

A movie poster for 'Van Wolf Moon' featuring actor Ethan Stone. The poster is dark and atmospheric, with a close-up of Ethan Stone's face on the left side. He has dark, wavy hair and a light beard, looking directly at the camera with a serious expression. In the background, a large, ethereal image of a wolf's face is superimposed over a night landscape. The wolf's face is semi-transparent, showing its eyes, nose, and mouth. The background landscape includes silhouettes of evergreen trees and a bright, glowing light source, possibly a full moon or a low sun, creating a misty or smoky atmosphere. The title 'VAN WOLF MOON' is written in a large, stylized font across the bottom. 'VAN' is in a light, almost white, serif font, while 'WOLF' and 'MOON' are in a darker, bold, serif font. The actor's name 'ETHAN STONE' is at the top in a white, serif font.

ETHAN  
STONE

VAN  
WOLF  
MOON

# WOLF MOON

ETHAN  
STONE



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Wolf Moon  
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This book is dedicated to my daughter. You may have given me gray hair before my time, but thanks to you, I know that I can deal with anything that comes my way. If I can survive your teenage years, then I can survive anything.

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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## PROLOGUE

EVEN at five years old, I knew something wasn't right.

My parents were grabbing clothes and toys and stuffing them into grocery bags. I asked my mom what was wrong.

"Nothing, honey," she answered. But I knew she was lying.

I tried to ask more questions, but my mom shushed me, picked me up, and took me out to the car. She strapped me into the car seat and got into the front. My dad stuffed the bags into the trunk and got in.

He turned the key several times before the engine started up. That was pretty common for the car we had, but it seemed to piss my dad off more than normal.

"Damn it!" he cursed.

"Alonzo," my mother scolded. That was the first time I had ever heard my mom call him that. She always called him Al, and at that age, I had assumed that was his name.

"Sorry," my dad mumbled under his breath. He put the car into gear and we took off. The freeway was less than a mile from our house and as soon as we were on it we were speeding away.

"Slow down, Alonzo," my mother said.

"Damn it, Katie. We don't know how much time we have. I can't believe you did that. I told you we couldn't do that again."

I could tell my dad was mad at my mom. Not just a little mad—very mad. Furious. I had never seen anger between them before, and it scared me.

“I’m sorry, Alonzo. I thought it would be okay. I had to convince them we were telling the truth. I had to know they would take care of our son.”

I realized they were talking about me and was about to ask Mom what she meant when I heard her scream, “Look out!”

The car jerked to the side, and my head hit the high side of my car seat. I started to cry, and the car jerked to the other side. I tried to look out the front window, but I couldn’t see around the driver’s seat. I couldn’t see out the back window, either, because of the sides of the car seat.

I heard my dad cuss and my mom scream. Everything started spinning in all directions; it felt like we were flying. Everything stopped moving and went dark in a split second.

When I opened my eyes again I couldn’t see my dad. My mom was slumped in her seat, her long, red hair over her face. The front windshield was mostly gone, with shards of glass around the edges.

I started screaming and couldn’t stop. It seemed like it was forever before I heard sirens. Someone tore off the side door of the car and pulled me out. My rescuer was someone I knew—Bart Coleman. He and his family had been our neighbors for as long as I could remember.

Bart held me and told me everything would be okay. I refused to let go of him. He let the other EMTs handle the wreck while he held me until I fell asleep.

I WAS the only survivor of the car crash. Both of my parents died. At the age of five, I was an orphan.

We lived in a small town in Nevada called Imlay, pronounced Im-Lee. With a population of around two hundred fifty, Imlay had small homes and trailers and no businesses at all. It also had almost a zero-percent crime rate.

There were no accredited foster homes in Imlay or in the county, so Bart and his wife, Peggy, were allowed to take me in. Bart and



Peggy already had three daughters, but I was never treated as anything other than a full member of their family. Six months after my parents died, I became an official member of my new family. Jack Pratt was a person of the past as I became Jack Coleman.

That was twenty years ago, and I always figured one major change in my life was enough and there couldn't be any other life-altering differences made.

Christ, I was wrong about that.

## CHAPTER I

IT WAS in August that my life started on a path that would change everything I knew about myself. It began when I saw him—a blond-haired, blue-eyed beauty.

It was one week before the start of my junior year at The University of Nevada, Reno. My friend's parents were out of town, and he was hosting an end-of-summer party at their house, near the UNR campus.

We all have moments in our lives when we know we'll never be the same again. The car crash that killed my parents was one of those moments for me. For some people it's marriage, the death of a loved one, or the birth of a child. For a lot of people it's when they meet a certain person—a person who will be a friend for life. For others it's when they meet the person they will fall in love with.

That's how it was when I met him. It wasn't love at first sight—I don't believe in that. No, the love came later, and it was better than I had ever imagined. It was definitely *lust* at first sight—for me and for him.

I heard a raucous, hearty laugh and recognized it as my new roommate's laugh. I turned and looked for Josh Valentine. I saw Josh across the room, but it wasn't him I focused on, it was the beautiful creature next to him. The young man had golden hair cut short and styled. He was about five foot nine—three inches shorter than me. He had blue eyes that seemed to shine, exquisitely chiseled cheekbones, and a dazzling smile. He was wearing a pair of tan jeans that seemed to be painted on and an open shirt with a black tank top underneath.

Our eyes met from across the room, and they stayed locked as I moved toward him and Josh as if I were caught in a tractor beam.

I saw Josh smiling at me, out of the corner of my eye. I also heard him say something, but it didn't register.

"Hello... Jack!" Josh snapped his fingers in front of my face.

"Huh? What?" I mumbled.

"Jack, this is my friend, Derek Malone." I stuck out my hand and Derek grabbed it. His skin was warm and welcoming. Neither one of us released our grip.

"Nice to meet you," he said, still holding onto my hand. His voice was light but not too effeminate.

"I'm Jack," I replied.

"Yeah, Josh told me." Derek laughed. It was a chuckle that reached right into my chest. I was used to feeling strong attractions to men, but this went beyond the normal attraction. It was all I could do not to throw Derek to the ground and tear his clothes off. In my mind's eye I could picture him naked, even though I'd just met him.

I saw a hairless body—hairless almost everywhere. Bright pink nipples aching to be sucked. A trim stomach with the beginning of a six-pack. What little hair he had was below his bellybutton, a trail of blond hairs leading to a trimmed bush and a long thin shaft with a pair of balls pulled up tight against him.

I had to shake my head to clear the image of Derek's naked body. I realized our hands were still clasped. I quickly released and immediately missed the contact.

"You two have fun," Josh said as he walked off. Neither Derek nor I acknowledged Josh leaving.

"You want a drink?" I asked.

"I never turn down a free drink from a handsome man."

I felt myself blush. I was used to being hit on—by both men and women—but the heat coming from Derek's eyes was scorching. I actually started sweating.

"What do you want?"

He reached out and lightly touched my arm. *"I want you."* I wasn't sure if I had heard right. His lips hadn't moved, so I figured I must have only heard it in my mind, but I wasn't sure.

"What?"

Derek smiled again. "Whatever they got in the keg."

"Oh, okay." I turned and walked away. I knew Derek was watching me walk away; I could feel the warmth from his eyes. I told myself not to turn around and look at him, but I couldn't resist. I turned only slightly to get a look behind me, and I was right—Derek was watching me with an amused smile. When our eyes met he waved at me. I reddened again, waved, and turned around again. And ran straight into a guy, causing him to spill his drink.

"What the fuck?" the guy said.

I was prepared to begin a string of apologies or to turn and run if he got angry. Luckily, I didn't have to do either. The guy I had run into was one of my best friends, Jerusalem Evans.

"Salem," I said. "Where you been, man? I've been looking for you."

"Well, you found me." Salem laughed. He had a deep voice—almost as deep as Barry White. Salem was a tall, black man with light brown eyes and short, black hair.

"Let me get you another beer," I offered, "since you seem to be wearing the first one." I looked up at him. He towered over me at six foot six.

"Only cuz my best friend decided to run into me. What were you looking at?"

I ignored the question as I pumped the keg handle and aimed the hose into Salem's cup.

"Thanks, Jack," he said after I had filled his cup and one for me.

"I need another cup," I said.

"For who?"

"Josh introduced me to a friend of his."

"A friend or a friend-friend?"

I looked at Salem with my eyebrow raised. “What’s the difference?”

“Well, one is just a friend with no chance or thought of exchanging bodily fluids of one kind or another, and the other is one that Josh thinks you might want to do that with.”

I tried not to laugh, but couldn’t help myself. Salem had always been accepting of me being gay, even if—as a consummate ladies’ man—he didn’t understand. We had been friends for more than ten years.

“Well, which is it?” Salem asked.

“I don’t know,” I answered.

“You don’t know if he’s gay?”

“No, I don’t know. We just met.” I was telling the truth. I didn’t know 100 percent if Derek was gay or not. My gaydar told me he was, and I certainly hoped it was right.

“Where’s he at?”

I looked around and saw Derek exactly where I had left him, and he was still staring at me. I pointed him out to Salem.

“Oh, he’s gay. No doubt about it.”

“Oh, so now you can tell if a guy is gay just by looking at him. What is it—his fashion sense?”

“Well, he *is* dressed pretty nice. But I would say the clincher is the fact that he is absolutely eye fucking you right now.” Salem laughed deeply. I felt myself turn red again. “Don’t be embarrassed, Jack. I say go for it if you want to.”

“Did you forget my new rule?”

“I didn’t forget, but I thought maybe you had. Whatever you decide, it’s your decision. Just be safe. You got condoms on you?”

“Yes, Father,” I joked. “I have rubbers. But I already told you. I’m not going to fuck someone I just met.”

“I’ll ask you about it later.” Salem wrapped an arm around my shoulder. “Just have fun. I plan to. See you later.”

I had recently established a new personal rule: No sex on the first date. I wasn't even having a date with Derek, so there wouldn't be any fucking tonight. And when—if—we went on a date, we wouldn't fuck on the first date either. Not that I didn't want to. I wanted to fuck him in the middle of the floor with everyone around us.

But that wasn't going to happen. I had grown tired of one-night stands and weekend affairs. Not that *affairs* was the right word; *fuck fests* might have been the better term. I was twenty-four and nowhere near being a chaste and pure virgin. Not by a long shot. I had slept with lots of guys since I figured out I was gay. I'd always been a horndog. I loved sex and had always gotten it whenever and wherever I could. But it had become stale and boring. No longer exciting. I didn't know what I wanted, but I knew I wanted something different.

I returned to where Derek sat. He took his cup, and I sat down next to him. He reached over and touched my leg. I looked into his amazing eyes and had a vision of us together. Right there in the very spot we were in, with everyone around us, Derek was on his knees giving me the best blow job of my life. Then the image was gone as he withdrew his hand. What the hell was going on with me? I wondered if someone had slipped something into the beer. I felt flushed and broke out in a cold sweat.

"Are you okay, Jack?" I heard Derek ask. But I couldn't respond. Everything started to spin. I felt Derek grab the drink out of my hand, and then I felt his hand on my arm. He tried to get me to stand up. I couldn't seem to make my legs work, but Derek continued to pull me up. He was pretty strong for a guy his size.

Finally, I stood and waited to make sure my legs weren't going to give out on me. Derek was still touching me, and it seemed his touch was making me feel at least a little bit better. He led me out a side door and onto the outdoor patio. He leaned me up against the railing as he shut the sliding glass door behind us.

The loud music was gone and the cool breeze stopped everything from spinning. I took deep breaths and tried to focus.

"You okay?" Derek asked, his concern genuine.

"Yeah. I don't know what happened."

“Sensory overload,” he replied.

“What do you mean by that?”

“You know—the loud music, all the people, and the booze. All together in a cramped, warm room. Your mind couldn’t handle the intake of everything.”

“I guess so. That was weird.”

“So who was that tall guy you were talking to?”

I smiled. “That’s Salem. One of my best friends. We grew up together. He’s great.”

“He’s straight, right?”

“Yeah,” I answered. I wanted to ask Derek if he was gay—just to confirm what I knew, and hoped, to be true.

“And he’s okay with you being gay?”

“Josh told you I was gay?”

He nodded.

“No, Salem’s never had a problem with it.”

“It helps to have a friend when you decide to come out.”

Here was my chance. “Did you have any trouble?”

“Trouble with what?”

I was afraid to spell it out but decided it was the only way. “You know. With... coming out.”

“Jack, is that your not-so-subtle way of asking if I’m gay?” He smiled and laughed.

I laughed too. Even if he wasn’t gay (*please God, don’t let me fall for another straight man*), at least he wasn’t going to be offended.

“Yeah, I guess so.”

“You mean it’s not incredibly obvious that I’m gay?”

“No.” I tried to make the relief not quite so obvious. “I assumed you were gay but wasn’t sure.”

“Well, thank you for telling me I could *almost* pass for a straight guy, though I don’t know why I would want to.”

“Yeah, I’ve never hidden my homosexuality either. Not that I could’ve in Lovelock.” Lovelock was the biggest town near Imlay. With a population of around 2,000, Lovelock was nowhere near being a big city, but it was where kids from Imlay, and other surrounding small towns, went to school. “I didn’t exactly have a lot of choices of kids my age to mess around with. I pretty much had to come out just so other guys would hang out with me. Most of them stayed in the closet or claimed to just be experimenting, but that was okay with me.”

I suddenly realized I was sharing something very personal with a complete stranger. Though Derek *did not* feel like a stranger. It felt like I had known him for years.

“Don’t stop, Jack. I’d love to hear more about your younger years. I bet you were a wild man.”

I laughed. “Once I discovered sex, I wanted it all the time. Thankfully, there were plenty of guys who would let me suck them off. A few football players liked to get BJ’s from me before the game, as sort of a good luck thing, I guess. A few others liked to get sucked off after a game.”

“When did you first realize you were gay?”

“Fourteen,” I replied. “Salem had gotten hold of a few porn movies and nudie mags. We looked at them together and he would talk about the big boobs and the female genitals. But I was enamored of the cocks—all the shapes and sizes. I focused on the big dicks driving into the women and imagined what it would be like to touch one.

“Salem was the first one I told I was gay. He was confused, but then said he didn’t really care. He’s always been a big guy, so he always looked older than he was. He passed for eighteen when he was fifteen. He came to Reno one time for the weekend and convinced his parents to let him take the bus around town.

“He went to an adult bookstore, bought himself some titty mags and a couple movies. He also bought me a stack of gay mags, even found a discounted old gay porn flick.”

“That was sweet.” Derek smiled.



“Yeah. I was hooked. I had to find out what it was like to touch another guy’s cock. I set my sights on a guy in the class above me who I was sure was gay. I was right. He was really into oral and we sucked each other a lot. He wasn’t interested in anything more than that. But it didn’t take long to find another guy my age who wanted me to fuck him.”

“Have you always topped?”

“For a long time, yeah. Then I met this guy who really wanted to fuck me. It took some convincing but I finally agreed.”

“And?”

“It wasn’t a good experience. I don’t know if it was the wrong guy or what. But it was a painful experience, and I don’t think I enjoyed a moment of it, even though he swore I would like it.”

“Doesn’t surprise me,” Derek murmured.

I looked at him. “What do you mean by that?”

He seemed to be searching for the right words. “I just mean, you’re such... an alpha-male type. To give up control of your body like that must’ve been... unnatural.”

His assessment was pretty much right on, though I had never thought of it like that. The experience had been painful and humiliating. I had never bottomed again, which worked out good once I found the right guys. There were plenty who wanted me to top them. I wondered how Derek, who had just met me, could’ve figured that out about me when even I hadn’t thought of something like that.

The sliding glass door slid open and Josh stepped out.

“How’s it going, guys?” he asked with a sly smile.

“Good,” we answered simultaneously.

“I’m glad you’re hitting it off,” he said. “Hey, Jack, I won’t be in the dorm room tonight. I’m going home with Elsa, the German foreign exchange student.”

“Have fun,” I said.

“I plan on it.” He smiled and left.

I first met Josh when he hit on my roommate at the time—a straight kid named Oliver. Josh was bisexual; actually he preferred the term heteroflexible. He literally hit on anything with legs—except me. For some reason the idea of being anything other than friends never crossed our minds. It felt like I had known Josh forever; he seemed like a brother to me.

“Wanna go for a walk?” Derek asked.

“Sure,” I said. We headed to one of the paths that meandered along the house. It was a beautiful night with a clear view of the stars. We walked in silence for a bit, and I was surprised when Derek grabbed my hand and held it as we walked.

Holding hands like that had always been an intimate gesture for me. I had seen my parents do it all the time and had always hoped to be able to find that someone special like they had. Holding Derek’s hand seemed right. I loved the feel of his skin on mine—its warmth and softness. I glanced over at him, and he had a slight smile on his lips.

We stopped and leaned against the back of a park bench. He was so close I could smell him. I could actually identify his cologne—Stetson. That in itself was odd. I’d never had a strong sense of smell, but now it was amped up. It was very much in tune as I stood next to Derek. Besides the Stetson there was another scent—a spicy, wintergreen smell. I found the scent intoxicating. I grew erect in my pants. Quickly and painfully erect.

Derek turned to face me and pressed his body against mine. His face was just inches from mine, and I breathed in that wonderful aroma. We met each other’s eyes, and I slowly leaned forward to press my lips to his. We stood lip to lip for a moment, our bodies connecting at several points. Each of those points seemed to be electric, with volts of energy running through him and into me and back again. I was sure there were sparks where our lips touched, hands connected, and crotches pressed against each other.

I slowly slid my tongue into his mouth, and his lips parted to accept it. I searched his mouth with my tongue. The wintergreen smell was even stronger as we kissed. Our tongues pressed against each other as if they were trying to become one.

I moaned at all the sensations my body was experiencing. It was almost an overload. I could taste and smell Derek. I could feel him all over my body, and it felt like we were already physically connected in some way other than our mouths. I felt my erection leaking, and I moaned as Derek's erection pressed against mine. Derek smiled as we continued to kiss and then suddenly pulled away. Not wanting to lose that connection, I grabbed the sides of his face and pulled him back into a kiss. This one was stronger and more forceful than the first. My tongue slammed into his mouth this time. I was trying to keep that sweet and wonderful flavor present on my taste buds. He halfheartedly tried to pull away, but I kept him there until I had to breathe. I released his lips from the kiss but kept his face close to mine for a moment longer.

Derek smiled and pressed his lips to my throat. He bit gently and I loved it. I had never enjoyed having my neck bitten, and I never allowed guys to give me hickeys. But Derek's teeth felt amazingly wonderful there.

"You can fuck me, Jack. Right here, right now. I want it so bad."

I wanted it too. I could already feel myself sliding into him as we kissed. But I didn't want to break the promise I had made to myself.

"I... I can't," I murmured. He rubbed the front of my jeans and laughed.

"It sure feels like you can."

I smiled. "Well, yeah I *can*, but I shouldn't."

"Why not? We both want it."

"Yeah, I want it. So bad, you have no idea. But I made myself a promise. No sex on the first date, and this isn't even a date."

Derek laughed and buried his face in my neck again. I smelled his hair. It smelled like cinnamon.

"No way I can change your mind?" he asked me.

"No. I'm sorry. I've made so many bad decisions by jumping into bed too early. I just don't want to do that again."

"Trust me, babe. I would *not* be a bad decision."

"I think you're right, Derek. But if it's the right decision then we can hold off. I do want to see you again. Maybe an actual first date."

"I'd love that. I really would. As soon as possible."

"Tomorrow night soon enough?"

"I guess it'll have to do." He sighed, laughing.

"I don't have a car, but we can walk somewhere."

"I have a car. I'll meet you at your dorm room, and we can decide where to go."

"Okay," I replied.

We kissed again. This one was gentle and sweet. I had to fight the urge to take him aggressively again, because I knew I wouldn't be able to stop myself from going further if I did. My sexual aggression with Derek was unusual for me. I was used to the other guy taking charge. Even though I always topped physically, the other guy always directed the action.

As we kissed, his lips parted for my tongue, but I didn't slide it in. Instead I pulled away. I heard a sad moan slip from his lips. He looked at me with sad, puppy-dog eyes, and I couldn't help but laugh.

A snarky laugh from behind me surprised me, and I turned around.

"Isn't this sweet?" the guy said. He was wearing jeans, but no shirt. I had seen him around school but didn't know his name.

"What are you doing here, Elias?" Derek asked.

"Taking a walk, just like you," he said snidely.

"And you just happened to follow us?"

The guy ignored Derek's question and turned to me.

"Who the fuck are you?" he asked. His blatant hostility took me by surprise. He was slightly taller than me, with a sleek, trim body. He almost looked skinny but had a decent six-pack and large biceps. He had strong cheekbones, but his eyes were cold and gray. He had a five-o'clock shadow on his face and a thin layer of hair on his head.

"Jack Coleman," I said and stuck out my hand. He ignored it.

“Derek, what’re you doing with this asshat?”

“Excuse me?” I said and stepped up to him.

“Get the hell out of my way. I’m talking to my boy.”

“I am *not* anything of yours!” Derek exclaimed.

“You belong to me, Derek. You always have.”

“He wants you to leave,” I said. “I suggest you do it.”

“I don’t know who you think you are, asshole, but Derek and I go way back. He’ll always be mine. You’re just another notch in his bedpost.”

“You’re crazy, Elias,” Derek said. Elias and I were almost chest to chest. Our eyes were locked on each other in a stare down.

“Leave now,” I commanded. My voice was stronger than normal, and Elias broke eye contact and stepped back. I didn’t back down at all.

Elias turned to leave, but somehow I knew he was going to try something. And when it happened it felt like slow motion. Elias half-turned toward me and lifted his leg as he moved. My hand went up and caught his foot just before it would have connected with my face. I could see the surprise on Elias’s face. I held his foot there for a split second. Then I twisted his leg and pushed him to the ground. He landed on his back. I walked up to him and stared down at him. I could see the mix of anger, hate, and fear in his eyes. Derek stepped beside me and took hold of my hand.

“You should leave, Elias,” Derek said softly.

Elias scooted back a few feet before he stood up. He took several steps backward. “I’ll see you soon. Both of you.” He turned and jogged away.

“Okay,” I said. “Who the hell was that?”

“Elias Fairchild.”

The name immediately rang a bell. The Fairchilds were a wealthy family in the Reno/Tahoe area.

“Is he part of *the* Fairchild family?”

“Yes,” Derek answered. “He’s Edmund Fairchild’s youngest son. The Fairchilds have been in Reno for generations. They’re filthy rich, too.”

“How do you know him?”

“We grew up together. He’s a year older than me and Josh. His father and my parents are all part of the same... organization.”

“Organization.” I laughed. “Like the mob?”

Derek smiled. Damn, I was already in love with that smile. “No, more like the Masons or the Elks.”

“Do you and Elias share a... past?”

“Yeah,” he murmured, like it was something he regretted.

“You don’t have to talk about it if you don’t want to.”

“No, it’s okay. He wasn’t my first, but I was his.”

“So you dated?”

“We had sex several times. But that’s all it was—sex.”

“The guy’s a creep,” I said. “What the hell did you see in him?”

“I was seventeen, and I wasn’t exactly picky about who I slept with. He was very good in bed.”

“So what happened?”

“He got very possessive. I tried to make it clear that what we had was just sex, but he didn’t agree. He caught me with another guy and beat the shit out of him.”

“Damn.”

“I ended things with him, but he didn’t back off. He basically stalked me for a while. My parents had to intervene with his father to get Elias to back off.”

“Doesn’t seem like he’s backed off at all,” I said.

“He hasn’t done anything dangerous in a while. He’s convinced that I will come back to him after I’m done sleeping with all these other guys.”

“Has it been a lot of guys?”

Derek bowed his head like he was ashamed. “Yeah. I’ve slept with a lot of men.”

I put my finger under his chin and lifted it so I could look into his eyes.

“That’s nothing to be ashamed of. I’ve slept with a lot of guys too. Just out looking for Mr. Right.”

“But taking Mr. Right Now most of the time,” Derek joked. I laughed.

I looked at my watch. It was almost midnight.

“I need to get back. I have an early appointment with my adviser,” I said. Our hands entwined as we walked back to the dorm and up the stairs to my room.

We kissed again outside my door. I wanted it to be a goodbye kiss, but I couldn’t seem to say the words. I looked into his gorgeous blue eyes and studied his face. He had chiseled cheekbones and a strong, square jaw. His face was that of the classic all-American boy next door.

“You sure about not having sex?” Derek asked me. “Not even some oral fun?”

“Stop tempting me, bad boy.”

I ran my fingers through his hair and noticed that he had several different shades of blond hair. From dirty dishwater blond to almost pure white. A tuft of cute curls sat on the front of his head with a few curly locks falling down onto his forehead.

“I am so goddamn attracted to you, Jack. I can’t explain it. I’ve never felt such a strong pull so soon after meeting someone.”

I felt the same way, but I was afraid to say it out loud. I wrapped my arms around him and held him tight. He relaxed in my arms, and I bent down to bite his neck. He didn’t resist; instead he bent his neck to give me better access.

His submissiveness was endearing and made me feel not just in control, but strong. Those were feelings I wasn’t used to having. He felt so right in my arms, so I nodded.

He untucked my shirt, ran his hands up my chest, and stopped at my nipples. He pressed down gently on them as he brought his head up and closed his eyes. I kissed him again and felt the electric shock from tongue to tongue and from his fingers to my nipples.

“You’re pretty fit,” Derek said. “Work out?”

“I jog,” I answered.

“Me too!”

“With the kind of food I eat it’s the only way I stay thin.”

His hands traveled downward. His left hand rested on my hip, but his right hand roamed all over my chest. When his hand stopped, it ended up resting on my birthmark.

The birthmark was on the back of my left hip, an inch above my beltline. It resembled a crescent moon and was no larger than a quarter. It wasn’t the brownish color of most birthmarks; it was devoid of any color—completely black.

I’d had the mark my whole life, but it had changed from light and barely visible to the dark color it was now when I had gone through puberty. The mark always gave me odd sensations when I touched it. But when Derek’s fingers brushed it, it felt like my entire body was lit up like a Christmas tree. Sensations everywhere—traveling through my body to every muscle, every organ.

My erection, which had subsided somewhat, was back again. The light touch on the mark excited me so much I couldn’t help but pull him close to me. I stared into his bright blue eyes as he licked his full pink lips. I grabbed the sides of his face and took possession of his mouth with my lips. My tongue stabbed into his mouth and licked the roof of it. His tongue gently pressed against mine, but mine pressed back and asserted its dominance. Then I took his tongue between my lips and sucked it in. He pressed his body harder against mine and gripped my hip harder, pressing against the mark even more. I gently bit his lip, and he let out a soft moan.

“Christ, you taste good,” I whispered.

My pants felt so tight it was almost uncomfortable, and it didn’t help that Derek was rubbing against me. He offered his neck to me, and



I couldn't help myself. I sucked his earlobe and darted my tongue in his ear. I loved the soft whimpering noises he made as I kissed his neck. I opened my mouth and nibbled at his skin. His hands gripped my hips even harder, and the pressure against my mark sent massive shock waves through my body. I told myself I needed to stop before I grabbed Derek and took him into my room.

I sucked harder at his neck; I wanted to leave a mark on him. A sign that said he was mine. A sign that would warn all other men away from him. The idea that I considered Derek as mine stunned me. But he did feel like he belonged to me. I took his mouth with mine again, and he flexed his fingers, digging into my hips, and rubbing the mark.

I tried to pull away, but I couldn't do it. Then something weird happened: I came in my pants.

Orgasms normally hit me in stages. I'd feel it starting in my testicles and sliding up my shaft before it erupted from me. That didn't happen this time. Instead, all the feelings hit me at once, and I felt myself surge several times. I moaned into Derek's mouth as I came and couldn't pull away from him until I was spent.

"Christ!" I exclaimed. "That's never happened to me before. That was incredible. What the hell happened?"

Derek looked me over with a smile. "Did you like it?"

"Well, yeah. It felt good, but I don't like to make a habit of coming in my pants."

"Well, you're home, so you don't have to worry about that."

"Yeah, I guess so. How about we meet here tomorrow? Seven?"

"I'll be here, babe. Count on it." Derek turned to leave, but I grabbed him and pulled him into another kiss. We parted again, and I went inside my dorm room to get out of the sticky clothes.

Josh and I lived in the best dorm hall on the UNR campus—Sierra Hall. It had been recently renovated, with a game room on the first floor and a big-screen television and Blu-ray player on the second floor. The best feature was that each room had its own private bathroom. During my freshman and sophomore years I had lived in

Lincoln Hall, where I had to share showers with all the other guys on the floor.

I stripped down to nothing, walked to the bathroom, and climbed into the shower. As I washed up I found myself thinking of Derek and imagining what he looked like naked. The image that came into my head was the same one as when we first shook hands.

He had perfectly round nipples and a hairless chest. A treasure trail of almost invisible hairs started just under his bellybutton and led to a small patch of pubic hair of the same color. In my mind, Derek's cock went from soft to semi-erect to totally engorged. His cock had prominent veins that matched the ones that traveled down his arms.

My prick was hard, and I took it in my hand and began to stroke it. The Derek in my mind mirrored my actions—grabbing his own erection and pulling on it softly. I was amazed that I could be hard again so soon after the explosion in my jeans, but I was hard and ready to come again. I increased the speed of my strokes and felt the orgasm building in me. I came with such force that my legs almost gave out. I leaned against the shower wall and let the water wash me off.

I cleaned myself up and got out of the shower. I slipped on a pair of underwear and got into bed. Derek was my final thought of the day.

## CHAPTER 2

I HAD an eight a.m. meeting with my faculty adviser. My first two years at UNR my adviser had been a cranky old man named Mr. Brettin. Thankfully, Brettin had retired, and I had a new adviser. I hadn't met him yet.

I knocked on the door, which still had Brettin's name on it. He answered it quickly.

"Mr. Coleman? Come in, come in. I'm Avery Fowler."

"Good to meet you, Mr. Fowler."

"Please, call me Avery," he said as we shook hands. He was a short, skinny man with long hair and glasses. He looked at me over the top of his glasses.

"Have we met before?" he asked.

"I don't think so, sir."

"Please call me Avery. You look so familiar to me." He stared at me for a minute, and I fidgeted uncomfortably. "I'm sorry," he said. "Please, sit down." He sat in a big chair behind his desk, and I sat in the chair opposite him.

"So what can I do for you, Jack?" he asked.

"Just wanted to make sure I was on track with my classes."

"Well, let's take a look."

For the next hour or so, Avery and I looked over my classes. I was happy to learn that I was right on track.

Every so often Avery would look at me like he was trying to remember something.

"I'm so sorry for staring, Jack. But you look so much like someone I used to know. You don't have family from Reno?"

"No," I answered. "Grew up in Lovelock."

He didn't say anything for a minute.

"Well, just remember I am here for anything you might need. Any time you need to talk, and not just about classes. I'm here to discuss any personal problems you may have as well."

"If that's the case, you'll have to have an open mind." He gave me an odd look. "I'm gay," I explained.

He smiled and nodded. "Then we have more in common than just journalism." He winked at me and I understood. He was gay too. Maybe I *would* be able to go to him if I needed advice on my personal life.

AFTER my meeting with Avery, I ran into Salem at Jolt-N-Java, UNR's coffee shop. We both got coffee and sat at an outside table.

"So what happened with the kid last night?"

I laughed. "Derek's not exactly a kid. He's twenty-one."

"Still a kid as far as I'm concerned. So what happened with him last night? Did you lay some pipe?"

"Christ, Salem. I told you I wasn't going to sleep with him."

"But I didn't think you'd stick to it. I know you wanted him."

"Yeah, I wanted him. I wanted him bad. But I didn't sleep with him. The last time I jumped right into sex with someone it was a colossal mistake. Remember?"

"Yeah, but he was an asshole."

"And how do you know Derek isn't?"

"Just a suspicion. So you didn't screw him. Did you do anything else?"

"Yeah, we kissed." I didn't want to tell Salem about coming in my pants. That was something I would never live down.

"What do you know about this kid?" Salem asked.

“He’s not a kid,” I reminded him.

“Okay, he’s not a kid. He just looks like one. What do you know about him?”

“Not much, but we did run into an ex-boyfriend of his. Crazy son of a bitch.”

“What’s his name?”

“Elias Fairchild.” Salem’s jaw dropped. “Yes, *the* Elias Fairchild,” I acknowledged.

“Shit, Jack. I had Elias in one of my classes last year. Dude is certifiable. Getting mixed up with his ex might be a very bad idea.”

“What they had was in high school, Salem. And even if it was recent, it wouldn’t matter.”

“I don’t want you to get hurt, Jack.”

“I can take care of myself with Elias.”

“I’m not just talking about Elias. I was talking about Derek too.”

“Christ, five minutes ago you were telling me to fuck him. Now you’re telling me to be careful?”

“There’s a difference between sex and emotions.”

“I barely know him. Who said anything about emotions?”

“The look on your face tells me there’s something.”

I wasn’t sure if he was right or not, but I knew I wasn’t going to admit anything to him that I hadn’t yet been able to admit to myself.

I STOPPED by the UNR library to look for books I needed for a class. I had trouble finding them so I asked the librarian for help. Maurice Brewer was short and round and always had a smile on his face. He loved to tell corny jokes every time I saw him.

“What do you call a boomerang that doesn’t come back?” he asked me after he directed me to the books I needed.

“I don’t know, Maurice.”

“A stick!” He guffawed. It was an old joke, but I laughed—not so much at the punch line but at Maurice’s reaction.

I only had a few things to do that day, but it seemed like it took forever. All I could think about was seeing Derek again. It was only five when I got back to the dorm room, but I started getting ready right away. I began with a hot shower. As I stood under the steaming water, I couldn't help but think about Derek and how good it felt to kiss him and press against his body. Before I even realized what I was doing, I was stroking my cock into a full hard-on. I stopped myself before I went too far. Not that I was saving it for anyone.

After the shower I looked through my clothes. I didn't have much of a wardrobe but could usually make the best of what I had.

I grabbed a white jockstrap and slipped it on. Then I grabbed a pair of distressed jeans with rips and tears in them. A few tears were in somewhat revealing places. I had a number of shirts, mostly T-shirts. I settled on a plain gray V-neck. It was tight enough to show off my muscles but not so tight it was uncomfortable.

I was ready more than an hour before the date was supposed to start, so that meant sitting in my dorm trying to occupy my time before Derek was supposed to show up. I got on Josh's laptop but ended up checking out porn, which just made things worse. I tried to study but couldn't concentrate. I finally headed downstairs and waited for Derek outside. I was surprised when he pulled up in a silver Camaro. It looked to be brand new. That had to have cost about \$25,000.

He pulled up to the curb where I was standing and smiled at me. He got out and gave me a peck on the cheek.

"You're driving," he said.

"I don't know if that's a good idea."

"You're driving," he repeated and handed me the keys.

He was wearing a pair of tight jeans and a blue silk shirt. He walked to the passenger side, where I opened the door for him. I climbed in and got a good look at the interior. It was perfect.

"This new?" I asked when I sat behind the wheel.

"A year old," Derek answered. "My mom's family is wealthy. She and my dad own a chain of car and motorcycle dealerships. I'm the stereotypical spoiled rich boy."

"I don't think you're stereotypical at all."

“I have been quite the party boy,” he said. “But I also earn my own money. I work at Triumph Motorsports, one of the dealerships my parents own.”

The fact that Derek worked, even though he didn’t have to, didn’t surprise me. “Where we going?” I asked.

“San Rafael Park, but we have time. Take it for a spin.”

I got onto the freeway and got past the traffic. Part of me wanted to put the pedal to the metal. But the timid part of me told me to hold back and not risk my life.

“Let go, babe. Let go of your fears. Just go for it.”

I didn’t respond but did start pressing on the gas. It rode smooth, and before I even realized it, I was going one hundred miles per hour. I also realized I was enormously turned on and had a raging hard-on.

Derek had realized as well. His hand reached over and stroked the outline of my cock. I brushed his hand away, but he immediately snaked it right back over.

“Derek, I can’t concentrate when you’re doing that.”

“I can’t help it; you turn me on so much.”

“Why don’t we head over to the park? What’s going on there?”

“The balloon races,” Derek replied.

“Oh, I love watching the balloons.”

“Then you’re going to love what I have planned.”

IT WAS just getting dark when we got to the park. The light from burners gave the whole evening a beautiful glow. Derek slipped his hand into mine as we walked around taking in the sights.

“I love this park. The botanical gardens, the labyrinth.... They’re always beautiful. Especially this time of the year,” Derek said. “I like to come here in the middle of the night when I can’t sleep. I strip down to my running shorts and take a run through the grass. It’s incredibly relaxing and freeing.”

“Sounds like it,” I said.

He walked directly up to a balloon on the ground and nodded at the man standing by it.

“Derek,” the older man said.

“Hi, Lowell,” Derek replied as he shook the man’s hand.

“You all set to go?” Lowell asked.

“What? Go where?” I asked.

“Up,” he answered.

“Uh, no way, Derek. I don’t like heights.”

“Don’t worry. I’ll be in control.”

“You?”

“I’m a trained balloon pilot.” Christ, this boy just kept surprising me.

“I don’t know. Heights freak me out.”

“You need to let go of those fears.”

“I know, but I don’t know if I can do this.”

“Do you trust me?” he asked.

“What?”

Derek leaned in and whispered in my ear. “Do you trust me?”

I nodded. I didn’t know why I trusted him so implicitly, but I did.

“Okay. Good.”

Derek took me by the hand and walked me to the balloon. I slowly climbed in, and he climbed in behind me.

“We’re not actually going to float away or anything, are we?”

“No. It’ll be tethered.”

“Okay,” I murmured.

I gripped the sides of the basket as Derek turned on the burner and slowly increased the heat. The balloon started to fill. There was a quick bump when the basket first left the ground. I almost jumped out right then, but I felt Derek’s hand on my shoulder.

“Come over here,” he said. “Don’t look over the edge; that’ll just freak you out. Stand by me.”

I stepped up to him and held him close. The tension left my body almost right away, and I felt a thousand times better.



We finally stopped going higher. “How high are we?” I asked.

“About a hundred feet. Want to look over the side?”

“No. Yes... no. I don’t know.”

“Let’s go.” Derek took my hand, and together we stepped over to the side.

I wrapped my arm around Derek and held him as I looked over the edge. To my total surprise, I wasn’t afraid. Well, I was a little scared, but I was also excited—and turned on. Once again, Derek had noticed my excitement. I felt his hand traveling over my crotch.

“Derek, what are you doing?”

“Jack, please. I can’t wait. I want you so bad.”

“I told you I don’t fuck on the first date.”

“Technically, this could be considered a second date.”

“No, this is our first official date.”

“Spoilsport.” Derek pouted. He looked at me with a set of sad, puppy-dog eyes and a big grin.

“Sorry, pup.” I chuckled.

“Pup?”

“You look like a puppy dog when you pout.”

“Does that mean you’ll scratch my belly?”

“Only if you don’t piss on the floor.”

We laughed, and I pulled him into a kiss. I took his mouth with mine. There was a hunger and passion I hadn’t felt in a very long time. I pulled him as close as possible, and I felt his excitement press against my leg. My tongue pressed against his closed lips and forced its way in. I put one hand on his hip to keep him close, and I ran my other hand through his silky blond hair.

He untucked my shirt and ran his hand along my chest before once more resting it on my birthmark. He pressed against the mark as he flicked his tongue on mine. An unintentional groan escaped from my lips, and that egged him on even more. He rubbed his erection against me even harder and dry humped me. He pressed his lips to my neck and bit hard. The bite made my cock pulse, and I had the sudden urge to do the same to him.

I moved Derek's head to the side, leaned in, and bit the side of his neck. He whimpered as I bit and sucked at him. I inhaled his intoxicating scent and reveled in his glorious taste.

He pulled back and smiled at me. I grabbed the sides of his face and kissed him again. Hard and rough. He rubbed his body against mine and bit at my neck and began to slide down my body. I tried to stop him, but it was useless. He was determined, and I wasn't really all that interested in stopping him.

He lifted my shirt up a bit and kissed my belly in several spots. His lips were so soft and gentle. He was driving me crazy with lust and desire. He pressed his face into my crotch, and I could feel his hot breath through the thin layer of jeans. One hand grabbed an ass cheek, a finger found one of the tears and worked its way through.

He slid down my zipper, and I started to say "stop," but all that came out was "st—" He opened my pants as wide as they could go, pressed his face into my jockstrap, and inhaled deeply. His tongue traced the outline of my prick, and when he finally released my cock into the cool night air it felt like a lion being released from its cage after years of captivity. He stroked my shaft slowly and purposely, using the leaking fluids at the head as lube for more strokes. I watched him as he touched me. The look on his face was beautiful. He seemed to enjoy touching me as much as I loved having him touch me.

I gasped as Derek touched his tongue to the head, swirling around and tasting my pre-come like a professional wine taster savoring that first sip of wine. He looked up and our eyes locked onto each other. He opened his mouth wide and began to slowly swallow me. His tongue slurped the underside of my shaft as his velvety lips caressed all around it.

He took me in and out of his mouth, taking me deeper each time. He broke our eye contact to concentrate on consuming my length. I looked out over the basket and took in the awe-inspiring sight of Reno at dusk. It was gorgeous and incredible, just like the beautiful pup at my feet. I felt the orgasm building in my testicles and suddenly needed Derek to swallow my seed. Without even considering the possibility of hurting him, I grabbed his head and began to fuck his mouth. I was

rough, but I couldn't control myself. Derek's hands grasped my hips so hard I felt his nails digging in. That drove me on even further.

"Oh, fuck, pup. This. Is. Incredible. Oh, Christ!" I started shooting before I even finished the sentence. I shot once, twice, three times, and Derek drank it all. I started to go soft and Derek pulled back. I hurriedly pulled him to his feet.

"Kiss me, pup," I commanded as I pulled him to me. He opened his mouth before our lips connected, and my tongue was in his mouth instantly. My seed and his saliva had mixed into a wonderful bouquet of sweet, salty wonder. Our tongues fought to share the flavor, and it was gone before I wanted it to be.

We pulled back and stared into each other's eyes. I smiled and he returned a grin.

"After that you may as well fuck me."

I laughed. "No, I'm not going to break my promise to myself."

"Isn't it already broken?"

"Bent, not broken."

"Fine." I laughed as he pouted again.

"There's my pup." I pulled him into a gentle kiss as I zipped up. He went to the burner and started to decrease the gas so we would descend.

"You want me to return the favor, pup?" I asked as I pressed against him.

"No," Derek replied. "I'm not going to come with you until I do it while you're buried in me."

I laughed and pulled him closer.

It was dark by the time we landed, but the burners all around us gave us plenty of light. We walked leisurely back to his car. I drove slowly back to the dorm, not really wanting the night to end.

I could have continued the night with Derek at my side, but I wanted to keep the promise I had made to myself. It might have seemed stupid to everyone else, but it was important to me.

Derek and I said goodbye at his car with a tender kiss.

“Call me tomorrow, babe,” he said before pulling away from the curb.

I stood there and watched him leave, waving as he disappeared.

I climbed the stairs to my dorm room and was relieved to see Josh wasn't there. I just didn't have the energy to deal with his questions. I crawled into bed without removing my clothes and quickly fell asleep.

THE next day began with a major disappointment. I was jogging around the UNR campus when I felt my cell phone vibrate in my pocket. I stopped and checked the caller ID. Derek.

“Hey, pup,” I answered.

“I have bad news, Jack,” he said.

“What?”

“I'm leaving town. I'm going to be gone for at least a week or two.”

Christ, I had been thinking about nothing but seeing Derek again.

“Something wrong?” I asked.

“It's business. Trouble with a new shipment. I need to go handle it and supervise the transportation personally.”

“When are you leaving? Maybe we can get together before you go.”

“I'm at the airport now, babe. I'm leaving in ten minutes.”

“Shit,” I said. “Okay. Let me know when you're back.”

I closed the phone with more than a little disappointment.

I jogged back to the dorm and got into the shower. I was covered in soap and half-hard from thinking about Derek when the shower curtain was flung open.

“Holy shit,” Josh said, laughing. “Look at the size of that thing.”

“Christ, Josh!” I yelled. “A little privacy, please.”

“Privacy? Jack, we're gonna be living together. We're bound to see each other naked. I figured it was better just to get it out of the way first thing.”

Josh had barely been in the room since I moved in. I didn't know where he had been sleeping—or who he had been sleeping with. I pulled the shower curtain back.

“I don't need to see your dick. Now get the hell out of here.” I heard the door shut and peeked out from the shower curtain to make sure he had left. Once I was sure I was alone, I washed and rinsed. After drying off, I wrapped the towel around my waist and stepped out.

Josh was standing there—totally buck-ass naked and posing like a model. He was short and stocky with red hair on his head, long sideburns, and a goatee. The same red fur covered his body, including a thick patch of pubic hair just above his short, thick cock.

“Christ, Josh,” I said as I looked away. “I said I didn't need to see you naked. That hairy body is going to make me have nightmares.”

Josh laughed his usual raucous laugh. “I like to walk around naked a lot. So you better get used to it.”

I turned around as Josh slipped on a pair of shorts and a T-shirt. I grabbed a pair of pants and tried to get them on with the towel still wrapped around my waist. The towel slipped off a second before I got the jeans pulled all the way up.

“Nice ass.” Josh chuckled. “Remind me why a gorgeous guy like you and a horny stud like me never hooked up?”

It was a good question. When I first saw Josh, I thought he was attractive. And we hit it off right away.

“We're both tops,” I said.

“I've been known to bottom on occasion,” Josh said, laughing. “I don't know if I could take that monster you got between your legs.”

“You're a good friend, Josh,” I said. “Sex between us would ruin things.”

“I agree, pal. Getting sucked by you would be like getting a blow job from one of my brothers.”

I chuckled but knew he was right.

“How many brothers do you have?”

“Four older brothers, one younger brother, and one younger sister.”

“Christ, your parents were busy folks,” I said.

“So what’s going on with you and Derek?”

“What do you mean?”

“Don’t play dumb. You know what I mean. Have you guys fucked?”

“Do you have to be so crass?”

“Sorry. Have you guys made love yet?”

“Not really.”

Josh burst out laughing. “It’s a yes or no question.”

“It’s like the thing with Bill Clinton. *‘I did not have sex with that woman.’*”

“He sucked you off?”

I nodded.

“Derek’s always been a horndog. Why didn’t you guys fuck?”

“I’ve made too many mistakes with too many guys.”

“Sex with Derek wouldn’t be a mistake.” I thought it funny Josh and Derek had said the same thing.

“I just didn’t want to rush into anything again. I insisted that we not have sex on the first date.”

“And now that the first date is over?”

“Well, I was hoping we would see each other tonight, but Derek had to leave town for a couple weeks. Some emergency with his job.”

“Bad timing.”

“How long have you known Derek?”

“We grew up together. Our parents were friends.”

“So you know Elias?”

“Fairchild? Yes, I know him. Unfortunately. How do you know him?”

“He interrupted me and Derek that night at the party.” I told Josh about what happened.

“He’s a piece of work,” Josh said. “Dangerous. Watch out for him.”

## CHAPTER 3

I DIDN'T have a lot of plans for the days before school started, and what plans I did have I just didn't feel like following through on. The plans had mainly involved partying and getting drunk. Now that held no interest for me. All I could think about was Derek and how much I missed him.

The dorm was filling up, but most students were busy moving in. The game room was empty and so was the entertainment room. I turned on the television and tried to interest myself in an episode of *Maury* with a woman who admitted to her husband that their child might not be his. I couldn't concentrate but sat there feeling sorry for myself.

I was zoned out when I felt a strong hand on my shoulder and jumped in surprise. I looked up and saw Salem standing there with a big smile on his face.

"Hey, Salem," I said. "What are you doing here?" Salem had his own place off campus.

"I came to talk to one of my teachers and decided to pay my best friend a visit. What're you doing? I figured you'd be hanging out with your boy."

"Derek had to leave town for a couple weeks. A job thing."

"So you're just hanging out and feeling sorry for yourself, right?"

I smiled at how well Salem knew me.

"Let's go get some lunch. I feel like Mexican," Salem said. I got up and followed him.

We didn't talk much as we walked to Las Trojes Express. Another one of UNR's eating establishments, Las Trojes offered fresh

and fast Mexican food. Salem and I got a table and placed our order. I looked around and saw Avery sitting with another man. I stood up and walked over to the table.

“Hello, Professor Fowler—I mean Avery.”

“Hello, Jack. How are you doing?”

“Very good.”

“Jack, this is a colleague.” He gestured toward the man sitting next to him. “Professor Abraham Dearborn.”

“Professor Dearborn,” I said. “I have a class with you this year.”

“That is good to hear,” the man said. He had a low voice that almost seemed creepy. We shook hands. His hand was as cold as ice. I noticed an unusual-looking ring on his finger.

“What kind of stone is that?” I asked.

“Turquoise,” he answered. “It’s a family heirloom.”

“It’s gorgeous,” I said.

“Is that your boyfriend?” Avery asked, gesturing toward Salem.

“No, that’s my best friend. My boyfriend is out of town.”

“Remember,” Avery said. “If you ever need anything, let me know.”

I noticed our food was at our table, so I excused myself.

“You going for older guys now, bud?” Salem joked when I sat down.

“Avery is my faculty adviser,” I said.

“Avery?”

I ignored the jab. “The skinny guy with stringy hair is Professor Dearborn. He’s teaching my class in journalism law.”

“I’ve had them both as teachers,” Salem said. “Dearborn is extremely intelligent but kind of odd. Fowler is an excellent teacher. I enjoyed his class, though I did spend most of the time checking out a hot chick.”



SALEM kept me busy all day; it almost kept my mind off Derek. I was about to get into bed when my cell chirped, telling me I had a text.

*Hey, sexy. It was a message from Derek.*

*What are you doing?* I typed.

*Wishing I was there,* he wrote back.

*Me too.*

*Want to be with you so much.*

*Want to be in you,* I wrote.

*Hell, yeah. Need our second date.*

*As soon as you get back.*

*What R U wearin,* Derek wrote.

I quickly stripped off all my clothes.

*Nothin,* I typed back.

*Me either.*

I closed my eyes and could see his smile. I was instantly erect and began to stroke myself.

*Touchin myself,* I wrote.

*LOL. Me 2*

*Lets cum together,* I wrote.

*How close r u*

*Very*

*Me 2*

*So close*

I stroked my cock and felt the orgasm building quickly. I erupted and the loads landed on my chest and stomach.

*U done,* Derek asked.

*Yes u*

*Yes so hot*

*Miss u,* I typed.

*See u soon.*

I shut off my phone and quickly fell asleep.

## CHAPTER 4

THE first week of school was crazy busy, and I was grateful for the hectic schedule. I was meeting teachers, organizing study groups, buying new supplies, and doing homework late into the night.

Even Josh's usual schedule of playmates, both in and out of our room, slowed down. He had even more homework than I did.

Derek and I communicated occasionally with quick phone calls, text messages, and e-mail.

The week flew by, but Friday night I was too tired to join Josh at a club.

I woke up Saturday morning wishing I had plans for the day. Something like taking Derek and kissing him and... I had to push those thoughts out of my head.

I lay there for a while trying to go back to sleep and attempting to *not* think about Derek and what I wanted to do to him and with him. I wanted to kiss him and press my naked body to his. I wanted to feel his silky lips around my cock again. Christ, it had felt incredible when he blew me. So unlike anything I had ever felt. The two orgasms that occurred with Derek had been by far the two best I had ever experienced in my life. They had been incomparable to the rest, thousands of degrees different. Like the difference between the sun and the South Pole.

And all I could think was that if it felt that good when Derek sucked me it would feel even better when I fucked him.

As I lay there in bed I started to grow. I realized I still had my clothes on from the night before, so I unzipped my pants and pushed

them to my knees. I started stroking my semi-erect shaft until it was fully engorged. I closed my eyes and focused on the feeling of my hand wrapped around my erection but wished it was Derek's hand—or his mouth—on it instead.

I imagined Derek lying in his own bed, stroking his own erection. I could see every detail of the scene, from the glistening pre-come on the pink head of his beautiful cock to the sweat forming on his forehead. I could even see a blue and purple bedspread, but I knew that had to be my imagination.

I stroked myself as I watched Derek do the same in my mind. I was close to orgasm when I suddenly pulled my hand away and sat up.

I turned on my cell and saw I had a text message from Derek.

*Hey, babe. Got home on Friday night. Give me a call on Sat. We'll make plans.*

It was nine a.m. and I figured that would have given Derek enough time to sleep.

I threw on some clothes and ran down to the Downunder Café, another of the restaurants at UNR. Downunder offered buffet-style food. Josh worked there part-time.

I cut through the line for the breakfast buffet but ignored the dirty looks and comments.

"Josh, where does Derek live?"

"Hey, Jack. What's up?"

"Where does Derek live?" I repeated.

"Why?"

"Please, man. I need to know. I forgot to ask him."

"Is he back in town?"

"Josh, please. I promise I will tell you everything later. Just please tell me where Derek lives. Please?"

"Fallen Leaf Condos on Wedge Parkway, Number 2521."

"Shit, it'll take forever if I take a bus there."

Josh reached into his pocket and threw me the keys to his motorcycle. I caught them and looked at them, then at Josh, with incredulity. I had once been scared to even ride on a motorcycle, but Josh had forced me to face my fears. He had even given me a few driving lessons. I wasn't the best driver, but I was competent.

"What the hell? Are you sure?"

"Just take the keys and go," he said.

I didn't need to be told again. I took off to the parking lot where Josh parked the bike. I knew I should have gone back to the dorm room for the helmet, but I didn't want to take the time.

Josh's bike was a sleek-looking red 1985 Honda Nighthawk. It was his baby. He had worked all through high school and bought it with his own money. It rode smooth and went extremely fast. I knew if I damaged the bike in any way, he would have my hide.

I jumped on the bike and started it up. I drove out of the parking lot, made a couple turns, got onto Interstate 80 headed east, and then merged onto US 395 South. I weaved through traffic illegally and broke the speed limit by at least fifteen miles per hour. Breaking the law was new for me, but I had to see Derek as soon as possible. What should have taken ten minutes took me three. Soon I was on the exit headed toward Wedge Parkway. The Fallen Leaf Condos were less than half a mile away.

I pulled into the vast complex and began looking at the numbers. The condos all appeared to be three levels with immaculately maintained grassy areas. I knew the condos had to be expensive to either rent or buy, and I wondered which one Derek did.

I finally located Derek's condo. Like the others, it looked to be at least three levels. It was tan with brown trim with several windows and a garage. I parked the bike in the driveway and quickly walked to the front door. I had knocked only once when Derek opened the door.

I had to take in a breath when I saw him. He wore only a pair of baggy black shorts. His chest was just as I had imagined it. There was hardly any hair, and what there was of it was almost invisible. He had pert and pretty nipples and a tight gut. There was a trail of hair under his bellybutton leading down to his shorts.

“Um, hi,” was all I could say.

“Hello, Jack. I’ve been expecting you.”

“What? How could you know I was coming? Did Josh call you?”

He hesitated before answering. “Yeah, he gave me a call just a minute ago. I can’t believe he let you borrow his bike.”

I couldn’t say anything. I couldn’t form the words. I just continued staring at his beautiful body. In fact, that lame old pickup line popped into my head: *If I said you had a beautiful body, would you hold it against me?*

Derek looked at me and grinned. “Come inside, Jack.” I couldn’t make my feet move, so Derek grabbed my arm, led me inside, and closed the door.

He stood on his toes to give me a peck on the lips.

“Look. Here’s the thing, pup. I want to talk to you, and get to know you, and get to know about your life. I want to go on more dates.”

“I want the same thing.”

“But there is this one thing that I can’t stop thinking about. And I’m thinking you might be thinking about the same thing. And I kept the promise I had made to myself, and the fact that I did that surprised me more than anyone else. But I say we get that out of the way.” I realized I was babbling.

“And what is this thing that you can’t stop thinking about and are assuming I’m obsessing on too?”

“Sex. I can’t stop thinking about you, Derek. You are so fucking hot. That blow job in the balloon was... incredible. And as much as I want to know about you—everything about you—I just can’t stop thinking about what it would feel like to....” I paused and realized I was babbling again. I wondered if I sounded as stupid as I felt. I had never fumbled in trying to find the right words.

“Go ahead, babe. You want to know what *what* would feel like?”

I took a deep breath, collected my thoughts, and spoke slowly. “I want to know what being with you—in you—feels like. I want to fuck

you, make love to you, and connect to you. I have never felt such a draw to anyone. Sex is part of it but not all of it. But right now the sex is all I can think about. I'm sorry if that sounds crude or rude, but that's how I'm feeling."

I looked at Derek and wondered if I had been wrong. Maybe he didn't feel the same way about me as I did about him. Maybe I had said too much, and he was going to tell me to fuck off. He gave me a blank stare that I couldn't read.

He slowly reached his right hand out and touched my cheek. And I knew. I knew without him saying a word. It was like his thoughts were pouring straight into my head. He was attracted to me as much as I was to him. Sex with me was all he could think about.

I grabbed the sides of his head and pulled his face up to me as I leaned down. He wrapped his arms around my neck and kissed me with a fervor I had never known. My tongue slammed past his lips and slid across the roof of his mouth.

I lifted him up, and he wrapped his legs around my back, my hands planted firmly on his bubble butt. He pulled back from the lip-lock and whispered in my ear, "The bedroom is upstairs."

I looked around and saw the stairs. I hadn't noticed a thing about the condo's interior before, and I still noticed nothing but the stairs. Well, I noticed the stairs and Derek's body pressed to mine. I walked as quickly as I could while carrying Derek and kissing him.

We both realized that walking up the stairs with him in my arms was going to take longer than either of us wanted.

"Put me down," he whispered, and I reluctantly set him down and broke the contact. He took my hand, and together we walked quickly to the bedroom. As soon as we stepped into the bedroom, we kissed again. I looked at his bed and was shocked to see the blue and purple bedspread, just as I had imagined it. I tore off my jacket, and Derek pulled my shirt over my head. The feeling of our bare chests touching was amazing. My fingers ran across his nipples, and I leaned down to take one, then the other, into my mouth and flicked each with my tongue.

I kissed his nipples and then trailed my tongue down his stomach as I knelt down. I pulled his shorts down and got my first look at Derek's prick. It was exactly as I had pictured it. Six inches long with a large, pink head and bright veins everywhere. It was exquisite, perfect.

I kissed the head, tasting his pre-come. It was so incredibly sweet. I licked the head all over. That elicited a moan from Derek, a moan that turned me on more than I had ever been turned on before. The sensation of my hand on his shaft and my lips on his crown was amazing, but I swore I could feel how he was feeling too. It was like we were connected, like I was in his head feeling my hand on his cock. It was a euphoria unlike anything else I had ever known.

My tongue swirled around the edge of his crown and then up and down the top and underside of his shaft.

"Damn, babe," Derek murmured.

I kissed the head again and then slowly swallowed his pulsing cock until my nose was buried in his blond pubes. I drew in the wintergreen scent, now mixed with a masculine scent of sweat and passion.

"Stop," Derek said as he tried to push me away. "I'm gonna come if you keep doing that."

"What's wrong with that, pup?"

"I told you I wasn't going to come until you were buried in me."

I smiled, remembering that statement. I stood up and kissed him again. He stepped out of the shorts that were at his ankles and stepped backward to the bed. He lay down on it and gave me the prettiest smile ever.

I slipped off my shoes and socks, undid my pants, and took them off. My cock slapped me on the belly, leaving a shiny spot of seed. I stepped up to the bed and lay myself on Derek, my hands on either side of his head. Our erect shafts rubbed together as we kissed again. Christ, he tasted and smelled so amazing.

"Lube? Condoms?" I asked.

"On the nightstand," Derek answered.

I crawled off him and found the lube and condoms. I slid back between Derek's legs, popped the lid on the lube, and squirted it on my fingers. I slathered some on his hole and slowly slid one finger in. I leaned forward and kissed him as I slid a second finger in. I found his gland and rubbed it gently.

"I can't wait anymore," he whispered.

"Are you sure?" I didn't want to wait either, but I didn't want to hurt him.

"Just go slow." He caressed my face, and I knew he was telling me the truth—he was more than ready to take me in.

I slid on the condom and lubed up my shaft. I pressed the head of my cock against Derek's entrance and softly pushed forward. I met resistance and pressed only slightly harder. I was about to tell Derek to push outward when he did it, and my head slipped inside his hole. He gasped and arched his back, taking me a little farther in.

"You okay?"

"Oh, hell yeah. Better than okay."

I smiled and relaxed, taking in the exquisite feeling of his satin tunnel surrounding my length. He was warm and smooth and tight.

"Okay, give me a little more."

I slid a bit more of myself into him as I leaned down to take his mouth with mine. He groaned and ran his fingers through my scruffy, dark hair. He pressed his lips harder against mine as he moved and allowed another inch into himself. It was my turn to groan. Derek used the opportunity to slide his tongue into my mouth.

As Derek moved under me, I felt an aggression in him that I hadn't felt before. He was submitting and dominating at the same time. It turned me on even more, and I slid all the way into him. As I buried my shaft in him, I realized I might have done it too roughly.

"Christ, did I hurt you? I'm so sorry. I just got excited."

"No, babe. It's good. So fucking good. Just don't move for a minute."



I smiled as I looked down at him, gazing down at his stomach and to the junction of our bodies. The sight of my shaft buried in his hole was incredible. I couldn't believe I was so lucky. Lucky to have even met this beautiful young man. Luckier still that he was sharing his body with me—an awesome privilege.

He moved his hips as he grabbed my head and pulled me into another mouth-devouring kiss. I pulled out a few inches and then slid back in. The heat and the slickness of his hole were driving me crazy. I started pulling out farther and sliding in faster and harder.

Before I realized what I was doing, I was slamming all of my length into him again and again. I grabbed hold of his shaft, using the massive amounts of pre-come as lube to stroke him. I had never been this aggressive during sex. Even with the horniest of lovers, I couldn't slam into them. But Derek was not only taking it; he loved it.

I wanted to talk, to tell Derek how good he felt, how happy I was to be here and to be in him. I wanted to say that I had never felt anything as good as his ass, but I couldn't. I couldn't form any actual words. All I could mutter was, "Uhh. Uhh."

Derek started lifting his hips as I pushed into him, and I knew he was getting close to exploding. I increased the speed of my strokes on his cock and the rhythm of pounding into him.

"Oh, babe. Jack. Feels so good. I'm gonna come, babe. You're making me come."

I finally found the words in my head.

"Let it go."

Derek bounced under me, twisting his hips as he let out a loud groan. I saw the seed fly from his cock, then felt the hot come on my hands. He grabbed my hips, and his fingers pressed against my birthmark. Between him touching my mark and the pulsing and tightening of his ass around my length, I lost control. I pushed forward one more time, arched my back, and felt the orgasm travel up my shaft and then squirt out into the condom. A weird noise escaped my lips—part moan, part growl. I shook as shot after shot erupted from me. My entire body felt like it was changing. Changing how, I didn't know. My hands and feet felt different, my mouth and teeth felt odd, even my eyes

seemed to hurt for a split second as time stood still. Then it was over, and all the strength left my body.

I collapsed on top of Derek, completely spent. I breathed heavily against his neck, placing gentle kisses there. His hands went up and down my back. I wondered if I was suffocating him and told myself I should roll off of him. That was the last thought I had before I fell asleep.

WHEN I woke up I was still on top of Derek. My cock was limp but still had the condom on. Derek was awake and rubbing my back.

I groaned as I rolled off him.

“You should’ve woke me up, pup. I didn’t mean to suffocate you.”

“You weren’t suffocating me, babe. I liked it. I like the feeling of a big, strong man on me.”

I pulled the condom off and disposed of it in a trashcan by the bed. I was sweaty and sticky and realized I needed to clean up.

“Want to take a shower, pup?”

“How about something better? A nice bath?”

“You have a tub big enough for the both of us?”

He stood up, grabbed my hand, and walked me into the bathroom. The bathroom was large, with a freestanding shower as well as an extra-large bathtub. The tub was in a raised section of the room, with ceramic pillars on all four corners and fake flowers flowing around it.

“Christ, that’s a big tub.”

“They call it a garden tub,” he said. “I had it put in when I bought the place. It has three twenty-five-gallon-per-minute spouts so the water doesn’t get lukewarm before the tub is filled.” He reached over and turned on the spouts, starting the tub filling with steaming water.

As we waited for the tub to fill, I pressed Derek up against the wall and kissed him, first softly, and then harder. My hands caressed his bubble butt, and his fingers ran through my hair.

When the tub was finally full, I stepped in first. Derek was behind me and stopped me before I got all the way in.

“What’s this?” he said as he grabbed my hips. He was looking at my birthmark.

“Just a birthmark,” I said. Derek got as close as he could and examined the mark. He rubbed it, and I felt a tingle run through my body and shivered.

“Is it sensitive?” he asked me.

“Extremely. You’ve touched it every time I’ve come with you.”

“I have?”

“Why are you so interested in my birthmark?”

“It’s interesting looking, that’s all.”

I sank down into the water, and he sat opposite me. We entwined our legs.

“Get over here,” I said after a few minutes. He slid over and sat against me, his back against my chest. I took a sponge and ran it over his chest.

“Do you have siblings?” I asked him.

“No. I’m an only child.”

“Were you spoiled?”

“Not in the way most people think. My parents are awesome. I couldn’t ask for better parents. They gave me all the love I ever needed, taught me right from wrong, and taught me responsibility.”

“How long has your dad owned the bike shops?”

“Started the first one when I was just a kid. He had been a mechanic at a shop, and when it came up for sale he decided to buy it. My mom jumped right in and helped make the shop a success. A year later they had a second dealership.”

“When did you start working there?”

“I was there all the time as a kid and loved it. I loved talking to the mechanics and the customers. By the time I was twelve I was one of the best salesmen my dad had.”

“You were selling bikes at twelve?” I asked.

“Yeah. I knew the specs of the bikes as well as the other salesmen did, and I was always honest with the customers. I didn’t try any of the usual pushy sales tactics. My mom says I could sell matches to the devil. By the time I was seventeen I was the top salesman for all of my dad’s dealerships.”

“That’s awesome.”

“It may look like my parents give me everything, but believe me, I’ve earned it. He pays me a good salary, and I get commissions on sales, but he doesn’t cut me any slack.”

“How did they react when you came out?”

“My dad told me he had suspected for a while. He was cool with it. My mom was shocked and upset about it at first. She said she was afraid I was going to get hurt. She also hated the idea of not having grandkids.”

“Is she better now?”

“Oh, yeah. She’s fine with it now. She even set me up on a few blind dates.”

“Christ, I’m glad those didn’t work out.”

“Me too.” He laughed. “What about your family?”

“I have the best family you could imagine, but they do drive me crazy sometimes. Three older sisters who always treated me like the baby of the family.”

“Do you look like your parents?”

“No, but that’s because I’m adopted.” I saw an odd look on Derek’s face when I told him that. “My biological parents and I were in a car accident when I was five. They both died, and I didn’t have any other family. My adopted parents had been our neighbors.”

“You know anything about your biological parents before they had you?”

“No. Not a thing.” I thought it was an odd question.

“The crash must’ve been pretty bad. You’re lucky you survived,” he whispered.

“Very lucky. My mama said God had chosen me to survive so I had to live carefully and not do anything that would endanger my life.”

“What did that mean?” Derek asked.

“I couldn’t play any type of sports. I had an early curfew so I wasn’t out late. My parents had to approve every friend I had. They were strict about where I went and always checked up on me.”

“Sounds like a drag.”

“It wasn’t so bad. I liked feeling safe and protected. Part of it was the car crash that killed my parents. For the longest time I had trouble getting into a car. I had to get over that, of course. But when it came time to get my driver’s license I was terrified.”

“I’m surprised your parents let you get your license.”

I chuckled. “My mom hated the idea. But Dad said I had to do it to get over the fears. He was right, of course. But even after I got my license, I couldn’t drive very far without one of them.”

“You’ve been protected and sheltered your whole life,” Derek said matter-of-factly. “You haven’t done anything like bungee jumping or white-water rafting or things like that.”

I shook my head. “The balloon ride was one of the most dangerous things I’ve ever done.”

“You have *so* much to experience,” he said, laughing.

“As long as you’re with me, I’ll try anything,” I whispered in his ear.

“Anything? I’ll have to remember that.”

AS WE climbed out of the bathtub, there was a knock on Derek’s door. He wrapped a towel around his waist and went to answer it. I dried off, walked into the bedroom, and lay down on the big, fluffy bed. I was still naked, wondering if we would play again. I wanted to and was sure he would want to as well, but I wasn’t sure if either one of our bodies could handle it.

I heard some feet stomping up the stairs. The bedroom door flew open before I could pull anything over my nakedness.

“Jack!” It was Josh, and he was smiling from ear to ear.

“Sorry. I tried to stop him, but you know Josh,” Derek explained.

Josh ran to the bed, and I knew what he was going to do. I tried to move to the side, but Josh was too fast. He jumped on top of me and held my hands down.

“You guys fucked, huh? I knew you guys would be a perfect match.”

“Josh, do you mind? I’m naked here.”

“It’s not like I haven’t seen that monster thing before.”

“Doesn’t mean I want to lay here naked under you.”

“Afraid I’m going to try to fuck you?”

“That is *not* going to happen, Josh. And you know it.”

“That’s the truth,” Derek piped up. “I know I don’t want Jack sleeping with anybody else. And I’m hoping he feels the same way.”

Josh looked from me to Derek and then back at me.

“Is that true? Is this a serious thing?”

I wasn’t in the position I imagined I would be when we had this talk. For sure, I didn’t imagine Josh would be here, let alone him sitting on top of me.

“I’m not answering this question right now. Not with you on top of me.”

“Answer the question or I’m not moving,” Josh said.

“Seriously, Josh. Get the hell off of me.”

“Answer the question.”

“Joshua Valentine, get off of him,” Derek ordered in a deep, manly voice I hadn’t heard from him before.

Josh didn’t say a word, but he jumped off of me. I grabbed my underwear and slid them on, and then I walked up to Derek.

I looked into his eyes and grabbed his hands. “Pup, I never imagined I would say this to anyone after such a short time. The answer is yes; I think we may have something special here.”

“I feel the same way, babe. We don’t have to use the dreaded L word or even the C word.” Love and commitment: two words I didn’t think I would be discussing, ever. “But we can agree to be monogamous, can’t we?”

“Definitely,” I answered.

I pulled Derek into a kiss and then felt Josh’s arms wrap around us both.

“This is just freaking great, my two best friends in the world.”

I broke away from the group hug and excused myself to use the bathroom. In the bathroom I leaned up against the counter and looked into the mirror. Everything felt so different, yet so right at the same time. I had moved from man to man for so many years. I’d had loveless affairs with married men, one-night stands with *straight* men, and even long weekends with lots of different guys. Any time the other guy got serious and even joked about being exclusive I was out of there faster than a black man at a skinhead rally. The spontaneity, the variety, the uninhibited sex had thrilled me for so many years; I wondered how I got to this point where I was agreeing to be monogamous with a man. A man I had only known for a few weeks.

But I wasn’t questioning my decision. I knew it was the right one. So much had changed in such a little amount of time that my head was spinning. I didn’t know why I was so absolutely drawn to Derek, but there was no denying the attraction. It was more than a sexual attraction; there was an emotional connection as well. A connection that I had *never* felt with anyone before. I wasn’t going to risk what I had with Derek for some cheap trick I would regret in the morning.

There was a soft knock on the door. Derek opened the door and peeked around. “Can I come in?” I nodded. He stepped in, wrapped his arms around my waist, and kissed my back. “You okay? It’s okay if you want to take back what you said. Josh kind of pushed you into it.”

I spun around, cupped his face in my hands, and kissed him gently on the lips. “I meant what I said. I want to be exclusive. I couldn’t share you with anyone even if I wanted to.”

“I’m willing to let it be a one-sided thing. I won’t sleep with anyone else, but you can if you want to.”

Christ, he just kept shocking me. “No.” I kissed him again. “I don’t want to sleep with anyone else, either. I have a feeling you can keep me plenty satisfied.”

WE ORDERED a pizza and decided to have a movie marathon. We started with all four *Die Hard* movies. We sat with my arms wrapped around Derek. We kissed, touched, and caressed each other and talked. At some point around the middle of *Die Hard with a Vengeance*, I asked Derek a question. “Have you had many serious relationships? Besides Elias, that is.”

He hesitated before answering. “What I had with Elias wasn’t serious, at least not for me. But not too long after things ended with Elias I was involved with a guy for a couple years. We had fun and thought it was love, but it wasn’t. We parted on good terms.”

I could tell Derek didn’t want to talk about the subject anymore, so I didn’t push it.

“What about you?” he asked me.

“Well, nothing serious. Never any real emotions involved. My last relationship was a mistake from day one, but it took me forever to get out of it.”

“What was so bad about it?”

“Well, he was married. *Is* married, I should say. I didn’t have any feelings for him, but sex with him was like a drug. It was a high doing it and knowing we could get in trouble. Having sex at work, in his office, in the conference room, even at his place.”

“You worked with him?”



“He was my boss at the mine in Lovelock. The attraction was instant. It was crazy really, fucking like we did. But I couldn’t stop. He said he loved me, and I wanted to believe it. I wanted to believe that we could have a real relationship. He had slept with guys in high school, then slept with a girl and got her pregnant. He married her but didn’t stop sleeping with men.”

“Why did you end it?”

“I saw him with his wife and kids. I realized I was a home wrecker. Not that Dave didn’t play a huge part in it himself. But I didn’t want to be *that* kind of man. And I realized I didn’t love him, and he didn’t love me. It was a powerful lust for sure, but not love. Eventually, I got up the courage to do it.”

“How did he take it?”

“Not well at all. Wouldn’t accept that it was really over for a while. He begged me to take him back. He even promised to leave his wife. That’s when I decided to leave town and start college.”

“See, something good *can* come out of bad circumstances.”

“Enough talk about that. How about giving me a kiss, pup?”

“Any time.” He leaned in and pressed his lips to mine. It was a soft and gentle kiss, and we didn’t break contact for several moments. He pulled away and gave me that sweet smile I loved so much. He laid his head on my shoulder, and we continued to watch the movie.

I DIDN’T leave Derek’s place until Sunday evening. We spent the entire weekend indoors watching movies and having sex as often as our bodies could handle it. I didn’t want to go home but needed to get back to my dorm, so I could get a normal night’s sleep before class on Monday.

“You ready to go home?” Derek asked around five p.m.

I nodded.

We stepped through the inside door that led to the garage. I was surprised to see his car wasn't the only vehicle there. He also had a motorcycle, a gorgeous street bike.

"Christ, pup," I said, as I looked the machine over. "What is it?"

"V-Rod Muscle. 2009."

"It's awesome," I cooed. It was charcoal gray and silver—a sleek modern look with a touch of classic. The bike was sex on wheels, with curves that I'd never seen on a bike. Its exhaust gleamed in the light, and the dual engines just screamed power. It called to me, and I wanted to run my hand over that shiny metal surface.

"I thought you'd like it. I planned on driving you home with it."

I wasn't that thrilled about riding bitch, but it was Derek's bike. I couldn't hold back a smile when he handed me the keys.

"You're driving." He handed me one of two helmets sitting in the garage.

I was excited at the idea of driving the bike, which was odd because just two days ago I had been nervous about driving Josh's bike. Somehow I knew Derek was responsible for giving me a new desire for excitement and maybe even danger.

Derek opened the garage door, and I pushed the bike onto the street. He closed the garage door and hopped on behind me, wrapping his arms around me. I started up the bike and took off down the road.

The bike felt strong underneath me. It was more power than I was used to, and I wasn't sure I could handle it. My fears began to rise up again, and I could hear my mom's voice.

*Be careful. Don't do anything that could kill you. You're a miracle child; don't press your luck.*

Then I heard another voice in my head. It sounded like Derek's but I knew that was impossible.

*"Don't be afraid. Feel the power. Just go with your instincts. Control the bike, control the energy."*

I took a deep breath, exhaled, and pressed the accelerator. The bike sped up, and when the anxiety hit me, I pushed it back down. I

remembered a small quiet road off one of the next exits. I took the exit, made a few turns, and got on the gravel road.

I breathed deep again and got the bike quickly up to more than one hundred miles per hour. For a moment I felt like I was flying. The freedom was exhilarating, and I felt my pants tighten. I almost forgot Derek was behind me until his hand snaked down and started rubbing my crotch. I drove well past the speed limit for a while before slowing down and removing Derek's hand from my cock.

I knew if I didn't get back soon I'd never say goodbye to him. To my astonishment, never saying goodbye sounded like a wonderful idea. Maybe someday it would happen.

I turned the bike around, got on the freeway, and drove to UNR. I climbed off the bike and removed the helmet. He did the same, and we kissed for several minutes.

"Hang on to the helmet, babe," Derek said. "I'm sure you'll be using it again."

"Christ, I hope so."

"Count on it, babe."

We kissed again and finally pulled our bodies apart.

"Bye," he said sadly.

"Later, pup."

I walked away and could feel Derek's eyes on my back. I turned around and waved at him. I didn't want to break the eye contact so I walked backward for several steps. Derek replaced the helmet on his head, started up the bike, and roared off.

JOSH was getting out of the shower when I got to the room.

"Have a good weekend?" he asked me. I blushed and nodded. I shuffled through a box of my personal items. I still hadn't put everything on the wall that I wanted to. I had a large collection of wolf pictures and figurines, and I'd only put out a few items. I hung up a large picture of a white wolf howling at the full moon.

“What’s with all the wolves?” Josh asked me.

“I’ve always liked them. They’re strong and powerful. So free to run and play. I had a weird experience with wolves one time.”

“What happened?” he asked as he sat down on his bed.

“I was seven when my family came to Reno to the Sierra Safari Zoo. We were at the wolf exhibit, and all the wolves were in the center of the structure, nowhere near the people. But when I went to the fence all the wolves stood and looked at me. Then they walked as close as they could, all in a line. I was so drawn to them I would’ve joined them if I could’ve.”

“Sounds awesome,” Josh said quietly.

“It was,” I replied. “Being the kid I was, I started howling. And the wolves joined me. It was like they were copying me. They kept on howling long after we went on to the next exhibit. Since then I’ve collected all this.”

“Let me see this birthmark of yours.”

“How do you know about the birthmark?” I asked, surprised by the sudden change of topic.

“Derek told me.”

“Why would he tell you about that?”

“He mentioned it was unusual, that’s all. Can I see it?”

I pulled my shirt off and turned so Josh could see the mark. He got up close to me just like Derek had.

“It looks cool,” Josh said.

## CHAPTER 5

THE alarm clock went off way too early, but I dragged myself out of bed. I didn't have time for a shower, but I brushed my teeth and ran a comb through my long hair. My hair always seemed to grow quickly, but lately it seemed like it was growing even quicker than ever. I usually let it grow long, not out of some fashion statement, but just because I had better things to do than make an appointment at a salon, sit in the waiting room, and then sit in a styling chair for some chatty woman to hit on me. I managed to get my hair to look somewhat decent and headed out.

As I neared my third class, I saw a familiar face standing near the door. Derek.

"Pup, what are you doing here?"

"I thought it'd be fun to sit in class with you." I took his hand and we walked into the class together.

The class was Journalism Law. Professor Dearborn turned and looked at us and smiled.

"Derek," he said.

"Abraham, how are you?"

"You know Professor Dearborn?" I asked.

"I've known him my whole life. He's a friend of my parents."

"Christ, do your parents know everyone?"

"They're all part of the same...."

"Organization?" I finished his sentence, and he nodded.

Derek and Abraham spoke for a minute before the older man turned his attention to me.

“Dear boy, I didn’t know young Mr. Malone was your boyfriend. You look like such a wonderful couple.”

I mumbled a “thanks” before I pulled Derek to a chair and sat down.

“Just so you know, there are lots of other UNR faculty members who I’ve known for years,” Derek said.

“Like who?”

He rattled off a list of names, most of which I didn’t recognize. But there was one name I knew: Avery Fowler.

“Avery is my faculty adviser,” I said.

“He’s a great guy,” Derek said. “He plays on our team.”

BETWEEN classes I ran into Salem at Jolt-N-Java. I got a coffee and sat next to him.

“So what’s up with Blondie?” Salem asked me.

“He has a name, Salem,” I replied.

“Whatever. What’s up with you guys?”

“I like him, Salem. I like him a lot. He’s fun to be around.”

“I bet he’s a tiger in bed,” Salem said, laughing.

“Christ, Salem!” I exclaimed. “You want to know the details of my sex life?”

“Hell, no. I don’t want details,” he said. “I just want to know that my buddy is satisfied.”

“Yeah, I’m satisfied. And yes, he’s fucking awesome in bed.”

“You’re not moving too fast, are you?”

“I managed to wait to have sex with him until after our first date.”

“Yeah, and you’ve been fucking like rabbits since then, huh?”

I blushed. “Yeah.”

“And it’s already serious?”

“Yeah, it’s serious.”

“How serious?”

“Well, we’re not seeing anyone else,” I said.

“You’re monogamous already? You don’t think that’s moving too fast?”

“No, I don’t think it’s too fast. He’s a great guy, and I don’t want to risk losing him. I don’t need sex with anyone else.”

“I just don’t want you to get hurt,” Salem said.

“You think Derek is going to hurt me?”

“It’s possible.”

“Does he seem like a player?”

“You never know,” Salem said.

“Derek is *not* a player. I’m sure of that. I’m not worried about him hurting me. I’m more worried about me hurting him.”

“Okay, Jack,” Salem said. “Don’t get pissy. I’m just watching out for my best friend. That *is* my job, after all.”

“Okay. Let’s leave that subject alone for now.”

“Cool,” Salem said. “You see that girl over there?” He pointed to a girl with short red hair.

“Yeah. What about her?”

“I’m going to take her out to dinner tonight,” he said.

“Cool. When did you ask her out?”

“I haven’t done it yet.” He smiled.

“What?”

“I’m gonna go ask her right now,” he said, and stood up.

I WENT to my room after my classes and saw Josh pulling on running shorts.

“Going for a jog?” I asked.

“Yeah. Wanna join me?”

“Sure,” I said. “Give me a minute.”

“Make it fast,” he said, laughing.

We jogged around Manzanita Lake on the southeastern part of the campus. We had jogged side by side for a mile when Josh stopped. “Need a short break,” he said between heavy breaths. He took a seat on a picnic bench and I sat next to him.

“How’s Derek?” Josh asked.

“He’s good,” I said.

“And everything’s good between the two of you?”

“Yeah.”

“Good,” he said. I knew there was something else he wanted to say and waited for him to finally say it.

“You’re not going to hurt him, are you?” he asked. I laughed because I could have been angry about the question—but I wasn’t. Josh was watching out for his friend just like Salem was doing for me.

“I don’t plan on it, Josh. I like him a lot.”

“I hope so. He’s a good man.”

“He’s a great man.”

Josh was silent for a few minutes again. “He’s in love with you. I hope you know that.”

“What?” I was shocked. “No. He’s not in love with me.”

“I know Derek better than anybody. I know when he’s in love. Trust me. He is head over heels in love with you.”

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

“Yes, I do. I know when Derek is in love. He might not admit it to you. Hell, he might not even admit it to himself.”

“How do you know when Derek’s in love? You can’t possibly know him that well.”



"I *do* know him that well. I've known him his entire life. He was in love with m—" He paused for a second. "I've seen him in love."

"It's way too soon for the L word," I said.

"So you aren't in love with him?"

"No. Not yet."

"Not yet?"

"We just met, but it does feel like I've known him forever. But love? I don't even really know what romantic love is. I do know that I care about him. I care about him a lot. My feelings for him are stronger than any feelings I've ever had for a guy before."

"Well, that's a start," Josh said. He stood up and stretched. "Race you home," he said, and took off running.

"Asshole," I muttered as I took off after him.

By the time I made it back to the room, Josh was already changed out of his running clothes and into jeans and a T-shirt.

"I got a date," he said, smiling.

"Aren't you going to shower first?"

"No, he likes me all sweaty and musky." He laughed loudly.

"I didn't need to know that," I said. He laughed again as he walked out the door. I stripped and got into the shower.

When the shower curtain was ripped open a few minutes later, I was prepared to yell at Josh again. But it wasn't Josh—it was Derek.

"What're you doing here?" I asked.

"I came to see my incredibly hot boyfriend," Derek said, smiling. "May I join you?"

"Get your ass in here, boy." I grabbed him and pulled him in with all his clothes on.

"What am I going to wear home?" he asked with a smile.

"I think you're going to have to stay the night."

"Are you allowed to have sleepovers on school nights, little boy?" he teased.

“I ain’t no little boy.”

“That’s for sure,” he said as he grabbed my semi-erect prick.

I pulled him into a kiss and started unbuttoning his shirt. He stroked me slowly and removed his hand only long enough for me to get his shirt off. I rubbed my hands across his chest as our tongues danced. I reached down and unbuttoned his pants, reached in and played with his hard shaft. I sank to my knees and pulled his pants to his ankles.

I drank the warm water that ran down his body and off his shaft like a waterfall. I kissed the tip of the head and then swallowed his entire length in one move.

His hands went to the back of my head, and he pushed farther down my throat. I kept him deep-throated for a second before I pulled back off. I helped him get his clothes totally off and stood. I held him at arm’s length and scanned his amazing body.

“What are you doing?” he asked.

“Looking at my gorgeous boyfriend and wondering how I got to be so lucky.”

“Do you believe in fate?”

“I never did before. But ever since I met you I’m not so sure.”

“So you think we were destined to be together?”

“I don’t know how long we’re supposed to be together, but yeah, I do believe fate brought us together, at least for right now.”

“I think it’s forever,” he whispered so lightly I almost didn’t hear him. I didn’t think he wanted me to hear him, so I didn’t say anything.

I grabbed our cocks with both my hands and rubbed them together. I leaned forward and bit his neck. He moaned and pressed against me. His hand grabbed my hips, and his fingers pressed into my birthmark.

“Fuck me, Jack. Fuck me right here, right now.”

“No condoms in the shower,” I said.

“I don’t care,” he said, shocking me. “I was tested just before we met. I’m negative.”

“I haven’t been tested for a while, though.”

“I don’t care.” He shocked me again. “I’m sure you’re okay.”

“I don’t know that, so you certainly don’t know that. I’ve done so many things and slept with so many guys I wouldn’t even think about taking that risk. Not with anyone and especially not with you.”

Derek sighed but didn’t argue anymore.

“But I can still make you feel damn good,” I said as I turned him around so his face was to the shower wall. I pressed up against him and bit his neck. He leaned into me and reached his hand backward and ran his fingers through my hair.

I stepped back and squeezed body wash onto my fingers. I spread Derek’s cheeks and slid one finger into him. It was a quick and sudden invasion, and I could feel Derek’s body trying to resist. I kissed his ear and neck and reached around with my free hand to rub a nipple. His body relaxed, and I slid my digit slowly in and out. With no warning, a second slid in. I rubbed that special gland that makes men feel so good, and Derek moaned.

He grabbed his cock and started to stroke it, but I pushed his hand away.

“No touching yourself until I tell you to. Do not come until I tell you to.”

Derek nodded, as if he were unable to make the words come out of his mouth.

I scissored my fingers in his ass, then slid a third finger in. My boy took it like a champ. He didn’t just take it—he loved it.

“Play with yourself but don’t come yet,” I ordered. He started stroking his cock as I increased the speed of my fingers in him. I bit down on his neck and hammered his gland. He was moaning loudly now.

“Now,” I said in his ear. “Come for me, pup.”

“Oh, fuck,” he cried as he fisted his length faster and then erupted. Large shots of come hit the shower wall and were then washed away by the water. I pulled my fingers out of him and started stroking myself.

Derek spun around and got on his knees, his face just inches from my dick. I came seconds later. Ropes of my seed shot out and landed in big streams on his face. I quickly pulled him to his feet and licked my come off his face. He kissed me and we shared the taste of my seed.

"It's a good thing we're in the shower because we would've needed to get in after that for sure," I said.

"I'm starving," Derek announced when we got out of the shower.

"We can drive to one of the casinos and get something there, or we can walk down to the twenty-four-hour diner down the street."

"Let's take a walk," he said. "But I'll need some clothes."

I gave him a pair of my shorts and a T-shirt. We walked down to the diner, which was named, imaginatively enough, The 24-Hour Diner.

We both ordered bacon cheeseburgers with fries. Derek went to use the bathroom. A few moments later, I suddenly knew something was wrong with Derek. I quickly went into the bathroom and saw Elias pushing Derek against the wall. I was across the room in a flash, jerking Elias away.

"Stay the fuck away from my boyfriend!" I ordered. Elias took a step back before he found his courage, puffed up his chest, and stepped up to me.

"Shit, Derek," he said, while not breaking my stare. "You're still with this dickface? You've usually moved on by now."

"What Derek and I have is serious," I said. "You chasing after him all these years is pretty sad. Get over it already. Move on."

"I will *never* move on," Elias growled. "Derek is *mine*."

"No, Fairchild," I said. "Derek is mine." Elias seemed shocked. He then did something really odd. He leaned forward just a bit and sniffed the air like he smelled something. His head snapped back, and he took a few steps backward. He had a look of shock and anger on his face as he looked from Derek to me. Without a word, he turned and left.

"What the hell was that about?" I asked.

“Who knows when it comes to Elias? He never has done anything that makes sense.”

DEREK snuggled next to me in my small bed.

“Thanks for coming to my defense,” he said.

“I’m sorry for what I said,” I whispered. “For what I said about you being mine. I didn’t really mean it. I just wanted Elias to back off.”

“I didn’t mind,” Derek replied. “In fact, I liked it.”

I liked hearing that. I did feel like Derek was mine. Mind, body, and soul—he was mine. He pressed against me, rubbing his ass against my crotch. I reached around and played with his soft cock.

“You can’t really be horny so soon after our little thing in the shower,” I said, laughing.

“That was just an appetizer. The fingers were nice, but I want the real thing.”

I started to get hard as he pressed against me. His shaft grew in my hand and I gently stroked it. He bent his face backward and we kissed.

“Hold on a minute,” I said. “The condoms are in my desk.”

“Come on, babe. We don’t need those.” He grabbed my cock and pressed his ass against it. I grabbed his hips and pushed him.

“No!” I said in a commanding voice I didn’t know I had. “I am not taking that risk. Especially not with you. I care about you way too much to risk anything.”

“But it’s not a risk; I have no doubt that you’re negative. I want to do this with you.”

“I do too,” I whispered. “But I will be absolutely sure it’s okay to do so before I make that decision. And nothing you say or do will change my mind.”

He relaxed, so I got up, walked to the desk, and got the condoms and lube. When I turned back to Derek he was on his hands and knees

with his ass pointing toward me. I stepped back over to him, knelt down, and placed my face between his butt cheeks. I licked his hole and he whimpered. I pressed my tongue as deep into his rim as I could.

“Fuck me, Jack.” As much as I loved foreplay, that wasn’t what I was in the mood for.

I dripped lube on his hole, tore the condom wrapper open, and slid the condom down my shaft. I lubed my length and pressed it against Derek’s entrance. As I pressed forward slowly, Derek pushed back quickly. Half my length slid in, and he grunted as if in pain.

“You okay?” I asked.

“Yes,” he hissed between clenched teeth. “Give it to me. Fuck me hard.”

I wanted to ask if he was sure. I wanted to ask if he could handle it. But I didn’t ask because I wanted the same thing. I wanted to let go of all self-control and just pound him. I slammed the rest of my shaft into his body, and our skin made a sound as it slapped. Derek’s body rocked and he cried out.

“I didn’t hurt you, did I, pup?”

“Hurts...,” he moaned. “Hurts good. Feels so good. It’s what I want. Give it to me.”

I pulled out and slammed into him again. “Yes,” he cried out. “I’m yours, babe.” He grabbed my hip and rubbed the birthmark, gently at first and then harder. Powerful sensations took over my body, and I pounded into him again and again.

“Christ, Derek. You feel so good. Better than anything.”

With no more words I began fucking him hard. I slammed in and out of him again and again and again. Unintelligible grunts and moans and cries came out of both our mouths.

I slammed into him one last time, and I filled the condom. Derek grabbed his dick and stroked it to eruption. I pulled out, tore off the condom, tied it off, and threw it away. I lay down next to Derek, and he pulled himself against me, putting his head on my chest. He was snoring softly a minute later, and I with him right after.

## CHAPTER 6

SEVERAL weeks later in late September, Derek and I were at his place watching TV when he told me not to make any plans for the next weekend.

“All my plans involve you.” I laughed. “Haven’t I spent every weekend at your place since we started dating?”

“Yes, but if you ever wanted to do anything else it wouldn’t be a problem. You haven’t hung out with Salem in a while.”

“He’s cool with it; he’s busy with his own women anyway.”

“You’re not calling me your woman, are you?” He playfully punched my shoulder.

“No way, pup. You are all man.” We kissed for a moment. “So what are we doing this weekend?”

“Street Vibrations,” he answered. Street Vibrations is an annual bike show held in Reno. It’s labeled the sixth biggest bike rally in the country and includes all sorts of vendors, a parade, live entertainment, stunt shows, and more.

“I went last year and it was pretty cool,” I said.

“It’ll be even better this year.”

“Two queers around a bunch of rough bikers. We’ll have to be careful.”

“Don’t worry about that, babe. You’d be surprised how many bikers are friends with my parents.”

“Bikers with long hippy hair who wear leather pants are friends with Reno’s white-collar set?”

“Hard to believe, huh?”

DEREK and I walked into the massive crowd full of dangerous-looking bikers mixed with everyday people. We walked side by side, as if we were nothing but two buddies hanging out.

We watched stunt shows and live bands, occasionally even dancing together. At the end of the day we stopped at a Ducati sales vendor that was showing off more than a dozen different bikes.

“This is one of your dad’s dealerships, right?”

“Yeah,” he answered.

After riding Josh’s and Derek’s bikes, I had been thinking about what kind of bike I wanted for myself. I knew I wanted a lightweight, fast bike. Derek’s was sex on wheels, but I wanted speed. As I looked around it was the cherry-red sheen that first caught my attention. The 2010 Ducati Streetfighter.

The bars, starting from just below the handles and down to the tires, were a flashy gold. It also had both mufflers on the right side of the bike instead of one on both sides. I could see the seat was big enough for two people—which was important to me. I wanted to be able to ride with Derek if we chose to. I loved that the bike looked different from other street bikes. It had attitude—just like me. It was also just the slightest bit ostentatious—again, just like me. I could admit I liked being the center of attention.

I slid my fingers along the glossy coating and felt the leather of the seat. It looked like it would be comfortable. I hefted my leg over the bike and straddled it. I sank down into the seat, and the bike hugged me. I immediately fell in love. It was exactly what I wanted—light and powerful. I looked at Derek and saw him smiling at me. I realized that Derek was a lot like the bike—lightweight and more powerful than he appeared.

“Hey, Derek. What’s up?”

“Hey, Scott,” Derek said to a tall, slightly overweight man. He wasn’t wearing the typical salesman clothes, not that he would be at a bike show. He had on jeans, a plain gray T-shirt, and sandals without socks.



“Scott, this is my boyfriend Jack Coleman. Jack, this is Scott Lamont. One of Dad’s best salesmen.”

“Second best, actually,” Scott said, laughing as we shook hands.

“Second best?” I asked.

“Derek here is the best. He always has been.”

“You like it?” Scott asked me.

“Christ, this is a nice bike,” I said.

“Absolutely the best. Top of the line,” Scott said.

“This is the Streetfighter S, which is slightly different from the base Streetfighter,” Scott said. “One main feature of the Streetfighter is the DDA system, which stands for Ducati Data Analyzer. The DDA gathers information concerning throttle opening, gear positions, revs, and speed and lap times. It comes with the Streetfighter S, but is optional on the base Streetfighter.”

“This bugger can just about drive itself.” Derek laughed.

“Where’s the fun in that?” I replied, making Scott laugh.

“The front of the bike has what we call the *evil eye*,” Scott continued. “Two LED lights in the front which can appear to be eyes coming at you at night. Come around here so you can check it out.”

I reluctantly climbed off the bike, and Derek and I walked to the front. Scott turned on the two LED lights. It was dark enough that we could see what he was talking about. The lights looked like two ominous, glowing eyes. I thought it looked like two wolf eyes glaring at me in the darkness.

“That’s cool,” Derek murmured, and I nodded in agreement. I was forced to admit it made the bike look as mean as a street bike can.

“Cannon-style, vertical-stacked mufflers are finished in black brushed steel for the Streetfighter S, both delivering the famous Ducati L-twin synonymous with raw power,” Scott continued with his sales pitch. Which he didn’t really need to do; I was sold. I wanted the machine but knew the price tag would be the determining factor.

“Ducati built the Streetfighter with pure performance in mind, so it uses state-of-the-art suspension as well as lighter forged-aluminum wheels and carbon fiber pieces for the front fender and other parts.

“And the fact that the Streetfighter S features a traction-control system sets it further apart from its sibling. Using information from the wheel-speed sensors, the traction control will first intervene by retarding ignition timing and then, if necessary, cut out fuel supply to the engine with the use of the fuel-injection system, preventing dangerous wheel spin.”

“How fast does it go?” I asked.

“Well.” Scott laughed. “Based on the horsepower alone it could probably go as fast as two hundred miles per hour. The gauge only goes to one seventy-five. But even going that fast would break speed limit laws in the country, so I’m sure you would never go that fast.” He winked at me as he said it.

Now it came time for me to ask the question I knew I didn’t want the answer to.

“What’s the price tag?”

“You interested, Jack? We can get the ball rolling with the paperwork right now. I’m sure we can arrange financing.”

“What does it cost?” I asked again.

“The base model is just under fifteen thousand.”

“And the S model?”

“Eighteen thousand, nine hundred,” Scott answered.

“Christ!” I said with a whistle.

“You want to get the paperwork started?” Scott asked me hopefully.

“Sorry, man. I don’t have anywhere near that much money.”

“I’m sure we can arrange financing.”

“I’m a college student with no credit, good or bad. And even if I did get approved I couldn’t afford the monthly payments. Sorry, man. It’s a beautiful bike, just not meant for me.”

Scott didn't say anything else as Derek and I left. We left the rally and walked to Derek's car. Neither one of us said anything on the drive back to Derek's place.

We climbed into bed and I held him tight.

"You really liked that bike, didn't you, babe?"

"I loved it. But it wasn't meant to be. I can't complain about my life. I have you. What else do I need?"

He snuggled closer to me, and a minute later I was asleep.

I WOKE up in the morning to find Derek in the kitchen, dressed and cooking breakfast.

"Where you going?"

"I have some things to take care of at work today. Might not be done until noon. You want to hang out here or do something else?"

"I'll just hang out here until you get back." I didn't feel like admitting to him that I was still rather depressed about finding my dream bike and having to leave it behind.

I didn't bother getting dressed. I just hung out in my boxers on Derek's suede couch watching stupid daytime talk shows.

Around eleven thirty, Derek called my cell.

"Hey," I answered.

"Get dressed. I'm taking you out to lunch."

"Cool. Someplace fancy?"

"No. I'm thinking Chili's."

"Sounds good." I hung up the phone and ran upstairs to Derek's room. I had been spending so much time at Derek's place that I had a decent amount of clothes in his closet. I threw on a pair of blue jeans and a white T-shirt with a funny saying: "Ask me about my stimulus package." Next to the saying was a cartoon man with a big smile. Cartoon man was pointing downward.

Derek pulled up a few minutes later, and I walked out as he pulled into the garage.

“I want to take my bike,” he said as he stepped out. “Give me a minute while I change out of my work clothes.”

A few minutes later he was back down in an outfit similar to mine. Derek wanted to drive, and I didn’t argue with him. We threw on our helmets, hopped on the bike, and took off. It was about a twenty-minute drive. Sitting behind Derek, I couldn’t help thinking about the Streetfighter and what it would be like to drive it with Derek next to me on his bike or on the seat behind me with his arms wrapped around me.

When we pulled into the Chili’s parking lot I groaned out loud. Sitting in the parking lot was a Ducati Streetfighter. It was even the same color I had looked at the previous night.

We climbed off Derek’s bike, and I walked over to the Ducati. I wanted to touch it, and I really wanted to climb on, but I figured the owner wouldn’t appreciate it. I looked at it for a few minutes before Derek grabbed my hand and we walked into the restaurant.

I had a tendency to eat when I was sad, which was something I had to be careful with. Today I decided to say *fuck it* and enjoy a totally delicious, and unhealthy, meal. I ordered an extra-thick strawberry shake and an appetizer of chili cheese fries. For my main course I ordered the Ultimate Stacked burger. It was two huge burger patties with melted American cheese, mayo, bacon, pickles, lettuce, tomato, and crispy onion strings. Derek ordered the Margarita grilled chicken, a slightly healthier meal. We shared dessert, a decadent brownie sundae. When we finally walked out of the restaurant with our bellies stuffed, the Ducati was still sitting there.

“Christ, I figured it would be gone by the time we got back. This is torture.”

“Why don’t you climb on it, babe?”

“Are you kidding me? If the owner saw me, he would freak out. Probably kick my ass.”

“I have a feeling it’ll be okay.”

I wanted to disagree with Derek, but I also wanted to sit on the beautiful machine, if only for a few minutes. I straddled the bike and sank down into the seat. It felt so right. It felt perfect. I could almost feel the bike speaking to me.

I was about to climb off the bike when Derek dangled a set of keys in front of me.

“What are these?” I said as I grabbed the keys.

“The keys to the bike. To *your* bike.”

“My bike? What are you talking about?”

“The bike is yours, babe.”

“What? How?” I started to get excited when I realized there was only one way the bike could be mine. Someone would have had to buy it for me, and there was only one person who could afford it. Derek.

“I can’t accept it. I can’t let you do that for me.” I started to get off the bike, but Derek stopped me.

“Just take it for a ride. After that we’ll talk.”

“I don’t know.”

“I do know, babe. Take a ride for as long as you want. I’ll go back to my place and see you there when you’re ready.”

He handed me my helmet, and I knew I had to take the machine for a ride. I pulled Derek into a kiss, put on the helmet, and took off.

I drove into the same area where I had ridden Derek’s bike. But now I went farther and drove faster—much faster. This time I didn’t need Derek’s voice in my head to tell me to let go of the fear. This time any and all apprehension disappeared quickly. I drove for more than forty-five minutes before I knew where I needed to be.

I turned the bike around and headed back to Derek’s house. I opened the door and slammed it shut. Derek had been sitting on the couch. He jumped up when I stormed in. He looked afraid that I was upset with him and started to apologize. I stopped him by pulling him into a deep kiss, forcing my tongue into his throat. I was hard as a rock and ground myself against him.

I felt him smile, and he began to push back against me.

“Jack, I—” he started to say.

“Shhh. No words.” I put a finger to his lips.

I raised his arms and peeled his shirt off him. I kissed his neck, alternating between sucking and biting, and then traveled down to his chest. I sucked his left nipple and swabbed it with my tongue before taking it between my teeth and biting down for only a second. I followed the gentle bite by blowing on the tit. He gasped.

My hand went downward and grabbed the erection in his pants. I rubbed his crotch as I licked his right nipple. His hand went to the back of my head, pushing me against his nipple, and I sucked even harder, and then bit more forcefully than I had the first time. I felt his prick throb in his pants when I bit him so I did it again.

I dropped all the way to my knees and buried my face in his crotch. I unzipped his pants and pulled down his pants and underwear in one swift movement. His hard prick hit me in the face. I wrapped my fingers around it and in one quick move sucked the entire thing down my throat.

“Oh, hell.” Derek groaned as I slid up and down his length, coating it with my saliva. I removed his shaft from my mouth long enough to lick two fingers, then started sucking on him again. The hand with the spit-soaked digits traveled underneath Derek’s balls and forced its way past his ass cheeks. The two fingers pressed against his rosebud for only a second before they slipped in. It was maybe a little fast for him, but I wanted him bad and didn’t know how much longer I could wait. I slid my fingers in and out of him as I sucked his prick for a few minutes before I decided I couldn’t wait a second longer.

I removed my fingers from his hole and his shaft from my mouth. I grabbed him and laid him on the floor on his back. He got his legs out of his pants as I stripped myself to nothing. I stroked my aching cock and realized I had forgotten two necessary things for penetration—condoms and lube.

As if he read my mind, Derek said, “On the coffee table. I was hoping you would feel this way when you got back.” I smiled when I saw the items on the coffee table. I wasn’t sure how I had missed them when I first came in.

I opened a condom package and slid the condom down my length. I coated myself with the lube and slid between Derek's legs. I rested my prick on the outside of his hole as I leaned down to kiss him. Our tongues danced, and I pushed my hips in as he pushed out. My cock slid almost all the way in before I stopped, worried that I could hurt him.

"Give all of it to me, babe. Please." He grabbed my hips and pressed hard against the mark. My shaft pulsed for a quick second as energy and lust surged through me. I slid the rest of my length into him and kept it there. I was again amazed at the heat of his tunnel. I didn't know any man could be so tight or that a man could take all of me without even the slightest bit of pain. Our lips and tongues were still connected as I slid myself all the way out and then slammed back in. His body shook and rattled, and a moan escaped from his lips as I took him—rough and hard and fast.

He grabbed his cock and started to stroke, but I pushed his hand away. I grabbed both his hands and held them down as I fucked him like I had never fucked anybody before. We never broke the kiss, our lips as connected as our lower bodies.

I pushed into him again and again and felt the pressure rising in my balls. It felt so good I didn't want it to end. I tried to stem the rising tide for as long as I could. Derek moaned into my mouth, and I felt his seed shoot from his cock and coat our stomachs. I lost it at that moment and slid into him one last time, unloading into the condom.

I rolled off of him, quickly disposing of the condom. It was a few minutes before either one of us could speak again.

"Thanks, babe," he said.

"Why are you thanking me? You bought me a fuckin' Ducati. I don't know if I can keep it."

"Of course, you can," he said as he snuggled against me, laying his head on my chest.

"It's a pretty extravagant gift, pup."

"Let me tell you a secret. Wholesale price is a lot less than retail price."

“Even so, it’s still really expensive.”

“I wanted to do it. You didn’t ask for it.”

“What if we break up down the road? I can’t afford to pay for it,” I said.

“I don’t think we have to worry about a breakup, but if we do we’ll take care of it then.”

“If we break up I don’t want this between us. Can we write up some kind of agreement?”

“Sure, if that’s what you want.”

“It is.” I jumped to my feet.

“What are you doing?”

“I’m gonna write something up.”

“Right now?”

“Sure. Why not?”

I grabbed a scrap piece of paper and started scribbling.

*I, Jack Coleman, agree to return the Ducati Streetfighter to Derek Malone should our personal, romantic, and sexual relationship ever come to an end. Additionally, I agree to repay Derek \$100 for every month I had use of the bike.*

I signed my name at the bottom and had Derek do the same. I ran into Derek’s home office and made a copy on his scanner/printer/copier. I gave him one copy and I kept the other.

Derek laughed as he hugged me.



## CHAPTER 7

“HE BOUGHT you a fucking Ducati?”

“Yeah,” I replied. Salem was more than a little surprised at Derek’s gift to me. We were sitting at Jolt-N-Java. I was sipping my espresso while Salem preferred straight-up coffee, no cream, and no sugar. Derek was going to be meeting us there. We were all going to see a movie. I wanted Salem and Derek to get to know each other a little better. I wanted my boyfriend to like my best friend.

“Hey, babe.” Derek came up behind me and wrapped his arms around me. He kissed me gently on the cheek. “Hi, Salem,” Derek said as he sat down between us.

“Hey, I got a question, Derek. If I let you suck my dick, would you buy me a Ducati?”

“Salem!” I exclaimed. I was horrified and worried Derek would be offended. But when I looked at Derek he was smiling.

“First of all, I don’t think you’d let me suck your dick for any price. You are way too hooked on women to even consider letting a man touch your junk. Second, I don’t play around with guys when I am involved with someone. Third, I didn’t buy the bike for Jack because he lets me suck his dick, or because he sucks mine, or even because he pounds my ass. Not that all those things aren’t great, because they are. I bought him the bike because I care for him.”

I thought I could see Salem blush. Talking about gay sex always unnerved him. But there was a slight smile under that grimace. The smile told me that Derek had earned a modicum of respect from Salem—not something that was easy to do.

By the end of the night, Derek and Salem were laughing and joking around like they had been friends forever. When Derek and I climbed into his bed that night, I pulled him close to me.

“Thanks, pup.”

“Thanks for what?”

“For getting past Salem’s rudeness. He usually rubs people the wrong way. It’s hard to get to know him.”

“I knew what he was doing. I just chose to give as good as I got and he figured out he wasn’t going to push me around.”

“I appreciate it. I do.”

“Show me how much you appreciate it.”

I slid down his naked body and took his hard prick into my mouth. I showed him exactly how much I appreciated everything about him and swallowed all that he gave me.

THE end of October meant two things: Halloween and Nevada Day. Nevada became part of the United States on October 31. Generally the state celebrates Nevada Day on the last Friday of the month, so it doesn’t coincide with Halloween. This year Nevada Day would be celebrated on October 29 and Halloween would happen on a Sunday night.

Halloween had always been one of my favorite holidays. It’s a chance to be whoever or whatever you want. Sometimes it’s the chance for the real you to come out, to be the person you hide from others.

We didn’t have school on Nevada Day, so Derek, Josh, Salem, and I all decided to go to Carson City to check out the parade and other events. There were music and art shows and a chili cook-off. Derek and I rode our bikes to Carson City and met Josh and Salem there. We checked out some of the booths before we found a good spot for the parade.

“Hey, Derek,” Josh said, as we were waiting for the parade to start. “Remember the time we watched the parade here when we were

sixteen? Our parents let us wander by ourselves. Instead of watching the parade we slipped into an alley and fucked like bunnies.”

Josh and Derek had slept together! I was shocked. I knew they had been friends for a long time but didn’t know any of the details. Derek had always seemed reluctant to talk about it. But I figured if it had been something serious, Derek would have told me.

I looked at Derek. He was glaring angrily at Josh.

“What?” Josh asked. He looked at me. My mouth must have been wide open, because he seemed to realize he had just spilled a huge can of beans.

“You didn’t tell him?” Josh asked Derek.

“Not yet,” he replied.

“Why?”

Salem was being uncharacteristically silent as he watched the reactions of the rest of us.

“Yeah, Derek. Why not?” I asked. “Why didn’t you tell me you and Josh had fucked?”

“I didn’t think it was that important. I was going to mention it.”

“Didn’t think it was important?” I asked loudly. “You used to fuck one of my good friends, and you didn’t think it was important?”

“It doesn’t change anything, babe.” Derek reached out to me, but I swatted his hand away. He looked hurt physically and emotionally by my action, but I couldn’t seem to stop myself.

“Dude,” Josh said. “It’s not like you thought Derek was a virgin when you guys hooked up. You sure as hell weren’t a virgin. I’m sure you didn’t tell Derek about everyone you slept with.”

“Maybe not everybody, but I sure as hell would’ve told him if I had fucked one of his best friends.”

“So I didn’t tell you one little thing. So what?”

“Yeah,” Josh spoke up. “Derek and I were involved in our teens. It was passionate for the years we were together, but it was never love.”

“Josh, shut up!” Derek ordered with that deep, commanding voice I didn’t hear very often. Josh started to talk again, but a look from Derek kept his lips closed.

“Years?” I said. “You guys were together for years? Not just casual sex? Holy shit. I gotta get out of here.”

“Wait, babe. Please,” Derek said as he grabbed my arm. I didn’t pull away from him this time. “Please, we can go. Let’s talk about this. We can work this out.”

“I need to be alone,” I replied.

“Fine, but at least tell me you’ll come to my place when you’re done being alone.”

“I don’t think so. I’ll call you when I’m ready.”

I pulled away from Derek and walked away. I heard both Josh and Derek call out to me.

“Let him go. He’ll come around,” Salem said.

I got on my bike and drove and drove and drove. I tried to make sense of the feelings I was experiencing. The anger, the jealousy, the fear—none of it made any sense at all. But that didn’t mean I could get rid of it.

I didn’t know how long I drove or even how I ended up on the doorstep of Salem’s apartment. He wasn’t there. I was sure he was still enjoying the sights of Nevada Day. I fell asleep sitting against his door and woke up with tears dripping down my cheeks.

Salem showed up a few minutes after I woke.

“Hey, Jack. I figured you might end up here.”

He put out his hand and helped me stand. He unlocked the door, and we stepped into his studio apartment. It was sparsely furnished. His hide-a-bed couch was still in the bed position with rumpled sheets. Dirty clothes lay on the floor in several spots. Salem had never been the cleanliest person. I lay down on his bed, trying not to think about who might have been there with Salem recently.

“So what’s on your mind, bud?” Salem handed me a beer and sat next to me on the bed. He put his hand on my knee—a purely platonic gesture.

“I really like Derek, Salem. A lot.”

“And?”

“He slept with Josh. My roommate and, next to you, my best friend.”

“And?”

“I hate it when you do that, Salem.”

“I know. That’s why I do it.”

“Shithead.”

“Yeah, I know.”

“You want to talk about it, Jack?”

“No,” I answered.

“Okay. Let’s watch something.” He climbed onto the bed and sat against the wall, grabbed the remote, and flipped on the TV. He flipped through the channels until he found ESPN, and stopped there. I sat next to him and watched the show in silence as we both sipped our beer.

Salem reached over and patted my leg again. “It’ll be okay, bud.”

I fell asleep there an hour or so later and slept the entire night with Salem at my side—the first time in a long time I’d slept with a man in a nonsexual way.

I WOKE up early Saturday morning. Salem was snoring loudly. I had forgotten that particular habit of my friend. I crawled out of his bed and went to the small bathroom. I relieved myself, turned on the shower, stripped, and stepped in.

The hot water felt good but didn’t last long; the old building had a shitty water heater. I climbed out quickly and threw on my clothes.

I didn’t know where to go or what to do. But I decided to head to my dorm room to at least get some clean clothes. I hoped I wouldn’t

run into Josh, but he was there in the room and stood up the minute I opened the door. He looked like he hadn't slept all night.

"Jack, I am so sorry."

"Sorry for what, Josh? For telling me or for not telling me sooner?"

"I didn't know Derek hadn't told you. If I had known, I would've told him to tell you. I don't like secrets."

"I just don't know how to take this, Josh. I really don't know how I should feel. But right now I feel angry. Angry and hurt."

"That's understandable. But is it enough to end what you and Derek have? Isn't your relationship something special? It's more than casual fucking, right?"

"Yeah, it is something special, and it's more than just sex. But I don't know if I can get over this."

"What bothers you the most? The fact that Derek and I had a relationship or that he didn't tell you?"

I had to think about that question for a while.

"It's a little of both. But it does bother me that Derek was able to keep a secret like that from me. What if there are other secrets?"

Josh was silent for a moment.

"I can't tell you if Derek has any other secrets or not. But I know this much: If he is keeping anything from you, it'll all make sense at some point. You can trust him. You can trust him with your life."

"I don't know what to do, Josh."

"Talk to Derek. At least let him explain things. Listen to him about our relationship. Then make a decision."

"I'll consider it," I replied. Then Josh did something very unexpected. He pulled me into a hug. I found myself hugging him back as all the anger I had with him left me. The anger at Derek was still there, however.

"We good?" Josh asked.

"Yeah, man. We're good."

“Excellent. So when are you gonna talk to Derek?”

“Later today. I need to be alone. Maybe do some studying.”

“No problem. I got things to do. The room is yours.”

Josh took off, and I grabbed a biology textbook and tried to study for an upcoming test, but my brain couldn’t focus. I kept thinking about Derek. I was picturing him with Josh. I knew Josh well enough to know that he didn’t have vanilla-type sex. His sex is hard, sometimes rough, and always passionate. I wondered if he was a better lover than me, if Derek enjoyed getting fucked by him more than he did getting fucked by me.

Around noon, I finally turned on my cell. Derek had called fifty times, leaving only one message: “I’m sorry.”

The phone rang again a minute later. It was Derek. I debated whether or not to answer it. I decided just as it was about to go to voice mail.

“Hello,” I said softly.

“Jack. Oh thank God. You’re okay?”

“I’m fine. Physically anyway. I spent the night at Salem’s.”

“I figured. I wanted to see you so badly. Can I explain everything to you? Please?”

“Yes, but not right now. I’ll be by your place around six tonight, okay?”

“I can’t see you any sooner than that?”

“No. Six tonight.” I didn’t give him time to reply. Right then I could almost feel Derek’s emotions. I could see Derek at his place. He was sitting on the floor with his face in his hands. He wasn’t crying, but he was close. I was close to tears myself.

I ENDED up wanting to see Derek earlier than six, but I made myself wait. I pulled up in front of his house at exactly six. I knocked on the door, and he answered like he had been standing there waiting for me.

“Come in.”

I didn’t say anything as I stepped in. Derek went to the couch, but I walked to the kitchen and sat down at the table. Derek followed me and took a seat opposite me.

“I want to hear about your relationship with Josh.”

“All of it?”

“Yes. All of it.”

“Josh and I grew up together. We were always friends. Our birthdays are just a few months apart. Our parents were good friends, so that meant we spent a lot of time together.”

“How did the friendship turn into a sexual relationship?”

“Josh and I went through puberty about the same time. But while he went for girls, I was only attracted to guys. I was shy and afraid to approach anyone. But at a party I met an older kid named Heath. He was a total horndog, bisexual, and very good looking. He hit on me and I was more than happy to give in. Heath was an awesome teacher.

“I told Josh I was gay, and to my surprise he was interested in trying things out. We traded blow jobs, and I introduced him to Heath. Heath was more than happy to introduce Josh to the joys of anal sex. Heath, Josh, and I played together in twosomes and threesomes.”

“So when did Josh and you become an item? And where does Elias fit into this?”

“I was sixteen when Elias and I started sleeping together. Josh helped me out when Elias got all freaky and possessive. Josh had been sleeping with girls more than guys, but by then he was getting tired of the games the girls were playing. I was tired of the quickies and wanted a serious relationship. It was Josh’s idea for the two of us to be monogamous.”

“Josh wanted the commitment?” I was stunned.

“Yes. Strange, I know. I had my doubts back then. I told him we had to be one hundred percent with each other. No going behind each other’s backs for a fuck. If we ever wanted the relationship to end we would say so.”



“And it worked?”

“Josh had an ass to fuck whenever he wanted. We both wanted sex all the time and now we didn’t have to look for it or play games to get it. So, yes, it did work out. For a long time. Longer than I expected, that’s for sure.”

“How long did it last?”

“A little more than three years.”

“What was the relationship like?” I was afraid of what the answer would be.

“It was hot and passionate,” Derek admitted. “We had sex all the time, and we never got tired of it.”

“Did you love him?”

“I thought I did. We said the words all the time. But it wasn’t love. It was lust and friendship. But not true love.”

I didn’t know if his answer made me feel better or not. “How did it end?”

“Not long after we had both turned nineteen, I decided to make a couple changes. The first was to tell Josh I was ending the relationship.”

“You ended it?”

“Yes. I knew Josh was beginning to look around. Women were easier to get, and so were the men. He wanted to have fun, so I ended it. He pretended to be sad, but I knew he wasn’t. I knew because I wasn’t upset at all. I also knew if I ever wanted to sleep with Josh again, I could.”

I laughed because I knew Derek was right. Josh was always up for a suck or fuck.

“What other change did you make?”

“I told my parents I was gay. Completely and totally gay with absolutely no interest in women at all.”

“What did your parents do?”

“My mom burst into tears. Like I said, my dad had figured it out. But it all worked out.”

Even with the information I had, I didn’t know what it meant regarding our relationship. Derek was shook up from having talked about that incident in his life. I reached over and touched his right hand. His left hand covered mine. “Thank you for telling me,” I murmured.

“Where do we stand? I want to be with you. I couldn’t sleep last night.”

“I need a little more time, pup. Just a little more time to get my head in order.”

“You called me pup. That’s a good sign.”

“I need to go.” I stood and walked to the door.

“When can I call you?”

“You can call me whenever you want. But don’t ask me about my decision. I’ll tell you when I decide.”

“Fair enough.”

I opened the door, but Derek pulled me into a hug and kissed me on the cheek. I kissed the top of his head.

“Later,” I said.

“Bye.”

I hopped on my bike and sped off.

I drove for a while before I returned to the campus. I decided to walk around Manzanita Lake and ran into Avery.

“What’s wrong, Jack?” I shrugged my shoulders. “I can tell something is bothering you.”

He took my arm and led me to a park bench. We sat down, and I buried my face in my hands.

“I don’t know what to do, Avery. I don’t know if I’m making the biggest mistake of my life.”

“Tell me what happened.”

“I really care about Derek, but I just learned he and Josh were involved.”

“Recently involved?”

I shook my head. “Years ago.”

“And did you think Derek hadn’t slept with other men?”

“No,” I replied. “I knew. It’s not just the fact that he slept with Josh; it’s the fact that he didn’t tell me.”

“Did you two agree to full disclosure?”

“You mean tell each other about guys we’d slept with?” Avery nodded. “No. We didn’t do that.”

“So why should he have told you about Josh?”

“Because Josh is my roommate and a good friend,” I said.

“I understand how you feel, Jack,” he said as he put his arm on my shoulder. “It’s a big deal that he kept something from you. But is it a big enough deal that you’re willing to lose Derek? That’s what you have to figure out. I’m sure you will. After all, you’re a smart young man.” He stood up and walked off. I sat there for a while longer.

IT WAS late when Josh got back to the room. I was already half asleep.

“How’s it going?”

“Good,” I mumbled.

“Did you talk to Derek?” I nodded. “What happened?”

“He told me about your relationship and how he ended it.”

“He told you about that? He never tells anyone. He hates talking about it.”

“Really?”

“Yeah. So are you guys cool, or what?”

“I haven’t decided yet. Still need a little more time.”

“Don’t wait too long, Jack. You don’t want to lose Derek because of your stupid pride.”

## CHAPTER 8

I WOKE up around eight Sunday morning. Josh was up and making noise.

“Hey, Jack!” he called out. “We got big plans for tonight.”

“We do?”

“Yeah, man. Halloween, remember?”

“I don’t have a costume, Josh.”

“I’ll get you one. I have an idea. We are going to party tonight!”

“We do have class tomorrow, remember?”

“Yeah, I remember. But it’s Halloween. We have to party.”

“We’ll see how I feel tonight.”

“I don’t care how you feel. We are partying.”

I laughed and stopped arguing. I knew it wouldn’t do any good. Josh would drag me to the party no matter what.

AT THREE that afternoon, Josh showed up with a zipped-up garment bag.

“What’s that?” I asked.

“Your costume,” Josh said with a broad smile.

“What is it?” I had no idea what Josh would pick out for me. I could imagine anything from a French maid’s outfit to a leather S & M getup.

When he opened the bag and pulled it out, I couldn't tell what it was. I saw what looked like jeans and a T-shirt, and a mask with teeth and a long snout.

"What the hell is it?" I asked again.

"A werewolf," he answered. "Try it on."

I stripped down to my boxers and slid the costume on. I stepped to the full-length mirror and was amazed at what I saw. I looked as close to a half-man/half-wolf as possible without the special effects of the big screen. The pants were jeans that were made to look torn and bloody. There was also a hole in the butt of the pants for a tail. The shirt was gray and long sleeved and also made to look torn and bloody. The werewolf look finalized when I slid on gloves to change my hands into claws and put the mask over my head. The fur looked and felt real. The snout and fangs, the paws, the tail—they all looked real.

"Pretty nice, huh?" Josh asked.

"Yeah. Where'd you get it?"

"My mom made it several years ago. But we never found anyone that fit it so it's been hanging in a closet since then."

"It fits me perfectly," I said.

"Yeah, like it was made for you."

I couldn't argue with him.

I took off the costume and slipped on a pair of shorts. I walked to the shower and cleaned up, getting ready for the Halloween bash. The party was in the hills outside Reno, in a private spot where the cops didn't usually bother us.

I rode the Ducati to the site, wearing the pants and shirt and carrying the rest of the costume in a backpack. Once there, I slid the remaining items on, got myself a beer, and started making the rounds. Almost everybody there was wearing a costume. Some I recognized; others I didn't.

Josh was flirting with guys *and* girls. I saw him disappear a couple times into the woods and come out sweaty and smiling. Every time I took a drink of beer, I had to take the mask halfway up. The beer was helping to loosen me up, and I realized I was horny.

I started thinking about my relationship with Derek. Was this a minor bump in the road or a relationship-ending situation? I didn't know for sure. I'd had several beers at that point and was feeling a little lightheaded. I was seeing people hooking up all over and started to wonder if a quick hookup would clear my mind. Certainly not the most mature decision, but at the time I wasn't exactly thinking clearly.

I spotted a guy named Rudy, who I had played with several times. The guy could suck a golf ball through a straw. I knew if I approached him for some fun, he'd say yes. I was a split second from approaching Rudy when it dawned on me what hooking up with him would mean. It would mean trading a serious, committed relationship with an attractive and amazing man for a ten-minute blow job in the bushes. It would mean trading happiness for misery. And it hit me that I was being a major shithead for being so mad at Derek for something so... minor.

I got to my bike as quickly as I could and jumped on. I took my mask off, stuffed it in the backpack, pulled the pack on, put on the helmet, and took off.

When I got to Derek's place, there were swarms of kids everywhere. I put the wolf mask on and mixed in with a group going to Derek's door. When he opened the door I could see the sadness in his eyes, but he smiled when everybody said "Trick or treat!"

He handed candy to every child, one by one. I was the last one to the door. He looked me over.

"Kind of big to be trick-or-treating, aren't you?"

I shook my head. He smiled and tried to hand me some candy. I shook my head again and waved my hands, indicating that wasn't what I wanted.

"You don't want candy?" I shook my head again.

"Okay. What do you want?"

I pointed at him.

"Me? You want me?"

I nodded. He gave me a quizzical look. I pulled off the wolf mask, and he smiled when he saw my face.

"Jack!"

“I’m sorry, pup. I was being an ass. Can you forgive me?”

“Of course I can. Can you forgive me?”

“There’s nothing to forgive.” I pulled him into a kiss. “That’s an amazing treat.” I laughed.

“I have a few tricks I can show you,” he replied.

“I bet you do.” I pushed Derek inside as we kissed. I shut and locked the door.

As I started to take off his clothes, his doorbell rang.

“Don’t answer it,” I said.

“I have to, babe. My light’s on.”

I opened the door, grabbed the candy bowl, and handed out every last item to the kids there. The kids squealed in delight as they walked off.

“Look, you’re all out of candy. What a shame.” I flipped off the light. “Now show me some of those tricks you know.”

## CHAPTER 9

A FEW weeks after Derek and I had reconciled, I stepped into my room to Josh waving a piece of paper in my face. “What’s this?” He handed me the paper. I only had to look at the letterhead, which read *Washoe County District Health Department*, to know what it was.

“It’s my test results.”

“I can see that, Coleman.” Using my last name instead of my first name meant he was really pissed off.

“What’s the problem?” I asked.

“The problem is that the results are negative.”

“That’s a problem?” I laughed. “I thought that was a good thing.”

“That’s not what I mean. This test is more than a month old.”

“So what?” I really didn’t understand what he was so upset about.

“You’re still using condoms.”

“What the hell are you talking about, Josh?”

“You’re still using condoms when you fuck Derek. You know he’s negative and you know you’re okay, so why are you still using protection?”

“My sex life isn’t any of your fucking business, Josh. Why the hell are you so goddamn concerned about whether or not I use condoms when I fuck *my* boyfriend?”

He seemed startled at my burst of anger and took a step back.

“I just don’t understand.” His voice was much quieter than it had been. I started to calm down as well.



“Understand what?”

“Being able to have sex with someone and not use protection is special,” Josh said. “It takes it beyond sex to making love. To have that complete and total trust is incredible. I know what you and Derek have is special. And going bareback is special. I just don’t understand why you don’t want to take that step. Unless it’s Derek you don’t trust.”

I snapped my head around to look at him. “Of course I trust Derek. I trust him with my life.”

“Then what is it that’s stopping you?”

“It’s me I don’t trust,” I answered. “I slept around so much. I was drunk a lot of the time. I don’t remember everything I did, or who I did it with.”

“But the test results say you’re clean.”

“Yeah, but what if something pops up down the road? What if I am infected with something that just couldn’t be detected, and I end up infecting Derek?”

Josh sat down next to me on my bed and put his arm around my shoulder.

“You worry too much, Jack. These tests are almost one hundred percent accurate.”

“See, you just said it yourself: *almost* one hundred percent. I don’t want to take a chance with that *almost*.”

“Seriously, can’t you just accept the fact that you’re both okay?”

“I’m not ready. Not yet, anyway. I’ll get there.”

“I hope it’s soon.”

DESPITE invites from both sets of parents for Thanksgiving, Derek and I decided to spend our first Turkey Day at home—together. Derek bought a medium-sized turkey and my mother gave me recipes for stuffing and sweet potatoes.

That morning, we were neck deep in getting everything made when Salem called.

“What’s up, Salem? You on the way home?”

“My car’s dead. I think it’s the starter. Guess my Thanksgiving plans are fucked,” he said.

I covered the mouthpiece of the phone. “Salem’s car won’t start.”

“Invite him over,” Derek said without hesitation. I smiled and blew him a kiss.

“You’re joining us,” I said.

“No. I can’t intrude on your special day.”

“Don’t argue with me. I’ll be there in an hour or so to pick you up.”

Salem sighed. “Okay. I’ll run down to the store and get chips and dip.”

“Tell him to grab some beer,” Derek said.

“I heard him,” Salem said, laughing. “See you in an hour.”

We got back to the food prep. Twenty minutes later Derek’s cell rang.

“It’s Josh,” he said when he eyed the caller ID.

“Hey,” he answered. A minute later he covered the mouthpiece. “Josh was at his parents’ for dinner, but he got in a huge fight with a couple of his brothers, and he doesn’t want to go back.”

“Invite him,” I said. “Have him pick up Salem.”

“Pick up Salem in half an hour, and get your asses over here. Yeah, I’m sure.”

Derek and I looked at each other and laughed.

Salem and Josh arrived and made halfhearted offers to help with the meal. They quickly retreated to the living room and turned on the game.

Derek and I joined the other guys on and off as we worked on the meal.

“I need butter. I’m going to the convenience store,” Derek said.

Twenty minutes later, Derek was back—with a guest.

“Look who I found buying turkey sandwich meat and bread at the store,” Derek said.

I looked, and Avery Fowler walked in behind him.

“Hey, Avery.” I stood and stuck out my hand to him. He ignored the hand and pulled me into a quick hug.

“Do you know everyone here?” I asked Avery.

“Yes, I’ve known both Josh and Derek since they were kids. And Mr. Evans was in a literature class of mine a few years back, though I do believe he spent most of the time either sleeping or hitting on a cute brunette.” Salem looked at Avery and ducked his head.

“Sorry about that, Professor,” Salem mumbled.

“Please, call me Avery. And don’t be sorry. If I was the slightest bit heterosexual I would’ve hit on her too.”

Salem looked at Avery. “Yeah, I’m gay,” Avery said. “I don’t suppose you have a problem with that?”

“If I had a problem with gays would I be hanging out with this bunch?” Salem chuckled.

Avery sat down between Josh and Salem and watched the game.

An hour later, Derek announced that everything was done. We all stood in line and filled our plates and sat down.

The turkey was juicy, the sweet potatoes sweet, and the stuffing delicious. We both got accolades from our guests.

We were all laughing and smiling as we finished up the meal.

“Wait a minute,” Salem said. “I just realized I am the only one at this table who doesn’t like to smoke pole. Is this a setup for a straight-bait video or something?”

“Sorry, Mr. Evans,” Avery said, laughing. “I don’t go for younger men.”

“And I don’t want to do my boyfriend’s best friend,” Derek said.

“And I don’t want to do my best friend,” I said, laughing. “That leaves Josh.”

“I’m starting to feel neglected,” Salem said. “Josh, what’s your excuse going to be?”

“No excuse,” Josh said straight-faced. “I’ll do ya. Let’s go.”

“Fuck you.” Salem chuckled.

“That’s the plan,” Josh said.

Salem picked up a glob of mashed potatoes and threw it at Josh. It hit him right in the face. Without hesitating Josh grabbed a spoon of stuffing and threw it at Salem. Seconds later, we were all throwing food.

## CHAPTER 10

THE night after Thanksgiving was some of the best sleep I ever had. The second night was a different story.

“Derek!” I screamed as I sat straight up in bed. Josh was at my bedside moments later.

“Jack! What’s wrong?”

I couldn’t figure out where I was. I was still in that halfway spot between dreamland and real life. Josh grabbed my shoulders and shook me.

“Were you dreaming?”

“Yeah,” I finally managed to utter.

“Tell me about it,” Josh said. I wondered why Josh was so curious about my dream. It wasn’t the first time I had had a bad dream, but it was the first time he had ever been so adamant about me telling him about it.

“I could see Derek. And there was someone else there, but I couldn’t see who.”

“Do you think it was a friend? Did you sense any emotions?” Again I wondered about the odd questions.

“I don’t think it was a friend. I felt anger... and fear.”

“Anything else?”

“There was more, but I can’t quite see anything else.”

Josh grabbed his cell and dialed a number. He hung up a minute later and dialed another number. “He’s not answering his cell, or his home.”

“I need to see him, Josh. I need to make sure he’s okay. The dream was so vivid. It didn’t feel like a dream.”

“Grab your helmet. We’ll take the bikes.”

I pulled on some clothes, grabbed my helmet, and followed Josh down the stairs. Josh’s bike was closer than mine, so he got a head start.

I had just pulled out of the UNR parking lot when everything went blank for a moment. Time froze, and when I could see again I saw Derek and the same mysterious and dangerous man I had seen before. But now I could see where they were. They were outside on green grass with trees on one side of them and a big open area on the other. I recognized the area because Derek and I had been there recently—San Rafael Park. I knew Derek was in trouble. I don’t know how I knew, but I did.

I turned my bike around and headed to the park. Thankfully the drive from UNR to the park was a short one—less than ten minutes. I was able to run several red lights because of the little traffic at that time of night. I knew where to go, knew exactly where they were. I rode the bike up onto the grass and drove to a secluded area of the park where there were no lights.

The moon was only a sliver, and there were no stars visible, but somehow I could still see almost perfectly. My instincts guided me to where I needed to go, and up ahead I could see two people. One lay on the ground, unmoving, and the other stood over him in a hunched position. I could have sworn the standing person looked like he had claws for hands, but I knew I had to be imagining things.

One thing I knew for sure was that the man who lay on the ground was Derek, and that he was in danger. I didn’t slow down as I approached the man standing over him. In fact, I sped up. He turned to face me. It was Elias! His eyes seemed to glow, and his face seemed twisted into the face of a monster. I wondered if the Ducati’s *evil eye* headlight freaked him out as much as his glowing eyes freaked me out.

Seconds before I would have plowed into Elias, I had an intuition he was going to dodge left. I turned left as he tried to avoid the collision, and I ran into, and over, him.

I crashed after I hit him, but I quickly got to my feet. Elias stood up as well. He was dazed but ready to fight. He leapt at me, but I jumped to the side. Every move he made toward me, I seemed to sense and managed to avoid. I knew I couldn't evade him forever, but I wasn't sure if I could take him on in hand-to-hand combat. In a normal situation I would have been able to take Elias, but this wasn't a normal situation. I could tell he was out of his mind and therefore unpredictable.

He leapt at me once more, and I somersaulted underneath him. I landed on my haunches with my eyes on Elias and my hands on the ground. Our eyes met, and I knew this was a situation where I could very likely lose my life. I knew he wanted to kill me. And if I were dead he would kill Derek next. I didn't give a shit about my own life, but I wasn't about to risk Derek's.

The adrenaline was pumping through my veins at an incredible rate. I was filled with strength—both physically and emotionally—that I had never known before. I got to my feet, and a growl escaped from my mouth.

Elias rushed me, but I didn't move even an inch. I stood my ground and never broke eye contact with him. In that moment, I could feel his emotions, hate and anger, and I could also see exactly what he was going to do. He leapt into the air, as I had known he would, and I reached up into the air with both hands. One hand wrapped around his throat and the other wrapped around his right leg. With my hands tightly on him, I slammed him to the ground, picked him up, and slammed him down again.

Elias was conscious; though I didn't know how he could be after the pounding I had given him. He was still growling and grabbing at my hands, scratching at me with ferocious strength.

My grasp was still firm despite his struggling, so I picked him and lifted him into the air again. I turned toward the trees and threw Elias as hard as I could at one of the largest ones. Elias hit the target with so much force that he was finally knocked unconscious. He slumped to the ground and didn't move.

I ran to Derek and knelt by him, cradling his head in my arms. He was shirtless, wearing only tennis shoes and a pair of athletic shorts. I ran my hand across his chest.

“Oh, please, pup. You can’t be dead. Please, Derek, wake up. I love you. Christ, I love you so much.”

Derek coughed and sputtered, and his eyes opened slightly.

“Gonna take more than this to kill me, babe.” He attempted a smile and I hugged him close. “Did I hear right?” he asked.

“What?”

“You said you loved me. Did you mean it or was it some deathbed confession?”

“Of course I meant it, pup.”

“Tell me again.”

“I love you, Derek Malone.”

“I love you too, Jack Coleman.”

“Isn’t that sweet?” The voice came from behind us, but I recognized it so I wasn’t worried.

“Hey, Josh,” I said. “How’d you know to come here?”

“Maybe the same way you did,” he replied. I couldn’t explain how I knew where to go, so I didn’t ask Josh anything else.

“Watch out for Elias,” I said.

“Elias did this?” Josh asked.

“I threw him over in the trees.”

“He’s gone now,” Josh said.

“Shit. He could come back any second.”

“I think you scared him off, Jack. Maybe for good this time.”

“Call the cops, Josh,” I said.

“No,” Derek said.

“You can’t seriously want to let Elias go,” I said.

“I don’t want to deal with him at all. His father would just help him get out of the charges, anyway. Please, babe. Just let it go.”



“Okay, pup. For you.”

I helped Derek get to his feet. He was still shaky. I saw two burn marks on the side of his torso and ran my fingers across them.

“He got me with a taser,” Derek said as he looked at both Josh and me.

“Knocked you out before you could fight back,” Josh said.

“Yeah,” Derek replied. “I couldn’t sleep, so I decided to come here and jog. I was just about to start running when I felt a sharp pain in my side. I grabbed the spot and saw the taser wires. I couldn’t control my body and fell down. I was awake, but I couldn’t move. I saw Elias standing over me with a knife. He kicked my face, and just as I passed out I heard a motorcycle.” He turned to me and gave me his million-dollar smile.

“I knew you were going to save me, babe.”

MUCH to my surprise, Elias did indeed stay out of our lives. For a while, anyway.

A week after the incident with Elias, Derek and I had just finished dinner and were snuggling together. It was getting late, and I knew I should head back to my room.

“I wish we could stay like this forever. I wish I could say goodnight instead of goodbye.”

“I’d love that. So why don’t we? Move in with me. You’re here most of the time anyway. You have the bike to get to school.”

“What about Josh?”

“What about him?” Derek laughed. “You don’t think he’d be happy for us that we took this step? Or that he’d have the room to himself for... entertaining people?”

“He does like to entertain people a lot.” I chuckled.

“So what do you say?”

“Let’s do it!”

Derek straddled my lap and pressed his lips to mine. His tongue pressed past my lips, and I sucked it in. He was wearing only a thin pair of cotton pajama pants; my hand snaked down the back side and slipped between his soft cheeks. My index finger found its target and pressed against the soft entrance. It slipped inside, and I slid it in until I found his gland.

“Oh, babe,” Derek whispered. “That feels wonderful. But damn, I want your cock.”

“And you’re gonna get it, pup.” We kissed again as I finger-fucked him, first gently with one finger, then rougher with two, and then even rougher with three.

“If you keep doing that I’ll shoot before we get to the main event,” he cooed.

I slid my fingers out of his ass, and we both stood. We quickly stripped our clothes off and stood there naked. I held him at an arm’s distance, so I could gaze at his gorgeous, nude body.

“Christ, pup, you are amazing. Breathtaking.”

He ran one hand across my chest and down to my cock. The other hand traveled to my birthmark and pressed against it.

“You’re the beautiful one. I dreamt of you for so long, I never thought you would make me feel so whole, so complete.”

I pulled him against me and into another warm kiss. Our cocks rubbed as we ground our bodies together.

“Christ, I can’t wait any longer to fuck you.”

Derek pushed against me, so I sat back down on the couch.

“Don’t move. I’ll go get the condoms and lube.”

“Just the lube,” I said.

“What?” He turned to face me.

“Just the lube. We don’t need the condoms. Not anymore.”

“You sure?”

I gave him a look that said I was 100 percent sure. Derek smiled and ran up the stairs. He was back down very quickly with the lube.

He straddled my lap and bit my neck, sending shivers throughout my whole body. Between him biting my neck and pressing against my birthmark, my entire body was alive with sensations. My dick rubbed against the outside of his ass as he wiggled his hips up and down. I grabbed the lube and squeezed some onto my fingers. The fingers went to his ass, and I slid two fingers in and rubbed his prostate again.

“Enough with the foreplay,” he murmured in my ear. “Give it to me.”

I coated my shaft and pressed against his rim. He lifted his hips so the head could slip in and then forced himself down until all of my length was buried deep in him.

I never imagined that bareback sex could be so much better than sex with a condom. But it was a thousand times different. My prick was alive with sensations. Every inch surged with intense pleasure as Derek, the man I loved, pressed against me, taking my cock as if it were a natural part of his body. This was the completeness I enjoyed so much. The connection of our bodies as an act of love, without even that thin layer of latex between us, was more enjoyable, more thrilling, than anything I could have ever believed possible.

“Christ, you feel so good.”

“Your cock absolutely fills me. I love it when you fuck me. I’ve been thinking about you barebacking me for so long. It’s even better than in my fantasies.”

I reached around and spread his cheeks apart and pistoned my hips as best I could.

“Oh... hell... yeah,” Derek grunted. Getting a good, deep stroke into his ass was hard in that position. I wanted—needed—a different position, but I didn’t want to take my shaft out of him.

“Hold on tight.” I stood up with a firm grip on his ass. He wrapped his legs around my waist and his hands around my neck. When I stood, gravity sank him down deeper onto me. I pushed up on his ass and let him drop back down on my cock. I had never done a standing fuck before, though I had seen it done in porn movies. I knew it wasn’t a position I could keep up for long, but I was going to enjoy it for as long as I could.

With his hands clasped around my neck, Derek leaned backward, which pushed his hips harder against mine.

“Christ,” I murmured. He groaned in agreement.

I slowly got to my knees with my cock still firmly implanted in Derek’s tunnel. I laid him down gently until he was on his back and hovered over him. I fucked him slowly at first, just enjoying the slow act of making love. I realized it was the first time I had ever really made love in my life. I had never loved any of the other men I had slept with. And this step, not using a condom, made me feel even closer to Derek than I had before.

As good as making love—really making love—felt, I wondered if life could get any better. At that moment, life felt about as perfect as I thought it could. I knew it was a defining moment in my life, and I hoped that I, that we, were going to experience even greater thrills together.

Looking into his eyes, I saw the love he felt for me. I didn’t get it, didn’t understand what he saw in me, but I wasn’t going to question it. I was extremely lucky to have Derek in my life, and I hoped he would be in it forever.

Derek started flexing his sphincter. The contractions around my already sensitive prick sent me over the edge.

“Christ, I’m gonna come.”

“Do it, babe. Come inside of me.”

I pistoned in and out, faster and faster, until at last I was beyond all control. Buried as deep as I could be, I felt the seed shoot out of me. Blast after blast of my hot come coated Derek’s insides.

“Oh, babe. That’s... fucking... amazing!” Derek grabbed hold of his cock, and with just two strokes he shot three heavy loads onto his stomach.

For the first time ever, I blacked out after an orgasm. I was out for only a few seconds, and when I came to I was still on top of Derek, my softening cock slowly sliding out of his hole. I kissed him gently.

“Jack, babe, that was—”

“Mind-blowing.” I finished his thought.

“You read my mind.” Derek laughed.

I rolled off of him and sat up.

“We need to shower. Then I want to do that again.”

Derek laughed as he hopped to his feet.

“You read my mind again, babe.”

He pushed me down on the couch. “Race you to the shower.” He took off, laughing as he went. I got to my feet and chased after him. I caught up to him on the stairs, picked him up from behind, and threw him over my shoulder. I carried him into the bathroom and set him down. He grabbed my bicep and rubbed it.

“Damn, babe. You’re getting muscular.” He was right. I had been getting stronger than I had ever been in my life. I wasn’t working out any more than I ever had, unless you counted sex as working out.

While standing in the shower, it suddenly felt like all my strength left me. I had gone from feeling as strong as I’d ever felt in my life to as weak as a baby. Derek washed me, and I wanted to wash him, but I could barely keep my eyes open.

“I need to go to bed,” I whispered. It took effort to even talk.

“I know. Don’t worry. It’ll be all right. I’ll take care of you.” I didn’t understand what he meant but was too tired to ask.

He helped me get out of the shower and dried me off. I leaned on him as we walked to the bed. He laid me down and kissed me on the cheek. Before I drifted off I heard him dial his cell.

“Josh,” he said. “It’s time.”

## CHAPTER 11

I WOKE up screaming. I was in incredible amounts of pain. It was more pain than I had ever felt. It felt like someone was trying to pull my arms and legs off. My head felt like someone was hammering a metal stake right into my brain. My heart was beating so fast I was sure it was going to explode.

I knew I wasn't in bed because I could feel grass beneath my naked body. I wondered where I was and why I was naked. I heard sounds around me, but I couldn't make out what they were. I tried to block out the pain and concentrate on the sounds. It seemed to take forever, but I finally did it.

I realized the sounds were voices. Voices I recognized, but I couldn't get my brain to remember who the voices belonged to. The voices soothed me, and I was able to relax enough to listen to what they were saying.

"Don't fight it, babe." It was Derek, my boyfriend and the man I loved.

"Go with it, man," the other voice said. That was Josh. Josh and Derek were there. But I couldn't figure out why I was naked and outside.

I tried to talk. My mouth moved but no sound came out. I tried to open my eyes, and this time they opened. I saw Josh and Derek looking at me. I lay on my side and rolled to my stomach. I tried to get on my hands and knees but didn't have the strength.

"Don't try that yet. You're not strong enough," Derek said.

What the hell was he talking about? I tried to talk—and failed again.

“Damn,” Josh said. “I’ve never seen such a beautiful animal. He’s incredible.”

“Of course he is, Josh. Would you expect anything else?”

My eyes started to droop again.

“Are you tired?” Derek asked. “Go to sleep. Don’t worry. We’re both here.”

I didn’t want to sleep again, but my body told me I didn’t have a choice.

The pain was gone when I woke up. Thank God. I don’t think I could have handled any more of that gut-wrenching agony.

I opened my eyes and saw Josh sitting there. I wondered where Derek would have gone.

“Hey, Sleeping Beauty. Feeling better?”

I didn’t bother trying to talk; I wouldn’t be able to. I pushed up to get on my hands and feet, but when I tried to stand up I couldn’t do it. My legs and arms felt different. My entire body felt different. I knew I wasn’t wearing clothes, but I didn’t feel naked. My skin felt like it was covered in something soft. Something like... fur?

All my senses seemed heightened by a thousand times. My eyesight, my hearing, and my sense of smell were all amped up. Similar to my fight with Elias, but even more so. I was confused, but it all felt okay. Not just okay, but right.

“It’s a rush, isn’t it?” Josh asked me. “Just go with it. Accept the power. You’re going to love it.”

I lifted my nose in the air and caught a familiar scent—Derek’s scent. I suddenly needed to be with him. I moved, but I hadn’t stood upright. My brain told me I had to be on my hands and feet, but it didn’t feel like I was crawling. I moved faster until I was running. I knew I had to be dreaming. This had to be a dream because nothing else made sense.

If it was a dream, it was a good one. I followed Derek's scent as I ran. I found him near a river I recognized as the Truckee River. But it wasn't him. Well, it was Derek, but he was a wolf. He was small, but sleek. And he was beautiful. I don't know how I knew it was Derek, but I did.

Derek gestured with his head toward the water, so I walked up to it. I could make out my own reflection in the water. I was a wolf too. I was larger than Derek, more muscular.

I approached Derek and we nuzzled. Then he lay down and rolled to his back, exposing his stomach to me. It wasn't a sexual move. He was telling me I was the dominant one—the alpha male. It felt special that he would be so willing to submit to me. My head was full of more than just my emotions; it was like I could feel Derek's emotions as well. I felt warmth and happiness and trust—complete and total, all-consuming trust. I didn't understand how I could feel Derek's emotions, but it was wonderful. I stepped close to Derek and nudged his head. He rolled over and stood up. Our eyes met—Christ, his eyes were so beautiful—and in those eyes I saw exactly how much he loved me. I didn't know what I had done to deserve that love, but I was grateful for it. I loved him as much as he loved me. I wanted to be able to say I loved him *more* than he loved me. But the love and adoration I felt from Derek was so immense I could only hope that one day it would be equal. I also hoped that one day I would earn the right to feel like I deserved his love.

I heard a noise behind me and turned to see another wolf walking to us. The wolf was short and stocky with auburn fur. I knew it was Josh. He approached me and rolled onto his back as well. He was also showing me I was dominant to him.

Derek and Josh both stood up.

*"You doing okay, babe?"* Derek asked me. But he hadn't spoken. I hadn't heard it in my ears—I heard it in my head.

*"It's confusing, isn't it?"* Josh asked. Again, I heard his voice in my head.

*"Come with us. Let's run,"* Derek said. Derek and Josh took off running. They were twenty feet away when Derek stopped.



*"Come on, babe," he said. "Trust me."*

I ran up to him and stopped. He nuzzled me, and we took off running. We caught up with Josh, and I sped past them both. The power I felt in my body was incredible. I loved the feel of the breeze in my fur and the grass under my paws.

I stopped and waited for Josh and Derek to catch up with me. As they did I pounced on Derek and knocked him over. He got back up and ran at me. I avoided him but couldn't evade Josh, who came at me from the other side. We played for several minutes before I felt my body tiring again.

*"Tired?" Josh asked.*

*"Yes," I spoke, but the words didn't come out of my mouth. I must have been using the same mental trick as they had.*

*"The first time is always tiring," Derek said.*

*"This is an amazing dream," I said.*

*"It's no dream, babe. It's much better."*

*"Let's head back to the main park," Josh said.*

We all took off running again, but I couldn't run as fast as I had been. My limbs were hurting. It was the same pain I had felt earlier—only in reverse. Whereas before it felt like my body was being pulled outward, now it felt like everything was being sucked inward.

We made it back to where I had originally woken up before I collapsed on the grass. I couldn't make a single body part move.

*"Go to sleep," Derek said.*

And I did.

I SAT up suddenly and looked around me. I was in Derek's bed in Derek's bedroom. I figured it must have been a dream, but it hadn't felt like a dream. When I moved my body ached like I had run ten miles. I pulled on a pair of shorts and went downstairs.

Derek was in the kitchen. I looked at him and somehow knew it hadn't been a dream.

"It all really happened, didn't it?" I asked. He looked at me and nodded. "I need to sit down," I said, and walked into the living room. I sat down on the couch, leaned forward, and put my face in my hands.

I heard Derek walk into the living room. He sat next to me and put his arm around me.

"What the hell is going on? Am I going nuts?" I looked into Derek's eyes.

"No." Derek laughed. "You're not crazy. But there is a lot you need to know."

I knew my world was going to change once again. "So you and Josh are werewolves?"

"You are too," Derek replied.

"Is this like *The Howling*, where we change at the full moon?"

"No, we can change at will. More like *Twilight*, unfortunately," he said, smiling.

"If you tell me there are sparkly vampires living around the corner, I am *so* out of here."

"No sparkly vampires." Derek smiled. "But werewolves have been around forever. Our history books go back as far as the Tower of Babylon. No one knows who the first werewolf was or how he became a werewolf, but history traces our lines throughout the centuries and throughout the world."

"Christ. All the stories and all the legends. They're true?"

"Based on the truth," he said. "Curt Siodmak, the writer of the 1941 *Wolf Man* movie, was a wolf."

"He was a werewolf *and* wrote a screenplay about werewolves?"

"He thought by making it public people would be less suspicious of the stories. There have been lots of famous people who were wolves," Derek said.

"I'm picturing the scene in *Men in Black* where Tommy Lee Jones and Will Smith looked at all those people who are aliens," I said.

“It’s something like that.”

“Okay, so you guys are werewolves,” I said. “You’re part of the same... what would you call it? Herd? Gaggle?”

“Pack,” he answered.

“Pack of wolves,” I murmured. “What happened to me? Why didn’t I grow up in a pack?”

“That’s part of what I need to tell you, babe.”

Derek took a small photo album off of the coffee table and flipped through a few pages. He showed me a picture of a man. He was younger than I remembered, but I recognized him.

“That’s my father!”

“What was his name?” Derek asked.

“Al Pratt.”

“His real name was Alonzo Bloodworth.”

“He was a werewolf?” I asked.

Derek flipped a page and pointed out a picture of a beautiful red-headed woman.

“That’s my mother.”

“Katherine Bloodworth. Alonzo was my father’s best friend,” Derek said. “Josh’s parents were also good friends with your parents.”

“We’re all part of the same pack?” That explained why I felt such a strong connection to the both of them.

“You would’ve grown up with us if things had been different.”

“What was different about me? Why didn’t I grow up with you?”

“You’re a Chosen One,” he said.

“What the hell is a Chosen One?” I asked.

“They’re werewolves born from strong bloodlines who are destined to become the pack alpha.”

“Like alpha dog?” I asked.

“Alphas are the leaders of the pack. My dad is alpha of our pack right now and has been since before I was born,” he answered.

“They’re generally the strongest and smartest members of the pack. Usually being alpha is part of a bloodline and is passed down from parent to child. But there are other ways to become alpha.”

“Other ways? Like being a special one?”

“Chosen One,” he corrected. “Alphas can also be challenged on certain dates. But Chosen Ones don’t have to challenge the alpha; they just have to participate in a ritual. Chosen Ones are born with a distinct birthmark. That’s how I knew that’s what you were. I was drawn to you right away, but I didn’t understand it until I saw your mark. I told Josh, but he didn’t know what we should do. We asked for help from a couple elder wolves—Josh’s parents and Avery.”

“Avery’s a wolf?” Then it hit me. Of course he was a wolf. “So is Elias, right? And Dearborn?”

He nodded. “Maurice too. Lots of other faculty and staff at UNR too.”

“Why are there so many at UNR?”

“What’s the name of the football team?” he asked. I smiled when I thought of the answer—The Wolf Pack.

“I don’t know everything that happened with your parents. Maurice does. He knew them. I do know about Chosen Ones, although I wasn’t sure they were real until I met you.”

“What exactly does it mean if I’m a Chosen One?”

“Chosen Ones are destined to lead their pack.”

“Me? Destined to be a leader? No fucking way. I am not a leader.”

“It’s fate.”

“I don’t believe in fate,” I said. “I believe we make our own choices.”

“I think things are going to change in our pack soon. We could have a new alpha soon.”

“Well, I don’t want to be an alpha. Let someone who does want it have it.”

“The strongest wolf wouldn’t necessarily make the best leader, Jack. One of the strongest wolves, and the one most likely to take control, is Elias.”

“Christ. He obviously wouldn’t be a good alpha. Why would it have to be me? Aren’t there other Chosen Ones?”

“There are very few Chosen Ones, and they are born all over the world. Chances are there isn’t another one in the states right now.”

“I’m telling you: I am not a leader. I don’t care about my birthmark; I am *not* a leader.”

“We don’t have to discuss all this right now. I know it’s a lot to take in. There is more to talk about, but we can talk about it later. I’m sure you have questions. But we can deal with that later.”

“Christ, I don’t think I can deal with this.”

“I *know* you can handle it.”

“I need some air,” I said. “I’ll be back.” I didn’t wait for a response. I grabbed my helmet and keys, got on my bike, and started riding. I rode for a half-hour before my stomach told me I needed to eat. I stopped at The 24-Hour Diner and ordered a double bacon cheeseburger with a side of chili cheese fries. I was chowing down when someone slid into the seat opposite me. Avery.

“Let me guess,” I said. “Derek called you?”

Avery nodded. “It’s a lot to take in, isn’t it?” he asked.

“That’s an understatement.” I snorted.

“Most of us grow up knowing the truth about ourselves, but you’re getting thrust headfirst into a whole new world.” I looked at him and stuffed some fries into my mouth. “You know, a lot of wolves don’t believe that Chosen Ones have extra power.”

“Really?”

He nodded his head. “Most wolves *don’t* believe. Most of us have never seen a Chosen One become alpha. It’s become a myth over the years.” He reached over and grabbed a couple of fries.

“So just because I have this mark doesn’t necessarily mean anything.”

“That’s what some wolves believe,” he said.

“But not you, right? Or Derek?”

“Josh is a believer too. They both believe in you.”

“They don’t believe in me,” I said. “They believe a legend that’s more than a thousand years old.”

“You’re wrong, Jack. They don’t *just* believe in you because you have a birthmark. They can see that you are a good man and would make an excellent leader. If they hadn’t thought you would make a good alpha they would’ve let you keep on living your life the way you had been. Derek supporting you will put him at odds with his father.”

“It will? How?”

“Rick has been alpha for a long time and isn’t ready to step down. He’s taken on plenty of challengers and won. But if you decide to be alpha, he has to step down.”

“Christ,” I muttered. “Derek is choosing me over his father?”

Avery nodded. “He’s putting a lot of trust in you. I know you’re dealing with a great deal right now, but so is Derek. His life is changing almost as much as yours. He’s in love for the first time in his life, and then he has to tell the man he loves that he’s a werewolf.”

“I didn’t think about how this is affecting him,” I said. “I need to go home.”

“Good idea,” Avery said. I slid the rest of the chili fries over to him, stood, and walked toward the exit. At the door, I stopped and turned. “Hey, Avery!” I called out. He looked at me. “Thanks.” He nodded and smiled.

I got on my bike and drove home as fast as I could. I stepped inside, walked to Derek, and pulled him into a kiss.

“What was that for?” he asked.

“For believing in me. I’m still not sure I understand everything, but as long as you’re by my side I know it’ll be okay.” I kissed him again and we held each other for a minute. “I can’t believe you’re choosing me over your father.”

“It should’ve been a tough decision, but it wasn’t,” he answered. “I know without a shadow of a doubt that you’re the real thing. Not choosing you didn’t even feel like an option.”

“I’m starving,” I said, changing the subject as I pulled away from Derek. I didn’t know why I was so hungry since I had just eaten at the restaurant.

“I thought you might be,” he replied, and led me into the kitchen. He had made a plate of buffalo wings, which were warming in the oven. I grabbed a plateful, spooned sour cream onto the plate, and poured a huge glass of milk. I sat down at the table and started eating. Before I knew it, I had eaten the entire plate of wings, and I was still hungry. I grabbed another plateful of wings and devoured those as well. Derek sat there in silence and watched me eat. He had a small, knowing smile on his face.

“What are you smiling about?”

“It’s all going to work out, babe.”

“I trust you, Derek. My mind’s spinning, but I still trust you.”

“You tired?” he asked me.

“Not at all, but I’m horny.”

“That’s part of the change too. For most of us it happens in our teen years. The testosterone really kicks in. Adds to our strength as well as our sex drive.”

“Really?”

Derek nodded and laughed.

I scooted the chair back. “Come here, pup.” He walked over to me and smiled when he saw the tent in my shorts.

“Damn, babe. You weren’t joking.” Derek bent down in front of me, taking my erection in his hand. He stroked up and down before he pulled it out through the fly. His skin felt warm on my prick as he caressed it. I put my finger under his chin and moved his head up so we were face to face. I stared into his beautiful eyes and saw how much he loved me.

“I love you so much,” I said.

“Love you too.”

I leaned forward and he did the same. Our lips met for just a minute before I leaned back. “Suck my dick.” I grabbed the sides of his head and guided it to my dick. He kissed it gently, but gentle wasn’t what I wanted.

“Swallow,” I murmured. He opened his mouth wide, and I pushed him down until his nose was buried in my pubes. “Yeah, pup. That’s it.” His mouth was incredibly warm. I felt his tongue on the underside of my shaft. I held his head down until I was sure he couldn’t breathe any longer. I released him, and he pulled off of my cock. I looked at him to make sure I hadn’t gone too far. The grin on his face told me not only had I not gone too far, but he had enjoyed it. I grabbed his head and pushed him down on me again. When I was all the way in his throat, I lifted my hips and fucked his mouth.

Derek had sucked me before, but this time was different. There was a different quality to the act. The bond between us was even stronger. Now I understood why I could feel so much of his emotions. When we had sex, that connection was even stronger. In addition to my own sensations, I could feel Derek’s. I could feel how much he enjoyed having my shaft in his mouth, and I could feel how excited he was.

I pulled him off and told him to stand. He stood before me, and I swallowed his cock. I wanted to make him feel as good as he had made me feel. I didn’t suck him for long before I heard his voice in my head. “*Fuck me.*” It was like when we were in the field, but now I understood it.

I spun Derek around and had him bend over with his hands on the table. I spread his cheeks open and buried my face in his ass. I kissed his cute little rosebud and bit his ass cheeks.

“Oh, babe,” Derek whispered. I swiped my tongue up the inside of his cheeks. I did that several times before I stopped to concentrate on tonguing his rim. He moaned and pushed backward. I pressed harder against him, licking his hole and trying to get my tongue into him.

I reached around and stroked his pulsing cock without stopping the tongue-fucking I was giving his hole. He relaxed his sphincter, and my tongue slid in slightly.



*"I'm gonna come soon."*

"Turn around, pup," I said.

*"Use your mind to tell me what you want."*

I was about to say I needed lessons in ESP, but I decided to give it a try. It was easier than I expected. It was like an instinct; I already knew what to do.

*"Sit on my lap, pup."*

Derek smiled as he straddled me. I pulled him into a kiss and thrust my tongue deep into his mouth. He pressed his face hard against mine and stroked my prick. He rubbed it against his ass, then leaned back and lifted his hips. I grabbed my shaft and positioned it against his hole. Derek sat down on me and didn't stop until the entire length was buried in him.

*"Oh, fuck, babe. This is incredible."*

*"You're incredible, Derek. You feel amazing."*

*"We're mated, Jack. I hope you know that. It's a connection that will last forever."*

*"That's exactly what I want. Forever... with you."* It surprised me that that was what I wanted. I never imagined I would want such a bond at such a young age. But it *was* what I wanted. It was what I needed.

I grabbed Derek's cheeks and spread them apart and lifted him up at the same time. With as much power as I could, I slammed deep into his body, thrusting again and again.

Small, quick grunts escaped from Derek's lips. I tried to read his mind, but he couldn't form a coherent thought. And that turned me on so fucking much I started to lose control.

I started doing short, fast jabs, hitting his prostate repeatedly. The orgasm started in my balls and quickly shot through my shaft and out. I shot deep into Derek's body with several powerful spurts.

I reached between us and grabbed his cock. I stroked him quickly, and it didn't take long for him to erupt. His hot, sticky seed coated my hand and my stomach. I brought my hand to my lips and tasted his come. It was sweet and salty, and I cleaned my hand off.

Derek leaned down and we kissed, sharing his seed between us. He sat next to me and rested his head on my shoulder.

“Did you mean it?” he asked me.

“Mean what?”

“When you said you wanted me forever.”

“Hell yeah, I meant it. I still don’t understand everything about being a werewolf, but I know I want you to be by my side.”

“Good. Because that’s what I want too. Want to take a bath?” he asked. “We can talk more.”

“Sounds good,” I replied. He stood up slowly and my soft cock slipped out.

“Oh,” he said.

“Did I hurt you?”

“No, babe. You didn’t hurt me. It feels so right when you’re in me that when you slip out I feel empty.”

“Well, I guess I just need to fuck you as often as possible.” I laughed.

DEREK and I sat in his tub in my favorite position—him between my legs with his back pressed against my chest. I was running a wash rag up and down his chest.

“When did you first shift?” I asked.

“Puberty,” he answered. “That’s when it happens for wolves raised in the pack.” My hand stopped to pinch his left nipple. He released a gentle moan.

“Why didn’t I change during puberty?”

“Because you weren’t part of a pack,” he replied. “Being around other wolves and their scents is a big part of it.”

“If being around other wolves brings on the change, how come I didn’t change when I started spending time with you and Josh?”

“Because you hadn’t been around other wolves your entire life, you needed more than proximity to wolves to change.”

“And making love without a condom did it?”

“Yes. It forged an unbreakable bond between us. A sexual *and* emotional bond.”

I was silent for several minutes. He laid his head back on my shoulder, and I embraced him.

“I know you think it’s important for me to become alpha, but what if I decide I don’t want to be leader? Will you still stay with me?”

Derek turned around so we could look into each other’s eyes. “I might not agree with that decision, but I will always be at your side.”

“Good,” I said, pulling him into a kiss. I hardened and it pressed against his back. Derek laughed, and I felt him reaching into my mind. I felt his passion as if it were my own. I stood and pulled Derek up with me. I spun him around and bent him over. I grabbed some soap to lube up my cock and pointed it at his hole.

“*Ready?*”

“*Go for it, babe.*”

Without hesitation, I slid my length into him until my balls were pressed against his ass. I stayed buried for a moment before pulling out and slamming into him again.

After our second orgasms of the day, we both lay down in bed and slept. When we woke it was dark out.

“Want to go for a run, babe?” Derek asked.

“You mean as a wolf?” He nodded. “San Rafael?”

“I’ve got a better idea,” he said.

DEREK’S idea was to go for a run in the lower regions of the Sierra Nevada Mountains near Reno. We took a dirt road for several miles up into the mountains, then stopped and hid our bikes behind some trees.

“Ready?” Derek asked.

*"Ready as I'll ever be."*

Derek stripped off his clothes. I couldn't help but stare at his gorgeous body. I felt myself harden and tried to get my mind off sex.

*"Take your clothes off, babe."* I did, and Derek smiled when he saw my erection.

*"Not right now."*

*"I'm trying,"* I said, and Derek laughed. *"You want me to go first?"* I asked.

*"Yes."*

*"How do I do it?"*

*"Just see it in your mind."*

I closed my eyes and imagined shifting into a wolf. It happened much quicker than I thought it would. It was also much less painful than it had been the first time. It happened in only an instant, and I felt amazing strength, as well as freedom.

*"Good job. How does it feel?"*

*"Awesome."* I watched as Derek transformed in front of me. It amazed me that he was as gorgeous as a wolf as he was as a man.

*"Ready?"*

*"Yeah. Let's go."*

Derek took off running first, but I wasn't far behind him. I soon caught up with him, and we jogged next to each other. Derek taught me how to isolate certain senses and how to use all of them at once. The things I could smell with my enhanced power of scent were amazing. There were scents I had never known even existed. We jogged, and walked, and full-out sprinted. I never got winded, and it felt perfect. So very right. I didn't know how long we were out there, but I never wanted it to end.

Eventually we wandered back to our bikes, shifted, dressed, and returned home. We were both exhausted by the time we got home and fell asleep as soon as our bodies hit the sheets.

## CHAPTER 12

WHEN I woke up Saturday morning I was ravenously hungry. Derek made stacks of waffles and I wolfed them down.

“Will I always need to eat this much?” I asked.

“No, your body will adjust soon. The first several changes take a lot of energy.”

“Good, because I’d get fat if I had to eat like this all the time.”

“Wolves have a very fast metabolism, but they can gain weight. However, you don’t have to worry about most diseases, even HIV. Our bodies destroy the infection before it can harm us.”

I finished up the last few bites of waffles.

“What do your parents know about me?”

“They know that I’m dating someone, and they knew you’re a wolf. But they don’t know anything else. I need to tell them soon. I’m not sure how they’ll react.

“The only wolves that know you’re a Chosen One are Avery and Josh’s parents. You’ll get different reactions from people based on whether or not they are believers.”

“I want to talk to Maurice before I meet your parents. Is he a believer?”

“One of the strongest believers in the pack. He’s pack historian and knows just about everything that you would need to know.”

“I’ll talk to him tomorrow,” I said.

"I'll ask my dad if he'll throw a little party next weekend. I'll have him invite Josh and his family. Josh's dad and my dad are good friends, so if my dad gets upset Todd might be able to calm him down."

AFTER classes on Monday, I went to see Maurice.

"Jack!" he said when I approached his desk. "Did you know Kareem Abdul-Jabbar was cousins with the kid who played Buckwheat on *The Little Rascals*?"

"No, I didn't know that," I said, bracing for the joke.

"Yeah, he converted to Islam at the same time and changed his name to Kareem of Wheat." He laughed and I smiled at him. I had other things on my mind.

"What's up, Jack? You look like someone ran over your dog."

"I need to talk to you... privately."

"The library closes in two hours. Can it wait until then?"

"I'm afraid not. I just learned you knew my parents."

"I did?"

"My biological parents. Alonzo and Katie Bloodworth." His eyes went wide, and he turned to his student assistant.

"Mind the store, Marvin."

"The name's not Marvin. It's Charles," the student corrected.

"Change your name. All my assistants are named Marvin," Maurice said as he ushered me into his private office and shut the door behind him.

"I should've recognized you," Maurice said. "I knew your parents pretty well."

"That's what Derek told me."

"I knew your dad and his parents. His parents died several years before you were born. I was very happy when he met your mother. I knew any child they had would be a strong wolf."

“Why?”

“Your mother was from a pack in Ireland,” Maurice answered. “Her family had lived in Ireland for many generations and was one of the strongest packs there. She felt a calling to come to America, and when she and Alonzo met it was love at first sight. It was obvious to everyone that Alonzo and Katie were destined to be together. Your father’s family was a strong bloodline, so I knew an offspring of the two would be powerful. And I was right; you were born a Chosen One.”

“You know I’m a Chosen One?”

“I was the only person your parents told. They kept your mark a secret because they wanted to protect you.”

“Protect me from whom?”

“Anyone that would ever want to be alpha. If they could kill you as an infant they wouldn’t ever have to worry about you taking over. It worked for a while, but then someone tried to kidnap you when you were almost a year old.”

“Someone tried to kidnap me?” He nodded. “What happened?” I asked.

“Your mother was pushing you in a stroller and someone knocked her to the ground and took off with the stroller. Katie chased after the guy and saved you, but the kidnapper got away.”

“What happened after that?”

“Alonzo and Katie decided your life would be in danger if they stayed with the pack.”

“What did they do?”

“They went into hiding. It was a sacrifice because it meant they couldn’t shift. As humans other wolves couldn’t track them, but if they shifted, even for a minute, wolves would be able to find them.”

“The day of the accident my dad was mad at my mom. She said something about feeling the strength for just a minute.”

“She probably shifted, and your dad was afraid other wolves would come after them.”

“Wouldn’t they have been able to track me?”

“No, because you were human and had never shifted. Your scent wouldn’t have been any different than anyone else’s.”

I WASN’T really looking forward to meeting any other werewolves. Mainly because I knew they were going to push the whole idea of me being *destined* to be a leader.

The school week seemed to go by really fast. It was getting close to the end of school. I had classes Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday, but we had Thursday and Friday off as preparation for final exams. Derek and I ran as wolves several times that week, but we only talked about being wolves one time.

“If your dad has been a good alpha for so long, why can’t he just remain leader?” I asked one night while Derek was helping me study for my Journalism Law class.

“He could, but I know he’ll be challenged this year by Elias. I’m not sure Dad’ll be able to beat Elias this time. If you don’t complete the ritual and Elias challenges my dad and wins, he’ll be alpha for at least five years.”

“Why that long?”

“Alphas can only be challenged on certain dates,” Derek answered. “Those dates only occur around every five years. Those are the same dates that a Chosen One can complete the ritual and become alpha.”

“How many wolves does the alpha take during a challenge?”

“Only one,” he answered. “All the wolves wishing to challenge the alpha take on each other in a cage-style match. The sole winner of that goes against the alpha. There are lots of strong wolves, like Josh or his brothers, but Elias doesn’t play fair and I am sure he will win.”

“Has your father been challenged a lot?”

“Several times. It’s been a Fairchild most of the time. The Fairchilds have been alphas for generations. Edmund became alpha



when his father died. He had only been in the spot for a couple years when my dad challenged him and won. Once you've been alpha you can never be one again, so Edmund decided the only way to get the power was to have one of his sons challenge Dad."

"How many sons does he have?"

"Three: Emmett, Elton, and Elias. Emmett and Elton were from his first wife and Elias from his second, much younger wife. Emmett fought my dad three times and lost. Elton didn't even make it past the cage match."

"Elias hasn't tried yet?" I asked.

"You have to be eighteen to challenge an alpha. The next date is the first time Elias has been old enough to do it. He's stronger than either one of his brothers because they have different mothers."

"Why does that make a difference?"

"Edmund's first wife was human, but his second wife is a wolf. She came from a pack in Florida. I think that's why Edmund chose her—he was hoping to breed a strong son."

"Elias is strong like me, because of the two powerful bloodlines?"

"He's strong, but not as strong as you. Though he has had more years of training than you have."

"What about you and Josh? You guys don't come from strong bloodlines?"

"Neither one of us has two parents who are wolves. My mom is human and Josh's dad is, too. Because my dad is alpha now, I could eventually take over down the road if he doesn't lose a challenge."

ON SATURDAY, Derek and I drove to his parents' place in Tahoe. We were silent for most of the drive.

"Am I going to be pressured about this whole leadership thing? I don't think I can handle that, pup."

"You'll be fine. If someone starts to pressure you, I'll help you out."

“How? You won’t be at my side the entire time.”

*“I’ll sense your emotions.”*

*“Thanks. It means a lot that you’ll be there for me to lean on.”*

“Josh’s siblings will be there, He has twin brothers who are strong and capable fighters. If there’s anyone you want to impress, it’s them. If they like you, they’ll help you even if you don’t choose to be leader. But if you do choose that and you get their respect, you’ll win a lot of people over.”

We pulled up, and I checked out the house Derek had grown up in. It was a modern-day log cabin. It had a beautiful front yard with immaculate green grass and flowers of all types.

“My mom’s quite the gardener,” Derek said. “We have a private beach on the lakefront too.”

“Christ, it’s beautiful,” I said.

I saw two people come out of the front door, and I immediately knew they were Derek’s parents. Derek’s light blond hair and blue eyes came from his mother. She was a few inches shorter than Derek and almost a foot shorter than her husband, who was several inches taller than me. Derek inherited his muscular body from his father.

Derek and I stepped out of the car and met his parents halfway up the stone path.

“Mom, Dad,” Derek said. “This is my boyfriend, Jack Coleman. Jack, these are my parents, Richard and Angela.”

“It’s a pleasure to meet you, Mr. Malone.” Derek’s dad and I shook hands. His grip was hard and firm.

“Please, call me Rick,” he said. He had a deep voice and a gentle smile.

I turned to Derek’s mother. She was grinning from ear to ear.

“Mrs. Malone,” I said, and stuck out my hand. She ignored my hand and pulled me into a hug. I hugged her back after a moment of shock. After the hug, she grabbed my face and kissed me on the cheek.

“Call me Angie, honey. I am so glad to meet you. Derek has told me so much about you. I’ve been begging him to bring you over for months.”

Rick led me up to the door, with Derek and his mother a few steps behind us.

When we stepped through the door, Josh walked up to me with a man and woman directly behind him. “These are my parents,” Josh said. I was shocked because I would never have guessed it. Where Josh was short and stocky, both of his parents were tall and thin.

“Jack, this is Todd and Charlotte Valentine. Mom, Dad, this is Jack.”

I shook their hands. I could tell they were all business.

“We need to talk about you becoming alpha,” Todd said.

“Whoa, Dad,” Josh spoke up. “He needs a little time.”

“But there isn’t much time,” Charlotte said, loudly. I was about to say something when I felt Derek at my side.

“Come on, babe,” he said. “Let’s go. There are other people to meet.” He led me to a large living room. The living room was huge, with high vaulted ceilings and unique wood furniture. Avery was there, and we talked for a minute before Josh introduced me to his siblings, except for the all-powerful twins that I had to make a good impression on.

“Here they come,” Derek said. I followed his eyes and saw two tall, burly men walking up to us. “Remy, Roman. How are you doing?” They looked so much alike, I would have sworn they were clones.

“Hey there, Derek,” one of them said. He picked Derek up in a huge bear hug. When he set him down the other one picked him up.

“Guys, this is Jack. Jack, this is Remy and Roman.”

“Nice to meet you,” I said and stuck out my hand. Neither one took it; instead they folded their arms and glared at me. I pulled my hand in and looked at Derek. He shrugged, and I knew this was my chance to impress these guys.

“Where do you guys work?” I asked.

“Construction,” Remy said.

“Your brother is a good friend,” I said. They didn’t say a word, just continued to stand there with their arms folded.

“You got a fucking problem with me?” I said, loudly. Their eyes widened and their hands went to their sides. I looked at Derek and saw he had a small grin on his face.

“What the hell did you say?” Roman said.

“Are you deaf or just dumb?” I stepped up to him. We were almost bumping chests. “I said. Do. You. Have. A. Fucking. Problem. With. Me? Did you hear me that time or do you need me to write it out in big letters? Unless you can’t read.”

“Boy, you got a big goddamn mouth. Your ass better be able to back it up.”

“I can walk the walk and talk the talk. Bring it on, Tweedle Dee and Tweedle Dum.”

“You gonna take us both on, boy?”

“Hell, yeah!”

Remy and Roman stepped up to me, and I was ready to fight if I had to. Instead Roman wrapped his arms around me and lifted me into the air like he had done with Derek. He laughed loudly as he damn near squeezed the life out of me. He sat me down and Remy picked me up.

“You got balls, Coleman. Big, huge fucking balls.” Remy laughed. When I had my feet on the ground again I watched both brothers laughing.

“I like you,” Roman said. “You ever need help, you call us.”

WE ATE a lunch of fried chicken and mashed potatoes in a large dining room and then sat in the living room and talked casually. Derek sat on one side of me, and Josh sat on the other. Josh’s parents and Derek’s parents were there as well as Avery, Remy, Roman, and a few others.

“Abraham will be joining us in a few minutes,” Rick said. “He had something else to do today.”

“Why is Abraham coming?” I asked Derek in a whisper.

“He’s an important member of the pack,” Derek answered. “Sort of like the consigliere in the mafia. He handles all the legal matters.”

There was a knock on the door and Rick answered it. He returned with Abraham. The old man walked up to me. I stood as we shook hands.

“Hello, Mr. Coleman,” he said. “I’m glad we can finally meet as members of the same family.” I nodded and Dearborn took a seat next to Josh’s parents.

“You ready, babe?” Derek whispered in my ear. I wasn’t ready but nodded anyway.

Derek stood up and cleared his throat to get everyone’s attention. “There is something some people here know and others don’t, but it’s pretty important.”

“Go ahead, Son,” Rick said. “You have everyone’s attention.”

“I’ve told you all that my boyfriend Jack is a wolf. I allowed you to think he was from a different pack, but that’s not the truth. He’s from our pack.”

There were a couple of bewildered looks. “What do you mean, sweetie?” Angie said.

“Jack is adopted. His biological parents were Katie and Alonzo Bloodworth.”

“Oh my God!” Angie gasped. “All these years.”

“There’s more,” Derek said. “The reason they disappeared all those years ago is because Jack is a Chosen One.”

“What the hell?” Rick said, loudly. Derek gestured for me to stand next to him, and I did. “Show them, babe.” I lifted my shirt and showed them the birthmark.

“Is that why you’re here?” Rick stood up. “To put me out to pasture so you can take over?”

“Whoa, whoa,” I said. “You’re jumping a few steps.”

“Like what?” Charlotte asked.

“Like the fact that I haven’t decided if I want to be alpha or not. I’m still adjusting to being a werewolf. I don’t know if I can be leader or even if I want to be leader.”

“You don’t understand,” Charlotte said. “You *have* to be leader. It’ll be a disaster if Elias takes over.”

“With all due respect, I don’t *have* to do anything. I agree Elias would not be a good alpha, but there have got to be other options.”

“There are,” Rick replied. “I’m not ready to step down as alpha, and I will take down any challenger. I don’t believe that birthmark means anything.”

“But I do believe,” Charlotte spoke up. “You know I love you, Rick. You’ve been an excellent alpha. But Jack is a Chosen One, and I and my family are going to support him.”

“I haven’t decided anything,” I said. “We have time to figure all this out.”

“No, we don’t,” Charlotte said. “We only have a few weeks.”

I looked at Derek. “What is she talking about?”

“One of those important dates is coming up,” Derek said. “January nineteenth.”

“Christ, why didn’t you tell me?”

“I was trying to ease you into everything. I didn’t want to shock you too much.”

“Well, you failed at that,” I said, and stood up. “Excuse me; I need to use the bathroom.” I ran up a flight of stairs and found the bathroom. I turned on the sink faucet and splashed water on my face. “Christ,” I said to myself.

I heard a noise at the door and turned to see Dearborn leaning against the doorframe. “It’s a lot to take in. Isn’t it, dear boy?” he said.

“I understand everything they’re feeling, Mr. Dearborn.”

“Please call me Abraham.”

“Okay, Abraham. I understand their points. But I’m young; I don’t even feel like an adult. And now I have to make a decision about the rest of my life. I can barely decide what to eat for dinner tonight.”

“It’s a lot of responsibility, dear boy. I certainly wouldn’t blame you if you took off. Run for the hills and hide out. I’m not sure I wouldn’t do exactly that if I was in your shoes.”

“I’m glad someone understands,” I said.

He walked up to me and put a hand on my shoulder. “If you ever need someone to talk to, please don’t hesitate to call.”

“Thank you,” I said.

“Ready to rejoin the party?”

“I guess.”

Everyone was still in the same spots when Abraham and I walked back into the living room.

“Look,” I said to everyone. “I don’t think there is anything else Derek hasn’t told me. And if there is, he’ll tell me now. But I won’t be strong-armed into doing anything I don’t want to do. I will make a decision in my own time. If there is anything that needs to be said to me, you will go through either Derek or Josh. Do I make myself clear?”

Everyone nodded their heads. I was amazed at my own forcefulness. Derek, Josh, Remy, and Roman all had smiles on their faces.

I walked out of the room and into a game room on the other side of the house. Derek joined me a couple of minutes later. He pulled me into an embrace and held me in silence. Angie walked in a few minutes later.

“We’ll figure all of this out,” she said. “I would love for you both to spend the night.”

“I don’t know,” Derek said.

“I’d love to,” I said.

“Excellent.” She smiled and left the room.

“Are you sure, babe?”

“Yes. I want to get to your know your parents aside from all the other crap.”

AVERY, Josh, and his siblings said goodbye to me when they left. Josh's parents didn't, however. Remy and Roman hugged me when they left.

"They're two of the strongest fighters in the pack," Derek said. "You have their loyalty. They'll die to protect their alpha."

"I'm not their alpha, pup," I reminded him.

"I know. I'm just saying if you do choose to become alpha, they will be two of your best soldiers."

When everyone was gone, Derek showed me to his room—the room where we would be spending the night.

"Your parents are going to let us share a room?" I asked.

"They're not prudes, babe. They know we're having sex."

"I guess so," I said. His room was large, with a queen-sized bed and a thirty-two-inch television. It was decorated with contemporary designs as well as pictures of Derek as a teenager.

"You played the trumpet?" I asked. "You were a band geek."

"A band geek and a math nerd," he replied.

"Straight-A student, I bet."

"I got a B once." He laughed.

"When?"

"Um... sixth grade."

I laughed as I grabbed Derek and threw him on the bed. I landed on top of him and pressed my lips to his.

"You want to play my trumpet, pup?"

"Hell yeah, babe," Derek answered.

We kissed again and rubbed our erections together.

"Want to know my favorite mathematic equation?" Derek asked.

"Sure."

"Add the bed. Subtract the clothes. Divide the legs."

I burst out laughing. "We've got the bed."



“Let’s do the next step,” he said. He started to take off his shirt and I did the same. There was a knock on the door. Before we could do anything, the door opened and Angie walked in. When she saw us shirtless, she stopped and turned a bright red.

“Oh my sweet heavens!” She gasped. “I am so sorry.” She turned around.

“What did you need, Mom?” Derek asked.

“I just wanted to tell you that dinner will be ready in ten minutes. Dora made her famous Roman-style chicken. Come down when you guys are... done.” She stepped out of the room and shut the door behind her.

We both burst out laughing. “That’ll teach her,” Derek said. “Shall we... finish?”

“I need more than ten minutes, pup,” I said as I put my shirt back on. “Who’s Dora?”

“She’s our housekeeper. She’s been around since I was a kid. She’s awesome. You’ll love her Roman chicken. It’s an Italian dish with this to-die-for sauce that has prosciutto, peppers, and wine.”

“Sounds good. Let’s get downstairs before your parents think we really are doing something,” I said, laughing.

DORA started dinner with salads. After serving the salad, she filled our wine glasses and set the Chianti bottle close to Rick. I picked at the lettuce with my fork, not really interested in it—though it did taste excellent.

“Something wrong, Jack?” Rick asked.

“I never wanted to offend you, sir,” I said. “I don’t know if having this birthmark means anything or not. And I would hate to come between you and Derek.”

“I’m trying not to take it personally, Jack. I think we can agree to set the alpha thing aside and concentrate on the most important thing—Derek.”

"I'd like that, sir. I love him very much." Rick and Angie both looked at me and smiled.

"I'm glad to hear that," Angie said. "How did you two meet?"

"Josh introduced us at a party and we took a walk and talked," Derek said.

"It was nearly perfect. Would've been if it wasn't for Elias."

"Elias? What happened with him?" Rick asked.

"He followed us," Derek said. "Same old shit. He still thinks he has some kind of ownership of me. But Jack took care of me."

"Elias is as crazy as his old man," Rick said. "Removing Edmund from power was the best thing I ever did."

"You've done a lot of great things, dear," Angie said. She turned to me. "This pack is one of the most accepting of homosexuality. Even before Derek was born Rick believed in equality for everyone. Before that, gay wolves were forced into seclusion. That's how Avery came to join our pack."

"Avery didn't grow up with the pack?" I asked.

"No," Rick answered. "He was kicked out of his original pack in Oregon because he was gay. My pack was already well known for its acceptance of homosexuality, so he came here, changed his name, and became part of our pack."

"Did you know he was friends with your mother?" Angie said.

"He didn't tell me," I answered.

"He already had a journalism education when he arrived here, but she taught him about photography."

"I'll have to talk to him." I finally started to eat my salad—just as the main course arrived.

"So you've never met a Chosen One?" I asked halfway through the main course.

"One," Rick answered. "Abraham."

"Abraham is a Chosen One? Why isn't he alpha?"

“He had meningitis when he was a kid,” Derek answered. “It affected his brain, and he’s unable to shift.”

“So he can’t be alpha at all?” I asked.

“Nope.” Rick shook his head. “He’s always wanted to be alpha, though I don’t think he has it in him to do it. But I have allowed him to be part of my Inner Circle.”

“What’s an Inner Circle?”

“Every alpha picks several people to be his closest confidants,” Derek answered. “He turns to them for advice and help with his decisions.”

“Do you think he’d be alpha if he could?”

“Definitely,” Derek said. “He craves power and control.”

I turned back to the meal in front of me.

AFTER dinner and dessert, I went upstairs to the bedroom while Derek talked to his parents a bit longer. I lay down on the bed and zoned out thinking about everything. I jumped when I felt a hand on my shoulder.

“I didn’t mean to scare you.”

“I didn’t hear you come in.”

“You ready for bed?”

“Yeah.” I sighed. “I’m exhausted.”

“Not too tired, I hope?”

“Never too tired for that.”

Derek flipped off the light, but moonlight shined through the window. He stripped off his clothes. I didn’t think it was possible, but Derek’s naked body was even more beautiful in the glow of the moon.

“Christ, you’re gorgeous, pup.”

“Then make love to me. Here. In my parents’ house. Now.”

“Like I could ever resist you,” I said as I pulled him close to me.

“Remember my favorite equation?” Derek asked.

“Yes. Add the bed.” I pulled him onto the bed and kissed him.

“Subtract the clothes,” Derek murmured.

I tore off my clothes and laid my naked body on his. My hard prick rubbed against his. “Divide the legs.” I pressed my knees into the inside of his thighs and pressed out. His legs separated—divided—and I fell between them. My rock-hard erection already pointed at his tight hole.

“The real equation refers to heterosexual sex,” Derek said.

“What’s that?”

“Add the bed. Subtract the clothes. Divide the legs. And then you multiply.”

I laughed. “There won’t be any multiplying with us, will there?”

“No, there won’t.”

“But that isn’t going to stop me.” I grabbed my cock and pushed it into his hole. I stopped when the head popped in.

“Oh, fuck,” he moaned. He put one hand on my chest and one on my mark.

“Don’t worry, pup. I wouldn’t do anything to hurt you.”

“I know. I trust you. It just feels so good. Feels like you’re going to split me apart. But when you’re not in me I feel so empty.” He pushed a finger into my mark.

I slid a few more inches in. “How does that feel?”

“Amazing. More. Give me more.”

I slid in more. “Christ, pup. So fucking tight. So fucking hot. Pup, you were made for me. I could spend the rest of my life making love to you.”

“Babe,” he murmured. “I want that too. I want you with me and in me, forever.”

“You got it. I’m not ever letting you go.”

In a quick thrust, I slid the rest of my length into him. He arched his back and bit his arm so he didn’t make noise. I stopped, but not just because I was afraid of hurting him. I stopped because if I didn’t I

would lose it far too soon. His silk entrance was like a warm glove around me, and it felt like I could come any second now.

“Jack?”

“Yeah?”

“Move. Please, move. Make love to me.”

“You feel so wonderful. I’m afraid I’m going to lose it. I’m not ready to come yet.”

Derek wiggled his hips and moved a bit. He slid backward slightly and then pushed back down on me.

“Derek!”

“Fuck me, Jack. Please.”

I pulled out a few inches and slid back in.

“More,” he murmured. I pulled halfway out and slid in harder than before.

“Oh, yeah!”

“You like that, don’t you?”

“I love it. I love you.”

I pulled all the way out and slammed back into him. His entire body shook, and he moaned.

“Shhh,” I whispered. “I don’t want your parents to hear us.”

“I can’t help it. You just feel so... so... good. So fucking amazing.”

I wrapped one arm around the back of his head and pulled his face to mine. I kissed him and pushed my tongue into his mouth and licked the roof of his mouth. I thrust again, and this time he moaned into my mouth. Our kiss silenced him, so I continued making love to him, making love to his ass. I kept his face pressed against mine as I plunged into his body repeatedly.

Derek’s grunts started slipping out in quicker succession, and I knew he was going to come soon. I felt his body tighten around my shaft and then felt the hot, slick seed between us. I kept driving into

him and increased the tempo and strength. Without releasing his mouth from mine, I penetrated him until I couldn't stop the rush from coming.

His mouth swallowed my moan as I erupted and shot deep in his body. He flexed his ass, and it made my orgasm last longer than ever before. Longer than I had even thought possible.

I buried my face in his neck with sweat dripping off my brow.

"Christ, pup. You continue to amaze me. Sex gets better and better each time."

"And we have years to improve." He laughed.

"I don't know how it could get any better," I said.

"Oh, it can. And it will."

I rolled off of Derek and lay next to him. He reached down and grabbed a warm towel.

"Were you planning on this?" I asked.

"Planning, hoping. Whatever you want to call it."

He straddled my legs and wiped me down with the warm rag. He cleaned off my dick, my chest, and my face. The last thing I remembered before I fell asleep was him laying down next to me and resting his head on my chest.

## CHAPTER 13

SHORTLY after returning home Sunday morning, I got a call from Maurice.

“What do you call a man with no arms and no feet who’s in the water?” he asked me.

“I don’t know.”

“Bob.” He laughed. “I can’t believe I forgot to tell you this when we spoke before. I have a few boxes of your father’s personal belongings. He and I were working on something before he left.”

“What were you working on?” I asked.

“Can I come over so we can talk face to face?”

Maurice was there ten minutes later. Derek and I helped him bring in three boxes before we sat down to talk.

“Your dad suspected that there was someone in the pack who was playing both sides of the fence,” he said.

“A double agent?” I asked.

“He and I tried. But we couldn’t figure out who it was. We decided it was better to not let anyone know where they were going so the traitor wouldn’t find out.”

The idea of the double agent bothered me. I thought packs were loyal and trustworthy. The fact that someone could betray their own family was disheartening.

“These boxes have some of the things we worked on to try to deduce the identity of the traitor, as well as some personal items. I thought you might like to see them.”

“Thanks, Maurice,” I said as I began to rifle through the boxes. I barely noticed Derek escorting Maurice to the door.

I found pictures—lots of pictures. There were pictures of me, me and Dad, me and Mom, and of all three of us together. We looked like such a happy family. I wondered what it would have been like if I had been raised by them. But that would have meant not having the family I did grow up with. If I had to go back and make the choice, I don’t know if I could choose.

I also found several of my dad’s notes and appointment calendars. I noticed October 2, 1987, had a note on it—*1330 AD*. Next to that were two crosses. I didn’t know what it meant, but my gut told me it meant something important.

I spent more than an hour looking through everything but didn’t find anything interesting. I was sure there was something there I needed to see, but I didn’t know what it was.



## CHAPTER 14

BETWEEN classes on Monday morning, I was sitting at Jolt-N-Java when Salem showed up.

“What the hell, man? I haven’t talked to you for weeks. I know being in love takes a lot of work, but you can’t make time for your oldest friend?”

“Sorry, Salem,” I replied. “I’ve been dealing with a lot of shit.”

“Like what?”

“I wish I could explain, but it’s complicated.” How could I tell my best friend that I was a werewolf?

“What’s all this?” he asked, referring to the paperwork that had belonged to my father. Before I could stop him, he pulled out an appointment book and flipped through the pages.

“1330 AD?” Salem read one of the notes. “Did anything happen that year? What is all this stuff?” he asked again.

“Some stuff that belonged to a friend of Derek’s dad,” I lied. “The guy died several years ago, and Derek’s dad thinks it might have been murder.”

“What does that have to do with you?”

“I thought it would be a good test of my investigative skills to see if I could figure anything out.”

“Want some help?”

“Sure,” I answered. I could work on my dad’s paperwork and spend time with Salem at once.

I pulled out my cell and called Derek.

“Hey, babe,” he answered.

“I’m going to hang out with Salem after school, so I was hoping you would be able to come to campus and have lunch with me.”

“Order sandwiches and I’ll meet you by the lake.”

Half an hour later, Derek and I were eating our sandwiches when I saw Elias approaching us with three other men.

“Christ, here comes Elias,” I said. Derek turned.

“Those are the Sturges brothers: Roscoe, Owen, and Lyle. I call them the Three Stooges. They’re members of Elias’s entourage *and* his cousins.”

“Hey there, Derek my love,” Elias said. He reached out to stroke Derek’s cheek, but I pushed his hand away and stepped in front of Derek.

“He is *not* your love, Fairchild.”

Elias glared at me and the Three Stooges stepped forward.

“I see you’ve learned you’re a wolf,” Elias said.

“That’s what freaked you out in the bathroom at the diner, isn’t it?” I asked. “You realized I was a wolf, and you got scared shitless.”

“It took me by surprise, that’s all. You’re late to the game. I’ve been doing this a long time. If you’re thinking of challenging me for leadership when the time comes, I wouldn’t bother. I’ll destroy you.”

“I’m not so sure about that, Elias. But that’s really a moot point.”

“Are you talking about the bullshit that you’re a Chosen One?” Elias asked.

“It’s not bullshit,” Derek said.

“I *do* have the birthmark,” I said.

“I’m sure you have *a* birthmark, but I don’t believe in any of that hocus-pocus about Chosen Ones having special abilities. You may be a wolf, Coleman, but you’re just another wolf. A wolf that I can easily get rid of, if I so choose.”

“Are you positive about that, Elias?” I asked. “If you’re wrong you run quite a risk. Not only could you end up *not* as an alpha, but also kicked out of the pack. If I so chose, that is.”

Elias snorted. "I'm quite sure. I *am* going to be alpha, and you will not stop me." He spun and walked away—with the Three Stooges in tow.

"How does he have so many followers?" I asked.

"It's not so much that they follow him as they've been supporting the Fairchild clan for generations. Between aunts and uncles and cousins, the Fairchild family is quite large. Add those numbers to the people who blindly follow *anyone* with the last name Fairchild and you have quite a large group."

SALEM and I spread out the paperwork on the floor of his place. We examined each scrap piece of paper again and again. The 1330 AD note seemed to be something important, but I couldn't figure it out.

"The 1330 isn't necessarily a year," said Salem. "It could be an address or part of a phone number."

"That's possible," I said.

"It could be military time," Salem said. "One thirty p.m. I'm not sure about the crosses. Two crosses, double crosses. I don't know."

Double cross. That was it. Maybe whoever was at that meeting was the traitor my dad was trying to find?

"What about the letters?"

"I don't know. Initials?"

"Initials? Christ, that's an awesome idea, Salem. It was probably a meeting at one thirty p.m. with someone with the initials A.D."

Someone immediately came to my mind: Abraham Dearborn. But I couldn't tell Salem the name. I decided I was going to visit Abraham at school tomorrow.

I said goodnight to Salem and went home. It was late, and Derek was already asleep. I stripped and pressed my naked body against his. He pushed back against me, and I fell asleep with my arms wrapped around him and my face buried in his neck.

## CHAPTER 15

I TOLD Derek about Salem's idea and about my plan to talk to Abraham. I arrived at school early and went to Abraham's office and knocked on his door.

"Come in!" he called out. He smiled when he saw me step in. Abraham's office was small, decorated simply but elegantly. Large plants sat in corners and near antique chairs and desks. Large Monet reprints decorated the walls.

"What can I do for you, dear boy?"

"I was looking through some things of my parents' and I found an appointment book that belonged to my dad. It appears he may have had an appointment with you on October 2, 1987. Can you tell me why he was meeting you?"

Abraham smiled. "Your father and I were friends and we got together often." He picked up a letter opener shaped like a sword and used it to clean his fingernails.

"So it was a friendly visit?" I asked.

"No, that particular appointment was regarding a pack matter. I was preparing to talk to you regarding this matter. I didn't want to throw even more at you."

"Why did he need to meet with you?" I asked.

"I helped your father arrange a legal document. He arranged things for you in case both he and your mother died before you were of age."

"What did he leave me?"

"A small amount of money and a key to a safety deposit box."

“How much money?”

“Enough to ensure you can finish your college education,” he answered. “Five hundred thousand dollars.”

“Half a million dollars?” I was stunned.

“Yes.” He smiled.

“Wow. And what’s in this safety deposit box?”

“I don’t know,” he answered. “He left strict instructions, and only you can get into the box.”

“How am I going to prove I’m his son?”

“The bank has the instructions. I wasn’t privy to that information.”

“When can I go?” I asked.

“No time like the present,” he answered. “Bank of Reno on South Virginia. Shall we drive together?”

“I have a final exam in a few minutes. I’ll go to the bank after class,” I replied. “I can go there myself. I don’t need you there, do I?”

He was silent for a moment, and I wondered if I had upset him. “No, dear boy. You don’t need me there. I just thought you could use some emotional support.”

He reached into his drawer, brought out a small manila envelope, and handed it to me. I opened it and took out a small key.

“Have you made your decision yet?” he asked me.

“No. It’s still so much to take in.”

“I don’t think even your parents would blame you if you chose to live your own life, instead of one supposedly arranged by fate.”

“It’s a tough decision. I don’t know what I’m going to do.”

“I recently traveled to Puerto Rico. Absolutely beautiful. If you ever get the chance to go there, you should go.” I wasn’t sure why he was talking about Puerto Rico, but I didn’t question him.

“I’ll consider it.” I stood up and stuck out my hand. “Thanks for everything, Abraham.”

“Of course, dear boy,” he said as he shook my hand. “Don’t hesitate to call me if you ever need anything.”

"I will." I left his office and went to class. The final exam was fairly easy and I was the first to finish. I handed in my test, left the classroom, and headed to the bank.

At the bank I walked up to a good-looking man sitting at a desk.

"I have a key to a safety deposit box," I said. "Who do I need to talk to?"

He instructed me to wait and returned a few minutes later with a short, skinny man who was horseshoe bald.

"My name is Clayton Brooks," he said. We shook hands.

"My name is Jack Coleman," I said. "My father left me a safety deposit box and I would like to look at it."

"What is your father's name?" he asked.

"Alonzo Bloodworth."

Clayton had a look of shock on his face. "You're Alonzo Bloodworth's son?"

"Yes," I said. "It's a long story."

"Come to my office," he said. I followed him to a private office and sat across from him.

"Did you know my father, Mr. Brooks?"

"Please, call me Clayton. I knew your father in a business capacity only."

"Do you know about the safety deposit box?" I asked.

"I had just been promoted to manager when he came in. It was an odd request but one that was doable. I wasn't sure I would ever see his son. But here you are. Provided you are who you say you are."

"I was adopted," I said. "I barely knew my biological parents."

"He mentioned you," Clayton said. "He loved you very much. He said he wanted you to be safe but wasn't sure if you would be unless you all disappeared. I didn't understand everything he said, but it wasn't my job to understand."

"But you arranged what he asked?"

"Yes, I did. He said he feared for his own life, as well as yours. So he arranged it so only you could get into the safety deposit box."

“How did he do that?”

“Two things. Of course, you must have the key.”

I handed him the key. “What else?”

He pulled out a picture. “Do you have a birthmark?”

“Um... yes.”

“May I see it?”

I stood and pulled up my shirt. Clayton walked over to me and looked at my birthmark. He compared it to a picture in his hand. It was a picture of me as a baby and was focused on the mark.

“Very well,” he said. “Follow me.” I did, and we walked to a back part of the bank. He punched a private code into an electronic keypad, and we walked into a room with wall-to-wall boxes. He looked around for the box number and directed me to it. He slid a key in, and I slid in mine. I pulled out the box.

“There’s a private viewing room over there.” Clayton pointed.

“Am I allowed to take whatever is in the box?”

Clayton nodded. “It belongs to you. You can either turn in the safety deposit box or save it. Your father paid for fifty years of use.”

I took the box and sat down at a table. I slowly opened the box—not sure what was in it, and not sure what I wanted to be in it. I imagined a letter that told me I had free will and could choose not to become leader of the pack. Or there could be a letter which said I *had* to become leader.

I finally lifted the lid. Inside was a small wooden box. It was around four inches tall and three inches wide. The top had a beautiful design made up of five different types of wood. In the center was a half-inch dark square. The four pieces around it were almost a triangle, but not quite. Each of those pieces had one of the bottom points made into flat edges to make up the square of the top of the box. They had four sides instead of just three, making them more of a quadrilateral. The sides of the box had three sections. The top and bottom were light sandalwood, and the middle stripe was a dark oak.

I picked up the box, expecting there to be a lid. There wasn’t. I felt all around it and couldn’t find anything that moved. I looked at it

for several minutes before I decided to take it home with me. I called Clayton in and told him I was taking the box home but wanted to keep the safety deposit box available. We replaced the safety deposit box, and I left.

I looked at my watch. I had another final exam to take in one hour. As I pulled into the parking lot, I saw Avery and called out his name.

“Hello, Jack. How are you doing?”

“Why didn’t you tell me you knew my mother?”

He smiled. “I planned on it when we had time to be alone. Katie was my best friend in the world. I’d have done anything for her. I knew you looked familiar when I first saw you. It all made sense when Derek told me who you were.”

“Your friend’s son, and a Chosen One too.”

“Well, I have to admit I knew you were a Chosen One.”

I looked at him quizzically. “She and I were hanging out one time, and she changed your diaper. I saw the birthmark. I figured there was a reason she didn’t want me to know, so I didn’t say anything.”

“Was this before or after the attempt on my life?”

“Before,” he answered. “I was so young back then. I had plans to be alpha back then.”

“What happened to that dream?”

“I woke up and realized there were better things to do with my life.”

“Did she tell you why they were leaving town?”

“No, but I knew why. She had been acting nervous the last couple weeks. There was even one day where she canceled the plans we had made months before.”

“Do you know what she did that day?”

“No. She wouldn’t tell me. She was gone for several hours in the afternoon. I saw her much later that afternoon. I assume she was taking pictures because I borrowed her camera, and her batteries were dead.”

“Do you know what she was taking pictures of?”



“She was gone before I had a chance to ask.”

“She didn’t say goodbye?”

He shook his head. “I always assumed they didn’t have time.”

“What about the film?”

“I don’t know what happened to it.”

“Damn it,” I said. Avery put his arm around me in a comforting gesture.

“Thanks, Avery,” I said. I pulled him into an embrace.

I was about to walk away when Avery spoke.

“Jack?”

I turned around. “Yeah?”

“I know you have a lot to decide right now, and I’m not about to offer any advice. But I know your mother would be proud no matter what you choose.”

I nodded and went to my last class of the day.

AFTER class, my head was spinning. I needed a way to calm down and maybe get my thoughts together. I stopped at Salem’s place and was grateful he was home. I knocked on the door but didn’t wait for a response. I just walked in. Salem was sitting on his bed drinking a Mountain Dew.

“Damn, Jack. One of these days you’re going to catch me fucking a chick.”

“It’s more likely I’d catch you jacking off. I bet that’s the most action you get nowadays.”

“Fuck you,” he said as he threw a pillow at me.

I avoided the pillow. “Nah, you ain’t my type.”

“Jack, anything with a dick is your type.”

“That was true at one point,” I admitted, “but not anymore.”

“I’m glad, bud. I like Derek. He’s good for you.”

“Thanks, man.”

“Did you play hooky so you could get some nooky?” Salem laughed.

“No, I had some other things to take care of today. I was wondering if you wanted to go for a jog.”

“Sure. I need to get off my ass.” He grabbed a pair of running shorts and went into the bathroom to change. I was wearing jean shorts and figured they would do. Salem and I got on my bike and made the quick ride to San Rafael.

We parked, and I took off my shirt and left it on my bike. We started jogging. About fifteen minutes later we stopped abruptly. There was a wolf in front of us. “Christ,” I said.

“What the hell?” Salem muttered.

The wolf was long legged with a full body. It had dark fur and wicked eyes. Its mouth was open, and I could see its fangs. I knew we were in trouble, and I knew it was more than just a regular wolf, but Salem didn’t know. I knew I was the target; the wolf had been sent to take me out. Salem might not be the one the wolf was after, but I was sure the wolf wouldn’t hesitate to kill us both. I wasn’t about to let my best friend be collateral damage.

In my head I ran through a list of options. I could shift and protect us, but that might shock Salem too much. I could also try to protect us in human form, but I didn’t think that would work. Running was another option, but I didn’t think we could run faster than the wolf.

The wolf started advancing toward us as it growled.

“Get out of here!” Salem yelled and waved his arms. Of course, the wolf didn’t move.

“It has to be feral or have rabies or something like that,” Salem said. “Most wolves are more afraid of people than we are of them.”

“Not this one,” I answered. “You run one way and I’ll run another. He can’t chase us both. Maybe he’ll get confused.” I was actually hoping the wolf would chase me, and I could shift and take on the fight myself.

“I say we charge it. The two of us could overpower it,” Salem murmured.

“Not a good idea. I don’t think that would work. I say we go with my idea.”

The wolf moved closer to us, and we took a few steps back.

“Please, Salem, just do what I say.” I was getting ready to convince Salem to run when two other wolves came seemingly out of nowhere.

“Oh, shit,” Salem whispered. But I didn’t share his concern. The wolves were large and burly. They looked exactly alike with the same auburn-colored fur. I knew it was Remy and Roman.

Remy and Roman walked up to us. I felt Salem tense up and get ready to run. I put my hand on his shoulder. “Don’t move.”

“What? We’re outnumbered.”

“Just wait. I have a feeling.”

Remy and Roman walked up to us and then spun around to face the other wolf. The lone wolf growled at them, but the twin wolves’ growls were even louder. The lone wolf began to back up. After a few steps the wolf turned around and started running. Remy and Roman looked at me with what I swore was a grin and then took off after the other wolf.

“What the hell was that?”

“Let’s get back to your place.”

BACK at Salem’s place we sat down on his bed.

“That was fucking insane,” Salem said. “I don’t understand what happened.”

“I do,” I said.

“You do? Well, maybe you can explain it to me.”

“You won’t believe it, Salem.”

“What the hell are you talking about?”

“Those wolves in the park aren’t regular wolves.”

“Then what the hell were they?”

“Werewolves,” I answered.

“Werewolves? Are you fucking insane?”

“I said you wouldn’t believe me.”

“You really expect me to believe you? Next, you’re going to say you’re a werewolf too.”

“I am a werewolf.”

Salem started laughing loudly. “You’ve lost it, buddy. You really have.”

“How can I convince you I’m telling the truth?” I asked.

“I don’t know,” he said. “Change into a wolf right now. Or do you need a full moon or wolfsbane or something like that?”

“No,” I answered. “Don’t need anything like that.” I stood up and stripped off my clothes.

“Jack, what the hell are you doing?”

“I have to be naked to shift,” I said.

“Shift?”

Without another word, I closed my eyes and triggered the change. When I opened my eyes, I was seeing in black and white. I looked at Salem. His eyes were wide open, and his hands were over his mouth.

“Holy shit!” Salem exclaimed.

I shifted back and slipped my clothes on.

“Oh my God,” Salem murmured. “This can’t be real.”

“It is, buddy. It’s very fucking real.”

“How long have you been a werewolf?”

“Well, I guess I’ve been one my whole life. But I just recently found out.”

“Just found out? I don’t get it.”

“Derek helped me realize the truth.”

“Derek?” I saw something click in his brain. “Is he one too?”

“Yes. And Josh.”

“Derek *and* Josh? Holy hell.”

“It’s a long story, Salem. Are you ready to hear it?”

“Sure. Why the hell not?”

I TOLD Salem everything, including talking to Abraham and Avery. Less than an hour later, I finished with the story. “Shit, Jack. No wonder you’ve been in your own world.”

“You don’t hate me for not telling you sooner?”

“Hell no, bud. I don’t blame you. I probably would’ve done the same thing.”

“I still have a lot to figure out. I have to decide if I want to be alpha. I have to decide if I want to figure out who the traitor is.”

“I’d like to help, if you’ll let me.”

“You’re not afraid of getting fleas from me, are you?”

Salem chuckled, and I saw some of the tension leave his body.

“I’d love your help. You might be a little more removed from the situation than Derek or Josh. Speaking of Derek, I better get home. I’ll call you tomorrow and we’ll figure out a time to get together.”

“Sounds good, bud.”

I took off and headed home. I was glad Derek was still awake.

“Hey, pup,” I said as I walked in the door. “I’ve got some stuff to tell you.” I sat down and filled him in on the day’s events. I talked about meeting with Abraham, the wooden box, talking to Avery, and the incident in the park with Salem.

“Thank God Remy and Roman were there,” Derek said.

“There’s more, pup: I told Salem the truth.”

“You told him you’re a werewolf? Are you sure it was a good idea?”

“I’m sure we can trust Salem. I think he can help me. I needed to tell him.”

Derek leaned over and kissed my cheek. “It’s okay, babe. I understand. We’ll figure it out.”

“Let’s go to bed. I’m exhausted.”

“Too exhausted for sex?” Derek asked.

“I’m never too tired for that.”

## CHAPTER 16

THE following afternoon after our classes, Salem, Josh, Derek, and I all got together at Derek's place.

"I can't believe it," Salem said. "My three closest friends are werewolves."

"Think how I feel," I said. "I *just* learned I'm a werewolf, and I have to make what could be the biggest decision of my life."

"Are you any closer to making a decision?" Josh asked.

I shook my head.

"You know what the right thing to do is, don't you?" Salem asked.

"What's the right thing to do?" I asked.

"You know becoming leader of the pack is the right thing to do. I know you, Jack Coleman. Maybe better than you know yourself. But you know which decision is the one you're supposed to make."

"That's easy for you to say, Salem. You're not the one who has to make the decision. What kind of leader would I be? I was never any good at taking charge."

"Have you forgotten?"

I looked at him like I had no idea what he was talking about.

"I can't believe you don't remember the Boy Scout camping trip when we were thirteen."

"Boy Scouts?" Josh said.

"Your mother let you join the Boy Scouts?" Derek asked.

"It was one of the few activities my mom let me do. She hated the idea of the camping trip, but my dad convinced her to let me go. After what happened, my mom flipped out."

"What did happen?" Derek asked.

"It really wasn't anything," I said.

"The hell it wasn't," Salem said.

"You tell us the story, Salem." Josh laughed.

"We were hiking up into the mountains near Lovelock. There were eight kids and one camp leader. What was his name, Jack?"

"Mr. Hockney," I replied.

"I knew you remembered," Salem said. "Anyway, we were ten miles or so up the hiking trail when Hockney collapsed. He grabbed his chest and passed out."

"Heart attack?" Derek asked.

"Yeah," Salem said. "And all the kids freaked out. Started screaming and crying."

"Even Salem," I threw in.

"Yes, even I freaked out," he admitted.

"Big, bad, tough Salem was flipping out like a girl." I laughed.

"Yeah, and what did you do?" he asked.

"Yeah, babe, what did you do?" Derek and Josh were both smiling.

"I didn't do anything major," I mumbled.

"Knock it off, Jack," Salem said. "Quit being humble. What you did was huge."

"Tell us what he did," Derek said.

"Jack here took charge the minute every kid started screaming. He told a few kids to gather sticks and build a fire."

"A fire? For what?" Josh asked.

"Smoke signals," I answered.

"Smoke signals?"

"It was just to keep them busy and their minds occupied," I replied.

"Yes, exactly," Salem said. "Every kid had a chore. For some it was meaningless chores, but it kept them busy. Jack and two other kids performed CPR on Mr. Hockney. He sent me to run as fast as I could with Hockney's cell phone until I could find a signal and call for help."

"Wow," Derek murmured.

"I was so proud of you that day, Jack," Salem said. "What you did was incredible. You saved Hockney's life because you took charge."

"Mom freaked out," I said. "She made me quit the Scouts."

"I think you're a natural leader, Jack. You don't have to think about what to do. You just do it. You know what is right and what is wrong."

"That doesn't make it any easier, Salem," I said.

"I understand. But I know you'll make the right decision."

"Let's see this wooden box you got," Josh said, after I told him about talking to Abraham and Avery.

I got out the box and handed it to Josh. He fiddled with it for a second before Salem pulled it out of his hands.

"It's probably one of them puzzle boxes," Salem said.

"A what?" Josh asked.

"A puzzle box. Hidden doors and compartments."

"Like all those things in *National Treasure*?" Derek asked.

"Yeah, like those," Salem answered. He handed it to Derek after not having any luck with it. Derek messed with it for several minutes before he handed it to Josh.

"It's like a Rubik's Cube," Josh said. "I was always good with those." With one hand on the top of the box and one hand on the bottom, he twisted, and the top panels slid open.

"Christ, you did it, Josh," I said.

He pulled up on the center square, and underneath it was a small compartment.



“There’s something in here,” Josh said. He handed me the box, and I looked inside. I pulled out the item.

“It’s a roll of film,” Derek said.

“Maybe those are the pictures my mom took the day before she died,” I said.

“We need to get this film developed,” Josh said.

“We can’t just take it down to Walgreens where a pimply faced teenage boy runs it through a machine,” I said. “I’m not going to risk it being damaged.”

“And the images might need to be manipulated,” Derek said. “We need to find someone who has the knowledge of how to use the chemicals to get the best picture.”

“Avery knows how to do all that,” Josh said.

“Avery can be working on that while you and I work on this AD 1330 thing,” Salem said.

“What are you guys talking about?” Josh asked.

I told Josh about my dad’s appointment and the note. “I talked to Abraham, and he says that’s the day my dad set up the safety deposit box.”

“AD could be someone other than Abraham,” Josh said. “It could be Avery.”

“Avery’s last name is Fowler,” I replied.

“Yeah, it is *now*. He changed it to Fowler when he joined our pack. Before that his last name was Douglas.”

“He could be the traitor,” I said. “We can’t give him the film.”

“How can we prove he’s not the traitor?” Josh asked.

“He already admitted that he knew I was a Chosen One, and that he wanted to be alpha back then. But he’s also the one who saved me when there was an attempt on my life.”

“Maybe that was a setup to get him even closer to your parents,” Salem said.

"I'm going to go see him," I said. I liked Avery. I didn't like the idea of him being the double-crossing pack member.

"What're you going to do?" Derek asked.

"I don't know. I'll figure it out when I get there."

I drove to Avery's place and knocked.

"Hello, Jack." He smiled as he opened the door.

"Can I ask you a couple questions, Avery?" I asked.

"Of course. Come in."

I stepped into his house and took a seat on the couch. "I've been looking through several things that belonged to my parents, and the date October 2, 1987, seems to come up a lot."

"That's the date Katie had plans to go to a concert," he answered.

"What time did you see her that afternoon?"

He paused to think about it. "Around three or four in the afternoon."

"What did you do that day?"

"I spent the day working on developing film."

"By yourself?"

"Yes." Something about the way Avery said that made me think he was lying. I didn't like that feeling, but I knew I had to find out the truth.

I thanked Avery for his time and left. But my instinct told me not to leave yet. I pulled my bike off to the side and hid. Through the front window I could see Avery on the phone talking very animatedly. He looked upset. A minute later, Avery got into his car and left. I followed him to the Sparks Marina Park. A running track with trees and picnic tables surrounded the Sparks Marina Lake. The lake is a beautiful crystal blue and is fed with freshwater from an underground aquifer.

Avery got out of his car and walked over to a man sitting on a park bench. I stripped, shifted, and snuck as close as possible. With my enhanced vision and hearing, I could see and hear the conversation.

The man Avery met was tall and hairy and wore a black leather trench coat. He reached out and stroked Avery's cheek. He leaned into the caress for a second but then pushed the hand away.

"We can't," Avery said. "That was over a long time ago."

"I never stopped loving you," the man said. Avery looked at him sadly.

"I wanted to remind you that no one can ever know we were involved," Avery said.

"I don't give a shit anymore. I'm tired of being in the closet and trying to be what everybody else thinks I should be."

"I wish it were different, but I don't think it's safe. Your family would flip out if they learned. You would lose everything, and who knows what they would do to me."

The guy started to argue, but then he gave a resigned sigh. "I promise, I won't tell anyone." Avery and the man stared at each other for a moment before Avery turned and left. I quietly left and returned home.

"I FOLLOWED Avery to the Marina Park and he met this guy," I told Derek. "It looks like they were involved at some point. Maybe they still are."

"Did you recognize the other guy?" he asked.

"No, but he was tall with a leather trench coat."

"That has to be Emmett Fairchild. He wears that stupid coat everywhere in the winter."

"Is it possible Avery and Emmett were involved twenty years ago?" I wondered. "Avery could've found out about me and was trying to use that information for either one of them to become alpha."

"We need to find someone who can develop that film. Maybe the pictures can tell us something," Derek said.

"I'm tired of talking about this. Let's relax and watch a movie."

"What do you have in mind?"

"*Batman?*"

“Michael Keaton or Christian Bale?”

“What about George Clooney?”

“Not a chance in hell.” Derek laughed.

“Okay, let’s go with Christian Bale,” I said. I stood up and walked to the movie cabinet. I looked through the movies and found *Batman Begins*. I put it into the DVD player and sat down on the couch next to Derek.

We watched the movie and then put in *The Dark Knight*. I don’t know how much of that we watched before we fell asleep on the couch. I woke up just before midnight to the title screen of the movie. Derek was sound asleep and looked so cute I didn’t want to wake him up. Instead, I picked him up in my arms and carried him upstairs.

I laid him in our bed, stripped my clothes off, and snuggled up against him. I wasn’t asleep thirty minutes when a noise woke me up. It sounded like scratching on glass followed by someone opening the front door but trying not to make any sound.

I jumped up and shook Derek. “Babe, wake up.”

“What is it?” he mumbled.

“I think someone’s downstairs.” He jumped up and was fully awake. He was listening.

“I hear it too,” he said.

“Should we shift?” I asked.

“No. It may just be a stupid thief or a druggie. Stay here. I’ll check it out.”

“I’ll go with you.”

“No! You stay here.” He was so adamant I knew it wasn’t worth arguing about it.

He got up and walked slowly out of the room.

*“Be careful, pup.”*

*“Don’t worry.”*

Of course, I did worry. I didn’t want anything to happen to the man I loved. I didn’t know what I would do if something happened to him.

*“I don’t hear any more noise,”* Derek said.

*"Maybe they left."*

*"Wait. I see shadows moving downstairs. I smell something too. Someone is definitely here."*

*"Pup! Wait!"*

"Christ!" I shouted as my head rang like someone had hit it with a bat. Then I felt a sharp pain in my gut. I knew Derek had been hurt. I stood and ran out the bedroom door and froze where I stood.

At the top of the stairs—right in front of me—was a wolf. It was a huge wolf, growling with teeth bared and saliva dripping from his fangs. The wolf's fur was coal black and his eyes glowed a vicious yellow. This black wolf seemed even more vicious and fierce than the wolves Salem and I had encountered the other day. This wolf seemed ravenous and pure evil. I knew he was out to kill me. The wolf began to inch toward me. I actually considered not fighting, just letting the wolf tear into me and get it over with quickly. That idea lasted only a second.

I shifted quickly, but it did nothing to stop the black wolf from continuing toward me. I stood my ground, bared my teeth, and snarled. I advanced on him, and he stepped toward me again. One of us had to make the first move. I wanted it to be me, but I was terrified. I'd been a wolf numerous times since I discovered my heritage but hadn't done much more than run and play. Derek and I hadn't practiced any fighting moves, though we had talked about it.

The dark wolf jumped, but I avoided him, and he landed behind me. Before I could turn to face him, he sank his teeth into my right ankle and threw me down the stairs. When I landed at the bottom of the stairs, everything went black.

I was unconscious for only a few seconds, but when I opened my eyes I was seeing in color. I had shifted back to human and was on my stomach. The wolf had me pinned down and I could feel his hot breath on the back of my neck. My head—my entire body—was racked with pain. I tried to shift but couldn't do it. My brain couldn't focus enough to transform.

I tried to push my body up and throw the wolf off of me, but I couldn't do it. My arms flailed and came into contact with the fireplace

poker. I swung the poker backward, connected with the wolf's head, and knocked him off of my back.

The wolf yipped and fell down but was soon back on his paws. I stood up, still unable to shift. The wolf lunged at me as I lifted the fireplace poker outward. I saw recognition in his eyes, but he couldn't stop. The poker pierced the wolf in the chest, and he yowled in pain. He fell to the ground, rolled onto his back, and shifted.

I stepped closer to the man. He had jet-black hair that reached the middle of his back. I recognized him as one of the Three Stooges—Roscoe Sturges. His body was thick, with curly hair and a large cock. I stepped back when his eyes snapped open and was amazed as the man stood—the fireplace poker was still embedded in his chest. I could smell the iron tang of blood in the air. Blood poured from the wound and gushed down his body. The red liquid traveled down his chest, onto his pubic area, and dripped from his cock. He stared into my eyes and smiled as he brought both hands to the poker. Without breaking our gaze, he pulled it from his body. Even more blood gushed out of the wound—so much blood I expected the man to keel over. But he didn't. He laughed loudly, put both hands to his chest, and rubbed them in the blood. He put a finger to the head of his cock, lifted his hands to his mouth, and licked the blood from his fingers.

Roscoe laughed a guttural laugh and shifted. When he became a wolf, there was no wound. I was sure I would still be unable to shift, but it happened. I knew this would be a matter of life or death. One of us was going to die, and I wasn't going to let it be me.

I ran to the dark wolf, grabbed his front leg, and threw him on his back. I pinned him down and bit his neck. He yowled in pain but was still strong enough to throw me off him. He stood, but I didn't give him a chance to collect his wits. I ran behind him, leapt on his back, and bit his neck again. He shook me off, but I didn't relent. I barreled into him and knocked him onto his stomach. I latched onto his neck, bit down, and refused to let go. The wolf struggled under me for what seemed like hours, but I'm sure it was less than a minute. Finally, he stopped moving, and I knew he was dead. He shifted to human but didn't move. He was indeed dead.

I shifted and was trying to catch my breath when I remembered Derek.

I called out his name. I heard a groan coming from his office and ran in there. Derek lay on the floor, a knife protruding from his side.

“Christ,” I whispered. “Derek. Don’t be dead.”

He opened his eyes, but I could tell he was weak. “Is the wolf still here?”

“I killed him.” I was starting to panic. “I need to call an ambulance.”

“No. Take me upstairs and help me get undressed.”

“Are you crazy?”

“Jack, I need you to trust me. Please.”

I lifted Derek and carried him upstairs as quickly as I could. I laid him on our bed, not caring about the blood that was getting everywhere. I slipped him out of his pants but tore his shirt off, fighting the panic and the horror that welled up inside me. “What now?”

“I need you to pull the knife out.”

“I thought you weren’t supposed to do that.”

*“Trust me. As soon as you pull it out, I’m going to shift.”*

Even though I had seen it happen with Roscoe, I was still shocked to see there was no wound on Derek as a wolf. He shifted back, and the wound was still gone.

“One of the benefits of being a wolf,” Derek said.

“Are you totally healed?” I asked.

“I’ll be sore and tired for a couple days, but I’ll be fine.” His eyes started to droop. “Call Josh. He’ll know what to do.” Derek closed his eyes and he was asleep.

I grabbed my cell and called Josh. “Derek was attacked by a wolf. He’s fine, but there’s a dead wolf in my living room.”

“You take care of Derek, and I’ll take care of the rest.”

I closed the phone, cleaned up the bed as best I could, snuggled up against Derek, and fell asleep.

## CHAPTER 17

DEREK was already awake when I woke up the next morning.

“Why didn’t you wake me up?” I sat up and stretched.

“I love watching you when you’re asleep.” His voice was still low.

“You feeling okay?”

“It hurts, but I’ll be fine.”

“Do you need anything?”

“Just you next to me.”

“No problem.” I cradled Derek in my arms.

After a few minutes I spoke again. “I can’t imagine what I would’ve done if you had died. I’d hate myself if you died because of me. I don’t think I can stay and fight if it means putting your life in danger.”

“If you leave town, I’ll go with you,” he said.

“You won’t think less of me if I choose to run?”

“I’ll love you forever, babe. I will follow you wherever you go and whatever choice you make.”

“Thank you, pup.”

“I love you,” Derek whispered as he drifted off to sleep again. I sat there for some time before I slipped away from him, stepped into the shower, and cleaned myself off. After the shower, I dressed, called Salem, and asked him to come over. I only had one final exam that day, and it was in the afternoon.

“Can you come over?”

“Sure thing,” he replied.



True to his word, Josh had taken care of everything. The living room was immaculate. I looked outside the window and saw Remy and Roman. Remy waved at me.

I stepped to the front door, and Remy walked over to me. He pulled me into the customary bear hug.

“I’m so glad to see you’re okay,” he said.

“Thanks, Remy. What are you guys doing here?”

“Josh told us what happened. Our parents helped us clean up and dispose of the carcass. We decided to stay here and watch over you guys.”

“Thanks, Remy. I appreciate it, and I’m sure Derek does too.”

“It’s part of our duties—to protect our leader.”

“I’m not the leader,” I said.

“Not yet,” Remy said with a smile.

I was about to argue with Remy when Salem pulled up. Remy took a protective stance in front of me. I tapped him on the shoulder. “It’s okay, Remy. He’s a friend.”

Remy stood to the side and allowed Salem to come in.

“Who’re the big bruisers?” Salem asked.

“My protectors, I guess. Remember the wolves that saved us at the park?”

“That was them?” I nodded. “Why are they here?”

“There was an incident last night.” I told Salem the story of being attacked and of Derek almost dying.

“Shit, bud. You okay?”

“I’m fine. It’s Derek I’m worried about. He’s fine this time. But what about next time? If I become alpha there could be even more attempts on his life. I can’t be responsible for his death.”

“What’re you saying?” he asked me.

“As soon as Derek is well, we’re going to leave town. I am *not* going to be leader of the pack.”

“Have you told Derek your decision?”

“Not yet,” I said. “But he said he will follow me wherever I go and support me in whatever decision I make.”

“Derek will live with you if you choose to run, but will you be able to live with yourself?”

AFTER Salem left, my cell rang. The caller ID said “Bank of Reno.”

“Hello?”

“Mr. Coleman?”

“Yes.”

“This is Clayton Brooks from Bank of Reno.”

“Yes, Clayton. What can I do for you?”

“I forgot to have you sign some papers. I was hoping you could swing by and sign them.”

“Sure. I’ll be there in a few minutes.”

Clayton was waiting when I got there, and he escorted me into his office. He grabbed a file off his desk and slid some papers toward me.

“Just sign where it’s marked.”

I looked at the papers and was about to sign when I noticed a date. It was the date my dad opened the safety deposit box: February 26, 1987. Nine months before we left town.

“Is this date correct, Clayton? Is this the date my dad opened the safety deposit box?”

I slid the paper to Clayton and he looked it over. “Yes, that’s the correct date.”

“Are you sure?” I asked.

“Absolutely sure. Why do you ask?”

“I thought my dad came here in October, not February.”

“No,” Clayton replied. “He opened the safety deposit box in February, but in October he came here, asked to get into the safety deposit box, spent a few minutes here, and left.”

“Thanks, Clayton,” I said. I signed the papers and returned home. I wasn’t sure what to do with the new information I had.

AFTER my trip to the bank, I went to school and took the exam. Shortly after I arrived home, Remy knocked on my door.

“Abraham is here to see you,” he said when I opened the door. “Do you want to see him?” I nodded.

Abraham stepped in and pulled me into an awkward embrace. “Dear boy, I am so sorry about what happened.”

“Thank you, Abraham,” I said. We sat down on the couch. “I’m glad you stopped by. I have a question to ask you.”

“How can I help?”

“I went to the Bank of Reno to sign some papers, and I learned my father opened the safety deposit box in February, not October. You told me the meeting you had with him in October was about the safety deposit box.”

“I must’ve mixed the days up in my head, dear boy. Now that I think about it, I believe the meeting was personal—not business.”

“I see,” I said. I was positive he was lying.

“You know, what happened with Derek is just the beginning,” Abraham said. “If you become alpha, others will come after you and your loved ones. And I don’t mean just Derek, but also your adoptive parents as well.”

“My parents?”

“Yes,” he said. “Anyone after you will use whatever and whomever they can.”

“Christ, I never thought of that.”

“You do have a lot to think about, dear boy. Let me know if I can help,” he said, and stood up.

“I will, Abraham. Thank you for stopping by.”

DESPITE the fact that Derek was totally healed from the incident, I still didn’t want him leaving the house.

That evening I made dinner for the both of us, and we sat down to watch *Three's Company*—one of Derek's favorite shows.

"Do you care if I leave you alone for a couple hours?"

"Got a date with a hot guy?" Derek smiled.

"Yeah, that's it," I smiled. "You caught me. Actually, I want to see Avery. I don't think he's the traitor, but I need to know for sure."

"What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to try a new approach: total honesty. I'm going to ask him about Emmett. But I don't like the idea of leaving you alone."

"I'm not exactly alone, babe. The Wonder Twins are out there, and they won't let anyone hurt me."

I laughed at his nickname for Roman and Remy. "Get some sleep, and I'll see you when I get back."

I FOUND Avery at his office and walked in. He looked at me but didn't say a word.

"We need to talk, Avery. And please tell me the truth." He gestured toward the chair opposite him, and I sat down.

"How are you connected to Emmett Fairchild?" Avery put his face in his hands, and I let him sit there silently for a moment.

"I'm in love with him," Avery said. His declaration surprised me. I figured he was having sex with Emmett, but I wasn't expecting love.

"Where did you go on October 2, 1987, when my mother canceled the concert plans?"

"I met with Emmett, and we made love," he answered. "We'd been together several months at that point. We hadn't planned to fall in love, but we did."

"Why did it have to be such a secret? Edmund accepts Elias as gay. Wouldn't he have accepted Emmett?"

"Not back then," Avery answered. "Emmett was nineteen years old, and his father had big plans for him. His father would've been furious."

"What about now?"

“Emmett’s married. She’s a shrew and wants to keep hold of the Fairchild money. She told Emmett that if he leaves her she will take him for everything. For years Emmett has been afraid of being disowned by his father. But he’s getting to the point that he doesn’t care. There’s a chance that we could actually be together after all these years. But we aren’t ready yet. Are you going to tell everyone?”

“Why would I?”

“Isn’t that why you’re here?”

“No. I’m here because my father thought there was a traitor in the pack, and I’m trying to find out who it was.”

“You thought it was me? Why?”

“There was a note in my dad’s appointment book—1330 AD and two crosses.”

“What does that mean?”

“I think the AD stands for initials and the 1330 for a meeting time. Two crosses—double cross. I think whoever the meeting was with was the traitor. The same person who tried to kill me as an infant.”

“How does that point to me?” Avery asked again.

“I thought the AD stood for Avery Douglas. My theory was that you and Emmett were working together so he could be alpha, with you at his side. I thought you staged the attack on my life so my dad wouldn’t suspect you.”

Avery looked at me and smiled and then burst out laughing. “Jack, I don’t have a mean bone in my body, and I loved your mother more than my own life.”

“My gut told me you weren’t the traitor, but I had to be sure. And when I saw you with Emmett at the marina I was confused.”

“You followed me to the marina?” I nodded. “If I’m not the traitor, who do you think is?”

“Abraham,” I replied. “As much as I don’t like the idea, I think he’s the traitor.” I spelled out the evidence I had on Abraham. I also told him about the film.

“I can use the darkroom on campus to develop the film,” Avery said. “It shouldn’t take very long at all.”

I reached into my pocket and tossed him the film.

"If I become alpha, I want you in my Inner Circle, Avery."

He smiled, a huge grin. "Thank you, Jack. That means a lot. Does that mean you've decided?"

I shook my head. "I'm still looking at all my options." He gave me a knowing smile but didn't say anything else.

I GOT home and was about to walk upstairs when I heard noise coming from Derek's office. I stepped in and was shocked to see Derek sitting at the desk.

"What the hell are you doing?" I asked.

Derek must not have heard me come in because he jumped about five feet. He spun around in his chair and smiled at me.

"Sorry, pup. I didn't mean to scare you."

"I couldn't sleep, and I wanted to check my e-mail."

"Come sit with me in the living room," I said. We walked into the living room and sat down on the couch.

"What's the significance of January nineteenth?" I asked.

"Do you know what Native Americans called the first full moon of January?" I shook my head. "It's called the wolf moon. In this area that was one of the coldest times of the year; wolf packs often had trouble finding food. They would gather outside villages and howl at the moon. So the wolf moon plays a significant part in all Western packs' legends. January nineteenth is important in 2011 because it will be the first full moon of the second decade of the third millennium."

Neither one of us spoke for several minutes. I was looking at all my options and trying to figure out what the best one was. I felt Derek's head lean on my shoulder, and I knew he was asleep. I kissed him on the forehead, carried him upstairs, and laid him on the bed.

"Stay with me. Please," he begged.

I snuggled in next to him, and we were both asleep a few minutes later.

## CHAPTER 18

WITH less than a month until January 19, I had to make a decision—and soon. Wednesday was my last final exam and the last day of the semester. I focused on the test and was sure I aced it.

The next morning, with Derek still asleep, I slipped out of bed and got dressed. I went downstairs and called Remy to the door.

“I want to meet with Elias,” I said. “Can you arrange it?”

He looked at me like I was crazy. “Sure, I can do that. But you have to have protection with you when you meet him.”

“That’s fine. As long as someone stays close to Derek.”

“No problem, boss. Roman and I will take care of everything.”

“Thanks, and don’t call me boss.”

“Okay, chief.” I closed the door and laughed.

Twenty minutes later, Roman knocked on my door.

“You ready to go, boss?”

“Sure,” I said. “What’s the plan?”

“You and I are going to go meet Elias at the Sparks Marina Park. Remy will stay here with Derek.”

“Just you and me? Will that be enough if there is any trouble?”

“What? I ain’t enough for you?” Roman said, laughing.

“That’s not what I meant.”

“Don’t worry, boss. We’ll have plenty of ours around us. Elias will likely do the same.”

“Okay. And don’t call me boss.”

“Yes, sir.” I rolled my eyes as I stepped out of the house.

ROMAN and I sat at a picnic table at the marina park. We were there for about ten minutes before I saw a trio of men walking toward us. I recognized their stupid swaggers before their faces—Elias and the Sturges brothers.

“Coleman, what the fuck do you want?” Elias asked me.

“Derek was hurt a couple nights ago. I don’t suppose you know anything about it?”

“I don’t know nothing,” Elias said, sneering. “But I’m sure you were the target, not Derek.”

“You must’ve underestimated my fighting abilities, Elias. You and Roscoe both. He pissed down both legs when I drove that poker into him.” Owen and Lyle growled and stepped forward, but Elias held them back.

“My boys aren’t very happy with you. Seeing as you killed their big brother and all. I should let them tear you apart.”

“I’d like to see you try,” Roman growled. Elias and his cohorts took a step back.

“Why do you want to be alpha, Elias?” I asked.

“What is this? Twenty questions?”

“More like *Are You Smarter than a Fifth Grader?*,” I said. “But those would be rhetorical questions since we all know you aren’t.”

Elias sneered at me again. “I’m meant to be alpha,” he said. “My whole life has been about getting to the point where I can challenge Derek’s old man and take him down. It is my destiny and no fucking Chosen One is going to stop me. I want to be alpha, and I want Derek. I always get what I want. So get out of the way, or get ready to be taken down. Everyone you care about could get caught in the crossfire.” Elias and the stooges turned and walked away.



“Come on, boss. Let’s go,” Roman said. I didn’t say another word as we left, but I could feel the glares of Elias and his boys on my back.

“Elias is pure evil, isn’t he?” I asked Roman on our drive back home.

“Yes, he is.”

“And if he becomes alpha things will go really bad.” It wasn’t a question.

“Really, really bad,” Roman said. “You know, you don’t have to be scared of him. You and Derek will be protected. Your family, even Salem, will come under the protection of the pack.”

“He thinks that if he threatens the people I love I’ll run, doesn’t he?”

“I’m sure that’s what he wanted.” Roman was silent for a minute. “Did it work?”

I didn’t answer, and he didn’t ask again. I had made a decision, but Derek had to be the first person I told. I went upstairs and snuggled into bed with my lover. I was afraid the decision I made was going to hurt him, but I knew it was the right decision. The right decision for me, for us, and for everybody.

“Hey, babe,” he murmured. “Everything okay?”

“Yes, actually. I made a decision.”

“You did? What is it?” He sat up in bed, and I moved so I could face him.

“I’m doing the right thing. I’ll be the alpha.”

Derek wrapped his arms around me. “I knew you’d make the right choice. What happened to make you decide?”

“Elias. He’s crazy, and lots of wolves and people will get hurt if he takes over. I’m not thrilled about becoming alpha. But I can’t let him take over.”

“You’re making the right choice, babe.”

“Your dad won’t be very happy.”

“I know. He’ll deal with it. He doesn’t have a choice.”

“Is it going to cause problems between you two?”

“Probably, but I chose you a long time ago.” He caressed my leg and then moved up to my crotch. My cock quickly got hard.

“Stop that,” I said as I swatted his hand away.

“Why? You don’t want to make love to me?”

“Of course I want to. But I don’t want to hurt you.”

“You know I’m totally healed. If you’re concerned don’t be rough like normal.”

“That might not be a good idea.”

“I don’t care. I need you in me.”

He unbuttoned my shirt and slid it off. He pushed on my chest, and I lay down. He climbed between my legs and pulled off my pants. My erection hit my stomach before Derek grabbed it and swallowed it in one fast move.

“Christ!” I murmured. He sucked me with force, and I worried I was going to lose it too soon. He moved and lay on top of me in a sixty-nine position. He sucked my cock slower this time.

“Get me ready for you,” he said, and I understood what he meant. I spread his ass cheeks and swiped my tongue up the crease. I licked up and down before stopping to concentrate on his sweet hole. My tongue attacked his rim and tried to force its way in. I slurped two fingers into my mouth, covering them with my spit before sliding them slowly into Derek’s body. I felt around and found the small gland that had big power. I massaged his prostate as he sucked my cock and my balls.

He pulled up quickly and moved around.

“Just let me ride you,” he said.

He lined his spit-lubed hole up with my shaft and sat down. I felt the head push past his tight ring; Derek froze. It took every ounce of my power not to slam the rest of it into him. It wasn’t that taking it slow wasn’t good—because it was amazingly good. It drove me crazy as gradually he took all of me in. Finally, I was completely buried in him. My balls pressed tight against his ass as I felt his body relax and accept the invasion.

“Ohhh, damn, babe,” Derek groaned.

“Christ, yeah,” I said.

“*Don’t move yet,*” Derek said in my mind. We hadn’t communicated like this since the attack.

*“You’re in control, pup.”*

*“It feels so incredible when you’re in me. I can’t describe it. I love sharing my body with you. I love sharing my heart and soul with you.”*

*“Your body is awesome how it accepts me. I can’t believe how lucky I am. I feel privileged every time we make love. So fortunate that you choose to share everything. I love you with all my heart. I hope you know that.”*

*“I do know that. I can feel it all the time, but even more so when we do this. It’s not just a physical connection; it’s an emotional and spiritual one.”*

He began to move, gripping my length with his ass muscles as he went up and down. I gripped his hips, using all my self-control to let him take me as he needed.

“*Can you feel what I am feeling?*” Derek asked me. “Can you feel how you make me feel? Can you sense how close I am to coming?”

*“I can feel it all.”*

*“Come with me, babe.”*

I concentrated to not only take in my sensations but Derek’s as well. Neither one of us had to talk to tell each other how we felt. We didn’t need words because I felt his sensations and he felt mine.

I felt the eruption starting in my body but held back because Derek wasn’t quite there yet. A moment later he was, and I stopped holding back my orgasm. He had slid up most of my length and had just the head inside when he quickly sat down to take it all in again. I shot into him at the same time his seed splashed onto my chest.

Derek pulled off and lay down next to me. I told myself I needed to clean up, but I couldn't make my body move. I allowed myself to close my eyes for a few minutes.

THE few minutes of sleep turned into three hours. I woke up when I didn't feel Derek in bed with me. I heard the shower running so I stepped into the bathroom—and froze. Derek's beautiful body took my breath away. I could see only his silhouette through the shower door, but even that was gorgeous. I watched him for a few minutes before I joined him.

"Hey, babe," he said. I embraced him from behind.

"How're you feeling?" I asked.

"Wonderful. A little achy in certain places," he said, laughing. "You ready for the big announcement?"

"I guess so. Still not sure I can be the leader everyone thinks I can be."

"You'll be an incredible leader. I have faith in you. I wish you could see the man I see. You're such a strong man. You've dealt with so much in your life and come out stronger."

I shrugged and grabbed the soap and washed myself. Derek took the bar of soap and washed my back. He washed between my ass cheeks and rubbed his finger across my hole.

"Does that feel good?" he whispered.

I nodded. I hadn't been the recipient of much ass play other than the failed time I tried to bottom. After learning of my heritage as an alpha, I just assumed that meant I was a total top.

"Alphas can be bottoms too," Derek said. He must've been feeling my emotions.

"What?" I asked. "But the time I tried—"

"That was the wrong guy," Derek interrupted. "Alphas can enjoy bottoming with their mate."

"I don't know."

“Don’t worry; we’re not going to try it until the time is right. For now, let’s just try an experiment. You okay with that?”

I nodded. His finger was pressing against my hole, but my body was resisting. I took a deep breath and pushed out. His finger slipped halfway in, and a wave of pain coursed through my body. Derek pressed his other hand against my back, and I felt all the pain leave. With the pain gone I felt the gentle pleasure as he slid more of the finger in and out. The finger went back in, and my lover finger-fucked me, rubbing my prostate and sending tingles throughout my body.

Blood rushed to my shaft, and I went from soft to hard in a split second. Christ, it felt good. Better than I thought it would. One finger slid out and two replaced it. The stretching of my hole combined with the manipulation of my gland sent me over the edge, and I shot a load of seed onto the shower wall. Derek slowly slid his fingers out, and I felt empty without them there. I turned around and pulled him into a kiss.

“Did you like that?” He laughed.

“Hell, yeah. It was awesome.”

“When the time is right, we’ll get to the better part. When do you want to make the announcement?”

“Not right away. Let’s enjoy a week of peace and quiet. I don’t have school; you’re still off work. Let’s just be Jack and Derek instead of an alpha and his mate.”

Derek kissed me hard, and I knew he approved.

## CHAPTER 19

IN MY family, we opened our presents on Christmas Eve. Derek and I drove to Lovelock, where he had the pleasure of meeting my large family. Of course they loved him. I never doubted they would.

Early Christmas Day, we drove back to Reno, where we had a huge meal with Derek's and Josh's family. I looked around and realized these were my friends and my family. I had always loved having a big family, and now it was even bigger.

I DECIDED to start telling people my decision the day after Christmas.

Salem was the first person I told. I visited him at his place to tell him the news in private. When I went home I made several phone calls.

Remy, Roman, and Josh were the first to arrive at my place. As my closest friends, I wanted them to know my decision before I made the official announcement.

"I won't be saying anything to anyone but you guys about trying to find the identity of the traitor."

"Why?" Josh asked.

"I just don't know who to trust, except you guys," I answered.

"Even our parents?" Remy asked.

"We decided not to tell my parents, either," Derek said.

"All of you will be members of my Inner Circle. Plus Avery, Maurice, Charlotte... and Salem," I said.

“A human?” Remy said.

Roman finished his twin’s thoughts. “You want a human in the Inner Circle?”

“Part of being a wolf means living alongside humans. Trying to keep the truth about ourselves a secret, but working with those who do find out. Who better to help us achieve that than a human?”

They all nodded, and I hoped they agreed with me. Not that it mattered if they didn’t; I was going to do what I thought was best regardless of what they thought.

I ASKED Josh to invite his parents over first. When they arrived they shot me the same icy glares they had when they first met me, and I wondered if there was a reason they didn’t like me.

“Mr. and Mrs. Valentine, I’m sure you’ll be pleased to hear that I have decided to become alpha.” Before I could say another word, Charlotte and Todd hugged me.

“I was sure you were going to run,” Todd said. “I didn’t think you had it in you to stay. I’m glad to admit I was wrong.”

“My boys were right,” Charlotte said, as she cupped my face with her hands and kissed me. “I should’ve listened to them. They saw the truth.”

“I’d like to offer you a seat on my Inner Circle, Charlotte. Do you accept?”

“Of course,” she said, and embraced me again.

They left shortly afterward, and Derek and I waited for his parents to arrive.

“That went well with Todd and Charlotte,” Derek said.

“I hope it goes half as well with your parents, but I doubt it will.”

When Rick and Angie arrived, they greeted me with warm hugs after hugging their son. I realized they were my in-laws, and I didn’t think I could have picked a better family to become part of. Too bad I was about to ruin my father-in-law’s life.

“I have called you here because I’ve made a decision. It wasn’t an easy choice, by any means,” I said. “I know this is the right thing to do. It’s what my parents would’ve wanted.” I stopped and looked at everybody’s faces. Their eyes were trained on me, and I felt a surge of pride. I finally started to feel like I could indeed be a leader—a good leader. “I have decided to accept my heritage and to become alpha. I will be leader of the pack in just a few days when I undertake the ritual on January 19, 2011.”

There was a stunned silence for a moment before Rick stood up. I could tell he was angry.

“You think you can kick me out, Jack?” he said loudly. “I will not step down as alpha until I’m ready, and I am not ready yet. So you may want to think about your decision.” Angie tried to calm her husband down, but he wouldn’t listen to her. “I don’t give a fuck if you have a silly little blemish. It doesn’t mean a thing. I know that, and you will know it too. When you realize the truth, I will be ready to accept an apology. From both of you.” He looked at Derek.

“I’m willing to let you hold a seat on my Inner Circle,” I said.

“Former alphas aren’t allowed to sit in an Inner Circle. But thanks so much for the thought,” he said sarcastically.

“Dad, please, listen,” Derek pleaded.

“No, Son. I don’t want to talk to or see you until you and your boyfriend can say you’re sorry.” Without another word, he left the house and slammed the door behind him.

“I’ll call you soon,” Angie said, and she followed her husband out the door.

I could tell Derek was near tears. I embraced him. “He’ll come around, pup.”

“I know he will,” Derek said. “You’ll become alpha, and he won’t be able to deny it any longer.”



AFTER the meeting, Avery asked me to go to the darkroom on campus.

"How's it going?" I asked when I stepped into the darkroom and let my eyes adjust.

"I've got the pictures developed, but they're dark," Avery replied. I looked at the pictures he had hanging throughout the room. He was right. The pictures looked like they were taken in a dark alleyway. I could tell there were two men talking but couldn't make out the faces. "I'm working on lightening them up," he said. "I can do it; it just takes a little time."

I looked at all the pictures that had been on the roll of film. In addition to the two men, there were also family pictures of my parents holding me. I had never had any family pictures with them, and it felt so good to see them.

My cell phone rang, so I said goodbye to Avery and stepped out of the darkroom. It was Salem.

"How did the meeting go?" he asked. I told him what had happened.

"Are you sure you want me as part of your Inner Circle? I'd understand if you changed your mind."

"I want you there, Salem. As my oldest friend, I need you there."

## CHAPTER 20

UNR has a short three-week semester during the winter break called the Wintermester. It's a good time to take extra classes, which is what I had originally planned to do. I decided not to take classes then because I now had too many other things to take care of. I had also decided to take a light load of classes in the spring semester. It would push back my graduation date, but it was better than having to drop classes if things got too busy.

We celebrated New Year's Eve with a huge party. Almost the entire pack was present. We all went into the mountains and shifted just after midnight. We ran in packs, hunting rabbits and other small animals. The feeling of unity was incredible, and I really started to feel like I could be part of this pack.

The Monday after New Year's, I told Derek I needed to visit my family in Lovelock. "They need to know what's going on. This is going to affect them."

"How will they take it?"

"My mom will freak out, but my dad will take it in stride, just like everything else."

Derek smiled. "And your sisters?"

"I could never predict how they would deal with anything, and I'm not going to start now."

"Want me to go with you?"

"I wish you could, pup," I answered. "But I think I need to do this alone."

“You need at least someone there to help in case they come after you.”

“I can ask Remy to come with me and leave Roman with you.”

“I don’t need a babysitter,” Derek grumbled.

“Roman isn’t a babysitter,” I said. “He’s a bodyguard. I’m not going to leave you alone and risk you getting hurt again. No arguments, okay?”

He sighed. I kissed his lips and wondered how I had ever lived without him.

I called Remy and Roman in and told them my plans.

“This might not be the best time for a trip, boss,” Remy said.

“I need to do it before the nineteenth. After that there might not be any time that’s good. Besides, if they see wolves wandering around their property they need to know what’s happening.”

Remy and Roman gave in when they realized I wasn’t going to change my mind.

“You want to drive there, or run?” Remy asked.

“I’d love to run and get a feel for the land. How long will it take?”

“Driving to Lovelock would only take an hour and a half. If we don’t stop too many times we could get there in five to six hours.”

“So if we left right away we could be there by six tonight?”

“Yeah,” Remy answered. “You can stay the night there, and we can leave in the morning.”

“Sounds good,” I said. “What about clothes? We can’t exactly show up butt-ass naked.”

“We’ll pack some clothes in a backpack. I’ll shift first, and you can put it on me.”

I laughed. “I wonder what people will think when they see a wolf wearing a backpack.”

MY CELL rang as I was getting ready to leave. It was Avery.

“Jack, I recognize one of the men in the pictures. It’s Edmund.”

“What about the other man?”

“Still working on that. But I’ll get it.”

“Good job,” I said, and hung up.

I told Derek what Avery had found. “I’m sure whoever is with Edmund is the traitor.”

Twenty minutes later Remy and I were ready to go.

“Don’t let my man get hurt, Roman,” I ordered.

“Don’t worry, boss. I’d die before I let anything happen.” Roman and Remy stepped outside so I could shift. Through the window I saw Roman kiss Remy on the cheek. They embraced warmly.

I got naked and pulled Derek into a passionate kiss. His hand started stroking my cock.

“Not now, pup. We can do that later,” I said.

“Promise?”

“I promise.”

I released him and shifted. I looked at him. Even in black and white he was gorgeous. He waved at me, and I nodded my head. He walked to the door and opened it. I stepped outside. Remy had shifted, and Roman had put the backpack on him. I joined Remy and we ran off. I stopped a couple hundred feet away and looked back. Derek was still standing at the door. Remy nudged me as a way to tell me we needed to get moving.

“*I love you,*” I told Derek. Once I was farther away, our connection would be lost.

“*I love you too. Come home safely.*”

THINGS went very well with my family. I decided to go with the old cliché “actions speak louder than words.” I shifted to wolf and then back to human in front of my parents.

“Holy shit, Son. You’re hung like a horse.” My dad had always been a believer in the supernatural, but that isn’t why he, or my mother, accepted the fact that I was a werewolf so easily.

Turns out my biological parents had told my adopted parents that they were werewolves. They had asked the Colemans to watch over me in case something happened. Of course, the Colemans hadn’t believed them but had still agreed to take care of me.

Katie had decided she had to do something to convince my adoptive parents she was telling them the truth. And her decision set in motion the events that led me to where I was now. She shifted in front of the Colemans. They were shocked but convinced. She shifted from human to wolf and back in less than a minute, but Alonzo spotted her. She was sure the shift hadn’t been long enough for anyone to catch a scent. But he insisted they had to leave immediately. They left, but not before the Colemans promised to take care of me no matter what. And only a few hours later, Katie and Alonzo were dead.

They had decided not to tell me about my heritage, because they didn’t think I would ever become a werewolf since I had been away from the pack my whole life. They had decided to let nature take its course, if it ever did, not realizing I would end up exactly in the middle of the entire mess.

The next morning, Remy and I were on the outskirts of town when we stopped near a small waterhole. We shifted to human and played around in the water. For a straight guy, Remy was rather casual about us being naked together. I’d heard he had his eye on a fellow pack member named Josephine.

I was swimming when a sudden pain ran through my head.

“Fuck!” I yelled. Remy swam to me as quickly as he could.

“What’s wrong?” he asked.

“I don’t know. Help me get to the shore, so I can concentrate.”

Remy pulled me to the shore. I sat in the dirt with my face in my hands and focused. Another bolt of pain ran through my body.

“It’s Derek! Something’s wrong with Derek. He’s hurt.”

I shifted and took off running. I felt Remy right behind me.

“*Derek!*” I yelled in my mind as we got closer to town. Christ, we should’ve been close enough that our connection would work. The fact that it wasn’t working meant something had happened to him.

I continued calling to him the closer we got to home. There was no response. When we got to the house, I could see the front door was wide open. I shifted as I stepped inside and saw Roman lying on the floor. He was bloody and bruised. Remy was right behind me and shifted the moment he saw his twin.

I ran upstairs. The bedroom was a mess. An end table and lamp had been smashed; I could tell there had been a struggle. I checked everywhere. Derek wasn’t there. I ran back downstairs. Remy was cradling Roman in his arms.

“Come on, Roman. Wake up!” he cried. He looked at me. “He’s barely breathing, Jack.”

I grabbed the phone and called Josh.

“Josh, Derek’s gone and Roman’s been hurt. I need help.”

Josh was there within a few minutes, and a few minutes after that dozens of pack members were there. Josh pulled Remy away from Roman, and several people grabbed Roman and took him away.

“They’re doctors and healers,” Josh told me. “They’ll do whatever they can for Roman.”

“What about Derek? I don’t know where he is.”

I jumped when my cell phone rang. I grabbed it off the counter. The caller ID read “Unknown.”

“Hello?” I answered.

“We have your boyfriend,” a digitally altered voice said.

“What the hell have you done with him? I swear to God I will tear your heart out and rip your body to shreds if you hurt him.”

The voice laughed. "You are in no position to make demands, Jack. If you want him back, you must listen to me. I will call at eleven p.m. on January nineteenth. You will meet me where I say, one hour later." The call disconnected before I could say anything.

"Who was it?"

"I don't know. But whoever it is, they have Derek."

"What do they want?"

"They want me to meet them at midnight on the nineteenth," I answered.

"They want to make you choose between Derek and the ritual," Josh murmured.

"Christ, what am I going to do?" I sat down on the floor and buried my face in my hands. I tried to hold the tears in, but I couldn't. Josh sat next to me, wrapped his arms around me, and held me. He sat there for a while, left for a minute, and then came back.

Ten minutes later, there was a knock on the door.

"Come in, Salem!" Josh called out.

Salem ran to me and joined us on the floor.

"Jack, are you okay?"

"They took Derek." I lifted my head. "I can't lose him, Salem. I just can't."

"We'll figure it out, bud. I promise."

They helped me stand up and directed me to the couch. I lay down and dozed off. Ten minutes later, Josh shook me awake.

"Jack, wake up. Avery's here. He has something you need to see."

"What is it?" I asked, groggily. I shook my head and tried to focus.

Avery and Salem were standing at the kitchen table. I could see large pictures spread across the table.

"I managed to clear up a few of the images," Avery said.

"Can we see the face of the other man?" I asked.

“No,” he said. “But I got something just as good.”

“Check out the ring on the guy’s hand,” Josh said. I looked. It was a silver ring with a large turquoise.

“That’s Abraham’s ring! He’s the traitor,” I said. “We need to tell everyone.”

“Wait, Jack,” Salem said. “If he is the traitor that means he has Derek. And if we try to force his hand, Derek could get hurt. We need to keep this info to ourselves.”

“Any ideas of what to do?” I asked.

“First of all, we need to put a few pieces together,” Josh said.

Josh and I sat down at the kitchen table.

“We know Abraham must’ve lied to me about meeting with my father the day before he died,” I said.

“The note in the appointment book must’ve been regarding Abraham meeting with Edmund,” Salem said. “I assume your mother followed them and took the pictures.”

“And when they realized Abraham was the traitor, they decided to take you and run,” Avery said.

“None of this is helping me figure out what to do,” I said. “If I do the ritual then Derek will die. If I save Derek, Elias will take over the pack. How can I choose?”

“You know what Derek would tell you to do, don’t you?” Salem asked.

I sighed and nodded. “Yes. He would tell me to think of the greater good. That doesn’t make it any easier.”

“I know, bud. I know,” Salem said.



## CHAPTER 21

FOR a couple weeks there wasn't much for me to do besides hang out and decide what to do—save the man I loved or save the pack. I decided to visit Roman and see if anything had changed.

Roman was in the Intensive Care Unit in the Renown Regional Medical Center. The nurse told me Roman was conscious. She directed me to his room.

“You can't leave me, brother. I need you in my life,” Remy said. “I love you.”

“I'm not going anywhere,” Roman murmured.

I stepped back so I wouldn't intrude on their moment. A moment later, I cleared my throat before I stepped into the room. Remy was sitting on a chair next to his brother's bed.

“Roman,” Remy said. “Jack's here.” He motioned me over to Roman. Roman's eyes were barely open, but he managed a slight smile when he saw me.

“Boss, glad you're okay.” His voice was so low and weak it almost made me cry. He was normally so loud and boisterous that the sharp contrast was startling.

“You just worry about yourself, Roman,” I said.

Roman's gaze went quickly downward, and I saw tears in his eyes. “I'm sorry, boss. So sorry about Derek. I should've—”

“Quiet, Roman. You did your best. Don't ever doubt that. You get some sleep now,” I said.

Roman nodded and covered my hand with his.

“You know what you have to do,” he said before he slipped into sleep.

I DROVE my bike to where Derek and I had run as wolves shortly after I learned the truth. I hid my bike, shifted, and ran. And ran. And ran.

For more than an hour I wished I would have a sudden insight and my decision would be easy. But I knew the decision would never be an easy one. It wasn't supposed to be an easy choice. The most important ones are never simple. If they were simple they wouldn't be important.

I knew if I saved Derek he would be furious with me. He wouldn't want to be responsible for sentencing innocent people to death. So I knew what decision I had to make. I had to complete the ritual.

WHEN I got home I made phone calls to Josh and Salem. I told them both I had decided to be alpha but was still determined to save Derek.

“Talk to Maurice,” Josh advised. “He might be able to help.” I called Maurice and asked him to come over.

“I know I need to be alpha,” I told Maurice. “But I can't give up on saving Derek, either. I can't lose him. I don't know what I'd do if he died.”

Maurice sat next to me and wrapped his arm around me. “It'll be all right.”

“Where does the ritual take place?” I asked.

“There's a place in the Sierra Nevada range that is our territory,” Josh said. “We have a secure spot there for the artifact that is used in the ritual.”

“Why is it done in the evening?” I asked.

Maurice paused. “I don't know why. It's just always been done at night when we can see the moon.”

“But the full moon is always there, even if we can’t see it, right?”

“Yes, I suppose so.”

“We could do the ritual in the morning, and I could meet Dearborn that night with the power as leader.”

“You’d certainly have the element of surprise on your side.”

For the first time since Derek had been taken, I felt hope.

“I’ll make the arrangements for the ritual,” Maurice said.

“How will we know if the ritual is successful?” I asked Maurice.

“According to history, there is one thing that only a Chosen One can do *after* the ritual. A partial shift.”

“What the hell is that?”

“It’s when a wolf can shift just certain parts of their body. Like just their hands or just their face.”

## CHAPTER 22

CLASSES for the spring semester started Tuesday, January 18. I had all my classes on Tuesdays and Thursdays. I went to classes on Tuesday and told my teachers that I wouldn't be able to attend class that Thursday due to a family emergency. They gave me the homework I would be missing and wished me luck.

In the early morning hours of January 19, I drove my bike to the spot where I had left it before, at the foot of the Sierra Nevada Mountains. There I met Maurice, Josh, and Charlotte. The ground and trees were covered in snow. I was cold but knew I wouldn't be once I shifted.

We wordlessly shifted, and I followed them for miles into the mountains. When we stopped I was sure what I saw wasn't the hiding place of the artifact. It was a shack built into the side of the mountain. The roof was falling in and there was no door, but I followed the others in.

It was a one-room shack, approximately twenty by twenty. Maurice went to the back of the shack, knocked loose a floorboard with his snout, and stuck his paw in. I heard clanking, and then the back wall shook and slid open.

I followed them in and saw a huge chamber. I was shocked at the size of the space. The room was circular, with a large pedestal in the center and seats all around.

Maurice, Charlotte, and Josh shifted and slipped on large blue robes. Maurice walked to me and held a robe up. I shifted and he slipped it on me.

“Are you ready, Jack?” Josh asked.

“Yes,” I said. I was amazed that there wasn’t any doubt in my voice. I knew what I was doing was right. It was what I had to do—even if I wasn’t able to save Derek.

“Follow me,” Maurice said. We walked to the pedestal. Josh and Charlotte took seats in front of me.

“The artifact is thousands of years old. It has been used to pass on the power for many generations,” Maurice said. “Usually, the father is here to pass the power to his son.”

“I wish he was here,” I said.

“Me too,” Maurice said as he patted my back.

The artifact sat on top of the pedestal. It was circular—about one foot in diameter—and made of silver. It looked like a maze, with crevices twisting and turning and leading to a center icon. The icon was a Native American medicine wheel—a circle with horizontal and vertical lines that intersected exactly in the center.

“The wheel has always stood for unity,” Maurice said. “Today it unites you with your pack—your family. Your blood must be spilled onto the artifact, where it will mix with that of the past leaders. Are you ready?” Maurice asked me. I nodded, and he moved to the other side of the artifact.

“Give me your hands,” he said. I stuck out my hands and he moved them so they were palm up.

He closed his eyes and tilted his head upward. “Mighty Wolf Spirit, our protector, we thank you for your continued guidance. This boy, this man, is your chosen leader, and he has accepted the responsibility of leading our pack. I ask that you give him the power he needs to do as you wish. Give him the strength he needs to change the things he can, the peace to accept what he can’t change, and the knowledge to know the difference. Guide him, protect him, love him.”

He pulled out a knife with an ornate porcelain handle. He grabbed my right wrist and sliced across the palm of my hand. He repeated the action with my left hand. It should’ve hurt—it should’ve hurt a lot. But it didn’t. There was no pain at all.

He turned my hands so they were palm down.

“Let your blood mix with the blood of your ancestors.”

I watched as my blood dripped onto the artifact and traveled down the crevices. He moved my hands around so the life juice dripped on every part of the artifact. The blood drained toward the center icon.

“Be prepared, Jack,” Maurice murmured.

I was about to ask him what I should prepare for when I felt a slight electrical charge travel through my body. I looked at the artifact and saw that my blood had started to pool on the symbol. The charges came again and with more intensity as more blood hit the symbol. My entire body shook and I couldn’t do anything but stand there and watch as my blood pooled.

“Accept the power!” he yelled. I could feel the electricity in the air. It wasn’t just around me; it was in me too. It surrounded me and possessed me. It took over every inch of my body. My hands shot out to my sides and, with my palms up, I looked upward. I knew it wasn’t possible, but I could see the sky and the sun. Dozens of lightning bolts reached out to me. They filled me with power, with strength, and with courage.

Then suddenly it was all over, and I collapsed. Maurice stepped over to me and helped me to my feet.

“How do you feel?” he asked me.

I paused before answering. “I feel good. Incredible.”

“Good. Do you feel the strength?”

“Yes,” I answered.

He released me, and I stood. Josh and Charlotte joined Maurice and me. All three shifted and rolled to their backs—showing their submissiveness. I knelt and directed them to their stomachs. I looked into each of their eyes and was amazed at the trust I saw.

*“You will be an excellent leader,”* Maurice said in my mind.

*“I agree,”* Josh said.

*“You honor me,”* I replied.

They shifted back to humans and donned the robes. They embraced me warmly.

“This has to stay our secret,” I said.

“Of course,” Charlotte said.

“You are the alpha, Jack,” Maurice said. “We will do whatever you say. You can count on us.”

“Can I attempt a partial shift to ensure that the ritual worked?”

“Do you doubt yourself?” Maurice asked.

“No,” I said. “I just want to try it because it seems cool.”

Maurice smiled and nodded.

I closed my eyes and envisioned my right hand shifting. I looked and saw it had worked. My right hand was covered in fur with sharp claws. I focused and willed my left hand to shift and watched it happen before my eyes.

“Awesome,” I murmured.

“Shift just your eyes,” Maurice said.

I closed my eyes, and when I opened them I was seeing in black and white.

“Fucking cool,” I said.

“Now, do your teeth.”

I focused and felt my canines drop down. I reached up and felt the sharp teeth in my mouth.

“It worked,” I said. “Thank God.”

We left the chamber, and Maurice secured the secret wall behind us. We shifted and left the shack behind. As I ran I could feel the energy circulating through my muscles more than ever before.

I left them all behind and ran deep into the woods, never once tiring. I ran as high as I could and looked over the country. The country that was part of my territory—part of the land I ruled. It was surreal and awe inspiring. I don’t know how long I stayed there before I returned to my bike, shifted, dressed, and returned home.

I lay down on the couch, because I had been unable to sleep in the bed I had shared with Derek. I wouldn't sleep in it again until he was in it with me.

I slept until noon and showered after I woke up. I wouldn't be getting the call from Dearborn until late that night. But until then I had some planning to do.

I called Josh after I showered.

"I need the strongest fighters of the pack," I said. "You know who they are. Have them be here in an hour, but I want you here as soon as the phone calls are done."

"How many do you want?"

"A dozen or so. Don't force anyone. It must be their free will. There is a chance they won't make it back alive."

"I'm on it," he said, and hung up.

Thirty minutes later, Salem showed up at my place.

"Salem," I said. "You know I love you, but you shouldn't be here."

"Why?"

"Josh is bringing over several pack members. I'm creating a team to help me deal with Dearborn tonight."

"I'm in!"

"No, Salem. I don't want you to get hurt."

"Are you saying I can't take care of myself?"

"In a normal situation, yes. But this isn't a normal situation. I can't risk you getting hurt."

"You're not going to stop me, Jack. I'm coming whether you let me or not."

"Fine." I sighed. "Come in. Have a seat."

Josh showed up and he, Salem, and I sat and made a plan for the evening.



The pack members—*my* pack members—started arriving. I recognized only a few faces, but they all greeted me with respect. Among the pack members Josh had brought were several women.

“Don’t underestimate them because they’re women,” Josh said. “These ladies are some of the best fighters you’ll ever see.”

One woman stood out. Her name was Kaley Meyer and she was tall and thin with long dark hair. She was beautiful and also very confident. She caught Salem’s eye right away. They spent a while talking before I asked everyone to be quiet so I could speak.

“As many of you know, my lover, Derek, has been kidnapped by Elias Fairchild. What many of you don’t know is that Elias has someone working with him—another pack member.”

“A double agent?” Kaley asked. “Who is it?”

“Abraham Dearborn,” I answered. “He is unable to lead himself, so he chose to align himself with Elias. Elias has the support of lots of other wolves—his family and others who have supported the Fairchild family for years. The fight tonight will be between your friends and maybe even your family. I need to know that I have the support of each and every one of you here. I need you to be willing to follow my orders with absolutely no questions asked. This will be dangerous. There will be no judging if you decide this isn’t what you want to do. Some of you have families you want to go home to, so I won’t blame you if you decide to go.”

I looked around the room. “Are you all ready to commit to this action tonight?”

Everyone nodded, and some spoke their agreement.

“Good. I will be working with Josh to figure out a plan and who to place where. He speaks, you listen. Understood?” Everyone nodded. “Another thing. Salem Evans is human, but he is to be given as much respect as Josh or myself. He is on our side, and he’s not someone I want upset.”

A pack member named Ray spoke. “I don’t understand, sir. You have to complete the ritual tonight. How can you do that if you’re going after Abraham and Elias?”

“I completed the ritual this morning.” I got several confused looks, so I held up my right hand and shifted just my right hand. There were gasps across the room. “It worked. I’m going to use that secret to our advantage tonight. So who’s with me?”

“I am,” Kaley said as she stood up.

“Me too,” someone else said, and stood. Across the room everyone stood as they agreed to stand by my side. When the last person stood, there was a voice behind me. “I am too.” I turned and saw Remy.

“Remy, are you sure?” I asked. “Roman’s already been hurt. I don’t want you to get hurt too.”

“I won’t get hurt,” he said. “I’ll make it home. I have to go with you. Because of what they did to Roman.”

“Very well,” I said. “You’re in.”

Remy joined the rest of the pack as they sat down.

## CHAPTER 23

THE phone call came at exactly eleven p.m. on January 19. I was alone with Josh and Salem. The rest of my army was waiting for instructions.

“Hello?” I answered. I tried to sound as weak and sad as possible.

“Do you know the empty industrial building on Financial Boulevard?” the voice asked.

“Yeah,” I replied.

“Be at the loading dock in half an hour. Alone.” The call disconnected.

The building the caller had mentioned was in an industrial area off of McCarran, one of the main streets of Reno. However, it worked perfectly for my plan because that particular building, which had been empty for more than a year, was in a parklike setting. Trees and bushes were all around the building, which would allow my warriors to easily hide. There would still be power to the building because it was for sale.

“I’m meeting him at the empty industrial building on Financial,” I said.

“The one with the big, red, triangular awning over the front door? Used to be a recycling plant?” Josh asked.

“Yeah, that one,” I replied.

“That’s going to work perfectly, isn’t it?” Salem asked. I nodded.

I held back the urge to ask them to go over the plan. I knew that part of being a leader meant trusting my pack. I had to have faith in Josh and Salem as well as everybody else.

Josh and Salem took off, and I was left there alone for a few minutes. Josh and Salem headed back to their places, just in case anyone was watching. I headed to the industrial building and arrived at the loading dock exactly at eleven thirty.

I was greeted by the two stooges, Lyle and Owen.

“Don’t move,” Lyle ordered. I obeyed, and Owen patted me down. I didn’t resist and did my best to appear as weak and disheveled as possible.

“He’s clean,” Owen said.

“Up the stairs, boy,” Lyle ordered. I walked up the steps to the loading dock with Lyle and Owen behind me. When we got to a door, Owen stepped in front of me and knocked. I heard the door unlock and Owen pushed me inside. I wanted so badly to turn around and slam my fist into his face, but I had to act the part for as long as possible. We stepped into a large, empty warehouse. The scent of the carcasses that used to inhabit the space was still strong.

“Bring him to me,” a voice boomed from the other side of the room.

Owen and Lyle each grabbed an arm and roughly walked me across the nearly empty space. To the right of me was a conveyor belt which would take items from the loading dock up to an elevated area.

The elevated area was where Elias stood. I almost laughed at how ridiculous Elias looked. He stood in some weird model-like pose. His hands were on his hips, and his face was turned to the left and upward. He was trying to look strong and powerful, but he looked like a moron. He turned to me and gave me a look that reminded me of Ben Stiller in *Zoolander*. His eyes were wide open, his lips pouty, and his cheeks sucked in. I almost shouted out “Blue Steel,” “Ferrari,” or “Magnum!”

“Hello,” Elias said. “You made the right decision, boy. You can leave town and live happily ever after. Meanwhile, soon I will take on all challengers and become alpha.”

“I just want Derek back,” I murmured. “I don’t care about anything else.”

“Derek is mine,” Elias said. “I told you I would have him and be alpha. But don’t worry; I’ll take good care of him.”

“You bastard. Derek doesn’t want you.”

“I never said I would let Derek leave town with you. You’ll have to be satisfied with the fact that at least he’ll be alive. As much as I care about him, I’d still kill him if that’s what it took to be alpha.”

Elias looked down at me like a slave owner looking at his slave. I knew in just a few minutes he would be getting what was coming to him.

“Who’s your boss, Fairchild?” I asked.

“What are you talking about?”

“I know you’re working with someone. You’re not smart enough to arrange all this yourself.”

Elias jumped down so we were face to face. “You fucking punk. Who the hell do you think you are? You can’t talk to me like that.”

“I’m sorry.” I pretended to cower.

“He’s a smart boy.” A voice from above me spoke. Someone was standing in the shadows. I saw a body but no face.

“Hello, Abraham,” I said. Elias laughed, and I looked at him questioningly.

“You’re smart,” the man in the shadows said. “But not smart enough.” He stepped out of the shadows.

“Avery?” I was stunned. Avery looked at me and laughed. His laugh and his voice were different from how they normally were. The light, somewhat effeminate tone was now much deeper.

“Surprised, Jack?”

“Why?” I demanded to know. “You were my mother’s best friend.”

“I loved your mother and was very upset when I thought I was going to have to kill her baby. But I’ve always wanted to be alpha. In my old pack my bloodline is the one in charge. As the eldest son, I would’ve been next in line to become alpha. But they kicked me out because I’m gay. So I decided I would take over a different pack.”

“Rick was already alpha when you came to town,” I said.

“I planned on challenging him when the time came,” Avery said. “But I realized I could never beat him or the other would-be challengers.”

“So instead you aligned yourself with the family most likely to defeat Rick in a challenge, right?”

Avery smiled. “Yes. At the time Emmett was the son Edmund was grooming, so I seduced the young man and we became lovers. I wasted a decade of my time with him. Rick mopped the floor with him each time. I didn’t bother with Elton; I knew he was a lost cause from the beginning.”

“So you concentrated on Elias instead,” I said.

“Seducing him was much easier,” Avery said. “He was searching for an older man to teach him.”

“You slept with Emmett *and* Elias?” I said. I looked at Elias. “You like your brother’s sloppy seconds?”

“Shut the fuck up.” Elias snarled.

“Easy, my sweet,” Avery said gently. He knelt down close to Elias and put his hand on his shoulder. Elias looked adoringly into Avery’s eyes and they kissed.

“You’re both sick. Sick and insane. Elias, I thought you loved Derek.”

“I do love Derek,” he said. “I love Avery too. I can have both, and I will—as alpha.” I could tell Elias was being honest, but by the look in his eyes I saw Avery didn’t return the feelings. Elias was nothing more than a useful object to Avery. I wondered how Avery had fooled me so easily.

“You would’ve had power as a member of my Inner Circle,” I told Avery.

He stood and laughed. “Would I have more power in your Inner Circle or as the alpha’s lover? I would’ve seduced you if I thought I could’ve, but I knew immediately that you wouldn’t be taken from Derek.”

“Your life would’ve been so much better if you had never come to Reno,” Elias growled. “You and your meaningless birthmark confused my sweet Derek.”

I looked at Avery. “I knew Elias was a non-believer, but what about you?”

“I’ve never believed either,” he answered.

“So why try to kill me as an infant and why arrange this to stop me from completing the ritual?”

“I wanted you dead as an infant because just having that stupid mark meant that you would have followers supporting you. As for tonight, it was simply about covering all our bases.”

“Tell me where Derek is, and I’ll be out of your hair forever.”

“He’s at Cave Rock,” Avery said. Cave Rock is part of the Lake Tahoe Nevada State Park. It’s at the southern end of Lake Tahoe and is the throat of an extinct volcano. I knew he was lying. Derek wasn’t there. Cave Rock is a very public place used by Native Americans and rock climbers. I figured if I made it to Cave Rock I would be ambushed. I sensed Derek would be somewhere near Cave Rock, but in a much more secure place.

“Wait,” Elias said. “You said I could have Derek.”

“I don’t like to share my men, Elias. Trust me—it will better this way.” Elias started to argue again, but Avery knelt down and pulled him into a deep kiss. Avery nodded at Owen and Lyle, and they released me. “Go.”

Elias muttered something under his breath but didn’t quarrel with Avery. Halfway across the warehouse floor, I heard Avery whisper, “Kill him.”

I turned and saw Lyle and Owen smile and shift into their wolf forms. They ran toward me. When they were a few feet away, they leapt at me, prepared to tear me to shreds. It was time to make my move.

I stretched out my arms and performed a partial shift—turning just my hands into paws and claws. I grabbed Lyle and Owen by their

throats and squeezed hard until they shifted and passed out. I threw them to the ground.

Avery and Elias looked at me in shock.

“Surprise,” I said. “I *am* alpha. I *am* leader of the pack. Surrender now and you won’t die.”

“What the hell?” Elias asked.

Even Avery was dumbfounded. “How?” he asked.

“Turns out you don’t have to do the ritual at night. Morning works just fine. And guess what? The ritual worked, and I have more power than everyone here combined.”

“Kill him,” Avery ordered. I smiled. He couldn’t accept that I had won. Wolves appeared from behind him. They all had their teeth bared and were snarling viciously. Avery was still sure he could kill me. Maybe he wasn’t as smart as he thought he was.

“Let’s go!” I yelled. It was my cue to Salem, who I hoped was in place. The scent that permeated the meat packing plant had hidden Salem’s scent. When I heard the sound of the roll-up doors going up, I knew everything was going as planned. Salem had managed to sneak into the building and was hiding in the shadows near the door controls. As the doors opened, my pack came up behind me. They stood at my side, and I saw the smile disappear from Avery’s face.

“Destroy them, Elias. Kill him and you can still be leader!” Avery ordered.

Elias shifted, and as he ran at me, all his warriors followed.

“Don’t let Avery get away!” I screamed before I shifted. I watched as Avery blended into the shadows.

I tried to jump over the wolves coming at me, but Elias met me in midair. We collided and fell to the floor. He and I faced off. We snarled and stood there. We were both waiting for the other one to make the first move. I moved first and made a fake to the left and to the right before I charged him, lifted my feet, slid into him, and knocked him to the floor. Before he could stand again, I jumped on him, grabbed his neck with my mouth, and bit down. He yowled but managed to slip out from under me. His neck was bleeding, but he wasn’t ready to give in.



Elias backed away from me, and I stepped forward, keeping the same amount of distance between us. I sensed he was getting ready to run, and I couldn't have that. I had to defeat Elias and show his pack that I was the one in charge.

As I predicted, Elias spun around and made a run for the open door. He was fast, but I was faster. I nipped at his back leg before I grabbed hold and threw him across the floor. He stood again and slipped past me—still determined to make a run for it. I leapt into the air and changed at the same time. When I landed on his back, I was human. I grabbed the scruff of his neck, picked him up, and threw him across the distance of the room. He landed on the elevated area and was knocked out. He shifted and lay there without moving a muscle. I shifted again, ran across the floor, and jumped to where Elias was.

He woke up as I jumped on his stomach. He looked into my wolf eyes, and I could tell he was scared shitless. I snarled at him for a moment. Then I bent down and took hold of his neck with my mouth, but I didn't bite down. I could have ended his life right then and there, but I chose not to.

"Please," he begged. "I'll do whatever you want. I'm so sorry."

I released his neck and sat back. I shifted and stood over him.

"I will spare your life, Elias. But you must order your followers to stop. Do you understand?"

"Yeah," he murmured.

"I didn't hear you," I said as I bent down and grabbed his neck.

"Yes, sir," he replied. I let go of his neck, grabbed his arm, and pulled him to his feet.

"Tell them all to stop. Now."

"Stop!" he tried to yell, but his voice was hoarse.

"Louder, Fairchild," I ordered.

Elias put his fingers to his mouth and whistled. It echoed across the warehouse and every fighting wolf stopped.

"Stop fighting," Elias ordered his followers.

“Stand down,” I told my own team. The two groups separated from whoever they were fighting with. I saw several unconscious people, and I was sure there were some fatalities.

“Shift!” I commanded. Everyone shifted, and the result was a sea of naked men and women. “Tell your team to come forward,” I told Elias. He did so.

I looked down at the dozen or so wolves who had wanted to kill me just a few minutes before.

“I will not allow dissension in the pack!” I yelled. I turned to Elias. “I should either kill you or send you away. But I will give you one chance and one chance only. You will acknowledge me as alpha. You make the choice, Elias. Serve under me or leave and take any of the pack members who want to go with you.”

“I would rather starve than answer to you.”

I laughed. “That’s your choice. Go ahead and leave.”

“You’re not going to kill me?” he asked.

“Not now. But if you ever come to this area again I can’t guarantee anything. You will be disowned and will never receive help or support from any pack.”

“Like I give a shit.” He sneered.

“Leave now,” I ordered. “Anyone who wants to go with him is free to go. I am not forcing anything on anyone.”

Elias watched me as he walked down the steps.

“Let’s go!” he called to all of his pack members. Lyle and Owen were the first to join him. A few others walked over, but most of them stayed where they were. A few even stepped next to members of my pack as a show of their support of me.

“Fucking traitors!” Elias yelled. He and his small group left the building.

“We need to find Avery so he can tell us where Derek is,” I said.

“I saw Salem go after Avery!” Kaley yelled out. “I can follow Salem’s scent.” I smiled because the fact that she could follow his scent meant that they were more than just friends.

“Do it,” I said. “Josh, Kaley, Remy—come with me. The rest of you go home.”

We all shifted, and Kaley jumped up to the elevated area with me. She sniffed the air, turned, and ran into the building. We all followed her. We ran down a long hallway and into another large room with its own set of roll-up doors. This part of the building had been used as a recycling center. There was still some older equipment there, including a tire shredder which stood about six feet tall.

Kaley stopped and sniffed the air. She was trying to get a fix on Salem’s location, which meant he was close.

“Jack!” Salem’s voice was coming from above me. I looked around and saw a large set of stairs leading up to a loft. Salem was at the top of the stairs, and he was pointing into the loft.

“He’s up here!” Salem yelled. “The coward’s been hiding.”

“Filthy human, I’m no coward!” Avery yelled.

I ran up the stairs toward them and wished Salem would be smart and let me take over. But he didn’t. Instead he stayed where he was and watched as Avery shifted and walked toward him. Avery leapt at Salem, but Salem ducked and Avery collided with the wall.

Salem laughed at him, which only infuriated Avery more. They both stepped further into the loft area. I knew Salem was trying to keep Avery focused on him instead of me, but it was a bad idea.

It was obvious Avery hadn’t been spending a lot of time honing his wolf skills, but even as a weak wolf, he was still stronger—and more dangerous—than Salem. Salem was too self-confident to realize he was in trouble. He continued taunting Avery, calling him a coward and a weakling.

Avery ran at Salem, grabbed his leg, and threw him to the ground. Salem rolled to the side and jumped to his feet before Avery could jump on him. Salem finally realized he was in deep shit and made a run for the stairs just as I was going up them. Avery grabbed his leg again and threw him against the railing surrounding the loft. Salem was upright when he hit the railing, but the railing didn’t hold. I saw Salem go over the edge, his arms flailing as he tried to grab onto something.

I watched as my best friend flew through the air, and I was positive he was going to die. Then I saw a movement out of the corner of my eye. Kaley had been behind me on the stairs; she was about halfway up when Salem fell. She leapt into the air, grabbed Salem's arm, and rolled under him. When they landed, Kaley was under Salem—protecting him from the impact. Kaley shifted to human, but neither one moved. There was a chance they were both alive, but I didn't know for sure. And it didn't matter; I had to take Avery on.

I stepped into the loft and faced off with him. He had shifted back to human. He knew I would win in a dogfight and had to try a different tactic. I shifted to human.

"I see I severely underestimated you, Jack. I did the same thing with your mother. I wanted Emmett to kill you himself, but he let Katie take him down. I decided I had to go to Edmund with what I knew."

"My mom followed you, didn't she? That was you in the picture, but you altered it to point the finger at Abraham. You and my mom didn't have plans that day," I said. "That's why she didn't say goodbye."

Avery nodded. "I was furious when you all left, but I didn't give up. I had been looking for you for years and thought I'd found you when she stupidly shifted. I didn't get there in time and thought you had left town. I was sure I would never see you again. Now, if you want Derek back, then I need a deal."

I growled at him, letting him know there would be no deals.

"If you kill me you will never know where your lover is," he said. I knew he wasn't going to tell me anyway. He would try to make a deal and stretch it out long enough to stop me from saving Derek. I knew Derek was close to death. I could feel it, and it pissed me off.

"Tell me where he is, Avery. Right now."

"First, let's make a deal. I'll tell you after we have an arrangement."

"No deal. No arrangement. You tell me now or you will die."

“You don’t have it in you to kill anyone, young man. You’re pathetic.” He sneered. “You couldn’t kill Elias. That was a major mistake.”

“If Derek dies it will be because of you,” I said. “Not Elias. Elias didn’t know where Derek really was. You’re the only one that does.”

He smiled. “That’s right. I am the only one who knows where he is. But I can’t tell you unless I get something.”

“The only thing I’ll give you is your life. I’ll let you leave.”

“But I’ll be cut off from everyone. I’ll die and I’ll have nothing.”

“I’m not giving a traitor like you anything else. Your life is more than you deserve.”

“You pathetic little pup!” he screamed. “You come along and take everything I deserve. I should be the leader.”

“Tell me where Derek is!” I ordered.

“Never. He is going to die and there is nothing you can do about it. You will be a leader with a broken heart.” Avery laughed an insane laugh and it filled me with fury. He was crazy and would never do anything but hurt people—people I loved and cared about.

I rushed him and he didn’t have time to avoid me. I grabbed his throat and lifted him out over the railing.

“Last chance, Avery. Tell me where Derek is and I will spare your life.” I thought he might actually tell me when he moved his lips together. Instead, he spit on me. Without another word I flung Avery across the room with as much force as I could. He landed on the blades of the tire shredder.

Josh ran to Avery and felt his wrist. “He’s still breathing,” Josh said. He started to move Avery to pull him off the blades.

“Leave him there,” I ordered, and Josh stepped back. I ran down the stairs and to Salem and Kaley.

“They’re okay,” Josh said. “Banged up, but nothing major. I’m sure they’ll be fine when they wake up.”

“Avery will never tell me where Derek is—no matter what I do. He’s scum.”

“What’re you gonna do?” Josh asked. I walked up to Avery and looked at him. He opened his eyes and glared at me.

“I told you that you wouldn’t be able to kill me,” he murmured. He managed a slight smile. He tried to move but couldn’t.

“You are so wrong, Avery,” I said. I walked to the power switch for the machine and put my finger on the green button.

“You wouldn’t!” Avery exclaimed.

“Wrong again,” I said, smiling. I pressed the green button and the machine whirled to life after a couple chugs. The blades began to spin and grabbed hold of Avery.

“No!” he screamed. He tried to grab something, anything, to hold onto, but it was hopeless. The blades dug into his body and pulled him into the grinder.

Josh came up to me and embraced me.

“You did the right thing,” he said.

“I know. Now I have to find Derek.”

“I can help,” he said.

“No, I need to do this myself. You get Salem and Kaley home. Call for someone to clean this place up, and make sure there is no trace of what happened here.”

I went to my bike and headed to Tahoe.

## CHAPTER 24

EVEN though I knew he wasn't there, I started looking for Derek at Cave Rock. I shifted and tuned out the surrounding noise so I could concentrate on my connection to Derek.

I was sure he was weak and unconscious—or close to it—so I knew we wouldn't be able to talk to each other in our minds. But I hoped our emotional connection could lead me to him.

I started on the beach and after a mile or so I found something. It was a faint scent. Very small but strong enough for me to follow it. The more I followed the scent the stronger it got. I knew it was Derek—it had to be him.

I tried reaching out to him in my mind but didn't get anything back. I didn't give up, though. I followed the scent to a trail covered by bushes and followed the trail to a cave.

I called out for Derek in my mind again, and this time I got a response.

*"Jack?"* I heard Derek in my mind. I could tell he was weak.

My heart skipped a beat.

*"I'm coming, pup. Don't give up."*

I walked into the cave and noticed the ceiling was covered in stalactites. About ten feet into the cave I saw him. He lay on his stomach with his hands and feet bound behind him. I shifted to human, ran to him and tore off the ropes, and flipped him onto his back.

“Derek, it’s over now. I got you.” He was unconscious. “I’ll get you out of here.” I took Derek in my arms and got to the trail near the caves. I heard a voice behind me.

“Jack, is that you?”

I turned and saw Rick. “Rick, thank God,” I said. “I found Derek. Help me get him out of here.” I knelt down and placed Derek on the ground. I wondered why Rick didn’t rush to my side. I turned to him again. “Come on, Rick. Help me.”

“I can’t let you do it, Jack.” His voice was so low I almost didn’t hear him. I stood up and looked at him. “I’m not ready to step down yet. I still want to be alpha.”

Not knowing what Rick knew about recent events, I wondered if I could fool him.

“Elias is gone, Rick,” I said. “We chased him off. You don’t have to worry about him challenging you. I can’t be alpha because I missed the deadline. You’re still alpha, Rick. Now, please help me with Derek.”

“I know everything, Jack,” he said. “Josh just told me. You already completed the ritual.”

“But you don’t believe, so the ritual didn’t mean anything, right?”

“I still don’t believe, but too many other wolves *do* believe. They will support you.”

“I’ll leave town, Rick. I won’t interfere.”

“It’s too late, Jack. Don’t insult my intelligence. I’m afraid the only way I can remain alpha is to kill you. I’m sorry.”

“You’re willing to kill me and your son to get what you want?”

“I would *never* kill my son. He doesn’t have to know anything. I can kill you and come up with a story to cover myself.” He was so calm and cool it scared me more than Avery’s insane ramblings.

“What are you going to do now?” I asked.

“I’m sorry, but I’ll have to kill you.”

“You’ll have to kill me too, Dad.” Rick looked stunned. I had felt Derek waking up in my head. I helped Derek to stand up.



“What are you going to do, Rick?” I asked.

“You have to choose, Son,” Rick said. “Choose me or your lover.”

“Why would he choose you?” I asked. “What do you have to offer?”

“I can offer him power. Enough power to have any man he wants. We will run this pack as father and son. A perfect team.”

“I’m sorry, Dad. I choose Jack. I always will.”

“Then I’m not giving you a choice, Son.” Rick stepped forward and grabbed Derek. Derek fought back and fell to the ground.

“Leave him alone!” I cried. I grabbed Rick by the arm and threw him against a tree. He grabbed a branch to keep his balance, broke it off, and came at me with it as if it were a club.

I grabbed the branch and spun Rick around in a circle. He lost his grip on the branch and slammed into the tree, but he didn’t fall to the ground. I wondered how he was still standing—especially when I saw his legs collapse.

“Oh, shit,” Rick said. I helped Derek to his feet, and we walked toward Rick. He was still upright because he had been impaled on the sharp stub of the branch he had broken.

“Dad!” Derek ran up to his father.

“I’m sorry, Derek,” Rick whispered. “I screwed up.”

“I love you, Dad.”

“Love you too, Son,” Rick said before he collapsed. I felt for a pulse, but there wasn’t one.

“I’m so sorry, pup,” I said again and again. He held me close, and I felt him cry. I felt his pain, anger, and hurt, and I cried with him.

“I don’t want anyone to know what my dad did,” Derek said. “Please, let’s keep this between us. I don’t want my mom to know. Let’s tell her Dad died a hero.”

“Whatever you want.”

We removed Rick from the branch and moved his body to the lake. We secured rocks to him and carried him out into the water. Derek kissed his dad on the forehead before we let go and let the body sink to the bottom of the lake.

The story we told Derek's mother, the story we told everyone, was that I had found Derek and was walking him back home when Rick found us. We were walking near a cliff over the water when Rick and Derek slipped over the edge. I grabbed hold of Derek's hand and Rick had hold of Derek's leg. I was too weak to pull both of them up so Rick sacrificed his own life to save his son's. We said we tried to find the body but couldn't.

No one questioned our story. Not at first, anyway.

A few days later, I was watching television with Salem.

"What really happened out on the lake?" he asked. "I want the truth about what went on with you, Derek, and his dad."

"What we said was the truth, Salem."

"Bullshit. I know when you're lying. I've known you your whole life. You can't fool me."

"Look, Salem. What happened is what Derek wanted to happen."

"Rick was going to kill you, wasn't he?" I didn't say anything, so Salem continued. "He was going to kill you so he could stay alpha."

I was silent.

"Derek didn't want his father's name dragged through the mud, so you guys came up with a story to make Rick look like a hero." I looked at Salem and he pulled me into a hug.

"You're a good man, Jack Coleman. I'm glad we're friends."

## CHAPTER 25

THE weeks following the events of January 19 were busy. Derek was at my side almost all of the time, except when I attended classes. I met my entire pack and met privately with several of the long-term pack members. Edmund Fairchild wasn't happy with the fact that I was alpha and Elias was disowned, but he accepted it. Edmund received another shock when Emmett left his wife and came out of the closet. Emmett had been destroyed by Avery's actions and refused to hide any longer. Edmund accepted Emmett's choice because he didn't want to lose another son.

Though Derek and I shared the same bed every night, we were celibate for weeks. Part of it was being exhausted, but I also knew Derek needed to work through a few things. I knew he would come to me when he was ready.

And finally he did.

I had already drifted to sleep after a busy day of meetings and arguments. I felt Derek press against my back. This wasn't uncommon—we spooned all the time at night—but what *was* different was the feel of his erection against my ass.

He rubbed against me, and I slowly came out of my slumber.

"Mmmm," I murmured. "Feels good."

Derek kissed the back of my neck and bit down gently. The blood began to run to my cock, and it quickly became totally engorged.

As he continued to bite me on various parts of my neck, I felt a finger push between my cheeks and poke at my hole. His digit slipped in and found the gland. He rubbed it slowly.

“Damn, pup. That feels so good.”

“I want to be in you, babe. I want it so bad.”

“I want it too, Derek.”

“Are you sure you’re ready?”

“I’ve been ready for a while; I was just waiting for you.”

He slid out from behind me, and I lay on my back. He lay on top of me and took control of my mouth, forcing his tongue in and exploring my gums and teeth. His shaft rubbed against mine.

“I’m not going to last long. It’s been a while.”

“You wanna fuck the foreplay and get right to the main event?”

“Hell, yeah.”

Derek scooted back and spread my legs. I reached to the nightstand, grabbed the lube, and handed it to Derek. He coated my ass and several fingers and slid two, then three fingers into me.

“Christ, pup. Do it. Fuck me.”

Derek smiled at me as he withdrew his fingers. He grabbed his shaft and positioned it outside my rim. He leaned down and kissed me. At the same time, he pushed his hips in and penetrated me.

I gasped at the pain of the invasion, but Derek froze. He didn’t move his cock in the slightest but continued kissing me as his tongue dueled with mine. His hand slid down to my birthmark, and he pressed on it. Pure, intense, and powerful bliss engulfed my body. I arched my hips, and Derek buried the rest of his length in me.

I had always seen bottoming as giving up control. But it wasn’t about that. It was about sharing my body with the man I loved. We both had control in that moment. He wasn’t going to be rough with me—I couldn’t have handled that right then. Maybe another time—and there was going to be another time—maybe then I would let him slam into me and fuck the shit out of me. But right then, at that moment, we were making love.

His body slid in and out of mine as my hands traveled down his back to cup his ass cheeks and then back up to run my fingers through

his beautiful blond locks. We kissed as he made love to me, his stomach rubbing against my cock as he slid in and out.

“Christ,” I whispered. “So... perfect.”

Derek looked at me and smiled.

He increased his rhythm, and I knew neither one of us was going to last much longer.

Derek started moaning and buried himself as deep as possible. I felt his dick pulse as he shot his seed into me. My own orgasm came then, ropes erupting from my shaft without even a hand on it.

Derek collapsed on top of me.

“I love you, babe,” he said.

“Love you too, pup.”

## EPILOGUE

THE next morning I picked up the puzzle box, turning it in my hands. Something in it clicked, revealing another secret compartment. Inside was a letter.

*To my son,*

*If you're reading this it means your mother and I have died, and you have discovered your true heritage. I'm sure you have found out most things already, so I have very little to add to the story.*

*Your mother and I want you to know we love you very much. Everything we did was for you. We wish we could've been there to watch you grow into the wonderful man we know you will be.*

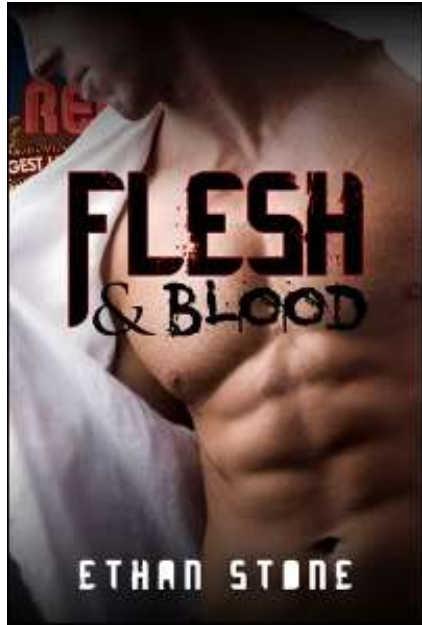
*I have no doubt that you made the right decision. I know you are a good man—no, a great man.*

*We love you, son. Always.*

ETHAN STONE lives in Nevada. But not Reno or Las Vegas. There are other cities there, you know. Where he lives, gambling isn't on every block, just every other block. He has been obsessed with two things in his life: books and all things gay. After spending years trying to ignore the voices in his head, he finally decided to sit down and listen to them. What he discovered was a perfect union of his two obsessions. Ethan has a day job that pays the bills. He wears a uniform to work and he looks damn sexy in it.

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