



# Mac's Mate

KITTY DUNCANE

Loosely

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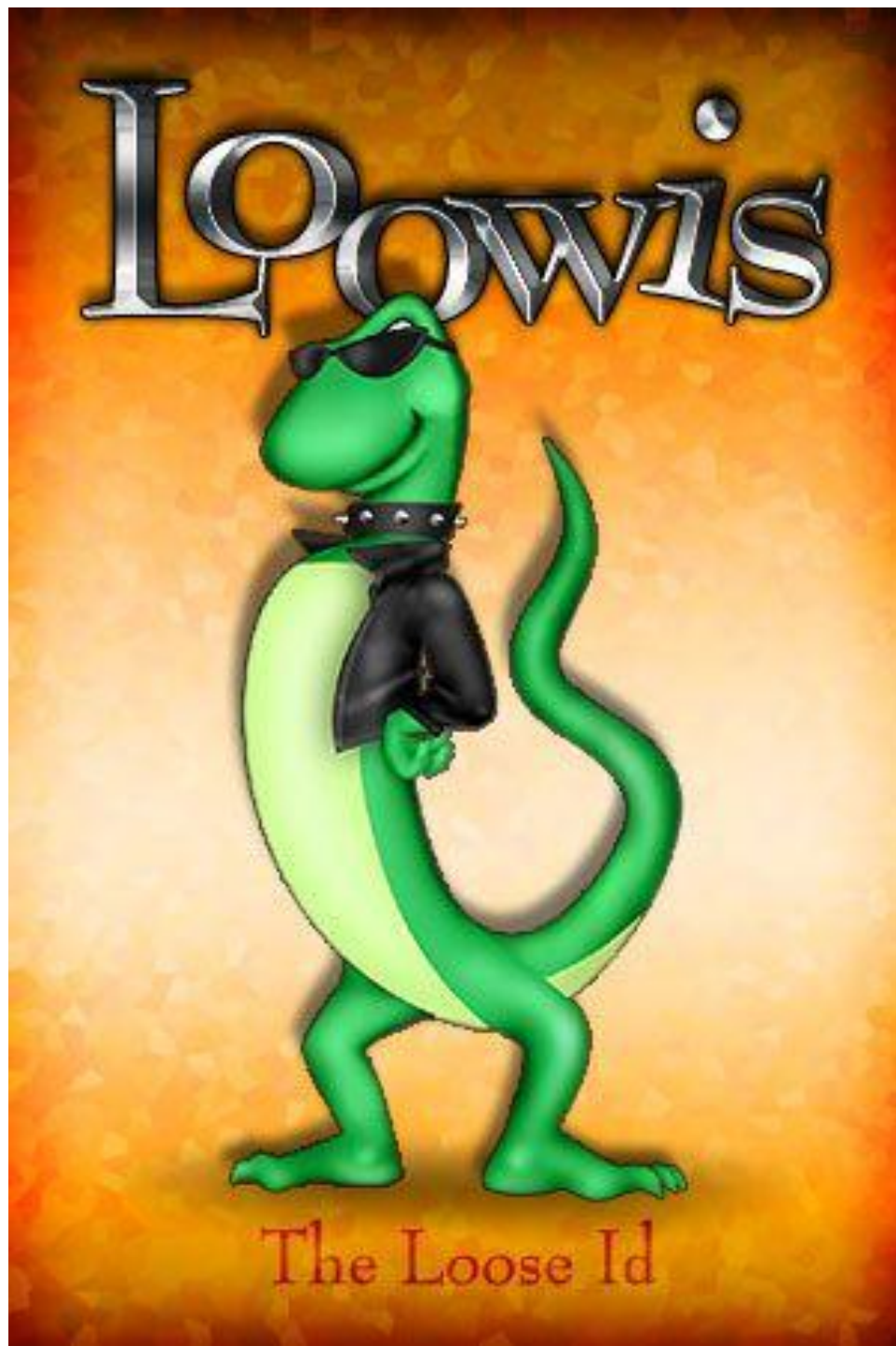
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## Chapter One

Warning bells blared in the helo, and the instrument panel flashed like the twinkling lights on a Christmas tree.

“We’re going down, Mac,” said Luke “Helo” Jones as a hard shudder rolled through the bird.

DEA Special Agent Mac McNamara had figured that much out when smoke filled the cabin. He felt the bird tip to the left. “Coming in hot,” he called to his men over his shoulder. They braced for impact, knowing that if anyone could save their asses, it was Helo. Lord knew he’d saved their asses too many times to count.

“The subject’s house is just over that grove of trees,” said Mac. “You can put down in her front yard.” It wasn’t an option that he would have considered, but he wouldn’t risk his men’s lives by trying to find another place to land. Of course, he’d have to change tactics. Sneaking up on the suspect now would be out of the question.

“What happens when the guards fire on us for trespassing?”

“Let’s hope they’re not that stupid,” replied Mac. “They should know that we’ve radioed our position, and the smoke rolling out of this thing should be an indication that we’re in trouble. I doubt they want the DEA, FBI, and the military to come down on their asses.”

The aircraft cleared the trees, bringing the suspect’s front yard and homey little cottage into view. Definitely not the mansion he was expecting. The big bird groaned, reminding him that this was supposed to be a walk in the park.

The suspect owned five hundred acres on the Texas/Mexican border, and it appeared that she used those acres to smuggle drugs into the good old US of A. The

mission was to gather evidence and make an arrest. The bets were that it would only take a week. She was, after all, one woman against his highly trained DEA team.

The helo pitched to the right and started to twirl. It teetered one way and then the next as more smoke invaded the cabin. The helo's tail rotor ate the roof off the white country porch before the big beast pitched away from the house and slammed into the ground.

"Yee-haw," someone in the back yelled.

Helo cut the power, and the big monster started a pitiful wind down.

"Nice job," said Mac as he slapped Helo on the shoulder. Looking out the window, he waited for her security detail to swarm on them like flies on shit. He took in the landscape. Where was the high fence that all drug lords used to keep out everybody and the badass dogs that smugglers were so fond of?

"Maybe she's not home," Moynihan said.

And leave the premises unprotected? Highly unlikely. Drug runners were as paranoid as the day was long. It was the first requirement on their résumés.

"Okay, girls. Change in plans. Since there's no welcoming party, we need to convince our suspect that we're here on a need-to-know mission, and she's not the one who needs to know. I'll pull something out of my ass to convince her; all you have to do is play along. Weapons ready. Let's move."

"Sir," said Nate. "Look."

Mac followed Nate's gaze. That was when he saw movement in the bushes, right under the damaged roof. A small head emerged, followed by a short woman as she pulled herself to a standing position. Her tattered ball cap was askew, her sunglasses askance. She stumbled from the bushes, fixed her hat and sunglasses, looked at the damage to the house, and then glanced at the helicopter. Her sunglasses hid her eyes, and he wondered if she was glaring.

"What's the temperature?" Mac asked.

"Ninety-eight," answered Helo.

"Who works in ninety-eight-degree heat?" Mac asked, more to himself.

"Not by choice. Must be the hired help," Nate said. "The military should hire her. She'd be right at home in Afghani."

That was what Mac was thinking.

This mission was thrown together based on a tip that several million dollars of cocaine was coming across the border in two days. His team had landed and taken off in the same day, not giving Helo time to do a thorough maintenance check, just a rush job, hence the helo failure. So intel on her was sketchy—it was her land, and she had millions in the bank. More intel about her would be ready tomorrow. Mac didn't even know how many people she employed. Talk about going in blind.

The door slid open, and his men filed out, weapons pointed down, safeties off, fingers resting beside the triggers, ready to efficiently eliminate any threat. Mac always brought the same men home that he'd left with, and this mission would be no different, despite the present bad luck.

Her feet and legs were clad in knee-high black rubber boots. He watched as she limped a few steps, wondering if she hurt herself avoiding the flying debris. Of course, why would he care that an employee of a drug smuggler hurt herself diving for cover? He almost laughed until she pulled a cane from the ground. Leaning heavily on it, she hobbled toward the bird.

She stopped before him and held out her hand. "Parking. Five dollars a day."

Several of his team chuckled. Mac sized up the lady. Her hair was wet at her neck and curling. The arms of her old, ragged T-shirt were cut off. Her shabby and dirty shorts encased short plump legs. He guessed she was in her forties, but he still didn't know if she was the suspect or the gardener. He'd skipped over reading the suspect's physical description, thinking he had plenty of time to familiarize himself with those aspects later when he was hunkered down in the woods, setting up surveillance.

"Do you need some help?" she asked, her voice full of concern.

“No,” Mac replied. “But you do.”

She glanced at her arm, where a deep gash had sliced through her skin. Blood poured from it. “I guess I do.”

“Who are you?” Mac asked.

“The gardener,” she replied in a husky voice.

Who employed a crippled gardener? Seemed cruel, but drug dealers weren’t known for their hospitality.

“Medic,” Mac said over his shoulder.

“There’s no need. I’ll drive myself into town.” Her voice was deep, sensual, and slid over his skin like silk. Her sultry voice was made for phone sex.

“How far is town, ma’am?” He knew how far she was from civilization but wondered if she’d tell the truth.

“A couple of hours.”

“You’ll bleed out before you get there,” he said. It wasn’t true, of course, but he couldn’t let her leave. Damn, why didn’t she remove her sunglasses? He needed to read her reactions, needed to know how suspicious she was, needed to know just how damn smart she was, if she was a threat. His nose told him she was irritated.

She looked at her arm and frowned. “I don’t think so, but I’ll call a Life Flight to come and get me.”

The sarcasm in her voice told him that she didn’t believe him. “I can’t let you do that.”

“I beg your pardon?”

Mac didn’t say anything, just waited.

She removed her glasses and shoved them on top of her ragged ball cap that was so worn, it was nothing but strings. “Exactly who do you think you are? You shred the eaves of my porch, bounce that bird on my lawn, and then have the audacity to tell me that I can’t call for help?”

Well, what a surprise. A drug smuggler who did her own weeding, if she was telling the truth. He inhaled deep. Yep, she was telling the truth. This was her land, and that would make her the suspect.

“That’s what I’m telling you...ma’am.” Her eyes narrowed as fire shot from her gaze, even though they were as blue as the winter sky. “Now, if you’d be so kind as to sit on the steps and let Moynihan tend to your wound.” His wolf nose detected a sweet scent underneath her sweat and dirt, something flowery with a hint of feminine musk. It bothered him that he’d even noticed. His wolf pushed him to get closer. Instead, he turned and ordered his men to secure the area.

Mac had to give it to her, though; he admired the bleeding hellion, all five feet of her, who’d stick up for herself when surrounded by trained killers holding big badass weapons. His team was hard-core DEA—seen it all, done it all, and she chose to bow up to them like a Chihuahua. There was a good possibility that she was what she was accused of—a drug runner with brass balls. The only thing missing was the arrogance that most drug runners seemed to possess—that and the hired guns. Most drug smugglers would immediately demand that he leave, but she asked if they needed help. Mac scratched his head. This smuggler was an anomaly.

Moynihan stepped forward and gently took her good arm. She immediately jerked her arm away, lifted her cane, and settled it between his legs, against his balls.

“Don’t touch me unless you want to hit the high notes in church.” She turned and limped toward the steps.

Moynihan shot him a surprised look, and Mac grinned. No man wanted his balls rung by a cripple’s cane.

He watched his men throw a camo tarp over the bird, for now. After they secured the area, his team would haul it somewhere out of sight. The best they could hope for was that someone didn’t do a flyover and spot them.

\* \* \*

Callie Johnson decided she was in big trouble. An unmarked helicopter was parked on her front lawn, and ten black-clad men with dangerous-looking weapons had disappeared behind her house, guns drawn, looking for something.

She was lucky to be alive. She'd been wearing her iPod and hadn't heard the helicopter, but she had felt the rush of wind right before it trashed her porch, raining debris down on her.

She studied the man in front of her as he opened his medical kit. "Are you any good?"

He grinned at her. "I'm the best."

"Sure you are." His smile was pleasant, and he kinda looked like the GQ type: young, with dark hair that curled at this neck, and his eyes were the color of whiskey. She glanced at the apparent leader's hair. It was kind of long too. She could tell these weren't military men. Military trained, maybe, but not in the military. A couple of them even had ponytails.

"I've never lost anyone, and I don't plan on starting with you. Now, I'm going to clean the wound and see what the damage is."

Callie debated telling the man the truth—that she was terrified of anything medical, especially needles—but decided that she needed to be strong and figure out what in the hell they wanted.

GQ dabbed her arm with something that hurt like hell and peeled back the lips of the gash.

"You're gonna need stitches."

"I'd figured that much out myself, GQ."

He grinned, apparently liking her nickname for him. "I'm gonna shoot it full of numbing medicine and then stitch you up."

She could only nod. Did she mention that she hated needles? She'd had enough of them to last a lifetime.

"Where's your husband?" the apparent leader asked.

She lifted her gaze to his, wishing he'd remove his sunshades. This man was taller than QG and bigger. Authority rolled off him, along with a big dose of arrogance. But apparently, he didn't know much about her if he didn't know about her husband. "Behind the house...up on the hill...six feet under."

He hesitated, probably weighing the truth in her story. "I'm sorry," he said, which surprised her.

"Don't be. I piss on his grave every day. Feel free to do the same. In fact, I insist you *all* do that while you're here."

She saw a slight grin on her medic, but she was dead serious. She thought about having his body moved off her land, but since he was looking up from hell, she wanted the opportunity for him to see that she had survived.

"How did you get shot?" her medic asked as he pointed to her dirty thigh.

Callie looked down at her fat thigh, the indentation clearly present, along with a ten-inch scar running down beside it, hence the reason she disliked needles. The bullet had shattered her bone, requiring metal rods and pins that ached every time it rained, every time she moved, every time she breathed. "I don't believe that's anyone's business but mine."

"Yes, ma'am," GQ replied.

Callie looked at the leader. "Do you have a name?"

"Yes, ma'am."

He stood emotionless, his face a mask, giving her the impression that he was an asshole, the asshole in charge. "Well, what is it?"

"Why do you want to know?"

"Because it will be easier to argue with you if I know what to call you." A cough came from GQ.

"It's Mac. What's your name?"

She responded with "Callie," but just to piss him off, she didn't reveal her last name either. "Well, Mr. Mac. You want to tell me what the fuck is going on?"

A dark brow arched over his shades. "It's highly classified. You don't have clearance."

Clearance? Who were these people? "Classified, my ass. I need to see some ID."

"We don't carry ID."

She glanced at GQ, and he slightly nodded. No ID? Were they mercenaries? "Okay. How about a contact name and phone number?"

"We're on a highly classified mission. That's all you need to know."

"Then I'm a hostage?"

"No, you're just unexpectedly involved. But make no mistake: you will do what I say, or it's not going to go so well for you."

Mac the Asshole didn't know to whom he was talking to. Nothing in her life in the past few years had gone well for her, but she'd never let anyone just walk over her.

"And if I don't do what you say, you're going to what? Kill me?" She'd been close to death before. Yeah, it was frightening, but she was a survivor, and no arrogant son of a bitch was going to scare her.

"Hopefully, it won't come to that."

Okay, she knew he was bluffing, because GQ stiffened.

"So, when will you be leaving?" *Because you can't leave here fast enough for me.*

"Why?" Mac asked. "Are you expecting company?"

"Yes," she replied. It was a lie, but she had no problem with lying when necessary. Hell, she'd gotten really good at it lately.

"Then, there's gonna be a problem. You need to call and cancel your date."

Date? She hadn't dated in years, and damn if she'd start now. Nobody dated a cripple. The only callers she'd had were men who wanted her land. When she died, it went to the National Parks Service, but she couldn't get it through their thick heads.

Looking at the conceited man in front of her gave her a feeling that the Parks Service may be getting the land early.

She felt the tugging of her skin as GQ worked on her arm, and her belly protested. Sweat popped out on her lip, and her mouth went dry.

"Did you hear what I said?" Mac asked.

She narrowed her gaze at his stern voice. "I heard you."

"Well?"

"I'm just ignoring you." That, and trying not to hurl. Or course, hurling on Mac had merit.

GQ tried to hide a laugh. Apparently, no one talked to Mac the Asshole that way.

"People don't ignore me."

Her eyes snapped to his sunglasses. "Let's get something straight, Mr. Mac. I don't take orders from arrogant assholes running around with guns on my property. If you're going to kill me, do it. Otherwise, I will ignore you when I choose to and confront you when I choose to."

She glanced at her arm, where the medic was putting a bandage on. When he was done, she stood. "Now, if you will excuse me, I'm going to take a shower and wash the roof out of my hair."

"I'll go with you," said Mac.

"What? I can't shower by myself?" The last thing she wanted was to have this yahoo in her bedroom.

"I'm sure you can."

"Oh, I get it. You want to watch a cripple shower. Pervert. Are you going to tie me up too?" She didn't know why she said that. She never pointed out her disability to anyone but herself, but here, with these bigger-than-life men, her disability was just so obvious.

"I won't restrain you unless you give me reason to, but I might gag you just to shut you up."

She smiled. "You're not the first man who tried to shut me up." She maneuvered the stairs with less finesse than she wanted to, each step shooting a pain down her leg. She'd overdone it today, and she'd pay for it later. She heard the scuff of boots behind her. Let him look. Maybe he'd be so repulsed, he'd throw up, and then she could whack him on the head with her cane. She cruised through the front door and purposely slammed it behind her. But it didn't slam. Figured.

She took an immediate right and stumbled to a halt in her bedroom. One of the men was rummaging through her drawers, which just happened to contain her granny panties. She felt her face heat as she snatched the garments from his hands. "Get your slimy paws off my stuff." She slowly turned and faced her captor. "If you tell me what you're looking for, I'll gladly tell you where it is, *if* it will get out of here sooner."

"We're looking for weapons."

This guy had to be kidding. "There are knives in the kitchen, aerosols in the bathroom. Oh yeah. There's a broom in the laundry room."

"No, guns," he asked.

"There's an old Mossberg in the closet, but it hasn't been fired since my daddy died."

"Show me?"

Huffing, she hobbled to her closet, dug around in the back, and pulled out the shotgun. "Here. I want that back before you leave."

He took it from her, cocked it back to check for shells in the chamber. "Where are the shells?"

She shrugged. "I don't have any." Well, she did, somewhere around here, but she wasn't going to find them just to satisfy him.

She could tell that he didn't believe her, but right now, she didn't give a flying flip. "I have a question for you."

He hitched a brow.

"This is America. I am an American citizen with rights. I demand you either arrest me, let me call my lawyer, or get the hell off my land."

"What makes you think that we work inside the law?"

She didn't know what to believe. Being on her property, uninvited, certainly wasn't within the law, but would they stitch her up just to kill her later? She'd bet her life they were angling for a signature on a deed. Too bad. She'd go to her grave before she'd sign anything over to these slimeballs.

"Well, do you? Work inside the law?" Her granddaddy always said to face adversity head-on, throw it back at them.

"This is a covert operation. Your rights are the least of my problems right now."

*Covert operation, my ass.* There wasn't anything covert about that huge helicopter sitting in her front yard. If it was covert, why didn't they just say that they were on a training operation and had mechanical trouble? That was believable. "Covert operation? Heaven help our country. You're not very good at this, are you?"

His jaw clenched, and a tic emerged at his temple. Good. She hoped she pissed him off. "Get the hell out of my way, so I can take a bath."

"Listen, little girl, I'm not one you want to piss off."

"Actually, I'm going out of my way to piss you off. How am I doing?"

He glared at her, but she wasn't scared. If he wanted her dead, she would be, and surely no one would find her body if he chose it not to be found. She needed to find out what was going on. She wouldn't put it past several of her *suitors* to send mercenaries in here to scare her into signing over the deed. If she wouldn't marry them, why not scare her to death with big men dressed in black, carrying guns, led by Mac the ass?

And their timing sucked. Tomorrow night, she had a midnight rendezvous, or lives would be in danger. Payment had to be made or else. And then she had another meeting two days after that. The last thing she needed was for these men to be here tomorrow.

She shucked her boots in the dressing area, limped into the shower room, and shoved the door closed behind her, again noting it didn't slam either, but at least it was partially closed. Dropping her dirty clothes into a pile, she turned on the water and adjusted it to as hot as she could stand. She was tired, sweaty, and pissed. The world was filled with arrogant men. She'd thought that God had smiled on her the day she'd killed her rotten bastard of a husband, but apparently that was a short break in her miserable life.

She washed thoroughly, knowing she'd looked at some poison ivy today, and that meant it would show up somewhere on her body. She didn't have to touch it, just look at it. After turning off the water, she toweled off and cursed. She didn't own a robe. Near the end, her husband had demanded that she stayed covered up, that he didn't want to see her fat ass. So when the bastard died, she'd decided to hell with the robe. She'd lived by herself since then and was totally used to walking around naked in her own home. Her body didn't bother her. Her wounds didn't bother her either. And if that moron out there thought she was going to change her routine because of him, he was dead wrong.

Besides, she was used to the pity in people's eyes, especially the men. She wrapped a towel around herself, grabbed her cane, and opened the door.

\* \* \*

Mac reclined against the vanity and listened to the running water. His wolf crawled around inside him, pacing. He was agitated for some reason. The changing sounds of the water made him think of her washing herself, and why he thought about that was unbeknownst to him. He admitted that she intrigued him. Hell, he always knew that dynamite came in small packages.

He wondered about his little drug runner. *His?* Where did that come from? He still couldn't figure out why she had no guards, unless that was her cover. But a cover like that would be hard to maintain. Good guys didn't run in these circles. There was always someone who wanted to be the top dog at any cost. Since she had no guards, it would be so easy for someone to kill her and then take over her operation.

The shower stopped, causing his beast to stand up and take notice. What the hell was wrong with his wolf? Hell, she wasn't even his type. He always gravitated to the tall willows with legs long enough to lock him in, keep him anchored. His arms were longer than her legs. She was too short, not fat, but plump.

And she didn't look like a drug dealer. And that fact bothered him.

A second later, the door opened, and her five-foot frame stood in the threshold wrapped only in a towel that wasn't quite big enough to go all the way around her. Leaning hard on the cane, she gave him a look that he interpreted as *why the fuck are you still here?*

He inhaled, pulling her scent in. His eyes narrowed, his beast pressed to the surface, his fangs and claws elongated. His beast claimed—*Mine!*

Mac snapped his mouth shut to hide his teeth; his cock instantly turned to steel. His wolf's tail was wagging, and if his wolf could purr, he would be.

*What the fuck!*

His wolf's eyes raked her from head to toe and then settled on her plump breasts with the big valley between them. Her pulse was beating frantically in her delicate throat. His eyes narrowed. Was that a garrote scar on her neck? His beast snarled.

Like a scene from a bad movie, she stepped forward, her cane catching on her discarded rubber boot, pitching her forward. Instinct kicked in. He reached out, grabbed her, and pulled her against his body. Not instinct from training, not gentlemen instincts, but wolf instincts. He nestled her perfectly between his legs,

his erection pressing into her belly. Blind need tore through him, a need to kiss, a need to fuck, a need to claim.

Her heart sounded out a wild staccato beat as she tried to wiggle free, which was hard to do with a death grip on her towel and her cane in the other hand. Her breathing was ragged, her eyes wide—with fear. His beast snarled.

“Oomph!”

His beast yelped when the sterling silver head of her cane landed square on his shin.

“You will unhand me, you...you...”

“Brute. Bastard,” he offered.

“Pervert,” she said.

He let her go but kept his hand on her arm to keep her steady. “I believe it was you who threw yourself at me.”

“You know damn well I didn’t throw myself at you. I tripped.”

“That’s not what it looked like to me.”

She clenched her towel tighter and headed into the bedroom.

What had come over him? He was a hairbreadth away from ripping her towel from her body and throwing her down on the bathroom floor. It was like an out-of-body experience, nature and his beast taking over. He was a trained agent, known for his calm and reserve in the face of danger, and that certainly should be true in this mission. He’d taken down the worst criminals, gone undercover in the seediest of gangs. But he couldn’t contain his wolf? This was not good. He had a job to do.

“Mac, we got company,” said Nate through the comm in his ear. “Big-ass black truck’s just pulled onto the road to her house.”

“ETA?” asked Mac.

“Five.”

“Okay, everyone disappear,” ordered Mac.

He pushed away from the counter and saw her rummaging around in a drawer, but he was fairly certain there were no guns in here.

“You know anybody in a big-ass black truck?”

Her shoulders slumped as she looked up at the ceiling as if she were pleading. “Yeah, he’s a royal pain in my ass. Seems to be an abundance of them today.”

Her apparent discomfort angered his beast, but her humorous shots intrigued him. She had a quick mind and didn’t mind insulting him. “You got any men’s clothes?”

She turned around to face him, and something passed across her face—he wasn’t sure what. “Yeah, if you don’t mind wearing a dead man’s clothes. There are clothes upstairs in the closet.”

“Get dressed and go sit on your back porch. Don’t say anything to your visitor unless you want him dead.”

The look she gave him said that she knew he was lying. “And just how am I gonna explain the roof and that big bucket of bolts parked in my front yard?”

“I’ll handle that. You just go sit pretty on the porch and wait for me.”

## Chapter Two

Callie grabbed a glass of wine on her way to the porch. Hell, she should probably grab the whole damn bottle. Maybe it would clear her mind so she could figure out what the hell was going on. She took her regular seat in the old rocking chair and couldn't help but look around. Those men—she was pretty sure they were mercenaries—were out there somewhere, scopes aimed at her head. And they were good, because she didn't see any of them. The real question was: what did they want, and how soon would they make their move to get it? She didn't feel threatened by Mac and his men, and she knew the prudent thing to do would be to snatch the handset from the table beside her and dial 911, but she was curious about the game.

Her granddaddy always said that her curiosity always overrode her common sense.

The black truck pulled into her driveway and parked. She wondered how this was going to play out. Earl was a bald, slimy little thing, barely five feet four inches tall, and drove that big truck to make him look bigger. She knew he'd be wearing a white dress shirt, dress jeans, and cowboy boots even before he slid his fat ass from the seat.

"Earl? What brings you out this way?" she asked when his boots touched her steps.

Earl Butler, who liked to be called Big-Dawg, ambled up on her porch. She'd never call him Big-Dawg. Shithead came to mind. He wanted her land, but he wasn't getting it.

“What in the hell happened to your roof? And is that a helicopter sitting in your yard?”

Before she could answer, the back door creaked open. “It’s mine. I had a little mechanical trouble.”

She shot a glance at Mac or whatever his name was, who gave Earl a big grin. Mac wore a pair of her late husband’s jeans. No shirt. No shoes... No problem. Earl’s eyes grew wide, and she was sure that her jaw was flapping in the wind along with Earl’s.

“Who the hell are you?” asked Earl.

Mac stepped forward and offered his hand. “Name’s Mac.” Earl looked like a munchkin beside Mac, but she couldn’t take her eyes off all those fluid muscles just above those low-slung jeans or the way his arms bulged as he extended his hand to Earl. Mac’s body was perfect. She was sure he had women all over the world just waiting for him to visit them. God, what she wouldn’t give to be forty pounds lighter and eight inches taller.

Earl looked at the offered hand and extended his own.

“And you?” Mac prompted.

“Earl ‘Big-Dawg’ Butler.”

Callie swore that Earl’s chest puffed out like a bird’s...or maybe a frog’s. Earl winced during the shake, and she stifled a laugh. She guessed that Mac challenged Earl on the Big-Dawg part, and Earl failed.

Mac came and stood in front of her, and that was when she noticed his hair was wet...just like hers. Apparently, he wanted Earl to think they’d just showered together. That was hilarious. Even Earl wouldn’t believe that.

Before she knew it, Mac had hauled her up, slipped in behind her, and pulled her down onto his lap. He settled her against his big, hard body. A blaze of heat rushed to her cheeks.

Earl’s eyes grew wide. “What happened to your arm?”

She glanced at the bandage. "Oh, it's nothing. I snagged it on a...nail. Now, what can I do for you?"

"I came to see if you wanted to go out for dinner," said Earl, his gaze darting between her and Mac.

"We're planning on cooking out, weren't we, honey?" purred Mac.

"Uh, yes, we were." She hoped her voice didn't betray her disbelief.

"Callie, how did you two meet?" asked Earl, apparently very surprised that a gorgeous hunk like Mac would give her the time of day, which was exactly why this ploy wasn't going to work.

"Oh, come on, Earl. I do limp off this property occasionally."

"I know that, Callie, but he doesn't seem your type."

*Boy, that's an understatement.* She was pretty sure she wasn't anyone's type.

Her back ached because she was sitting ramrod straight, trying to keep herself off his heated body. Mac leaned forward and whispered in her ear.

"Relax. Pretend we are lovers."

Then he planted a kiss on her cheek and pulled her closer, the heat from his body branding her. She'd never been around good-looking men. Hell, all the people she'd ever known were skinny or fat—no muscled GQ men, armed and dangerous, for her.

*Pretend we're lovers? He's got to be kidding.*

"You should be ashamed of yourself," stated Earl. "I mean, David loved you. He's probably rolling over in his grave right now."

"Loved me? He tried to kill me."

Mac tensed. His body became rigid behind hers. That was an odd reaction. *What gives?*

Earl looked down at the porch and then back at her. "You know he wasn't in his right mind at the end."

"I know. He shot me and then tried to strangle me. But I agree with you, he wasn't in his right mind." She'd pissed David off because she wouldn't sell half of the forest so he could cut it down to make room for homes, a golf course, and other such nonsense. People had plenty of homes; animals didn't. Thank God she'd had enough foresight to have a prenuptial agreement between her and David. He couldn't touch her land or her money unless she deemed so. He was drunk. She wasn't. He was bigger and faster. She was smaller and slower.

"Like I said, he didn't know what he was doing."

"Oh, really? And why are you here, Earl? You want to take me out to dinner? Why?"

"Well...it's just supper."

"No, Earl, it's not. You asked me to marry you, and David wasn't even cold in the ground. After I turned you down, several times, Harry and Jacob came sniffing around."

"You live out here alone. It's not safe for you. We were just trying to do the right thing."

"By marrying your best friend's crippled widow?"

"You're not a cripple, and you know it."

"Earl. I heard through the grapevine what you, Harry, and Jacob said about me at the diner about two weeks ago. Apparently you were so loud, everybody heard you. I had several people call and tell me that you were all relieved that I turned you down, because you didn't want to marry a fat cripple anyway."

Earl's face, which was always red, turned even redder, which indicated that what she'd just said was the truth. She should be hurt, but she wasn't. She didn't give a shit what they thought. They'd have to be the last three men left on earth before she'd marry any of them.

For some reason, she nestled into Mac. "You're not getting my land, Earl. If I die, it goes to the National Parks Service. The only way you will get it is if I sign it

over to you, and that will damn sure never happen. You make sure you tell Harry and Jacob too, so they can stop coming around here.”

“What makes you think he”—Earl pointed to Mac—“doesn’t want your land too?”

That was a good question, but the chance that a stranger would fall out of the sky just to get her land was too far-fetched, unless he was part of some elaborate scheme cooked up by Earl. But even that was far-fetched. Would Mac patch her up and then torture her until she signed over the deed? “I didn’t know she had any land, but I don’t want it.” Mac looked at her and smiled. “I just want her.”

Mac said that with so much conviction, she was almost convinced herself.

“Right,” said Earl. “You watch him, Callie. I guarantee he only wants your land and your money.”

“Like you?” she asked.

“You know that’s not true. We promised David that we’d take care you.”

“Me or my land?”

“You, Callie. Why do you have to be so damned difficult?”

“It’s in my nature, Earl. I’m sure David told you all about that.”

“You know we forgive you, Callie. We don’t blame you for David’s death.”

“Wow. What a relief. Now I can sleep at night.”

Mac pulled her tighter against him, and she let herself be manipulated for this farce. Earl didn’t act like he knew Mac, but she still wouldn’t put it past the three slimeballs to try to get to her some other way. She wondered what would have happened if the helicopter hadn’t had trouble. Would Mac have shown up and tried to get in her good graces to get her to sign the deed? Were Earl and his two buddies now a threesome, with a badass security force thrown in for good measure? Or was something else going on?

Mac’s arms encircled her harder, pulled her closer, and she froze. Did he have an erection? This could so not be happening.

"I think," said Mac, "that you're upsetting Callie, so it's time for you to leave."

Earl pulled himself up straight. "Now you listen here. Callie and I have been friends for a long time, so don't you think I'll let you walk in here and hurt her."

Mac unfolded Callie from his lap, stood up, and then he eased her back into the chair. He walked over to Earl and stopped about a foot away. "I'd never hurt Callie or any other lady. Now, I suggest you go before I have to throw your little ass in that big truck."

Earl shoved his cowboy hat on his head and headed down the steps. After hoisting himself up into the truck, he slammed the door, started the truck, and revved it up before spinning out of the drive.

But Callie wasn't fooled. Mac could be in this up to his eyeballs. Trust wasn't her strong suit, especially for people who fell out of the sky carrying guns.

Mac turned back to her, a scowl on his face. "How often does he come around?"

"Too damn often." She crossed her arms over her chest.

"Thanks for playing along," he said, "but I do wonder why you did it. You could have easily told him that we were holding you against your will."

Oh, the answer to that was so simple. "Because I hate Earl more than I do you...for now."

A little smile played on his lips, surprising her. But she wasn't making a joke. She was dead serious.

"Are you staying for dinner?" she asked.

"Yes," was all he said before he strode down the steps to meet his men, who were crawling out of the woods, guns in hand, faces blank.

She threw her head back and drained her wineglass, then stood and limped out to the barn to get some steaks. All this talk about food had made her hungry. The moment she stepped out of the barn, one of the men was there to take the meat from her. "Thanks. There's more on the table in the barn." Mac was scowling. "I have a bag of potatoes that someone needs to help me peel."

“Moynihan can help you.”

“And I need to know how long you are planning on staying. I don’t have enough food to feed an army.”

“You don’t have to feed us at all.”

“Good. I’ll let you start the grill.”

\* \* \*

Mac watched her lift her chin and hobble away, dismissing him. Nobody had ever dismissed him. He was a foot and half taller than her, he could snap her in two with his fingers alone, but she wasn’t afraid of him. Most men shook in their boots when he was around, never looked him in the eye, but not her.

“Woman’s sure got some spunk,” Helo said. “I don’t think she’s intimidated by you.”

And she wasn’t afraid of Earl. Hate and rage still coursed through his body at how that man had treated her. His nose confirmed her words—she despised the man, and so did Mac. He’d met Earl’s type before—little-man syndrome—small man trying to act bigger than he was, and for some reason, Mac knew that the little man could do something stupid just because he didn’t get his way. His wolf wanted to come out and tear little Earl into smaller pieces for insulting its mate. At least the wolf had allowed him to play the interested lover, because Earl hadn’t missed Mac’s erection.

His wolf also wanted to fuck her, hard and fast. Her eyes had gone wide, and she’d bristled when she’d realized he had an erection, but he couldn’t control his body. She smelled heavenly, she felt great, and his wolf had gone wild with lust.

Mac turned to his men, who had gathered in the makeshift command center. “Ted and Jeff. There are some clothes in the house that were her husband’s. Find something to wear, borrow some transportation, and be our eyes and ears in town. I want to know when Earl and his buddies, Harry and Jacob, take a shit. Moynihan and Chris, you two are on KP duty.”

"Wait," said Chris. "She assigned you to the grill."

Mac bared his canines as the rest of the men snickered. No one gave him orders. "Wayne, set up the command center in the barn, and I want all the information you can get on our host and the three stooges. Helo, take a couple of men and haul your bird out of sight, and then see if you can repair her. The rest of you are on patrol. I want you out of sight. After she goes to sleep, we'll meet back here at 0100."

\* \* \*

"I'm telling you, that man had an erection," Earl said as he paced in his den. Harry and Jacob sat on his couch drinking Scotch. "And both of them had wet hair, like they'd showered together."

"Maybe he took a Viagra. Hell, that would be the only way that anyone could get it up for her," chimed Harry. Harry and Jacob both snickered.

"He threatened me. Practically threw me off her porch. And you should have seen how he possessively held her."

"Maybe she hired him as her lover and bodyguard," Jacob offered. "That would explain the Viagra."

Earl stopped pacing. "You may be on to something. She's made it perfectly clear that she wants nothing to do with us. Hell, she's even filed a complaint with the sheriff's office. It took a great effort to convince Sherriff Boyles that we are only concerned about her living out there by herself and that we'd promised David that we'd look after her."

Harry snatched the bottle of Scotch off the end table and refilled his glass before passing it to Jacob.

"And I think she was serious about leaving her land to the government. Harry, you're friends with her lawyer. See if you can find out anything about her will."

"But what are we going to do if it's true? Steal the will?" asked Jacob. "Killing her won't buy us anything, unless we can destroy that will."

Earl flopped down in his favorite wingback chair. This was a fine mess they all were in, just because David couldn't keep his temper under control. Why David thought he could strong-arm Callie into anything was beyond him. Callie was as headstrong as David was, never giving an inch, no matter how much pressure David put on her.

Earl couldn't stall the investment firm any longer. They wanted Callie's land for a golf course and country club, and if they couldn't have it, they wanted their money back, with interest. It had been stupid to take a down payment from them. Now time was running out for him, Harry, and Jacob to either deliver the land or return the money—money the four of them had blown on a trip to Vegas. Booze, women, gambling, and a ton of bad luck had been their undoing.

A week ago, the investment firm had given him two weeks to make good on his promise, and there was no way they'd have the money by then. Business had dropped off lately, and they'd made some stupid mistakes, like not saving to pay back the money when David died. Instead, they'd spent the money and hoped they could convince Callie to sell to them. When that didn't work, they'd tried to get her to marry one of them. Which had also flopped.

"You want me to take out the bodyguard?" Jacob asked.

"Not yet. I need to think about it. Tomorrow night is Callie's annual charity gala in San Antonio. I'll see how he reacts around her, and more important, how she reacts around him. If there's something more, I'll sniff it out."

"You just let me know if you want her man eliminated. I've got a new scope. I'd love to hunt him and take him out," said Jacob.

## Chapter Three

Mac leaned against Callie's bedroom wall and watched her sleep. Sleep didn't come easy for her. She tossed and turned and moaned, which called to his wolf to soothe her, but he couldn't let that happen. For all Mac knew, she was going to jail for running drugs across the border.

She groaned again and rolled onto her back, kicking the covers off. Obviously, her leg was killing her, probably from overuse today. He'd make sure she rested tomorrow. She didn't need to feed his team. They were more than capable of doing it themselves.

Subtle light played across her face and her short legs, where the covers had fallen away. He tried to view her objectively. She could be a criminal, or maybe not. She wasn't his type, but his wolf said otherwise. She had courage, spunk, and a quick wit.

And he wanted to crawl into bed with her and take away her pain.

The man-versus-wolf battle wasn't something pleasant. His mind told him to keep her at arm's length, and his wolf snarled at that. One option would be to enjoy his mate, even if she went to prison later, and maybe that would satisfy his inner wolf.

But could the man enjoy his mate if he thought she was a criminal?

He'd heard the tales about connecting with one's mate on a primitive level, a love of the highest order, and the downside... Could he let her go when and if the time came? Could he snap the cuffs on her and do his job? Would that ultimately destroy his wolf?

His internal clock told him it was time to head to the command center for a briefing. His gut tightened just thinking about what he could possibly learn about his *mate*.

Mac's wolf eyes helped him maneuver easily through the dark house and out to the barn. His team was assembled except for the two he'd sent into town. They were all tired, since there'd been no downtime between missions. His team was strong, but no one could run forever.

Helo leaned into the speakerphone. "Hey, Ted and Jeff, you missed a damn good meal. The steak was fabulous. Too bad you two got the short straw and had to recon in town."

"Sure was," echoed Billy. "And who knew that one could make plain old toast into tasty cheese bread."

"I'm glad you all liked our suspect's cooking," replied Mac, irritated that they'd softened to their target. If she did have a security crew lurking somewhere and his men let their guard down, they could all be in danger.

"My money's on the fact that she's *not* a drug runner," said Wayne. The fact that Wayne had spoken at all was a miracle. He was the silent type who put all his efforts into making the computer sing and keeping a low profile. He watched. Observed. Stated the facts. He'd certainly never voiced an opinion before.

"You got intel to support that?" asked Mac.

"No. What I've got is *no* intel to support that she's involved with drugs. She does have a large bank account inherited from her dad, and her investment portfolio is the size of a small country, but that's all. She has made some large cash withdrawals over the past year, but nothing alarming. Her phone records are clean; there are no guns on this property, no guards, and all deliveries traced back to reputable retailers. Her bills are paid on time, she has no criminal record, including zero parking tickets, and she has a library card."

"So, she's not our typical drug dealer." Mac shrugged. "Maybe she's smart enough not to leave a trail or have bodyguards to protect her from the people she deals with."

Wayne just shrugged.

"Anyone else find anything?"

"She has a Hummer in one barn that's covered with mud. She has a sweet 1969 red Corvette convertible in another barn that's also covered in mud. She has a beat-up old truck that the guys took into town, and then she has an older Honda."

Wayne's fingers were flying over the keyboard. Everybody waited. In less than a minute, information about her vehicles would be known.

"The Hummer and the Vette belonged to her late husband. She transferred them into her name after his death. The truck was her granddaddy's, and the Honda is hers. The inspection is due on the Honda next month."

"What about the three stooges?"

"According to the county newspaper, the three stooges used to be the four stooges until she killed her husband." Wayne didn't even flinch when he talked about her offing her husband. Mac didn't know if that was good or bad. "They liked to hunt and have their pictures in the paper, a regular good-old-boys club. Earl's into used cars, Harry owns a hardware store, and Jacob runs a hunting and fishing store. Their tax filings for the last three years are pitiful, but they like to travel to a lot to places like Vegas and Cancun, and to Colorado and Montana on hunting trips, which I deduce they're either cheating Uncle Sam or getting some tax-free money."

"And how and why did she kill her husband?" Mac asked, knowing his beast was highly pleased that the bastard was dead.

"An article in the county paper states that her husband of seven years, David, came home drunk one night. They got into an argument. He knocked her around and then shot her in the leg, shattering the bone but missing the femoral artery. Then he tried to strangle her, using a cord from a blind. She, being the resourceful

woman that she is, played dead, and when he released her, she grabbed the gun and put one in his chest.”

“Good for her,” Helo said.

Mac cringed. So now they were rooting for the suspect? “What was the argument about?”

“Paper didn’t say, but I can make a formal paper request to the sheriff’s department. They’re not totally computerized.”

Mac knew the woman had a backbone, but at five feet tall, she’d used her head to even the playing field against her attacker. She was smart. Probably smart enough to run drugs. “Ted and Jeff, you got anything to tell us?”

“Earl had two visitors tonight. They sat in his den, drank liquor, and talked. Other than that, nothing.”

Mac looked at Wayne.

“Check your phones.” Wayne replied without looking up. “I just sent you pictures of stooge two and three.”

After a few seconds, Mac heard. “Yeah, that’s them.”

“They didn’t stay long, but that fellow that came to see her was pacing a path in the rug.”

So the three stooges were upset...about what? Because she had a boyfriend? Somebody was encroaching on their territory? Mac relayed the conversation between Callie and Earl, especially about the part that they wanted her land. “Wayne, see if you can find any information about her leaving the land to the Park’s Service.”

“I’ve got a tap on her home phone, but her cell doesn’t work out here,” Wayne informed him.

With all her money, Mac wondered why she hadn’t had a cell phone tower installed on her land. “How’s your baby, Helo?” Mac asked.

"She's gonna need some major work that I can't get done here. We'll have to fix her back at HQ."

Mac inhaled. It sucked a big one to be without wheels and rotors. "Call HQ and get them to deliver another one, find them a landing zone away from here, and schedule it, the sooner the better."

Mac started pacing. "So what do we know? One: intel say's there's a drug shipment coming across the border in a day or two on a very rich lady's land. Two: she doesn't fit the profile, unless she's the smartest dealer we've ever met. Three: the three stooges want her land for...something."

"Maybe they want her land to continue running drugs. Maybe her husband was in on it before he died," said Jeff.

"But she's got five hundred acres," said Wayne. "They can continue to run the drugs without her even knowing about it. Owning the land doesn't really buy them anything that they don't already have. *If* they're doing so."

"Then they must want it for something else," said Mac.

"Well," said Wayne, "I'll run their phone recs and see who they're conferring with."

"No, I want everyone to get some sleep, except two people on roving patrol until the sun's up. Then we'll patrol in eight-hour shifts. Stay out of sight, and be prepared to move on a moment's notice. We're supposed to be getting more info from an informant when the shipment's on the move, and hopefully we'll have a new bird before that happens."

Mac left the men to decide the schedule. His wolf was urging him to get back inside and check on Callie. He really should call HQ and excuse himself from this case, because he knew that he'd be constantly battling his wolf over her, but there was always an off chance—something akin to a long shot—that she was innocent. He'd have to question her tomorrow and see if she lied to him. His wolf grew agitated, protesting that he would try to trick his mate.

When he entered her back door, his wolf's nose immediately let him know that she was somewhere near the kitchen. He heard a drawer rattle and then some plastic rubbing together. What in the hell was she doing? And why was the kitchen still dark? He moved on silent feet, stopping at the door. With his wolf eyes, he saw her throw her head back and then drink from a glass. The smell of medicine set his wolf to pacing.

Mac decided to remain silent and hidden, but his nose teased him with her scent, making it very hard not to go to her. Her cane tapped on the tiled floor as she moved to a cabinet in the far corner. Laying her cane against the counter, she struggled to her knees, moaning as she went down. He edged closer to get a better look in the dim light. She dumped stuff from the cabinet onto the floor and then pulled out what appeared to be a box. The box lid sprang free when she punched in a code, but from here his wolf couldn't make out the code. Fear gripped his wolf. Fear that she really was guilty.

Thankful his wolf could see in the dark, Mac could see that she pulled a lid up, and then the room flooded with light from inside the box. He heard several clicks before she eased the lid down with a soft snap. He watched her stuff the box along with everything else back under the cabinet and wondered how she could see so well in the dark. Or maybe she'd done this enough times that she could do it blindfolded. Whatever *it* was, was a very important piece to the puzzle.

And he was pissed off at a very high level. Pissed off that a mate he'd never wanted, but one his wolf had waited for its entire life, was potentially a criminal.

\* \* \*

Callie struggled to stand. Tears filled her eyes as pain shot through her leg. She released the breath she'd been holding—holding partly because of the pain and partly because of secrecy. She had no idea where that Mac guy was, but she wouldn't let him stop her. Now that she'd sent the signal, she just needed to figure out how she was going to pull it off. At least she'd had the luck to have called T-

Bone a couple of days ago and told him to bring a limo to take her to the gala. Somehow, she and T-Bone would figure out how to pull it off.

Turning, she slowly inched her way back to her bedroom. The *tap, tap, tap* of her cane annoyed her more than usual tonight. So much for being super quiet. Her heart was thudding against her ribs.

Hearing something, she stopped, leaning heavily on her cane. Someone was in here. Perhaps this was it. Mac and his band of killers were going to terminate her. Well, two things were for sure. Nobody was getting her land, and she wasn't going down without a...fight. She whirled around, teetered unceremoniously on her good leg, and let the silver head of her cane lash out into the darkness.

She heard an *oomph* and swung again. Before her attacker could recover, she brought the cane upward, hoping to ring a gonad or two.

Suddenly her arms were pinned to her sides. "Let me go," she screamed.

"Take it easy." Mac's husky voice slid over her.

"Damn it, let me go."

"I will if you'll stop slinging that thing like it's a billy club."

*Oh my God, how long had he been spying on her?* Had he seen her under the cabinet? She went perfectly still. True to his word, he released her, but her leg collapsed. With a curse, he scooped her up and carried her to her bedroom and to the bed.

"You should stay off your leg." His tone indicated irritation. Her captor was worried about her leg?

"I can't. Shit doesn't get done if I don't move, and I needed my pain meds. And if you hadn't sneaked up on me, I wouldn't have twisted on it, further stressing it. Why did you sneak up on me anyway?"

"I didn't. I was just roaming the house."

Her bedroom was dark, but she still pulled the covers over her. Since she didn't own any sleepwear, she'd donned a floppy T-shirt and a pair of gym shorts.

“Why don’t you find another house to roam? Another person to scare the daylights out of?”

“Trying to get rid of me?”

“Hell, yes. Is it working?”

“No. I’ll leave when I get ready and not one second before.”

He’d done it again, switched from caring about her leg to going all authoritative in a blink of an eye. “At least you could tell me what you’re doing here.”

“Like I told you before, that’s classified, and you don’t have clearance.”

She rolled her eyes so far into the back of her head, she was afraid they were going to permanently stick there.

“How long ago did your husband shoot you?”

Mac’s voice eased through the darkness. It was soft and full of concern, making her realize that Mac could play any game easily, the hard-ass or the concerned citizen. “Almost a year ago.”

“What happened?”

“I prefer not to discuss it.” She’d said too much on the porch this afternoon, but she’d been on a roll. She never talked about it, and why the hell she’d mentioned anything in front of Mac was a mystery. She didn’t want his sympathy, which was what she always got when people realized that her husband had tried to kill her.

Cool air brushed her legs. “What are you doing?” she asked, apprehensive.

“Relax. I’m going to give you a massage.”

“Why?”

“Because I want to.”

A warm hand wound around her foot and pulled it toward the edge of the bed. Two thumbs pushed into her instep. *Gosh, it felt so good.* But what was he up to? One second he was full of commanding bullshit, and now he wanted to give her a massage? “I don’t get it,” she said. “You barge on to my property, tear the hell out of

my roof, tell me you're on some secret mission that I don't have clearance to know about, eat my food, and now you want to give me a massage? That's just fucking insane."

"I'm off duty right now. I can do whatever I want to."

"And when you're on duty, you can do whatever you want to do too. What a life."

"Your skin's so soft," he said.

His voice was low and husky and shot a thrill through her entire body. "Are you trying to seduce me?"

"Is that so bad?" he asked as he gripped her heel and kneaded it with his thumb.

Bad? No one had ever seduced her, not even David. She'd been plump since she was born, never dated much in high school, certainly never in college, and now this man, who was all muscle, hard lines, and good looks, wanted to seduce her. *No way!* It was just part of the game that was going on here, a game where she didn't know the rules or what they were playing for.

Or did he really want her land too? Yeah, he'd had an erection while she was sitting on his lap on the porch, but surely there was some explanation besides him wanting her, because that was so crazy ridiculous.

"What?" he asked. "You don't think you're sexy?"

"Fuck no."

He hand roamed up, massaging her calf. "Ah, but you are very sexy."

"I don't know what's going on here. I don't know why you dropped out of the sky on this so-called mission, and I certainly don't know why you'd want to seduce me—unless it's part of your mission. Is this part of your mission?"

"No. Like I said, I'm off duty right now. That erection I had on the porch was because of you, and my cock is throbbing right now because of you."

"I don't believe you."

“Your disbelief doesn’t change reality.”

\* \* \*

Disbelief mixed with sorrow poured off her, irritating his wolf. She wasn’t beautiful, not like his usual women, but she was cute. She also wasn’t tall with a strong or athletic body.

But she was his.

Mac tried to fight his wolf, tried to make it realize that they’d been dealt from the bottom of the deck, but it was a losing battle. The wolf wanted to touch, to taste. And perhaps that’s just what he should do, enjoy her while he could. When it was time to lock her up, he’d snap the cuffs on her and walk away.

“What were you doing in the kitchen?” he asked

“I told you. Getting some medicine for my leg.”

He moved up past her knee and worked the lower thigh muscles on her bad leg. “Was that all?”

She sharply inhaled, her body went rigid, and her heart beat frantically. “Of course.”

The smell of her lie was acidic and left a bad taste on his soul. She was hiding something—probably her drug dealings—and her body had betrayed her. But his wolf urged him to overlook that and seduce her. Either way, he was going to be the laughingstock of his werewolf team when they figured out that this little drug runner was his mate.

But right now, all he wanted to do was strip and crawl into bed beside her. Her scent was heavenly, something sweet and floral, driving him insane. Her creamy skin was smooth and soft, reminding him of delicate flower petals. He felt the little quivers that moved through her body because he was touching her.

“Why don’t you just ask me whatever it is and then get the hell out of my bedroom.”

“You know what I want to do to you?”

She shook her head. "No."

He moved his hand up to her wound and gently kneaded the puckered scars. "My beast wants to tie you up, naked, and then kiss every inch of your body." Just saying the words caused his cock to throb harder against his pants.

"Your...beast?"

His body went utterly still. Did he say beast? Had she affected him so much that he could no longer think straight to protect his species? "The sexual side of me is a beast that wants to claim you."

He knew his words excited her, because her sexual musk flooded his senses. "Will you let me do that to you?" Mac prayed that she'd say yes. His human mind knew it was wrong. He was breaking the rules by getting involved with the suspect, but his wolf was winning. The need to fuck, to mate, to mark was strong, clouding his mind, shoving good sense out of the way.

"Yes," she whispered, so low that he wouldn't have heard it if not for his wolf ears.

He abruptly stood, not intending to give her a chance to change her mind, not giving himself the chance to come to his senses. He turned on the bedside lamp, flooding her with soft light.

She yelped. "What are you doing?"

"My beast wants to see you." He headed for her bedroom door and closed it. The blinds were already down. The last thing he needed were the prying wolf eyes of the roving patrol. He turned back to the bed and noted her flushed face, her eyes wild with excitement and a hint of fear. He quickly shucked his black shirt and boots, then slowly unzipped his borrowed jeans. In a seductive move that he'd never done before, he put his thumbs in the waistband and slowly tugged his pants and underwear down. His raging cock sprang free, and he was pleased with the sharp intake of her breath. If this didn't tell her he wanted her, nothing would.

He moved to the side of the bed and held his hand out. "Your turn."

Her eyes flew from his hand to his face and then went deep south.

\* \* \*

It was official. She was insane, and so was this Mac guy. She couldn't figure it out. His erection said he wanted her, but the "why" was totally eluding her. David called her a cow, saying she was unattractive and too fat. The only way he could get his up was to watch porn. So the fact that this man had an erection for her was mind-boggling. Not to mention that Mac's cock was considerably larger than David's. David was probably up on that hill, rolling over in his grave. Good for him. He should be ashamed of how small his penis was.

Seeing the heat in Mac's eyes, Callie decided to grab this opportunity with both hands and not let go. She placed her hand into his bigger one and swung her legs over the side. She unsteadily stood, let go of his hand, pulled her T-shirt off, and dropped it on the floor. Callie watched for his reaction, waited to see disgust in his eyes, but instead, he reached out and feathered the backs of his fingers over her nipple.

"So pretty," he murmured.

With more sexual courage than she'd ever had, she shed her shorts and panties. She stole a glance at her rounded belly and large thighs, wishing she was toned.

He stepped into her, his thick cock pressing into her upper belly. "Are you wet for me?" His hand slipped down her body. Chills skated along the wake of his hand. His gaze held hers as he slid his fingers between her legs. She knew she was wet, felt her body responding to his.

She liked this feeling of sexual awareness, how electric energy hummed just below her skin. She felt alive. In a bold move, Callie wrapped her hand around his erection, thumbed the smooth head. Mac groaned and threw his head back, and she grinned at her newfound power. She'd never touched a man like this before, never had the courage before now, and certainly not with David.

"You can't touch me like that," he said as grabbed her hands and put them behind her. "I won't last long enough. Now keep your hands behind your back and spread your lovely legs for me."

She did as she was told and was totally unprepared when he dropped to his knees. She watched as his hands skimmed the sides of her hips, as he kissed one nipple. White-hot need shot through her. Her head fell back. This was a dream.

"Your nipples are so pretty."

He licked the other nipple and then blew on it. Chills skated over her flushed skin, making her want to squirm. Pulling the nipple into his mouth, he sucked hard and then lightly bit it as his fingers pinched the other nipple. Arching into him, she wanted more of the forbidden pain. She wanted to run her hands through his dark hair, wanted to hold him to her breast as long as she could, but she obeyed his command. She was good at obeying...when she wanted to, and she definitely wanted this.

Leaving her nipple, he kissed the spot between her breasts before continuing his way down her belly, barely brushing her skin with his lips, sometimes nipping and sometimes licking. She struggled to keep her hands behind her.

"Lie down. Keep your hands over your head," he said, his voice deep and dark with emotion.

She did as he asked, and he pushed her legs so that she was completely open to him. "Your curls are wet. Is that for me?"

"Yes," she whispered. How could she not be wet? He was making her feel things she'd never felt before. Made her want things she'd never wanted before.

She held her head up. His gaze caught hers. His tongue flicked out, scraped across her clit, and she almost jackknifed off the bed at the sizzling sensations that shot to her core. He pulled the nub into his mouth and sucked, stoking a fire that burned low in her belly. She'd never felt anything like it, and before she could process the sensations from his warm tongue, his finger slid into her wet folds. She jerked in surprise.

His big finger moved in and out, creating a warm friction against her slick core. David had never touched her; she'd never gotten any pleasure from David, because sex with him had always been quick, which she was thankful for. But this...this was different. "More. I need more," she begged.

"I'll give you two fingers, but you will not come. Do you understand?"

No, she didn't understand—any of this. She nodded.

Two fingers stretched her pussy. Teeth tugged on her clit. Her hips wiggled. Every nerve ending was begging for release. His fingers moved faster; his mouth sucked harder. And she was building, racing toward something she'd never had.

\* \* \*

Mac withdrew his fingers. She was building too fast. He wanted her to come around his cock, to feel every inch of her pussy when she came. He crawled up on top of her, driven by a need he'd never tasted before. He drew her tongue into his mouth and sucked. Her body writhed beneath his, trying to rub her clit against anything she could find.

She was hot and ready for him and his wolf, burning with a fire that matched his.

He stilled and laid his forehead against hers. "I don't have any protection," he said. "Do you have any condoms?"

She shook her head. "I can't get pregnant...and I'm clean."

He smelled the truth mixed in with her arousal. "I'm clean too. You sure you want to do this? I have other sexual games we can play."

"No. I want you inside me...now."

He smiled at her demand. "Yes, ma'am."

His erection nudged her pussy and then pushed in, past silky tissue that needed to stretch. God, she was too slick and tight; she seemed to pull him deeper. He started to move, slow at first, but she lifted her hips beneath him, meeting him thrust for thrust. This was heaven. She was heaven. His fangs extended, and his

wolf urged him to latch on to her shoulder to claim her. He fought his wolf. He would not claim her, just enjoy her. When she disobeyed his order and raked her nails down his back, his wolf went wild, pumping into her fast and hard.

"Yes," she cried as her body arched and her orgasm exploded around him. He lost his control and shot his release into her, over and over, arching away from her to keep from sinking his canines in and claiming her.

\* \* \*

Mac watched her sleep for a few hours, but his raging dick wouldn't let him do the same. He needed more of Callie. He poked around in her bathroom until he found some lube and a purple vibrator. It was surprisingly small. Most women he knew had huge vibrators, but not his little Callie. But that gave him an idea. He sniffed the lube and vibrator, thankful that it was only Callie's sweet scent on them. In his mind, he'd hoped that she'd used these by herself and not with that bastard husband of hers or somebody else.

The last thing he wanted was to remind Callie of her dead husband, and the best way to do that was to give her pleasure the likes she'd never had before.

With two scarves he'd snatched from a hook in the closet, he carefully secured both of her hands to the headboard and then eased the covers down her luscious body. She was tired. He should leave her alone, let her rest. Then again, she could sleep tomorrow.

He felt like he was handling glass, she was so delicate, physically fragile. He laughed. There was nothing fragile about her sassy attitude, though, and that mouth of hers.

He nestled himself between her thighs and drew her nub into his mouth, sucking it, flicked it with his tongue. A whimper escaped her lips, followed by a little tremor that rolled through her body.

"Open your eyes, Callie. See me make love to you."

Her lashes fluttered open. She lifted her head and stared at him.

He waved the vibrator in front of her. "Tell me, little Callie. Why do you have a vibrator under your sink?"

Heat rushed to her pretty face as her gaze traveled to her bound hands. "What are you doing?"

He loved the huskiness of her voice, the innocence in it. "I asked first."

She swallowed hard. The pulse in her neck beat frantically.

"Do you play with yourself at night? Tell me, Callie. I want to hear all about it."

"I...I use it...sometimes."

He knew that. Sometimes, not all the time. Just sometimes. "Does it feel good, sliding into your tight sheath?"

"Yes," she whispered.

He generously lubed it, turned it on, and placed it against her opening. He swirled his thumb over her clit, wanted to tongue her but needing to see her pleasure. Her hips flexed, and he rewarded her by pushing it in farther. He increased the pressure on her clit, and then he couldn't help himself. He nipped the inside of her leg. Her yelp went straight to his cock. He was hard, felt the moisture on the tip. This was as much torture for him as it was her. She struggled against her bindings.

"The sight of you submitting is incredibly arousing."

\* \* \*

Callie was going insane. Fire burned low in her belly. She struggled against her bindings, wanting to finish herself off instead of enduring this torture. He was moving too slow.

He pulled the vibrator out. "I wonder what this feels like inside your other hole."

Her heart stopped, then kicked into high gear. She wanted to protest that it was just wrong, but the wickedness of it appealed to her.

"I'm going to prepare you with my finger first. Then we'll try out your little purple pleasure."

His slick finger slid into her tight hole. Her whole body tensed at the invasion. He pushed in and out before he added a second finger that stretched her, bordering on pain.

"Breathe through it," he said. "You're small everywhere, every man's dream."

Breathing wasn't going to get her past her vibrator. His fingers moved in and out, increasing the pressure against her tight ring. She whimpered when he removed his fingers. She watched him lube her vibrator, and her back hole flinched.

"Trust me. You're going to love this."

Trust. That was a difficult word to use between them. The only thing she trusted right now was the fact that she was swamped with a driving need.

"Relax and breathe," he said as he pressed the head against her right ring. "Push out."

She did, and the phallus slipped in. Discomfort, not pain, shot through her. He pushed it all the way in and turned it on. The vibrations threatened to take her sanity.

Her whole body tensed as little shards of lightning raced around her womb. He thrust his fingers inside her pussy, setting up a fast rhythm. It was too much. Her clit, her pussy, her anus. She arched off the bed, as her orgasm stole her breath. She heard her ragged cry as lights exploded behind her eyes and searing ecstasy claimed her.

Little aftershocks rippled through her body as her mind tried to comprehend the wickedness. The vibrator slipped from her rear.

"Oh, you're not done yet, sweetheart." He looped her legs over his arms and shoved his cock inside her. "You're so slick and hot. I could just die here."

He didn't go slow. His thrusts were hard and forceful. She kept her eyes on him, watched his member slide in and out of her. His abs strained; his arms bulged.

He was beautiful, in a feral sort of way. And she felt herself building again, wishing her hands were free so she could wrap her arms around him. His face grew taut, but she couldn't keep her focus on him, because her own pleasure was overtaking her. His shaft was hard, relentless against her soft tissue, the friction exquisite. Before she knew it, her womb contracted. She opened her eyes in time to see him throw his head back, and a guttural cry escaped his lips. She felt his hot semen inside her as her second orgasm shattered her very soul.

He collapsed beside her. A knife appeared in his hand, and he sliced her bonds before she even had time to register it. He gathered her close. "Sleep, little one."

She snuggled close, threw her arm over his firm belly. This was a night of firsts. She'd never snuggled after sex. She had always been thankful when David rolled away when he was done, but tonight, she was grateful that Mac wanted to hold her.

Yes, tonight was a night to remember.

## Chapter Four

The next day, Mac was visibly absent, which was fine with Callie, because she wasn't sure she could look him in the eye and not blush like a virgin. But a virgin she wasn't—she'd acted like a whore, couldn't get enough of him. But she didn't feel like a whore. For once in her life, she felt like a woman, not a crippled, frumpy person. Who knew there was a sexy woman behind that cane?

But the fact that she hadn't seen him all day made her wonder if he regretted last night. She ignored the little pain around her heart. She didn't regret it. If Mac disappeared from her life right now, she'd treasure their night together.

At one o'clock, she took a bath and slipped into her cobalt blue knee-length halter dress that accentuated her only physical asset—her boobs—and was flouncy enough to hide her ample hips. The white bandage gleamed on her arm, but there was nothing she could do to hide it. Donning her rare blue diamond pendant with matching earrings—the only gift she'd ever bought herself—she was set to go. She studied the diamonds in the mirror, loving the way the blue in the diamonds matched her eyes.

Now if lady luck would cooperate and the man watching the road could somehow be in a coma, T-Bone could whip in here, pick her up, and they'd be gone before Mac's troops could rally. Yeah, like that was going to happen.

Right on time, she saw the limo barreling down the driveway. She quickly grabbed her wrap, purse, and cane, and hobbled to the back door. T-Bone was out of the car, holding the door for her by the time she reached the back door. A giggle spilled from her as she limped as fast as she could to the awaiting car.

“Get me out of here as fast as you can,” she said to T-Bone as she threw herself into the backseat.

T-Bone’s brow quirked, but he wasted no time, slamming her door shut and then his.

Callie couldn’t contain her excitement. “Go. Go. Go,” she squealed. The adrenaline was coursing through her system. Her heart fluttered. Her mind whirled. What if she pulled this off and escaped Mac and his merry men? How cool would that be?

T-Bone shoved the car into gear, and the limo lurched forward, making her thankful that the circle driveway would save time instead of having to back out.

Callie caught T-Bone’s gaze in the rearview mirror.

“You want to tell me what’s going on?”

Another giggle escaped Callie when she slid along the seat as the limo curved to the left. When she stopped, she glanced over her shoulder, relieved that the black-clad men with the big-ass guns were absent. “A helicopter crash landed yesterday and...”

She swallowed the rest of her words when T-Bone braked hard. She slipped right off the seat and onto the floor.

“You okay?”

“Yeah.” She laughed as she pulled herself up. Mac stood in the driveway, a gun aimed at the limo.

“Who the fuck is that?”

“He said his name was Mac. Can’t you cut through the grass and go around him?”

“I could. This is a bulletproof limo, so you’d be safe, but if I were him, I’d shoot the tires.”

Damn, she hadn’t thought of that.

“Tell me all you know,” said T-Bone as he pulled his weapon from his holster.

Callie grew serious. "They crashed yesterday, and ten men dressed in black carrying really big guns rolled out. Mac, the leader and the one in front of you, wouldn't tell me what's going on, wouldn't let me call anybody or leave."

"You think they know what we're doing?"

"I don't know. I first thought they were here to convince me to sign the deed over to Earl, or maybe they know about tonight." Did they know about her transaction tonight? How could they? She and T-Bone were so careful. "We have to be at the checkpoint at one a.m. We can't miss that."

Mac moved toward the limo, his weapon aimed at T-Bone. When he stopped, the barrel was two feet from T-Bone's head.

"Can he shoot you through the glass?" She couldn't risk anyone's life, especially T-Bone's. T-Bone was her only friend. Yeah, she paid him, but she trusted him.

"The first few will only crack it, but eventually it will break."

"Can you get us out of here before he can shoot the tires?"

"No. There's another man up the driveway."

She followed T-Bone's gaze, noting one man stood in the middle of the driveway with his gun aimed at them. "Okay," she said. "Game over." *Damn it.* But it had been fun trying to outwit Mac while it lasted.

"Just tell them I'm your driver, and we'll figure something out later."

She scooted over to the door and opened it. When she stepped out, Mac moved fast—she didn't even see him move—and yanked her behind him.

"Are you okay?" Mac asked.

Okay? She was more than okay. She felt alive for the first time in her life. She couldn't help it—she started laughing.

\* \* \*

Mac's heart thudded against his ribs. He'd never felt as helpless, as desperate in his life as when he saw Callie dive into the back of the limo. He knew she wasn't

forced. His mind knew she was trying to escape—he expected nothing less—but the need to kill was a blind rage that took over. The driver was a hairbreadth away from dying.

Mac hugged her close to him, his beast judging her well-being as his men swarmed the limo. The driver was yanked out and unceremoniously slammed to the ground with seven trained killers aiming powerful hardware at his head.

“Stop,” cried Callie. She tried to insert herself between the driver and his men, but Mac kept her pinned to his side.

Mac’s beast paced around, unsure of this man’s relationship with Callie. Was he Callie’s lover? He sniffed.

And this man was pack.

“Tell me what’s going on,” Mac said through clenched teeth. “Who is this man?”

She jerked away from him, his nose telling him that her joy at outwitting him had turned to anger. “This is my driver, T-Bone. Now let him up.”

God, she was beautiful when she was angry. Mac hitched his head, and his men stood down. T-Bone pushed himself off the ground and brushed off his tux. “Hey, man,” said T-Bone. “This is a rental.”

Mac glared at him. “You’re lucky it’s not full of bullet holes.”

T-Bone grinned. “Yeah, well, there is that.” T-Bone stuck his hand out, but Mac ignored it. “Okay. No problem.” T-Bone glanced at his watch. “Mrs. Johnson, we need to get going if you’re going to make your bank appointment.”

“What appointment? And why are you dressed up?” Mac asked.

“Tonight’s my annual charity gala.”

“And you didn’t think that I needed to know that?”

“I was hoping you had disappeared during the night,” she replied. “Besides, you don’t own me.”

Oh, but he did own her, a piece of her at least. He owned the sensual, sexy seductress who had ensnared his wolf, the seductress who made all women pale in comparison to her, the woman who held the power to shatter his life, his career, his soul.

"Get in the car, and let me talk to your driver," he said through gritted teeth.

"No."

*Damn obstinate woman.*

"Fine." Mac grabbed T-Bone by the front of his pressed shirt and hauled him to the front of the car, not caring how he treated the man, hoping he'd do something stupid like take a swing at him.

"What's your real name?" demanded Mac.

"Just T-Bone."

"Listen, smart-ass. You don't know what you're in the middle of here. I can arrest you now and hold you for as long as I want to."

"Listen man, I'm her driver, and she has to get to the bank."

"For what?"

"A check for the gala, of course."

Mac's nose said that the man was telling the truth, but that didn't mean that Mac trusted him.

"Are you her escort too?"

T-Bone grinned. "No. I'm just the hired help."

Mac wanted to slice that smile off his face.

"Your woman is safe. She smells of you, you know. I noticed it right off when she jumped into the car."

"That's none of your concern," growled Mac.

T-Bone shrugged. "Whatever you're going to do, you need to do it quick." Mac followed T-Bone's gaze. Callie was rubbing her leg through her gown. "She can't

stand long, and as pissed as she is with you, I'm sure she'd stand out here all day just to prove a point."

Claws grew from Mac's fingers as his wolf wondered just how much T-Bone knew about Callie, because that comment was dead-on. Mac forced his claws to retreat as he tried to pull a plan out of his ass. He couldn't tell her not to go—that would draw more attention—but there was no way in hell that he was letting her go anywhere without him.

He dragged T-Bone back with him to where Callie stood. "Here's what we're going to do. Moynihan and Chris will come with me. T-Bone will drive, and if he blinks wrong, I'll add another hole to his head. We'll stop by the bank first, then at a rental store, and pick up some formal wear. Then we'll all go to the gala. How's that?"

"Fine with me," said Callie. "But if you hurt T-Bone, somehow I'll make you pay." She dismissed him and slipped into the back of the limo.

He knew there was some weight to her threat. She couldn't physically best him, but he knew she was resourceful enough to figure something out, like telling someone at the gala about him and his men, having the cops swarm in and save her. That would be a major FUBAR—fucked up beyond all recognition.

Mac entered the car and sat beside Callie. Chis and Moynihan followed, sitting across from them in the opposite seat. The ride to San Antonio took about three hours, three hours of her anger scraping across his beast's soul. And he couldn't keep his eyes off her. The color of the gown was perfect for her. He liked the cleavage but didn't want any other male to enjoy that view. How many men would be at this thing, sniffing around her? He might actually have to kill someone tonight.

His wolf was beside himself when this T-Bone joker opened her door and she placed her hand in his as he helped her out. Then the bastard placed his hand in the small of her back to escort her inside—like they were a couple.

"Relax," said Moynihan. "Your agitation is killing me."

Mac scowled. "I really don't give a shit." He now knew what people meant when they said they wanted to crawl out of their skin, because he was seconds from shedding his.

"I want you two to do a sweep of everybody in attendance, and let me know who is wolf." Mac ordered Chris and Moynihan. "I assume there are others like T-Bone who might work for her. Keep an eye on her. I don't want anything to happen to her."

Moynihan laughed. "Mac, you need to make up your mind. One second, she's a criminal; the next, she's not."

"The jury is still out. She's hiding something." Mac flipped open his phone and called Wayne. "Tell me what's under her cabinet."

"I don't know. I haven't been able to get the damn thing open without damaging it. I have tapped into the line so the next time she uses it, I can trace it. It's simple and yet very sophisticated; she paid a wad for this setup."

Mac closed his phone and frowned. Callie was more than capable of paying an underground source for the contraption. A private coded line was the best way to communicate. Hell, you couldn't tap in unless you knew it existed, and then you'd have to decode the message.

Twenty minutes later, his beast relaxed when she exited the bank, but growled when she laughed at something T-Bone said. Those two were too close, too comfortable with each other. She slipped into the backseat, her demeanor changing from happiness to coolness once she sat beside him.

An hour and a half later, after Callie assured the proprietor that the black-clad men weren't thugs, but friends who'd *dropped* in on her; the three of them were dressed to the nines and barreling toward the Henry B. Gonzales Convention Center. The proprietor of the rental place had assured him that the only reason he'd had tuxes to fit them was because they were bigger than most men. Apparently, everybody was going to this damn gala.

“Who’s invited to your gala?” Mac asked as he resisted tugging on his shirt collar.

She briefly glanced at him. “Everybody. Politicians, businessmen, the governor.”

“What’s the security setup?”

Callie’s look told him she thought he was insane. “None, except what’s with the governor. This *is* a charity event.”

“With lots of people, lots of money, and fancy jewelry. Prime pickin’s.”

She rolled her eyes. “Everybody brings checks.”

“It’s still a perfect setup for anyone who wants to take advantage of anyone at the party.”

“Trust me, Mac...or whatever the hell your name is. The charity is taking advantage of the generosity of the fine people of Texas.”

The limo pulled up to the front of the convention center and let them out. Callie was immediately engulfed by people waiting outside the building, setting Mac on edge. He inhaled deep, slicing through all the soaps and perfumes, looking for any werewolves or anyone who was emitting unease, but he found nothing but humans. Mac’s hackles were up, something he never ignored. Something was going to happen tonight, whether he wanted it to or not.

\* \* \*

Callie’s feet were killing her, along with her leg. Why couldn’t designers design comfortable heels? Yeah, she was crippled, and yeah, she was wearing a three-inch heel, which probably wasn’t a good idea, but she couldn’t pass up the Jimmy Choos when they matched her dress so perfectly. *Besides, didn’t we send men into space? Good, comfortable shoes should be a piece of cake.*

And her face was killing her too, since she’d plastered a smile there, which was utterly ridiculous, because the turnout was great. They were going to beat last

year's total, but Mac was hovering like a mother hen. She'd also answered a million questions about her arm, telling lie after lie.

T-Bone's escape plan that he'd hatched out while they were in the bank was shaky, and he'd told her to be as natural as possible around Mac and his men, because they were very astute men with very good hearing. Astute? Could they read minds? And if their ears were that good, surely they could hear her heart as it ping-ponged around in her chest.

Of course, Mac had managed to scowl the whole time he'd been there. He wasn't good with the meet and greet. Neither was she, but she could pull it off. Occasionally, she'd catch his heated gaze, which would send her body into its own fiery need, but she tried to avoid him, kept herself immersed within groups of people. When it came time to escape, she hoped to lose him in the throngs of people.

All the ladies loved Mac and his friends, and that jabbed a jealousy stick into her gut. Several unattached ladies and a few who were attached inquired about Mac, his friends, and T-Bone. This was the first time that T-Bone had attended a function with her. Her male acquaintances wanted to know if she was in trouble and needed bodyguards.

She wanted to know if she was in trouble too.

Seeing T-Bone with Mac, Callie realized that both men were cut from the same bolt of cloth, probably well-worn duck canvas. Both their gazes could turn lethal, they both moved with the calculated skill of predators, and both were handsome as sin, drawing the ladies like flies to honey.

Of course, Earl was the most annoying and inquisitive person there, wanting to know everything about the men, including their shoe sizes. Earl had pointedly asked why Mac wasn't glued to her side like yesterday, and since she was so good at lying these days, she simply told him that Mac didn't like to be in the spotlight, so he'd hung back.

Earl was harder to ditch than Mac, but she kept moving from group to group, waiting for the clock to chime the Cinderella hour...or maybe it was the bewitching

hour. She resisted looking at her watch every five minutes. T-Bone had told her—almost ordered her—not to do that, because it would give her away. T-Bone's warning was more terrifying than dealing with Mac.

"I've noticed you haven't had any champagne," Mac whispered in her ear, sending chills skating down her spine. What was it about him that turned her on? His bad-boy persona? With dismay, Callie realized that she'd failed to keep herself attached to a group, and now he was there, invading her personal space.

"I try not to drink in public," she said as calmly as she could, which was a lie. She loved good wine and expensive champagne. However, she had a mission tonight and needed all her wits. "I've noticed that you aren't drinking either."

Mac was behind her, and even though he was barely touching her, she felt the heat from his body, his breath whispering across her skin.

"You look lovely in that dress."

That was unexpected. "Thank you."

"It's giving me all kinds of wicked fantasies."

*Like what?*

"Really?" she whispered.

He whispered in her ear. "You meet me in a conference room. I bend you over the table, spread your legs wide, and slowly pull your soft and dreamy dress up over your luscious ass. You don't have any panties on, because you've been waiting for me. I pull out my cock and slide it into your hot, dripping pussy so far, you're standing on your tiptoes in those fuck-me heels you're wearing. I pump in and out of you slowly, savoring every slick slide, but your pussy feels too good, and I can't hold back. I start pounding into you, holding your hips in place with my hands. The sound of our flesh echoes in the room, and I can smell your arousal. You want me.

"Then when you can't take it anymore, your orgasm explodes, causing your pussy to clamp down hard on my cock. My hot seed shoots into you as waves of pleasure course through both our bodies."

A shiver raced through her body at the picture he painted in her mind. She felt the wetness between her legs, knew her panties were soaked, wanted nothing more than to find that conference room.

He reached around her and snagged a champagne glass, his arm brushing against hers. "My other fantasy is going to become a reality when we get home tonight. I plan on drinking champagne...from your luscious body."

Her eyes closed as a thrill shot through her. Would he do that?

"And I'll be prepared tonight. I'll bring my own bindings to tie you to the bed, so you'll be mine to do with as I please."

*Can I get a rain check?*

She certainly didn't consider herself a submissive, but Mac's words played havoc with her libido. And when he'd tied her to the bed this morning, she'd liked it.

It was about trust. She did trust Mac not to hurt her, and why she trusted him, hell, she really didn't know. He had his own agenda, and what it had to do with her was still a mystery. And after the stunt she and T-Bone were getting ready to pull, any building trust between them would be shattered.

"I don't think we should have sex again," she said, keeping her voice calm. Oh, she wanted it, but doing it wasn't a good idea.

"Why? Are you afraid to enjoy?"

She still hadn't turned to face him. "No, but I can't let my body override my mind. You won't tell me why you're at my home, why I'm virtually a prisoner."

"You're only half a prisoner. You're here, aren't you? I could have stopped that limo and not allowed you to attend tonight."

"So, you're saying you're reasonable?"

"Yes."

"That's debatable." He was only reasonable when it suited him.

More chills raked her when the backs of his fingers skimmed her bare arm. It would be so easy to fall into his arms. He was so charming...in the bedroom. She turned to face him. "I see someone I haven't spoken to. Please excuse me."

"You've been running from me all night."

"Then take the hint." She easily sidestepped him and flew into the crowd, latching on to the first group she came too.

She did manage to glance at her watch. Two minutes. She hoped her heart didn't explode before that time. She pushed thoughts of a wicked Mac and bedroom antics out of her mind. She had a mission tonight. Counting down the two minutes in her head, she chitchatted, then excused herself and headed for the ladies' room. She casually stopped along the way, pretending to meander and not look over her shoulder for Mac or any of his team. According to T-Bone, they'd be watching her, and she was the prey. T-Bone was never wrong.

She pushed the door to the restroom open, and T-Bone quickly pulled her inside, pushed the door shut, and locked it.

"Come on, Callie. We've got to get you through the window."

She looked at the open window that was about three feet off the ground. "The window? This is your plan?"

"I tried to work out something through the kitchen, but one of his men has tailed me the whole night."

"So how did you get away from him?"

T-Bone jumped on the wide window sill and extended his hand to her. She put her hand in his, and he easily hauled her up, like she weighed nothing. T-Bone jumped down from the window onto the grass and then lifted her down by her waist. "Can you run?"

She rolled her eyes, knowing that he was playing with her. "Sorry, my heels are too high."

Gripping his hand like a lifeline, she followed him as he kept to the side of the building, keeping to the shadows. "How did you get away from him?"

She saw T-Bone flash his perfect teeth. "I asked him if he wanted to meet me in the bathroom for some...um...extracurricular activity."

"What?" She didn't understand.

"I asked him if he'd let me bang him."

At first she was alarmed, but then she giggled. "And what did he say?"

"When hell froze over."

T-Bone stopped at the corner of the building and looked around before he dragged her toward the parking lot. "I hope you don't mind, but we're borrowing a car."

"Well, I guess it's okay, as long as we return it."

He grinned. "Of course."

Her jaw dropped when he pulled a set of keys from his pants and hit the remote unlock button. "How?" she asked over the top of the Lexus before she slid into the seat.

T-Bone didn't answer her until they were out of the parking lot. "Sue let me borrow her car as long as I bring it back...and stay awhile." She could clearly see his grin in the dark car.

"Sue who?"

"Sue Grimes."

"You're going to see Sue Grimes? I hear she's into kinky stuff."

"I heard that too; that's why I picked her."

"You sly dog."

"Yep, that's me." T-Bone flipped open his cell and called his team. "We're on the move."

\* \* \*

Mac tracked Callie as she moved around the room. He knew she was keeping herself surrounded by people and away from him...and that slimy bastard, Earl. Earl was also good at staying away from Mac, especially when Mac wanted to get up close and personal with him—like in his grille. The man was demeaning to Callie, and that would just not do.

The vibration of his phone interrupted his thoughts of what he wanted to do to the little man. He stepped back away from the crowd, until his back met the wall. “Yeah.”

“Mac, it’s Wayne. I’ve researched Mrs. Johnson’s charities. They’re all legit. She raises a lot of money for women’s and children’s shelters all over Texas, but most of the money comes from her own purse.”

Putting on his DEA hat, Mac said, “They could be havens for illegal money laundering.”

“Don’t think so,” said Wayne. Mac heard some keys clacking. “Not unless she’s funneling money buying mattresses, toiletries, sheets, towels, food, clothes, and medicine. Those businesses are legit; I’d stake my reputation on it.”

If Wayne was staking his reputation on it, then it was so. The only requirement Wayne needed was power connected to the computer he was hacking into. No, it wasn’t always legal, but neither were the suspects that they tracked. Mac slept well at night, because invading people’s privacy was the least of a suspect’s worries.

“There is one puzzling thing,” Wayne finally said. “You would think she’d just make her donation with a check instead of cash.”

“What?”

“She got five hundred thousand dollars cash out of her personal account this afternoon. Doesn’t seem safe, carrying that much cash.”

Mac gulped in a breath, since he’d forgotten to breathe. *Cash? Five hundred thousand dollars?* “She donated with a check; I saw it when she challenged everyone to match her fifty-thousand-dollar donation. It wasn’t cash.”

"Well," said Wayne. "Where's the five hundred thousand?"

That was the million-dollar question. "How many bundles of cash would that be?" Because unless she'd strapped it under her dress, she didn't have it in that tiny purse of hers.

"Let's see. Largest denomination is the one hundred dollar bill, so five hundred thousand divided by one hundred is five thousand, and there are one hundred bills in a bundle, so five thousand divided by one hundred is fifty. She would have picked up fifty bundles of one hundred dollar bills."

"Shit. She didn't come out with the cash. How about hacking into her bank's security cameras and seeing who she gave the money to? Call me back ASAP."

Mac sent a 911 message to his team, and in under a minute, Moynihan and Chris were standing beside him. He started firing off questions the minute they arrived.

"Where's T-Bone?"

"Taking a piss," replied Chris.

"Did anyone see where Callie went?"

"She's in the ladies' room," said Chris.

Mac made a beeline for the restrooms, his heart sinking, his wolf pacing. Violence was near the surface, and so was fear. Her scent lingered in the hallway, and it was laced with an edge of excitement. Not a good sign. Mac turned the knob to the ladies' room. Locked. Using his rage, he launched his shoulder against the metal door with such force, the hinges gave way along with the dead bolt. The door clattered to the tile floor. Mac's eyes were instantly riveted to the open window. Callie's scent was strong.

And so was T-Bone's.

Mac vaulted out the window, thinking he should have killed T-Bone when he had the chance. Any one of his men could drive a limo. His nose led him alongside the building and into the parking lot, straight to an empty parking spot. The only

good thing was that no other strong scents lingered, just those of Callie and that damned T-Bone.

Mac dialed Wayne. "Callie and that T-Bone guy have fled the convention center. You got any information that I can use?"

"I hacked into the bank's security cameras. It looks like there was another man inside the bank that this T-Bone jerk handed a black bag too. It was really ingenious. The man got into a van, and I tracked him until he got out of range of the TxDOT cameras. Now I'm using satellites, but that may take me a while, due to the darkness. I could put out a BOLO on the van."

His wolf urged him to do that, since the van was the only lead he had, but the DEA agent inside him said that he didn't need to tip his hand and drag other agencies into this. Mac had no solid information that Callie was into something illegal, but his gut told him otherwise. She had to eventually return home, and then he'd make damn sure the next time she slipped off to who-knew-where to do who-knew-what, he and his team would be ready.

\* \* \*

Callie held on to the oh-Jesus bar as the Suburban rumbled down a dirt road. It could be called a dirt path as far as she was concerned. Branches slapped the sides of the vehicle as the wipers eerily scraped back and forth across the windshield. The wind whipped occasionally, and lightning sliced thorough the black inky night. Bum luck that it was raining tonight. Another Suburban with three more men brought up the rear.

"You should have stayed back and let us do this," said T-Bone.

She glanced over her shoulder toward the back of the SUV as lightning illuminated the three big men dressed in black who sucked all the air out of the SUV. "I've always come with you before."

"I know, but the weather is a bitch tonight, and I'm afraid you'll get your fancy party dress messed up."

Her face heated at the mention of her dress. "I'm not worried about my dress." She wasn't really worried about anything except Mac. She could picture him seething right now, with his feral eyes and predator-like demeanor, but she couldn't afford to blow this tonight. People were depending on her.

"I've already got six men in the trees to cover us," said T-Bone.

"Why? We've never had any trouble before."

"This is a new broker. I've checked him out, but I don't trust anyone."

"As long as he's got the merchandise, I don't care," she replied. Before the Suburban had even stopped rolling, the men behind her were out, guns drawn. She hated all these guns, but she'd learned early on that some people wouldn't deliver what they said they would but wanted payment anyway. She grabbed her rinky-dink umbrella that looked like it belonged in a martini glass and stepped into the mud with her Jimmy Choo pumps. Normally, she'd bring a change of clothes with her, but tonight she hadn't been able to, what with all the uninvited guests at her house. It would have been a dead giveaway to pack a change of clothes.

T-Bone was suddenly by her side, gripping her arm to keep her on her feet as she tried to keep the umbrella from poking his eye out and keep her cane from tripping them both. He led her down the slippery slope, three men in front of her and three in back. Before they reached the bottom, she was contemplating just ditching the shoes and cane and letting T-Bone carry her. Lord knew she paid him and his men enough.

They approached a vehicle. Thanks to the lightning that split the sky, it looked like a battered truck. A lone man stepped from the vehicle, and T-Bone immediately blinded him with a flashlight beam as two of his men patted the broker down.

"He's clean," muttered one of them.

"You got the merchandise?" T-Bone asked.

The man nodded and pointed to the truck bed. T-Bone moved to the back of the truck and pulled off the tarp. He nodded, and one of his men tossed the money bag

to the man. She used to inspect the merchandise herself, but it had become too painful. Now she let T-Bone handle the confirmation.

She turned, and T-Bone grabbed her arm and helped her back up the slope. T-Bone was right; she didn't have to be here. When she'd first started, she'd wanted to see what her money was buying. And yet seeing the merchandise always flooded her with a barrage of emotions, from anger to sadness, hate to sorrow. Maybe T-Bone was right. Maybe she shouldn't come along anymore. The wind caught her umbrella, flipping it inside out. T-Bone grabbed it and stuck it under his arm.

When they finally reached the SUV, she stepped back to let him open the door. Her foot slipped in the mud, and down she went, her feet sliding under the SUV. Pain exploded in her left arm. She lay on her back, her beautiful dress floating in the rivulets of muddy water.

T-Bone bent over her. "Are you okay?"

"No. I'm pretty sure I broke my arm."

"Shit."

She laughed. "Yeah, shit."

"That Mac dude's gonna kill me."

She doubted that. "He might kill you because you helped me escape from him tonight, but not because I'm hurt."

"Yeah, right," muttered T-Bone.

T-Bone eased her up, so she could stand, and she couldn't help but wince from the break. He helped her into the Suburban and examined her arm, but there was nothing he could do. He drove as gingerly over the potholes left by the rain as he could, but she was thankful when they finally reached the main road. Her arm hurt like a son of a bitch. She laid her head back and closed her eyes as he drove to the hospital. What she needed were some pain meds for her arm and her leg.

## Chapter Five

Mac needed a cage to put himself in. He was worried about Callie. It was now late afternoon, and she still hadn't returned. He wanted to roar to the heavens, reach out, and kill something—that something being one certain werewolf who went by the name T-Bone. Wayne still hadn't found out who the guy was or who his companion at the bank was, making Mac wonder how many other people were in her employ.

Wayne also hadn't found anything to point to illegal activity, except for the huge amounts of cash she had withdrawn sporadically over the past year. It had to be drug money. Yet his beast balked at the thought.

"Approaching vehicle," Chris said in Mac's ear. Apprehension coupled with fear raked down his soul. He bolted out the back door and stood on the porch—waiting to pounce. Before the Lexus stopped in the driveway, Mac was standing beside the car, his Sig aimed at T-Bone.

"Get out," snarled Mac.

T-Bone smiled, shoved the car into park, and stepped out, giving Mac the opportunity to slam him against the side.

Through the blood rushing in his ears, Mac heard Callie say something about releasing him.

Mac leaned into T-Bone, pressed his gun into his back, and whispered. "You made a big fucking mistake taking Callie."

"I work for Callie. I do what she tells me to do, and she told me to get her out of there without you. Now, instead of going all Billy Badass on me, you need to get Callie to bed. She's hurt."

Mac blinked. *Hurt?* And his wolf hadn't picked up on it?

"I'm not done with you yet," Mac snarled, and then he shoved T-Bone toward his men. "Secure him."

Mac took a deep breath, hoping to squash his anger before confronting Callie. For once in his life, he was unsure if he could control himself, control his wolf.

He wanted to punish her for making him worry.

Making his way around to the other side of the car, he snatched open her door and leaned down. His nose twitched. She smelled like a hospital. What the fuck!

"You are an asshole," she said, her voice a cross between pained and lethargic.

His gaze raked down her body, noting the cast on her left arm, her beautiful dress covered in dry mud, her fuck-me shoes scuffed and dirty, and her hair plastered to her head.

"Where the hell have you been?" Mac asked.

"The hospital."

"I mean before that."

"T-Bone and I had some business to tend to...outdoors...and it just happened to be raining last night."

She stared straight ahead, and Mac could smell T-Bone on her, sending his beast into a raging frenzy.

"What happened to your arm?"

"I fell."

"How bad is it?"

"Hairline fracture," she quipped. Then she turned her head toward him and narrowed her eyes. "What are you doing with T-Bone?"

T-Bone? Why did she care so much about T-Bone? "I'm going to talk to him."  
*And if he doesn't give me the answers I need, well...*

"I suggest you let him go. Don't make me regret not calling the cops while I was free. I have the best lawyers that money can buy."

"Your *driver* will be fine. Now, let's get you into the house, get you cleaned up, and into bed." He didn't wait for her to protest; he hauled her out of the car and scooped her up along with her cane.

"Put me down. I walked out of hospital. I can certainly walk into my own house." Her protest was weak, though. She tried to hide a yawn but couldn't.

Mac easily carried her into the house and snagged a trash bag on the way to her bedroom. His beast could hear her shallow breathing. She was tired, and painkillers were snaking through her system. He started the shower, stripped off her clothes and his, and then bagged her cast. She could barely stand, but he didn't mind holding her up as he washed her short hair and the rest of her body. His cock was throbbing by the time she was clean, but she was so out of it, she didn't even notice.

He quickly dried her off, noticing the scratches on her legs. It was apparent that she'd been in the woods last night, probably making that drug deal his superiors had suspected. T-Bone would give Mac the answers tonight.

Mac carried her to bed and tucked her in, but she rolled over and moaned a few minutes before dropping off into sleep. Thank goodness for the painkiller. His wolf wanted to crawl in there with her and hold her while she slept. But Mac had his DEA hat on tight. It was apparent she was doing something illegal. Nobody, especially a cripple, bolted out of a window at her own charity event and broke her arm in the woods in the middle of a rainstorm just for kicks. It had been important to her that she be somewhere last night, regardless of her own safety. He knew that dealing with drug dealers would make a person do that, if only to stay alive.

His beast latched on to that. Maybe she wanted to get out of the business, but her Mexican suppliers wouldn't let her. It didn't matter; she was going to prison anyway, end of story. But so was that slimy T-Bone—if Mac let him live long enough.

Mac tried to rein in his temper as he approached the barn. It would do no good to kill the bastard before he got some answers, and that might prove to be Mac's hardest challenge yet.

He entered the barn, his gaze immediately going to the too-confident man in the chair. T-Bone wasn't secured, but then maybe he'd do something stupid, like try to run. A hunt would be a good thing tonight.

Mac stopped in front of T-Bone, but unfortunately, the man was a werewolf, and he wasn't afraid. It was so much easier to intimidate humans. Well, except for Callie. She didn't intimidate easily.

Mac crossed his arms and stared at T-Bone. "I'm in no mood to chitchat. I want direct answers, or it's not going to go well for you."

"I'm a werewolf, just like all of you," T-Bone said, angling his head. "I don't scare easily."

"What's your real name?" Mac asked, choosing to ignore T-Bone's smart-ass remark.

T-Bone just shook his head.

"You're in deep shit," growled Mac. "I should just lock you up."

"You won't do that, because my men know that I brought Callie home. They know I'm in this barn. If I don't get to leave here in the next"—T-Bone looked at his military-issue watch—"thirty minutes, they'll call the sheriff's department. Since Callie is loved by everyone in this great state of Texas, they'll be all over this place in a matter of minutes, and whatever little game you've got going will be over. In fact, I might just call them myself when I get out of here."

The man's confidence was staggering, and Mac knew that he had them over a barrel. Oh, they could keep T-Bone on ice for a while, but having the Texas State Patrol, sheriff's department, Texas Rangers, and whoever else crawled out of the woodwork to save Callie wouldn't work. Mac surged forward and grabbed T-Bone's shirt collar. "Don't fuck with me, or I'll make you disappear. Now tell me where you took Callie last night."

"It's not my story to tell. You'll have to ask her."

"I'm asking you, shithead."

"I work for her. If she wanted you to know, she would have already told you. Now, who the hell are you anyway, and what are you up to?"

"That's on a need-to-know basis."

"Really, because protecting Callie is my number one priority."

"Callie's in no danger from me."

"I see. Well, if there's nothing else, I need to leave and save you the hassle of having more company than you've bargained for." T-Bone smiled, stood up, and headed for the door.

"How do I know you won't call them anyway?" Mac asked before T-Bone reached the door.

T-Bone turned and looked Mac dead in the eye. "Because Callie asked me not to. But I'm watching you, and if you hurt Callie, you'll pay—with your life."

Mac knew that his men had placed a tracker on T-Bone's ride, but it wouldn't do any good. T-Bone was too smart and would dump the car or disable the tracker, because deep in Mac's bones, he knew that T-Bone was good at what he did. As soon as T-Bone disappeared out the door, Mac said, "Get info to Ted and Jeff in town and see if T-Bone shows up."

Wayne sent a text with a picture of T-Bone to Ted and Jeff before Mac finished his sentence. "Done."

"You got anything on that arrogant bastard?" Mac asked.

"Zilch," replied Wayne. "Some fingerprints would have been good, but he always wore his gloves."

Mac shook his head in disgust. "I can't arrest him. We have nothing on him other than the fact that I don't like him, and that doesn't usually hold up in court. We could hold him the standard twenty-four hours, but I don't want to deal with

any outside interference. We need to catch him and Callie in the act.” Just saying that caused a pain around his heart.

“Have our vehicles arrived yet?” Mac asked Wayne.

“They’ve been delivered to Ted and Jeff, and they can bring them out any time. Another bird is parked a few miles away from here, gassed up and ready when needed. All we need now is a clue.”

Wayne’s computer beeped. “Hold on. Secure message coming through from HQ.”

Mac held his breath, hoping the message had a lead.

“Drug deal went down last night,” said Wayne.

Mac’s gut bottomed out. “Where?”

“Eight miles west of here.”

A dark gloom settled over the interior of the barn slash command center. Damn her. “So you still betting that she’s not a drug runner?” Mac asked Wayne.

“As you said, it’s all circumstantial.”

“Circumstantial? She was MIA last night, the same night drugs crossed the border.”

“Hey, the lady’s music collection consists of classic rock like Boston, Lynyrd Skynyrd, CCR, and Jimmy Buffett, for Christ’s sake. Nothing about her screams drug runner,” replied Wayne.

“And the box under the cabinet?”

Wayne shrugged. “Her communication device with T-Bone. Maybe T-Bone doesn’t want her to call him. Hell, I don’t know, but I’m still saying she ain’t running drugs.”

“Well, she sure ain’t collecting daisies in the middle of the night. Is the transaction site accessible by vehicle?” Mac asked.

Wayne’s hands flew over the keys, and a map popped up on the screen. “Yes, by this road here,” Wayne said, pointing to a line on the map.

"Three of you ride out there and see what evidence you can pick up." There was no need to sniff to see if Callie and T-Bone had been there, because the rain had cleaned the air last night, along with any other important evidence, like footprints and tire tracks. It was a long shot, but right now, that was all they had. This mission had been a cluster fuck since they'd crash-landed in her front yard.

Wayne's computer beeped again. "Another transaction is scheduled to go down tomorrow night."

"Any idea where?" asked Mac.

"No, coordinates aren't given until the last minute."

"Which side is giving them, Mexican or Texan?"

"Intel didn't say."

It was apparent to Mac that the best plan was to catch Callie and T-Bone in the act, and that meant giving them enough room to make the buy and incriminate themselves.

"Any movement on her bank account?" Mac asked. If he were the one sneaking around with Callie, he would have handled the planning and money today before bringing Callie home.

"Yep," answered Wayne. "Half a million was withdrawn today, before T-Bone brought her home. How did you know?"

"That's what I would have done. Tell me if T-Bone has it or if it was passed off to someone else."

Mac paced as Wayne hacked into the bank cameras. His beast bristled. It wasn't fair to finally find his mate right before she headed off to prison.

"The bank manager met her at the car, I suppose to sign the paperwork since she's hurt, and then three suitcases left the bank by three different men all heading in different directions."

"Decoys," said Mac. That was what he would have done. Harder to figure out which one had the money that way.

"I need a tracker to put in her cane. I want trackers on every vehicle of hers, and I want everyone to be ready to roll out of here at 0600. We're going to give her enough rope to hang herself."

\* \* \*

Earl flipped over the CLOSED sign to his used-car business after he let Harry and Jacob in. They both took their usual seats in his office. Earl looked over at the corner of his desk. David usually sat there, pushing whatever paperwork lay there out of the way. Earl missed David's easygoing smile, the one that had all the women falling at his feet. David had always had something for the four of them to do. David made life interesting.

"Well," asked Harry, "how did the party go?"

"It was great if you like being dressed up like a turkey, plastering a smile on your face, and pretending you actually like all those people," replied Earl.

"What about her boyfriend?" asked Jacob. "Did he stick to her like glue?"

Earl shook his head. "No. I only saw them together one time."

Jacob and Harry burst out laughing. "The Viagra must have worn off," said Harry.

"I don't know," said Earl. He scratched his head. "He watched her like a hawk all night. He knew where she was every second. His body might not have been glued to her, but his eyes sure were. And then before the shindig was over, they both disappeared."

"So, what's next?" asked Jacob.

"I have a plan. I don't like it, but we've approached the desperation point. But once the plan is underway, there'll be no turning back."

"I'm in," said Harry.

"Me too," said Jacob.

"Good," said Earl. "Here's what we're gonna do."

## Chapter Six

Callie tried to peel her eyes open, but they were stuck. She reached to wipe them with her hand, but she couldn't. It was too heavy.

"How you feeling?"

*Mac?* She finally managed to open her eyes and saw his silhouette sitting by the door in a chair he'd brought in from somewhere. Images floated through her murky mind. Her jumping out of the window at the convention center, being in the woods, falling down in the rain, breaking her arm.

"My arm hurts," she said, her voice raspy. "What time is it?"

"One in the morning. You need to eat and then take some more pain meds."

She didn't like taking pain meds. They made her groggy for days, and she couldn't afford to be out of commission. She had one last buy to make, and then it would all be over for a while. She flipped the covers off and instantly realized she had no clothes on, but what the hell. She didn't even remember getting into bed yesterday. Mac was there in an instant. He turned on the lamp and helped her sit up.

"What do you need?" he asked.

"To pee."

He scooped her up and carried her to the bathroom.

"I can walk, you know."

"I'm sure you can, but this will be quicker."

He set her on her feet and left, closing the door behind him, for which she was grateful. He could have been a bastard about it and stayed to watch. Before she'd

pressed the lever on the toilet, he was back, scooping her up and depositing her back in the bed. She'd wanted to wash her hands but decided not to point that out.

"Would you like a sandwich, soup, some crackers maybe?"

"Crackers would be nice and maybe a Coke."

She watched his broad back retreat, wondering what was going on inside that head of his. She vaguely remembered that he'd been pissed when she got home. *Oh my God. T-Bone?* Here she was, asking for crackers, and who knew what Mac had done to T-Bone? She barely remembered Mac shoving T-Bone against the car. But T-Bone had assured her that Mac wouldn't do anything to him, because T-Bone had a card or two to play. She could only hope that T-Bone was right.

Mac reentered her bedroom, and she tried to hide her smile. He really looked ridiculous dressed in black clothes, combat boots, and carrying a serving tray. She pulled the covers up over her breasts, and he sat the tray on her legs. She grabbed the Coke and gulped it down, hoping to wash the cotton out of her mouth.

"What did you do with T-Bone?" she asked before plopping a cracker in her mouth.

Mac's lips thinned; his jaw clenched. "I let him leave."

"With or without his skin attached?"

"I didn't touch him, but I wanted to."

"Why? What has he done to you?"

"It's not what he's done to me; it's what he did to you."

"He didn't do anything to me."

"You broke your arm, didn't you?"

"Because I slipped and fell. He surely didn't push me down."

"You shouldn't have been out last night."

*Here we go again. What I should and shouldn't do, according to Mr. Authority.* And blaming T-Bone was ridiculous. "I was out there because I had to be. Because T-Bone works for me, he took me there."

"Out where?"

"The woods."

"Why?"

"I had something I had to do. Something important." She smiled. "It's highly classified, and you don't have clearance." His eyes narrowed when she threw his words back at him.

"Nothing good can come from running around in the woods at night."

She could understand why he'd think that, and perhaps it was true, but she didn't care if she broke a bone every time she went out. It was worth it. She ate another cracker under his watchful gaze. She could feel his agitation rolling off him in waves.

"What were you doing in the woods?" His voice was edged, came out almost as a growl.

"I can't tell you." *You wouldn't understand.*

"Whatever you're mixed up in, I can help you."

"I...don't need any help." *It will all be over soon.*

When she finished, he removed the tray and then handed her a pill.

"I don't need one right now." *Got to stay awake for tonight.*

"I've had broken bones; they hurt like a bitch."

"I'll pass."

"We're pulling out tomorrow. Do you need me to call someone to come and stay with you?"

She shook her head. *Leaving? He's leaving?*

"We've been reassigned. Someone will come and get the helo next week and repair your roof."

"Okay." She heard her voice crack and hated it.

Suddenly she was filled with sadness, which was stupid, because she'd only known Mac a few days. Yeah, the sex with him was off the charts, but she'd known that whatever they had was temporary. A guy like Mac wouldn't want to stay with her.

Of course, with him leaving, that would make what she had to do tonight so much easier—if she could stay awake long enough. But she'd miss that adrenaline rush of trying to escape from his watchful eyes.

"You need someone with you. You can't take your pain meds without someone here to make sure the house doesn't burn down around you."

His voice had changed from that hard military line to one of concern, which surprised her again. He always seemed to be struggling with himself over her. "I'll be fine. I'm not planning on taking any more pain medication, just some Tylenol."

"Then I'll just take them with me."

What? Did he not believe her? "Okay by me, but I'm sure that's a crime." What in the hell did he want with her pain meds, anyway? Or was he concerned for her welfare?

She felt his gaze on her, boring into her soul. Too bad he didn't work for her. But what she'd seen of him and T-Bone together, that would never work. Both of them were leaders, used to giving orders and having them obeyed. Putting the two together would be like pouring gas on a fire. One was bound to get burned.

Callie lifted her gaze to his, shocked to find his heated. Did he still want her? Could that possibly be true? She must be suffering the aftereffects of the pain medicine. She flicked her gaze downward, surprised to see a bulge in his black pants.

"Yes," he said. "I want you."

"But why?"

"Because you're sexy as hell."

She surely didn't feel that way right now. Her hair must be a mess, along with the rest of her. "But I thought you were mad at me."

"I am, on a professional level."

"And what profession would that be?"

He shrugged. "But on a personal level, my body still wants you."

"How about your mind?" she asked.

He shrugged again, making her think that he was like her—his body wanted what his mind knew he shouldn't. And that was fine with her. A question played around in her head. Would she sound too needy if she asked him for one more time? Would she sound too much like a whore?

What did it matter? She'd never see him after tomorrow. She fisted her hands in the sheet. "Will you...will you make love to me tonight?"

"Your arm is..."

"Not required," she said.

He studied her hard, and she thought he was going to say no. She didn't blame him. "My rules," he finally said.

She released the breath she'd been holding. "Okay."

"Stay right there until I get back."

She watched his large frame leave the bedroom. Her ears perked up. He was in the fridge. His returning footsteps in the hall sent a thrill through her. What was he planning? Surely, he wouldn't.

Mac sauntered back in, carrying an open bottle of wine. "I couldn't find champagne, but I like wine just fine."

*He would.*

He eased up beside the bed. "I want to tie you up, but with your arm in a cast, I don't think I will. Here's the game. You get to be in charge first, and then I get to play next. Agreed?"

*Agreed?* The images she was processing sent her brain to sizzling. She'd never played sex games before and really didn't know what to ask for. But she was game. She scooted to the edge of the bed and held his gaze. "Off with the shirt and boots."

He grinned and handed her the wine. He bent and unlaced his boots and then toed them off. The socks followed and then his shirt.

She reached for him, grabbed his belt, and pulled him to her. Mac was exquisite, with well-defined pecs, roped abs, and bulging arms, and she couldn't wait to explore. Her good hand fanned the warm plane of his rigid abs and then meandered up to his nipple, where she brushed it with the backs of her fingers. His nipple grew rigid under her touch.

With a trembling hand, she unbuckled his belt, popped the button, and slid the zipper down, surprised when his magnificent cock sprang free. No underwear. It was thick and long and fully erect. She wrapped her hand around it, gave it a slide down, and was rewarded with a hiss from Mac. He may not want her with his mind, but his body did. Her hand pumped lightly as she marveled at the feel of the smooth, soft skin over hard steel. She thumbed the little drop of moisture on the slit. She needed to taste.

"Drop your pants and lay down."

After he dropped his pants and climbed onto the bed, she crawled up beside him. She smiled as she poured some of the wine over his chest and belly. The white wine sparkled and shimmered against his tanned skin, pooling on the hard ridges of his muscles. Leaning forward on her good arm, Callie flicked her tongue over his belly. His cock jerked at the contact.

She couldn't believe that she was lapping wine from such a beautiful body, something she'd never, ever considered. Her tongue traveled up, flicked over a nipple before she pulled the bud into her mouth and sucked. A low growl came from his throat, and his body arched slightly off the bed.

"Bite me," he said.

Her eyes flew to his, but they were closed. Wickedness bolted through her. Pulling his nipple into her mouth, she gently sank her teeth into his flesh.

“Harder,” he growled.

She bit a little harder, but not as hard as she thought he wanted. She just couldn't do it. Leaving his nipple, she kissed her way back down his belly, knowing she was a coward, but she didn't want to dwell on that. Right now, she wanted to finish her exploration. His flat belly dipped when she kissed it. Sitting up, she grabbed the wine bottle and slowly poured it on his erection. She licked her lips as the wine ran down his hard cock.

Leaning forward, Callie flicked the tip of her tongue across the thick head. A growl rumbled from Mac. Reveling in her newfound power, she took the head into her mouth. She liked the taste of the wine mixing with his precum. She sucked hard and took in as much of him as possible.

“Yeah, baby. Just like that.”

Excitement rushed through her as she toyed with him, sucking hard and then teasing the head. Mac made a strangled cry, grabbed her head, and pounded into her mouth. His hips pumped, gyrated, but then he suddenly pulled her head away.

He propped himself up on his arms, slightly winded. “As much as I'd like it, I don't want to come in your mouth. I want to come in that hot, slick pussy of yours that was made just for me.” He grinned. “My turn to play. Lie down and scoot your butt to the end of the bed.”

She wasn't done exploring, but anticipation skated through her as she did as she was told. He picked up the wine bottle, grinned, and poured it on her breasts, belly, and her curls. The wine was cool against her heated skin. All of this playing was pushing her sexual boundaries, making her realize that a part of her was, indeed, a very sexy woman.

The long swipe he made with his tongue over her belly sent chills all over her body. He lapped like he couldn't get enough of her. And for once, she wanted to believe that he couldn't get enough of her, just like she'd never get enough of him.

“You make the wine taste better, sweetheart,” he said against the swell of her breast. “And I’ll never be able to drink wine in a glass again.”

He sucked hard on one engorged tip and then nipped, causing pain mixed with pleasure to shoot through her system. Her mind knew that was so wrong. She felt the quickening in her womb when his hand traveled down and brushed against her clit. She shamelessly pushed against his hand, needing more, needing what only Mac could give her.

He crouched at the end of the bed. “Your pussy is so beautiful,” he said. “And it’s wet, dripping for me.”

With her gaze locked on him, she watched his tongue flick out. She almost bolted off the bed when he licked her clit. Her head dropped back as she reveled in the wickedness of the act. More sucking and nipping had her squirming. She was close, so close.

“You don’t have permission to come.”

*What?* That was a battle she was going to lose.

Mac plunged a finger inside her pussy, pumping slowly; then he dragged some of her moisture down and swirled his finger around her ass. “Relax,” he said. “I promise, it feels good.”

She knew it would feel great. Her body trembled as his finger pushed in. The pressure wasn’t painful, just sinful. He pumped in and out slowly, pressing against sensitive tissue. She squirmed. This was so wrong, but it felt so good.

“I’d love to really show you how good it feels to bury my cock in your ass up to my balls. Would you like that? You’d be on your hands and knees, and you’d feel my balls pressed against your ass.”

She shuddered at the thought. Was that even physically possible? Mac was much bigger than her vibrator.

\* \* \*

Mac's body was strung tight. He'd give anything to fuck her in her ass, to feel her tight ring convulse around him. He'd fill her pussy with a vibrator and fill her ass with his cock. It would drive them both crazy. Because of her cast, though, she was incapable of presenting her fine ass to him.

Her hands reached for him. "Please. Please fuck me."

Right now, he couldn't refuse her. Anything she wanted, his wolf would give her. He stood and slid her closer to the edge. He nudged his cock into her slick folds, felt the slight tremor roll through her. He pushed in slowly, and when he was fully seated inside, he stopped and looked at where they were joined. She was perfect for him. He reached for her breasts, felt the weight of them in his hands. They were perfect too.

"Play with your nipples for me."

She shyly placed her hands on her nipples, rolled them between her fingers. She arched her back like a cat, and then in a bold move, she wrapped her legs around him and lifted her hips, pulling him deeper. Part of him wanted to draw this out; another part wanted to taste the sweet rapture.

"I'm begging. Please fuck me."

Her talking dirty was his undoing. He moved with hard, demanding thrusts, felt the friction against the walls of her core, knew he couldn't stop now, even if he wanted to. She shattered, clamping down on his cock as she bucked and writhed beneath him. He leaned forward, pushing deeper inside her as he buried his face in the softness of her neck. Her sweet scent invaded his senses, intoxicating him. His canines elongated.

His hot seed shot into her at the same time as he clamped down on the sweet, tender flesh in her neck, holding her still, and she erupted again, her slick flesh unraveling around him. They rode the hard sensual waves together.

Suddenly, remorse flooded his soul, and Mac almost howled, knowing he'd never experience this feeling again.

## Chapter Seven

Callie moped around the house all day, missing Mac, and that pissed her off. Hell, she didn't even know his last name. If she wanted to get in touch with him, which she didn't want to do, who would she call, and what would she say? *Hello, um, yes. I'm looking for Mac, you know, tall, dark, good-looking but brooding, and really, and I mean really, great in bed.*

Maybe she needed a vacation. Somewhere tropical, not that Texas couldn't be hot as the devil, but somewhere with white sands and cabana boys to deliver fruity drinks with little umbrellas.

Callie rolled her eyes. Boy, was she pathetic. She was not the same person she'd been four days ago. Back then, she was content to be by herself, stuck in her own mind on her own time. Now, she was...lonely. But not lonely for just anybody. No, she wanted Mac, the one person she couldn't have.

"Callie, you need to get over him," she said out loud.

If he hadn't walked out on her, she might have admitted to herself that she was in love with him. How could she love someone she'd just met? God, she was crazy. That had to be it. She couldn't have him. End of story. He'd made that ultimately clear this morning, slipping out while she slept. He didn't even say good-bye.

All he left her was this bite on her shoulder, and every time she thought about it, it reminded her of the wonderful pleasure he'd given her. But apparently, it didn't mean jack to him. She was glad when the sun finally went down, because that meant it was time to head into town. Between her arm and her leg, the pain was almost unbearable, but she was going to stop by the ice-cream shop and get

herself a double scoop of something sinful. Yeah, she was feeding her pain and despair with sugar instead of medicine, but what the heck? Mac wouldn't be here to see her wallow in her treat. Maybe the ice cream would make her feel better.

She hopped into the Hummer, knowing she'd leave it in town when T-Bone picked her up. Apparently, T-Bone's plan was to use a different vehicle for every buy. She didn't know if he bought them, but she suspected he *borrowed* them, which was fine with her as long as no one got hurt and he returned them. He promised her that everything was on the up-and-up, and she had no reason to doubt him.

Of course, T-Bone would be surprised to see her tonight. Between the hospital and the bank, he'd asked if she wanted him to go ahead and make the buy if she didn't show up. She'd told him certainly, but she'd also told him that she'd be there, even if she had to arrive in a wheelchair. He'd just grinned and told her that it was okay to sit this one out if her arm was too much. She'd just grinned back and said she'd see him at the rendezvous point.

Callie pulled into the parking lot of the Ice Cream Shack, put her car in park, killed the engine, got out, and locked her vehicle. Inside, after looking at the delicious flavors, she settled for a scoop of black cherry and a scoop of chocolate, knowing that those flavors probably wouldn't complement each other, but not really caring at this point. Sugar was sugar.

She hobbled back outside, ice-cream cone in her good hand with her cane looped over her good arm. She swiped her tongue around the sides. God it tasted good. She hit the Unlock button, but before she could open the door and slip inside, a cloth covered her mouth, stifling her scream. Her eyes and throat burned as she struggled against someone's hold.

Then everything went black.

\* \* \*

"Where is she now?" Mac asked Wayne.

"She's still at the ice-cream shop, just like she was one minute ago when you asked me. I'll let you know when she's on the move again."

Mac and his men were in the woods about a mile from the last drug buy's coordinates, hoping the next buy would be close by. It was fucking hard to cover five hundred miles when a drug buy could go down and be done in an hour or two, depending on the amount of product. Wayne was tracking Callie on his computer, but Mac was uneasy, his instincts telling him that something was going to happen tonight, and his wolf wouldn't like it. He couldn't shake the feeling, no matter how hard he tried to talk himself out of it.

The plan was simple. Follow Callie, and that would lead to the drugs. End of story. His beast snarled at him, because his wolf wanted him to try to save her, go against everything he believed in, turn a blind eye. Just take her and run off somewhere together, where she couldn't commit crimes anymore.

The wolf, where his mate was concerned, apparently didn't give a damn about right and wrong, just the strong need to be with her.

The waiting for something to happen was killing him, because there was that little bit of hope still left. Hope that she wasn't guilty.

"Send Jeff and Ted over there to see if she's OD'd on ice cream."

Wayne glanced at him like he'd lost his mind but sent the message.

Mac got out of the black SUV and roamed away from the vehicle, trying to get himself under control. He was the most out of control he'd ever been in his life, control that was shattered by the knowledge of a mate. His wolf wanted to run...needed to run, something he should have done last night instead of making love to Callie. He hadn't gotten Callie out of his system. No, she'd only become even more entrenched in his soul.

Wayne leaned his head out the vehicle. "Mac, get over here. You need to hear this."

Mac's gut bottomed out as fear gripped him. He managed to sprint to the SUV without his heart exploding. "What's up?"

"Mac's here," said Wayne. "Repeat."

"We're standing beside Mrs. Johnson's Hummer. Her ice-cream cone and cane are lying on the ground beside the open driver's side door. She's not out here or in the establishment. We've asked around but haven't found anyone who's seen anything," said Ted.

"Do you smell another werewolf?" Mac asked.

"Negative. I do smell something chemical and an unknown human. But Mac," said Ted, "I can smell her fear."

Fear was a strong emotion, and if it was still lingering, that meant she was terrified.

Before Mac could ask, Wayne said, "Traffic cameras are not in position to help me find her."

"Does anyone have any idea where this T-Bone fuck is?" Mac growled out.

"Actually," said Wayne. "I've got movement about three miles from here. I can't say who, though." Wayne had tapped into the government's infrared satellite that frequented the Mexican border. Yeah, it was something from the movies, but art did imitate life, at least in this case.

"Have you received any coordinates from HQ?"

Wayne shook his head.

"Fuck," said Mac. "Let's move, because right now, that's all we got."

Mac climbed and slammed the door as the SUV headed down a dark road. They didn't need the helo to cover three miles. He said a prayer, hoping to find Callie alive, because his gut told him he wouldn't.

When they were within a mile of the site, Chris backed the SUV into some bushes, just in case someone came by on the road. The team filed out, the *clicks* of weapons echoing in the night. "Wayne, you stay here and man the instruments."

"Ah, man. I want to kick some dealer ass."

"Well, you shouldn't be so damn good at what you do. I'll let you kick mine when this is over," said Mac.

“Yeah, right,” said Wayne as he crawled back in and put on his head phones, his disappointment evident.

“And Wayne,” Mac said quietly, for his ears only, “I need you to find Callie if she’s not here.”

Wayne briefly nodded as understanding flooded his face.

Mac and his team headed out, not needing night vision goggles, because their wolf sight was so good. The wolf owned the night with its pronounced strength, sight, smell, and hearing.

Wayne maneuvered them to within half a mile, and by that time, they heard muffled sounds echoing in the night. His men branched out, forming a circle around the dealers.

“Does anyone smell anyone we know?” Mac whispered into his comm.

“No,” Chris replied. “There are four men, and they are transferring bundles from one vehicle to another.”

“Let’s see if we *cannot* kill anyone tonight.” Mac knew he said that more for himself than his team.

His men moaned, and even though they were kidding somewhat, Mac knew the wolf was a hunter. “You girls will have to hunt rabbits after all this is over. On the count of three. One, two, *three*.”

Even before the three had left his mouth, he and his men moved in, yelling the famous slogan: “DEA. Drop your weapons.”

Three of the men did just that, but one swung his wicked machine gun toward them, and Mac put several rounds into the smuggler’s chest. His men secured the area and the merchandise, which was not what he considered a major deal. It was possible that this wasn’t the big event the HQ kept reporting on. Mac questioned the three men who were still alive, getting absolutely nothing from them, but he didn’t much care. Callie wasn’t here, and neither was that bastard T-Bone. Hope bloomed in his chest, his beast telling him “I told you so.”

But he still didn't know where she was, and he was pretty sure she wasn't safe.

"Mac," Wayne said. "Come in."

"Go ahead."

"You're not gonna believe this, but I've got movement about a mile north of where you are."

*Callie?*

"Let's tie and gag these pieces of shit. Chris, you stay here and make sure no one comes to rescue them. The rest of you are coming with me."

After the prisoners were secured and hidden about one hundred yards away from the dope, Mac and the rest of his men headed off in a dead run, only slowing when they were a hundred yards from the second site. Could there be two drug runs tonight? What were the odds of that? And was Callie here?

Once again, his men spread out to encircle the new group of suspects. Two more vehicles came into view, but this time, there were eight men, and one of them was T-Bone. Mac inhaled deep, sucking all the scents in he could.

No Callie.

On the count of three, they stormed the group, but none of the suspects did anything stupid, which was a shame, because Mac wanted T-Bone to draw so he could put one in his head. After all the suspects were secured, Mac got in T-Bone's face. "Where's Callie?"

"I don't know. Isn't she home?"

"No. She left her place around nine."

T-Bone rubbed his hand down his face. "What do you mean, no? She didn't show up at the pickup point, but I didn't think anything of it because of her injured arm. I'd hoped she'd stayed at home."

Mac grabbed T-Bone by the throat and sniffed, hoping he smelled a lie. He just needed one reason to kill the guy.

But all he could smell was the truth.

Mac glanced around. There was only one human here, and he was scared shitless. The other men stood nonchalant, pissed at being on the business end of so much firepower, but otherwise very relaxed. They were all werewolves too.

“Mac, you need to come and see this,” said Nate.

Nate was standing at the back of a van, clearly agitated. Mac pushed T-Bone away from him, rounded the corner of the van, and stopped dead in his tracks. His gaze traveled from one frightened face to another.

*Children.*

Six frightened, starving children were in the back of the van.

With a roar, Mac turned and barreled toward T-Bone, catching him square in the chest. Both of them bounced when they hit the ground. “You bastard. You and Callie are dealing in human trafficking?”

T-Bone tried to speak, but Mac’s forearm pressed tightly into his throat, limiting his ability to do so. T-Bone shook his head. Mac felt himself slipping. Women and children were the weak who needed protecting, not exploited. He couldn’t believe his sweet Callie would even consider doing something as heinous as this.

Mac eased off the pressure but fully intended to snap the bastard’s neck.

“Not even close,” rasped T-Bone. “Yeah, we’re buying them, but from the scum that exploits them. Callie’s got a network set up. She rescues children and women who are sex slaves. Most of those children in that van will be back at home with their parents within a week, with access to psychological help. A couple of them were sold by their parents, so they’ll be taken to a private children’s home, owned by Callie. They will be given medical attention, psychological help, food, clothing, education, and anything else they need to become successful people. Now get the fuck off me.”

Mac pushed to his feet, his mind trying to process what he'd just heard. His nose said it was the truth.

T-Bone was still lying on the ground. "We've shut down eight traffickers and are still working on a few more."

Mac's beast was overjoyed. Callie was not a drug runner; she was...risking her life to save exploited women and children.

Mac extended his hand to T-Bone. T-Bone grabbed his arm, and Mac hauled him up.

"Sorry, man," Mac said. It pained Mac to say that. He'd truly thought T-Bone was into illegal shit clear up his ass.

T-Bone nodded. "Well, Callie's one of the good guys, the best, actually." T-Bone's mouth formed a thin line; his jaw clenched.

"But..." said Mac.

"This business is killing her. She used to be able to look at the people she rescued, help soothe their fears, but the past four times she's gone, she hasn't. Sorrow has poured off her, almost choking the rest of us. She's not mentally strong enough to handle this anymore. I've tried to get her to just do the funding and let me take care of everything else, but she always insists on coming. It's slowly killing her, man."

Mac could see that. After seeing so much war, terror, and evil, you either got immune to it or it made you go insane.

"Right now, Callie is missing," Mac informed T-Bone. "We found her abandoned Hummer and her cane outside an ice-cream shop. Do you have any idea where she could be or who could have her?"

The concern on T-Bone's face was genuine. "I don't know, man. Everyone loves Callie." He made a face. "Except Earl and those two good-for-nothing shit friends of his. Callie hated them. She said something about them wanting to marry her for her land."

Mac knew that was true. Now it was time to visit Earl.

\* \* \*

Callie heaved as her belly rolled and her head swam. Muffled voices played in the background. Just a few hours ago, she'd felt like there was too much noise. Then things had quieted down, gotten peaceful even.

"Damn," said Harry. "How much of that shit did you give her?"

"Apparently," laughed Earl, "she doesn't even make a good cokehead. Glad I was a medic in the army." Earl loaded a syringe. "I'm gonna give her a sedative. Then we'll strip her and wash her off with a bucket of creek water. The sedative should keep her from throwing up."

"How long will it take your plan to work?" asked Jacob.

"Everything I've read on the Internet says that addiction could come within two weeks, but I'm betting I can beat that record.

"But we've only got six days before the money is due," whined Jacob.

"As soon as she signs the deed over to us, I'll show it to them. Between now and then, they won't be able to find us, because we'll be out here babysitting a cokehead."

"After she signs the deed, what you gonna do with her then?" asked Harry.

"I'd figure we'd do a little...hunting." Earl smiled.

\* \* \*

A chill skated down Mac's spine as he read the hastily scribbled note tacked on the front door of Earl's Used Cars. *Gone hunting. Be back in a few weeks.* Mac resisted the urge to smash his fist through the door. He didn't believe in coincidences. Earl's absence and Callie's disappearance were tied together.

And Earl was going to die a violent death.

His men had already told him that Jacob's Fishing and Hunting Outfitters and Harry's Hardware Store were closed too. Thick as thieves, those three were. He assigned three two-man tag teams to watch their business places for 24-7 coverage,

and Wayne was working his ass off, trying to find somewhere they might have taken her.

And all Mac could do was wait.

Mac's cell rang. He looked at the number, happy to see that it was Wayne. "Give me some good news, man."

"HQ finally came through with a location—for tonight."

Mac, the wolf, was hopeful that perhaps Callie would be there. Mac, the man, knew she wouldn't be. She wasn't involved with drugs or anything illegal. She was a heroine, for Christ's sake.

## Chapter Eight

### *Eight Days Later*

Mac paced in Callie's kitchen. An hour ago, he had been running as pack with his men. It had felt good to let the wild side loose, lose some of the frustration that was literally eating him alive from the inside out. But the respite didn't last long. Now, as the sun's brilliant rays pierced the horizon, he was jacked, driven by frustration and fear.

He had to force himself to stay out of her bedroom. Her sweet scent lingered there, along with the scent of her arousal. It was pure torture.

After they'd made the drug bust last week, taking down a major supplier, he had demanded leave...and so had his men. HQ didn't argue, because they were basking in the limelight of the biggest drug bust in history. And when his superiors weren't in front of the camera, they were interrogating the suspects for more leads. Mac didn't give a shit. He had done his job, but not with the same gusto that he usually had. Hell, who was he kidding? His heart wasn't in anything. His men made him eat, telling him he needed his strength for when they found Callie, so he could kill a bastard or three.

T-Bone had shown up three days ago with two of his men. He had investigated all the trafficking rings that Callie had been involved in; they were all clean. Mac didn't actually like T-Bone, but T-Bone had protected Callie, done all the legwork for her charity. T-Bone had been right. If he didn't help her, someone else would have, and they might not have been on the up-and-up.

He heard footsteps on the back porch before the door burst open. Wayne barged in with a big smile.

"We've caught a break," Wayne said. "Earl came back to his car lot, stayed five minutes inside, and then left. Ted put a tracker on his truck. I've got him, Mac. We can follow him."

Wayne swam before Mac's suddenly tear-filled eyes. Would Earl lead him to Callie? His wolf all but romped inside him.

"Helo's got the new bird warming up. Ten minutes to air."

Wayne raced out the kitchen door with Mac on his heels. His team, along with T-Bone and his men, were already gathered at the helo, checking their weapons. Moynihan checked his first-aid bag. Mac's voice left him. His men—no, his friends—were taking their personal leave to help him find his mate. He still hadn't told them she was his mate, but Mac figured a few suspected it.

When they were up in the air, Mac sat unmoving as his barely contained beast paced inside. The helo lagged behind the suspect by three miles, not wanting the rotor noise to give them away by echoing in the forest. The chance that Helo could find a place to put the bird down was slim, so the men were strapping on their rappelling harnesses.

"The vehicle's stopped," Wayne announced.

"Let's give him two minutes and see if he's stopped to take a piss or if he's at his destination," said Mac, knowing that waiting would be the hardest thing to do. Waiting was something the DEA did a lot of, but this was different. This was personal.

Before two minutes had passed, Mac stood and threw open the door, fixed his harness to the rope, and stepped into the night.

\* \* \*

Callie's heart was beating fast, too fast. Usually, she was floating on a white sea of clouds, the slow beat of her heart the only thing she could hear, but not now.

Now, the hum was too loud, and shivers racked her body. She was cold. She was hot. Pain sliced through her belly and then her head. She sucked in a breath, not quite getting enough. Her head pounded harder, keeping time with her heart.

Was it time? It had to be time. Where was...what? Them? *It*?

Yes, where was *it*?

*Why*?

Why was she here? And where was here? And where was her savior? She'd dreamed of a savior—a faceless man—to take away the pain, to give her *it* to ease her pain.

"Ah, she's awake," said somebody, who sounded too close and yet too far away. "Callie, can you hear me?"

She swallowed hard and opened her eyes but quickly shut them against the blinding light that stabbed her brain. She tried to shield her eyes, but her arms were too heavy.

"Come on, Callie. You need to sit up. You've got important business to carry out."

She heaved when she was suddenly whipped to a sitting position. Her head flopped to the side.

"Sit up and don't throw up on me."

Forcing the bile down, she opened her eyes and focused on the blurry thing in front of her. The room spun, and pain jabbed her belly.

"Callie, I can take your pain away. Do you want me to do that?"

Something waved before her. *It*. Sweet bliss. "Ye-yes. P-p-please."

"All you need to do is sign this piece of paper. Can you do that, Callie?"

She swallowed hard. She needed to think. Something she should remember. A reason. Somebody wanted...something. Something...that belonged to her. A firm hand gripped hers as something was shoved between her fingers.

"Sign your name, Callie, and then I'll give you what you want."

A part of her screamed *No*.

But desperation clawed at her, needling her.

She needed *it*. The peace, the quiet of *it*.

She couldn't survive without *it*.

"Yes. I will sign...anything." Someone helped her place the pen on something white.

"Just sign your name, Callie. It has to look like your signature, and it will all be over."

"My...name?"

"C-a-l-l-i-e. That's good. Now. J-o-h-n-s-o-n."

Her hand moved as if a ghost directed her, drove her to do something that her soul said was wrong. When the final letter was made, she smiled as joy spread through her. *It*.

"Now what we gonna do with her?" she heard someone ask.

*It*. They would give her *it*.

"We'll take her up to the ridge, play a cat-and-mouse game. Maybe she'll jump off when her cravings get too much."

"Nooo...you promised. I need *it*."

"There's no more."

"What?"

"It's the end."

"But I...need *it*."

"Hey, Earl. There's something moving outside."

"What the hell does that mean?" asked Earl. "You talking about the wind?"

"No. Shadows."

\* \* \*

Mac sniffed the cool night air. Callie was close, but something was wrong. Her scent was off, changed somehow. "I don't care if anyone lives except Callie." Mac said into his comm.

"Mac, are you sure?" someone asked.

Mac didn't blame his man for asking the question. That statement was so out of character for him. He chose not to take lives unless absolutely necessary. He never tolerated violence just for the heck of it. Vigilantes weren't welcome on his team, but this was different. This was his mate that he'd failed to protect.

His beast would never forgive him for not protecting Callie.

And he'd learned something over the last few days of his personal hell.

He loved Callie.

And it was more than just his beast talking. Perhaps since she wasn't a suspect anymore, his heart finally overrode his stupid brain. He wanted to spend the rest of his life with her if she'd have him. But he had to come clean with her. He had to explain that she was the suspect in a million dollar drug cartel and his mission was to arrest her.

"If anyone has a problem, hang back. This is personal."

Mac moved from the protection of the trees to the front of the cabin and hunkered down beside the door. His nose told him that Callie was inside. There were three more with her, and one of them was Earl. His wolf ears heard scuffling and muffled curses. They knew they were here, no need to delay the inevitable. Mac stood back from the flimsy wooden door and kicked it in. He slowly stepped inside, his eyes taking in Earl holding a naked Callie in front of him with a pistol to her head. The other two dickheads leveled shotguns at him.

Mac walked further inside, surprised his beast was calm, cold, calculated. "You've made a mistake, Earl."

"Oh yeah? What mistake is that?" Earl's voice was laced with fear, but it would be nothing compared to the fear he was about to experience.

Mac cradled his submachine gun in his arms. "You should have shot me when I came through the door."

"You've got two shotguns aimed at you. Have you ever seen a gut shot full of birdshot? It ain't pretty."

"I'll survive, but unfortunately, you three won't."

"Come on, Earl," said Harry. "Let me shoot him."

"Not yet."

Mac's wolf growled when Callie moaned, and her head rolled from one side to the other.

"You three are screwed," said Mac, his voice cold and flat. "You're under arrest for kidnapping, drug possession, extortion, and attempted murder."

"You're insane," said Jacob. "You're in no position to arrest us." He lifted his gun higher and aimed it at Mac's head. "You're a dead man."

"If you kill me," said Mac, "my team will kill you. You should surrender, but I've got another proposition for you. I'll give you fifteen minutes to run, and then I'm coming after you. Just me. Not my team."

"Team?" Harry scoffed. "Who the hell are you, the Lone Ranger?"

"I'm your worst nightmare," Mac snarled. "Doesn't matter who I'm with; this is personal."

Earl's eyes flashed, and the three looked at each other. "You gonna hunt us?" asked Earl.

A slow smile filled Mac's face. "Yep. But I intend to make it fair. You get to keep your weapons. Just lay Callie down on the cot and walk out of here. My men won't follow you. You're free to go. But after fifteen minutes, I'm coming for each one of you, and I'm going to kill you."

"We could just walk out of here with Callie."

"That's the one thing you can't do. I'm giving you a chance at freedom. If you elude me, you're free."

“And if we shoot you while you’re hunting us?”

Mac shrugged. “Self-defense. I’ll be dead, and you’ll be free. So what’s it gonna be? Surrender, kill me, be killed by my men, or run for your lives?”

“I’m not going to jail,” replied Harry. “I’d rather take my chances outside.”

“Earl. Take the deal,” said Jacob. “Nobody knows these woods like us. We can’t lose.”

Earl was quiet for a moment, obviously weighing his options. “Answer one thing for me. You’d kill us over Callie?”

Mac nodded. There was no doubt about it. This was revenge against the men who dared to hurt his mate. This was pack business.

“Why?” asked Jacob. He sneered at her. “She’s nothing.”

Mac leveled his gaze on Jacob, knowing he’d be the first to die. “She’s beautiful, witty, honest, brave, and very sexy.”

The faces of all three men merely registered disgust.

“Time’s up,” said Mac. “Choose now.” He wasn’t going to give them time to take potshots at Callie. He might not be able to contain his impulse to kill, and Callie needed medical attention.

“And you promise that only *you* will come after us,” said Earl.

“I promise.”

“Okay,” muttered Earl.

“Team. Stand down. I repeat, stand down,” Mac said into his comm. He nodded at Earl. “Your turn.”

Earl moved to the bed and dumped Callie on it. Mac suppressed a growl and stepped aside to let the dead-men-walking walk out the door.

As soon as they cleared the threshold, Mac rushed to the dirty cot. Callie’s eyes were open but unfocused, laced with the pain of withdrawal. He could smell the cocaine leeching from her pores, the stench from where those bastards had let her lie in her own filth. Her cast was nasty, the cut in her arm festered with pus.

He felt his team behind him. Moynihan set his case on the floor, flipped it open, and pulled out his stethoscope and an IV port.

"Callie, are you okay?" Mac asked.

"T-Bone? You came to save me," she whispered.

Blood drained from his head, leaving Mac so light-headed, he thought he would faint. His heart ceased to beat. He somehow found his way out of the confines of the cabin. Fresh air. He needed fresh air.

T-Bone followed him out, and Mac turned on him. "T-Bone," he snarled, "it's not safe for you out here."

"Mac, you're not thinking clearly. She's out of her mind on coke. Moynihan also found a vial of sedatives. The fact that she can remember anyone's name is a damn miracle."

"And out of all the people she knows, it's your name she can remember?"

"The only reason I can give is that she's known me longer than you. You can't hold it against her, not when she's in this bad of shape. She may not make it, Mac."

"Then I suggest you see to it that she does make it."

"It's you she needs, Mac. We've all seen the bite mark on her. She's yours. Don't abandon her just because she's jacked up on something she's not able to control and can't think straight."

The helo kicked up dust as it came and hovered at the edge of the small clearing. A rescue basket was lowered. Two of his men filed out of the cabin to retrieve it. A few minutes later, they came out carrying Callie with the IV in her arm. Mac couldn't resist stealing a look at her. She was unconscious. Moynihan may have sedated her for the ride, or he may have sedated her because of her addiction. Either way, it was good that she was resting. Several of his men shimmied up the ropes to assist getting the rescue basket inside.

Mac turned to Moynihan. "Get Callie to the hospital. I'm going hunting. I'll call you to pick me up when I'm done."

"Mac," said T-Bone, daring to lay a hand on his arm. "Don't do something stupid before you can patch it up with Callie. Don't hold this against her."

A jolt of realization raced through him.

She was his.

But he wasn't hers.

## Chapter Nine

### *Three and half Months Later*

"I'm what?"

"You're pregnant, Mrs. Johnson. Apparently, you're almost sixteen weeks."

"But I haven't been sick..." Well, that wasn't true. She'd heaved her guts out for six weeks, trying to break the addiction to all that shit that Earl and his buddies had pumped into her. She attributed her weight gain to getting over the addiction, needing to eat to try to quench the beast of addiction that still clawed inside her. It never crossed her mind that she could be carrying a baby—Mac's baby.

A baby. She was going to have a baby.

"I thought you said that I couldn't have children."

"According to all the tests, you shouldn't be able to. But apparently your body healed itself enough for an embryo to attach itself to your uterine wall. However"—the doctor sighed—"I recommend immediate termination."

She blinked. "What?"

"The fact that you're still pregnant after all you went through is a miracle, but there's no way the baby can be normal. You were subjected to harsh drugs when the cells of the embryo were just beginning to divide. It's a wonder that your body hasn't already aborted it. The chances of the child being normal are less than one percent. Even if the baby does survive to term or near term, there'll be a host of problems with the heart and brain, not to mention the emotional problems that cocaine babies

have. But you must decide today. You're right under the sixteen-week cutoff for termination."

She heard what her doctor was saying so casually, as if this baby wasn't already a miracle. She could probably even understand why he was telling her this, but the last thing she would do would be to take her baby's life.

Callie's childhood had been full of a family who loved her. She'd been raised by her grandfather after her mother and father died. Her adult life hadn't been so wonderful, but that was her fault for marrying that jerk David, thinking that he loved her when what he really wanted was her money and land. But she would love this baby, regardless of any problems it would have.

She'd always wanted children but had resigned herself to the fact that she couldn't have any. She couldn't possibly throw this gift away.

"No, Doctor. There will be no termination."

The doctor stilled. "Okay, then I suggest we get your routine tests and a sonogram done and get you started on prenatal vitamins."

She smiled. She was having a baby!

\* \* \*

Mac stepped onto the tarmac as the rotor blades started their slow wind down. Another successful mission, another shipment of dope that wouldn't make it to the streets, and a few of the bad guys were dead.

All in a day's work.

Before he reached the hangar, a man stepped out. Mac instantly snarled.

*T-Bone.*

When Mac stopped in front of T-Bone, his canines were fully extended, and claws protruded from the tips of his fingers.

"What the fuck do you want?" snarled Mac.

T-Bone smiled. "It's nice to see you too."

Mac wanted to wipe that smile off his fucking face. "Don't fuck with me, man. I've been up for three days, and I don't feel like getting buddy-buddy with you."

"Callie's pregnant."

Mac felt his body fill with hatred, but he managed to say, "Congratulations."

"She's four months along."

"Congratulations on moving so fast."

"It's not mine."

Mac bared his teeth. "Earl or one of his friends?"

Every night for the past fourteen weeks, he relived seeing Callie in that cabin, her body withered away, her eyes filled with pain. He'd hunted and played with his prey for hours. His wolf had reveled in their fear, attacking and retreating, tearing flesh as their screams echoed in the surrounding forest. He'd taunted them for hours, and his wolf had enjoyed every second of it.

"It's yours."

Mac sucked in a breath. "That can't be. I didn't mate with her. I would have remembered that."

"Hey, man, I don't pretend to understand how the mating thing works. Perhaps your wolf decided that since you're so fucking hardheaded, he'd take the matter out of your hands. Either way, that baby's yours."

"I don't believe it."

"Doesn't change the truth."

"Did she tell you it's mine?"

"No. She hasn't said, but it has to be you."

"Why me? Why not someone in the crowd she runs with?"

"She hasn't had sex with anyone but you since David died."

"She tell you that?"

"No, she didn't have to tell me."

“What? Are you omniscient now?”

T-Bone shook his head. “Listen, man, I wasn’t going to tell you, thinking that eventually you’d come to your senses, but apparently you’re never going to come around without a swift kick in the ass.”

Mac let his bag drop. “If you want to try to kick my ass, let’s get to it.”

T-Bone huffed. “Callie was in bad shape. She was in the hospital for eight days.”

Mac knew that. He’d somewhat kept tabs on her. It was a fight he fought every day to stay away from her. His wolf forgave her for asking for T-Bone, but Mac, the man, had no forgiveness in his heart. His nose told him that there was nothing between them when T-Bone had answered the question, but he couldn’t get past it. She was better off without him. Besides, he was dedicated to his work.

To the very thing that almost killed her.

“She talked out of her head for days. She always called your name.”

In a second, Mac had T-Bone by the throat, shoved up against the building. “Don’t lie to me. It’s you she wants.”

“Sniff me, man. She called your name.”

Mac gritted his teeth and inhaled. He shoved T-Bone when he released him. T-Bone rubbed his neck.

“Well, like you pointed out,” said Mac, “we can’t trust what she was saying when she was jacked up or coming down, now can we?”

“She’s been through a lot,” said T-Bone. “She hired me and my team to stay with her around the clock.”

So T-Bone had moved in. That much he believed. The wolf inside him bristled.

“To make sure she didn’t pull her hair out, scratch her eyes out, or cut herself,” T-Bone added.

Mac’s breath caught in his throat. “She’s cutting herself?” Mac knew withdrawal was a bitch even for the strongest of people.

"Only once. And one time she escaped. We found her in the bad side of town, trying to make a buy. But she's better now that she's having *your* baby. It's a daily fight, but she's a trouper."

"Good, so what do you need me for?"

T-Bone's eyes narrowed, and his lips thinned. "I need you to man up. You have a child on the way, from a woman who's your mate. This same woman needs someone to love her for her. Not for her money. But because she's Callie."

"Well, if you're so high and mighty, why don't you marry her?"

"I asked her... She turned me down."

Mac's wolf snarled, and Mac resisted taking a swipe at T-Bone. Mac couldn't have her, but he certainly didn't want T-Bone to have her either. "I'm sure she'd turn me down too." Mac grabbed his bag off the concrete and headed for the door.

"Don't you want to know?" said T-Bone.

Mac stopped and turned. "Know what?"

"If you're walking away from a son or a daughter?"

\* \* \*

Callie had been on the Internet, researching baby furniture all day. It didn't have to be the best on the market as far as designer brand, but it had to be the safest. But she was getting tired, and because of her ordeal, she wasn't up to full strength. Eventually, her doctor would put her on complete bed rest because of her leg and the baby, but until then, she planned to do the best she could. At least her cast was gone and her stitches removed, but in their wake were more scars.

She stood and stretched her back, and her baby decided to kick. She placed her hand on her belly and smiled, hoping for another kick. The life inside her was amazing. The doctor said that everything appeared to be normal, and in his mind, that was a miracle. She'd known from day one that this little life was a miracle.

Grabbing her cane, she made her way to her bedroom, saying good night to the man sitting on her couch watching TV. She knew there was at least one man

outside somewhere, in case she conked this one on the head and tried to escape again. Addiction was ugly, and if it wasn't for the love she felt for her baby, she probably wouldn't be strong enough to kick the incessant cravings.

She brushed her teeth, washed her face, and then eased into bed. Sleep wasn't easy for her. She had nightmares about the cabin, about the drug, and about losing her baby. She vaguely remembered Earl and his friends at the cabin. According to T-Bone, the three escaped into the woods when they figured out that she was being rescued. Over several weeks, hunters had discovered their mutilated bodies, which apparently had been mauled by wild animals.

Her conscience also tormented her with dreams of Mac, but it was a sweet torment. God, how she missed him. She had no regrets about her short time with Mac. She put her hand on her stomach. He'd given her a precious gift.

A few weeks after she got out of the hospital, she'd called and asked who had visited her. The nurses said it was only T-Bone, and what a lucky girl she was to have such a hot man looking after her. She *was* lucky to have T-Bone. He'd been with her since her rescue. Sure, she paid him and his men to keep her honest, but it was worth it, especially now that she had something important to live for. Occasionally, she'd still get a craving, but she just thought about her baby. Thinking about her baby helped her overcome anything.

Well, almost everything. Mac was still constantly on her mind. She wished T-Bone had never told her that Mac was DEA, because now she worried about where he was, how many bad guys he was after, and if he was safe. T-Bone had urged her to call the DEA and ask to have Mac call her, but she'd never gotten up the nerve to do it. Disappointment was something she'd learned to live with. Maybe after the baby was born, she'd somehow let Mac know. It wasn't very courteous of him not to come see her when she was in the hospital, but who could blame him? She was a coke addict, addicted to the very thing he'd devoted his career to eliminating.

Call her crazy, but she still loved Mac. Some might say that was the drugs talking. Love. If the definition of love was thinking about someone all the time, she

was there. If wanting to see him all the time was love, she was there. She missed him on some deeper level that even she didn't understand. She rubbed her bite mark. It was almost gone, which made her sad.

She smiled, pushed away the sadness, and snuggled down, grateful that she would always have something of Mac's.

Callie's eyes popped open as a scream lodged in her throat. Someone was in her room.

"Easy, Callie. It's me."

She blinked, trying to find the source of the voice. "Mac?"

"Uh-huh."

She clumsily scooted herself to a sitting position and turned on the bedside lamp. He was lounging against the far wall. "What are you doing here?"

"I came to see you."

"In the middle of the night? How did you get past...my men?"

"Piece of cake."

"I see." She didn't really see at all. "Did you hurt them?"

He shook his head. "I've missed you."

That was the last thing she expected him to say. Too bad he didn't mean it. She smoothed the wrinkles out of her coverlet. "How are you?" she asked.

"I've been in pain."

Her heart pounded in her chest. "Oh my God. Are you hurt? Are you better?"

"I am, now that I've seen you."

Realizing that he wasn't hurt, she relaxed a little bit. This chitchat was stupid and confusing. What did he really want? "Why are you here?"

"I came for many reasons. I missed you. I wanted to see you. I wanted to see if you were okay."

"I'm fine. Thanks for asking." She realized that she didn't know Mac at all. Fear lodged in her throat. Would he try to take her baby away? Was that why he was here? Would he use the fact that she was a recovering addict to take her baby away?

"I think you need to leave."

"Why?"

"I don't know you, Mac; I haven't seen you in four months." *And I really needed you.* "I don't even know your last name. And on top of it all, you show up in my bedroom in the middle of the night. I'm not exactly comfortable with you sneaking in here."

"My name is Mac McNamara, and I'm not leaving, Callie. Ever."

She felt her heart skip as hope bloomed in her chest, but she wouldn't let it. She wouldn't let herself be hurt again. "What does that mean?"

"It means that I love you, and I want you to be my wife."

"I don't think—"

"That's a good idea," Mac interrupted. "I don't blame you. I was an ass. I abandoned you, when you needed me most."

"Why, Mac? Why did you abandon...me?" *Us.*

"Because when we rescued you, Callie, the first name out of your mouth was T-Bone."

"But I was—"

"Out of your mind. I understand that now, but I thought you wanted T-Bone, not me."

"Mac, I don't remember those days of my life. If I said it, it was... I was out of my mind with pain, a craving."

"I know that now. I knew that then, but I just didn't want to open my eyes to see the truth."

"But why now? What made you change your mind?"

She tensed when he pushed off the wall and moved toward her. He pulled up short. "I won't hurt you."

She knew that. Not physically, anyway. But her heart was a different story.

He lifted the edge of the coverlet, eased her foot out, and then eased himself down on the bed. She almost moaned when he gently pressed his thumbs into the arch of her foot. Just like old times.

"I'm not going to lie to you. T-Bone came to see me."

Her heart fell. "He told you?" She'd all but ordered T-Bone not to inform Mac, because she wanted Mac to come for her and not for the baby.

"Yes. And I'm sure you think I came just because you're carrying our child."

"Yes, that's exactly what I think. Now get out."

"I don't blame you, and I might not have ever gotten the courage to come see you if T-Bone hadn't shown up and told me what an ass I was."

She cocked her brow.

"But I was hurting too, Callie. I thought you wanted T-Bone. That through your drug-induced state, you wanted him, not me."

That was so far from the truth. No matter what she'd blurted out during those weeks of hell, it was Mac, always Mac, who she wanted.

"I love you, Callie. Even without the baby on the way, I'd still love you. I loved you the first day you crawled out from the bushes and decided to give me hell every chance you got. Can you forgive me for abandoning you when you needed me most? For letting my pride get in the way of fighting for you?"

He loved her? That put her on an emotional roller coaster. Could she forgive him? Was there anything to forgive, other than not coming to see her in the hospital? She didn't expect him to love her after knowing each other for only four days. In fact, she didn't expect him to love her at all. It was just a hope of hers, a foolish hope. She looked at him. He couldn't be telling the truth.

"I don't know. I'm...confused."

He grinned. It was a beautiful grin. He was beautiful, even though he looked tired.

“You don’t have to make up your mind about throwing me out. That will just give me more time to convince you how much I love you. I’m asking you for another chance.”

She frowned. Another chance? She tried to put herself in Mac’s shoes. What would she have done if *he* had blurted someone else’s name out besides hers? It would have hurt like hell. She would have felt betrayed. She would have probably run away too.

“Now, how’s our baby?”

Should she tell him? Did he deserve to know that his baby may be born with issues or may not be born alive? The child was his. He deserved to know. Besides, it might do her good to share the burden of the unknown.

“Mac, the doctors wanted me to terminate the pregnancy. With all the drugs that were pumped into me, there’s bound to be issues.”

She watched his brow wrinkle with concern, but just as quickly, he said, “I’m glad you didn’t follow their advice. We’ll just have to take whatever is thrown our way.”

Her breath caught in her throat. He still wanted the baby, even after what she’d just told him? What man would do that?

\* \* \*

“There are also some inconsistencies in the blood work, but nothing that they’re too worried about,” she relayed.

Mac didn’t doubt that, because there was wolf blood in their baby. He’d have to get Wayne to erase the results that were damaging to their people, then get her a doctor who knew how to deal with their kind. And the wolf genes were probably why the baby was still alive. Werewolves were hard to kill, even in the womb.

Callie was tired, her weakness rolling off her, concerning his wolf. She stifled a yawn. Probably pregnancy hormones. "Why don't you go back to sleep? I'll be here when you wake up."

Callie jerked. "Oh."

"What? What is it?" Mac asked. Had his presence tonight upset her? That was the last thing he wanted.

She smiled. "It's just a kick. You want to feel?"

"Hell, yes."

He scooted forward as she drew the covers down. She took his hand and placed it on her belly. His breath caught in his throat when he felt the kick of his child. A strong kick.

"You didn't ask me if it was a boy or a girl," she said.

He shrugged. He didn't care, because they were going to have many more if Callie could carry them.

"Tell me," he said.

"It's a girl."

He smiled. A girl. Perhaps a werewolf. A girl would be perfect. Of course, he'd have to provide constant security to keep all the suitors at bay, but he could do that.

He decided to keep his kind hidden from Callie for now. She didn't need any more shocks to her system. He'd tell her after the baby came, maybe even turn her so that her leg could heal. And if the baby wasn't born a werewolf, he could turn his daughter later, which might take care of any issues related to the cocaine addiction.

The baby kicked again.

"Doesn't look like she's ready for me to sleep," she said.

"How about I get naked, crawl in there with you, and just hold you while you sleep?"

"You're afraid of hurting the baby," she said.

“Absolutely. We’ll both talk with the doctor first and see what he says. Right now, I’m just content to hold you.”

She nodded, and he wasted no time shucking his clothes. He crawled into bed, careful not to jostle her. He leaned back on the pillows and gently pulled her into the crook of his arm.

It didn’t take long for her to fall asleep, but Mac didn’t mind. He had the rest of his life to love Callie and their child.

❧ THE END ❧

## Loose Id Titles by Kitty DuCane

*Dominating Victoria*

*Mac's Mate*

*Santana's Heat*

*Zellia's Blade*

## Kitty DuCane

Kitty lives in NC with her wonderful husband of 28 years, a yellow Lab, and a pile of cats, all strays—well they're not stays now. She has two children in college and is taking full advantage of the empty nest: no more ball games or golf matches, just time to read the hot stuff and write the hot stuff.

Check out the latest on her Web site at <http://www.kittyducane.com>.