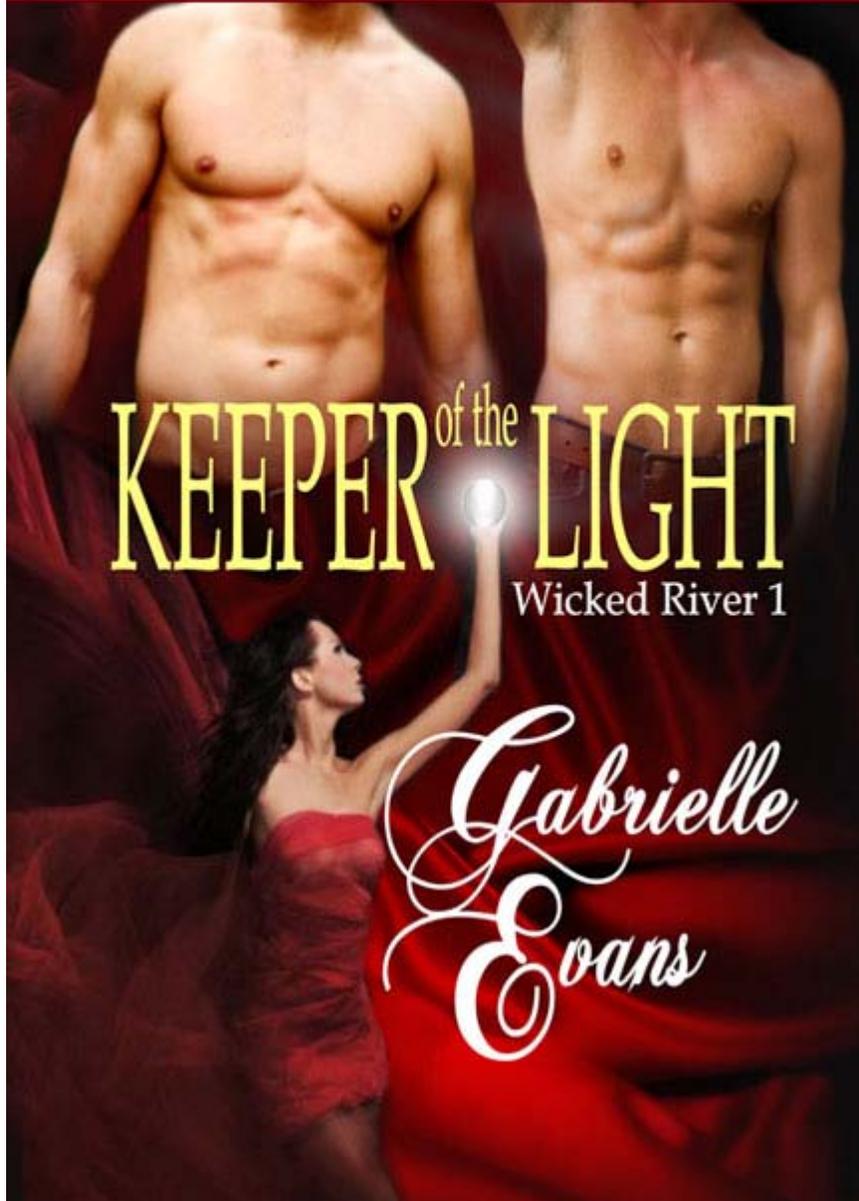


Siren Publishing

*Ménage Amour*



KEEPER <sup>of the</sup> LIGHT

Wicked River 1

*Gabrielle  
Evans*

## Wicked River 1

# Keeper of the Light

Mated for over a decade, Damon and Tate have searched long and hard for their zeta. When they meet Ryah at the county rodeo, they know instantly she's their missing mate. Unfortunately, she's also married, and the laws of their kind prevent them from claiming her.

When Ryah's husband publically attacks her and Damon rushes to her rescue, she knows it's time to accept his offer of help. Discovering the men she loves are vampire/lycan hybrids is unexpected but not as surprising as learning she is a lycan herself—and born to a destiny she never could have imagined.

Things are further complicated when Ryah's marriage is revealed to be a sham. That doesn't mean her husband is going to let her go without a fight, though. And a lot more rests on her safety than just happily-ever-after.

*Warning: This book contains physical abuse of the heroine by the villain.*

**Genre:** Ménage a Trois/Quatre, Paranormal, Vampires/Werewolves

**Length:** 44,871 words

# **KEEPER OF THE LIGHT**

*Wicked River 1*

**Gabrielle Evans**

**MENAGE AMOUR**



**Siren Publishing, Inc.**  
**[www.SirenPublishing.com](http://www.SirenPublishing.com)**

**ABOUT THE E-BOOK YOU HAVE PURCHASED:**

Your non-refundable purchase of this e-book allows you to only ONE LEGAL copy for your own personal reading on your own personal computer or device. **You do not have resell or distribution rights without the prior written permission of both the publisher and the copyright owner of this book.** This book cannot be copied in any format, sold, or otherwise transferred from your computer to another through upload to a file sharing peer to peer program, for free or for a fee, or as a prize in any contest. Such action is illegal and in violation of the U.S. Copyright Law. Distribution of this e-book, in whole or in part, online, offline, in print or in any way or any other method currently known or yet to be invented, is forbidden. If you do not want this book anymore, you must delete it from your computer.

WARNING: The unauthorized reproduction or distribution of this copyrighted work is illegal. Criminal copyright infringement, including infringement without monetary gain, is investigated by the FBI and is punishable by up to 5 years in federal prison and a fine of \$250,000.

If you find a Siren-BookStrand e-book being sold or shared illegally, please let us know at **[legal@sirenbookstrand.com](mailto:legal@sirenbookstrand.com)**

**A SIREN PUBLISHING BOOK**

IMPRINT: Ménage Amour

**KEEPER OF THE LIGHT**

Copyright © 2011 by Gabrielle Evans

E-book ISBN: 1-61034-394-8

First E-book Publication: March 2011

Cover design by Jinger Heaston

All cover art and logo copyright © 2011 by Siren Publishing, Inc.

**ALL RIGHTS RESERVED:** This literary work may not be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, including electronic or photographic reproduction, in whole or in part, without express written permission.

All characters and events in this book are fictitious. Any resemblance to actual persons living or dead is strictly coincidental.

**PUBLISHER**

Siren Publishing, Inc.

[www.SirenPublishing.com](http://www.SirenPublishing.com)

## Letter to Readers

Dear Readers,

If you have purchased this copy of *Keeper of the Light* by Gabrielle Evans from BookStrand.com or its official distributors, thank you. Also, thank you for not sharing your copy of this book.

### Regarding E-book Piracy

This book is copyrighted intellectual property. No other individual or group has resale rights, auction rights, membership rights, sharing rights, or any kind of rights to sell or to give away a copy of this book.

The author and the publisher work very hard to bring our paying readers high-quality reading entertainment.

This is Gabrielle Evans's livelihood. It's fair and simple. Please respect Ms. Evans's right to earn a living from her work.

Amanda Hilton, Publisher  
[www.SirenPublishing.com](http://www.SirenPublishing.com)  
[www.BookStrand.com](http://www.BookStrand.com)

## **DEDICATION**

To Tess, for kicking my butt and giving it to me straight. I can't thank you enough.

# KEEPER OF THE LIGHT

*Wicked River 1*

**GABRIELLE EVANS**

Copyright © 2011

## Chapter One

“Damon, can you come get me?” Ryah whispered brokenly into the phone. She had obviously been crying.

Damon clenched the phone tight as he fought to control his anger. “Why, Ryah? We both know the minute he offers up his lame excuse of an apology, you’ll be running back to him with open arms.” He couldn’t do this anymore. For over a year, he’d watched his mate be beaten and terrorized by her husband.

“P-please. I’m s-sorry. I’m j-just s-scared.”

Damon could barely understand Ryah through her sobs.

A large, warm hand encircled Damon’s wrist and removed the phone from his grip. Tate gave Damon a hard stare before lifting the phone to his ear. “Ryah, where are you?” Tate’s voice flowed, soft and soothing.

“I locked myself in the bathroom.” Damon could hear Ryah’s voice as easily as if he still held the phone.

Damon watched Tate nod his head. “Okay, sweetheart. You stay right where you are. I’m on my way. Don’t leave the bathroom and keep the door locked until I get there, okay?”

After Ryah promised to stay put, Tate hung up the phone and rounded on Damon. “We swore we would keep her safe, Damon.

Even if she is married to that piece of shit and we can't claim her, she is still our mate. Now, are you coming or not?"

Damon swore, but grabbed his jacket off the back of the kitchen chair and headed for the door. "I know. I know, but fuck! I just can't keep doing this shit. It's killing me, Tate."

"I understand, babe. I really do. It's our job to be there for her though, to protect her. I can't just turn away from that." Tate ran a hand down Damon's back.

They rode out of town in silence, heading along the country road that would lead them out to Ryah's house. Not exactly true—the house belonged to Carson. The sack of shit she called a spouse.

From the second Damon caught Ryah's scent at the rodeo last summer, he'd known she was their zeta—their missing mate and the link that would bond them together permanently. He'd nearly lost his mind when he discovered she was married. She belonged to him, to Tatum. How could she be with someone else when she belonged to them?

He smelled the sour stench of fear wafting from her as she spoke of her husband. He saw the wide, fearful eyes and heard her heart hammering against her breastbone. Damon had wanted nothing more than to wrap her in his arms, keeping her safe and protected from anyone that wanted to harm her. He still wanted that every day he spent away from her.

The regulations of their kind prevented him or Tate from staking their right to the beauty. As Gavolots, their laws forbid them to claim a mate, even their fated zeta, if another already held proclaimed possession to her.

Damon never concerned himself with rules and customs, didn't fear punishment or reprimand. Unfortunately, this went beyond rebellion against authority. He didn't know which of his hybrid genes the magic evolved from, but he knew he would physically be unable to complete the mating process.

So, Damon had no choice but to let her walk away. Time and time

again, he watched Ryah slip through their fingers, and each time the pain of it shredded his heart. He and Tate made a promise to themselves, and to each other, right there in the dusty air of the fairgrounds. Even though she could not truly belong to them, they would watch over her and do everything in their power to keep her safe and happy.

In a town as small as Wicked River, Alabama, they exerted little effort to learn Ryah waited tables at a small diner on the outskirts of city limits. Damon and Tate became regulars, going a couple of times a week, always sitting at a table in Ryah's section. Soon, they were eating there most every night.

It took several months to chip through the fear and distrust surrounding their mate, but Damon and Tate remained persistent. Eventually, she began to open up, greeting them nightly with a warm smile and brief hug. The more she let her guard slip, the more the light and warmth within her shown, and Damon fell in love a little more each time he saw her.

Ryah exuded intelligence, warmth, kindness, generosity, and all those other words people use to describe angels. Damon had never seen anything more beautiful. He could spend hours watching her flit across the diner, her movements precise and graceful.

Then Ryah's husband, Carson, lost his job as a sheriff deputy the previous fall and took up drinking as his full-time occupation. Damon heard they let him go for drinking while on duty, DUI, and officer misconduct. The last meant he'd been caught fucking some whore in the back of a sleazy bar...while on duty and in uniform.

Not long after his discharge, Damon noticed the bruises marring Ryah's ivory skin becoming more frequent. Her face remained unmarked, but Damon took notice of the bruises along her arms and legs. When she bent to clear a table, her shirt riding up over her hips, and Damon saw the fist-sized bruise on the small of her back, only Tate had stopped him from storming out of the diner.

It infuriated him, and he could do nothing about it. Until Ryah

walked away from the bastard for good, Damon remained powerless. So, instead, he bought a cell phone, programmed both his and Tate's numbers into the speed dial, and forced it on Ryah. He told her to call if she ever needed anything, no matter what time, day or night.

She tried several times to return it, which was kind of cute. Finally, she gave in, realizing she held no hope in winning the argument.

Damon honestly never expected Ryah to call, believing she would be too afraid or too proud to ask for help. But she did call—three times in six months. Each time, he and Tate would go get her, bring her to their place, and clean her up. Ryah would thank them, gushing over their kindness, then run back to her no account husband. Every time, it ripped Damon's heart out a little more.

When Tate pulled to a stop in front of the dilapidated farmhouse, Damon jumped from the truck and raced up the steps. Even without his sensitive hearing, the yelling from inside the house hit deafening volumes. He burst through the front door, Tate right behind him, shouting Ryah's name.

Carson Owens came stomping into the living room, his face red with rage. Even from his distance across the room, Damon could smell the stench of sour whiskey. "What the hell are you fuckin' faggots doing here?"

Damon strode right up to the man and punched him square in the face, knocking him out cold. He didn't have the patience for this shit right now. Carson hit the floor with a thud, and Damon stepped over his crumpled body, heading down the hall, following the scent of his mate.

He paused outside of the bathroom door and turned to Tate. The man would probably be the better choice to coax Ryah out of her shelter. He took a step back and nodded at his lover.

Tate nodded back and tapped lightly on the door. "Ryah, honey, it's me. Open the door."

Damon heard a snuffle, a shuffling sound, and finally a metallic

click. Ryah cracked open the door and peered around it. “Where is he?”

“Passed out.” Damon offered no more.

“C’mon, let’s take you home.” Tate reached for Ryah, and she took his hand, hesitantly leaving the safety of the bathroom.

“Thank you.” Ryah glanced up at Tate, then over to Damon. She reached out and took his hand in hers as well. “Thank you both.”

“You need to pack up what you want to take because you won’t be coming back.” Damon knew he needed to put an end to this. His mate should be protected, pampered, cherished—not beaten, ridiculed, and terrorized.

Ryah’s eyes widened, and she released their hands, shaking her head. “Oh, no...no, I can’t do that. He just needs some time to cool down, that’s all. Just some time to sober up.”

Damon stared at her for a long time, memorizing the soft planes of her face, before he nodded curtly. “Okay.” He turned to Tate and jerked his head toward the front door. “Let’s go.”

Ryah’s small hand landed on his forearm. “Damon, please, I can’t—”

“And I can’t either, Ryah. I’m sorry. I love you.” Damon motioned over at Tate. “We both do, but I can’t continue to pick up the pieces for you just to watch him tear them down again. You’re breaking my heart.”

“Damon.”

“No.” Damon took a step back, gently shrugging off her hand. “I can’t. Don’t call again. I won’t come. Not until you’re ready to leave his sorry ass for good.” Damon wrapped his fingers around the crook of Tate’s elbow and tugged. “Let’s go,” he repeated.

“Tatum?” Ryah’s voice broke on the last syllable.

Tate only shook his head sadly. “I can’t,” he echoed Damon’s words. “I really thought this time would be different, but it’s not. I won’t keep doing this. I can’t come out here to find you dead one day instead of locked in the bathroom. I’m sorry.”

Damon took Tate's hand and gave it a quick squeeze before letting it go. They each stepped forward and placed a small kiss on each of Ryah's cheeks. Damon's stomach churned, and the cramped hallway suddenly felt suffocating. His disappointment and heartache lodged in his throat, choking him. He had to get out of there before he completely broke down.

With one last look at his zeta, Damon walked away.

\* \* \* \*

"Did we do the right thing?" Tate looked out the window as Damon drove back to their house in town.

"I don't know." Damon sighed miserably. He sounded so dejected, it made Tate's chest tighten. "I just know I can't keep doing this. As much as it hurts to walk away from her, it hurts a hell of a lot more when she walks away from us."

Damon pulled into their driveway and cut the engine. They sat there, staring straight ahead, neither saying a word. Finally, when he couldn't take it anymore, Tate opened his door, climbed out of the truck, and silently made his way to the front door. Once he'd let himself in, he went to the kitchen and began to take makings for sandwiches out of the refrigerator. He went through the motions, less out of hunger and more for something to do.

Ryah never stayed. No matter what they did, no matter how they tried to help, she wouldn't leave Carson. Tate didn't know what she saw in the man. She had walked away from them numerous times, and back into the violent arms of her husband. It hurt like hell when she did it, but there had still been hope that the next time would be different.

Tate's hope died, along with a piece of his soul, the instant they stepped through the doors and left Ryah crying in the hallway.

Damon's arms circled his waist and pulled him back against the broad expanse of his lover's chest. "You need to feed, baby."

“What the fuck does it look like I’m doing?” Tate snapped. He immediately felt contrite. Damon hadn’t caused this mess, and Tate had no right to take it out on his mate. He turned in Damon’s arms and placed a small kiss under this stubble-covered jaw. “Sorry,” he whispered.

“I know. I’m not happy about it, either, but I don’t know what else to do.” Damon nuzzled the top of Tate’s head with his cheek.

“Why won’t she leave?”

“Not sure, but I know I can’t keep waiting for it to happen. It hurts too much.”

Tate rested his head against Damon’s shoulder and closed his eyes. “Need you,” he whispered.

Damon eased away and lifted Tate’s chin, looking him over critically. He ran his fingertips under Tate’s eyes, across the dark circles Tate knew were there. “You need to feed,” Damon repeated.

Tate resisted the urge to roll his eyes. He knew his mate wouldn’t let it go, and with good reason. He could smell Damon’s blood coursing through his veins, and it made his mouth water. The only vampire trait evident in him was his need for blood. His heart pulsed, his lungs craved oxygen, his body required nutrients from food, and he could walk in the daylight. Though abnormally strong and quick, those traits could just as easily be from his lycan nature.

Tate stared at the throbbing vein in Damon’s neck and licked his lips. He imagined sinking his canines into the tanned skin and letting the warm rush of sweet syrup wash over his tongue. Tate’s cock stirred, and he whimpered softly.

Damon smiled seductively as he began unbuttoning his jeans. The scent of his lover’s arousal, mixed with the more physical evidence bulging against his zipper, made Tate’s head swim. Too many clothes, too much space, too slow.

Tate grabbed Damon’s shirt in both hands and ripped it from his body. “Hey!” Damon protested. “That was my favorite shirt.”

“Shut up,” Tate ordered, burying his face against Damon’s neck,

inhaling the intoxicating aroma of his mate. Damon's chuckle turned to a shuddering gasp when Tate pressed his hand against the straining erection behind his fly. "If these aren't off in the next three seconds, they'll be in for the same treatment."

He claimed Damon's mouth in a hungry, possessive kiss. "Mine," Tate growled into this lover's open mouth. They worked feverishly to remove their clothing, breaking the kiss only long enough for Tate to pull his shirt over his head.

"My god, you're beautiful," Damon said, looking at Tate and licking his lips. He took Tate's mouth again and practically tackled him to the floor.

Tate spread his legs wide and groaned when Damon's hot, hard body settled over him. Damon's hands and mouth were everywhere, fanning the flames of Tate's desire. Damon nipped at Tate's hip, swirling his tongue to sooth the burn and causing Tate's cock to jerk and throb.

He tangled both hands into Damon's long blond strands, and guided his lover's mouth to where he needed it most. When Damon passed over his pulsing erection and moved to nibble at his other hip, Tate cried out in frustration. "Dammit, Damon! Suck me, or touch me, or...fuck! Do something!"

Damon's shoulders shook with silent laughter. The bastard. "You only needed to ask, love." He swooped down and enveloped Tate's cock into his hot, moist mouth. Tate growled, lifting his hips and shoving his prick further down his mate's throat.

Damon hummed his approval around the hard flesh. He pulled back, circling the spongy tip with his tongue, licking at the slit, and delving inside. Without warning, Damon plunged down again, burying his nose in Tate's curls and taking his cock to the back of his throat. He used his lips, teeth, tongue, and hands to send Tate hurdling toward the edge of euphoria.

Damon swamped him in sensations. Tate panted, moaned, and writhed. His heart pounded so fast he just knew it would explode

when he finally climaxed. The fire building in his lower belly spread like molten lava, triggering a flash burn across his skin. His cock leaked and flexed, begging for relief.

Tate cupped his lover's head roughly and thrust his hips, working his slippery pole in and out through Damon's swollen lips. His orgasm barreled down on him, building pressure in his sac. He grunted and growled, feral sounds escaping him as he fucked into his mate's mouth.

When Damon pressed hard against his hips, pinning him to the floor, and released his spit-slicked cock, Tate roared, trying desperately to get at his mate. "Wait," Damon commanded.

Tate instantly stilled. As the bigger, stronger, and more dominant of the two, Damon was definitely the alpha. "Want to be inside you when you come. Want you to squeeze my cock with that tight ass." Damon's tone softened. He pulled open the refrigerator door and removed a small bottle of aloe vera from the bottom shelf.

Damon poured a generous amount into his palm and slicked up his shaft before inserting two thick fingers into Tate's quivering hole. Tate hissed when the cold gel met his flushed skin, the sound quickly becoming a low moan. He pushed back against the invading digits, needing more and needing it now. "Fuck me. Please, Damon, now. I need you," Tate begged.

Damon immediately pulled his fingers free of Tate's clenching muscles, lined up his thick cock, and pushed in to the hilt. Tate gasped, his head fell back, and he bit his lip, willing his body to relax. Damon sat perfectly still, allowing Tate time to adjust. The slight burn quickly subsided, and Tate tightened his muscles around his lover's hard shaft, giving the go-ahead.

"Can't go slow," Damon puffed, setting a fast, hard pace.

"Don't want you to." Tate palmed his own weeping cock and began to stroke himself with the same frantic rhythm Damon used to pound into this ass. "Close."

Damon hooked his arms under Tate's knees, leaning forward, and

spreading Tate open further. Without comment, Damon turned his head to the side, baring his neck. The willing offer, combined with the new angle of Damon's thrust, his cock nailing Tate's sweet spot with every plunge, pushed Tate to the brink. He grabbed the back of Damon's head and pulled his mate's neck closer to his parched mouth.

Tate licked the pulsing vein, feeling his canine's elongate, and bit into the soft flesh of Damon's throat. He moaned as the wet, satisfying liquid flowed into his greedy mouth.

Mmm, the man tasted so good. Damon's long guttural moan and the frantic rhythm of his thrusts sent Tate leaping over the edge and into orgasmic bliss.

"Ahhh!" Damon yelled. Tate felt his lover's cock swell and jerk seconds before the hot, molten cream of Damon's seed filled his clenching channel. Tate's fangs retracted, and he fell back to the floor, gasping for air.

Damon fell on top of him, his breathing ragged and his heart fluttering like a hummingbird's wings. Tate wrapped his arms around his mate's sweat-slicked body and nuzzled into his hair, content for the moment.

## **Chapter Two**

Ryah sat on the threadbare sofa for a long time after Tate and Damon's departure. She clasped both hands over her mouth to stifle the sounds of her sobs, afraid any little noise from her would wake Carson.

Damon and Tate said they loved her, and probably they did, in a very platonic way. Though she thrilled to the word, she knew not to read too much into it. They loved her the way she loved her boss and friend, Midge.

Still, they did genuinely seem to care about her, had always been there when she needed them. Then with one little two-letter word, she had pushed them both away. Her heart ached as she rocked herself back and forth on the ratty old couch, seeking a comfort lost to her forever. For close to a year, Damon and Tate had been her solace, her security blanket, and now they were gone.

Ryah never saw either of them outside of the diner, but they were there every night at seven o'clock sharp. They always sat at one of her tables, always ordered the special of the day, and always left Ryah an exuberant tip. She never had the heart to tell them not to bother—all of her money went to Carson and his cheap whiskey anyway. She didn't care about the money, though, because for ninety minutes a night, six days a week, sunlight filled Ryah's miserable world.

Her dad split when she was just a baby, leaving her in the care of her abusive, drug-head mother. She met Carson at the county fair her senior year of high school. Not quite eighteen, Ryah became quickly infatuated with then twenty-six-year-old Carson. He had promised her the world, and she readily jumped at the opportunity to escape her

psychotic mother. A week later, she dropped out of school, and they eloped in Vegas.

It didn't take long for Ryah to realize her mistake. No longer the sweet, caring, and sensitive man she had met in line for the Ferris wheel, Carson revealed himself to be selfish, arrogant, domineering, controlling, and verbally abusive. Still, it beat the hell out of living with her mother.

Though controlling, Carson managed to hold off on the physical abuse for nearly three years. In fact, the beatings didn't begin until the night she met Damon and Tate at the rodeo. They were so gorgeous, and she had found it adorable the way Tate tripped over himself to apologize for spilling beer on her.

She could smile at the memory now. At the time, she had been so overcome with fear of being discovered talking to not one, but two attractive men, she had barely been able to string two words together. When she spotted Carson making his way through the crowd, his long legs eating up the ground as he strode toward her, Ryah thought she might wet herself.

He took one look at her wet shirt, her hard nipples poking out against the fabric. He then sent a sneering glance at the two men standing where she'd left them, staring after her. "Putting on a show for the new guys?" Carson slurred. Ryah couldn't remember ever seeing him so drunk. He didn't wait for a reply, but grabbed her arm and hurried her out to the parking lot.

No words were spoken the entire drive home, but everything changed quickly once he pulled to a stop. He dragged her up the front steps by her hair, cursing and screaming at her, calling her every vile and filthy name in his repertoire. Then he flung her in the house and beat her unconscious.

She hadn't been able to leave the house for over a week.

Since then her punishments became more frequent, though less severe. Even the slightest infraction earned her a beating, but Carson was careful not to mar her face again.

He never apologized for hitting her, as Damon believed. Ryah knew he felt no guilt. Carson made her a promise, though—a promise that would hold her like no amount of phony remorse ever could.

“Ryah, darlin’,” he said to her, “you will never leave me. If you ever try, I promise you, I will destroy everything and everyone you care about to find you and bring you back.”

Ryah had no doubt he meant every word, and for that reason, she could never allow Tate and Damon into her life. She didn’t have any material possessions that meant anything to her, and she stopped caring what happened to her long ago. She wouldn’t drag Damon and Tate into the middle of her drama, though. Wouldn’t see them hurt because of her.

She wouldn’t call them again, should have never called them in the first place. Their last words and abrupt departure made it painfully obvious they wouldn’t be coming into the diner anymore. She didn’t own a car, didn’t even know how to drive one, so she didn’t have an excuse to see them at the garage they owned in town. Although, she had kind of wanted to see the classic muscle cars they built and worked on.

Ryah’s heart ached, and her stomach twisted violently at the thought of never seeing Damon or Tate again. She wouldn’t regret pushing them away. As much as it hurt to live without them, she’d never survive if anything happened to either of them because of her.

She didn’t know what about her had gained the attention of the two gorgeous men. In less than a year, Damon and Tate both managed to break through the walls Ryah built around herself and wiggle their way right into her heart. They made it so easy for her to love them.

Ryah didn’t remember exactly when it happened. It hadn’t been an epiphany, a sudden realization, just a glowing warm feeling in her chest that grew and burned brighter each time she saw them. She knew the men loved each other, and she found the little covert looks they shared adorable.

They always came to her rescue—her brave knights in a dusty

pickup truck. Never once did they let her down. Just from their kindness and generosity, they had given her more than she could ever repay.

If you love something, set it free. Or some crap like that. Knowing and doing the right thing didn't make it hurt any less.

\* \* \* \*

“Hey, honey, when's the last time you've seen those boys?” Midge asked as she slid plates through the kitchen window.

Ryah didn't need to ask which boys. “Two months, three weeks, and two days.” She shrugged, loaded up her tray, and turned her back on her boss. “But who's counting?” she added under her breath.

She still held close to the belief that she protected Damon and Tate by pushing them away, but every day the clouds seemed to thicken just a little more. The two rays of sunshine that had once filled her life were gone, draining the color from her world, and leaving her to live in shades of gray.

Ryah set the last plate on the table just as the front door of the diner burst open, causing everyone in the place to jump. Heads swiveled and several people gasped when Carson marched across the black and white tile floor, heading straight for Ryah.

“You stupid bitch! Didn't think I'd find out, did you?” Carson yelled as he neared her.

Ryah's pulse sped, and her face paled. She didn't know what she had done this time, but clearly, she was in some deep shit. Never before had Carson lost his temper to the point he'd attacked her in public, let alone sought her out to confront her.

Without breaking stride, Carson delivered a vicious backhand across Ryah's cheek, letting his momentum add force to his backswing. Ryah cried out as her face snapped to the side, and she stumbled backward. Everyone stared, open-mouthed, at the couple.

She turned back to her husband, catching another blow to the face.

“You ungrateful, fucking whore!” Carson used a forward swing, open palm this time, the force of it knocking her to the ground.

She huddled there, looking up at her tormentor, cradling her abused cheek in her hand. She remained speechless, too frightened to form even the smallest sound. Carson pulled a large fold of dollar bills from his pocket and threw them at her. Ryah’s eyes widened, and she bit her trembling lip.

The day Damon and Tate walked out of her door, Ryah began putting back a few dollars from her tips each night. She hid the money in a tampon box in the counter under the bathroom sink. Never in her wildest imaginings did she think her husband would find it.

Before Carson lost his job as a deputy, Ryah had feared going to the police to file charges of spousal abuse. His badge proclaimed him an upstanding officer of the law, while people knew Ryah as the troubled girl Carson had rescued from the ghettos. That’s what he told everyone anyway. Ryah supposed it was partly true.

His removal from duty came only as a last resort, and mostly because of the gossip floating around town. Hey, it happened to be an election year after all.

He still had friends on the force, though, including the sheriff himself. No way could Ryah turn to the police for help, and she had pushed away her only willing heroes.

She couldn’t go to the police, she couldn’t involve people she cared about, but Ryah decided the time had come to help herself. With no car, no money, and no place to go, she knew she needed to save some money. Ryah figured she wouldn’t need much, just enough for a bus ticket and a motel room until she could find a job in a new town. She had only been able to save eighty-six dollars, but it had given her hope.

Carson continued ranting and screaming at her, but Ryah ceased to hear him. He would watch her closer than ever now. Any hope of escape vanished.

Ryah vaguely realized Carson had crouched down in front of her.

She saw his hand move, watched his arm rise to deliver another slap to her already throbbing face. She didn't move to defend or protect herself. Any act of defiance would only serve to make him angrier.

"I wouldn't do that," a husky voice drawled from behind Carson.

Ryah's head jerked up, and her mouth dropped open. She dreamt of that voice for months, but never thought she would hear it again.

\* \* \* \*

Damon wrapped his large hand around Carson's wrist and squeezed. Not hard enough to fracture the bone, but enough to elicit a yelp.

Carson turned his head and spat in Damon's face. "Get your fucking hands off me, you stupid queer!"

Damon calmly wiped the saliva from his face with his free hand. He used the hand still wrapped around Carson's wrist to exert more pressure until he heard the bone snap, and saw the blood drain from the asshole's face.

Despite the months of separation, when Midge called to say Ryah needed him, Damon didn't hesitate. Since the restaurant owner was also a Gavolot, a member of his colony even, she knew Ryah belonged to him. As an added bonus, he wouldn't have to explain to Midge how he'd covered seven and half miles in just less than two minutes with no vehicle.

Damon vaguely remembered yelling at Tate to bring the truck and meet him at the diner. He then shifted, gathered his clothes in his mouth and darted through the woods. Lycans were fast, but with the added mixture of vampire blood, Damon appeared as little more than a blur.

He glanced over at Ryah's pale face, the bruise already beginning to bloom across her cheek, and cold rage descended over him. He crouched down and leaned forward until his lips almost touched Carson's ear.

“If you ever come near her again, I will kill you.” Damon squeezed the shattered wrist to emphasize his point.

Carson cried out, tears streaming down his face. Damon stood, towering over the bullying coward. “I suggest you go get that looked at.” Damon pointed toward the man’s limp wrist. “It may be broken,” he mocked, “or maybe my gay really is contagious.”

A few people gave him disgusting looks, but everyone else in the restaurant laughed and jeered as Carson climbed unsteadily to his feet, and stomped out of the diner just as Tate walked in. Tate growled as the man passed him, sparking Carson to hurry his steps.

“You shouldn’t have done that. You humiliated him in front of all these people. He’s going to want payback. I can’t stand to see you hurt.”

Damon closed his eyes for just a moment, letting the soft voice of his zeta wash over him. He missed the sound of Ryah’s voice more than he could say.

Opening his eyes and turning back to the woman on the floor, Damon reached out a hand to help her to her feet. “I’m not afraid of him, and I won’t let him hurt you again, Ryah.” Damon glanced over at Tate as he took his place beside them. “We’re strong enough to protect you, sturdy enough for you to lean on, and smart enough not to get ourselves hurt.”

Tate stepped forward and took Ryah’s hand. “Come home. Please. Let us take care of you.”

The tears streaming down Ryah’s face, the way her fingers knotted together over her chest, tore at Damon’s heart. He held his breath as he placed his life, his heart, and his future in those tiny hands.

“I want my sunshine back,” Ryah whispered brokenly.

Damon didn’t have a clue what she meant, and he didn’t have time to ask before Ryah launched herself into his arms. He’d take the embrace as a good sign. He wrapped his arms around his mate’s slender waist and took his first real breath in over a year.

“Hey, can I get some of that?” Tate laughed.

Ryah pulled back, gave him a watery smile, and jumped into his arms.

Damon sensed, more than heard, Midge approach and turned to face her. “Thank you,” he said before she could speak.

“Believe me, it’s my pleasure. Take her on home. I don’t want to see that girl in my diner for the rest of the week.” Midge winked at Damon and gave him a light pat on the shoulder.

“Did you call the sheriff?”

Ryah clutched at the front of his shirt and shook her head frantically. “No cops.”

Damon frowned, but nodded. He and Tate were more than capable of protecting her anyway.

“Take care of our girl.” Midge smiled and patted Damon’s shoulder again.

Damon could only grin and nod. “Our girl,” he mouthed to himself.

## Chapter Three

“Here, baby, this will help the swelling.” Tate handed Ryah a bag of frozen corn.

Ryah took it with trembling hands and pressed it to her cheek. She hissed when it touched her skin, and Tate rushed forward, fluttering his hands uselessly around her face. “Shit, are you okay? Does it hurt? Maybe we should go to the hospital. Damon!”

The sound of a very girlish giggle had Tate whipping his head back to the raven-haired beauty in his kitchen. Surely, the noise had not come from her. Tate couldn’t remember ever hearing her laugh, let alone giggle. It sounded so sweet it made his teeth ache, and he found himself smiling. “I’m hovering, aren’t I?”

Ryah returned his smile and nodded. “A little, but that’s okay. It’s actually kind of nice. No one’s ever cared about me before.” The way she said it, so matter-of-factly, made Tate want to wrap her in his arms and hold her there forever.

“Well, I care,” Tate confirmed, reaching out to pull her to him.

Damon rushed into the room, skidding to a halt, barely avoiding a collision. “What? What’s wrong?” He pulled Ryah from Tate’s arms and held her at arm’s length, bending to look directly into her eyes. “Are you okay? Are you hurt? Do you need a doctor?”

“And, obviously so does Damon,” Tate mumbled, rolling his eyes. Hypocritical maybe, considering he had reacted much the same way, but seeing it come from Damon brought home how silly they were acting.

Ryah giggled again and reached up to lay her hand against Damon’s cheek. “I’m fine. Thank you.”

Tate thought he would bust a nut trying to hold in his laughter when Damon's eyes widened to the size of golf balls. He turned his dazed stare on Tate, his mouth hanging open. "Did she just giggle?"

That did it. Tate couldn't hold it in any longer. He threw back his head and laughed so hard he had to clutch his sides to hold himself together. Damon frowned as he looked at Ryah, then back to Tate, which just caused Tate to laugh even harder.

Damon blew out an exasperated breath and shook his head at them. "Fine." He took a step back, glaring playfully. "If you two are done, maybe Ryah would like to see her room."

"Oh, yes, please," Ryah sang with a smile.

The echoing grin on Damon's face melted Tate. Taking Ryah's hand, he led her down the hall after Damon.

\* \* \* \*

"Damon! Tate!" Ryah called out from the kitchen. "Breakfast!"

Damon turned his head to smile at the man lying beside him. "Breakfast." He smirked.

Tate gave him a shit-eating grin. "Yeah, breakfast."

Damon had to admit the quality of their meals had vastly improved in the four days since Ryah moved in. Well, their overall quality of life had greatly improved, but damn, the girl could cook.

He didn't want her to feel obligated, though. He wanted a mate, not a maid. When he tried voicing his concerns, however, Ryah quickly assured him she enjoyed feeling needed. And he and Tate couldn't cook for crap.

Apparently, they couldn't do a lot of things. Ryah had taken over the laundry, muttering to herself about lights, darks, whites, and delicates. Damon didn't know what the hell she was talking about, but his clothes did smell a lot better these days. The mountain of clothes beside the washing machine vanished as well.

On day three, Ryah gave the house a thorough scrub from top to

bottom. She'd huffed and clucked her tongue at them the whole time she dusted lampshades, ceiling fans, and even had them lift the couch to clean and vacuum beneath it.

"I thought gay men were supposed to be domesticated," she said to them while digging through the refrigerator, throwing out spoiled food and making a list of things they needed—like everything.

"Actually, we aren't gay. We like girls, too, if that counts for anything," Tate drawled.

She had looked at him and smiled sweetly. "Then you should at least be house broken, shouldn't you?"

Damon had never laughed so hard in his life.

There were still times when Ryah seemed to draw back into herself. He knew she still had nightmares, and she occasionally flinched if one of them moved too quickly toward her, but mostly Ryah seemed happier and lighter than he'd ever seen her.

"Last one there does the dishes." Tate issued the bet, springing out of bed and bolting for the kitchen.

Lost inside his own head, Damon didn't even register what his mate had said until Tate had already cleared the doorway. Well, dammit, he might as well take his time then. Not like they could make him do the dishes twice.

Damon climbed out of bed and grabbed a clean pair of sweats from his dresser drawer. He froze when he heard a shriek from the kitchen. He hustled to pull on his sweats and made his way swiftly down the hall.

"You march your ass right back to that room and get dressed!"

Damon paused in the kitchen doorway, blinked, then doubled over in laughter. Tate stood in the middle of the kitchen, head hung like a whipped dog, face red, and both hands covering his cock and balls. It seemed that in his hurry to get out of kitchen duty, Tate had neglected to remember his nakedness.

Ryah stood with one hand on her hip, the other pointed a spatula at Tate's face, as she reprimanded him. She sounded stern, even

angry, but Damon saw the glint in her eyes, the way her lips twitched at the corners, and knew she fought back a smile.

“Yes’m,” Tate mumbled, turning and hightailing it back to the bedroom to dress.

With Tate out of the room, Ryah rounded on Damon. “You can wipe the grin right off your face, Damon Lewis.” She pointed her spatula at him and winked. “Go put a shirt on. It’s neither proper nor acceptable for the breakfast table.”

Damon winked back, grinning like a fool. “Yes’m.”

\* \* \* \*

Ryah took a deep breath, watching Damon follow Tate out of the kitchen. She pressed a hand over her heart and tried to calm her racing pulse. It’s not like she had never seen a naked man before, but certainly never one as mouthwatering as Tatum. Add Damon’s smooth, tanned, bare chest to the equation, and Ryah had been afraid she’d start drooling right where she stood. She figured it should be illegal for anyone to look that good first thing in the morning—or evening—or ever.

Several times over the last four days, Ryah found herself staring openly at Damon or Tate, and sometimes both. Even a blind gorilla could tell they were in love. The two were always touching, kissing, or making goo-goo eyes at each other. She didn’t think they even realized it half the time.

Ryah felt like an intruder and a voyeur. Worse, she felt like a complete slut every time one of them turned their attentions on her and her body reacted quite inappropriately. Even the most casual of touches set her on fire, hardened her nipples, and sent electricity racing along her spine to pool and burn between her legs.

She enjoyed taking care of them, and they really seemed to need and appreciate her. She struggled daily to dig out of the hole of misery she had spent buried in for so long. Simply being away from

Carson made a huge difference in her outlook on life. Suddenly, she felt free, eager for a new day and new possibilities.

Ryah didn't want to give that up because she couldn't control her overactive hormones. She wouldn't. She promised herself she would quell her urges and love the gorgeous men from a distance if that's what it took to keep them in her life.

And, damn but they were beautiful. Both stood over six feet, with more rippling muscles than an entire high school wrestling team. Damon's long blond hair and Tate's equally long, but shimmering black hair made her fingers itch to twine in the silky strands. They both had the most deliciously plump, pink lips. What she wouldn't give to dive in and devour those perfect mouths.

Damon and Tate came back and took their seats at the table. Ryah quickly pulled herself together and set two heaping plates of eggs, bacon, hash browns, and toast in front of them. "Eat up."

They mumbled their thanks, digging in with appreciative grins. Ryah took her own, much smaller plate, and sat across the table from them. "I have to work tonight," she said casually.

Butterflies swooped in her stomach at the thought of going back to work and being away from her protectors. She needed to work, though, needed the money. She couldn't continue to live and mooch off of Damon and Tate forever.

"I hate to ask, but do you think one of you could give me a ride? I usually walk, but it's a lot farther from here than it was from h...well...it's a lot farther." Ryah had almost referred to Carson's house as home. It wasn't.

When she didn't receive a reply right away, Ryah looked up in time to see both Damon and Tate slowly lower their forks to their plates and glance at each other. She couldn't decipher their expressions, and it made her nervous. "Oh, it's okay if you're too busy. I can call Midge or I-I'll figure something out," Ryah rambled. She buttoned her lips and lowered her gaze to her plate.

"Ryah, look at me," Damon coaxed softly.

When Ryah complied, Damon smiled, the look in his dark blue eyes so tender it made her heart stop, flop over, and restart. Looking over at Tate, she realized he wore a similar expression. No one had ever looked at her like that.

“Ryah, you never have to be afraid to ask for anything,” Damon continued. “We are more than happy to help with anything you need. With that said...” Damon trailed off and turned again to Tate.

Tate nodded and cleared his throat. He looked at Ryah for a long time, his gray-blue eyes pinning her to her seat. He held out his hand, stretching it across the table. Ryah took it hesitantly, relieved when he squeezed her fingers gently.

“Honey, I know you’re a grown woman, and you feel you need to contribute financially in this relationship, but...” Tate took a deep breath and let it out before he continued. “Ryah, we would prefer if you didn’t go back to work at the diner.”

Ryah stared at him, mouth open, but completely speechless. They didn’t want her to work? Relationship? What relationship? Not a damn word Tate said made any sense to her. She started to say so, but Damon held up a hand to stop her protest. Ryah glared at him but remained silent.

“It’s not safe, Ryah,” Damon said. “We all know Carson is not going to let what went down at the diner go without wanting revenge. He was humiliated, and his ego took quite the beating.”

“Not to mention we took something he sees as belonging to him,” Tate added pointedly.

Ryah nodded slowly, chewing on her bottom lip. She knew they were right, of course. Carson viewed her as his property, and she knew he wouldn’t let her go without a fight. “I don’t feel right about staying here without contributing something,” she murmured.

“Baby.” Damon chuckled. A tingle went through Ryah. It left her giddy when he called her baby. “You do contribute. You’ve whipped this house into shape in less than four days and made it into a home. You take care of us in all the ways that matter. We couldn’t ask more

from you than that.”

Though still confused, she smiled at his praise. They made her sound like a housewife. Not that she opposed taking care of them. She cherished every minute of it, in fact. It delighted her to know she could make life easier for the men, but still...

“What will I do for money? How will I buy the things I need?”

“We’ll give you money of course. Or just ask. What’s ours is yours,” Tate answered automatically.

Ryah put a hand to her spinning head. What the hell is going on here? They wanted to take care of her, give her money, and make her their housewife. She didn’t have any experience with friendships, but even she realized Damon and Tate’s offer went a bit extreme. They were just roommates after all. Right?

“Why would you do that?” Ryah asked. She saw Damon’s forehead wrinkle and hurried on. “I mean, I’m extremely grateful, don’t get me wrong, but...I don’t...I don’t understand,” she admitted at last.

“We love you,” Damon said as if that explained everything.

“And I love you guys as well. I mean, you’re the best friends I’ve ever had, but I still don’t understand any of this. Why would you want...” Ryah trailed off when both men stood and walked around the table to kneel on either side of her.

“You and Damon are my best friends as well.” Tate spoke softly, taking one of her hands in his own. Ryah smiled a little, though she figured he probably just said it to make her feel better.

“Same here, but...” Damon took her other hand and waited until she turned her attention to him. “We want you to be more than our friend.” He brushed his lips across her knuckles and squeezed her hand. “We want you to be part of our life, to belong to you, and you belong to us.”

Her eyes bugged out, and she whipped her head around to look at Tate, surprised to find the silly grin on his face. “We love you in a very nonfriend kind of way, honey.”

Ryah continued to stare, flabbergasted. Did that mean...  
“You...both...I mean, both of you...”

“We are in love with you.” Damon kissed the back of her hand again. “How could we not? You are very easy to love once you let people in.”

Ryah felt like they had hit her over the head with a club. For so long she hid her feelings for them. She never imagined they felt the same way about her. More like a neglected puppy they had brought home out of pity. “Oh,” she breathed.

“I know it might seem a little strange at first, being in a relationship with two men at once, but just think of it as double the love.” Tate winked, though he looked a little nervous.

Damon reached out slowly and smacked Tate in the back of the head. Tate glared at him, drawing a snort from Ryah. They offered her the world, and they didn’t even know it. Anyone would be a fool to turn them away. Ryah had wasted too much time playing that role already.

“I love both of you, in a very nonfriend kind of way.” Ryah grinned shyly. “It never crossed my mind it was wrong to have feelings for you both. I guess I just kind of saw you guys as a package deal...like two for one. Besides, if Midge can make it work with her partners, I think we can as well.”

Both her men chuckled and rose up to kiss her cheeks at the same time. Ryah giggled and swatted them away. “Okay, okay.”

She looked at each of her men and smiled. “I’m still going to work.”

## Chapter Four

“Did you tell her?”

Damon looked at Midge and grimaced. “Not yet.”

“Well, why the hell not?” She pointed her long, crooked finger in his face. “Boy, you can’t keep this from her.”

“I know, okay. I know! But, we just crossed the whole three-way-relationship bridge, and I don’t want to overwhelm her.”

“That’s either a damn poor excuse for being a coward or an outright lie.”

Damon bit back a growl. He knew the penalty for disrespecting an elder of the colony, but damn it all, the woman infuriated him. He looked across the crowded diner, eyes zeroing in on Ryah as she floated from table to table. He still couldn’t believe they were here.

Ryah insisted she at least finish out the week, not wanting to leave Midge shorthanded. No amount of begging, pleading, reasoning, or demanding could change her mind. No way in hell was Damon going to let her out of his sight until they resolved the issues with her husband. Damn, he hated that word in reference to Carson Owens.

So what if he and Tate hadn’t told Ryah about them being Gavolots or that she was their mate. Considering they couldn’t claim her until she divorced that asshole, Damon didn’t really see the point. Until the divorce went through, Ryah still belonged to Carson. And didn’t that just suck a fat one?

“Easy there, big fella.”

He snapped his attention back to Midge, only then realizing he had been growling. “Sorry, Midge,” he sighed. “I don’t see the point in telling her when we can’t even claim her.”

To his complete surprise, Midge snorted. “Boy, do you have a lot to learn about women.” She sobered and leaned across the table to glare at him. “That poor girl has been manipulated, controlled, neglected, and abused her entire life. Do you plan to continue the practice?”

Damon gaped at the lined face sitting across from him. How could Midge even ask such a thing? He loved Ryah and Tate more than anything. Together, they were his entire world. He would do anything, be anything they needed him to be, in order to keep them safe and well.

Midge nodded sharply and settled back into her side of the booth. “I didn’t figure so. You disrespect her by not trusting her with your secret, Damon. Despite everything Ryah has been through, she still has one of the kindest hearts I’ve ever known. Give her some credit, and she might just surprise you.”

Damon bit his lip as he thought over Midge’s words. Had he manipulated Ryah into being with them? He didn’t think so, nor did he feel he had lied to her. He just...withheld certain information. Yeah, so he guessed some would consider that lying. If he’d lied, and Ryah didn’t know all of the facts, then that probably fell under the headline of manipulation as well.

He didn’t know what to do, and he didn’t like it one bit. He had always been the one in charge, the fix-it guy, the man with the plan. He always had the answers. As much as he hated to admit it, the old bat probably had a point. Okay, hell, he knew she was right, but it didn’t mean he had to like it.

More than not having the answers, Damon hated being uncertain. He felt very uncertain about how Ryah would react to him and Tate being hybrid shifters.

“Her last table is leaving now. Go on and take her home. I’ll take care of the cleanup.” Midge rose from the booth and shuffled back to the kitchen.

Ryah flitted across the room and stopped right in front of Damon.

“Hey, I just have to do my clean up and prep for the breakfast crew, then I’ll be ready. You want me to get you anything while you wait?”

Damon couldn’t help but smile up at her. Ryah practically vibrated where she stood. Her entire face lit up with a brilliant, heart-stopping smile. She looked simply radiant.

He grabbed her hand, pulling her down to place a quick peck on her cheek. “Midge said she would take care of it. Let’s get out of here and go get Tate.”

“Oh, but...I can’t...I can’t let her do that,” Ryah stammered. She worried her lower lip between her teeth as she eyed Damon uncertainly. “Can I?”

Damon chuckled and slid from the booth. “Of course you can. Besides, you know what a cantankerous old hussy our Midge is.”

“I heard that!” Midge yelled from the kitchen. “Go on, you two. Get out of here before I change my mind and make Damon do the dishes.”

Damon picked Ryah up and practically ran her out of the diner. He had done the breakfast dishes, and he’d be damned if he got roped into doing any more.

Ryah squealed and slapped at his chest. “Put me down, you big oaf!”

He grinned at her wickedly and grunted several times like a caveman. Ryah fell into a fit of laughter, so exuberant tears began to stream down her face. Damon’s heart swelled with joy to see her so open and carefree. Pride tinted his happiness because he had the ability to cause such a response in his mate.

He sat Ryah down beside the passenger door of his pickup and just stared at her. He still couldn’t get over her breathtaking beauty—inside and out. Maybe a little too thin, but a couple of good meals would cure that. He bent slowly, allowing her time to push him away, and gently pressed his lips to hers.

The immediate scent of his mate’s arousal slammed into him with enough force to steal his breath. He had caught a whiff of it over the

past few days, and it drove him insane. This close, and at such intensity, Damon wanted to growl and rut like an animal. His heart raced, his breathing sped up, and his gums stung, warning him his canines were moments away from elongating.

Pulling back, he brushed a stray curl away from Ryah's flushed face. If a simple, chaste kiss could set his blood boiling, he couldn't wait to find out what making love to this amazing creature would be like.

Unfortunately, he would have to wait to find out. Even if Ryah didn't run screaming after he revealed the truth, they still had the little problem of Carson's claim on her.

Damon's entire being ached for the woman standing before him, but his cock remained flaccid, snuggled limply against his thigh. Since Ryah technically belonged to Carson Owens, Damon couldn't get it up. As long as she maintained physical contact with him, his dick rolled over and played dead. Tate wouldn't be seeing any action from the little temptress either.

He swallowed down a frustrated groan and kissed the tip of her nose. "C'mon, baby, let's go get our man and get home."

Ryah grinned and nodded. "I like that. Let's go get our man."

\* \* \* \*

A loud crash, followed by a bloodcurdling scream, rent the air just as Damon pulled up in front the body shop they owned across town. The next sound from inside the building sounded part yell, and part...howl.

Ryah bailed out of the truck and hit the ground running before Damon could even move. Scrambling from the truck, he took off after her, desperate to get to Tate.

"Damon!" she yelled for him.

The scene that greeted his eyes when he rounded the corner made his heart stop. Tate lay trapped beneath one of the cars, the manual

jack several feet from the front tire. Damon couldn't see more than his mate's legs, but he smelled the blood.

"Damon!" Ryah screamed again. She shoved with everything she had while tears streamed down her cheeks, trying to push the car off of Tate.

He shook off the terror-induced paralysis and flew across the room in a blur. Grunting with the exertion of his task, he lifted the car, and watched Tate roll free. He dropped the car to the garage floor and quickly moved to kneel beside his lover.

Tate sprawled on his back, panting and wheezing, his right arm bleeding freely. Damon winced at the bone poking through the skin. Ryah bent over Tate's prone body, still sobbing, frantically running her hands over his body.

"Oh, Tate, are you okay? Can you talk to me? Please, Tate, open your eyes. Please, talk to me. C'mon, baby." The panic showed on her face, her voice crackling with hysteria. She looked up at Damon with pleading eyes. "We have to get him to the hospital. He could have internal damage, or broken ribs, or—"

"Shh. He's going to be fine. He just passed out." Damon moved to Ryah's side and pulled her into his arms. Tate would need to shift before he could begin to heal himself. Though, not the way Damon would prefer Ryah to find out, he could not let one of his mates suffer.

He slapped lightly at Tate's cheeks until the man's eyelids fluttered open. He waited for Tate to focus on him and ordered quietly, "Shift."

Tate blinked rapidly, the dazed look leaving his eyes, swiftly replaced by fear. He turned his stare to Ryah, then quickly back to Damon, shaking his head almost imperceptibly.

"It can't be helped. You have to heal." Damon spoke calmly, even as his heart thumped painfully against his sternum. He understood Tate's unwillingness to cooperate, but they didn't have time to argue. If he didn't shift and mend himself soon, the bones

would fuse together crookedly and need to be re-broken. Not fun.

Tate looked at him for a long time before nodding slowly and closing his eyes. Satisfied, Damon stood and held out a hand to Ryah. She allowed him to pull her from Tate's side, walking willingly into his embrace. He took several steps away from his injured mate, held Ryah securely in his arms, and waited. A myriad of different reactions swam through his head, and he wondered which would be Ryah's. He could only hope she wouldn't start screaming.

## Chapter Five

Ryah leaned against Damon's hard chest, trembling, her eyes focused on Tate.

"Don't be afraid," Damon whispered in her ear, clutching her tighter as if he feared she would run.

She just nodded. Some part of her brain argued she should be afraid, but she shoved the thought into a dark closet and slammed the door. Damon would protect her from anything.

A shadowy haze rippled through the air around Tate. His body began to shake and quiver, his back arching off the garage floor, and Ryah struggled against the arms surrounding her, trying to get to him.

"He's fine, baby," Damon assured her. "Just let him do his thing so he can heal."

She stopped struggling and slapped a hand over her heart as she watched Tate's body change before her eyes. His nose and mouth elongated into a muzzle. His hands and feet rounded into giant paws. His body sprouted soft, silver fur.

"Oh my God!" Ryah breathed. She jerked away from Damon roughly and stumbled backwards, her eyes locked on the enormous silver wolf lying where Tate had been moments before. "What the hell are you?"

No, no, no! She had fallen asleep, tripped and hit her head, died or something. None of this was real. People didn't shift into two hundred pound wolves. It just didn't happen.

"What are you?" she repeated hysterically.

"Ryah." Damon took a hesitant step forward and reached for her.

"No!" She took several hasty steps in retreat, almost falling as her

legs shook, threatening to give out. “Don’t touch me!” She continued to back away toward the exit. “This is not real. None of this is real. Oh God!”

“Ryah, please calm down.” Damon took another step toward her.

“Stop! Don’t come near me! Are you like him?” She pointed at the wolf that had climbed to his feet and stood staring at her, whining softly.

Damon nodded, a frown marring his handsome face.

Ryah’s stomach rolled, and her heart felt like it would fall out of her butt. “I trusted you. I trusted you both! I...I kissed you!”

“Just let me explain.”

“Explain? What exactly are you going to explain? How the man I love just turned into a goddamn animal? How are you going to explain that to me?” Ryah shook her head vehemently. She traveled backward until her hip bumped into the door, making her jump a little.

Taking one final look at the man and the beast in the garage, she turned, threw open the door, and ran. She ran until her trembling legs couldn’t take her any farther, and she crumpled to the sidewalk. Leaning heavily against the lamppost, she dropped her face into her hands and drug in air to her aching lungs, even as she sobbed them back out.

Maybe she had gone into shock at the sight of Tate trapped beneath the car and hallucinated the entire thing. Werewolves did not exist outside of books, bad movies, and fairytales.

“Ryah?”

Ryah jolted, squeezing her eyes closed tightly, and huddling closer to the pole she leaned on as if it could hide her.

“Ryah! Oh, honey, what happened to you?” Small, soft hands wrapped around her wrists, pulling gently but insistently. “Come on, girl, let’s get you inside.”

The voice finally penetrated Ryah’s fear induced paralysis. She jumped to her feet, throwing herself into Midge’s arms, clinging to

her, and sobbing against her shoulder. She didn't know how she had made it all the way back to the diner, but she was grateful for a friend nonetheless.

Midge helped her around the side of the diner and in through the door that led directly to the kitchen. She deposited Ryah in a chair and pulled another up beside her. Folding herself into it, she took Ryah's hands and squeezed encouragingly. "Tell me what happened."

Ryah shook her head frantically, slinging tears like a dog shaking off water. She couldn't tell her boss. Midge would have her committed if she started blubbing about werewolves.

Midge sighed and dipped her head as she stood from her chair, pulling on Ryah's hand. "Come with me."

Ryah rose numbly, shuffling after Midge, following the older woman through the kitchen to a flight of stairs and up. They entered a small, sparsely furnished, studio apartment, and Midge nudged her toward one of the stools near the bar.

She climbed up the wooden chair and plopped down obediently, watching Midge hoist herself onto the remaining stool and stare back at her intently. "Does this have something to do with those boys of yours?"

Ryah bobbed her head in assent.

"Did you get into a fight?"

She shook her head. No, she hadn't given them time to argue before she'd bolted from the garage.

"Tell me what happened." Midge patted Ryah's knee, an understanding smile on her aged mouth.

"Tate turned into a freaking dog!" Ryah clapped her hand over her mouth at her outburst, her eyes rounding as she stared at her boss and friend.

To her complete astonishment and confusion, Midge began to chuckle. "I think you mean a wolf."

Ryah gaped at her before her eyes narrowed in suspicion. "You're making fun of me."

Midge sobered and shook her head, her grayed, flyaway curls bouncing. “No, honey, I’m not making fun of you.”

“Then you believe me?” Ryah spoke uncertainly. How could someone as rational as her boss believe such a radical story?

“Yes. Now, tell me what happened.”

So, Ryah recounted the tale. She described her fear, the panic that had bubbled up inside her when she saw Tate pinned beneath the car. She frowned as she remembered Damon easily lifting the car. She had been too overcome with concern for Tate to think much of it at the time. She continued her story by detailing the unsettling transformation of man into animal.

“I ran,” she concluded. “I didn’t know what else to do.” The sobs started again, and she struggled to continue as her throat seized and clogged with her emotions. “I’m losing my mind.”

Midge slipped down from her seat and wrapped Ryah up nice and tight in her arms. “Hush now, honey. You’re just as sane as anyone is. What has you so upset? The fact your boy turned into a wolf? Or the idea that such things even exist?”

Ryah scrunched her nose, her brows forming a shallow V as she thought over the question.

Midge chuckled again. “I get that it’s a hard pill to swallow. You’re reacting much better than some I’ve known.” She pushed Ryah’s hair back from her temple and smiled tenderly. “Damon and Tate are still the same men you loved half an hour ago. The fact they’re shifters doesn’t change who they are, baby girl.”

“Shifters? Is that what they are? Like werewolves?”

“I’m not sure I’m the one that should be telling you this.”

Ryah grabbed the older woman’s wrinkled hand, pleading with her eyes. “Please.”

Midge huffed out a big breath, dropping her chin to her chest and rocking her head on her shoulders. When she finally looked up, Ryah thought she detected just a hint of sadness in those faded blue eyes.

“Werewolves only change during the full moon,” Midge began.

“Their form becomes something between a man and a wolf.”

“Oh fish sticks,” Ryah breathed. “You mean werewolves are different than shifters, and they exist, too?”

Midge nodded. “Yes, but we are lycan. We can change any time, and always to a completely wolf form.”

Ryah didn’t really see the distinction, but she would worry about that later. Then the first part of her friend’s sentence hit her, and she reeled backward, tumbling from the stool and landing heavily on her bottom.

The pain barely registered. “We? You’re one of them? Oh, God, is anyone in this town human besides me?”

Midge glared at her, fisting her hands on her ample hips. “May I continue?”

Ryah nodded and resumed her seat. “You’re not going to eat me are you?” A little of the tension left Ryah’s shoulders at Midge’s snort. “Okay, go on.”

“We are hybrids. There are a lot of hybrids, but our kind is very rare. There are only a few hundred of us in the world.”

Ryah just gaped at her. She considered a few hundred to be rare?

“Damon, Tate, and myself—as well as the rest of our colony—are actually a triple hybrid.” Midge paused and appeared to be steeling herself to continue. “We are Gavolots, a lycan, demon, and vampire hybrid.”

Ryah stared at her and frowned. She had thought lycan and vampires only existed in fairytales. “What does that mean?”

“You know what a lycan is,” Midge said.

Ryah nodded.

“And you know what a vampire is.”

Ryah nodded again.

“Gavolot is a bastardization of the Macedonian word for devil. Demons are a lot like vampires. They are immortal, nocturnal, and survive on the blood of others. They are more vicious, however, and have very little reasoning of right and wrong. Feeding and breeding

are their only objectives.”

Ryah tried desperately to process everything the woman told her. She didn't find it easy though. When she woke up that morning, she had thought werewolves, vampires, and demons were just myths. She wondered if Santa Claus was real.

“I doubt Santa Claus is real,” Midge said around a laugh.

Oops! Ryah blushed, but smiled a little in return. In her agitation, she hadn't realized she spoken aloud. “Sorry, it's just a lot to absorb. You said demons are vicious. Should I be concerned?”

Midge shook her head, her face serious. “No one will take better care of you than those boys. Now, you never answered my question. What freaked you out more?”

Ryah sucked her bottom lip between her teeth and gnawed on it for a long time. “I guess that these things exist at all.” She suddenly felt the need to defend her actions. “I mean, what the hell was I supposed to do? Just nod and smile and act like it's perfectly natural to turn into a damn wolf?”

“It's natural for us.”

“So you said,” Ryah mumbled under her breath. Her head hurt, and her stomach cramped painfully from the stress of the past hour.

Midge leaned forward and kissed Ryah's temple. “You can stay here as long as you like. Take some time to sort out your thoughts. Just remember we are no different than we were before you knew about our gifts.”

Ryah snorted. Gifts indeed.

Midge pulled away and headed toward the door. “Just think about it. The answer will come to you. I have to let them know you're safe, or those two will tear the entire town apart looking for you. I won't tell them you're here, though.”

Ryah nodded gratefully but couldn't form words. She watched Midge slip from the room and shut the door.

Propping her elbows on the bar, she dropped her face into her palms and groaned. The entire town had gone insane and pulled her

kicking and screaming behind it. With a deep sigh, she thought back to her arrival in the little rural community.

Carson moved them to Wicked River, Alabama, nearly two years ago to be closer to his family. Ryah had still yet to meet a one of them. She had never even heard of the place and doubted it existed on any map.

The residents of the small, sleepy town had seemed like a strange lot. Within the first few months of working at the diner, she noticed people were a lot more active after dark. Most customers ordered their steaks rare. Gross, but not concrete evidence of anything amiss within the city limits.

She also noticed people seemed to sniff a lot. They sniffed at everything—their food, themselves, each other, the air. They growled when they were angry. Not the normal human sounds of agitation, but low, feral sounds straight from Animal Planet.

Strange stories about the little creek south of town that shared its name with the community circulated through the restaurant. Supposedly, the stream ran red on the full moon, the water tainted in blood. Ryah shivered at the image. She had yet to see it, never venturing anywhere other than home or the diner, so she couldn't confirm the legend.

The strangest thing had to be the wolf population. She had even seen them roaming the shadows of the city during the nighttime. While not overly educated, even she realized how odd it seemed for so many different breeds to live within the same area. She had seen gray, red, tan, silver, and black since her arrival. On the nights of the full moon, the animal population seemed to double, while the humans of Wicked River were all but nonexistent.

Asinine thoughts of sentient monsters chased themselves around her overworked brain. An image of a huge black wolf with menacing yellow eyes flashed behind her closed eyelids. The wolf stared back at her, baring his fangs, saliva dripping from his snarling lips.

Ryah squeezed her eyes tighter, trying to hold on to the image, to

follow the thread of remembrance back to its origin. Moving from the creature's face, she travelled along its furry chest to the massive paws resting on the faded and cracked yellow planks of...

Her eyes flew open, and she gasped aloud. The wolf crouched on the porch where moments before her husband had stood, screaming obscenities at her. Then with a loud yell that turned into a spine tingling howl, his body had begun to melt and reform, the bones crunching, and sick popping noises emanated from him as he changed.

Ryah had screamed over and over until her throat became raw and her voice died away into a hoarse cry. Then she had fainted.

Jumping down from her seat, she paced the tiny room, her hands fisted in her hair. When she'd awoken alone on the sofa that night, she'd naturally assumed she had dreamed the entire thing. "Carson, Damon, Tate, Midge." She ticked them off aloud as she continued to walk in circles. It followed logically Midge's partners, James and Lydia, were shifters as well.

How had she not put the pieces together before? Perhaps she was the only human in town. Now, she just had to figure out how she felt about the knowledge. She believed in aliens, ghosts, poltergeists, voodoo, and alternate planes of existence. She believed in God, Satan, Heaven, Hell, and angels. So, why not demons? Why did she have so much trouble wrapping her mind around vampires and lycans?

## Chapter Six

Tate stomped about the house, snarling and grumbling. “Why can’t we go get her?”

Damon groaned inwardly. “Put yourself in her place. Her entire world has been turned upside down. Give her some time to work through it. She’s a smart, open-minded girl. She’ll be back.”

“It’s been a fucking week!” Tate came to a stop and glared. “So, she’s okay with Midge being a Gavolot, but not us? How is that reasonable or fair, let alone make any sense?”

“Midge is a little less intimidating than we are, love. Not to mention, she didn’t actually shift in front of Ryah. Seeing is believing. It’s a lot easier to pretend none of this is real when you don’t have a wolf staring you in the face.”

“I want to see her,” his mate answered flatly.

“Midge is watching after her. We can’t make her accept us, Tate.”

Tate looked as though he would argue, but his ringing cell phone interrupted him. He dug it out of his pocket and stared at the display in shock and excitement. “Hello? Ryah, honey, is that you?”

Damon jumped up from his seat on the sofa and hurried over to mate. He pressed his head close to Tate’s, frowning at their zeta’s panicked whisper.

“Tate. Please, come. There’s someone—something, I don’t know—just please come!” Her voice rose until she practically shouted the last word.

“Where are you, baby?” Damon asked loudly.

“In the little apartment over the diner. Shit!” Damon heard the loud thump come over the line. “Hurry, please hurry!”

“Lock the door and hide,” Tate said. “We’re coming. Just hold on, baby. We’re coming.”

\* \* \* \*

Ryah huddled inside the closet, trembling right down to her toes. She jumped and covered her mouth with her hand to muffle the cry. Another loud bang sounded against the apartment door as if someone rammed it repeatedly, trying to break it down.

More frightening and disturbing than the pounding, were the quiet growls, slight chuffing noises, and almost silent scraping against the wood that had awoken her from sleep.

Visions of eight-foot-tall Bigfoots and vicious-looking weregorillas with razor-sharp fangs assaulted her. Terrified and shaking, she did the only thing that made sense. She grabbed her cell phone and hid.

Only two people had ever been there for her, protected her, and cared for her unconditionally. Though she still didn’t know what to feel about them being some kind of freaky hybrid, preternatural beasts, she had no choice but to trust them. So, she called Tate, and prayed he would once again come to her rescue.

Another blow to the door had her scrunching down further in the corner as tears streamed down her face, and her chest burned with the effort to contain her sobs. “Please hurry,” she whispered over and over, clutching her phone to her chest and rocking back and forth.

Suddenly, a loud howl sounded from somewhere in the night. She heard the door downstairs crash open, and everything outside her own door stopped. Heavy padded footsteps raced down the stairs, growing fainter as they descended.

Ryah started to get to her feet, but a loud yelp, several vicious barks, and a resounding howl froze her to the floor. She listened intently, her body quaking when she heard more footsteps slowly navigating the staircase.

A soft knock came at the front door, and Ryah squeezed her eyes closed, mumbling fervent prayers under her breath.

“Ryah? Honey, come open the door.” Damon’s smooth voice drifted to her, and Ryah didn’t stop to think.

She scrambled to her feet, burst out of the closet, and flew across the living room. She fumbled with the locks until they finally clicked and wrenched open the door. Before anyone could speak, she launched herself into Damon’s arms, gripping the front of his shirt in a white knuckled grip and sobbing into his muscled chest.

Werewolves, vampires, or Martians on the moon, she couldn’t stop loving them. She had tried, almost convinced herself to forget them and move on. In the end, she had failed miserably.

Midge was right. They were still the same men she fell in love with. No amount of mythological bullshit could change that. No one would ever care for her the way these shifters did.

Damon swept her into his arms and carried her across the room to the bed. He eased himself onto the mattress, holding her in his lap, and rocked her like a baby. “Shh, it’s okay, Ryah. You’re fine.”

Tate moved to sit beside them, smoothing his fingers up and down her spine. “Hush now, love. No one can hurt you.”

A week of anxiety, uncertainty, and emotional upheaval crashed down on her like a tidal wave. Ryah reached for Tate with one arm, winding it around his neck, and pulled him into their embrace. Her other hand still gripped Damon’s shirt, and she buried her face between their throats and wailed like a newborn.

She found herself drawn to them in some way she couldn’t explain. Some deep-rooted, instinctual part of her soul yearned to be near them, and despaired at the thought of separation. More than sexual attraction, or even love, an overwhelming sense of belonging seized her when these men were close.

“What’s wrong with me? Why do I feel this way?” Her words came out muffled and distorted as she continued to weep.

“Let us take you home, baby.” Damon nuzzled into her hair.

“We’ll explain anything you want to know.”

\* \* \* \*

Damon’s heart thudded painfully inside his chest. What did he do? Happy, angry, and horny he understood. Tears, however, scared the hell out of him. He didn’t have much experience with females, especially human females. They were awfully emotional, bursting into tears at the strangest times. The knowledge he had done something to cause Ryah’s tears only added to his distress.

Tate sat beside Ryah on the sofa, gathered her into his arms, and stroked her hair softly.

Thank heaven for Tate. His mate just had a way about him that soothed and calmed everyone around.

“Why do I feel this way?” Ryah repeated her question from the apartment. “Why do I feel like I can’t really breathe unless I’m with you?”

“Shh, Ryah. It’s okay.” Tate spoke quietly against her hair. He kissed the top of her head then pushed her away to look into her eyes. “How much did Midge explain to you?”

Ryah cocked her head to the side and frowned. “I guess everything. She said you were Gava-somethings, which means you’re hybrids. You turn into wolves, and you drink blood.”

Tate nodded slowly. “Yes, though we can only drink from our mates. If we take blood from anyone else, it would be like poison to us.”

Damon closed his eyes and groaned inwardly. That had been cheery.

“So…” She looked back and forth between them. “You two are mated?”

“Yes. Since we were eighteen, so almost fifteen years now.” Damon smiled at Tate as he answered her.

“Then, why me? You two are obviously happy together. What do

you want me for?" She jumped up and started pacing the room. "And why the hell am I even here? I should be sitting in a padded room right now. Why do I feel like I need to be with you?"

Damon had never seen her so agitated before. His heart ached at the tearstains that marked her cheeks and the red puffiness around her eyes. He wanted to go to her, but doubted she would welcome his touch.

"We feel drawn to our mates. It's like a compulsion to be close to each other," he answered quietly.

Her eyes widened, and she began shaking her head frantically. "I'm...I mean we are...I'm your mate?" she stammered. "But, I'm not a shifter." She jabbed at her chest violently.

"Gavolots have two mates. We have one mate for our vampire nature and one for our lycan. Our vampire mate is almost always another Gavolot, but sometimes we won't share a lycan mate. Some of us actually have three mates. Our lycan mate can be a shifter, a vampire, and yes...a human."

Ryah stumbled backward and looked up into his eyes. "You have two mates? So, I'm mated to both of you?"

Damon nodded. He wondered when it would all become too much and Ryah would run again.

She studied him for a long time then turned to eye Tate for a while. "But I'm yours and Tate's, right? I mean, there won't be anyone else. Just the three of us?"

Damon grinned widely. His girl had quite the possessive streak, and he found it a huge turn on. "Yes, you are my mate as well as Tate's. There will be no one else."

She nodded curtly, crossing her arms over her chest. "Good."

He couldn't help but chuckle at the absurdity of it all. They had unloaded everything on her. She knew they were triple hybrid shifters that drank blood, and Tate had even shifted in front of her. Ryah's main concern, however, lie in having to share. He found it nothing short of a miracle.

“So, will I turn into a vampire, lycan thingy if you bite me?”

Vampire, lycan thingy? She was too much. Tate snorted before he answered. “No, you will not turn into a thingy. Only the pure bloods have the ability to change humans, and it takes much more than just a bite.”

Ryah resumed her earlier position on the sofa beside Tate and chewed on her lip.

“But some of the stuff in the movies and books are accurate, right?”

Damon nodded, but his brow wrinkled in confusion as he moved to sit on her other side. “Some of it, yes. Why do you ask?”

To his surprise, Ryah’s face flushed red, and she worried her lower lip more vigorously between her teeth, crinkling her nose. She wouldn’t look at him.

“So you can smell when I’m all hot and bothered, can’t you? When I’m turned on?”

Oh! Damon didn’t know how to respond. True, they could scent her arousal, but he didn’t want to embarrass her further by saying it. So, he went to his fallback plan. When in doubt, turn to Tate.

Tate chuckled, drawing Ryah’s attention, causing her face to redden further. Damon glared at him and growled.

Tate held up his hands in a gesture of peace as he slowly gained control of himself. “Sorry,” he said to Damon. Then to Ryah, “Yes, we can smell it when you are aroused. It’s unbelievable, completely intoxicating.” He shivered a little to punctuate his claim.

“But, you don’t want me.” Ryah’s voice turned soft and vulnerable. Damon didn’t miss that she said it as a statement rather than a question.

“We do want you. How could you think otherwise? Sometimes I think I’ll go crazy with wanting you,” he hurried to assure her.

She shook her head slowly. “No. I mean, you barely touch me, you’ve only kissed me the one time—”

“What?” Tate yelled, cutting her off.

Ryah whipped around to face him, fluttering her hands around her mouth. “Oh, Tate, I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to. Well, I did mean to, but I thought it was okay. You said...the other day...oh crap!” She slumped back into the cushions and closed her eyes.

“Ryah, look at me.” Tate’s voice lowered, sexy and persuasive. He waited until she opened her eyes before speaking again. “It’s okay. I’m not mad. I just want to know when I’m going to get my kiss.”

Damon waited, breath held, to see if Ryah would deny him. He still lacked the confidence that they could convince her to stay.

His breath rushed out in a pathetic moan when Ryah leaned forward hesitantly and pressed her plump lips to Tate’s mouth. Damon reached down to rub his palm over his suddenly aching groin as he watched Tate’s tongue glide along the seam of Ryah’s lips, seeking entrance.

When she opened for him with a whimper, Damon thought he would come in his jeans. He wanted in on that—wanted a sample of the combined taste of his mates. He reached over, placing his hands on Ryah’s waist, and felt his erection wilt immediately.

Fuck! They were going to have to do something about Carson Owens in a hurry. He didn’t know how much more he could take.

Ryah eased back and looked down at Tate’s lap. She turned her head and peeked down at Damon’s groin as well. “See, you don’t want me. You can’t fake that.” She nodded to Damon’s groin. “I don’t understand any of this mate stuff, but I’m sorry you two were saddled with one you’re not attracted to. I promise I’ll keep out of your way until I can find somewhere to go.”

She jumped from the sofa and hurried down the hall to her bedroom.

The minute Damon’s hands lost contact with Ryah, his cock perked right up again. It currently strained against his zipper, throbbing and aching like a bitch.

He looked over at Tate and found his mate in a similar condition. Tate groaned and scrubbed a hand over his face. His other hand went

to the mound in his pants, and he flopped back on the sofa.

“So, who’s going to tell her?” Damon smirked.

## Chapter Seven

Tate knocked on Ryah's door and waited. Damon stood behind him, his warm chest pressed against his back. When he didn't receive an answer, he tried the doorknob, only to find it locked.

"Ryah, please open the door."

He waited for what seemed like forever, but finally, the door cracked open, and Ryah peeped out. "Can we talk? There are things you need to know," he pleaded. He couldn't bear for his girl to hurt.

She nodded and stepped back, opening the door wider. He frowned when he noticed that she wore a tattered, flannel nightgown at least two sizes too big for her small frame. They were going to have to go shopping. She deserved better.

She crawled up in bed and settled against the headboard, pulling the blankets up around her waist.

Tate approached the bed wearily and perched on the side. Damon followed his lead, moving around the mattress to sit on the other side, but keeping a respectful distance. "Ryah, first, you need to know we are very attracted to you." He held up his hand when she opened her mouth to protest. "Let me explain."

He waited for her to nod, then took a deep breath. She didn't look as though she believed him. They would have to fix that. "Okay, let me show you something before I explain."

Her eyebrows pulled together in confusion, but she dipped her head again. Tate edged up the bed to nestle beside her. "Kiss me again."

She shook her head quickly, her eyes rounding in disbelief. "Tate, it's all right if you don't want me, but please don't do this to me. You

know I want you.” She looked at Damon. “No matter what you are, I can’t help but want you both.”

Damon smiled and moved closer to her side, but didn’t reach for her. “Kiss him, Ryah.”

She huffed and threw her hands up as if completely exasperated with the two of them, then pulled Tate to her roughly, attacking his mouth with such ferocity that he momentarily lost his senses. Recovering quickly, he wrapped his hands in her hair and took over the kiss. He rarely pursued the more dominant role in the bedroom with Damon, but he discovered he liked being in control.

Ryah’s tongue plunged into his open mouth, slipping and sliding, dueling with his. He tilted her head back, deepening the kiss, and plundering the depths of her sweet, warm mouth. Her soft moan pulled a growl from his throat, and he pushed her back against the headboard, crawling up her body.

He lost himself in the taste and smell of his mate, totally forgetting his experiment, forgetting everything. He couldn’t remember why he kissed her, but he never wanted to stop. Ryah felt hot, soft, pliable beneath his hands, and he needed more of the curvaceous body undulating beneath him.

Damon cleared his throat, the sound dousing some of Tate’s desire. He released Ryah’s mouth reluctantly, and glanced at his other mate, grinning sheepishly. Damon groaned, reaching down to adjust his jeans. The lust blazing from his eyes had Tate fighting not to throw him to the mattress and rip his clothes away.

Ryah appeared a little dazed, her cheeks pink, her lips swollen and glistening, her hair tasseled from his fingers. She looked like a debauched angel, and he had never seen anything more delectable.

Then her luscious lips turned down at the corners as her eyes focused on his zipper. “Okay, so what was that supposed to prove?” She sounded angry. Tate couldn’t blame her. He felt damn frustrated himself.

“Look at Damon,” he directed.

She rolled her eyes but looked at him. Her eyes nearly bugged from their sockets when she zeroed in on the sizeable lump at his groin. Seconds later, she shook her head and turned back to Tate, frowning again. “That could just be from wanting you.”

He sighed. God, did she have to be so cynical, so...stubborn? Sitting back, making sure there was no contact between them, he looked down at his lap. His erection sprang to life, growing and swelling inside his jeans.

She gasped in awe. “But...I don’t...I mean...oh wow.”

Tate chuckled, but it sounded a bit strained. Though pleased by the obvious compliment, he needed relief in the worst way. “Now, take my hand.” He offered his hand, and she placed hers in it tentatively.

She gasped again as his erection immediately deflated. “Now take Damon’s hand.”

Ryah took the hand Damon offered her, shaking her head as his erection subsided as well. “What the hell is going on?” She sounded amazed, confused, and a little frustrated.

Join the club.

“It’s the magic of our kind—our laws. As long as another has a claim on you, Mr. Happy isn’t making an appearance when we touch you.” Tate grimaced. Mr. Happy was anything but at the moment.

“But why?”

“Hell if I know,” he grumbled. “I think it has something to do with protecting birthrights and status in the colony.”

Ryah considered him for a minute before asking her next question. “Someone else has a claim on me?”

“Your husband does, baby.” Damon smoothed her dark hair back from her face.

“That doesn’t even make sense. He’s human!” she whined. “I’m human. What does a piece of paper have to do with laws of the supernatural?”

Tate groaned softly. He did not want to do this. “You’re right. A

human's claim on you would not matter, but..." He trailed off, and for once, turned to Damon instead of the reverse.

Damon took Ryah's hand and tried for a smile. It just looked painful. "Baby, Carson is not human. I'm not sure what he is, but I know he is preternatural."

"And he has a claim on me? How? Our marriage?" She sounded more hysterical with every word. Tate ground his teeth together, his fingers itching to wrap around Carson's throat.

"All he has to do is speak the words." Damon held up his hands when Ryah's eyebrows shot to her hairline. "Shitty, I know, but that's the way things are. He must renounce his claim on you before Tate and I can take you as our own."

"That fucking bastard!" she spat.

Tate fell speechless, shocked by her outburst. Ryah rarely cursed, and he had never seen her so angry. Damn, if it didn't make him hard as a rock. Well, it would if she didn't still have a hold on his hand.

He melted when Damon pulled her into his arms and kissed her temple. He really was just a big teddy bear. Not that Tate would ever say it out loud. He rather liked his balls were they were—still attached.

"We will deal with Carson, so just forget about him for now," Damon murmured. He eased Ryah back and smiled down at her. "How about some of what you were giving Tate?" He brushed her lips with his. "Kiss me." She complied eagerly, wrapping her arms around his neck, and pulling him closer, crushing their mouths together.

Tate pressed against Ryah's back, his hands wandering over her shoulders, down her ribcage, and over her hips. He nibbled at the back of her neck, smiling against the soft skin when he heard both of his mates moan loudly.

Their pricks may be useless, but there were other ways to please their girl. "Let us make you feel good," he whispered raggedly against her ear.

\* \* \* \*

Ryah's body trembled at the barrage of sensations coursing through her body. How could she have ever thought to give this up?

Her breasts ached to be touched as her nipples hardened to the point of pain. A trail of heat followed where Tate and Damon brushed their strong hands over her skin.

Damon's tongue continued to duel with hers, and she knew intuitively he needed her to submit to him. Both of her men needed to be in charge, to dominate and possess her, and she had no qualms about placing her pleasure in their capable hands.

This felt nothing like the rough and demanding sex she had endured with Carson. Though Tate and Damon sought to take control, they were gentle and passionate, obviously caring about her pleasure as much as their own. Another reason for her to stop worrying about what they were and embrace who they were.

Lost in the feel of Damon's tongue sliding against hers, and Tate's hands caressing her skin, she nearly leapt off of the bed when a loud pounding came from the front door. She knew exactly who waited on their front porch, as if just thinking his name had conjured him.

The pounding increased, accompanied by angry shouting. "Ryah! I know you're in there! You get your stupid ass out here right now. I'm taking you home, you ungrateful little cunt! Ryah!"

She buried her face in Damon's neck, her entire body quaking in fear. Carson promised he would destroy anyone that tried to stand in his way, and she knew he meant it. Tate and Damon would not be safe as long as she stayed.

Damon squeezed her briefly then eased her out of his arms, transferring her to Tate, who pulled her to him, smoothing his hand down her back. "Shh, baby. Have you already forgotten what we are?"

She smiled against the warm skin of his throat. Leave it to Tate to

make her feel better. “How could I?” she whispered.

“Good,” he replied firmly. “We will kill that fucker before we let him take you.”

Ryah reared back to look at him. She could tell from the tense set of his jaw and the anger burning in his eyes, he spoke the truth. As much as she loathed Carson, she didn’t want him dead.

The pounding on the front door stopped, and Carson’s voice echoed around the house as he raged, snarling and screaming. “Where the fuck is she? Where is my wife?”

She panicked, her fear for Damon overriding her own self-preservation. Clambering to get loose of Tate’s arms, she threw herself from the bed and raced toward the sound of her husband’s voice. She had to get to Damon. Carson was evil, vile, and fully trained in the use of a firearm.

Her fear dissipated, and she grew angrier the closer she came to the living room. She did not want anyone dead, but if Carson hurt Damon, she would kill him herself.

Strong arms wrapped around her waist from behind, hauling her off her feet. “Whoa there, tiger,” Tate said around a chuckle. “I think Damon has it under control, don’t you?”

She watched Damon wrap his long fingers around Carson’s throat, cutting off the rest of his rant. He slammed the smaller man against the wall, Carson’s feet dangling off the floor.

“Shadow Walker,” Damon growled in his face.

Tate snarled, and his head jerked around to stare intently at the two men by the front door. He pushed Ryah behind him and motioned for her stay put. Walking up behind Damon, he eased around, leaned in close to Carson, and sniffed.

“Oh fucking hell,” he groaned. The grin he gave Carson was full of malice, but with an edge of cockiness. “You’re in the shit now, pup.”

## Chapter Eight

Damon tightened his fingers around Carson's throat. "Who are your makers, asshole?"

Carson grinned maniacally, even as he struggled to breathe. Damon pulled the man forward then slammed his head back against the wall. "Answer me!"

"Fuck you," he sneered.

Damon reared back and punched the bastard right in the face. He gained great satisfaction at the sound of bones crunching beneath his fist and the volume of Carson's cry.

He couldn't believe he had never sensed it before. Carson Owens was a Shadow Walker. Rare, but he had seen it before.

Carson could shift, but it would be more painful than a born lycan's transformation. He could not walk into direct sunlight, but he could tread in the shadows during the day. He required both food and blood to survive, and though not nearly as strong as Damon or Tate, he was much stronger than a regular human. Petite and delicate, it was a miracle Ryah had survived the beatings.

Small ripples of power emanated from him. Little electrical shocks zinged through Damon's fingertips where they met with Carson's skin. The man had a little power, his turning not recent, so why had Damon not scented him before now? Only purebloods could mask their scent. Hell, even Damon couldn't do it.

"Did he bite you?" Tate stared at Ryah as he spoke. He looked a little sick, his mouth and nose twisted like he smelled something repulsive. Damon understood the feeling.

Ryah cringed and dropped her head. "Yes," she mumbled,

“sometimes as punishment and sometimes during sex.”

Damon squeezed his eyes shut, and tightened his fingers reflexively around Carson’s throat. Carson had taken blood from her. As Damon and Tate’s zeta, Ryah’s blood would mask his scent from them, and they would smell only their mate.

He had not fed from her in nearly two weeks, though. Damon couldn’t smell even a trace of her on the man he had pinned to the wall. He would make damn sure Carson Owens never touched what belonged to him again.

“You’re not even married are you?” Tate asked.

Damon opened his eyes when he heard Ryah gasp. She had both hands covering her mouth, and her eyes opened wide.

“No, but human’s wouldn’t understand my claim on her. Besides, I had to tell the little whore something to keep her with me.”

Damon slammed Carson’s head against the wall again for his slight against Ryah. “Renounce your claim,” he demanded.

“No, she belongs to me.”

“Not anymore she doesn’t. Renounce your claim, or we kill you. Either way, you’re never going to touch her again,” Tate growled.

“She’s mine! I’m going to take her home and teach her some goddamn respect. Then I’m going to fuck her until she screams, until she begs me to stop.” He leered at them, this upper lip curling over his teeth.

Before Damon knew what happened, Tate tackled Carson, ripping the man from his grip and knocking all three of them to the floor. Tate landed on top of Carson, driving his fist into the man’s face repeatedly. His fangs extended, his face twisting into a mask of fury.

Damon hesitated to intervene. He remembered the bruises on Ryah’s creamy skin over the last year. He thought of the phone calls from her, terrified and pleading for them to help her.

The bastard deserved everything Tate dealt him.

Ryah’s scream decided it for him, though. He lifted Tate off of Carson and threw him against the wall. “Control it!” he barked. Tate

glared at him, but remained against the wall, his fists clenched and his chest heaving.

Damon turned back to crouch over Carson's battered face. "Renounce. Your. Claim."

Carson stared at him sullenly for a long minute before grounding out, "I renounce my claim on the female, Ryah Hardaway." Then he smiled nastily through the blood on his face. "For now."

Damon lifted the man by his shirt collar until their noses almost touched. "Leave town, pup, because if I ever see you near her again, I will not be as merciful."

Tate opened the front door, and Damon threw Carson with enough force to send him flying out into the driveway, where he tumbled and rolled before coming to a stop on his back.

He slammed the door shut and reached for Tate, pulling his mate into his arms. He held him tight for just a moment, savoring their victory, then eased back to take Tate's hands in his own. He brought them up to his lips, brushing soft kisses over the bruised and scraped knuckles. They were already beginning to heal.

"You were wonderful, baby. Truly terrifying," he teased.

Tate snorted, pulling his hands away. "Asshole," he muttered back playfully.

"What just happened?" Ryah whispered, drawing their attention.

They rushed to her, Tate pulling her into his arms, and Damon enveloping them both in his own. "You're ours now, Ryah. That's what just happened."

"I was never married to him? For really real? And what the hell is he?" She sounded anxious and afraid, but also a little relieved.

"For really real." Damon chuckled. "And he is a Shadow Walker. He's been bitten and changed by a vampire and a lycan."

"I thought you said only the purebloods could change people?"

"True. But I don't mean a vampire-lycan hybrid. I mean he was bitten, drained, and given the blood of both a vampire and a lycan at the same time," Damon explained.

“That’s gross.” Ryah wrinkled her nose and cocked her head to the side, considering him. “I saw him change once,” she confessed quietly. “I passed out and when I woke up, I thought it was all just a dream.” She shuddered a little. “Does it always hurt when you feed from someone?”

“Carson Owens is a certifiable prick,” Tate growled. Then added in a softer tone, “We would never hurt you, Ryah.”

She nodded and smiled. “I know,” she answered confidently. “I know.”

Suddenly exhausted, Damon sagged against his mates. It had been a long, emotionally driven day. As much as he longed to continue what they had started in Ryah’s bedroom, he didn’t want their first time with the girl to have any connection to Carson Owens.

Ryah belonged to them. Forever. They had all the time in the world.

\* \* \* \*

Damon kissed Ryah’s forehead, then leaned over her to kiss Tate’s. “Let’s get you two in bed, huh? Ryah, would you like to stay in your room tonight?” It had been four days since her return home, and Damon wanted her in their bed.

“Oh, umm,” she mumbled, looking hesitant and uncertain.

“Would you like to sleep with us tonight?” Tate asked quietly. “The choice is yours, honey. We will never force you to do anything you aren’t comfortable with.”

“Do you mind if I sleep with you?” She still sounded uncertain.

Damon held his composure, but on the inside, he whooped like a kid on Christmas morning. “You are our mate, Ryah. We wouldn’t ask if we didn’t want you.” He brushed her lips softly with his own.

Ryah nodded and turned to Tate, apparently seeking confirmation.

Tate’s smile lit up his entire face. “Don’t look at me, little girl. I would have had you in our bed from the get go. We just wanted you

to feel comfortable, and we figured you needed your own space to do it.”

Ryah slung her arms around his neck and planted a brief, but searing, kiss on his lips. “I love you,” she whispered when she pulled away.

“Love you too,” he responded dazedly.

“Hey, what about me?” Damon pouted.

“Oh well, I suppose I love you as well,” she quipped.

“You suppose?” He gawked at the woman in front of him.

“Well, Tate is cuter. I guess you have your uses as well, though. I mean, we do need someone around to lift the heavy stuff.” She winked at him then giggled as she took off running down the hall.

Tate laughed so hard he had to prop himself against the wall to keep from falling over. “Don’t worry, big guy. I guess I love you, too,” he gasped around his chuckles.

Damon didn’t know what to do. His mates were ganging up on him, and he had a feeling he better get used to it. Honestly, he found it cute and fun. “Asshole,” he mumbled to Tate as he took off down the hall after his other mischievous mate. “Ryah, you little shit, get your ass back here.” Though he tried for commanding, he couldn’t keep the laughter from his voice.

Ryah hurried back down the hallway, coming to a stop right in front of him, and bouncing on her toes. She held her hands behind her back and looked up at him innocently. “You bellowed?”

It warmed his heart to watch her flirting with him, teasing him. She possessed none of the scared mouse look from when they had first met her. Gone was the terrified and disbelieving woman that had run screaming from the garage. She looked like a regular brat.

“You have about two seconds to give me a kiss and proper pledge of love, or I’m going to bend you over my knee.” Damon arched a brow at his little mate. “I’m waiting.”

Ryah tilted her head to the side and contemplated him. “Well, now a spanking does sound pretty kinky. Decisions, decisions,” she

muttered, shaking her head.

He stepped forward and wrapped his arms around her tiny waist. “Why don’t you give me a kiss now,” he whispered huskily, “and we’ll see about that spanking tomorrow?”

Ryah’s head tipped back on her shoulders, and she smiled. “I like the way you think, Mr. Lewis.” Then she twined her arms around his neck and rose up to give him a kiss that melted him on the spot.

“Get a room.” Tate chuckled as he walked up behind them, wrapped his arms around Damon’s waist, and pressed his chest to Damon’s back. “Preferably ours.”

Ryah pulled away from Damon’s mouth and looked over his shoulder at Tate. “You can sleep on the couch,” she said casually.

Tate jerked back, unwinding his arms from Damon’s waist, and stepping around him. “What the hell for?” he demanded.

Ryah didn’t back down. She put her hands on her hips and glared right back. “Because you, Mr. Jennings, left a sink full of dishes this morning, water all over the bathroom floor, and I found your smelly socks in the couch cushions again.”

He looked properly chastised and bowed his head. “Sorry, baby,” he mumbled. “I’ll do the dishes first thing in the morning.”

Damon bit the inside of his cheek so hard he actually tasted blood. Ryah’s little temper tantrums were funny as hell when not directed at him.

“Yes, you will. I still think you need to sleep on the couch and think about what you’ve done. I don’t bust my hump around here just so you can dirty it up again.”

Tate still stared at the floor, so he missed the quick smile and wink Ryah threw at Damon. He held on to his composure by sheer willpower.

Tate finally looked up at her, his eyes pleading. “Aw, come on, baby. I don’t want to sleep on the couch.” He turned his attention to Damon. “Damon, tell her to let me sleep with you guys. This isn’t fair.”

Damon had to look away. He was seconds away from losing it. “That’s up to Ryah,” he managed to get out without cracking up.

Tate dropped to his knees and placed his hands on her hips. “You are so pretty, and smart, too. You smell good, and your skin is really nice. Come on, have a heart. Please,” he pleaded. “I’ll take you shopping tomorrow.”

Ryah narrowed her eyes. “What kind of shopping?”

He perked up immediately. “Anything you want, baby. Clothes, shoes, purses, make up. We’ll even go and get your hair done.”

She pulled the ends of her long ebony hair through her fingers. “What’s wrong with my hair?” she asked icily.

Tate looked horrified. “Nothing, nothing is wrong. It’s beautiful, perfect even. I just thought girls liked that kind of stuff.”

Damon couldn’t hold back anymore. He doubled over, clutching his sides, laughter bubbling up from deep in his belly. He just laughed harder when Tate looked up and frowned at him.

“Well, it so happens, you’re right,” Ryah said to Tate. “It’s a deal, and you don’t have to sleep on the couch tonight.”

Tate squeezed her around the waist and buried his face in her midsection. “Thank you. I promise...anything you want.”

She joined in with Damon’s laughter as she held Tate close. After regaining control of herself, she kissed the top of Tate’s head and sighed.

Damon swallowed around the lump in his throat. If life got better than this, he had yet to see it.

## **Chapter Nine**

“Oh, guys, I don’t know about this.” Ryah bit her lip and pulled against Tate’s hold on her arm.

“I do,” he retorted, pulling her more insistently. “Do you really like wearing that ratty old nightgown?” He raised a brow at her and smiled.

Ryah bit her lip. She hated wearing the thing, but it was all she had. “No,” she whispered. “But, Victoria’s Secret?”

Damon took hold of her other arm and pulled her through the doorway. “Pick out five or six different things you like and go try them on.”

Her eyes widened as she looked around at the displays of underwear, brassieres, and lingerie. She had heard about places like this, but never in her life had she been to one. To her, going to a dollar store equaled couture. Most of the clothes she owned she had been wearing since high school. Thank goodness she had never gotten fat.

She circled the racks shyly, shaking her head. She couldn’t wear any of the sexy things hanging there. Her boys had lost their minds.

Tate had been serious about taking her shopping. Though excited, she assumed they would go to one of the little thrift stores or consignment shops in Wicked River. When she mentioned it to Tate and Damon, the men just looked at her as if she was speaking Arabic.

Instead, they loaded her up and drove half an hour into Tuscaloosa. The city was enormous, and she had been on sensory overload before even stepping out of Damon’s beast of a pickup. The sights, the smells, the noise...How could people even think with so much noise?

She cast a covert glance at her men. They each carried several huge bags. Everything in those bags belonged to her, and it made her uncomfortable. Tate, true to his word, had spared no cost. Close to a thousand dollars' worth of clothes, shoes, makeup, jewelry, sunglasses, purses, scarves, and other accessories resided in those bags. She would never be able to pay it all back.

"I thought girls were supposed to be good at shopping?" Tate teased as he slid up beside her. He placed a half dozen items in her hands and nodded toward the dressing room. "Same show and dance, woman. Get moving."

Ryah resisted the urge to groan. Some of the stuff in her hands looked downright indecent. She slipped into the dressing room and inventoried the merchandise. The two pairs of pajama pants, two pajama shorts, and four matching tank tops were okay. The itty-bitty, black sheer nightie, however, made her palms sweat. The hot pink lace panty and bra set made her balk. Tate could not be serious.

Knowing they wouldn't let her leave until she paraded around like a slut, she decided to get those out of the way first.

She shimmied into the hot pink number and whimpered. Apparently, Tate had misjudged her size. The underwear didn't even cover all of her ass, and her breast spilled over the top of the bra. "Tate, I think I need a bigger size," she yelled through the door.

"Let me see," he called back.

"I'm not coming out there in this!"

"Well, then I'm coming in." His voice sounded from right outside.

Ryah opened the door to the changing stall and peeked around it. Only Tate stood in the dressing room, his arms crossed over his chest.

"Don't laugh," she demanded, hesitantly slipping out of the stall and standing in front of him. Fisting her hands on her hips, she looked down at her breasts, then turned around, and looked over her shoulder at her ass. "See, it doesn't fit."

"Holy fuck," Damon breathed as he walked in the room behind Tate.

Ryah's cheeks heated, and she turned around to face them, crossing her arms over her torso to cover as much as possible. "Is it that bad?"

"Holy fuck," Damon repeated. She really wished he would stop saying that. Dropping her head, she shuffled toward the dressing stall.

"Stop," Damon ordered. He dropped the bags on the floor and marched right up to her. Wrapping one arm around her waist and taking her hand in his, he placed her palm against his crotch and groaned. "What does this tell you?" His voice went raw and sultry.

Ryah shivered as she massaged the straining bulge behind his zipper. "But, it doesn't fit," she whispered shakily.

Tate came up behind her and pressed his sizeable erection against her ass. "Oh, it fits." He rubbed against her, moaning as he did. "We need to go. Like right fucking now." He yanked her away from Damon and shoved her back into the stall. "Get dressed and do it fast."

\* \* \* \*

Tate didn't realize how late it had gotten until he hurried out of the mall and stepped into darkness. Hell, they had spent the entire day and closed the mall. He couldn't complain, though. It had been a hell of a day.

He would reflect on it later when his cock wasn't straining against his jeans, throbbing and painful. He had never seen anything as sexy as the sight of Ryah in that hot pink barely-there set. It took every bit of his willpower to resist pushing her against the wall and driving into her right there in the dressing room.

He groaned internally as they made their way through the emptying parking lot. He didn't know how they expected him to survive the thirty-minute trek home. Damon better damn sure drive like the demon he was.

Arriving at the pickup, Damon threw the bags unceremoniously

into the bed of the truck and closed the bedcover with more force than necessary. Apparently, he endured the strain as well. "Get in," he growled.

Ryah's face paled, and Tate knew they were scaring the hell out of her. He hurried her around to the passenger side and opened the door. "It's okay, honey. We're just a little worked up, is all. You are too hot for your own good." He kissed her head and gave her a hand up.

"Fuck this," Damon growled, slamming the door behind him. He pulled Ryah into his arms and claimed her mouth with a kiss that set even Tate's blood boiling.

As much as his cock protested, he just couldn't do it. He would not have the first time with their new mate take place in a fucking pickup in the middle of a parking lot. "Damon," he said loudly.

Damon jerked back and growled at him. Tate cleared his throat and nodded toward the windshield of the cab. "Do you really want to do this here?"

Damon seemed to come to his senses, and his features softened. "Point taken. Are you opposed to speeding tickets?"

"Whatever, just hurry." Tate held on by a tattered thread.

Ryah still hadn't said a word. He helped her with her seatbelt and wrapped an arm around her waist. "If this is happening too fast, just say so. If you aren't ready, or aren't sure about this, we will understand. All you have to do is say the word, and everything stops." His dick wanted to cut his tongue out, but it had to be her decision.

She stared at him for several long, agonizing seconds. Then she twisted in her seat to look into Damon's eyes and cocked her head. "Why are we still sitting here? I have faith you can make it home in twenty minutes," she challenged.

Amazingly, Damon made it in sixteen.

## **Chapter Ten**

“Get naked and get on the bed,” Damon growled at his mates as he shoved them into the room. For more than a year, he had imagined all of the ways he and Tate would take Ryah. Now that fantasy became reality, it couldn’t happen fast enough.

He grabbed Ryah by the arm and stopped her. “If I do anything to hurt or frighten you, I want you to tell me immediately. I will try to hold back, but...” He licked the crook of her neck, inhaling deeply. “Oh fuck, you smell good.”

Ryah shivered and a fresh wave of lust blasted across him. “Bring it on, big guy,” she whispered seductively. She pulled away from him and danced a slow grind with an invisible partner. Popping the buttons, she ripped open her tattered dress violently, letting it fall to the floor, and grinned.

She still wore the hot pink underwear that had almost driven him out of his mind. A damn shame he was about to destroy it. He made a mental note to buy her a closetful of the exact set.

A soft groan behind him drew his attention. The look on Tate’s face turned pure predatory. “What the hell did you do to her?” he asked, his voice thick and filled with desire.

Lost in admiring the long, sleek muscles along Tate’s back, he almost missed his man’s question. He had two of the most gorgeous mates on the planet. “Huh?” Not the most intelligent response.

“She’s a regular little sex kitten,” Tate explained. “Where’s our shy little mouse?”

Damon had to agree, but he knew better than to look a gift horse in the mouth. “Who cares,” he whispered as he began unbuttoning

Tate's jeans.

"Oh yes, finally," Ryah moaned breathlessly. "Kiss him. Please, let me watch. I've had to listen to and imagine you guys together for weeks now. Please, let me watch."

Damon looked at her in surprise. She wanted to watch him and Tate make out? Or maybe even more. He could certainly get on board with that plan. Besides, he was quickly beginning to realize he could not deny her in anything.

Tate's hand snaked around his neck and jerked him forward. "You heard the lady, kiss him." Then Tate attacked his mouth with such hunger, such need, Damon felt he would drown.

A long, desire-filled moan floated to them from the bed. Damon pulled out of the kiss to look over at their wanton mate. Completely naked and sprawled on her back, Ryah's pale skin seemed to glow in the soft light from the lamp. Her dark hair fanned across the pillow, her bright green eyes shining like some goddess from the sea. She watched them intently, reaching between her legs to caress her slit with two fingers.

"Oh, don't stop," she whined. It would have been cute if Damon hadn't been fighting not to swallow his tongue.

"Hurry," Tate whispered, choking on the word. He stripped out of his jeans in record time and prowled toward the bed. He dove at Ryah, pinning her knees open, and her hips to the bed. His mouth made a beeline between her legs, finding her swollen clit unerringly.

Ryah's head fell back, and she cried out his name. Damon almost came on the spot. His cock pulsed and strained, aching with his desire. Separately, his mates were gorgeous, but together, they robbed him of breath.

He undressed quickly, never taking his eyes from the erotic show. When he had divested his clothing, he crawled in between Tate's spread legs, and slowly parted the man's muscled cheeks. Mm, he had a fine ass.

There would be time for slow and sensual, but he didn't have the

patience for it then. His cock jerked, and he groaned loudly as he skimmed his nose along Tate's scrotum, breathing deeply. He had to taste that sweet little pucker. Swiping his tongue across the tight opening, he moaned, savoring the addicting flavor of his man.

Diving in, he sucked, licked, and probed Tate's hole like a starving man. The sensual sounds coming from his man made Damon feel like a king. Tate's moans pulled delicious sounds of pleasure from Ryah, and soon the room sounded like a porn set.

Though nice, Damon needed more—more from both of his mates. Sitting up on his knees, he slapped Tate's hip lightly. "Roll over," he ordered.

Tate seemed hesitant to comply, but eventually did as Damon asked. He rolled onto his back, his thick, veiny cock slapping against his lower belly, coating it with pre-cum. Damon had plans for that particular appendage, but became sidetracked by the glistening folds of Ryah's hairless pussy.

He leaned over Tate and pressed his tongue flat against her wet lips. He groaned loudly as her intoxicating flavor burst over his taste buds, then set to work, lavishing the same attention to Ryah's clit as he had shown Tate's sweet hole.

Adrift in the rich taste of his girl, he didn't realize Tate had moved until he wiggled between Damon's legs, enveloping his heavy erection in warm, moist heat. Damon shuddered violently and lowered his hips, pushing his prick to the back of Tate's throat. Moaning around the slick ball of flesh in his mouth, he delighted in the feel of Tate's tongue and lips working his slippery pole.

All too soon, he felt the tingle along his spine, the pressure building in his too tight balls, the twisting of his lower belly. Damon quickly flopped on to his back, pulling his mouth away from Ryah, and his cock from Tate's mouth. "Tate, on your back in the middle of the bed," he panted.

He hoped his mates didn't mind his domineering attitude, because he couldn't suppress it. They seemed eager to let him take control,

though, proving why they were perfect for him.

“Ryah, I want you to ride Tate’s face. Can you do that, baby? Let me watch.”

Tate moaned, his body shaking with his need. He gripped Ryah’s hips and helped her straddle his face before plunging in, sucking at her sweet juices like they were the fountain of youth.

Damon fell to the floor, digging through the various pieces of clothing, looking for his jeans. When he finally found them, he almost cried in relief. He grabbed the little bottle of lube he’d taken from the truck and hurried back to his lovers.

Slicking his fingers, he knelt on the bed and reached behind, pushing them into his clenching hole, and winced. It had been while since Tate had taken his ass, and it burned a little. Before long, though, the burn eased, and Damon fucked himself on three of his own fingers.

He grabbed the lube and dribbled it over Tate’s leaking cock. His mate hissed at the cold, but didn’t otherwise comment. Damon stroked his lover, coating the gorgeous prick as he continued to stretch his hole with his other hand.

Ryah went wild, bucking and crying out as Tate continued his assault between her legs. Damon couldn’t wait to see her luscious body wrapped around his thick cock.

Removing his fingers, he straddled Tate’s hips, lined the bulbous head of his mate’s cock up with his hole, and lowered himself. He dropped his head back, groaning loudly, his inner muscles clamping down on the hard flesh invading his ass.

\* \* \* \*

Tate groaned and thrust upward. His turgid flesh slid home, his hips slamming into Damon’s ass. He worried for a moment that his involuntary action had hurt his mate.

Damon’s guttural moan said otherwise. He slowly rocked, raising

and lowering his ass, taking Tate for the ride of his life. The tight heat wrapped around his cock, and the succulent moisture filling his mouth became too much. If he didn't get control, the ride would be over before it started.

"Oh God. Oh my God!" Ryah whimpered, fucking his face, as Damon's inner walls convulsed around his hard shaft. Her soft body froze, tightening as she screamed, pouring her sweet nectar down Tate's throat. He almost lost it, slapping at Damon's thigh, begging without words for the man to slow down.

Damon stopped completely. The three remained motionless, each panting and vibrating, as they fought to regain control. Ryah's body shuddered with aftershocks, small mewling sobs accompanying her shallow breaths.

Tate smiled to himself. He was in no way finished with the raven-haired seductress. She had started this, and she would pay the consequences.

Apparently, Damon had the same idea. His fingers wrapped around Ryah's hips as she began to move off of Tate's face. "Oh, no you don't. We aren't finished with you." His deep, commanding voice sent need and fire straight to Tate's cock.

Ryah sighed, leaning her head back, her hands skimming along her stomach and up to cup and massage her breasts. The sight pushed Tate's already shaky resistance to the edge. He took a deep breath, groaning at the sweet scent of desire and contentment flowing from the woman above him.

Something in him snapped, and he jerked up, sealing his lips around Ryah's throbbing clit, sucking hard. His hips slammed up so hard, Damon scrambled to remain seated. Pure animalistic lust blazed through him, and he needed his mates with a ferocity that scared the hell out of him. The gums around his canines burned and itched, his fangs threatening to push through.

Jerking his mouth away from Ryah, he gasped for breath. "Damon," he pleaded. The man needed to take control before Tate

ended up hurting someone. He couldn't stop the raging fire burning through him, consuming him.

With a fear born of experience, he realized his demon gnashed its teeth and tore at its constraints. "Damon," he whispered in panic.

Damon's hand smoothed over his abdomen, rubbing small comforting circles. "Shh, baby, breathe. You're okay. Show our girl what that talented tongue of yours can do."

His lover's voice washed over him, calming and reassuring. Tate could still feel the demon in him banging and throwing itself at the cage he kept it locked in securely. Damon wouldn't let anything happen to them, though. He would take care of him and Ryah, even protect them with his life. Tate had no doubts about his man.

He held Ryah's hips tenderly and laved her dripping core with erotic kisses. She tasted so damn good. He could stay like this forever.

\* \* \* \*

Ryah cried out, her body convulsing, her skin smoldering. She had never come so hard in her life. In fact, she had never had an orgasm before now. She wanted another one—and another and another. Tate, bless him, seemed hell bent of giving them to her. He licked and probed, fucking her with his tongue and mouth.

She glanced over her shoulder at Damon and nearly fell over. He rode Tate's cock, the most extraordinary mix of pleasure and pain on his face. So sexy, so hot, Ryah felt her belly tighten, heralding another climax.

Damon's eyes popped open, and he pinned her with a wicked grin. "You like to watch, baby? You wonder what it feels like. You're thinking how good it would feel to have his fat cock up your ass, huh?"

Ryah nodded numbly. No one had ever talked to her in such a way before. What astounded her even more, she found she liked it. More moisture pooled between her legs until she feared Tate would drown.

Damon grabbed a tiny bottle of clear liquid from the bed and poured some on two of his fingers. He slid both along her crease and circled her asshole. “Have you ever had a cock in this tight little hole before?” Damon growled thickly, his voice laced with need and desire.

Ryah nodded again, incapable of forming anything resembling speech.

“Did you like it?”

She shook her head. It had hurt like hell every time Carson had insisted on anal. She hated every minute he had forced her to endure.

Damon’s fingers stilled, and he looked at her for a long time. It seemed completely absurd with Tate’s dick lodged in his ass and his magnificent tongue still flicking away at her slick flesh.

“I’d never hurt you, Ryah,” Damon whispered. “Neither of us would.”

She nodded again, but this time managed, “I know.”

His grinned turned greedy, and all reservations fled. He pushed one slick finger into her twitching hole, pulling a sharp gasp of surprise from her.

Damon’s slick digit began to work its way in and out of her, twisting and curling, drawing deep, throaty, moans from her. A second finger joined the first, scissoring and stretching, until Damon could fit a third finger.

Ryah rocked back and forth between Damon’s fingers and Tate’s tongue. She couldn’t decide which felt better. Sensations swamped her entire body, the flames spreading and consuming her.

“That’s it, baby. Oh yeah, feels good, doesn’t it? I’m going to fuck this tight little ass until you can’t walk straight for a week. Gonna make you feel so damn good.”

Ryah watched Tate moan and shake beneath her. Apparently, she wasn’t the only one affected by the naughty words. Damon’s firm grip replaced Tate’s easy hold on her hips and jerked her back roughly.

She cried out, not from fear, but from a desire so intense, she felt she would shatter with it. “You ready, sweet baby? I can’t wait anymore.”

The instant she nodded, Damon pushed forward, slipping the crown of his enormous cock past the guarding ring of muscles. Ryah groaned, her eyes going wide. Holy hell, Damon was huge, and it fucking hurt.

“Easy, baby, just breathe.” Tate’s hands caressed her sides, and he smiled up at her knowingly. “Just relax, and it’s going to feel amazing.” His thumb skimmed down her body until it rested, once again, between her legs. He applied just the right amount of pressure to her swollen clit, rubbing quick circles.

Oh, that felt good, and even better when his other hand found her nipples and began pinching and tugging at them in turn.

“Oh hell, you are tight. Mmm, and you look so pretty wrapped around my cock. Gonna keep you forever, Ryah. You belong to us now.” Damon nipped at the sensitive flesh of her shoulder. “Never let you go, baby.”

The grip on her hips turned bruising, and Ryah could hear the strain in Damon’s voice. He tried so hard to hold back, not to hurt her. He kept up a litany of wicked words, stoking the flames, and driving her delirious with pleasure.

It didn’t hurt anymore, and if Damon didn’t move, pretty soon, she might explode. “Please,” she moaned pathetically.

Damon eased forward, pulling Ryah back against his hips, inching his way in until he bottomed out. He bit down hard on her shoulder and hissed. Tate’s thumb ceased the tight circles it drew, and Ryah growled at them in frustration. They were trying to kill her.

The pressure in her ass, her pussy, her entire body built until she couldn’t take anymore. Any second, she would spontaneously combust, and they had no one but themselves to blame. “Damon, Tate, please, oh my God, please!”

“You wanna come again, baby? Is that what you need?” Damon

pulled out a little and pushed back in hard. At the same time, Tate's fingers found her pulsing opening, plunging in with two fingers.

Ryah screamed.

"Oh yeah, that's it, my zeta. Love how your ass strangles my cock." Damon set up a steady rhythm, pumping in and out, teasing more than soothing the burn.

She didn't know what the fuck a zeta was, and she didn't care either. "Harder," she panted.

"Anything you want." Damon's hips snapped forward, enticing moans and growls streaming from his parted lips. "Tate, how you doing, baby?"

Tate's answer was a vicious growl. "Shut the hell up and fuck us!" he shouted.

Ryah agreed fully. The electricity raced along her skin, the pressure built in her lower abdomen. Her drenched pussy throbbed and ached, clenching around Tate's fingers. Her breast tingled, and her nipples hardened like pebbles. So close, she just needed a little more.

Damon chuckled, actually chuckled, the bastard. "You two are awful demanding."

She raised an eyebrow at Tate. He nodded and mouthed the words, "Clench your ass." Doing as asked, she tightened her inner muscles and pushed back against Damon. Tate arched his back, throwing his hips up, and grinding them against Damon's ass.

Damon's strangled cry made Ryah smile. It was a good thing she loved his smug ass.

"You asked for it," Damon gurgled. "Hold on, it's going to be a rough ride." He wrapped one strong arm around Ryah's waist, and his other hand found the little ball of flesh between her legs.

She rocked back against him, meeting him stroke for hard stroke. Tate's handsome face flushed, his sweat soaked hair sticking to his face. He threw his head back against the pillows, and the muscles in his neck corded and jumped. Somehow, his fingers still stroked in and

out of her, pushing and turning, spiking her pleasure.

Ryah put her hand over his, stilling his motions and drawing his gaze to her. Slowly, she removed his fingers from her soaked opening and brought them to her mouth, taking both between her lips.

“Oh fuck!” he roared. His entire body tensed, and his muscles bunched and flexed.

Damon followed him over the edge, echoing Tate’s yelled curse. She felt his cock swell inside her, and scorching lava coated her channel.

She still couldn’t come.

Tate’s fingers slipped from her mouth with a pop, and she whimpered. “Please,” she begged. “It hurts. I need...I need...” She didn’t know what she needed. Her stomach began to cramp, and her muscles ached. Her skin felt as if it may melt from the bones at any moment.

“Shh, baby, we’ve got you.” Damon ran his tongue along the smooth column of her throat.

“Don’t we always take care of you, honey?” Tate sat up as far as he could, pulling her down to meet his mouth. “Tell me what you need,” he whispered against her lips.

“I need to come.”

“Then come,” Damon commanded. He sucked hard on her neck, right over the jumping vein. His sharp canines scraped across her sensitive skin, causing her to shiver.

She hesitated, but only for a second. Would it hurt? Did it matter? She wanted to be with them forever. “Do it. Bite me.”

Damon didn’t ask for confirmation, but sank his teeth through her flesh like a knife through melted butter.

Ryah screamed, but it didn’t hurt. It did interesting and wonderful things to her pulsing nerve endings, though. She still couldn’t come. So close, right there on the edge, why couldn’t she find the relief she so desperately needed?

“Come for us, our zeta,” Tate mumbled before capturing her

mouth in a fierce, possessive kiss.

Ryah moaned into his mouth, sucking his tongue into her own. He pulled away much too quickly, and she growled at him in frustration.

“Ryah,” Damon’s voice held such commanding authority, it made her shiver. She hadn’t even realized he had relinquished his hold on her neck. “Let go, baby. Give yourself to us.”

“Mine,” Tate growled. He wrapped his fingers in Ryah’s hair, pulling her roughly to him as his teeth sank into the other side of her neck.

“Ours,” Damon whispered in her ear. He gave a sharp thrust of his hips, slamming his still hard dick as deep as he could go.

Ryah screamed until her voice gave out, and her throat burned raw. White-hot flames engulfed her body as she took the final leap over the edge. Tiny explosions rocked her body, and bright lights flashed behind her closed eyelids, leaving her head swimming and dizzy.

Then there was nothing—just a black emptiness, beckoning her down, pulling her under.

## Chapter Eleven

“Did we kill her?” Damon looked so worried, Tate turn away to hide his grin.

“She’s fine.” Even in sleep, Ryah wore a soft, serene smile on her lips. He pulled Damon out of the bedroom and down the hall to the kitchen. “Thank you,” he whispered with his back to his mate. He knew Damon would hear him.

Strong arms wrapped around his chest, and Damon nuzzled the back of his neck. “Why are you thanking me?”

“I almost lost it back there. I don’t know what happened. It was scary as hell.” What if Damon hadn’t been there? Tate shuddered violently. He didn’t even want to think about it.

“You would have dealt with it. You don’t need me, Tatum, but I will always be there for you.” Damon nipped at his earlobe. “You and Ryah mean more to me than my next breath. I will always take care of you.”

Tears pricked the corner of Tate’s eyes. Sometimes Damon just said all the right things. “You are a big old softy, Damon Lewis.”

Damon bit him again. “Don’t tell anyone. I have a reputation to uphold.”

He turned in his lover’s embrace and grinned as he wound his arms around Damon’s neck, pulling him close. “Your secret is safe with me,” he whispered.

“Not me, I’m telling everyone.” Ryah yawned as she entered the kitchen. She had a blanket wrapped around her shoulders, and her hair stood up in complete disarray. She looked as beautiful as ever. “Coffee,” she mumbled, stumbling toward the sink.

Tate fought back his laughter as she began slamming things around and banging the cabinet doors.

“Wow, you would think good sex would put her in a better mood.”

Tate closed his eyes and groaned. Damon had a lot to learn about women. Opening his eyes, he calculated his chances of making it out of the room before the eruption.

“Excuse me?” Ryah asked dangerously. *Too late.*

“Why are you in such a foul mood? I mean, I figured we pretty much fucked that out of you until at least your next cycle.”

Tate elbowed him in the ribs. “Would you shut the hell up,” he hissed.

“What, I just don’t understand why she’s all pissy,” Damon stated indignantly. God, the man could be thick.

Tate started to speak again, but Ryah held up her hand, stopping him. “Tate, honey, would you please go get my things from the pickup? I need some clothes.” She kissed him lightly on the cheek and smiled. “Thanks, baby. Love you.”

He didn’t hesitate. She had given him an out, and he seized it with both hands.

\* \* \* \*

“He was here, Damon.” Ryah bit her lip and looked up at him pleadingly.

“When?”

“When I woke up just now, he was at the window. I swear I wasn’t dreaming, Damon.” She held his hands in hers, begging him wordlessly to understand. “What does he want?”

Damon pulled her into his arms and sighed. “I don’t know, honey. We’re going to find out, though. Did he say anything?”

“Mine,” she whispered.

He growled possessively, but otherwise didn’t comment. He

didn't trust himself to speak about the man without snarling and spitting like an animal. "Is that why you're so PMS-y right now?" he asked, distracting her.

Ryah snorted against his chest. "You really do need to work on your socialization issues." Damon shrugged around her, pleased to feel her relaxing against him.

"And why are we not telling Tate?"

She sighed. "Because, he is irrational and overprotective. He'd rush out there and get himself hurt."

"Very true," Damon whispered. "You know us so well." Tate would be out the door and scouring the town the minute he heard.

They stood together, not speaking, until Tate walked back into the kitchen.

"I see you two made up. But, why isn't there any coffee? Or bacon. Bacon sounds good."

"Well, then hop to it, boy-o. I'm starving. Do you want me to find you an apron and a pair of high heels?" Ryah yelped and giggled, dodging behind Damon when Tate lunged at her.

"Back off," Damon growled playfully. He wrapped a protective arm behind him and around Ryah as he pushed at Tate's chest.

"Oh, that is so not fair," Tate protested. "She started it!"

Damon cocked his head to the side and considered his lover. "I suppose you're right." He removed his arm from around Ryah and stepped to the side. The little spider monkey clung to his back, sidestepping with him.

"I'll give you a blow job while you're eating breakfast," she whispered against his shoulder.

Damon's cock twitched, and he choked back a groan.

Not to be outdone, Tate leaned in and brushed his lips over Damon's. "I'll ride your cock and let you jerk me off while you're eating breakfast," he murmured seductively.

Damon did groan this time. His naked cock began to fill and throb. He glanced over his shoulder at Ryah and chuckled when he

saw her glaring daggers at Tate. “Your bid,” he offered around a smile. “Going once. Going twice.”

“I’ll let you slam that big monster cock into my pussy while I tongue fuck Tate’s ass. If he cooks breakfast,” she added.

Damon gripped the base of said monster. His mouth watered, and he almost shot his load just picturing it. Turning back to Tate, he smirked. “Sorry, love, but it looks like you’re cooking breakfast.”

“Wait! Don’t I get another bid?” He stepped forward and ground his erection against Damon’s hip.

“Well, I suppose,” he panted. “I don’t know how you’re going to top that, though.”

Tate thought it over for a moment. “I’ll ride that beautiful cock of yours while I lick Ryah’s sweet pussy, and you feast of that tight little pucker of hers.” He gave his hips a slow swivel, pressing harder against Damon’s hip. “Then you can fuck her juicy cunt while I shove my fat prick down her throat,” he rasped.

His hand closed over Damon’s erection and stroked once, twice, before his thumb pressed against the dripping slit.

“Fuck!” Damon screamed, his hips jerking, and the head of his dick exploded, coating his lover’s abdomen.

“Damn that’s sexy,” Tate whispered huskily. He brought his semen-covered hand to his mouth and licked his fingers suggestively.

Ryah stopped him, wrapping her long, elegant fingers around his wrist, and pulling his hand to her mouth, sucking in two fingers. She moaned around the digits then set to work cleaning the rest of his hand.

“Oh, god,” Damon breathed. His mates were so fucking sexy.

“I guess you win,” she whispered thickly. Her eyes heavy lidded and blazing with lust, she wrapped her small hand around his pulsing erection. “Need some help with this?”

Damon thought he’d come again just watching them. His breath hitched, and his flaccid cock began to twitch in renewed interest. “Suck him,” he whispered, his voice raw and strained.

“My pleasure.” Ryah sank to her knees and quickly enveloped the head of Tate’s heavy erection. Damon panted, watching the erotic show on the kitchen floor.

It only took seconds before Tate howled, his hips bucked, and he poured his seed down Ryah’s throat. She swallowed every drop and licked him clean before releasing his prick and grinning.

“You gonna make breakfast now, handsome?” She winked up at Damon.

“Uh huh,” Tate slurred. His eyes still looked dazed, and he had the goofiest grin on his lips.

“You are trouble.” Damon chucked down at his girl.

## Chapter Twelve

“That was an excellent breakfast, Tatum.” Ryah stood and began clearing the table. “Since you did such a fabulous job, you’re off kitchen duty.” She leaned over and kissed the top of his head.

Tate surprised her by wrapping a long arm around her waist and pulling her into his lap. “You are tricky, my little minx.”

Ryah just giggled. Yeah, she had played him like a fiddle, and he knew it. She couldn’t bring herself to regret it, though. It had been one of the best mornings of her life, and the sun hadn’t even risen yet.

Though she had been kind of married for years and had plenty of sex with her asshole husband, she didn’t have much experience. Mostly she would just lie there and let Carson do what he wanted to her while she prayed for it to be over. With Damon and Tate, she wanted to participate, do everything she could to please them.

“Hey now,” Tate whispered. “What’s all this?” Gentle fingers slid under her chin and tilted her head up.

Ryah looked into his eyes and tried to smile. It was a poor imitation of the real thing, and she gave it up quickly. “So, it was okay for you?” she mumbled. She could feel the heat creep into her cheeks as he just stared at her. “I’m sorry. I don’t have a lot of experience. I’ll get better. I promise.”

She tried to look away, unable to face the humiliation any longer. Tate’s calloused fingers held her face immobile, and he looked into her eyes for a long time, not speaking, barely breathing. “Damon,” he finally said. He spoke quietly, but Ryah knew Damon would hear him.

Almost immediately, Damon stuck his head into kitchen. “What’s

up?” He eyed them both suspiciously for a second, then sighed and shook his head. “Ryah, come here, darlin’.”

Ryah chanced a quick glance at Tate before climbing out of his lap and walking straight into Damon’s arms. “I’m sorry,” she whispered, burying her face against the warm skin of his naked chest.

He bent to give her a quick kiss on the lips. “None of that now. Why don’t you go take a shower and get dressed?”

She nodded without looking at either of them and made her way to the bedroom. Her chest hurt, and her stomach cramped. She should have just kept her stupid mouth shut.

\* \* \* \*

“So, you want to tell me what the hell that was all about?” Damon came over and straddled a chair next to Tate.

Tate closed his eyes and shook his head. He took deep breaths, trying to calm the anger boiling inside him. “I just needed a minute,” he said. His voice sounded strained, even to him.

“Well, while you’re taking a breather, our girl is in her room letting the water works flow.”

Tate squeezed his eyes shut tighter. With his sensitive hearing, he could easily hear the sound of Ryah’s sobs from down the hall. “I’m sorry,” he whispered.

“That word seems to be going around a lot. What exactly are you sorry for?”

He opened his eyes and looked at his mate, begging with his eyes for him to understand. “I just got so angry. I needed a minute.”

“Angry? At Ryah? What in the world could that sweet girl do to get you so upset you couldn’t even talk to her?”

Tate chuckled softly. “It wasn’t her. I don’t think I could ever be mad at her. It was Carson.” He growled.

“What? Where?” Damon jumped to his feet in an instant, charging toward the back door.

What the hell? “Uh, he’s not here. What is wrong with you?”

Damon came to an abrupt stop with his hand on the doorknob. Dropping his head, he slowly turned back to Tate, but wouldn’t look at him.

“You filthy liar! What are you keeping from me?” Tate demanded. He had seen this look on his big alpha mate before. Damon was hiding something.

Damon sighed as he dropped back into his seat. “Fine. You go first.”

Tate glared at him for a while longer before giving a curt nod. “Ryah more or less asked if I enjoyed the blowjob she gave me before breakfast. She started spouting off about how she’s not very experienced, and how she’d get better. I know exactly who is responsible for that slap to her self-confidence. I kind of lost it. He’s taken so much from her...from us.” He rubbed the back of his neck and snarled. “I hate that prick.”

“So, was it good?” Damon smirked.

Tate groaned at the memory. “Have you ever seen me blow that quick? The girl’s mouth is magic, I tell ya.”

“That good? Maybe I should find out for myself.” Damon started to rise from the chair, but Tate stopped him with a quick shove to the chest.

“Nice try. Spill it. What are you keeping from me?”

“Carson was here earlier, outside of the bedroom window. Don’t ask me why.” Damon waved a hand. “I didn’t see him, but Ryah did. Shook her up pretty good.”

Tate lunged to his feet so quickly his chair fell to the floor with a loud crash. “I’ll kill him.”

Damon stood and wrapped his arms around him, pulling him close and kissing the side of his neck. “Not that I don’t agree, but this is exactly why Ryah didn’t want me to tell you. You have to calm down, babe. This is not what she needs right now.” He cupped Tate’s cheek lovingly. “What she needs now is a damn fine explanation for your

behavior.”

Tate nodded his agreement. “You’re right.”

“Oh, I like that,” Damon moaned. “Say it again.”

Tate snorted. “Shut up and just look pretty, love.” He patted Damon’s cheek and kissed the tip of his nose. “I have some groveling to do, if you’ll excuse me.”

Damon suddenly tensed, and his eyes narrowed. “Something’s wrong,” he mouthed, his hold tightening around Tate.

Tate didn’t sense anything, but he trusted Damon. He nodded once, wiggled out of the embrace, and hurried down the hall to retrieve their clothes. If trouble was coming, he didn’t want to meet it with his cock and balls on display.

After dressing quickly, he grabbed a pair of jeans and T-shirt for Damon, then moved quietly back down the hall to the kitchen. He tossed the clothes to his mate and jerked his thumb in the direction he had just come. Cold fear balled his gut, his blood turning to ice water.

Tate didn’t understand where the feeling came from, but he suddenly had a desperate urge to get to Ryah. Turning on his heels, he no longer cared if anyone outside heard him. He sprinted to his mate’s room and pounded heavily on the door. “Ryah!” he yelled.

“Move!” Damon growled from behind him.

Tate fell out of the way just as Damon’s foot landed squarely in the middle of the door. It banged open, flying back against the wall, and splintering the frame. The room beyond illuminated with light from the hallway, but Tate saw nothing of interest to him.

His heart seized, his head spinning with fear and rage. “Ryah!” he screamed. If anyone had hurt her, he would rip them apart slowly and enjoy every minute of it.

A soft whimpering noise brought his attention to the closet. He whipped around, tilting his ear skyward, listening for the sound again. “Ryah?” He softened his voice as he slowly crept closer. “It’s okay, baby. We’re here. Damon’s right beside me. We aren’t going to let anyone hurt you.”

“Ryah, come on, darlin’.” Damon spoke quietly as well. “We need to see that you’re okay. You can come out of there now.”

“Something’s wrong with me,” she sobbed.

Damon’s eyes narrowed, and he moved more purposefully toward the closet door. “What do you mean? Are you sick? Are you hurt?”

Tate growled deep in his chest at the thought of someone hurting their girl. Screw this! He marched past his lover to the closet and threw the double doors open.

Ryah sat in the shadows at the back. Her head rested on her knees, her arms wrapped around her shins. Her small body shook and trembled as Tate watched, frozen immobile in the doorway.

Ryah’s blood scented the air, calling to Tate like a siren’s song. Clamping down on his bloodlust, he eased to the floor, and crawled slowly toward his mate.

“Ryah? Honey, where are you hurt?” More importantly, how had she been hurt?

“Stop!” she hissed, her face still buried in her knees. “Don’t come any closer. There’s something wrong with me. Just stay there!” She spoke frantically, her voice cracking several times. She still wouldn’t look at him.

He felt Damon enter the closet and kneel beside him. “Ryah, what’s wrong? Talk to us.” His normally sure voice came out scared and uncertain.

Ryah shook her head vehemently against her bare knees. “Just go,” she whispered. “Please, go.”

Tate didn’t know whether to cry or scream, break something, or what. The woman was damn frustrating and stubborn beyond reason. “We want to help you, but we can’t unless you tell us what’s going on. I know you’re bleeding. I can smell it. At least tell me where you’re hurt,” he begged.

“I don’t know what’s wrong!” Her head snapped up as she screamed at them.

Tate gasped. Four long scratches marred each side of Ryah’s face,

running from her temples, down her cheeks, and along the column of her throat to her collarbones. Blood beaded and dripped from each gash, smearing across her beautiful face.

“Oh God,” he breathed. He rushed forward, trying to pull his mate into his arms.

Ryah fought him, snarling and hissing, cringing back into the corner of the closet. “Don’t touch me,” she screeched.

Tate backed away slowly, but only a little. This close, he could see similar marks running along her thin forearms. “Who did this to you?”

She answered his concern with a loud wail, her hands fisting in her hair and pulling sharply. He watched in horror as the hands that were so gentle when they touched him, began clawing down her face, opening the wounds further.

“Fuck! Ryah, stop!” he yelled. Tate launched himself at Ryah, ripping her hands from her face and pinning them to the wall over her head. “What the hell?” He looked over his shoulder, letting the desperation bleed into his eyes as he silently pleaded for Damon to do something.

Ryah’s body bucked and shuddered. She shrieked and screamed, snapping her jaws at Tate’s throat. “It fucking burns,” she cried. “It fucking hurts, you son of a bitch! I hate you, you stupid cock-sucking piece of shit!”

Tate was so stunned, he almost lost his grip on her straining wrists. Never before had he heard such rage and hatred. The vile vulgarity somehow seemed even harsher coming from his angel’s lips.

“Ryah, stop,” Damon growled.

A shiver raced up Tate’s spine at the sound of Damon’s alpha voice. Ryah’s movements instantly stilled, her mouth clamped closed, and her eyes glazed over. Without releasing his hold, Tate looked back and forth between the almost comatose woman before him and the man behind him.

Though Tate's natural instinct ensured he obeyed an alpha command, it would have little effect on Ryah. Well, it shouldn't anyway.

"What the hell?" he repeated.

"Let her go, baby."

Slowly, reluctantly, Tate released his hold on her wrists. Ryah's arms dropped like lead weights to land limply at her sides. Her eyes remained unfocused, her mouth hung slightly open, and her face began to turn a light shade of blue.

Leaning forward cautiously, Tate trembled when he realized she wasn't breathing. Panic took root in his soul as he bent down and rested his cheek against her naked chest. Her heartbeat pounded slowly, sluggishly, a longer pause than the last between each beat.

He jerked back, staring at Damon and fighting the tears that threatened to spill over. Their mate was dying, and he no idea why, or how to stop it.

Damon must have read the despair in his eyes, because he moved swiftly, wrapping Tate in his arms, and rocking him side to side. "What? What's wrong, baby? Talk to me."

"She's not breathing," Tate whispered. "Her heart is slowing, like it's going to stop any minute." Pushed away from Damon, he crawled closer to Ryah.

He cupped her face in both palms, moaning miserably at the icy feel of her skin. "She's freezing. She's turning blue!" he yelled at no one in particular.

"What? No!" Damon yanked Ryah's lank body into his arms and carried her out of the closet. He placed her gently on the bed, stroking her frozen skin. Her eyes remained open, but unfocused, staring blankly at the ceiling.

"Do something!" Tate ordered. No, no, no! He couldn't lose her—couldn't lose his angel, his heart. She meant everything to him.

"Ryah, breathe!" Damon shouted, shaking her roughly.

Her tiny body jerked, and a loud gasp echoed around the room.

The steady rise and fall of her chest almost drove Tate to his knees in relief. He watched her critically, searching for any signs of distress. His eyes raked over more scratches on her flat belly, and he closed his eyes in despair. “What’s going on?” he whispered brokenly.

He crawled up the bed to rest beside his mate, kissing her temple, her cheek, her chin. Resting his head against her chest, his stomach clenched in anguish. “Her heart is barely beating,” he groaned to Damon.

Damon frowned, pressing two fingers to her neck. His frown deepened, and he cocked his head to the side. “Ryah,” he spoke clearly, his voice resonating through the room. “Start your heart beating. Not too fast, not too slow, just a normal heart rate.”

Tate’s brows drew together at the order. Damon had clearly lost his mind. You didn’t just order someone to maintain a certain heart rate. It was totally ludicrous.

Within seconds, his disbelief turned to astonishment as the thump beneath his ear increased until her heart beat normally again. Excited, he looked up to Ryah’s face, and the smile slipped from his lips. Still as stone, she gazed unblinkingly at the ceiling.

He looked at Damon hopefully. Maybe...well, just maybe.

Damon nodded. “Ryah, wake up,” he ordered.

She blinked once, twice, slowly regaining focus. Then her body went ramrod straight, and she began shrieking again, hissing and spitting, clawing at Tate and Damon, the bed sheets, herself. Tate rolled quickly, clasping her wrists in his hands and pressing her into the mattress with his body.

“Damon!” he yelled.

“Ryah, shut up and stop fighting!” Thank God, Damon didn’t take any more chances with vague non-specific directives.

Ryah stopped immediately, but she continued to glare at Tate with such violence, such disgust in her eyes, he wanted to throw up. No one had ever looked at him with such unhidden hatred. To have the look coming from the woman he loved more than his own life...Tate

couldn't take any more.

He rolled off of her and slipped from the bed. Without a backward look, or even a word, he walked away.

## Chapter Thirteen

Damon watched Tate leave the room with a heavy heart. Both of his mates needed him, and he didn't know what to do. He understood exactly how Tate felt. Ryah's words cut him to the bone. The hatred and loathing blazing in her lime green eyes left him cold.

Deciding Tate would be okay until he could get things sorted out, he turned his eyes to Ryah. She glared at him, her teeth bared in a vicious sneer, but she remained silent.

He didn't understand any of this. Not half an hour before, everything had been fine, amazing really. What had happened in this room?

"Ryah, I want to talk to you." He couldn't figure out why she responded to his alpha status. It didn't make any sense. She wasn't pack. Not vampire, shifter, demon, werewolf, or the like, so what the fuck was going on?

Though he didn't understand it, he wasn't above using it to his advantage. "You are to remain still and answer my questions honestly. Do not make a sound unless I ask you a question. And no screaming, snarling, spitting, hissing, screeching, yelling, or anything like that either," he added as an afterthought.

Hoping he had covered everything, Damon took a deep breath. "Do you understand?"

Ryah nodded, but made no sound. Good.

Deciding simple yes or no questions would probably garner the most information, he took another deep breath and proceeded. "Did anyone come into this room other than me and Tate?"

"No." The answer came out clipped and terse.

“Did you speak to anyone?”

“No.”

“Do you know who I am?” For some reason, the question seemed important.

“You are Alpha.”

Damon closed his eyes, as pain lanced through his heart. This could not be good. Definitely not good.

“Do you know my name?”

“Damon. You said your name is Damon. The other is Tate. He is mate to the alpha.”

“And who are you?”

The questioner seemed to confuse her. She pressed her lips together and scrunched her nose. “I—I do not know.”

Fuck, fuck, fuckity fuck!

“Why are you angry?”

“You and your mate have captured me. You hold me against my will. Would you not be angry?” Obviously, from the look on her face, she believed every word out of her mouth.

“Why did you hurt yourself?” He held his face impassive, his voice restrained. It had nearly killed him to watch Ryah claw at herself, drawing and spilling her precious blood.

“It eased the burn,” she whispered and cringed. “It feels like tiny ants are crawling beneath my skin, stinging me, biting me. Can you not feel the fire within me? There is something evil lurking beneath the surface. I must claw it out.”

Damon struggled to retain his composure. Never in his life had he encountered something like this. It went well beyond his ability to fix. He needed to speak to the elders. Perhaps one of them would know what to do.

Tate burst back into the room, his eyes red and puffy, tears streaming down his face. “I can’t fucking take it!” he yelled. “Make her snap out of it. Tell her to wake up! Make her wake up, Damon,” he sobbed.

Damon's heart broke a little more, and his stomach twisted in painful knots. "Tate, baby, she's not herself. She doesn't even know who she is. She doesn't know who we are. She thinks we've captured her and are holding her here against her will."

Tate's face paled, and he rushed over to the bed. He dropped down beside Ryah and ran his shaking hands over her body, choking on his sobs as his hands came away bloody. "Ryah, baby, please, please angel. Wake up. I love you so damn much. You have to wake up. Please, oh God, please."

Damon couldn't stand it anymore. The pain and desperation in Tate's voice left a hollow feeling deep in his soul. The lack of recognition, of sympathy or caring in Ryah's eyes ripped him open, leaving his heart bleeding.

As the alpha, he was supposed to make things better, protect and comfort his mates, make them happy, keep them safe.

He could do nothing. The utter sense of helplessness overwhelmed him, dragging a strangled sob from his throat. He didn't know how to make it better, how to stop the hurt. He just wanted his mates back—whole, healthy, and happy.

Pressing his lips together to stop the trembling, he closed his eyes tightly. Tate continued to cry and beg, pleading for Ryah to recognize him.

"Ryah, sleep," Damon whispered.

She closed her eyes immediately, her breathing slowing, and her body relaxing.

"No!" Tate yelled. He rose up to kneel on the bed, glaring at Damon. "Wake her up! Make her snap out of it! Damn it, Damon, do something!"

Damon opened his arms to his distressed mate. "Come here, baby."

Tate refused. Shaking his head, he climbed off of the bed, and marched toward the door. He paused with a hand on the doorframe. "I can't, Damon. I just can't."

Tate's words cut deep, ripping at Damon's heart. In less than an hour, he had lost more than his mates. He had lost his reason to live.

\* \* \* \*

"Here, honey, drink this." Midge shoved a steaming cup of coffee under Damon's bent head.

He looked at the dark liquid without interest. Ryah still slept, and Tate had disappeared. He searched everywhere, calling for his mate, but to no avail.

The booth creaked as Midge slid in across the table. Damon didn't even look up. He watched dispassionately as the tears he couldn't seem to stem dripped down his nose and into his coffee.

"Why don't you just tell me what's going on," she said quietly.

"That's just it," Damon said, looking up. "I don't know what the hell is going on." He shook his head, pulling at the ends of his long hair. "Ryah has gone completely insane."

"How so?"

"It was...she...oh hell, she clawed herself. She's talking about evil inside her and her skin burning. She was screaming and hissing, and you should have heard the vile things coming out of her mouth." Damon sniffed as the tears prickled his eyes again. "She doesn't know who we are. She doesn't know who she is. She thinks we kidnapped her and are holding her against her will."

To Damon's complete surprise and disgust, Midge smiled. More than smiled, she smirked.

"I'm glad I could amuse you," he growled. His entire life was falling apart, and she found the situation funny.

"Oh, now, just relax. I'm sorry, but I think I know what's wrong, and I'm pretty sure it's going to embarrass you." Midge took his hand and squeezed it firmly. "Everything is going to be okay."

"How can you say that? You didn't see her face. And the way she obeys my commands is just creepy. I told her stop and she did.

Everything! She stopped breathing, and her heart almost stopped for fuck's sake!"

"What do you know about zetas?" Midge asked gently.

"They are the heart of the relationship, the core, the glue that holds us all together. A Gavolot pair cannot be complete without their zeta." Damon frowned. "I feel closer than ever to Tate since Ryah came into our life. Like we were missing something and didn't even know it."

"Yes and no," Midge replied. "Have you ever wondered about Gavolot bonds between four or more? Who is the zeta in those relationships?"

Damon's frown deepened. He'd never really thought about it before. "I guess I just assumed the ones not of our kind are the zetas."

"Again, yes and no." Midge pointed to his untouched coffee. "Drink, and I'll explain." She waited until he brought the cup to his lips before she spoke again. "I can't believe your parents never explained any of this to you. Or Tate's," she sighed.

"You know my parents died when I was young. Tate's parents are...well...they aren't close."

Midge nodded. "I guess I knew that." She waved a hand in dismissal. "It doesn't matter. A zeta is a treasure, rare and beautiful. As you said, Gavolots are never zetas, and there can only be one in any grouping. You know we mate for life?"

Damon nodded.

"Vampires do not, nor do demons. The mating bond comes from our lycan roots. As such, a zeta is always a lycan...pureblood, purebred lycan."

He let the words sink in, twirling them around inside his muddled brain. "But, I would have scented her," he protested, piecing together the puzzle.

Midge just chuckled. "And just how much do you know about lycans, boy?"

He shook his head. Not much, if he were being honest.

“A zeta is also always female. Lycan females cannot shift until they pass through their first mating heat. Their scent is hidden, masked, until after their first shift. Are you seeing where I’m going with this?”

Damon shook his head again. No, he felt more confused than ever.

Midge sighed. “Men,” she muttered. “My dear boy, your girl is a lycan.”

“Funny enough, I gathered that much. I don’t understand what it has to do with her going all loopy on us though.”

“Men,” she muttered again. “Ryah is in the midst of her mating heat. She is out of her mind, crazy with lust, both sexual and blood. She burns from the inside out as if the fires of Hell have happily taken up residence inside her soul.”

“So, how do I snap her out of it? And why did her mating heat only begin now? Is this her first?”

“One question at a time.” Midge snickered. “This is her first, yes. Lycan females do not go into heat until after their mate has claimed them. Or in your case, mates. It’s a very rigid sequence of events. First they are claimed, then the mating heat, then she will shift, and then she will give off her lycan scent as well as a heavy dose of pheromones.”

“Pheromones?” Damon groaned. This shit just kept getting better. “So, now we are going to have fight off assholes left and right that want to hump her leg?”

“Not as long as you claim her regularly. Your mating mark will mask her pheromones.”

“Okay, so we’ve claimed her, and now she’s in heat. Just like that? We only claimed her a few hours ago.”

“The heat begins almost immediately and will last until the rise of the next full moon.”

“Eight days!” Damon yelled.

“It could be worse,” Midge replied with a grimace as if she knew from experience.

“How do you know so much about lycans?”

“Lydia is our zeta,” she answered simply. “I considered asking her to come and talk to you, to help you understand, but she thought it best I be the one since you don’t know her well.”

“I like her well enough,” Damon reassured. “But, she is right. I wouldn’t feel comfortable talking to her about this.”

Midge nodded and a soft twinkle lit her eyes. She seemed very pleased by his response.

“Okay, so what now? What do we do to snap her out of it? Tate is beside himself with worry. She said she hated him,” he whispered.

“Don’t pay any attention to anything she says. I think it’s clear to both of us she doesn’t have any idea what is going on inside her body or her head right now. She is lost until she can claim you as her own.”

“But why doesn’t she know who she is?”

“I’m not sure, but we, Lydia and myself, think it has something to do with testing the strength and devotion of their mates. Once a zeta has passed through her mating heat, her pheromones will call to every Tom, Dick, and Harriett in a ten-mile radius. They need a mate, or mates to claim them often to smother their natural scent. She can never be parted from you again.”

“For life,” Damon whispered. “A test of our loyalty.”

“And strength,” Midge added. “Make no mistake, she will fight you every step of the way. She is far stronger now, and she will say and do anything to keep you from claiming her.”

“You said she has to claim us as well?”

“Yes. You have to mate with her, both of you, and bite her while you are inside her body. You must then force her to do the same to each of you. Once your blood passes her lips, she should snap out of it. She only needs to claim you once, but it’s very important.”

“And what about the rest of the heat?”

“She will crave you sexually. She will be insatiable, really,” Midge giggled girlishly. “Which is why it’s a good thing she has two big strong mates.”

“Will she stop hurting? Burning?” Damon couldn’t bear to see his girl in pain.

“As long as she is sated, then yes. She will be uncomfortable until the full moon. More like an itch, though.”

An odd thought struck Damon. He really had no business asking, and he probably didn’t want to know the answer, but he couldn’t curb his curiosity.

“You said we have to claim her while we are inside her body. How did that work with you and Lydia?” Damon could feel his cheeks burning as he posed the question.

Midge just laughed and shook her head. “I didn’t say what part of you needed to be insider her. Just as long as it is sexual in its intent.”

“And what about the weird way she responds to my commands?” He hurriedly changed the subject.

“It is ingrained in a zeta to obey their mate. If Tate so chooses, he could bring out the same response.”

Damon groaned. “Is it always so severe, so literal? It was awful when she stopped breathing. I don’t ever want to live through that again.”

Midge grimaced as well. “Unfortunately, yes. James told Lydia to shut up once, and she didn’t say a word for four days until we realized he hadn’t told her she could speak.” She started laughing. “Boy, did she let him have it when she could talk again. Feisty little bitch.” She sighed fondly. “Just be careful, honey. I wish I could give you more, but that’s the reality.”

He rose and leaned over the table to kiss his friend’s wrinkled cheek. “Thank you. And tell Lydia thank you as well. I owe you both more than you can imagine.”

“Not at all,” Midge argued. “We are always glad to help you young bucks. Now go get your girl back.”

Damon beamed. “Yes, ma’am.”

## Chapter Fourteen

Tate sat on the top step of the porch, his knees drawn up to his chest. It had been nearly two hours since Damon left. He had hid in the kitchen cupboard like a child, ignoring his lover's pleas as Damon searched for him. He regretted it the minute he heard the front door slam.

He just felt so angry. Though unfair for him to take out his frustration on Damon, he knew the man was strong enough to carry the burden.

Ryah still slept, and nothing Tate tried would wake her. He just wanted their girl back. The sweet, innocent, beautiful angel they adored. This angry, spitting, hate-filled woman in the spare bedroom was not his Ryah.

He heard the roar of an engine pulling into the drive, and he closed his eyes in relief. He didn't want to admit it, but he had been terrified Damon wouldn't return.

Damon stepped out of the truck and walked cautiously toward where Tate sat on the porch. Unease radiated from his tense muscles, the scent perfuming the air.

Tate rocketed off the porch and threw himself into his mate's arms. He held on tight, clutching at Damon's broad shoulders, and burying his face in his neck. "You came back."

Warm arms wrapped around him, pulling him closer. Damon's fingers stroked through his hair, comforting and soothing him. "I'll always come back, baby."

"Love you," Tate mumbled against Damon's throat.

Damon held him for a moment longer before setting him back

gently. "I went to talk to Midge. I know what's wrong."

He listened as Damon informed him of the conversation he'd had with the elder. The more Tate listened, the more his heart swelled. Everything would be okay. "Let's go."

Damon chuckled, the sound happy and full of hope. "Okay, okay, let's go."

He didn't release Damon's hand, dragging him through the house and into Ryah's bedroom. After this night, Tate decided he would fill the room with cement and board up the door and windows. They didn't need the room anymore. He never wanted to step foot in it again.

"Let's take her to our room." He beamed at Damon's suggestion.

Damon lifted Ryah's still sleeping form into his arms and carried her down the hall to place her gently on their enormous bed. "Get her undressed before we wake her up. Midge said she would fight. We might as well make it as easy as possible."

"Can't you just order her to claim us?"

"I don't think it works that way. It's like a test of worthiness. I don't understand it, but well..." Damon trailed off shrugging. "I do know that after this we have to be careful what orders we give her. We don't want a repeat of earlier."

Tate nodded solemnly. He never wanted to go through something like that again. "We?"

"Wake her up." Damon smirked.

"I'm not Alpha," Tate spluttered.

"No, but you are her mate. Do it."

"I already tried. It didn't work." He shook his head.

"Reach down and grab ahold, babe. Just do it."

"Ryah, wake up," Tate whispered.

Nothing.

"Mean it," Damon encouraged.

"Ryah, wake up now," he tried again.

Nothing.

Damon sighed. “What if I tell you she will die if you don’t order her to wake up?”

Tate jerked back as if he’d been slapped. No, he wouldn’t allow her to die. “Ryah, wake the fuck up.”

Her eyelids snapped open, and she began to wiggle on the bed, her mouth opening to let out a scream, no doubt.

“Ryah, no screaming,” Damon ordered.

Her lips pressed together immediately. Damon nodded as he began to strip. Tate took that as his cue and undressed as well. Once everyone in the room was naked, he and Damon moved to stretch out on either side of their mate.

“Do you know who we are?” Damon asked. “Answer me.”

“Yes,” Ryah answered. “You are Damon and he is Tate—Alpha and his mate.”

Tate heard Damon’s exasperated sigh. He knew the feeling. He didn’t feel right about having sex with the girl if she didn’t know who they were. It sounded too much like rape.

“I don’t think I can do this,” he whispered.

Damon’s brow knitted together, and he scowled. “If we don’t, someone else will claim her. Is that what you want?”

Tate growled. Fuck it!

He rolled over on top of Ryah and pinned her arms above her head. “I’m going to fuck you so hard you can taste me. Gonna pound you into the mattress and make you beg for it,” he hissed, his face inches from hers.

Ryah’s mouth split into a smile, wild and wicked. “Try it, cowboy,” she taunted.

A feral moan escaped her parted lips when she arched up against him, spreading her legs and wrapping them around his waist. “Come and get it,” she sneered. Her right hand slipped free of his hold and connected solidly with his jaw.

Tate’s head snapped sideways, breaking his concentration. Ryah took advantage by locking her legs tighter and flipping them over

until she straddled thighs.

“Think you can tame me?” she jeered.

His cock begged for her touch, aching and throbbing, sliding smoothly along the slick lips of her drenched pussy. “Think you can last eight seconds, sweetheart,” he leered back.

Ryah laughed coldly, resting her forearm over Tate’s windpipe, and cutting off his air supply. He retaliated by thrusting his hips up sharply, slamming home into her clenching body. Her inner walls clamped down around him as she let out a strangled moan. It felt as though the muscles were trying to push him out, warring against his invasion.

Tate grabbed a handful of her hair and jerked her head back sharply. The action dislodged her arm, and he sucked in much needed oxygen to his aching lungs.

In one swift movement, he lunged forward, sinking his canines into the soft, tender flesh at the top of Ryah’s breast. Her sweet tasting blood rushed over his tongue, and his dick exploded, shooting copious amounts of cum into his still struggling mate.

Damon appeared suddenly, gliding his rigid shaft against Tate’s, inching his way into Ryah’s dripping pussy. He wasted no time once he bottomed out, pushing her head to the side and sinking his teeth into her neck.

Damon’s cock pulsed and jerked against his own, and a fresh rush of hot seed burst over Tate’s still hard pole.

Ryah moaned and writhed, even as she cocked an elbow back, nailing Damon in the ribs. He grunted, pulling his canines from her neck. “Fuck, she packs a punch,” he groaned.

Setting a fast rhythm, Damon rocked his hips, sliding in and out of her core, rubbing against Tate’s cock, and pulling deep moans from his chest.

“Fuck me harder,” Ryah spat, rising up and falling to impale herself on both of their engorged pricks. “Make me fucking feel it. Or aren’t you man enough?”

The fighting, biting, punching, clawing Tate could handle. His stomach and chest burned when Ryah had shredded him, but it didn't hurt nearly as much as the words streaming from her mouth.

"Bite me," he whispered.

"Fuck you," she spat back.

"What?" Damon taunted as he continued thrusting in and out of her. "Are you a coward?"

Ryah roared, falling forward, and sinking her teeth roughly into Tate's exposed neck. Damn, it hurt like a son-of-a-bitch. She didn't finesse it, and she damn sure wasn't gentle. Tate held perfectly still, clenching his fists and squeezing his eyes closed. His failing erection slipped from her body, and he gritted his teeth to keep from crying out.

After several seconds that felt like forever, the gnawing ceased and a gentle tongue raked over his neck, licking at the gaping wound. Ryah sat up, a serene smile on her lips, and contorted her body to sink her elongated canines into Damon's shoulder.

Tate heard Damon cried out, his body freezing and tensing. Ryah seemed to use much more care with him, but Tate didn't mind. It meant she was coming back to herself, and back to them. The fierce throbbing in his neck seemed a small price to pay to have their girl back.

Ryah pulled away from Damon's chest with a contented sigh. Her eyes rolled back in her head, and she fell limply from Tate's lap and onto the mattress.

## Chapter Fifteen

Ryah groaned, opening her eyes to look into the faces of her mates. She smiled sweetly, though her body felt sore and well used. She couldn't remember anything.

"How are you feeling?" Damon asked with concern on his face.

She frowned. "A little sore and kind of itchy, but okay," she answered honestly. "Why? What's wrong?"

She looked to Tate, and the blood drained from her face. Sitting up quickly, she ignored the spinning in her head and cupped his cheek. "Oh baby, what happened to you?" She took in the deep gashes on his torso, the bruise forming on his chiseled jaw, and worst of all, the gaping wound in his neck. It looked mangled, and it still bled.

Tate just smiled at her.

"Oh, Tate," she crooned. "Who did this to you?" She peppered kisses over his face, lightly skimming his swelling jaw. Tears pooled in the corners of her eyes. "Tell me," she insisted.

The smile slid from Tate's face, and he looked away. Ryah licked her swollen lips, tasting something salty and almost bitter. She touched her mouth gently, gasping at the blood that came away on her fingers.

She looked back and forth between her stained fingers and Tate's neck several times. No!

"I did this," she whispered. Lifting her other hand, she noticed the blood caked under her fingernails. She brushed the unmarked skin beside one of the long gashes on Tate's stomach. "And this," she breathed.

Bile rose up in her throat, and her stomach cramped painfully. What had she done? Her chest constricted, her heart beating rapidly against her ribs. There was no way they would ever forgive her for this, even if she didn't remember doing it. She would not even ask their forgiveness.

Ryah gasped, trying desperately to pull air into her lungs. "I'm so sorry," she managed to gasp out. It seemed grossly inadequate, but she didn't know what else she could say.

Damon's strong arms wrapped around her, and she went willingly into his embrace. It could possibly be the last opportunity to soak up his warmth. "I don't remember. I didn't know. How...oh God...How could I do that?" she sobbed into his chest.

Then Tate pressed against her back, joining the group hug. "Hush, baby, we'll explain everything. Just know that I'm okay, and I love you. Nothing is ever going to change that." Tate's voice cracked, and she could hear the strain. "I'm just glad to have you back."

His last statement startled Ryah enough for her to regain some form of composure. "What do you mean? Where did I go?"

"Not now," Damon mumbled against the top of her head. He still wouldn't release the crushing grip he had on her. "Just let us hold you."

She nodded her forehead against Damon's shoulder. Looking down at his naked body, she discovered a large bruise on his ribs. With a miserable moan, she realized she had caused that as well.

"I hurt you," she sniffed. "Both of you."

"Ryah, angel, you didn't know. It wasn't you, not really." Tate pulled her from Damon's arms, and surprisingly, Damon let her go.

Turning her to face him, he smiled tenderly. He stroked the hair back from her face and kissed her lips gently. "You're a lycan, a zeta to be exact. You were in your mating heat, completely out of your mind. You didn't know who you were, let alone who Damon or I were."

The information was far from comforting. "I'm a lycan? But I

thought you said I wouldn't turn from you biting me?"

"You didn't," Damon said from behind her. "We'll get through this, and we'll answer any questions you have."

Ryah nodded. So many emotions played through her body she didn't know what to feel. Shame at what she had done to her mates. Fear that it could happen again. Surprise to learn she was a fur ball. Though, after weeks of immersion in the preternatural world, the idea didn't upset her as much as it probably should have.

Settling on the love she felt for the men she needed more than breathing, Ryah pushed away the rest of the emotions. She'd deal with them later.

Looking up at Tate, she tilted her neck to the side and grinned. "Drink so you can heal."

Tate shook his head. "I don't need—"

"Drink," she cut him off. "You know you need to heal. You probably need the blood anyway since it appears I drained quite a bit of yours, and it would make me feel better. Please," she begged. It was all she could offer to make amends.

Tate sighed, the corners of his mouth twitching. "So stubborn," he breathed, leaning forward and swiping his tongue over the vein in her throat.

Ryah tensed when his sharp canines pierced her skin, relaxing almost immediately as pleasure speared through her body. "Need you," she whispered raggedly.

"Always," Damon whispered.

"Mmm," Tate moaned, nuzzling against her throat as he drank from her.

\* \* \* \*

In the first few days of Ryah's heat, Tate and Damon made love to her together, doing their best to relieve the burn that built inside her.

Six days into her heat, they both became so depleted and

exhausted, they had finally given up and began taking their needing mate in turn. Tate felt like a damn wrestler, tapping out and slapping in his partner while he recuperated.

As the full moon drew nearer, Ryah's desire increased until they spent the majority of their time in the bedroom, only coming out to eat and shower. Sometimes she even followed them into the shower.

It was with a sense of relief that Tate awoke on the last day. They only had to survive twelve or so hours until the full moon.

He hadn't ventured out of the house again after the reaming Damon had given him the day before. Hell, it wasn't his damn fault everyone and their mother had decided to go shopping at the same time. He had barely escaped with his life.

The sun hadn't quite crested the horizon yet, and Tate gloried in the fact he could curl up with his mates and sleep a little longer. He wondered what had woken him in the first place. Slinging a leg over Damon's hip, he curled into the man's strong back and closed his eyes.

His eyelids flew open again at the soft tapping he heard coming from behind him. His sore muscles tensed, preparing to fight to defend the safety of his home and his mates. Lifting his face from Damon's neck, he sniffed the air.

He couldn't find anything out of the ordinary. He smelled Damon's rich, masculine scent, and Ryah's sweet, floral scent. He could smell sex, sweat, and a pair of Damon's dirty socks in the corner. He'd deal with his sloppy mate later.

The tapping sounded again, and Damon jerked awake in his arms. "Turn over and kiss me," he whispered quietly to his mate, barely breathing the words into Damon's ear. "Don't let on that you know anything is wrong."

He took Damon's grunt as compliance. Rolling sleepily to his back, he smiled lazily up at Tate. "Morning, sweetheart," he said mumbled. Well, the man could act.

"Morning," Tate grinned as he leaned up on his elbow.

Damon rose to meet him, pressing his lips to Tate's, and putting on a great show. In reality, the kiss fell far from earth shattering. His lips stayed sealed together, his eyes barely open into slits. "Motherfucker," he mumbled against Tate's mouth a second later.

Damon shoved him roughly to the mattress and vaulted over him like a world class hurdler. Before Tate could even blink, a growling Ryah leapt over him as well, launching herself at Damon and knocking him sideways.

She jumped to her feet, snarling at the figure outside the window. With a mix of shock and rage, Tate realized who stood outside their house. So much had happened in the past week, he had forgotten all about Carson Owen.

"Leave." Ryah hissed. "Slither away like the snake you are." She tried to step closer to the window, but Damon's protective arm around her waist held her back. Tate approved.

"If you come near what is mine again, I will gut you like a fish."

Tate shivered at the ruthless statement. He had no doubt his little hellcat meant every word of it as well. Now that Ryah could shift, it wasn't just an idle threat either.

"Ryah, hush," Damon whispered. She quieted instantly.

Just as silently, Tate slipped from the bed and moved to take up ranks beside his mates. The three stood naked as the day they were born, staring down Ryah's ex-husband, or whatever he had been to her.

"Mine." Carson hissed. "She was promised to me. I will have what is rightfully mine."

Damon and Ryah were much too close to the window for Tate's comfort. It was another one of those times Tate wished the legends were true. In books and movies, vampires couldn't enter without an invitation. What complete rubbish. Carson could break through the window whenever he chose.

Stepping in front of his mates, Tate ushered them backward, spreading his arms to shield them.

“Tate,” Damon growled.

Tate ignored him. “Leave,” he snarled at Carson.

“I can smell her,” Carson moaned. The sound set Tate’s teeth on edge, and he snarled again in warning.

“I want her,” Carson whined pathetically. “She is mine!” he screamed. His eyes flashed with a crazed light, and his fist shot out, connecting with the glass and breaking through it.

Tate didn’t pause to think. He launched himself toward the man, shifting in mid leap. He crashed through the window, destroying the remaining glass, and yelping when a particularly sharp piece dug into his hip. Pushing away the pain, his gaze locked onto Carson’s throat, his large front paws connecting solidly with the other man’s chest.

They tumbled to the ground, rolling several times before coming to a stop several paces away from the window. Tate snarled and growled, baring his teeth, swiping at Carson with his claws. The man howled in pain, blood splattering across his face and chest.

With a loud roar, Carson delivered a disorienting blow to Tate’s temple, stunning him. Taking the advantage, he rolled until he hovered over Tate, his knee pressed painfully into Tate’s furry ribcage.

“You will die.” Carson hissed. He opened his mouth to reveal his pointed canines, smiling maniacally before swooping in with lightning speed to sink his teeth into Tate’s jaw.

Tate howled in pain, the sound turning into something somewhere between a grunt and a growl when Carson removed his knee from his ribs and jabbed it ruthlessly into Tate’s stomach.

Tate kicked out frantically, his legs flailing, claws scrambling for purchase. Though stronger than the Shadow Walker, in his current position, he couldn’t get the leverage he needed to push the man off of him.

Then suddenly, Carson fangs ripped painfully from Tate’s flesh, and his weight disappeared. Tate’s head swam and his stomach rolled, the pain blinding him. When he could finally get his eyes to focus, he

could find Carson nowhere. He sniffed the air, detecting a lingering trace of the man's scent, but nothing more.

He closed his eyes, harnessing his power, and forcing himself to shift back to human. With so much pain and blood loss, the transformation was lengthy and exhausting. The energy flowed from his body, and he blinked his eyes open to find the biggest white wolf he'd ever seen standing over him. The she-wolf whimpered and whined, licking his face and neck, nuzzling her silky head against his chest. He lifted a trembling hand, scratching behind her ear.

"You did good, baby," he whispered. His voice seemed to vibrate with the shuddering of his bottom lip. "I'm going to pass out now."

Tate rolled over, heaved into the dew-covered grass, flopped onto his back, and promptly fainted.

\* \* \* \*

The white wolf looked up at him and growled as Damon approached Tate. She hovered over her mate protectively, crouched low on her haunches, the hair along her spine bristling in her agitation.

Damon stopped moving and held up his hands in surrender. "It's just me, Ryah," he said quietly.

She stopped growling and rose, whimpering softly as she looked back and forth between Damon, and Tate's unconscious form. She nudged Tate's side with her nose and looked back up at Damon expectantly.

He knelt beside his injured mate and wrapped his arm around Ryah's neck, pulling her close. "It's okay, Ryah. He's going to be fine. We'll get him fixed up."

She continued to whine, licking at the skin on his throat and chin. Damon comforted her, petting her soft fur, stroking his fingers through the long, silken strands along her neck.

"You were amazing," he whispered. Everything had happened so

quickly, his brain still struggled to catch up. The fear that filled his being when Tate leapt through the broken window still left him struggling to breathe.

In a matter of seconds, Carson had gained the upper hand, pinning Tate beneath him, and Damon's chest constricted in panic. Before he'd been able to do anything, a huge white wolf appeared at his side. She hurled herself headlong through the window, bounding across the backyard and tackling Carson with the force of a locomotive.

Damon was damn proud of his girl, but it had still scared the shit out of him.

"Can you shift back, honey?"

Ryah whimpered, dancing back forth, rubbing her nose with her front paw. Damon knew the feeling. He could still remember his first shift, and how he had felt trapped. It had taken several hours for him to be able to turn back.

"Just close your eyes and breathe. Think about what you look like as human," Damon coached.

She tried for several minutes, before looking up at him with fearful eyes. He sighed. "That's really a shame," he mumbled. "All this fur makes you look fat."

In the blink of an eye, Ryah stood before him, naked and seething. "Damon Lewis, I am not fat!" she huffed.

He struggled to hold back his smile. "I don't know." He pretended to consider her. "I think we could rest a dinner plate on that ass."

The next instant, Ryah had him pinned on his back. She perched on top of him, a knee nestled snugly against his groin. "I am not fat!"

Damon let his head fall to the ground and roared with laughter. Damn, she was a feisty one. Then a new thought occurred to him, and he tilted his head to the side. "I thought I told you to be quiet? How are you talking? Well, growling actually."

Ryah just shrugged adorably. "It was more of a request than an order."

Damon started laughing again. “You are too much.” He chuckled.

She smiled and winked at him, then scrambled off of his lap, and went to kneel beside Tate. “Is he going to be okay?”

Damon pushed himself to his feet and moved to join her. “Yeah, he’ll be fine. Probably needs some blood.”

Ryah opened her mouth, letting her canines elongate. It amazed Damon that she had such control over her body when she had just shifted for the first time only minutes before. She brought her wrist to her mouth, but he stopped her.

“I’ll do it. You are probably tired from your shift and from your heat. You need to keep your strength.”

She looked like she would argue for a minute, but then simply dropped her arm and nodded once. Damon scored his wrist and held it over Tate’s open mouth, stroking the column of his lover’s throat to encourage him to swallow.

Tate groaned, sealing his lips over Damon’s arm, and took several deep pulls. Releasing Damon’s arm, he opened his eyes and grinned. “Did you see that?” he whispered in awe.

Damon nodded. “Rest for a few minutes. I’m glad you’re okay, but that doesn’t mean I’m not going to paddle your ass for scaring ten years off of my life.” He turned to point a finger in Ryah’s face. “Same goes for you, too, young lady.”

She just glared at him. “Get over yourself, Damon.” She pushed Tate’s hair back from his face lovingly and kissed his sweaty forehead. “Hello, handsome. How do you feel?”

“You are incredible,” he murmured.

Damon rolled his eyes and rose to his feet. “Okay, can you two come inside to make goo-goo eyes at each other? I have a phone call to make.”

Tate frowned at him, and Ryah stuck her tongue out. “You know, jealousy is not a good color on you, Mr. Lewis.”

## Chapter Sixteen

Lydia Jessup was a slip of a woman, younger than Midge and James by at least a decade. Her long blonde hair shimmered in the sunlight, and her pale skin looked as smooth as porcelain. She smiled a lot, showing off her perfect white teeth. She dressed well and exhibited impeccable manners. She didn't take any crap from her mates or from Damon and Tate, either.

Ryah liked her at once.

"Thank you for coming." She grinned as she set the tray of iced teas and cookies down on the patio table. "My men tend to be a little overprotective, overreacting at the slightest thing."

Lydia smirked. "Trust me, I know what you mean. Midge and James think I can't go tinkle on my own."

Ryah giggled at the four answering growls from the men and woman seated around the table. She imagined they were in for a rude awakening when it finally penetrated those thick skulls that Ryah and Lydia ran the show.

"I thought you said she wouldn't shift until the full moon," Damon blurted.

"I said her mating heat wouldn't end until the full moon. I never said when she would shift." Midge took a sip of her tea, regarding Damon sternly over the rim.

"And if we claim her, it's supposed to mask her scent," Tate said with steel in his voice. "The bastard could smell her."

"He said he wanted her, and you didn't hear the way he was moaning or see him rubbing himself against the window." Ryah shuddered more at the memory than the growl in Damon's voice.

Midge looked concerned. “Have you claimed her again since the first night?”

“Several times,” Tate answered.

“I thought we were supposed to be her protectors.” Damon’s voice became more guttural by the second.

Ryah rose from her seat and went to sit in his lap. She placed a hand on his cheek and kissed his lips. “They are here to help. Stop growling at everyone, love.”

Damon sighed and kissed her again. “Sorry,” he whispered.

“I see she already has your number, boy.” Midge laughed.

Damon blushed a little, but agreed. “Yes,” he stated simply.

“Why do you worry she doesn’t need you to protect her?”

“She’s huge!” Damon shouted. He seemed to realize his phrasing and turned to look sheepishly at Ryah. “Sorry, baby, but you are a really big wolf.”

Ryah giggled. “It’s okay. As long as you don’t start talking about my fat fur again.”

“Fat fur?” Tate mumbled in confusion.

She laughed harder, shaking her head. “I’ll explain later.”

“But...but Lydia is tiny when she shifts. Doesn’t look much bigger than a pup,” Midge sputtered.

Every head turned to stare at Lydia. She coughed a couple of times, a pink flush creeping up her cheeks. “What color is your fur?”

“White,” Ryah replied readily.

Lydia’s eyes widened, and she looked at Ryah as if she were special beyond measure. “White,” she whispered.

“Please tell me she’s a wolf queen or some such thing,” Tate grumbled.

“Tate, your sarcasm is not in the least attractive,” Ryah admonished.

He didn’t apologize. Just continued to grumble under his breath and looked away.

“Of course not.” Lydia huffed. “Lycans have no such royalty.”

“Oh well, that’s comforting,” Tate bit off.

“Tatum Jennings!” Ryah jumped up from Damon’s lap and bent to press her face close to Tate’s. “You are being a prick. Stop it, or I promise you, I will be getting really celibate.”

His eyes widened, and he swallowed hard. Nodding once, he whispered his apology.

“Better,” Ryah sniffed and climbed into his lap. Damon placed a hand on her knee and smiled.

“She’s a Keeper,” Lydia breathed in admiration.

“I think so,” Tate quipped, pulling Ryah tighter against his broad chest.

“No, no.” Lydia shook her head vehemently. “She’s a Keeper. A sentinel...oh!” She flapped her hands in frustration. “She’s a...a...She’s a guardian.”

She blew out a breath of exasperation when everyone continued to stare at her blankly. “She’s a protector.” Lydia looked into Ryah’s eyes. “You were born to protect the pack and be a keeper of the light.”

The way Lydia looked at her, the respect and wonder in her voice, Ryah knew this was a big deal. It meant nothing to her. She pressed her fingers to her temple and rubbed as if she could light a fire, and everything would suddenly become clear.

“I’m sorry,” she finally admitted. “I have no idea what you’re talking about. Keeper of the light? What light? Like the sunlight?”

Lydia groaned. “An omega is the heart and soul of the pack,” she began.

“Wait, I thought Ryah was a zeta,” Damon interrupted. He held up his hands and buttoned up when Lydia glared at him.

“As I was saying, an omega is the nucleus of the pack. It is said when a pack receives their omega, it will be a time of great celebration. The omega brings peace and contentment to the pack.” Lydia paused to make sure everyone followed her. “Many, in fact most, packs never have an omega.”

Ryah leaned forward in Tate's lap, resting her elbows on the table, listening intently. "Go on," she encouraged.

"Only a Keeper may give birth to an omega—the light of the pack."

"Keeper of the light," Ryah repeated. "So, the light is the omega, and I will be the omega's guardian...his or her mother." Tears sprang to her eyes, and she gasped.

Lydia smiled tenderly. "Yes, child. Packs have gone to war for the right to claim an omega. A Keeper must be big, strong, not only to defend the pack, but to protect her offspring until the child becomes of age to accept his position in the pack."

"I don't have a pack." Ryah's brow drew together, and she pursed her lips. "Do I need one?"

Lydia shook her head. "Other lycans will be drawn to you once you become with child. You will form your own pack."

"Damon will be Alpha," Ryah said immediately. She turned to Tate, "And you will be our Beta."

"Ryah, honey, I think we have some time to figure this all out." Damon patted her knee again. "Let's just get through one thing at a time."

"You have less time than you think." Lydia smirked.

"Huh? Why?" Tate tilted his head in confusion.

"The light already resides within her."

"I'm pregnant!" Ryah shouted, jumping to her feet.

"Well, what on earth did you think a mating heat was?" Midge laughed from her chair.

"I don't know...I thought...well, I was too busy trying not to burn alive to really think about anything," Ryah snapped.

"I felt the peace and joy the minute I laid eyes on you. It just took me a minute to work it all out."

"We need to be on our way, ladies." James spoke for the first and only time since arriving.

"Wait!" Ryah shouted. "Will I...I mean will it...I don't know

anything about having a baby! Will it hurt the baby if I shift?"

Midge and Lydia laughed. "You're going to be fine. We will be here to help you whenever you need us," Lydia said quietly. "No, shifting will not harm the baby. I told you before... You were born for this."

"Is there anything else I need to know?"

"Just that your presence soothes your mates. It's the same for all mated couples, but a Keeper's bond with her mate or mates is special." Lydia smiled mischievously. "Basically, you can make them do whatever you want."

Oh, Ryah definitely liked the sound of that.

"Also, as a Keeper, your blood is very powerful. It will heal your mates from almost any type of injury or affliction. It is a great gift."

Ryah liked the sound of that as well. Hot damn, she was just a big ole ball of awesome.

"I think you better take those boys of yours inside so they can have a lie down. I'm not sure they've so much as breathed since they heard the news," Midge cackled.

Ryah whipped around and started to giggle. Tate and Damon were staring at each other with blank expressions. Their mouths hung open, and they barely breathed.

"I'll take care of them," she assured the older women. She hugged each of her guests, thanking them for coming and for their help. Once the trio had departed, Ryah turned back to her men.

"Damon?" she whispered. "Tate? Come on, boys, snap out of it." She patted first Damon's cheek and then Tate's.

Tate was the first to come around, recognition lighting up his eyes. He looked at her dazedly for a second before breaking into a smile bright enough to rival the sun. "I'm going to be a dad," he breathed. He shot up from his seat, wrapping his arms around Ryah's waist, and lifting her off of her feet. He swung her in circles, laughing excitedly.

"I'm going to be a dad," Damon whispered from his chair. His

expression still blank, his gaze fixed on something Ryah couldn't see.

Once on her feet again, she walked over to kneel in front of him. "What's wrong?" Her heart tried its best to crawl up her throat and out through her mouth. "Do you not want this?" It surprised her how much the thought hurt.

Damon turned slowly to look down at her. He just stared. Then without warning, he grabbed her face and kissed her silly. "I'm going to be a dad!" he shouted when he pulled away to leave her gasping for breath.

He flew out of his chair, grabbing Tate, and hugging him hard. "We're going to be dads!" He laughed.

"We're going to be dads," Tate repeated in a whisper.

Then they were kissing, eating at each other's mouths, straining to get closer. Wow, it was freaking hot. Ryah watched them until the need to touch, to join with them, overwhelmed her, urging her to her feet.

"Hey, I'm the one carrying the baby here! If it weren't for me, you wouldn't be dads!"

Her mates broke away and turned to regard her seriously. The twinkle in their eyes held promises of wicked and wonderful things to come. Ryah shrieked, giggling like mad, as she raced into the house, her baby daddies chasing behind her.

## Chapter Seventeen

Damon sauntered into the kitchen, chuckling as Tate grabbed Ryah up and threw her over his shoulder.

“Let me down, you...you big bully!” Ryah’s face burned bright red, and she gasped in between giggles.

It all felt surreal. Never in his life had he imagined that he would one day be a father. Oddly, he found the idea exciting rather than terrifying. He didn’t know if the child would be his or Tate’s biologically, and it didn’t matter. He or she would always belong to the three of them equally.

Damon guessed most expectant fathers secretly wished for a little boy, but he hoped they had a girl—a beautiful little girl who looked just like her mother.

Coming out of his daydream, he realized the shrieks and giggles had turned to pants and moans. His mates were naked, wrapped around each other in a sensual kiss that had Damon’s cock hardening in seconds flat.

Stripping out of his clothing, he made his way quietly to the pair, pressing against Tate’s back. “Want you,” he whispered against the back of his neck.

Caught up in caring for Ryah while she suffered through her heat, he hadn’t taken Tate in more than a week. He craved his mate’s tight ass, the closeness they shared when he was buried balls deep inside Tate’s body.

“Yes, please,” came a deep moan in response. To Damon’s surprise, the plea came from Ryah, not Tate.

“Slut,” Damon joked.

“You bet.” She giggled back.

“Do it, Damon. I just want to watch.”

“Ryah, are you hurting?” Tate, always the caretaker.

She smiled and kissed his lips. “I’ll be fine, baby. I want to watch my two gorgeous mates love each other.”

Tate growled, pushing back against Damon, grinding his ass on Damon’s naked cock. “Pick a chair, babe.”

Damon had to blink several times before he could focus long enough to make it to one of the kitchen chairs. He sat down, waiting expectantly for whatever Tate had planned for him. He spread his thighs invitingly, rubbing his hands over his pebbled nipples and down his taut stomach. He crooked a finger, leering at his mate.

Tate climbed up into his lap, pressing their lips together and gyrating his hips. “Dammit,” he cursed, breaking the kiss. “Forgot the slick.”

Before Tate could move, a small bottle of lube sailed over Damon’s shoulder, smacking Tate in the chest. “Covered,” Ryah panted from behind him.

Damn, he adored that girl, especially, when she started laving kisses along his neck and shoulders. She nipped at his skin, lightly at first, then hard enough to bruise.

Damon let his head fall back, capturing Ryah’s lips and sucking her tongue into his mouth. They dueled, their tongues slipping and probing, each fighting for dominance. He appreciated that Ryah didn’t simply roll over and submit to him. Who’d have thought?

He almost came unglued when Tate’s long fingers wrapped around his shaft, and he impaled himself in one quick motion.

Damon ripped his mouth away from Ryah, turning quickly to look down at the place where his body met with Tate’s. Tate didn’t even take time to acclimate himself to Damon’s girth, just rose up and plunged down again.

He claimed Damon’s mouth, biting at his lips, thrusting his tongue in to explore the depths awaiting him. Then Ryah joined, her tongue

slipping into the three-way kiss, her slender fingers wrapping around Tate's cock. She stroked him quickly, even giving a little twist around the head just the way Damon knew his man liked.

The tastes, smells, sensations coursing through his body swirled and combined, until he knew he couldn't last. Not even a whole minute into it, and Damon fought not to blow his load.

"Not gonna last," he warned.

All movement stopped. Damon groaned in frustration, his dick so hard it throbbed painfully inside Tate's clenching ass. "Not done with you yet." Tate smirked. "Climb up Ryah," he said with a wink. "I believe I won our little bet the other morning."

Ryah looked blank for a moment then broke into a purely predatory grin. "Lie back, darlin'," she drawled.

Damon tried desperately to not swallow his tongue when Tate leaned back, resting his shoulders on the table. It became a near miss when Ryah crawled up on the table on all fours, straddling Tate's face and lowering herself to meet his questing tongue.

Her sweet moan caused Damon's cock to jump inside its sheath, pulling a ragged groan from Tate. They were trying to kill him, Damon was certain of it. Ryah peeked over her shoulder, her eyes smoldering at him, and he gulped audibly.

Move. He needed to move. The pressure in his balls built, his dick pulsed, demanding release. He surged forward, setting off a chain reaction of moans and whimpers.

Steadily pumping in and out of Tate's tight body, Damon eyed the enticing sight of Ryah's pink, quivering hole. Releasing his hold on Tate's hips, he leaned forward, parting the globes of her perfect bottom to get a better look.

His mouth watered as he watched her snug entrance clench and relax. He licked his lips once before closing his mouth over the sweet pucker. Ryah cried out, pushing into his mouth as Tate managed to rock back on his dick.

Damon swirled his tongue around the wrinkled hole, loving the

taste of his girl. He continued lavishing attention to Ryah's hungry ass, groaning at Tate's assault on his cock.

"Gonna," Tate gasped out, letting his head fall back to thump against the table.

"Oh, no you don't," Ryah panted. She moved forward, spinning quickly and almost diving off the table. She straddled Tate's face again, leaning down over his body, bracing her hands on the top of Damon's thighs. She dipped her head, swallowing Tate's cock to the root.

Tate's entire body jerked, his inner muscles gripping Damon's shaft, as a loud roar issued from his mouth. Damon had never seen anything so sexy.

After milking Tate's cock, Ryah licked him clean, pushing up on her arms to shove her tongue into Damon's mouth, sharing Tate's seed with him. "Fuck!" Damon screamed, driving his cock deep into Tate's ass as he coated his mate's internal walls with his release.

His jolting movements almost dislodged Ryah, and she scurried back up Tate's torso to the table before she ended up heaped on the floor. "Sorry," Damon puffed.

Ryah giggled. "It's okay, big guy."

"Come here, baby," Damon breathed tiredly. "I'll take care of you."

"We're good." Tate smiled, licking his lips. "I thought she was going to drown me." He laughed, his muscles tightening, causing Damon's flaccid cock to slip from his body.

"I think there was another part of that bet, but we're going to have to try it later. I need a nap," Ryah yawned.

A nap sounded like a damn good idea to Damon as well.

\* \* \* \*

The full moon dawned a little anticlimactic in Tate's opinion. Since Ryah had already shifted, it really didn't differ from any other

night. The three of them shifted and ran the woods on the edge of town, hunting and playing until the wee hours of the morning. It still unnerved him a bit that Ryah stood taller and bigger than him or Damon.

In the two weeks since they'd found out about the baby, Tate had become a complete basket case. He constantly worried if Ryah was warm enough, had enough to eat, if she was tired. Too many things could happen. He'd gone completely berserk, yelling and acting like a complete ass, when he'd found her up on a stepladder dusting the ceiling fans earlier in the morning.

She still wouldn't speak to him.

He couldn't help himself though. He knew he bordered on overbearing, but he would gladly lie down and die if anything happened to Ryah and their baby.

He never knew his heart could contain so much joy and happiness. He'd do anything, even alienate the mother of his child, if it meant keeping them both safe.

He gained little comfort in the knowledge that Damon had become a complete jackass as well. Tate needed one of them to be rational, and it sure as hell wouldn't be him any time soon. Why did it have to take so long to have a baby? Tate knew he'd be a blubbering nutcase by the time Ryah popped the kid out.

Damon had gone as far as to trade in his truck for an SUV. The biggest, most badass SUV he could find. Tate could not believe the man hadn't bought a tank. He had bought, however, an eight hundred dollar crib, complete with canopy.

Tate would never admit it, but he loved the damn thing. Nothing was too good or too expensive for their little prince or princess. God, he hoped they had a boy. Not because he wanted a star athlete, but because he knew a little girl would be even more spoiled than her mamma. He didn't need to be wrapped around anyone else's tiny fingers. He was a sucker, and he owned up to it.

"Go away!" Ryah screeched. Tate turned just in time to see a roll

of painter's tape fly out of the Ryah's old room—the new nursery. “Get out, get out, get out!”

Damon came running out, covered in yellow paint, just as a paintbrush flew over his head and smacked against the wall in front of him.

Ryah marched out of the room, hands on her hips, looking mad enough to spit fire. “I am not a fucking invalid. Stop smothering me, or I'm going to hand you your ass on a dirty plate,” she threatened.

Tate covered his mouth to hide his snort, hoping he would go unnoticed by the irate beauty. Too bad she looked like sin on legs when she was pissed. His cock jumped, filling quickly inside his jeans. “Not now,” he whispered to his groin. He backed slowly into the kitchen, trying not to make a sound.

“Tatum!” Ryah yelled.

Dammit. Caught. He stepped forward, shoving his hands deep in his pockets. “Yes, honey?” he asked innocently.

“Don't you use that tone of voice with me!”

Damn, she confused him. What tone of voice had he used? “Uh, and which one would that be?”

“Ugh!” Another paintbrush flew through the hair, nailing Tate in the forehead. “Leave me alone! Both of you!” Ryah marched back into the room and slammed the door with enough force to shake the walls.

“What the hell did you do to her?” Tate gaped at Damon.

Damon looked completely baffled. “I just asked if she needed help.” A slight flush crept up his neck. “I may have mentioned that she should probably rest and let me take care of it.”

Tate shook his head and sighed. “I yelled at her earlier for cleaning the ceiling fans,” he admitted. “I think we need to chill out a little. Women have been having babies for centuries, or so I hear.”

“Yeah, but those women weren't our woman.”

“True, but I still think we're going a bit overboard.”

Damon blew out a breath. “Yeah, you're probably right. I'll try,

but damn it's hard. I get sick at my stomach just thinking about something happening to her or the baby."

"I know the feeling, babe. We're being a bit overbearing though. She's perfectly capable of taking care of herself, and we both know it."

"Okay," Damon relented. "I'm still taking her shopping for a new car, though. She needs a vehicle here while we're at work. I don't want her being here alone without a way to get somewhere if she needs to."

"I think that's a great idea." Tate looped his arms around Damon's neck and kissed him chastely. "I don't really need a vehicle since I mostly ride with you. We'll trade mine in for something suitable. I wonder if she'd go for a minivan? I hear they're very safe."

Damon chuckled before kissing him again. "Yeah, I can just see her sporting a minivan."

"Not on your life." Tate turned to find Ryah watching them. She looked so appalled he had to turn away to hide his smile. "I will not drive a minivan."

"Whatever you want, baby," Damon placated.

"Good. Then I want Tate's car."

Damon's face mirrored Ryah's from moments before. "Why on earth would you want that piece of crap?"

Tate stepped back and slapped Damon in the chest. "What the fuck is wrong with my car?" Wow, his mate could be a snob sometimes.

"Absolutely nothing," Ryah said before Damon could answer. "It's practically new, and you barely drive it. It has four doors and is as safe as they come. I think it's pretty cute actually. There is no sense in going out to buy another car when there is nothing wrong with the one in our driveway."

"My car is not cute!" Tate started to become more irritated by the minute.

"Of course not." Ryah waved a hand in dismissal. "I meant it is a

nice car, sexy even.” She smirked at him, daring him to argue.

He couldn’t help but smile. “What would we do without you?”

Ryah bounced over to place a kiss on his cheek. “Be broke and alone with only each other for company.” She gave a mock shudder. “No one should have to live like that.”

“Hey!” Tate and Damon shouted together.

Ryah winked and raced out of the room, hightailing it to the bedroom where she slipped in and locked the door quickly.

\* \* \* \*

She had serious doubts as to what planet her mates lived on. She held up the itty-bitty black bikini and frowned. They wanted her to wear this thing in public? To give them credit, they had given her something to wear over it—a pair of black leather chaps. Add that to the cowgirl boots and black Stetson, and Ryah couldn’t stop the shudder that ran through her.

“You are out of your ever loving mind.”

“Come on, you’ll look hot,” Tate persuaded.

“I am not meeting the elders of your colony dressed like Annie Poke-Me or Come-In-Me Jane.” Nope, not going to happen.

Damon laughed so hard tears sprang to his eyes. “Where’s your sense of adventure?”

“I sold it on eBay for a diaper bag.”

Tate and Damon roared with more laughter. “It’s Halloween, baby. Everyone is going to be wearing a costume,” Tate coaxed.

“This,” Ryah waved the tiny scraps of fabric at them, “is not a costume. It’s a tissue. What are you wearing?”

Tate winked. “Be right back.” He grabbed Damon’s hand and dragged him from the room.

Ryah sighed. Six weeks into her pregnancy, and she felt like a cow. Though she hadn’t gained any weight, she felt puffy and bloated. Her hormones were out of control, her moods all over the

place. Bless her men, they just rolled with the punches, dodging occasionally, but mostly absorbing the blows.

She couldn't wear the skimpy little costume in public. She was going to be someone's mother for sobbing out loud.

Yes, she was going to have a baby and be responsible for the life of another human being. She didn't know anything about babies, but she promised herself she would be the best mother she knew how to be. She would never treat her child the way her mother had treated her. Her son or daughter would be showered in love and attention.

And damn her men were so cute about the whole thing. Ryah couldn't ask for better daddies. She never knew her dad, but she counted herself lucky for it. She wished she knew where he lived, though. She'd hunt his ass down and make him pay for the life he had left her to endure with her mother.

How could they never tell her who or what she was? Had her entire life been a lie? If she didn't already hate her mother, her mating heat would have clenched the deal.

Not that she was complaining really. She just wished she hadn't been blind-sided by the whole shifting, Keeper, omega thing. Shifting into her wolf was amazing, like a warm tingling deep in her bones. Running the woods with her mates had to be the most exhilarating thing she had ever experienced. Never before had she felt so free, so...powerful.

No, she couldn't regret her life. Everything she had lived through, every injustice heaped on her, had led her to this point in her life. To Damon, Tate, and the baby they would bring into the world.

"Ta da!" Tate sang as he swaggered into the room, Damon riding his heels.

Ryah's cheeks burned and sweat slicked her palms. "No freaking way!" she growled.

Tate and Damon wore matching costumes, very similar to the one they had chosen for her. The only difference was the lack of the bikini top. Ryah gulped at all the hard, rippling muscles on display. Flames

leapt along her spine to pool in her groin.

Her men were nuts if they thought she would let them go parading around in front of other women—and men—dressed as they were. “You cannot wear that!”

“Why not?” Damon looked bewildered. “What’s wrong with it?”

“There’s not enough of it for one.”

Damon’s grin was a thing of beauty. “You know you’re real cute when you’re jealous.” He walked closer, clinking his spurs with each step. “And as much as I love how possessive you are of us, I promise you have nothing to worry about.”

Tate circled around to her back, sandwiching her between them. “It’s just the four of us,” he whispered, sliding his hand over her flat stomach, stroking it protectively.

“You fight dirty.” She sighed in resignation. “Fine, I’ll wear it.”

“Hot damn!” Tate shouted, jumping back, and doing a little jig. What a cornball.

“I’m hungry,” Ryah said absently. As expected, both men raced from the room, directly to the kitchen.

“Works every time,” she muttered to herself.

## Chapter Eighteen

Ryah clutched at Damon's hand, her other arm linked in Tate's. How the hell did they talk her into this? "Why are we doing this again?" she hissed.

"I told you," Damon answered calmly. "Our clan wishes to meet our zeta."

"Also," Tate added, "there are Lycans living among the clan. We are to meet them and see if they would be interested in joining our pack."

Ryah sighed but nodded. Midge and her mates had already voiced their desire to become part of the pack. Midge and James planned to give up their positions as elders of the clan at the feast.

"Everyone's staring," Ryah whispered self-consciously.

"Don't worry, honey. They're all looking at me." Tate puffed out his chest a little.

Ryah growled.

Damon laughed. "We've been waiting a long time to find our zeta. Our clan is happy for us."

"That better be all they are," she muttered under her breath.

"Damon, Tate, we're so glad you could make it." A beautiful blonde woman, dressed as a ladybug, bounced up and kissed Damon's cheek. She moved to kiss Tate, but Ryah stepped forward, blocking her way.

"Who the fuck are you?"

The woman looked taken aback. Her eyes went wide, and her full, painted mouth hung open like a guppy. Ryah crossed her arms over her breasts, waiting.

“This is Rowena,” Tate answered at last, the amusement in his voice evident to all. “She is a member of the clan.”

“Mmhmm,” Ryah sneered. “Move it along, sunshine.”

Rowena nodded rapidly and turned to sprint away.

Ryah instantly felt ashamed of herself. Why had she done that? She turned back to apologize to her mate, but any words she might have uttered were cut off by Damon’s tongue down her throat. Tate joined in, all three tongues dueling.

“That was hot as fuck,” Damon rumbled.

Ryah smiled. “Don’t swear,” she chastised teasingly.

After that, she relaxed and enjoyed the party. No one else—male or female—tried getting too close to her boys again. Apparently, Little Miss Ladybug had spread the word that the clan hotties’ new zeta was extremely possessive and territorial.

Good.

The feast went off without a hitch. Ryah had never seen so much food in her life. She decided on the bourbon pecan pie first. Hey, she was pregnant. It should be allowed. She did check to make certain the pie didn’t actually contain alcohol first, though.

The clan seemed sad when they learned James, Midge, and Lydia would be leaving them, but they were happy Lydia had found a pack with a Keeper to accept her. By the end of the meal, they had eight new pack members.

“Our family,” Ryah whispered, looking at the new member’s hopeful faces. Tears leaked from her eyes, and she let them fall. All of her life she had wanted a family. She had been content with their little family of three. Then she’d found out she was expecting, and the number grew. Now she counted eleven people to love and care for.

“Are you okay, sweetheart?” Tate kissed her temple.

“I’m so happy,” she sobbed.

The new members of their pack seemed a little disconcerted at her breakdown. They shuffled nervously, looking down at their feet.

“It’s okay,” Damon reassured them. “You are all welcome. She’s

a little hormonal.” He shrugged. “You learn to live with it.”

Ryah slapped at him halfheartedly, smiling through her tears. “He’s right, however insensitive he may be. You are all welcome. We’re family now.” She went about, hugging and greeting each member, James, Midge, Lydia, three men and two women. She learned the newest members were all lycans, abandoned by their packs for one reason or another. It broke her heart.

“We stick together,” she said firmly. “That’s my only rule.”

Everyone nodded eagerly in agreement.

“This is Damon Lewis,” Ryah continued. “Your new alpha. His word is law and will be followed to the letter.” She waited for everyone to nod. “This,” she introduced Tate, “is Tatum Jennings, our pack Beta.” Again, everyone nodded. “And I am Ryah Hardaway, the pack Keeper. You will step forth, introduce yourself, including your status, and declare your allegiance to your alpha and the pack.”

Ryah stepped back behind Damon and Tate, shook her head and blinked. Where the hell had that come from? She hadn’t even thought the words before they spilled from her mouth as naturally as if someone else spoke through her. Would she ever get used to this Keeper gig?

Once Damon had accepted and welcomed the last member of the pack, Ryah stepped forward to stand between her mates. “You will remain with the clan until we can secure hunting lands. You will be safe here, but if you ever need us, do not hesitate to ask. Once we have obtained the land, we will move our pack. Does anyone object to relocating?”

Everyone shook their heads. “Good,” she said and smiled. “Let’s have some fun then.”

The entire clan broke into cheers and applause. Music began playing, and the crowd dispersed, many heading for the makeshift dance floor.

“Care to dance?” Damon bowed, holding out a hand to her and one to Tate.

“I’d love to,” Ryah said regally, then broke into fits of giggles.  
“Come along, Tatum.”

“Yes’m,” Tate agreed with a wink.

\* \* \* \*

Tate followed his mates to the dance floor, eating up the sight of their scantily clad behinds. They reached an open spot, and Damon twirled Ryah into his arms, grinding against her. Tate’s cock jerked, swelling rapidly, straining to free itself from the skimpy underwear.

Stepping up behind his girl, he rubbed his erection against her ass, swirling his hips, and reaching around to cup her swollen breasts. Pregnancy did have its advantages.

He pushed her curly hair to the side, baring her smooth neck. Licking a trail from shoulder to hairline, Tate swayed with the music, loving the feel of his mate’s warm body pressed against his.

“You smell good,” he whispered huskily, humping faster against Ryah’s backside. Damn, how he wanted to bury his aching shaft into that tight pussy. He couldn’t get enough of his lovers lately.

Ryah twirled out of his and Damon’s hold, spinning until she ended up behind Tate. She pressed her breasts against his naked back and slid her hands along his ribs. “I think our man is needing,” she murmured to Damon.

Damon skimmed a hand down Tate’s stomach and cupped his heavy erection. He squeezed roughly, leaning in to nibble along Tate’s jawline. “Is that right, baby? You need something?”

Tate groaned at the incredible torture. Ryah’s hands squeezed his ass, pushing him forward into Damon’s hand as it continued to massage his throbbing dick. Plump lips and a wet tongue moved over his back and across his shoulders.

Hell yes, he needed them. Not caring who bothered to watch them, Tate moved a hand behind him, maneuvering between his and Ryah’s bodies, until it rested on her flat stomach. He inched his way

down, dipping his fingers into the waistband of the bikini bottom, stroking the flesh just above his lover's slit.

Ryah groaned in his ear, going up on her tiptoes to force his hand deeper. Tate obliged, slipping his middle finger between the soft folds, rubbing it against her clitoris. He closed his eyes, growling softly at the drenched heat he encountered.

She pressed closer to him, grinding against his ass, pleasuring herself with his hand. One of her dainty hands reached around him and gripped Damon's hip, pulling him forward until his erection brushed against Tate's.

"Touch him," Ryah whimpered in his ear.

Happily. He wrapped his free arm around Damon's neck, pulling him down and capturing his mouth in a scorching kiss. His mates humped into him, Ryah from behind and Damon in front, assaulting his senses and sending him into erotic overload.

Jerking his mouth away, Tate dropped his head to Damon's shoulder and panted. "Gonna," he gasped.

"Wait," Ryah practically yelled. She stepped back, and Tate reluctantly let his hand slide free of her underwear. "This way," she whispered, taking his hand and pulling him along.

She led them off of the dance floor, around the tables, and into the improvised parking lot. Stopping behind a particularly large truck, she dropped to her knees and pulled at Damon and Tate's waistbands.

Catching on quickly, Tate pushed the tiny underwear down, letting his leaking cock pop free of its confinement. "Suck me," he demanded raggedly.

Damon hurried to follow Tate's lead, his eyes burning with desire. Ryah growled softly, wrapping her hand around Damon's shaft before diving down on Tate, swallowing his dick to the root.

Tate groaned, closing his eyes and dropping his head back on his shoulders. Ryah continued working his slippery pole, licking and sucking, swallowing around the head. She pulled off, replacing her mouth with a firm grasp of her hand.

Tate stared down at her, completely enamored. She jacked him roughly, holding Damon's cock at the base and licking the head with her tongue. She had no more than wrapped her puffy lips around the engorged helmet, when Damon fisted her hair and yanked her head away.

"Need to be in you," he ground out in a guttural growl.

"Oh fuck yeah," Tate moaned when Ryah released Damon and went back to devouring his cock.

\* \* \* \*

Damon pushed at Tate's shoulder's, encouraging the man to his knees. Tate crumpled ungracefully, Ryah following him all the way until she landed on all fours. Damon watched a little longer, stroking his pulsing shaft, feeling his balls draw up as Tate's dick slipped in and out of Ryah's eager mouth.

He couldn't wait another second. Dropping to his knees behind Ryah, he rolled her bikini bottoms over her hips and down her thighs to her knees. "Can't go slow," he warned.

Ryah popped off of Tate's member long enough to look over her shoulder and snarl at him. "Fuck me," she demanded. She turned back, engulfing Tate's rigid flesh in one swallow.

Damon grabbed his mate's hips, lined up his cock, and shoved in to the hilt in one hard thrust. He groaned from deep in his chest, leaning over Ryah's body, and resting his head between her shoulder blades. "Damn, you feel good."

Ryah moaned around Tate's erection, pulling an equally delicious sound from Tate's lips. Damon sat up and fucked his lover with every bit of pent up lust he possessed. Gripping her waist, he drove into her dripping, velvet-lined heat, pounding hard enough to jar her small body.

She took every inch of him, every brutal jab, and begged for more. Whimpering and groaning, she pushed back against him and arched

her back to take him deeper. Damon continued his invasion, laying siege to the gripping depths of her pussy. He watched as Tate grabbed her head in both hands and jerked his hips, pumping into her sweet mouth.

“Fuck! I’m gonna...” Tate threw his head back, howling out his climax, shoving his prick as far down Ryah’s throat as he could reach.

The sounds of Tate’s orgasm, the answering clench of Ryah’s inner walls, the smell of their climaxes pushed Damon over the edge. He thrust twice more, buried himself balls deep, and roared his own release, shooting into Ryah’s hungry depths.

“Amazing,” he panted, easing out of her body and helping her to lie limply on the ground.

Tate slumped to the grass as well, peppering kisses over Ryah’s sweat-slicked back. “Incredible.”

“I think I died,” she mumbled, her words muffled against her arm.

Damon chuckled, stuffing his limp and sticky cock back into his underwear, then grimaced. It would be uncomfortable, but well worth it.

After helping Ryah put her clothes to rights, he pulled her to her feet and kissed her sweetly. He then leaned over and kissed Tate, beaming like the well-loved man he was. “Let’s try that dance again.”

## Chapter Nineteen

They had just reached the dance floor when a loud roar rent the air. It sounded like nothing Ryah had ever heard before—more animal than human. It sent shivers down her back and froze her blood.

“Ryah Hardaway!” the voice bellowed.

Before she knew what was happening, her entire pack surrounded and shielded her. The men took up the front line, while the women tried to hurry her off of the dance floor. Ryah struggled, fighting off their hold.

She would not run. She was the Keeper and duty-bound to protect the pack. She had been born for this.

Carson Owens came striding through the crowd, people scrambling to get out of his way. His face twisted in a mask of hate and revulsion. “Ryah!” he thundered again. “You belong to me, and I intend to claim what is mine in front of these witnesses.”

Ryah sidestepped her sentinel and walked forward to face her ex-husband. “You have no claim on me,” she said calmly. “Leave now, and I will let you live.”

“You do not frighten me, Keeper.”

Something seemed very different about Carson, but she couldn’t put her finger on it. Perhaps the lack of alcohol fumes that always followed him threw her off.

“What do you want?” she demanded.

“You know damn well what I want. You belong to me, and I intend to have you!”

No one moved. No one spoke. The crowd barely breathed. “She doesn’t belong to you.” Damon growled deep in his chest.

Ryah struggled to contain her rage. Maybe if she just killed the bastard, they could get back to their dance.

“She was promised to me as a child, and I will have her. I will claim her here in front of everyone and teach her some fucking respect!”

“Over my dead body,” Ryah growled. She grew tired of his self-entitled bullshit. What would it take to get some peace from the man?

“You are promised to me,” Carson repeated. His eyes flashed with rage and menace, his upper lip curled over his teeth, and his body trembled, giving him a deranged look. “You have neglected your obligations as my wife, and you will pay for it.”

“I’m not your wife, and you mean nothing to me. You can take your promises and obligations and go fuck yourself,” Ryah spat.

\* \* \* \*

Damon still couldn’t get used to such foul words coming from such a delicate mouth. Ryah only cursed when angry, and he would never admit it turned him on like crazy. How messed up was he?

Turning his attention back to Carson, Damon’s dislike of the arrogant, self-important prick escalated the longer the man spoke. He had to agree with his mate. No one walked in and demanded his zeta, the mother of his child, belonged to them.

“My father destroyed my entire family, but he saw something in me. He knew I could do great things, so he and his *friend*,” Carson growled the word as though it left a bad taste in his mouth, “changed me.”

“You said I was promised to you.” Ryah’s small hands fisted on her hips, and she cocked her head to the side. “What does that mean?”

“My father promised you to me as my mate. He lied!” Carson screamed. “He took you after your parents died and hid you from me. Then he tried to give me your sister. I don’t want your fucking sister!”

“I have a sister?” Ryah’s hand went to her mouth, and she

stumbled backward.

“Who gives a shit? It took me seventeen years to find you! Seventeen long years of searching and months of seducing you to gain your trust. You belong to me, and you will come home now.”

Damon stepped forward at the same moment as Tate. His mate looked spitting mad, growling, snarling, and hissing. “She belongs to us,” Damon said in a guttural tone. “She is our zeta, and she carries our child.”

Carson sneered at him. “I can fix that. Can’t have her getting fat, can I?” Damon felt it before his eyes registered what happened. The mention of harming their child snapped Tate’s frayed hold on his self-control. An ear-numbing shriek ripped through the night. The sound long and loud, filled with rage and vengeance.

He watched in horror as Tate hunched forward, wrapping his arms around his midsection. His skin turned a sickly blue color, the texture becoming something akin to leather. His body pulsed and vibrated, melting and reforming.

Damon sprinted toward him, screaming for him to stop, to gather his control. Three steps before he could reach his mate, Tate rose up, head thrown back and arms extended wide. His clothes ripped from his body, falling to the ground like confetti. Huge, black, leathery wings exploded from his back, his face no longer recognizable, and his eyes depthless pools of onyx.

He screeched again, opening his wings and sending several people nearby rolling for cover. Tate hovered above the ground, flapping his wings softly. His eyes fixed on Carson, and death burned in his gaze. He lifted one long, spindly finger and crooked a talon at the intruder—the action universal.

Bring it on.

Damon glanced quickly back at Ryah. Her eyes were wide, and she seemed stunned, but unafraid. He, however, felt terrified. Once a Gavolot released his demon and took its form, it became almost impossible to change back.

He could not lose Tate. He wouldn't.

Carson smirked as if he found Tate's performance ostentatious. "Let's do this." He sounded all too eager. Ripping away his shirt, and pushing his jeans down his legs, he dropped to the ground and quickly transformed into one big ass, black wolf.

He growled ferociously, and prowled forward, low to the ground. Damon shredded his clothes, crouching down and shifting faster than he could ever remember doing it before.

He blinked open his eyes, threw his head back, and howled. Tate and Carson were locked together, rolling and snarling at each other on the ground. Blood covered them both, staining the grass where they battled.

Damon crept closer, circling the pair, looking for his opening. A vicious bite to the shoulder, and Tate shrieked in pain. The black wolf powered his way from beneath him, ending up on top of Tate, and Damon had his shot.

He crouched down, fangs bared, preparing to leap when a white blur shot past him, sailing into the air, and colliding with the wolf. The two lupines rolled, snarling and biting at each other. Howls and yelps of pain signaled when one found its mark.

Damon had no way to know from which wolf the sounds emitted. His heart seized, and his stomach rolled over. Would he be destined to lose both of his mates and his child?

Then Tate jumped back into the fray, ripping and tearing, spitting and hissing. He didn't seem to care where his blows landed as long as they connected solidly. Damon hated himself for what he was about to do, but now, Tate had become the biggest threat.

He bound forward, and in one long leap landed on Tate's back, sinking his teeth into his lover's neck. Tate yowled in pain, beating his wings against Damon, and shaking his head, trying to dislodge him from his back.

A long, clawed hand gripped Damon's neck and propelled him over Tate's head. He fell through the air to land several yards away,

his back leg snapping from the impact. His head throbbed, leaving him dizzy and his vision blurry.

Struggling to his feet, Damon limped toward the fighting threesome, intent on stopping Tate before the man did something he would regret. Well, if they could bring him back. He would worry about that later.

A high-pitched, strangled cry, part-human and part-animal, froze Damon in his tracks. The wail cut off into a gurgled sob and then went silent.

His beautiful white wolf stood over the felled Carson. Her fur lay heavily against her flanks, matted and saturated in blood. Damon had no way of knowing how much of the blood belonged to his mate.

Terror coursed through him as Ryah stepped over the ebony wolf and padded toward Tate. She didn't understand, didn't realize that Tate no longer recognized friend from foe—not even his mates. He would kill her without blinking.

Damon hobbled forward as quickly as his three legs would carry him. He knew he wouldn't be fast enough. He couldn't make it to Ryah before she reached Tate. Despair forced the breath from his lungs, and he crumpled to the ground, whining and whimpering, mourning the loss of his heart, his sunshine, his entire reason for being.

Tate hissed as she approached him, and Ryah growled in warning as they circled each other. Damon watched, fear paralyzing him in place, as Tate dove through the air and tackled their mate, sinking his sharp teeth into her neck.

A loud, high-pitched yelp froze Damon's blood, and he closed his eyes. He couldn't watch. He had failed them both.

After several long minutes of relative silence, he slowly parted his lids, and stared at the most amazing sight he'd ever seen.

Ryah stood over Tate, licking his wounds and rubbing her muzzle over his face. And Tate was...Tate. His sun-kissed skin, his lean, sculpted muscles, his beautiful, long dark hair. Damon gathered the

last of his waning energy and squeezed his eyes closed as he shifted back to human.

“Motherfucker!” he screamed when he had changed back. His leg throbbed like ten shades of hell. He could feel the bones mending, setting and realigning themselves.

Several members of his new pack surrounded him, asking inane questions and fawning all over him. “Help me up,” he ordered. They immediately lifted him to his feet. Maybe this alpha thing wouldn’t be so bad after all.

Someone wrapped an arm around his waist, supporting the majority of his weight, and helped him across the way to where his mates sat.

No one spoke.

The pack member lowered him to the ground beside Tate, and tears of joy streamed over Damon’s cheeks when he saw his lover’s eyes were open. “How are you, baby?”

“Hurts like hell,” Tate whispered. “But, I’m alive. I swear her blood is like an espresso shot and a valium all in one. As soon as it hit my tongue, I could feel myself coming back.”

“Ryah, honey, it’s over. Change back, sweetheart.” Damon smoothed a hand over the wolf’s head, scratching behind her ears. “I need to make sure you’re okay, baby. Please.”

Ryah barked softly, nuzzling into his hand for a second before stepping back and shifting. She sat on the ground, panting and shivering, her hair plastered to her face, and copious amounts of wet blood staining her skin from head to thighs.

“Sorry I bit you.” Then Tate’s eyes seemed to focus on the blood, and he choked. “How much of that is yours?” He tried to sit up, but gasped in pain, falling back to the ground.

Ryah moved quickly to his side, leaning over him and petting his face. “I’m fine, love. I’m just fine. A small scratch on my hip and a little bite on my neck is all.” She spoke softly, calming and soothing her frightened lover. She looked over at Damon and gave him a little

half-smile. "I promise." She placed her hand lightly against her midsection. "We are both safe."

Tate tried to reach out to touch her stomach, but his arm shook and fell limply to his side. Guessing what he needed, Ryah gently took his hand and held it over her red-stained stomach. "We're fine," she said around a smile.

"Thank you," he breathed then passed out.

Seeing the worried look in her eyes, Damon hurried to reassure her. "He's going to be fine. He just needs to rest. I'll give him some blood when we get home."

"Why is it always him?" Ryah asked. Her brow wrinkled, and she frowned. "It's always him."

Damon couldn't help but chuckle. "He leaps before he thinks. And...he's a bit of a klutz."

She shook her head, but he saw the corners of her mouth twitch. "He needs blood before we move him."

Damon bit his lip. He didn't want to tell her about his leg. He'd need more time to heal before he could give Tate the blood he needed.

"You both do," Ryah whispered. "Don't think you are hiding anything from me Damon Lewis." She glared at him. "How bad is it?"

He sighed. "A broken leg. It's already healing."

Ryah nodded and scored her wrist before Damon could stop her. She held out the bleeding appendage to him, shaking it in his direction when he refused to take it. "The baby," he reminded her.

"My body produces more blood now because of the baby. It won't hurt either of us. Now, drink."

Damon shook his head again. He and Tate had already agreed amongst themselves to hold off on feeding from Ryah until after she had the baby. They wouldn't risk putting either of them in jeopardy.

"Damon," Ryah growled. "Don't forget, I'm bigger and stronger than you. Open your mouth and drink, or you're going to find out just how unladylike I can be."

Damon didn't doubt the sincerity, or miss the threat in her voice. With a reluctant nod, he gently cupped her hand and brought it to his lips. He didn't take much, less than he really needed, but it seemed to pacify her.

Ryah smiled at him when he lifted his head. "Better?"

"Yes, thank you."

She turned, biting into her wrist again, and held it over Tate's mouth. Using her other hand to hold open his jaws, she let her life-giving essence flow into his body.

Damon started to protest, but thought better of it. She'd likely just rip his head off. After several moments, he couldn't stop himself any longer. He seized her wrist and pulled it away from Tate's mouth.

"Enough," he whispered. "Please, that will be enough. I can't...I just can't risk it."

Ryah glared. She studied him for a long time before her eyes softened, and she smiled. "Okay. Let's go home."

## **Epilogue**

Ryah awoke alone, the sheets cold on either side of her. Groaning, she rolled out of bed and slipped on a satin robe, belting it around her waist. She had a good idea of where she'd find her wayward mates.

A lot had changed in the last year. With Lydia's help, Ryah had discovered her birth parents. Once she shifted in front of the woman she had called mother her entire life, it hadn't taken long for the woman to divulge Ryah's real last name. From there, they had followed the trail all the way to the mountains of Tennessee.

Ryah's birth pack had long since dispersed. The few remaining members of the pack were reluctant to speak of why the pack had disassembled. They were, however, very forthcoming with information about her parents.

Carson had indeed been the adopted son of the former alpha, but she had never been promised to him. The rumors went that Ryah's father had fallen into some kind of trouble with the alpha and offered her as a bargaining chip, claiming she would be an omega once she reached maturity.

Seemed everyone in her life wanted to use her in some way, until Damon and Tate had come along and saved her.

The alpha took the deal, and like all crooked men, murdered her parents in cold blood. She had been spirited away in the night, taken to live with a human the alpha kept on the side. She was supposed to remain there until her eighteenth birthday, hidden away from anyone who knew what she would become.

No one counted on Carson tracking her down.

Though the news of her selfish parents left her disappointed, she

fell in love with the countryside. So, they bought a hundred and eighty square acres, mostly wooded, and relocated the pack to northern Tennessee. The members chose to find houses or apartments in town, but Ryah and her men decided to build their own house on the hunting lands.

The inability to find any information on a sibling she may or may not have left a blemish on her otherwise happy existence. She didn't even know where to begin looking for such a person. In her heart, her gut, Ryah believed she did indeed have a sister.

Other than her instincts, she noticed the former pack members she spoke with clammed up and quickly changed the subject when she made any mention of a sister. Once things settled down, perhaps she could convince her mates to hire a private investigator to look for her lost sibling. She had her biological last name—Gilson. It wasn't much, but it was a start.

Ryah smiled to herself as she made her way down the hall. She treasured every inch of their stone and log cabin, and poured her heart and soul into making it a home. Just big enough for their family, it felt cozy and warm. Exactly the kind of home she always dreamed of having.

Life was perfect.

She stood just inside the doorway, smiling at the scene before her. Damon sat in the oversized rocking chair, cradling Jasmine to his chest. Her dark hair poked out of the blanket he had her swaddled in, her face peaceful in sleep.

Damon wore an expression of complete surrender. Only four months old, and she already had her daddy wrapped around her finger.

Tate sat on the floor between Damon's knees, resting his head on his mate's thigh. His right hand pet Jasmine's tiny, socked foot where it poked out of the blanket. Yep, she had her papa wound up tight as well.

Damon hummed, low and soothing, stroking a finger over

Jasmine's soft curls. Ryah watched them, a fierce protectiveness settling over her. Her men and her little girl. She would tear anyone apart who threatened them.

Stepping into the room, she quietly made her way to the threesome, kneeling in front of Tate. "You are going to spoil her," she admonished in a whisper.

"She can never be spoiled. She is too perfect," Damon whispered back. When he looked down at her, his eyes shimmered with unshed tears. "Thank you," he mouthed.

Ryah's own tears blurred her vision, and she smiled. Every day since she gave birth to Jasmine, Damon and Tate would thank her. When she finally asked what on earth for, Tate simply said, "For the gift of being a father."

Her heart overflowed with happiness until she felt she would burst with it. "Let's put her down so you two can come back to bed. She's not the only girl in this house who loves you."

Tate reached up and cupped Ryah's cheek, pulling her face down to place a soft kiss on her lips.

She stood, helping him to his feet, and turned to Damon. The adorable pout on his lips made her grin. He always got all sulky when he had to give Jasmine up—even to her or Tate.

"She will be awake soon enough, and you can play with her to your heart's content," she coaxed.

Damon nodded, though his bottom lip still protruded. He rose gracefully from the chair and placed his bundle gently into her crib. He pulled a soft, fleece blanket up to her chest as kissed her little forehead. "Sleep well, my princess."

Ryah took his hand and led her men down the hall to their bedroom. They disrobed quickly, falling into bed in a tangle of arms and legs.

"You know," Tate said after a long moment of kissing Damon and then Ryah. "I was thinking we should have another one."

Ryah stared at him wide-eyed and shook her head. "We'll have to

adopt,” she said sadly.

Tate’s mock pout rivaled Damon’s real one. She didn’t shun having more children and hoped they would have many more. She wanted a large family, lots of little feet thundering through the house, making messes, and leaving fingerprints on the windows. She would only birth one, though.

As a Keeper, she had been born to bring light to the pack. According to Lydia, once she gave birth to an omega, her body would no longer be able to reproduce. It didn’t sound fair in the least, but at least she had Jasmine.

“Can we at least practice? You never know.”

Ryah laughed and shook her head again. “Practice away.” Even if by some miracle the gods blessed her with another child, she wouldn’t be in danger of conceiving until her next mating heat. Thank heavens it only came twice a year. It was fun, but damn exhausting.

They came together, Ryah and her mates, Tate inside her, Damon inside Tate. They made slow, lazy love full of joy and unspoken promises. And when they changed positions so both of her men filled her, tears gathered in the corners of her eyes.

“Are you hurting?” Damon asked from below her. “Baby, what’s wrong?”

Ryah shook her head rapidly, slinging tears to Damon’s chest. “Nothing’s wrong. Everything is perfect.”

They continued, nice and steady for a long time, the pace eventually increasing, becoming more frantic and demanding, as they barreled along the path to release. When their combined orgasms finally hit, it rocked Ryah to her core, leaving her weak and listless.

\* \* \* \*

“I think we really did kill her this time,” Damon muttered as he eased Ryah from his chest to rest on the mattress beside him.

Tate chuckled, slipping from the bed and into the bathroom. He

returned with two warm, wet cloths, tossing one at Damon and using the other to clean Ryah gently.

He climbed into bed on the other side of her and snuggled down under the blankets.

The fates had smiled on Damon. They had blessed him with gifts beyond measure. He would never take for granted a single moment spent with the people he loved.

His thoughts drifted to the precious bundle asleep down the hall. He had gotten his wish—a beautiful little girl who looked just like her mother. How someone so small could be so perfect baffled him. There were not words to express the feelings that surged through him when he held her in his arms.

“Who’d have ever thought,” he mused, “that a couple of demons like us would be granted the love of such perfect angels?”

“Speak for yourself,” Tate mumbled sleepily. “I rock.”

Damon covered his face with his pillow to muffle his laughter.

Yep, that summed it up to perfection.

Life rocked.

# THE END

[WWW.GABRIELLEEVANS.COM](http://WWW.GABRIELLEEVANS.COM)



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gabrielle Evans grew up in a small town in southern Oklahoma. We're talking one red light that may or may not work depending on the day of the week. She married her high school sweetheart and the rest is pretty much history. They have two very active boys and one high-strung wiener dog that keeps her constantly on the go. For now, Gabrielle parks her car in north-central Texas, but who knows what tomorrow will bring.

Gabrielle believes in love at first sight and taking chances. She enjoys dreaming up and watching ideas come to life that push the boundaries of "normal" society. When she's not writing, she can usually be found testing those same boundaries.

### *Also by Gabrielle Evans*

Siren Classic: The Moonlight Breed 1: *Leap of Faith*

Siren Classic: The Moonlight Breed 2: *By the Light of the Moon*

Available at  
**BOOKSTRAND.COM**



**Siren Publishing, Inc.**  
**[www.SirenPublishing.com](http://www.SirenPublishing.com)**