never accept your authority once they hear you murdered the alpha. This isn’t a proper challenge and you know it.” She struggled against the hands holding her tightly.

“I don’t give a shit about a *proper* challenge. A true alpha takes what he wants, which is exactly what I plan to do.” He dragged Stan’s body closer to the edge of the cliff.

“No!” she screamed. “Stan, wake up!” But her shouts were drowned out by the crashing sound of an SUV tearing through the forest toward them in the clearing.

Klivor glanced at the man jumping out of the black Escalade before he shoved Stan over the cliff into the water.

“No!” she screamed and tore free from the man grasping her arms behind her. With her arms still tied, she charged at Klivor, but a strong arm grabbed her around the waist and pulled her off her feet.

“No, Celina. You’ll knock yourself into the water,” Bear rasped. “I can’t lose you, too.” She turned into his chest and sobbed. “We have to help him.”

The air filled with the sound of two helicopters and she looked up to find a team of men roping down from above. As soon as their feet hit the ground, they contained Klivor and his accomplice with sharp blows to their heads sending the two men out cold to the ground where they were handcuffed.

Bear held her snug against him after he untied her wrists, even as she struggled to run to the side of the cliff.

“Check the reservoir. Find the body,” he commanded the nearest man dressed in combat gear.

The soldier issued an order to one of the helicopters via radio, and it swooped over the edge of the cliff toward the water.

“The body?” she said weakly, her resistance fading. “Do you think he’s really dead?”

“I hope not, baby, but the chances are real slim that he could have survived that drop, especially unconscious with his hands tied behind his back.”

“Oh God, Bear. I’m so sorry.” She buried her face deeper into his chest and wrapped her arms around him. Her chest ached from the loss of the man she’d just fallen in love with and committed her life to.

“I’m sorry too,” Bear said, his voice thick with emotion. “I’m so sorry I wasn’t here sooner.”

“How did you find us?”

“When I was assigned to protect you, I placed a tag in your cell phone. But damn it, it wasn’t enough. I didn’t protect you and Stan. I failed again.” His body shook in her embrace.

“You did the best you could,” she said.

“And it wasn’t enough,” he bit out.

She held him silently for several moments, deep in her own thoughts of not doing enough, not being good enough. Maybe she could have prevented this if she’d said the right thing to Klivor at the meeting. Maybe she should have insisted on linking him to her attempted kidnapping and banished him immediately from the pack. Why hadn’t she and Stan followed up on that before meeting with the congress? How could she have been so stupid to let Klivor walk away?

“What do you want us to do with these losers?” one of the soldiers asked Bear as he pointed over his shoulder at Klivor and his accomplice on the ground.

“Take them to the Wolf’s Den,” Bear said. “The pack will do a better job at bringing them to justice for the murder of their alpha than the police.”

Celina stared up at Bear’s clenched jaw. “The pack will tear these men apart. You can’t send them there.”

He stared down at her with a hard look in his eyes. “Why do you care about what happens to these men?”

“Because that’s vigilantism, and as a member of this human society, I can’t condone that. You have to take them to the police and turn them in for Stan’s murder.” Her voice broke on the last word and she began to tremble.

Stan—her kind, sensitive, beautiful mate—was dead. Fresh tears gathered in her eyes and spilled down her cheeks.

Bear’s eyes softened as he swiped her tears away with his thumbs. “Whatever you need me to do, princess.” He glanced over to the soldier who waited for his order. “Take them t—”

“Just a minute, sir,” the soldier interrupted Bear with a raised hand as a message came in over his radio. After listening for a moment, he said, “Roger that. I’ll let them know. Over.”

“What’s the news?” Bear asked.

“They’ve recovered the man in the reservoir, and they’re taking him to Boulder General Hospital.”

“To the morgue?”

“No, sir. He was found alive.”

Celina gasped and tightened her hold around Bear’s waist. “He’s alive?” she whispered.

“Yes, Your Highness. He appears to have suffered several broken bones, but he is alive. If you’ll take a step back and stand at the edge of the clearing, the second helo can land then transport you to the hospital.”

Celina tripped over her feet in her haste to get out of the way of the incoming helicopter. Bear caught her in his arms and carried her to the forest’s edge. He didn’t let her feet touch the ground as they waited for the helicopter to land. Then he carried her aboard.

Once she was belted into a seat, Bear shouted to the pilot, “Let’s go!”

Barrett watched the helicopter that had carried Stan lift off the hospital roof moments before he and Celina landed. As he helped Celina out of the open side of the helicopter, he touched the back of her hair on a spot that looked wet.

“What’s this?” he asked. Then he looked down at the blood covering his fingers. “My God, Celina. You’re hurt.” He picked her up in his arms and rushed to the door at the other side of the roof.

“I’m okay, Bear. I can walk. They must have hit me on the head with something,” she said.

“And knocked you unconscious?” he asked.

“Yes, when I came to, I was tied up in the car with Stan and he was still knocked out.”

“You are not *fine*,” Barrett ground out through clenched teeth. “They gave you a concussion. You could be bleeding inside your skull.” He made a hasty decision to not wait for the elevator and chose instead to hustle her down the stairs, following the signs to the trauma center.

“But I hardly even have a headache anymore,” she protested. “I’m okay. I just want to find Stan.”

“The doctors are taking care of Stan. He’s in good hands. And you will be too in just a moment,” he said as he punched the automatic door opener on the wall with his elbow, trying not

to jostle Celina too much. God, he couldn't lose her now, not after finding out that Stan was still alive. They both had to be okay.

"I think I feel sick, Bear. You might want to put me down," Celina warned.

He held her tighter to his chest and shouted, "I need a doctor!" as he burst through the doorway to the trauma center. "She's been hit on the back of the head and she says she's going to throw up."

A young nurse rounded the corner of the huge circular desk in the middle of the room. "Follow me," she said crisply as she led him to a curtained alcove against the back wall.

He gingerly set Celina on the narrow bed and kept his hands on her so she wouldn't roll off.

"I need a b—" Celina didn't have time to finish her sentence before she lost her breakfast over the opposite side of the bed. "Oh, God. I'm so sorry," she moaned.

Barrett wrapped his arm around her shoulders. "Hush, baby. It's okay."

"Oh, God. Don't touch me. I'm a mess," she whimpered.

"I don't care, Celina. I'm not letting you go," he said. He couldn't let her go, not now, not ever. She *had* to be okay.

The nurse picked up the phone and asked for the cleaning crew to come to their alcove.

"When's the doctor going to be here?" he demanded from the nurse.

"As soon as I am able to enter the patient's vitals and get a record started," she replied.

He tamped down the growl growing in his chest. "You have to do paperwork first? What if she has internal bleeding? She could be dead before you get to the bottom of your form."

Celina placed a hand on the arm he had wrapped around her waist. "Bear," she said, sounding stronger, "I'm not dying. I just got a nasty bump to the head."

He looked down at her pale face. "Enough of a bump to make you bleed and give you a definite concussion with vomiting."

"The vomiting could have been due to the motion sickness of riding in a helicopter and then being carried down several flights of stairs," she said.

He stared into her eyes, looking for dilated or uneven pupils, or something to indicate she was seriously injured.

"Really. I'm okay," she said.

"Sir, if you'll step back, I can take her vitals," the nurse said.

Reluctantly, he withdrew his arms from around Celina and moved to the foot of the bed, never taking his gaze off her.

The nurse checked her blood pressure, pulse, and temperature while asking Celina a battery of questions about who she was, where she lived, what day it was, who the president was, and a shitload of questions about her medical history. Once the nurse entered all the answers in her mountain of forms, she told Celina the doctor would be with her shortly.

Barrett moved back to Celina's side as the nurse left and a member of the cleaning crew came in to mop the floor.

"How's your headache?" he asked her.

"I told you, Bear, I'm going to be okay," she said.

"You have to be," he whispered. "I can't lose you."

"And I can't lose you and Stan. Can you find out how he is?"

He shook his head, torn between his two lovers.

"Please, Bear," she begged. "I promise nothing will happen to me while you find out about Stan. I have to know how he is."

He bent down and kissed her forehead. "I'll be right back."

At the nurse's station in the middle of the room, he asked for the status on his lover.

"Are you family?" an older nurse asked.

"Yes," he replied without hesitation.

The nurse must have helped treat Stan and was noticing Barrett's obvious lack of skin pigmentation, because she gave him a skeptical look.

"Different mothers," he explained, which was certainly the truth.

She consulted a chart in front of her as she spoke. "He broke his left leg and wrist. A broken rib on the left side caused internal bleeding, which is being examined in surgery at the moment."

"He's in surgery?" Oh, God, they were cutting into his man. What if he bled to death? What if Celina was bleeding to death right this moment too?

Black dots swam in front of Barrett's eyes.

The nurse scooted around the counter and pushed him into a nearby chair. "Head between your knees," she ordered.

"I'm not going to faint," he mumbled from upside down. "I don't faint."

“That’s what they all say right before they hit the deck,” the nurse muttered with her hand firmly holding down his head.

After taking a moment to catch his breath, he said, “I’m okay now. The dots are gone.”

“Take it slow,” the nurse said, removing her grip from the back of his head.

“I’ve got to get back to Celina.” He stood from the chair and only wobbled slightly, which he hoped the nurse hadn’t noticed. Then he rushed back to the side of his other lover.

Her eyes were closed in her drawn face. He quietly picked up her hand between the two of his.

“I’m okay, Bear,” she said with her eyes closed. “The lights were making my headache worse. The doctor was here. He doesn’t think it’s a bad bump, but he ordered a CAT scan just to be sure. How’s Stan? Did you see him?”

“He’s in surgery.”

Her eyes popped open. “I thought they said he just had a few broken bones.”

“One of which was his rib that made something inside bleed. They’re taking care of that now.” He squeezed her hand. “He’s strong. He’s going to be fine,” he said to reassure her as well as himself.

“Ms. Maddock?” An orderly pushing a wheelchair approached the bed. “I’ve come to take you to get a CAT scan.” He glanced briefly at Barrett. “You can wait here, sir.”

Barrett watched helplessly as the orderly assisted Celina into the wheelchair and left with her. He sat in the bedside chair, alone with his worries about his two lovers. Leaning his elbows on his knees, he dropped his head into his hands and closed his eyes, trying to block out the sounds of injury and illness around him.

He had to believe he would be walking out of here with his two lovers at his side. Not today because Stan would need time to recover from his incision, but very soon they would all return to Stan’s house and resume the mating process they had started with Stan and Celina’s mating. It would be his turn next to make her his one and only female mate.

When he tried to imagine himself with Celina, loving her, holding her close, he couldn’t forget the feel of the blood at the back of her head and the fear that had clutched at his gut as he’d rushed her down to the trauma center.

After thirty minutes of tortuous waiting, the older nurse from the desk approached him. He tried to read the expression on her face, but she gave nothing away with her bland look.

“You’re Stan Varka’s family, correct?” she asked.

He nodded. “Yes, is he okay?” His breath caught in the tightness of his chest.

“Yes, they repaired the torn artery. He’s in recovery right now and will be moved to a room once he’s awake. Then you’ll be able to go visit him. I’ll let you know his room number as soon as he’s assigned.”

“Thank you,” he said as his breath left his body.

As soon as the nurse walked back to the desk, Celina appeared in the wheelchair.

“I’m sorry I was gone so long,” she said as the orderly helped her into bed. “The technician thought he saw something that he wanted the doctor to look at before they brought me back here. So we had to wait for the doctor.”

His throat constricted, but he managed to ask, “What did he say?”

“He didn’t see any problems, but he wants me to stay overnight for observation because I was unconscious for a while.”

“The whole car ride from downtown Boulder to the reservoir?”

She smoothed the sheet over her belly. “Yeah, I guess, since I don’t remember how I got into the car.”

“I’ll go talk to the nurse. Maybe I can get you in the same room with Stan once I tell them that you are married,” he said.

“Did you hear about Stan?” She looked at him expectantly. Hope struggled against worry in her eyes.

“Yeah, sorry. He’s in recovery. They repaired the bleeding artery.”

“Oh, thank God.” She blew out her breath and rested her head back on her pillow. The bruise-like dark circles under her eyes reminded him how much she’d been through today.

“Rest. I’ll be right back,” he said, giving her another kiss on the forehead before walking to the nurse’s station.

Chapter Eleven

Finally.

Barrett had both his lovers home safe and in his bed. After a week, Stan still had to be careful of his stitches and wasn't allowed to do anything physically strenuous for another week or two yet. Though he swore that jerking off while he watched Celina and Barrett mating was just the physical therapy he needed.

While Stan snoozed on the far side of the bed, Barrett pulled Celina onto his chest so that she lay over the length of him.

She looked down at him as her blonde hair tumbled around her face and she gave him a sexy smile. "Again, already?" she asked.

"In a minute. Right now, I just want to look at you and feel your body on mine," he said, praising his good fortune.

Once the tribal council had learned Barrett had saved the Moon Princess from a rogue wolf and she had plans to become Barrett's mate, they'd forgiven him his trespasses, so to speak, and welcomed him back into the tribe with open arms.

He tightened his own arms around Celina's body and held her tighter to him as she laid her head on his chest, tucked under his chin. There was nothing like nearly losing the ones you loved to show you how important they were to you.

Turning his head, Barrett reached out with one hand and stroked Stan's chest as he slept.

When he and Celina had caught up with Stan in his hospital room, his lover had told them how he'd regained consciousness moments before Klivor had sent him over the ledge, but not soon enough to fight off the sudden shove. And Celina *had* been able to loosen Stan's knots enough in the backseat of the car so that as Stan went over the cliff, he was able to work his

hands free before he hit the water, which helped him stay afloat but didn't make the entry any less unpleasant.

"Sleep, Barrett," Stan murmured. "Even mating bears need to sleep."

"I don't want to close my eyes and miss anything," Barrett said.

"We promise to wake you for the good parts," Celina said, kissing his chest.

"This is all the good parts," Barrett said. "Having you both here is the best of everything."

"He's gone soft on us, Celina," Stan said. "He's waxing poetically."

She groaned softly into Barrett's neck. "The Moon Princess decrees we will all sleep for a continuous eight hours minimum before any more mating takes place."

Barrett growled and flipped Celina onto her back underneath him on the bed. "I thought we'd already discussed who was going to be giving the orders around here." He placed kisses down her throat and across her chest to her breasts.

She melted beneath him, becoming liquid heat in his hands. "You, Bear," she panted as her breath became ragged, as he revved her up with a finger on her clit.

"God, she looks beautiful when she gets close to the edge like that," Stan said, watching as he pulled on his cock.

"How are the stitches?" Barrett asked him. "Any pain?"

Stan looked at him with a puzzled frown. "I'm fine. Why?"

"I want to complete this mating the right way."

"You want me to join you?" Stan asked.

"If you feel you can handle it."

Stan's eyes lit from within as he nodded.

"Celina, roll on top of Stan, but be careful of him."

"I'm not going to break, Bear," Stan grumbled.

Celina held her body weight off Stan with her hands on either side of his face and her knees on either side of his hips.

"Take him in you," Barrett ordered.

Slowly, Celina lowered herself over Stan's erection. They both let out a simultaneous moan as she reached full penetration.

"How do you feel, Stan?" Barrett asked.

“Frickin’ awesome. But I’d feel even better if I had something to suck.” Stan grinned.

“You heard him, Celina. Give him your breasts to suck.”

She leaned forward without putting her body weight on Stan and dangled a breast in front of his mouth.

“Oh, yeah, that’s beautiful,” Stan said before taking Celina into his mouth.

While Stan kept Celina occupied with his tongue and lips on her breasts, Barrett grabbed the lube and slipped his prepared finger slowly into her back entrance.

A gasp that quickly turned into a moan escaped from her mouth. “Oh, yes,” she hissed as he added a second finger to stretch her. “Oh, God. That feels incredibly good.”

“And you, Stan?” he asked.

“Doing great.”

“Relax, Celina. I’m going to come in real slow,” Barrett said, placing his cock at her small, puckered hole.

“Oh, yesss,” she hissed again as he worked the tip of his head past her tight ring of muscles. “Oh, Bear, that feels so good. This is going to be over for me so quickly.”

“Ahhh,” Stan groaned. Then he quickly added, “I’m okay, Bear. She’s just squeezing the hell out of me with her muscles. I’m not going to last very long either if she keeps that up.”

With a gentle shove, Barrett drove himself the rest of the way into her.

“Oh, yes!” she screamed as she trembled under his hands.

He hadn’t even really started and she was already coming apart. He was going to love practicing this with her and Stan. Because they were definitely going to do this again.

He waited for her to catch her breath and was glad that Stan appeared to have held onto his orgasm even though Celina must have driven him crazy with her pussy tightening around his cock.

“You with me, Stan?” Barrett asked, making eye contact with him.

With his jaw clenched, Stan nodded.

“Here we go,” Barrett said and pulled his hips back slowly as he withdrew nearly completely from Celina. Then with his hands on her hips, he surged forward.

“Oh...oh...oh,” Celina moaned as Barrett built up a rhythm.

Stan echoed her sounds as Barrett added his own grunts of satisfaction.

Barrett looked at his lovers—his lifetime mates—and was overcome by his emotions. These two wonderful people wanted to spend the rest of forever with him. They completely accepted him for who he was.

With another thrust, Barrett felt himself go over the edge. Celina joined him with another one of her orgasms, which triggered Stan to follow. The three of them shook and moaned as the intensity of their mating tore through them.

When Barrett returned to his senses, he withdrew carefully from Celina and collapsed onto the bed next to Stan. Celina lifted herself off Stan, and Barrett pulled her back against his chest as he and Stan snuggled with Celina between them.

“That was yummy,” Celina whispered, her voice thick with exhaustion. “When can we do that again?”

“Not until the Moon Princess, the alpha wolf, and their bear mate sleep for a minimum of eight continuous hours,” Barrett said.

“I think I heard that not too long ago,” Stan muttered.

“I think I said that not too long ago,” Celina said.

Barrett slapped her lightly on the bum. “Go to sleep, Your Highness.”

“I love you too, Bear,” she replied.

“I love you too, Bear,” Stan echoed.

Barrett grinned and tightened his hold on his mates before he gave into the fatigue pulling him under.

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Revenge and passion are two very similar things. Blood sings, lust and tempers rise, and before they know it, neither is quite sure who the real monster is anymore. Or if it will even matter in the end.

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After a boating accident, Sean Harris wakes up staring into the eyes of a handsome doctor. Even when he discovers that he is on an island within the Bermuda Triangle, and there is no way for him to get back to his old life, he can't be too disappointed if it means being stuck with the doctor.

Dr. Wesley Carpenter cannot believe that the younger Sean Harris would want anything to do with him. After half-heartedly turning down the advances of his patient, he realizes that resistance is futile.

The men find themselves falling for each other quickly, but ghosts from their pasts and outside influences try to get in the way of their happiness. Sean and Wesley may be on the island forever, but neither is sure if that guarantees they'll be able to continue their *Tropical Hedonism*.

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Meanwhile, Joe and Sage must secure the last three Zodiac Stones and prevent their theft while they wait for exhibition. Can they put their sexual tension aside long enough to stop a clever thief? And even if they do, will Joe's heart be a casualty of their inevitable fling, or could Sage really be looking for more than a one-night stand?

The Not Quite Wicked Series

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When Department of Natural Resources officer, Gwendolyn Locke, hits a black bear on the way home from work one night, her entire view of reality changes. She discovers that shape-shifters exist, and she's just become Goldilocks to three gorgeous, very aroused men who also happen to be werebears. Being snowbound has never been so hot.

***Open Sesame* by Mia Watts**

Alister Baban overheard a business discussion that netted him and his Uncle Cassimer a lot of money. When the Simsim Group stock crashes and declares bankruptcy within weeks, the owners immediately suspect the Babans of playing dirty.

Oz Adamo, one of four brothers who owned Simsim Group, agrees to abduct Alister to obtain information and win back the lost pensions of former employees.

Tied to a bed and lusting after his captor, Alister fights the sexual attraction he has for Oz. They want information and he isn't about to give it. But Oz loves a good challenge, and shrewd, serious, sexy Alister is naked and his—at least for now.

***Heart of Ice* by Brynn Paulin**

Kai is perfectly unhappy with his life. Cast into a role as shop boy and forced into marriage to save his family, he sees nothing good in his future. In fact, his betrothed, Gerda, seems to hate everything he enjoys. Especially winter and his attraction to dominating his partners. His prospects look grim...until the Snow Queen arrives.

Wyn has spent her life alone, living vicariously through those who love winter. When she learns of Kai's predicament, she knows she must save him. If only she could save herself. She craves his dominance, but there's one tiny thing standing in their way. No human can touch her without experiencing chilly agony. And that might bring any relationship to an icy death.

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