



ASYLUM
Cassidy Hunter

LoSe Id

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Dedication

To Cecile, for her friendship and amazing attitude. To Antonia, my editor, for her strength and sweetness. To Loose Id, for giving me a chance. And to my dear friend Danielle Ferries for her unending support.

Chapter One

Fate ruled the world. It was easy to fight something you could see. Fate, though, that bitch, hid in dark, musty corners, jumping out to blindsides a person when they least expected it. She then ran away cackling, satisfied she was leaving behind chaos and confusion.

Who knew why? Maybe she was just that cruel.

Or maybe, maybe it only seemed that way to those whose lives she touched, whose paths she twisted, making it impossible for them to reach the end without tripping over carefully placed rocks, crashing into suddenly appearing trees, and falling into deeply dug holes.

Elijah Berry sat contemplating Fate, thinking about how she'd fucked with him until he was pretty much as confused as a man could be. All he'd wanted was to take care of the boss, to stand on one side as Andrew stood on the other and be the iron fist where Andrew was the sweet-talker. And as always, standing between them was Logan, the boss, the alpha, the ruler who kept the pack alive.

But then Fate threw Kimberlyn at them, and nothing had been the same since. Ever since the freaky bond and thirds and fourths and all that mumbo jumbo, a man could barely keep his thoughts to himself. One of them, Kimmy or Logan or even Andrew, was always staring at him like they were somehow listening to the inside of his head, and he didn't like it. Nope. Not one little bit. And Kimmy—

“Elijah?”

As though by thinking about her, he'd conjured her, Kimberlyn walked toward him, her hips swaying in invitation, red lips tilting up at the corners as she smiled at him. Just at him. Not Logan or Andrew, but Elijah, the big rough-and-tumble wolf other women tended to shy from in fear.

Or so he liked to think.

Her long red hair streaked over her breasts, covered in the cold winter air by a heavy brown coat. But that coat hid nothing from his imagination. He knew exactly what Kimmy looked like, what she tasted like, the way she looked when he fucked her a little too hard.

“What are you doing out here alone, Elijah?” She squatted beside him, her back against a tree.

He grunted. “Too much noise back at the house. What are you doing?”

She shrugged. “I missed you.”

He snorted. "Yeah."

He knew without looking at her that one of her slender brows would be lifted. It was a Kimmyism, as he thought of her little characteristics and quirks. She had a hell of a lot of Kimmyisms.

She put a pale hand on his arm. "Are you cold? You're not even wearing a jacket."

Again he snorted. "Wolves don't get cold."

"I'm a wolf."

He folded his arms and stared at her. Sitting on his ass with her squatting beside him, and he still had to look down to meet her big green eyes. "You're a girl."

She stiffened and snatched her hand away, as he'd known she would. Kimmy was so easy to rattle, it was almost funny. He grinned and looked away, waiting.

"I may be a *woman*, Elijah, but I'm as tough as you any day of the week."

"Kimmy, Kimmy. You know better than that."

She punched his leg. "You're such an asshole."

"Now, don't get mad, Kimmy. I'm only stating a fact." He jerked her off balance and onto his lap. "Take that coat off and let's see if you get cold."

He felt her shiver, and his dick automatically began rising to the occasion. That girl had a way of getting under his skin like no female he'd ever met. Roughly, he began pulling at buttons, finally giving up and just yanking the lapels apart.

"Elijah!" she said as buttons went flying. "You're ruining it, and this was a present from Logan!"

He paused. "A present? What for?"

She struggled off his lap. "Because Logan is sweet. Because he loves me."

He stood, blocking her escape. "Well, get the fucking coat off before I rip it to shreds."

She frowningly studied the damage he'd done but looked up quickly at his words. Or his tone. He was never real sure which. Her eyes narrowed, a sure sign she was pissed. He didn't mind Kimmy pissed, the little spitfire. She turned him on when she fought him. Just like he turned her on when he took command and control. He knew his Kimmy.

"I'm going back to Sanctuary." She turned her perfect little nose up at him and spun around, like she thought he'd actually let her go.

He smiled, unable to help himself. "Nah, baby. You're not." He grabbed a handful of the back of her coat and yanked her against his chest. "You came for this, didn't you?" He pushed his fingers inside her coat and felt for the hem of her shirt. He skimmed his fingers over her warm belly, then cupped a soft, naked breast.

She squirmed against him, and he bent his knees so her backside wiggled against his hard cock. "Damn you, Elijah. Why do you have to make me so mad?"

"Why do you have to make me so horny?"

“Asshole!”

He squeezed her breast, hard. “Shut up, Kimmy. I’ve got better things for you to do with your mouth than talk. Besides…” With his free hand, he unfastened her jeans, thrusting his hand down inside her thin panties. “We’ve got an audience.”

He found her clit and began rubbing, growling low in his throat when she shuddered against him. She sniffed the air. “Elijah, no! Who?”

“Some bored wolves looking for a quick thrill.” He rubbed faster, getting her little clit so excited that she moaned and melted against him. Kimmy *was* sex.

Regretfully, he took his hands from her body and started pulling at her clothes. “Let’s get you naked, Kimmy girl. And don’t worry, I’ll keep you warm.”

She groaned as he pulled her this way and that, until at last she stood bare and shivering in the cold. Her lips were parted, and she panted slightly, not even attempting to hide her body from him or the hidden, watching eyes.

He couldn’t help but stare for a moment. His Kimmy had a body that would make a man do pretty much anything she wanted, but she hadn’t seemed to grasp that little fact yet. She might be a sweet healer, but she’d also admitted long ago that sex was her drug, and she was extremely addicted.

Something about that, knowing that she couldn’t resist, that she had that much *need*, drove him crazy. And he liked giving her what she needed. Fuck, yeah.

Her nipples hardened, from the cold or his regard—he couldn’t tell and didn’t care. And while he stood staring at her like a kid staring at the most amazing toy he’d ever seen, she turned and ran.

He groaned. Kimmy was so fucking much work. But he couldn’t think of anyone more worth it. Growling to give her warning that he was hot on her trail, he ran after her.

There were certain perks to being the fourth. His Kimmy was one of the biggest and best.

He followed her through the woods, his gaze upon her white backside. “Kimberlyn, stop!”

But her laugh floated to his ears as the fleet-footed tease nimbly dodged trees and low, reaching limbs, laughing, perhaps, at his clumsy and loud pursuit. He crashed through that which she would have danced around, but Kimberlyn, though fast, would never outrun him.

He could have shifted and caught her, but he didn’t need his wolf to catch a single female. After all, *she* hadn’t shifted.

Breath billowing from him in great clouds, he drew close enough to hear her pants of excitement, of fear. He knew he could be too rough sometimes, but she surely knew there was a line he wouldn’t cross. But Kimmy liked the…fear.

And he knew that was why she provoked him.

Her squeal as he caught her only fueled his passion, and he bore her to the cold ground. “Did you really think you could outrun me?”

Her chest rose and fell as she panted, her wide gaze plastered to his. “Get off me. This ground is hard. And cold.”

He ignored her words, his mind on the way her breasts jiggled slightly, the way they seemed to grow even bigger when she inhaled. Her nipples were stiff red points, just begging for his mouth. He was happy to oblige.

“Logan wouldn’t like this,” she whispered.

He drew her nipple into his mouth, twirling his tongue around the tiny piece of heaven as he sucked. She dug her nails into his shoulders, arching her back, pushing her nipple farther into his mouth.

“God, Elijah!”

His clothes were restrictive, smothering, and he couldn’t wait to tear them off. Letting her nipple pop from his mouth, he rose up on his knees and peeled off his shirt, just as quickly ridding himself of his boots and jeans.

His cock grew larger and heavier beneath her hot regard, and he watched her as he pushed his boxers over his hips. Hearing her gasp when his cock sprang free pleased him, and he grinned down at her.

“What?” he asked.

“I always forget how enormous you are.”

Yeah, he liked to hear it. What man wouldn’t?

She reached for him. “Get down here, Elijah Berry.”

She shifted her legs, and he knelt between them. Just the touch of her skin against his made him hot, so hot. And the way she looked, all dark red hair, pale skin, those big eyes of hers looking at him like he was the best thing she’d ever seen. Like she wanted him more than anyone else. More than Logan, more than Andrew.

Dammit. He was becoming way too soft. And that wouldn’t do. He was the fucking alpha’s bodyguard. He could snap the head off a werebear. Yet here he was, wondering if this girl wanted him more than she wanted the other two.

If she didn’t now, she soon would. He knew how to push her buttons. Too bad he didn’t have any rope handy. He couldn’t give her that. She had a taste for restraints, did his Kimmy.

But she had a taste for something else, something he *could* give her.

“Elijah, come here!”

“Be quiet, girl.”

She growled and rose up enough to punch him in the stomach.

Felt like a mosquito bite. He laughed and grabbed her legs, flipping her over to her stomach. For a moment, the sight of her round ass made him forget what he was doing. Damn, but she was one fine-looking woman.

She tried to flip back over and nearly succeeded before he put a knee in the small of her back, effectively holding her right where he wanted her. He rested his weight on his other knee. His big body would have cracked her spine, otherwise.

“Let me up, you fucking animal!”

He swatted her on her quivering ass. He didn’t think he’d smacked her hard, but the red imprint of his hand was clear on the white of her skin.

She shrieked. “Elijah!”

He smacked her again, taking time to give her a quick caress to take the sting out. Or maybe just because he wanted any excuse to touch her magnificent ass. His cock felt like it was going to explode if it didn’t get some relief soon, but he had an iron will. She was going to get a spanking. And it wasn’t like she didn’t have it coming.

Crack! His palm came down with a little more force than he’d wanted, and Kimberlyn’s scream filled the air. Whether from rage or pain or excitement, he couldn’t tell, but he suspected it was a little of all three.

Once again soothing the sting, he couldn’t keep his fingers from wandering down the line dividing her cheeks. Kimberlyn stopped struggling, and he smiled. “Open your legs, Kim.”

“No,” she said, but even as she spoke, she pushed her legs apart, giving him access.

He pushed one finger inside her slick, damp pussy, then two, plunging inside her with short, hard thrusts.

She moaned and started moving her ass in little circles, nearly driving him crazy. “God, Kimmy,” he said and pulled his wet fingers from her to concentrate on the little nub of flesh, pinching it between finger and thumb, pulling it, feeling it swell at his touch.

He was fascinated by her clit, the way it responded to his touch, the way Kim panted and moaned when he massaged it, the way looking at it made his dick so hard he knew when he came it would practically blow his head off.

He flipped her over once again and, kneeling between her legs, held her thighs apart. His cock throbbed with hard, painful beats as he stared at her body, and it was all he could do not to fuck her. But not yet.

He grinned at her and thought that if his eyes could shoot laser beams of lust, she’d be a pile of ash by now. That’s how much he wanted her. And not just because she was so fucking gorgeous, but because she was...she was everything he’d ever wanted. And she was his. *His*.

“Elijah,” she whispered.

He slid down, though the ground was uncomfortably hard and cold against his erection. He gave a quick lick to her pussy, and she shouted one of those little sounds she liked to make during sex, digging her fingers into his hair. Hard.

She tried to urge him on, but being stubborn, he only went more slowly. Long, slow licks, pulling at her clit with his lips, sucking it into his mouth...

“Oh God! Elijah, please!”

Her pussy was the best candy he'd ever tasted, and he was a hungry, hungry wolf. He pushed the tip of a finger inside her and at last gave her what she wanted, licking her faster and faster, using his lips, tongue, even his teeth until she screamed his name, arching her back, struggling against the orgasm she'd been begging for.

He couldn't wait any longer. He slithered up her body, taking time to suck an irresistible nipple. She clutched at him with legs and arms, clinging to him as he at last allowed himself to push into her hot, wet, slick pussy.

Because he was so huge, he had to force himself to go slowly, inching in, waiting for her to loosen enough to accept him.

Fucking her stole his breath. He buried his mouth into the warm flesh between her neck and shoulder, pulling her skin into his mouth as his hips pumped.

Her sharp nails dug into his bare back, and she came again, her screams sure to bring the whole pack down upon their heads.

His thrusts grew harder, faster, and smoother as her pussy gave in, finally accepting he was boss. The walls of her pussy squeezed his dick, surrounding it with tight, wet heat, and again she screamed.

He did love a screamer.

His cock jerked inside her, and he roared, forced to give voice to a pleasure so extreme he had no other choice.

He came, the spurts of semen hurting his dick as they exploded from him, the pleasure of it nearly too much. Yeah, he loved her. And at that moment, his cock sheathed in pure ecstasy, he would gladly have snatched her up and sprinted for some faraway place, where they were not part of a circle of power, and he did not have to share her with anyone.

But he wouldn't. For as much as he loved her, he was his alpha's wolf.

Chapter Two

She'd missed it like an old friend who'd long been out of touch. Wolf's Grove. The name was appropriate. Kimberlyn smiled at the house, her gaze roaming lovingly over the flaking paint and the barren yard picked clean by winter's greedy hand.

It was hers. True, she had yet to make the old house into her home, but that was okay. Sanctuary was her home. She just liked knowing she had this place, a place none of the other wolves owned or lived or slept in, in case she wanted to be alone.

She walked up the rickety wooden steps, pulling a weathered piece of paper off the front door, squinting to make out the faded words.

Kimberlyn, when you come home, call me.

Julie

She unlocked the door and walked into the house, pushing the note into her coat pocket. She was going to have a hard time explaining to Julie where she'd been these last few months. Obviously the short call she'd made to the Realtor simply stating she was going away for a while wasn't good enough for Julie. Kimberlyn couldn't blame her. But these days, she answered to no one. Well, no one but Logan. And Andrew. Okay, and Elijah, blast him.

She and Elijah weren't exactly best of friends, but she couldn't resist the call of his body. And he had her back, no matter how much of an asshole he was.

The house was silent, dark, neglected. She was going to change that. It would be her...getaway. A place of privacy. God knew she didn't get that at Sanctuary.

Stopping suddenly, she cocked her head, listening. It wasn't a sound, exactly, more like an absence of sound. Like something held its breath, hiding in a corner, hoping she'd not see it. The nightmare of a child.

Trying for casual, she began walking again, peering into dim corners. Sometimes a homeless person would take over what he or she thought was an empty house. But no. There was danger here, and not a little desperation.

Anger began to build inside her, but no fear. Maybe she'd gotten a little too sure of herself after months with the wolves, but...

She halted again, sniffing. What the hell was that scent? Not human, not wolf, but something she didn't recognize. She smelled blood. Maybe she should have gone back to Sanctuary for backup. Elijah would have come with her. She'd left their

trysting spot to come, for the first time in months, back to her house. Why now? She couldn't have said.

There, in the basement. The old wooden door leading to the small basement was closed snugly, but the latch was not in place. Someone, or something, was down there.

Every territorial instinct she had flared to full power, and before she could stop herself, a low growl slid from her throat.

She shrugged off her battered and buttonless coat and left it lying on the floor. A vision of the bears, hideous and huge, shot through her mind, and she paused.

No. The bears were gone. She and her pack had seen to that. Nonetheless, the first sensations of unease started to flutter through her belly. Damn those bears.

The door creaked like an old witch when she pulled it open. She felt for the wall switch while keeping her gaze on the steps going down into the dark basement, but when she flipped it on, nothing happened.

It was like a bad horror flick. She stiffened her spine before putting her foot on the first step down. "I know you're there. Who are you?"

But only silence met her words. Maybe it wasn't even...alive. But she shook her head. No, that wasn't right. She could feel it. The dead didn't give off vibrations she could feel. Did they?

It wasn't an animal. She would have picked that scent up easily. There was blood, though. Lots of blood. Human blood.

She shuddered. Step by creaky step, she went down into the bowels of her neglected house. "Come out," she called softly. "I won't hurt you."

Logan was going to kick her ass for being stupid enough to face the intruder on her own, but they had to see she wasn't defenseless. She should be feared.

Yeah.

Even her sharp wolf's eyes would have had trouble penetrating the thick, black darkness at the bottom of the steps, but the light from the kitchen managed to lend a little yellow dimness to the basement, though it couldn't touch the corners.

She should have taken time to find a flashlight. How was she supposed to deal with the problem if she couldn't even see it?

But she cleared her mind of the uneasiness, of Logan's anger, of everything but the scent in the basement.

The small hairs on her arms stood to attention as she balanced on the bottom step, peering intently into the dark corners. "I'll give you one more chance to come out."

No one replied, no one breathed, no one so much as twitched. She would have known. There was only that scent—that teasing, elusive scent she could not quite place.

She walked farther into the mildewy old basement, letting her nose take her where she needed to go. Frustrated at being unable to identify the...thing in her basement, she crept on. She wasn't afraid, really, just cautious.

In the middle of the room was a naked lightbulb which she could turn on by pulling a string. She just had to find the damn thing. It wasn't like she was on familiar terms with her basement. She hadn't had time before Logan and Andrew had taken her to Sanctuary.

"If you're hurt, I can help you." She softened her voice, crooning, urging. Then she felt silly. It wasn't a person down here, or any animal she was familiar with. She was probably talking to a bloody rag some animal had dragged in.

Yeah, that was it. She stopped creeping along and stomped to the middle of the room, where she felt for and found the light cord. At last, yellow and dim but still comforting, the old bulb lit the room.

She turned in a tight circle to examine the room. There. She saw only a darkened heap in the far right corner, but her nose told her that was where the scent was concentrated.

"What the fuck is..." She walked closer, then realized she was back to creeping and stiffened her spine.

It appeared to be an old tarp, covering what she could only assume was a square box of some sort. She didn't remember seeing it when she'd taken a tour of the house with Julie, the real-estate agent, but she could easily have missed it.

Swallowing hard, she grasped the tarp and yanked it, half expecting a boogeyman to leap out and wrap his claw-tipped fingers around her throat.

But it was only a large box. Innocent-looking old plywood that appeared to have been hastily and messily constructed. A lid fitted over the top, and she realized the tarp had been nailed to it. Her yank had pulled it loose.

Of course she had to look. After all, no live thing, despite the sharp scent of blood, could be in the box.

At least she hoped so.

Taking a deep breath, she flung off the lid and jumped back. Nothing came screeching from the mysterious box; nothing moved.

Inching forward with a hand to her chest, she peered into the inky depths of the box.

Chapter Three

“What the hell?” It looked like a man had crawled into the box and expired. First of all, why would someone seek out her basement, nail together a wooden coffin, and crawl inside to die?

She stood with her hands on her hips, thinking. She’d have to tell Logan, of course. He’d handle it. She’d be more likely to screw up and get them all in trouble with the law if she was the one doing the talking.

Hurrying upstairs, she grabbed her cell and rummaged through drawers and unpacked bags until she finally found a working flashlight. She’d call Logan as she searched the dead man’s pockets for identification.

It was growing late, and she had a sudden premonition to drop everything and run back to the warmth and light of Sanctuary, where the pack would be gathering for supper. The feeling was so strong she almost gave in to it, but in the end her curiosity overrode her instincts, and she ran back to the basement.

Putting her cell on the cement floor, she held the flashlight on the body and leaned over to rifle through his pockets. Her nose wrinkled at the stench, but she wasn’t disgusted or frightened by death. She’d seen too much of it.

The guy looked like he’d really gone through some bad, bad stuff. Then she stopped searching and cocked her head. How odd. That smell, that strange smell that wasn’t human, wolf, or anything else she recognized, was still coming from this body. What the hell was it?

She found nothing in any of the pockets she could reach, and finally gave up looking for a wallet and picked up her cell phone. Time to call Logan.

Turning her back on the body as if it might somehow be offended by her call, she punched in Logan’s number. It went to voice mail. She set the flashlight on the floor, still on, then shoved her long hair out of her face.

“Dammit, Logan, you know I hate talking to your voice mail. Listen...I came home. I mean, to my house. I just wanted to see it again.” She shook her head at herself for rambling. “Anyway, there’s someone here, in my basement, in a box. A very dead someone. I didn’t know...”

Gooseflesh jumped on her skin like she’d just been immersed in an ice bath, and she felt the hair on the back of her neck stiffen. “Oh my God...”

She knew before she even turned around that someone was there. But she scented nothing, heard nothing, just *knew*. Something bad. Something real bad.

“Logan,” she whimpered, suddenly uncaring that she might be seen as a helpless female. Right now something was scaring the shit out of her, and all she wanted was her men.

Her stomach cramped, and she froze, unable to turn to meet her nightmare, unable to breathe. The cell fell from her numb fingers, and the sound of it cracking on the hard floor finally snapped her from her frozen horror. She whipped around, already shifting.

She’d gotten better at it over the last few months since she’d died, gotten faster, and the shift was not nearly as agonizing as it once was. A cry of half terror, half pure animal fury burst from her lips, starting as a human scream and ending in a wolf’s howl before she’d finished spinning.

The man had risen from the box and stood staring at her with blank, dead, ice-blue eyes. Just stood there watching her, no expression on his face, no familiar scent, nothing she could comprehend and make sense of. Then suddenly, his face seemed to animate and his blue eyes became black as his pinpoint pupils dilated.

A fucking zombie! raced through her mind, and she would have screamed but had no voice.

So she went for his throat.

She crashed into the wall behind him, the wall before which he’d just stood, her heavy wolf’s body crumpling the box as though it was cardboard.

Confused, she shook her head and lashed around, but he wasn’t there. What the fuck was he? Some kind of fucking zombie *ghost*?

He grabbed the loose skin around her neck and threw her, and she landed with a shocked *yip* against the opposite wall. Her front right leg cracked and buckled beneath her, and she couldn’t help the whine that whistled from her throat at the pain.

He walked toward her, a strange, gliding walk that was so full of death she once again froze. Dazed, she could only stare as he came for her.

No, Kimberlyn, get up!

Every ounce of self-preservation she possessed finally kicked in, and she leaped away just as he reached for her, his white, white hand floating in the near-dark of the basement.

She had to get a grip. She was a wolf, a healer, and a damn strong woman. She could take this asshole. She was about to kick some major ass.

His pale throat rose like a thin reed from the black water of his shirt, and once more she jumped, ignoring the pain in her broken leg as she went for him. All she had to do was get her teeth in his throat. *Then* he wouldn’t be such a badass.

But the bastard was fast, too fast for her inexperienced wolf’s body to even come close to catching. She realized she was in deep shit.

Then he was at her side, his foot lashing out to land a punishing kick that caved in a couple of her ribs and sent her once again into the brick wall.

That she was going to die was likely, as he wasn't going to give her a chance to heal. But she was a wolf, and she had more pride than any one little animal should have possessed. She worried for Logan and Andrew, and even Elijah. They would be devastated.

She climbed to her feet and watched him, pain shooting through her body. *Bring it, motherfucker.* She lowered her head and growled to let him know she wasn't finished with him yet.

He hesitated and, to her shock, turned toward the stairs. He was...going?

Unsure, she stood, crippled and beaten, and the part of her that was wolf couldn't let him go. She had to fight him.

But he looked up, seeming to hear, a split second before she did, the thundering stampede of paws coming for the house. Then it was too late for either of them to move. The wolves were upon them.

Logan burst into the basement with Andrew and Elijah at his side, the pack at his heels. She limped to a corner and licked at her paw. It was too dangerous to shift with the pack storming the basement, bloodlust seeping from every single one of them, but she'd be okay. She'd heal when the fighting was done and the...zombie ghost stranger had been dealt with. And if she knew her men and their rage, he'd *stay* dead this time.

But the dude had other ideas and one hell of a rage of his own.

She stood in the corner, pain forgotten, and watched him take on her entire pack.

Chapter Four

He was fast, this mystery man, and very, very strong, but against a pack of wolves the stranger had little chance. He must have known this, but he wasn't going to lie down and die, not easily.

Finally, with a glance at her, Logan halted his pack. They drew back, reluctantly, to give him his kill. As pack leader, he could do pretty much whatever he wanted.

Andrew loped to her side, and she couldn't help but put her snout up that it had taken him so long to see to her. For all he knew, she might have been dying.

He nosed her side when she ignored him, but that was all the apology he could give her for the moment. They both watched as Logan circled the stranger.

Logan was huge, shaggy, and so beautiful he took her breath away. Wild and strong, he could defeat any enemy. She'd never doubt Logan's abilities. Not even against the stranger who'd trespassed on her property and kicked the crap of her.

Logan would tear him to pieces.

But no matter what the man had done to her, the part of her that healed wanted to save him. Now that she wasn't battling him, she could look at him with a little more generosity.

He was thin, but she knew his frailness was deceptive. His eyes were black ink spots in his pale face, his lips full but bloodless.

She had no time for further rumination; Logan struck, and she watched, forgetting to breathe, as the stranger slid away. Slid was the only word she could think of for the movement the man made. He didn't run or leap or even seem to exert himself, though she knew the fight was taking a lot out of him by the way his body trembled. He was fast, so very fast. Still, Logan missed him by mere inches.

Growling a warning deep in his throat, Logan crouched low to the floor, and she could see in his eyes that he was done playing.

And the stranger had no place to run. Glancing around, the fact that he was trapped seemed to dawn on him and, with a quiet look at the pack, he stood his ground.

He straightened his body, pushed a handful of his thin, dark hair out of his eyes, and did something so odd and out of place that Kimberlyn could only stare.

He smiled.

Before she could wrap her mind around his smile, he attacked Logan. Logan was ready, but from his quick, deep grunt, she knew he'd been hurt.

They rolled on the floor, the stranger's thin body completely hidden by Logan's huge, hulking form.

Logan went for his throat, but unbelievably, the man held him off, his white hands buried in the thick fur of the wolf's chest.

But the man was weakening, and Logan was strong. With a casual swipe of his long, sharp claws, he slashed the stranger's arm to the bone, then buried his teeth in the white throat.

Kimberlyn shifted. The last time she'd interfered with Logan's battle it hadn't gone well for her, but she could not stop herself from interfering.

Unable as yet to walk on a broken leg, she hopped to Logan, screaming, "Logan, no!"

The stranger let his arms fall, and his eyes—so black, so empty—met hers. She couldn't look away, didn't want to. She wanted only to save this man.

She threw herself atop Logan, a stupid, stupid thing to do, but she was helpless to stop. She beat her fists upon his back. "Please, Logan, please..."

Logan lifted his face, growling, and shook her off. She landed on her injured leg, her agonized screams bouncing off the walls of the old basement. But Logan had taken his teeth from the man, and that was what she'd wanted. She could bear a little pain.

Elijah leaped at her and forced her away, pushing her puny body with his broad, furry one.

"Wait," she said, but weakly. "Logan?"

Seeming to understand that one little man was nothing to worry about, Logan shifted to human form, his shift quick and effortless. But he was pissed.

She sighed. So what else was new?

"*Why*, Kimberlyn? Why would you wish to save the man who would have killed you?"

"He was walking away when you came," she said and forced herself to meet his furious gaze. "He just wanted to leave, Logan. I attacked him."

Logan looked at the pack and, with a flick of his wrist, sent them filing from the basement. Andrew and Elijah shifted and came to stand on either side of Logan.

The battered stranger lay silent and still upon the floor, his chest unmoving, eyes closed. For all the injury he'd sustained from sharp teeth and claws, there was surprisingly little blood.

She frowned and sniffed the air. "What is he?"

Logan exchanged a glance with Andrew, and his glare when he stared back at her showed her he was not ready to forgive her just yet. For a long moment, she forgot his anger as she took in his bare, muscled body. Logan's hard male beauty was stunning. His hair was shorter than Andrew's long, sleek strands, neater than

Elijah's unkempt locks, his features as strong as Andrew's were fine and Elijah's were sturdy. The three of them together presented a dazzling harmony of sex and fierce male dominance that would leave any woman speechless and enchanted.

"We'll deal with him. Go home, Kimberlyn. To Sanctuary. I don't want you coming back here again. Elijah, help her."

She pushed Elijah away and, with a hand to the wall, lowered herself to the floor. "I'll go after I've healed myself." She looked at the stranger. "But I need to check him, Logan. Maybe he's still alive. I can heal him."

"You can't heal this one, Kimber," Andrew said.

"Now is not the time, Andrew." Logan finally crouched before her, running his hand over her injured leg. "Are you going to be all right?"

She nodded, relieved. "I'll be fine." She glanced at Andrew, who still stood above the stranger, an alien look on his face. A look of hate. "Would you check his pulse, Andrew? See if he's still alive."

"He has no pulse," Andrew said.

"How do you know? You didn't touch him! Please, Andrew. Please?"

"Kimberlyn..."

"Logan?"

"We don't keep his kind alive. We destroy his kind on sight. We're not going to change that for you."

She frowned, confused. "His kind? Don't tell me he really is a zombie? You know, he's dead but just doesn't have the sense to lie down?" She grinned.

He raised a winged eyebrow. "He's not a zombie, Kimberlyn."

"Look. I need to concentrate and heal myself. My leg is giving me fits. Just tell me, okay? The fuck is he?" She wondered if her careless attitude was really hiding her fear.

Logan stood, his magnificent, nude body drawing her gaze, even in the dim yellow light of the basement. She responded as she always did. She could be dying and lust would still bathe her body at the sight of him.

"Boss?"

Logan looked at Elijah and nodded. "Do it."

Kimberlyn tore her thoughts from Logan's body and stared at them all, mystified. "Logan? Do what?"

"In front of her, Logan?" asked Andrew, finally leaving the fallen man to kneel beside Kimberlyn.

"She needs to know. To see. They're here, and they've decided to be seen. She has to be prepared."

Elijah left the basement at a run, and Kimberlyn held a hand to her bare belly. “My stomach hurts,” she said like a child. She knew something bad was about to happen and didn’t want to see it. Didn’t want to know.

“Heal yourself, Kimber.”

“Andrew—”

“Shhh. Heal yourself. Quickly.”

Oh shit. But she swallowed hard, closed her eyes, and did as he asked. She was hurting and wanted to be at her best when she had to fight Logan because of whatever he was about to do. She had a feeling she wasn’t going to like it.

They were quiet, letting her concentrate, but she knew they watched each other with heavy gazes full of things she didn’t understand. Not yet.

She shut them out and, taking a deep breath, sank her mind into her body. When Elena had shot her full of silver, she’d died. And during her death, she’d discovered how to finally heal herself. To heal all living creatures, which was something that had eluded her before. And she no longer had to shift to wolf form to do it.

Impatient to hear what Logan had to say, she healed herself sloppily but completely and came out of her little daze feeling a hell of a lot better. Well enough to take on Logan.

She stood, pushing Andrew out of the way. “I’m going to see to him. I don’t care if he’s a zombie or a mortal enemy of the wolves or a...a *skunk*. I will heal him if I can.” She shook Logan’s hand off her arm and twirled to point a finger at him. “I don’t want to hear it, Logan.”

When he backed off with his hands raised, she almost tripped in surprise. Logan giving up without a fight? Weird.

She couldn’t help but think there was a trap involved.

Shrugging it off, she knelt beside the stranger just as Elijah came stomping back down the stairs. She ignored him and concentrated on the intruder.

He was so very still, so white and thin. She put her hand on his chest, closed her eyes, and let her mind sink into his body.

Or tried to. His body wouldn’t accept her. Every time she tried to get inside him, she was like a bird flying into a window. It *hurt*.

Finally, she sat back on her heels and felt for a pulse. Andrew was right. There was no pulse. Perplexed, she looked up at the three men gathered in a semicircle around her and the man on the floor.

“I don’t understand it. I can’t get inside.” She pushed her hair back. “But he’s dead. He’s definitely dead.” She shook her head, taking a moment to figure out what she was really feeling. “Who was he? Why was he hiding in my house?” She snatched her arm away from Logan when he tried to help her to her feet. “You killed him when you didn’t have to, Logan.”

“Don’t be a child, Kimberlyn.”

Elijah stepped forward and brought his hand from behind his back. “Enough of this shit.” In his fist, he held a thick stick as big as his forearm and sharpened to a point on one end. He shook the stick at Logan. “Can I stake the bloodsucking bastard now?”

Chapter Five

“Oh my God!” Kimberlyn jumped back, staring at the stranger with horrified fascination. “A *vampire*?”

Elijah shrugged. “Why not? Cocksuckers are everywhere nowadays.”

“I’ve never seen one.”

“You just didn’t realize you were seeing one, Kimber.” Andrew nudged the downed man with the toe of his well-worn leather boot. “Elijah’s a little off. They’re not everywhere, but they are many.”

“And they have been enemy to the wolf for centuries. That’s not going to change now.” Logan gave Elijah a sharp nod. “Stake him before he gets up.”

“What’d you do to him to make him unconscious, Logan? I thought vampires—”

“They’re not invincible, Kimberlyn, and they can be hurt. He’s healing, our trespassing vamp, and as soon as his energies aren’t needed for his wounds, he’ll be good as new.”

“But right now, he’s vulnerable,” Andrew said, his gaze as hard as his voice. “And when they’re vulnerable...”

“We can put a sharp stick through their hearts, take their heads, and the bastards are done for.” Elijah raised the stick. “Adios, motherfucker.”

“Wait!” Kimberlyn walked to stand before the vampire, hands up. “You can’t kill him like this. Let’s just let him go. He wasn’t going to kill me.”

Logan sighed and Andrew laughed. “Are you surprised, Logan?”

“Hardly.” His voice was as dry as a crusty old slice of bread.

“Want me to take her outside while one of you stakes him?”

Kimberlyn glared. “You lay one finger on me, Elijah, and I’ll make you sorry you ever knew me.”

He didn’t look real scared. “Boss?” No matter how many times Logan had told Elijah not to call him boss, it was a habit that wasn’t about to die.

Logan nodded. “Take her out.”

“Logan!” Why should she be shocked? They treated her like she had absolutely no say in anything they did.

“It’s three against one, Kimmy girl. Majority rules.” Elijah handed Logan the stake with a reluctant grunt. “Are you going to come easy?”

“Wait a minute! Just listen to me.” Surprised that they actually did as she asked, she paused.

“Yes?” asked Logan.

“Why won’t you let him go?”

“Because he’s a vampire,” Logan said, with the same tone of voice he might have used on a two-year-old.

“So?”

“They are not your friends, Kimberlyn. You can’t tame them, or put them into cages and take them out to play with once a day. He will kill you if it suits his purpose, or even if it doesn’t.”

“They’re evil,” Elijah added.

Her gaze sought Andrew’s. “What do you think?”

“Logan’s right, Kimber. They’re dangerous.” But he wouldn’t meet her gaze.

“This one was going to walk away. He wasn’t going to kill me. How does that figure into your tidy little explanations?”

“He wasn’t walking away,” Logan said, stubborn to a fault. “He would have killed you, us, and anyone else who got in his way.”

“I’d cornered him,” she said, as stubborn as he. “Let him go, Logan.”

“No. Now go with Elijah before—”

Before he could finish his sentence, the vampire had risen, grabbed her, and wrapped his fingers around her throat. “I seek sanctuary.”

She couldn’t breathe. His body pressed on hers like a familiar old coat but one with snakes in the pockets. Her fingers gripped his wrist. She was strong, but his arm was like an immovable block of wood. Why the hell would he want Sanctuary? Did he think the wolves would just walk away and give up their land? The bears hadn’t been able to take it, and neither would the vampires.

Embarrassed, and not a little afraid, she avoided meeting Logan’s stare. As the vampire’s fingers tightened around her throat, she got something from him. She couldn’t have said how or why, but a vision jumped from his mind to hers, and in the instant it flashed into her head, she saw a woman—a prisoner—restrained in a dark, dark dungeon, surrounded by pain and horror and evil...

She cried out and would have fallen, but the vampire’s cold hand around her ribs kept her standing. What the hell was going on?

“That’s the second time you’ve put my woman’s life in danger,” Logan said, his voice so calm, so deceptively gentle, Kimberlyn couldn’t help but shudder.

The vampire’s grip tightened. “I seek asylum,” he said, then waited. The air around him was tinged with expectancy.

“Fuck me,” said Elijah. “*Hell*, no.”

Andrew simply looked at Logan, who stared at the vampire.

“There is no sanctuary with the ones who hate you,” Logan said quietly.

“I shall risk it.”

Kimberlyn felt the vampire’s need. Physically felt it. It wound through her psyche, a blood-soaked ribbon of desperation, of sorrow. What had this man lived through?

“What’s your name?” she asked. She had to know. The vision of the prisoner had long since fled, leaving behind only an empty space of longing she could not explain. But the flash of worry the vampire had felt for the chained woman left a lingering, sweet knowledge in her mind. He cared about what happened to the prisoner. And for some strange reason, that made him less of a monster in Kimberlyn’s mind.

Logan closed his eyes, Andrew sighed, and Elijah turned to throw a punch at the wall.

“Let the bastard come, then,” Elijah said, snarling. “He’ll wish soon enough he’d found his asylum somewhere a little friendlier.”

Still, the vampire waited, as silent and cold as death. Glancing up, Kimberlyn saw that his gaze was pinned to Logan’s. He knew who the alpha was.

Logan clenched his jaw. “We must grant asylum to anyone who asks for it. I have no choice. Now let her go before I lose control. Next time, you’ll stay down.”

The vampire took his fingers from Kimberlyn’s throat. “I would hear the words. Take my hand on it.”

Logan snarled but stepped forward, reaching for the vampire’s hand. With his free hand, he reached for Kimberlyn.

He pushed her toward Elijah and Andrew, his hand hard on her back. He and the vampire stood with hands locked in an unfriendly grip, staring at each other with equally cold gazes.

“He’s going to bring trouble,” Andrew murmured.

Kimberlyn laced her fingers with his. “He’s going to *be* trouble.”

Elijah crossed his arms, his face stony. “He’s going to *get* trouble.”

But Kimberlyn wasn’t so sure about that. She’d seen the vampire move. She’d felt his strength, and the entire time had gotten the impression he was holding back.

“He *let* Logan take him down,” she whispered.

The vampire looked straight at her, as if he’d heard her whispered words. Then he smiled.

For a second, a brief second, her heart stopped its thunderous beat.

She wanted the vampire. Logan would kick her ass.

But then she glanced at Andrew’s cold, cold face and quickly changed her mind. Logan wasn’t the one she should worry about when it came to the vampire.

Chapter Six

Logan had the vampire ensconced in a secure room at Sanctuary, then called Kimberlyn, Andrew, and Elijah to him.

“I did what I was honor bound to do,” he told them, staring out the window. “But I want him watched. And I want you to stay away from him.” He turned then to stare at Kimberlyn.

“He won’t harm me, Logan. He’s asked to be here.”

“I won’t discuss it. You will stay away from him.”

She walked to him and looked up, way up, into his hard face. “I know you worry about me, Logan. I know that. But don’t give me orders. You can’t control me.”

“You like me to control you when I’m fucking you.”

She swallowed, her stomach tightening at the vision his words summoned. Turning her back on him, she said only, “No more orders.”

“Kimberlyn—”

She stopped at the door. “And another thing. He’s not a prisoner here. You’ve promised him asylum. That means you’ll have to trust him at least a little.”

“Vampires can’t be trusted.”

“This one is different.” This one was destined to be a very special part of them. She *felt* it. But she couldn’t tell them. Not yet. She had to talk to the vampire first.

“Different.” Logan folded his arms. “He’s not different, Kimberlyn. He’s a killer. Just like the rest of them.”

“He can’t help it, Kimber.” Andrew’s voice was softer. “He has to have blood to live. The more powerful the person, the...tastier the blood. You can’t lower your guard. Please, please don’t be stubborn about this. You’ll put yourself at risk.”

Elijah glowered. “You’ll put us all at risk. Giving him your lily-white body for a blood feast is one thing. Don’t offer us all up by being stupid.”

She shook her head. “How the hell could I possibly put anyone at risk? He’s one person. One person in the midst of a wolf pack. You’re all overreacting.”

“Do you think his coming here was an accident, Kimberlyn?”

“No, Logan, I think he has a very good reason for being here. And I don’t think it’s to destroy us.”

“No? Then why don’t you explain to us just why you think he *is* here.”

“I don’t know why he came, Logan. I don’t know! But...I just have a feeling.”

Elijah snorted. “Oh well then, that’s good enough for me. Let’s all go down and offer him our naked throats and see if he passes up the chance to drain us.” He looked at Kimberlyn. “You first, Kimmy.”

She raised her eyebrows. “I’m not afraid, Elijah.”

His stuck his chest out and growled. “Are you trying to say that I *am*?”

She shrugged. “You’re acting like—”

“Both of you shut up.” Logan rubbed the bridge of his nose. “Kimberlyn, at least wait until I’ve had a chance to find out some things about him. Just stay away from him for a couple of days.” He waited.

She knew she couldn’t. “Okay.”

He nodded. “Good. Elijah, check the guard on him. Andrew, I need to talk to you.”

“What about me?”

His gaze did a slow slide down her body. “You may stay as well.”

Elijah paused at the door beside Kimberlyn. “Oh no. If you’re fucking her, I’m not going anywhere.”

“Do you two never have sex without us?” asked Andrew.

Elijah’s gaze darted, and he kept quiet.

“Go do your job, Elijah.” Andrew could be as immovable as his alpha.

Elijah left without another word, and Kimberlyn watched him go, a little disappointed.

She shut the door and turned to watch Logan and Andrew. She would never get enough of them.

Logan stood tall and still, his stare locked with hers. Andrew slid his hands over Logan’s chest, then under the hem of his shirt. He pushed the shirt up, and Logan raised his arms so Andrew could pull it over his head.

Kimberlyn leaned against the wall, her mouth dry, unable to take her eyes from her men. Her fingers, itching with the need to touch their hard male bodies, bit into her thighs. The anticipation was nearly as good as the prize.

Andrew put his lips to the side of Logan’s neck, his fingers sliding over the bigger man’s chest. Logan closed his eyes and rested the back of his head against the wall.

Though across the room, Kimberlyn could still see his flat nipples harden. She shivered, gooseflesh rising on every inch of her body. “Logan...”

Without opening his eyes, he held his hand out to her. Her footsteps sounded abnormally loud on the wood floor as she went to him. She slipped one arm around Andrew and one arm around Logan. There was nothing else in the world like having their warm, smooth flesh beneath her fingertips. Nothing.

Andrew knelt before Logan, his practiced fingers unfastening the worn jeans. Kimberlyn watched him free Logan's rigid penis and slide it between his lips; then Logan buried his fingers in her thick hair and brought her mouth to his.

"Kimberlyn," he said, his lips moving against hers. "Every time I smell Elijah's scent upon you, I have to replace it with my own. Why must you sneak off and fuck him when we're not there?"

"I'm sorry, Logan." Elijah was so much more *Elijah* when it was just the two of them. He always held back when Logan and Andrew were part of the equation.

"You know I love you."

"Yeah," was all she could manage as she leaned into him, opening her mouth for his kiss. She knew.

Tangled in a tight embrace with the ones she loved, she let thoughts of the vampire gather in a corner of her mind to be taken out and examined later. Much, much later.

Chapter Seven

She realized she was on the bed without knowing how she'd even gotten there. They had that effect on her. Together, they were magic. There were no other words for it, not really. Magic wrapped them in a circle of light where every sensation was magnified a thousand times, every moment stretched into an eternity.

Sighing with the joy of it, she smiled. The only thing missing was Elijah, but Logan had his reasons. He didn't like the fact that though Elijah was part of their magic, as Fate had decided, Elijah would rather keep himself apart from them in the bedroom.

And Elijah required such work. He had to get incredibly turned-on before he could lose his reservations about Logan and Andrew. He thought he hid it, but he didn't. Not enough to deceive Logan.

Pushing Elijah from her mind and feeling traitorous for doing so, she trailed her hand over Andrew's smooth back. He kissed the side of her neck, already unbuttoning her shirt.

On the other side of her, Logan watched them for a second, his eyes serious. When he saw her watching him, he gave her a half smile.

"I've never seen anyone as beautiful as you, Logan," she said, feeling the need to let him know. But how different he might seem if he hadn't the weight of the world on his shoulders.

Andrew parted her unbuttoned shirt, his gaze going to his alpha. He slipped his fingers inside her bra. "Don't be sad, Kimber."

Surprised, she took her gaze from Logan. "I'm not sad, Andrew." She cupped his cheek, then pushed a silky strand of his long, dark hair away from his face. "I'm not sad."

As always, Logan took control. "Kimberlyn."

She turned her head toward him, already slightly dazed from an overdose of sex and magic that had just barely begun. Making love as a couple, as she and Elijah had done, was amazing. But all of them making love together was...spectacular.

He slid his hand around her throat and let it lie there, heavy and warm. "Undress her, Drew," he said, just before his lips claimed hers.

Andrew, with a gentleness that belied his sharp scent of eagerness, lifted her feet to remove her boots.

She lost herself in Logan's kiss. He kissed like the alpha he was, dominant and strong, big hand holding her across her throat like a warm rope. She opened her mouth for his tongue, and at last, he moved his hand to her breast.

She felt the caress of cool air on her bare body just before Andrew slid his fingers between her legs. He probed the slick folds, seeking and finding her clit. She moaned into Logan's mouth and moved her legs restlessly, jerking when Andrew replaced his fingers with his tongue.

He licked around her clit in slow circles, his tongue keeping the same rhythm as Logan's fingers circling her distended nipple.

It was a song of love, and they harmonized so perfectly, moving together in smooth, unstudied synchronicity. No part of her was left untouched by hand or tongue or lips. She became, as always when they loved, a pulsing body of sensation, immersed in a swirling pool of ecstasy.

Almost grimly intense, she held on and hoped she could bear it. They gave her no respite, no moment to accustom herself or to adjust. Overpowered by sensation, she closed her eyes and accepted it, welcomed it.

"Magic," she whispered into Logan's mouth, and even the word had substance, sliding from her throat like cold, rich ice cream, bursting upon her tongue in sweet flavor-filled droplets.

"Always," he said, or maybe she only heard his thoughts. "Together."

Andrew reached for her hand without taking his tongue from her and guided it to Logan's erection. Cupping her smaller hand in his, he squeezed it around the velvet-covered cock.

Logan groaned against her mouth as they stroked him, and his kiss became deeper, harder. His tongue swept over hers, and Andrew's tongue swept over her clit. Deep inside, her orgasm built—an inferno of desire they never failed to ignite.

She clenched her fingers around Logan's cock as he kissed her, and she wanted more. She broke the kiss with some work, as he wasn't inclined to let her go. "I want you in my mouth, Logan." Her voice was hoarse and whispered, but he heard her. As did Andrew.

They moved as one, her men, Logan turning smoothly to his back as Andrew rose from between her thighs. She lay on her side and grabbed the base of Logan's dick, in too much of a hurry to be delicate. He slid into her mouth, and she took him as deep as she could, cupping his firm balls as she devoured him, moaning quietly. His erection touched pleasure points inside her, no matter which part of her he entered. It never failed, and also never ceased to surprise her.

She realized, distantly, that Andrew was hurriedly undressing, and closed her eyes at having both of them, forever, as her lovers. Her men. She would never get enough and didn't want to.

Andrew climbed in behind her and slid his hand around her middle, then eased his fingers up over her ribs to caress a breast, his thumb moving over her stiff nipple. When his hand left her breast, she made a small sound of protest, but he

nudged her hand off Logan's dick and held it for her himself, his fist following her mouth as she sucked their alpha.

Logan arched, driving himself deeper into her throat, and she took him eagerly. She opened her eyes, the sight of Andrew's fingers wrapped around Logan's cock driving her into a frenzy of need.

She was hungry, and her body, her *spirit*, fed from the men as though to have them meant the very difference between life and death.

Logan's groan came again, sounding a little more desperate, and Andrew whispered, "Enough."

But it was never enough, not for her. Andrew wrapped his arms around her and pulled her off Logan. She was too dazed and heavy from lust and the dizzying drug of magic to fight.

Besides, she knew what was coming. Supporting herself on her elbows, she leaned back, her clit throbbing in an anxious, hard beat. "Logan," she said.

His gaze locked with hers as Andrew crawled up his body. Burying his fist in Andrew's long hair, Logan kissed him, his hot, hot gaze still connected to Kimberlyn's.

He knew her, knew exactly what she wanted, what she liked. And he gave her that and more. Always.

She shivered as the thought brought with it an ominous, chilly foreboding, then shrugged it off as the pull of her two men overpowered all else.

The two beautiful male bodies touched, chest to chest, mouths clinging, hands caressing. Andrew's long hair swept his smooth back as Logan rose to his knees, lips still locked with Andrew's, eyes still locked with Kimberlyn's.

They took her breath away.

Silken bonds beyond mortal understanding wrapped around them, creating a line of connection so vivid she was sure she could reach out and touch it. As though in slow motion, she looked away from Logan's gaze and slid her hand over Andrew's back.

She traced a path over his spine, over his muscled buttocks, his skin so warm and vibrant she couldn't help but lean forward to run her tongue over it.

He shuddered as she put her lips against him, and she smiled, pleased that her effect on her men was as strong as theirs on her.

Their bond was unbreakable. She knew that. Why, then, did an insidious fear sneak its way past the bliss and strike unease into her heart?

"Kimber?"

She started at Andrew's voice. She'd sat motionless, frowning at her two men without really seeing them.

They watched her with dark, serious eyes. "Where are you, Kimberlyn?"

She shook her head, smiling. "I'm here. I just... It's nothing. Nothing at all."

The men exchanged glances. "You're distracted, and that's not good," Logan said.

"No. It's not good at all," Andrew said, flashing his sexy-sweet smile.

She tilted her head, bemused. "What are you two thinking?"

But they didn't answer. "Get up," Logan said.

She scooted off the bed. "Now what?" The boys did come up with some good games, and already her unease was slipping from her thoughts and dissipating like flimsy clouds.

They advanced on her, both naked and huge, and not even a hint of teasing crossed either face. She knew they wouldn't really hurt her, but because they understood her on a very deep level, she was never confident enough to relax completely. It was as delicious as rich, creamy chocolate, this feeling of fear, of desire, of danger.

Her heart raced, her knees quaked, and she stood her ground, waiting. Wolves could be rough.

She smiled.

Chapter Eight

It was late, dark, and quiet. Those who didn't live at Sanctuary had filed back to town, to their homes, to lives where their secrets were well hidden. It was better that way. Humans weren't accepting of big bad wolves that might eat them at the slightest provocation.

Some of the wolves who made a home at Sanctuary were sleeping. Some were hunting. Some, like the three who stood naked in the icy white moonlight, had a totally different agenda planned for this night.

Kimberlyn shivered, the insidious cold of Old Man Winter weaving bony, icy fingers over her body. Logan and Andrew seemed to ignore the cold, their bare bodies showing no signs of the low temperature.

"Why are we outside?" Her teeth chattered, making speech difficult. She liked it outdoors as much as the next girl, but at night in the frigid air? Not so much.

And despite their hardiness, she'd never known the guys to particularly love fucking in the cold either. Andrew complained that it shriveled his balls.

"What are you smiling about?" Andrew asked, as though he knew her thoughts were of him.

"Just thinking about your balls," she answered and dropped her gaze to his cock. With a twitch, it began to rise under her regard. She swallowed, her breath quickening, glad the strange premonition of bad things to come had faded away.

Her gaze feasted on the two men. They displayed their hard bodies without a hint of self-consciousness. She never tired of looking at them. They stood side by side before her and watched her gaze slide over smooth chests, tight stomachs, muscled legs, and finally, cocks that hardened as she stared. "You two are so..."

"Elijah," Logan said when her voice trailed off.

He materialized in a second, his hulking body appearing from the dark line of trees like he'd been there, waiting, all along.

Her heart fluttered, and her stomach tightened. The boys were going to please her tonight. Otherwise Elijah might not have been called in so soon. He was their fourth, true, but that didn't mean there wasn't trouble with hard feelings when they all got together.

Andrew reached for Logan's erection, lightly running his hand over the huge head, up and down the shaft as Elijah walked toward them. Logan watched Kimberlyn, and Andrew watched Elijah, a halfway angry look in his eyes.

“Get undressed,” Andrew said, and though his voice was soft, a thread of darkness ran through it.

Elijah stopped, his stare probing Kimberlyn’s body. “You don’t tell me what to do, cub.”

“Elijah,” Kimberlyn said. “Please.” She didn’t want them arguing tonight. She wanted them, period. “For me.”

Logan waited, silent. If Elijah decided not to join them, he would hardly be forced to. Elijah wasn’t against Logan and Andrew being lovers; he just said he didn’t want to watch. Sometimes Kimberlyn believed he protested just a bit too much.

The other men thought so too.

Elijah wouldn’t have walked into the clearing if he hadn’t wanted to participate, though, and he kicked off his boots, his stare on Kimberlyn as he let his jacket fall to the ground. He pulled his shirt over his head.

She couldn’t help but shiver as he disrobed, revealing the massive, somewhat hairy chest, the strong, muscled legs, between which his huge sex stood hard and ready.

“Fuck,” she whispered.

He put his hands on his hips, his cock jutting toward her. “Come here, Kimmy girl.”

“No.” Logan’s voice stopped her before she’d taken half a step. “Run, Kimberlyn.”

And she realized why they’d brought her outside. “Run?” she asked, slightly dazed. Damn it. If they caught her before she reached the house, she wouldn’t be having sex tonight.

When she’d first come to Sanctuary, she’d been soft from living an entirely different life. She’d toughened up and was learning new things every day, but still...they usually caught her. And when they did, she had to watch, writhing in an agony of lust as they had sex without her. Except for Elijah, who excused himself and fled the room. Sure, they’d take care of her later, but after running from them, her blood hot in her veins, her heart pumping, her clit throbbing, throbbing...

She didn’t want to wait.

“Two minutes,” Logan said, “and then we’ll come after you.”

“If I catch you,” Elijah added, “I’m going to give you one hell of a spanking.” He looked at Logan, his eyes dark with challenge.

Logan met his stare with a cold one of his own. “You can spank her, but Andrew and I will make sure she gets a little something from you as well.”

“And do you know what that is?” Andrew asked.

Kimberlyn flinched at the sound of Elijah’s teeth grinding.

“What?” he asked, like he really didn’t want to know but had to ask.

“The three of us, together,” Andrew replied, his voice low, smooth, and heavy with promise. “She wants to watch us, with you.”

Elijah dropped his gaze to Andrew’s hand on Logan’s thick cock, and he shuddered. Before he could speak, Logan motioned at Kimberlyn. “Go, Kimberlyn. Now.”

She didn’t hesitate. Her body was already eager and ready for their love. To lose would be a sore disappointment. She had two full minutes on them. That and her desperation would give her a huge edge. Still...

Logan wanted to teach her. What if she was caught out alone and was set upon by enemies? He did not take that lightly and would pull no punches when it came to helping her hone her skills. He meant to catch her. The sex made it fun and meant she would put her all into it.

She ran, her nose keen, her bare feet sure and swift. Exhilaration filled her, and thirty seconds into the run, she’d shifted into wolf form. The wolf flew, paws beating down upon the frozen earth in a frenzied rush, cold air whistling past her ears and into her heaving lungs, leaving again in frosty white clouds.

Within seconds it had started to snow, and the wolf, tempted to stop and play with the fluffy bits of distraction, ran on. And as always, the wolf knew nothing, *nothing* could catch her.

She didn’t have to see them to know they were hot on her trail. The very ground shook beneath the heavy, running males, and she put everything she had into staying ahead.

Low to the ground, streaking across moonlit terrain, she veered into the thick trees that would spit her out at Sanctuary’s doors in less than two minutes. She would make it.

They were gaining on her; she imagined she could feel hot breath ruffling her fur, knew their claws would be digging into the ground just as hers were, propelling them through the air. If she didn’t find a burst of speed right *now*, they were going to catch her.

Fuck that. Splinters of pain shot through her legs as she dug deep inside and gave it everything and more. The world was a blur as she raced, only a narrow tunnel of clarity before her, leading the way to Sanctuary.

The huge house loomed, and she shot out of the woods like a bullet, laughing inside. She was fast. So very, very fast.

Fifteen seconds. That was all that remained of the time she’d need to reach the house. Fifteen fucking seconds.

They brought her down as she entered the clearing of the front yard. A loud *yip* of pain and surprise ripped from her throat as she tumbled, heavy male bodies riding her to the ground.

Enraged, she fought them, the wolf not prone to common sense, only deep animal instinct. She no longer remembered why she’d been running, just that she needed to get away from them.

She slashed with her sharp claws, raking Logan's heaving side as he sought to overpower her. Elijah growled at the threat to his alpha and rammed her, sending her flying into the old wood of the house. Andrew then attacked Elijah, but Logan only came after her.

Winded, she rose sluggishly and shook her head to dislodge the dizzying pain from her encounter with the house.

Logan barked a warning back at the two fighting wolves, and they followed him, still snapping at each other as they ran. She might have reached the doors had she gone for them, but in the second it took for her to think about it, they were upon her.

They bore her to the ground once again, waiting for her to see she had lost and roll over to accept defeat. But she was too pissed to acquiesce. And she'd never been a good loser.

She bit Elijah's foreleg when it got too close to her snapping jaws, her teeth closing with furious glee into fur and flesh—gratified to hear his startled *yip*.

Logan, knowing all was fair in the takedown, merely nudged her reprovably but stayed well away from her teeth when Elijah ripped his leg from her mouth. Andrew panted, trying to sit on her before she caused too much damage.

They were slowly overpowering her, and in a last burst of anger and rage, she threw her head back and howled.

Her voice rolled through the vast woods, undulating waves of fury and promised wrath, and not a little pain as Elijah sank his teeth into her shoulder.

Then she was on the ground, on her back, the males standing over her, singing their victory to the moon.

As she started to return Elijah's bite, she caught blurry, black shadows with her peripheral vision, and then the wolves were in the middle of something way more dangerous than a pissed-off female.

The vampires had come.

Chapter Nine

Where he came from, Kimberlyn could not say. One minute he was safely tucked away in a safe room in the house, and the next he was standing like a thin wall between the wolves and the vampires.

“Stop,” he said, just that one word, calm, quiet, but with an authority no one would mistake. He held up a white hand, and the vampires stood motionless, waiting. There appeared to be only five or six of them, but the air surrounding them palpitated with the promise of deadly force.

The wolves stood as well, but there was nothing subtle about them. They screamed power. They would have thought nothing of ripping long claws down the white bodies or of sinking sharp teeth into thin, delicate throats.

But something held them back. Surely not the lone figure of the vampire to whom they had granted asylum, whose name they had never cared enough to ask.

He wore a pair of shabby blue jeans, slung low on his hips, and black boots, and that was all. Kimberlyn the wolf panted at the sight of him.

At a look from Logan, she shifted, understanding immediately what he expected of her. The bigger wolves would remain in wolf form, more equal adversaries should the vampires be unwilling to listen to their master, if indeed that was what he was.

As she shifted, she felt the pack surrounding them, slipping into the shadows to wait until Logan called them. They would tear the bloodsuckers apart should they attack the wolves.

“Malik.” One of the vampires stepped forward, and Kimberlyn sensed the barely suppressed desire he had to hug the vampire, Malik. So that was his name. It suited him.

“Malik,” she repeated without meaning to. When he looked at her, she hid her body behind arm and hand, feeling naked. For the first time in a long time, she blushed.

Malik’s dark gaze made a quick run down her body, but at a low rumble from Logan, he seemed to realize he should tend to the problem at hand instead of creating a new one.

“I knew you lived,” the vampire said. He was a young, reed-thin man with blond hair and sad blue eyes. He was the least ominous-looking of the gathered vampires, but Kimberlyn knew looks could be deceiving. “Kali is fading. If you cannot free her soon—”

“What do they want here?” Kimberlyn said, interrupting the blond. The wolves had no time to stand and listen while the vampires caught up on the news. Still, the name *Kali* brought with it a feeling of urgency, of something she needed to know, to do. The vision of the imprisoned woman once again flashed into her mind, but she shook it off. Now was not the time.

Malik hesitated, his gaze on his people. “They were searching for me.”

“So they found you. Now what?” Before he could speak, she added, “And why were you hiding?”

“That is my business.”

She shrugged, suddenly unreasonably angry. It was *her* business as well. Kali was her business. Somehow. “You asked us for asylum. It’s time you explained why.”

The other vampires showed her their fangs in warning, but Malik motioned at them, and they closed their mouths, though with some reluctance. Malik looked amused. “You may shift so we can talk,” he said, glancing at Logan. “I promise my people will not attack.”

Elijah’s hackles lifted and he pawed the ground, looking more like an angry bull than a wolf. He snapped the air with his sharp teeth, a low rumbling deep in his chest. His show was all for nothing as Logan shifted in seconds, rising to stand beside Kimberlyn. Elijah and Andrew followed suit.

One of the female vampires rubbed her arms, frowning. “They have power not like mere wolves.” She stepped beside Malik and stared at Logan with narrow black eyes. “What are you?” She motioned at Kimberlyn and the other two wolves. “What are they?”

Logan ignored her. “They trespass on our territory. I will not let that slide.”

“You’ve let enough slide lately,” Andrew muttered.

Logan ignored him as well and simply stared at Malik, waiting for an answer.

Malik sighed. “I hope we can work out an arrangement. They only sought to...rescue me. Any one of your people would do the same for you.”

“We didn’t take you,” Logan said. “You asked to be here.”

“They did not know that.”

“They do now.”

Malik inclined his head. “They do now.”

“Malik, what is going on?” asked the blond boy. “You are safe?”

“I am, Daniel. But now you are not. None of you.”

The boy threw a contemptuous look at the wolves. “Because of them?”

“Yes. And because of Bonfils.”

The mention of that name caused the blond vampire to pale even more, and he shot a quick look around, as though Bonfils might be lurking in the shadows. “We had to try to help you.”

Malik's face softened. "I know."

"You have a plan?" asked the female.

Malik's back stiffened, and for the first time, Kimberlyn really didn't trust him. He was hiding something. "Not yet," he answered, but Kimberlyn could read the lie so easily that she was amazed no one else seemed to. She nudged Logan, but when he looked at her, there was only a question in his eyes.

Maybe she was just overreacting. Considering she was surrounded by a bunch of vampires who'd love nothing more than a good warm drink of her blood, overreacting was understandable.

But she was a wolf. And a healer. She had no reason to be afraid of these bloodsucking creatures, no matter that they looked underfed and very, very hungry.

Then she looked at Malik and forgot what she was thinking. He was so incredibly beautiful. Sexy in a different way from Logan's sexiness but not less.

"Tell me the news," Malik said. "Tell me everything of the prisoner."

His people darted glances at the wolves. "Here?" asked Daniel.

"May we go inside so I can talk with my people," Malik asked Logan, "or shall we find a quiet place in the woods?"

His face was perfectly still, perfectly bland, but Kimberlyn nonetheless caught a flash of mockery in his cold gaze. "Come inside," she said.

"Kimberlyn," Elijah said, no little amount of horror in his voice. "You can't invite the leeches inside Sanctuary."

"Why not? Malik has been staying here."

"He begged asylum," Elijah replied, turning his lip up.

"I do not beg," Malik said.

"Oh, that's right," Elijah said. "You only sneak into Kimberlyn's basement, then hide behind her with your skinny fingers around her throat until Logan agrees to let you stay with us so we can protect you from whatever big bad monster is after you." He widened his eyes, the mocking grin on his face not even close to humorous. "But you don't *beg*. No, sir."

Malik dropped his fangs and fisted his hands, and his people stood at the ready, eyes narrowed, fangs showing, their loyalty to Malik obvious.

Elijah crouched, readying himself to shift. A low growl slid from his throat, and his big body vibrated with eagerness.

Vampire and wolf faced off, and it was more than show. Their hatred spewed from their pores like poisonous vapor, and she was tempted to hold a hand over her mouth and nose to protect herself.

Before emotions could escalate out of control, Logan stepped between them. "Enough. Elijah, go run for a while."

“Fuck that. I was heading for a night with Kimmy. You want me to work off my rage?” He looked at Kimberlyn, and she met his gaze, though part of her wanted to take a step back. He held his hand out to her. “Come here.”

“No,” Andrew said, folding his arms across his chest. “She’s not going with you tonight.”

“Hey! I’m right here, guys. I’m not your bitch. I’m not your blow-up doll either.” Her face burned, and anger did a slow slide from her brain to her belly. “When I want to fuck one of you, I’ll be sure to let you know.” Tired of trying to hide her nude body behind her hands, she dropped them to her sides and glared at no one in particular and everyone in general. “I’m going to bed.” She turned to go, but Logan shot a hand out and grabbed her arm.

“Kimberlyn.”

“Let me go, Logan.” She twisted her arm from his grip. “Just let me the fuck go!”

“I guess it’s your time of the month,” Elijah said.

“I guess you’re brain-dead,” she shot back. Then, feeling like an angry child, she turned to walk away. But unable to resist, she glanced back at Malik.

He watched her, as she’d known he would. But so did Logan.

The vampires and wolves weren’t going to fight, not this night. And she was sick to death of all of them.

But she felt Malik’s black gaze burning a path down her back as she walked away.

Chapter Ten

She'd known, really, that they weren't going to let her lock herself in her room for long. No, they'd caught her earlier, and they were ready for their spoils.

They slipped into her large room not even two hours after she'd left them, and in spite of herself, her heartbeat began to gallop.

Forming a semicircle around her bed, they stood quietly in the dim moonlight coming from her window. She couldn't stay angry. Not for long.

"My beautiful men," she whispered. She raised a hand to welcome them, and they crawled in beside her. Elijah on one side, Logan and Andrew on the other.

But she remembered the warning Logan had given Elijah. "Are you going to spank me?" She lay between their heavy warmth, running her hands over their bare, hard bodies.

Elijah slid a hand up to cover her breast. His breath quickened, but he remained silent. Leaning forward, he kissed her.

"Are you?" She felt Logan and Andrew's attention and knew they would be as interested in his answer as she was.

But it was too much for him. "Not tonight."

She closed her eyes, waves of disappointment splashing through her. "Dammit, Elijah."

He put his lips close to her ear, his breath warm as he whispered. He had to know the other wolves would hear but whispered anyway. "Soon."

She smiled. "But will you stay anyway?"

His swallow was a loud click of unease. "I will."

That in itself was a huge step for him. Once Elijah gave his word, he would not go back on it. Not ever. She laid her hand atop his, where it still caressed her breast. "Thank you."

"Yeah."

Elijah was his own worst enemy. She knew what he wanted. All he had to do was accept it himself.

"Let's not play tonight, Logan," she said, her fingers creeping up his bare, smooth chest. "I want you tonight. All of you."

His acquiescence was so swift she didn't at first trust it. "Okay." He found her thigh with his big, warm hand, and she shivered. "Because tonight," he whispered, "I must have you."

Elijah's sigh of relief was so strong it stirred the curtains, and they all laughed. The mood immediately turned playful, and Kimberlyn echoed Elijah's sigh. She wondered but didn't want to ask about the vampires. Some things could wait.

She turned on her side away from Elijah, wiggling her backside against him. He took his cock in hand and began to rub it against her, then replaced it with his fingers. Rubbing his fingers over her pussy, he told her, "I have to have you tonight too, Kimmy. And every other fucking night."

She closed her eyes as the pleasure bathed her body. She threw her arm across Logan's hard abdomen and reached for Andrew's cock, wondering briefly why he was so quiet. But there was no room for such thoughts, as lust reared its head and took control. There was no place she'd rather be than right here, sandwiched between her men.

Andrew clicked on the bedside lamp. "I want to watch." His gaze went to Logan.

Why did he sound like he was losing Logan? Feeling as though Andrew needed some attention, she moved to lie on her belly across Logan, spread her legs to give Elijah easier access, and took Andrew's semihard cock in her mouth.

Andrew held her hair back and groaned as she sucked him. His satin-covered erection tasted like heaven, and she had to remind herself not to bite down when Elijah's fingers slid inside her. She moaned and opened her legs wider.

Her clitoris throbbed, begging for his touch, but he avoided touching it, moving his fingers inside her. He pulled his slippery fingers out and rubbed her juices all around her clit but still didn't touch it.

When she felt Logan's cock move beneath her belly, she changed her position to touch him. On her knees, she took Logan in one hand and held Andrew in her mouth with the other. With her ass in the air, Elijah took full advantage of her position, and in seconds she felt the bed dip as he moved.

Elijah was never subtle, never slow about leading up to anything. He grabbed her legs right below her ass, his grip hard, and rammed his open mouth against her sex.

He pushed a finger into her ass as he wrapped his tongue around her throbbing clit, and the pain from his abrupt, rough intrusion clashed with the pleasure he gave her with his mouth.

She squealed and squeezed Logan's cock, and Andrew's erection popped from her mouth. "Elijah!"

"Fingernails, Kimberlyn," Logan murmured.

She loosened her grip on his dick a little, and when Andrew got up to join Elijah behind her, Logan dug his hands into her hair and guided her mouth to his sex.

Elijah sucked at her clit, his mouth moist and warm, as he continued thrusting a finger in and out of her ass. He lapped at her pussy with wide, fast strokes, and each time his tongue hit her clit, she moaned.

Forcing herself to be gentle, she squeezed Logan's balls and slid his cock in and out of her mouth. She wrapped her tongue around his huge rubbery head, licking the liquid that gathered there. Faster and harder she sucked him as Elijah's mouth worked faster and harder on her pussy.

"Don't come," Logan said.

Her entire body spasmed as she forced down the orgasm that threatened to explode under Elijah's wicked tongue. And at the very last second, when she knew would not be able to stop her climax, he took his mouth from her, pulled his finger from her ass, and let her try to gain control.

"Give her to me," Andrew said, and she felt Elijah pulling her off Logan. He turned her to him, and she wrapped her arms around his neck, her legs around his waist, and hoped like hell that someone would fuck her before she lost her mind.

But Elijah grabbed her under her arms, lifted her into the air so he could give her nipple a quick nip. With her arms still around his neck, holding on for dear life, she felt him slide his arms between their bodies to hold her legs open.

Andrew had scooted back so he sat against the headboard, and grabbed her hips as Elijah lowered her. He slipped a hand under her to find her asshole, and he rubbed it with a finger slippery with lubricant. Positioning his dick at her hole, he nodded to Elijah.

"Let go, baby girl." Elijah lowered her, and Andrew thrust his slick cock up inside her. She felt like his cock was too big for her, that the pain would surely outweigh the pleasure, but her men knew exactly what to do to give her everything she wanted. And more.

Impaled on Andrew's erection, helpless to move, to do anything but feel, she let her head fall back against Andrew's shoulder and moaned.

Andrew slid his arms under her thighs and held her legs open as she sat on him, speared by his eager, hard dick. He moved his hips in little circles, widening her, hurting her, filling her. "Relax, Kimber."

And as he held her open, Logan, naked and hard, sat up and watched as Elijah reached between her legs and massaged her overly sensitive, swollen clit.

So good. She arched her back, pushing her breasts out, the nipples stiff with longing. Logan leaned toward her and darted his tongue out, licking a nipple, then closed his lips over it and began sucking.

"Oh God!" She opened her eyes, dazed, and the room moved in a dizzying pattern of dancing shadows and swirling light.

She watched as Elijah threw his head back, shuddering, his fingers busy between her legs. His cock stood stiff before him, hard, tempting.

Logan, without taking his mouth from her breast, reached out a hand and captured Elijah's dick in his fist.

Elijah jerked, and his fingers stilled on her clit, but he never once opened his eyes. Beneath her, Andrew moved. She knew he watched Elijah and Logan without

even looking at him. Knew because he'd stopped breathing. The whole room held its breath.

Elijah seemed to feel their stares and the heaviness of the situation. But before he could back away from Logan's hand, Logan knew he was about to. He slowly dragged his hand from Elijah's cock and went back to sucking at Kimberlyn's breast as if nothing had happened.

"Logan," Kimberlyn said.

Elijah withdrew from her but only to stand beside the bed as Logan knelt between her open legs. She turned her face toward Elijah and reached for his erection. "Let me taste you, Elijah."

She didn't have to ask twice. He rubbed his dick against her lips and, when she opened them, plunged into her mouth.

Logan rubbed her pussy with his cock, a growl rumbling low in his throat. Sometimes he lost control. Not often, but enough so that each time they had sex, she wondered if he would. It gave her a delicious thrill. Logan was heaven. Logan dangerous was perfection.

He thrust into her, and she screamed around Elijah's cock. A thin stretch of skin was all that separated Logan and Andrew inside her. They moved as one, all her men, filling her so completely the magic didn't just arise, it exploded.

Her orgasm spread through her body, stealing her breath.

As one, the wolves came, held captive in the circle of magic Fate had created for them.

Sometimes Fate could be a downright sweetheart.

Chapter Eleven

Roxie didn't bother to knock. She pushed the door open and started talking, bustling around on her high heels, gathering discarded clothing from the floor.

Kimberlyn opened one eye and shoved Elijah's heavy arm off her chest. "Roxie, wait. I'm not awake yet."

"Best get awake, honey. Logan and Andrew are having a confrontation with a shitload of vampires."

Elijah bolted from the bed before Kimberlyn even realized he was awake, his hair standing on end, eyes heavy-lidded, early morning—or night, as it were—erection waving unconcernedly in the cool air.

Roxie stared for a minute, fanning herself. "Lord, sugar. Get yourself some clothes on before I have a heart attack, would you?" She threw a glance at Kimberlyn. "Lucky bitch." Then she winked, her eye so weighted with blue powder and mascara that she had to struggle to get it to open back up.

Kimberlyn snorted and climbed from bed, taking the sheet with her. Though she was becoming accustomed to running around with little or no clothes on, she tried for modesty when it was possible.

"How long were we asleep?" she asked Roxie, hurrying to grab some clothes from the closet.

"I don't know how long you were asleep, but you all were in here for a couple of hours." Roxie put a scarlet-tipped fingernail to her chin. "So I'm guessing you didn't sleep very long at all."

Kimberlyn grinned, then looked at Elijah. "Quick shower with me?"

He yanked on his jeans, frowning, his thoughts clearly with his alpha. "No."

"Fine."

"Come on, girl. If I get in that shower with you, it won't be quick. And I'm needed outside. Fucking vampires."

She waved an understanding hand. "Go, go. I'll be there in ten minutes."

"Make it five," he said and was gone.

The cold water stung like stabbing icicles when it hit her skin, but she soaped up as she waited for it to warm and was out again before the warmth tempted her to stay longer. Her wolves needed her.

In just a couple of hours, daylight would barge into the world, running the vampires back into their holes. But for now, the moonlight shone its perfect white glow on its chosen, those who thrived in darkness.

Vampire.

As she ran down the long halls of Sanctuary, she could feel the heaviness of power in the air. It didn't just arise from the wolves. Something was going to happen. Maybe not tonight, but it was coming. She knew it as surely as she knew giving asylum to Malik had changed the wolves forever.

One of the wolves pointed her toward Logan and the others when she asked, but she would have found them anyway. These two powerful men would not be easy to miss. She heard Elijah talking, practically growling with every word, and she sighed. That man was so confrontational. And angry.

"Have Dracula tell us where they gather during the day," he said. "It'd be easy enough to torch them while they sleep."

Malik stared at Elijah, his eyes so flat and dark that Kimberlyn feared for the wolf. Elijah stared back, his only reaction a subtle but telltale flicker of his eyelids. Malik finally broke the silence. "You will not kill an entire coven of vampires. I will destroy you first."

She looked around, unable to see a single vampire other than Malik. Yet she felt them. They were there, in the shadows, watching and waiting.

"Threats are not going to get you anywhere," Andrew said, leaving Logan's side to stand in front of the vampire. "Elijah just likes pushing your buttons."

Elijah's eyes narrowed, and he clenched his fists, but after exchanging a long look with Logan, kept his silence.

"So you just want a place to camp out in relative safety while you decide how to get accepted back into your group?"

Malik sighed. "Not exactly."

"Then what, exactly?" asked Logan, not leaving his place against the huge old tree. "Why don't you tell us just what it is you do want?"

"Yeah," chimed in Elijah, apparently believing he'd been quiet long enough. "So we can get you the hell out of here. Vampires aren't my idea of good housemates."

"I'm hoping your repulsion isn't shared by your alpha," Malik replied, his voice smooth and unhurried. "I need to bring in a friend."

"A friend," Elijah said. "You actually think we're going to let another bloodsucking asshole into Sanctuary?"

"She will die if you do not."

"She?" Elijah perked up before remembering the "she" was still a vampire. He thought for a second. "What does she look like?"

"Elijah." Logan gave the man a sharp look, shutting him up once again, before turning to Malik.

“What have you and your friend done to cause your own to turn on you?” Kimberlyn asked, before Logan had a chance.

Malik didn’t look at her. “You wouldn’t understand.”

“Try us,” Logan suggested. “It’s not like you have a choice, not if you want to stay here.”

At last Malik looked down, shuttering his face and protecting his gaze as though they could read his mind if he continued to let them look at him. Nothing could have been further from the truth. Malik had the blankest face, when he wanted to, of any man Kimberlyn had ever seen.

“Tell us,” she prompted.

“Our master is a...cruel man.”

Something in his voice was so terrible Kimberlyn had to swallow hard before she could speak. “What did he do?”

He looked at her then, his eyes cold enough to wring an icy shiver from her. “What he does on a nightly basis. He hurts people.”

“You mean vampires? He hurts you?”

He gave a quick flick of his hand. “What has been done to me is of no consequence. It’s what he does to some of the others. They have no defense against him and he...” He shook his head, unwilling to go further. “I need to take him out of the picture. I’ve reached the limit of what I can stand by and allow.”

“Why didn’t you just leave and start over somewhere else? Obviously you’re a master vampire.”

Kimberlyn looked at Logan, surprised. It wasn’t obvious to her, but then she had never even met a vampire before Malik.

Malik’s eyes warmed enough to show contempt at Logan’s words. “Do you think we have no feelings, no conscience? I can’t leave my people at his mercy. I won’t. And it’s not just vampires he’s hurting. If it was, I might have let things go as they were. Maybe.” He was quiet for a second, his gaze far away. “But he’s taking humans. And other creatures. Not just for blood, but for...pets.”

“And you care about these humans,” Elijah said, scoffing.

Malik’s lips thinned. “You have no idea what I care about, wolf.”

“How do you plan on taking down your master if you’re hiding out in Sanctuary?” Andrew’s eyes were nearly as cold as the vampire’s, and again Kimberlyn frowned, confused. Andrew’s new strangeness bothered her, but she couldn’t have said exactly why. Andrew generally tried to be kind to everyone. At least he’d give a man a chance before throwing darts of hatred at his heart.

“Better question,” she said. “*Why* are you hiding out at Sanctuary? And aren’t you leaving your people at his mercy right now?” She walked closer to him and tilted her head. “Or is he taking a break from torturing people?”

Elijah laughed. “Maybe he went on a vacation to a kinder climate. The vampires don’t seem to like the cold a whole lot.”

“If you’ve committed a crime against your people,” Andrew said, “it’s their right to punish you.” He looked at Logan, his eyes harder than Kimberlyn had ever seen them. “We can’t interfere with their law. *Or his master.*”

Elijah nodded and clapped Andrew on the shoulder. “He’s right. We should just turn him over to his people and let them do whatever it is they feel the need to do. Vampires are weird creatures, but they have their rules and laws that keep them in line, as uncivilized as they may be.”

Malik snarled, his lip rising to show his very long, very sharp fangs. “You know nothing.”

“*I am the master here,*” Logan cut in, diffusing the rage rising from the vampire. “I’ll decide what to do. But you still haven’t told us what you want.”

They surrounded the vampire, the four wolves, but he in no way looked diminished for their hugeness. She could have drowned in their vitality, but Malik was no less. Different, but not less.

He stood, straight and still, calm everywhere but in those glassy eyes. Dark hair hiding too much of his face, body slender but so very strong.

Kimberlyn forced her mind away from his body and listened, fascinated, for his answer.

“Tell us.” Logan’s voice was flat and impatient. Clearly, he did not want to be here. And more than that, Kimberlyn understood he did not want *her* to be here.

She sighed lightly, the puff of air escaping her lips in the frosty night air. Stark, barren trees stood silent, with the huge white moon above keeping watch.

“Our master’s name is Seith Bonfils. At least, that’s the name he decided to take on so long ago that I doubt even he remembers whether or not it is his birth name.” Malik’s gaze stayed on Logan, quite deliberately away from Kimberlyn. “There is a battle coming. I need your help to win it.”

Elijah gave his customary snort, and Andrew looked incredulous. Logan simply folded his arms and stared at the vampire.

The silence stretched into eternity, the tension heavy and dark. Logan and Malik continued to stare at one another, and finally Kimberlyn stepped forward, unable to stand it a moment longer.

“Why would wolves help you in a battle with the vampires? That’s”—she threw her hands up and shook her head—“crazy.”

“I don’t believe him,” Andrew said, and again Kimberlyn wondered at the normally friendly wolf’s reaction to the vampire. “He’s not stupid enough to think he could just walk in and expect us to help him.”

“He’s stupid,” Elijah disagreed.

Andrew just watched his alpha carefully, but his eyes held a look that Kimberlyn couldn’t at first identify. Then she realized his look was *knowing*. She frowned, trying to catch his gaze.

“You realize that if I allowed you to join my pack, I would be...in charge of you.” Logan’s deep, quiet voice seemed to wrap around the vampire, cocooning them both in a private place the other wolves weren’t supposed to infiltrate.

She didn’t like it.

“I am my own master,” Malik said, never once looking away from Logan. “I will join your pack and rule them beside you.”

Kimberlyn rubbed her arms as an uncontrollable shudder shook her body. The combined power of the two men seeped through her skin like acid, dazing her. She hadn’t been with the wolves long enough to understand everything about pack politics, but she was pretty sure a vampire couldn’t be a pack member. And besides, how had she missed that Malik had even asked to join them?

Elijah caught her gaze, looking as puzzled as she felt.

“Making an alliance with the vampires is one thing,” Logan said finally, his voice lazy and amused. “But no vampire will ever rule a wolf pack. Especially not this one. Not as long as I’m alive.”

Malik glided closer to Logan, until Kimberlyn wondered if she could get an arm between them.

“I wouldn’t want to kill you.”

She couldn’t help but gasp at Malik’s words. Stupid, stupid vampire. Logan would destroy him for the implied threat of his words.

But Logan only stood there, nose to nose with the other man. Close enough to kiss. “You can try,” he replied, “but you won’t succeed.”

“This is the only way to free my people.”

“No, it isn’t,” Kimberlyn said, suddenly angry for reasons she didn’t understand. “You can take them and leave, start your own clan.”

Malik’s gaze dropped to Logan’s lips, so close to his. “That wouldn’t end it. That would only make it difficult for us to find a city to accept us. And Seith would never allow us to live. He is not without allies.”

Logan shook his head. “It’s not that simple. I know you have a council. They won’t allow you to walk in and kill a vampire just because you don’t like how he runs things.”

“No. But they can do nothing to *you*.”

Logan narrowed his eyes. “I see.”

“I don’t,” Andrew said. “Why don’t one of you tell us what you’re talking about?”

“He wants us to kill his enemies for him,” Elijah said. “I always knew vampires were cowardly fucks.”

Malik leaped at Elijah before he’d even finished speaking. One second he was standing too close to Logan, and the next he just...wasn’t. And Elijah was flying backward into a tree.

The vampire was fast. He was strong as well, but his speed was his greatest strength.

Elijah had shifted before he rebounded from the tree.

“Elijah!” Kimberlyn’s horrified scream came out distorted as she was in the middle of her violent, though quick, shift. Logan’s roar joined her voice as he too shifted, and she lost track of Andrew as she jumped toward the vampire and the wolf, locked together in a lethal embrace on the hard, barren ground.

Then Andrew shot past her, his beautiful wolf’s body shining in the moonlight. He threw himself on the two struggling males, creating a chaotic and deadly pile that Kimberlyn was not sure she wanted any part of. But that thought soon flew away as she scented blood, and her wolf took over.

It was difficult to think when the glory and freedom of the battle was calling. When bloodlust took over and nothing else was as tempting as tearing into a soft throat, the powerful spurt of blood shooting into your mouth like liquid heaven, and you wanted control more than you had ever wanted anything in your life.

Chapter Twelve

The vampires sped from their hiding spots at the edge of the thick, barren trees to throw themselves into a fight they had probably known was unavoidable, and Logan's wolves raced to the clearing to fight at their alpha's side.

Those in town would stop what they were doing, make whatever excuses were needed, and arrive at Sanctuary faster than a car could carry them.

Bloodlust took over, and the moon watched with an ancient weariness as her children battled for superiority. Long-tied bonds fashioned from hate and hurt and misunderstandings cut like barbed wire into the psyches of those fighting, and no amount of reasoning could have severed them.

The wolves embraced their beasts with savage glee, and the undead bathed in and drank of the lifeblood they spilled from their enemies. It was the way of things.

Through the red haze of fury covering her vision, a part of Kimberlyn, civilized from a life of restraint and aghast at the bloody chaos, tried to rise above the call of the battle.

She was a healer. She was not a destroyer of life, although she could taste the temptation and found it sweet. Almost too strong to fight.

And as the wounded screamed and the victors rejoiced, she knew she would never be quite as numbly savage as the others. The healer would heal, and though the wolf would fight when called, it soon lost its taste for blood beneath the healer's disgust.

The vampires were not nearly as many as the wolves and, despite their speed, strength, and skill, were still outnumbered by a huge margin. But most importantly, Logan, Andrew, Kimberlyn, and Elijah created a power that would have made it difficult for an entire clan of vampires to defeat. This power swirled like a physical thing, spilling from the four leaders to touch each wolf. They were unbeatable, invincible. One power-drunk wolf, torment and torture shining from his eyes, toyed with a fallen vampire. It was sickening.

All around her, blood splashed in vivid scarlet, dripping upon the whitewashed ground like an oil painting of destruction.

She shifted, without even thinking, and rose to her feet. She could not join them, she could not run. And she could not bear the pain of those fighting—neither the wolves, nor the vampires.

Walking past snapping teeth and sharp claws, she looked for Malik in the mess. Surreal in its rawness, the world went by in slow motion as she walked, turning her head from side to side, searching, searching.

“Logan, help me,” she said, but her voice was a whisper. He would not have heard a scream.

But suddenly the area was full of charging vampires. They seemed to drop from the unforgiving sky and rise from the frozen ground. Malik’s people had come for him.

She saw Andrew. Andrew the man, not Andrew the wolf. Lifted by the throat, his injured body held in the ruthless grip of a laughing vampire, he caught her eye.

“Andrew,” she screamed. “God, no!”

With a last charge of energy, he struggled in the vampire’s grip, trying to tell her something, something she could neither hear nor understand. She ran, but her feet were heavy—and slow and clumsy with fear. She would never reach him in time.

If she lost Andrew, she would not live. She stopped running and fell to her knees, watching in horror as a vampire behind Andrew swirled, nails like scythes shooting from the ends of his fingers.

The vampire made one last round, his long hair swinging like a black cape, and slashed Andrew from hip to shoulder.

She screamed, screamed in rage and agony, as the vampire holding her love let him drop, and splashes of Andrew’s blood seem to hang in the frigid air.

Then Logan was there, his fur covered in gore, howling at the sight of Andrew lying still and destroyed on the ground. Andrew’s slasher came back for Logan, and Kimberlyn forced herself to her feet.

She was a fucking *healer*.

The world quieted as she ran for Andrew, and all she could see was his slender, slashed body lying ignored on the ground.

Someone grabbed her around the waist, and a vampire drew back his lips, aiming his fangs at her shoulder, striking like an enormous, poisonous viper.

She felt no fear. At last calm had descended. She reacted without thought and, faster than even the vampire, grabbed her attacker’s throat. He fell without a sound, and she ran on, the vampire gone from her mind.

Elijah reached Andrew moments before she did. He could not shift to carry the other man, else his chances at living would be as slim as Andrew’s. He simply threw back his head and howled—a sound full of mourning, of death, of a pain so deep Kimberlyn was unsure of her ability to heal the fallen one. But no, her confidence would not waver. It could not.

Elijah tried to pull Andrew away but could not sink teeth into skin to do so. Right before Kimberlyn reached them, he had taken Andrew’s long hair in his mouth and was attempting to drag him away.

He saw her then and whimpered, his eyes full of sorrow. It cut her to the core.

A female vampire kicked out, her foot landing a powerful blow against Elijah's ribs and sending him flying from his fallen friend. Then she turned for Kimberlyn, gaze glowing a red-tinged black, face expressionless. In that face was death.

Kimberlyn smiled.

The vampire paused, something flickering through those hideous eyes. But she came at Kimberlyn anyway, unable to do otherwise. This battle was a fight to the death. Neither vampire nor wolf would surrender.

Electricity ripped through Kimberlyn's body, hurting her with its strength, filling her with unfamiliar power. It was so vivid she could taste it, could feel the pressure of it pushing at her eyeballs, squeezing her heart.

She pointed her hand at the vampire's throat, her fingers stiff, and faster than light, she jabbed. Her fingers went through the front of the vampire's throat and exited through the back.

Kimberlyn pulled her hand back in a blurry speed of movement and watched as the vampire's body crumpled, her head flopping uselessly, held on by a shred of skin.

Before the body touched the ground, Kimberlyn bent and lifted Andrew from his blood-soaked bed of dirt. As she lifted him, she pushed the same hand that had destroyed the vampires into Andrew's body.

His heart did not beat.

"Heal him, Kimberlyn, for God's sake heal him!"

She looked at Logan, blinking. He'd shifted back to human form and cradled Andrew's head with big, gentle hands.

"I will take care of him," she said, the words coming out thick and rusty. And hoped for everyone's sake that she could.

Elijah joined them, his battered face and body no worse than Logan's, and she realized the fighting had stopped. But that was all she cared to realize as the wolf pack surrounded them, enclosing them in a circle of protection as Kimberlyn concentrated on Andrew.

"Save him," Logan said, and though his voice was hard, his face was tortured. "Save him, Kimberlyn."

She let them take Andrew from her and lower him to the ground, and she fell to her knees beside him.

"I will," she promised, and the last thing she heard before diving into Andrew's body was Logan's sigh.

He believed in her.

The experience was so different, so much more. She sank into Andrew's body, exploring, mending, waiting for that precious moment when his blood would once again begin to flow.

Only it didn't.

She couldn't let herself panic. She couldn't lose the tenuous hold she had on the power. She had to guide it, to command it. It must squeeze Andrew's heart with a life-giving grip and force it to pump.

Closing her eyes and shutting out the world, she took a deep, cleansing breath and felt the power, embraced it like a long-lost love, and sent it her request.

Heal him.

The moisture on her face could have been the mist of cold rain or the stream of hot tears. She became suddenly aware of her body. Her gentle breath left her lungs like wind through willow trees, her strong heartbeat providing music by which to work.

She heard her blood rushing through her veins like water through a peaceful stream, felt dry sticks and leaves cushion her knees from a cold, cold ground.

She felt *life*.

Heal him.

"Andrew," she breathed, and his name was magic upon her tongue. Leaning over him, she lowered her mouth to his. Giving him her breath, her power, her love.

She stretched out atop him, covering him with warmth. And then, with body, lips, and hands, she brought him back.

He jerked beneath her, yanking his lips away and taking in great gulps of air. He gripped her hips with hard, biting fingers. "Logan?" he asked.

It was the first time she'd seen Logan cry.

Chapter Thirteen

Logan lifted Andrew to carry him to the house, and Elijah, after a quick squeeze of Andrew's arm, withdrew to stand behind a tree, pondering, perhaps, what life would have been without the man they all loved.

The wolves parted to let them pass, and Kimberlyn gasped as she became aware of the area. The dead and dying littered the ground.

Logan walked past her with Andrew in his arms, taking him back to the house where not only his body but his mind could finish healing.

"Logan," she said, stopping him with a gentle touch.

He closed his eyes, sighing. "I owe you much, Kimberlyn. Do what you must." And he walked away.

The wolves' doctor had been waiting, and Jericha now stepped among the fallen, her face a mask of stoic pain. The beautiful twin swans Cord and Corliss walked with her, heads bowed in sorrow.

Kimberlyn nodded at the doctor and her aides. She would heal the wolves, then do what she could to help the vampires. She couldn't heal them with her power, but she could help Jericha patch them up.

A couple of the wolves were too far gone; the tiny window through which she might bring back the dead had closed, but she found most of them still breathing. Between Jericha and her, the living wolves were healed, and the dead were covered to be readied for burial.

When she knelt beside the vampires, Jericha said nothing but refused to stay, taking her swans with her. The other wolves went as well. No one could deny her; she had saved Andrew's life. Still, it would have been too much to watch her try to help the very enemy who had killed him.

"I can't help it," she said. And she really couldn't. But it wasn't her problem if the wolves refused to understand that. She wasn't going to feel guilty for being the only person she knew how to be.

Well, maybe a little bit.

She looked up to survey the area, shoving her hair out of her face. There were a lot of vampires but not nearly as many as she'd first thought. Only eight or nine littered the ground, but surely some of them must have escaped, gone to nurse themselves back to health and get ready for the next round.

And then she saw Malik and froze. He wasn't down, didn't even appear to be hurt. He stood at the line of trees, watching her. He didn't move, and for a moment, neither did she.

"You betrayed us," she said finally, knowing he would hear her. "After asking Logan for shelter, you turned on us." Carefully, she reached for the vampire lying before her on the ground. "And still I have to help your people."

He glided toward her, dark in the fading moonlight. "You don't have to do anything, kid."

"Why did you do it?" She kept her voice casual. The last thing she wanted was to show the vampire she cared. Or that she'd been so naive. He'd proven his soullessness.

"I did nothing."

"You attacked us. And if Logan comes back and catches you here, you're dead."

"I went for Elijah because he deserved it."

She gestured to the ground, indicating the carnage there. "*This* is what you did. Did your people deserve to die like this? Did mine?"

"Now I know."

"Now you know what?"

He hunkered down across from her, his fallen comrade's body between them. "I'd heard of you and of the power the wolves now possessed because of you. I needed to see it for myself."

She swallowed hard. "You mean you deliberately set your people up to die and murdered some of the wolves just to see our strength?"

Even in the near dark, she could see his black, winged eyebrow rise. "No, but it was a nice bonus. And how many of the wolves actually died, kid?"

Putting the back of her hand to her mouth, she fought the rising nausea. "I don't know."

"Three of them."

"So what are you saying? That because only three wolves died, what you did was okay?"

"I didn't do that." He indicated the vampire between them. "Those were Seith's vampires. Now he knows where we are. And I need your power. If you don't convince your wolves to help me, he will destroy a lot of people."

"That's crazy. Leave, Malik. I have a need to heal the injured, but—"

"You can't heal my people."

"No, but I can help them."

He spread his hands. "As you like."

"Who is Kali?"

Something flickered deep in his eyes. "No one." He looked around, his gaze landing on the bodies of those he had known and, perhaps, had loved.

The vampire between them had been cut nearly in half. “Will he eventually heal himself since he’s not been staked?” she asked, knowing he was not going to answer her question about the prisoner Kali. She would let it go, for now.

Again the eyebrow lifted, his eyes dark blotches in his pale, tired face. “No.”

“But I’d heard—”

“You heard wrong.” He gestured at the vampire. “He’s been hurt too badly.”

She felt the weight of his stare as she placed her hand on the fallen vampire. She closed her eyes. “I wish I could heal you,” she whispered.

“I know you trust me, kid. Or you wouldn’t be talking to me right now.”

She kept her eyes closed, ignoring him. She’d deal with her emotions, or lack of them, later. Later when she could sit alone and try to figure out why she was so calmly talking with the man whose people had almost destroyed Andrew. The man who’d destroyed three of her wolves.

The shock of the whole exhausting night suddenly wore off, and she put a hand to her face and sobbed. When she wiped her eyes and looked back up, Malik was gone.

But he’d be back.

Dawn broke as she thought the words, and she scrambled back with a shout of horror as the vampires caught fire and burned to ash even as she watched. It was a terrible magic.

How could she trust a man...no, not even a man, a *vampire*...who would deliver his people to such a fate?

Because she felt something. Something deep inside that her mind wasn’t willing to comprehend. But her heart, her gut, *they* knew.

She sat in the clearing and watched the cold light chase away the shadows, shivering. Gathering up enough energy to move was beyond her ability. Now that she was no longer needed, she crumbled like a hammered cracker.

She heard a step but didn’t care enough to see who was coming. Then she was lifted against a solid, warm chest, and Logan stared down at her.

“There’s too much I don’t understand,” she told him.

“I know.”

“Will you tell me?”

“I’ll tell you what I know.” He smiled, a quick flash of white that brought forth her answering smile. “Or what I think I know.”

“That’s all I ask.” She pressed her cheek against his chest. “Andrew?”

“He’s better. If you hadn’t been here...”

“But I was. Don’t think about what-ifs.” Silence for a moment as he strode back to the house, holding her tightly against him as though she wasn’t naked, cold, and grimy.

Then he asked quietly, “Your power grew tonight, Kimberlyn.”

“I killed them easily.” Her voice came out a whisper. She hadn’t wanted to think about what she’d done that night.

“You protected your people.”

“Something changed inside me. I was…”

“You were full of power. It shone from you.”

“It was in my hands.”

“It was in your heart, Kimberlyn.”

“Malik came back,” she said, wanting off the subject of her cold, killing rage.

“I thought he would.”

“What?”

“He can’t go far. Bonfils will tear him apart.”

“I’m confused.”

“Malik lost his temper, which is understandable. Elijah would test a priest. But Malik also meant to test *us*. He needs a group with our power and strength to defeat Bonfils, so he can take over.”

“If he can’t defeat Seith himself, he doesn’t deserve to take over.”

He gave her a quick glance, his eyes glinting with humor. “You think not?”

“You’re in an awfully good mood for someone who has just been through hell.”

He shifted her as he climbed the steps and opened the door. “Those most precious to me are alive and safe. Why shouldn’t that cheer me?”

Men. She would never understand them. They could fistfight all day long and then get up and clap each other on the back.

“Those vampires we fought. They weren’t Malik’s, were they?”

He shook his head. “No.”

“I can walk, Logan.”

But he ignored her and carried her upstairs. The wolves in the house paid them not the slightest attention. Well, other than a couple of young wolves who eyed Kimberlyn’s body as Logan swept by them.

“What are you going to do, Logan?”

“I don’t know. We’ll all discuss it later. Right now you need a hot bath and some food.”

“I want to see Andrew.”

He nodded and carried her to Andrew’s room, not even putting her down long enough to open the door. He carefully placed her beside the sleeping Andrew, then stood and just watched them.

She turned toward Andrew and slid her arm over his covered belly. She kissed his bare shoulder, needing the contact. His eyes opened briefly, and he smiled, then tumbled back down into his dreams.

“I love you,” she whispered and fell asleep as Logan crawled in beside her. She wanted food, she wanted a bath, but her exhausted body was only going to give her sleep.

* * *

“Kimberlyn.” Logan’s voice woke her hours later, and she was surprised at the darkened room. Night had come as she’d slept the day away. Just like Malik did.

Logan had slipped from her side as she’d slept and now stood beside the bed, watching her. “Hmmm?” She rubbed her eyes and stretched, careful not to disturb Andrew.

“I won’t let anyone hurt you.”

She smiled, slightly quizzical. “I know.”

His face looked so tired, so discouraged, and suddenly she got it. “Logan, it wasn’t your fault about Andrew. About any of them.”

But he shook his head. “I couldn’t protect them. I have to”—he flung his hands out, disgusted—“I have to do more.”

“You can’t save the world.”

“It’s not the world I’m worried about.”

That he needed her reassurances touched her in ways she’d never been touched. She slid from the bed and wrapped her arms around his waist. “Logan.”

He sighed, his hand tugging gently at her long hair. “Let’s get you cleaned up.”

Logan smelled so good. She wrapped her arms around his waist, loving the solidness of him. “Where’s Elijah?”

“I would imagine he’s gone to find Malik,” he said. “Come on. Your bath is ready.”

“Why did you let him go?”

“In case you haven’t noticed, Elijah is all grown up.” In the bathroom, he lifted her and sat her in the tub when she moved too slowly for his liking. Climbing in behind her, he pulled her back against his hard body. The warm sudsy water splashed, almost overflowing onto the tile floor.

“That’s a matter of debate.”

He grunted an agreement. “Still.”

“What’s going to happen?”

“Elijah will convince him to come back.”

She twisted in his arms to stare up at his face. “What the fuck is going on? How is it I’m so clueless about everything that’s happening around here?”

“You were occupied.”

Images of the wounded wolves flashed through her mind. And on the heels of those pictures, Malik. Malik standing still and serious, Malik kneeling across from the fallen vampire. Malik with his slender power and his paleness, his dark eyes

full of ancient things she couldn't understand, his straight hair brushing his cheek...

She shook her head to dislodge him from her mind.

"Kimberlyn?"

"Yeah?"

"I asked you how you feel about Malik."

She swallowed. "How do *you* feel about him?"

He allowed her to dodge the question. "I feel like he's familiar, somehow. The longer I'm around him, the deeper I feel a connection. I'm not sure yet, but I may have to kill him."

She laughed until she realized he wasn't joking. "Logan, what?"

"I think he's hypnotizing me. Vampires can do that. Not to wolves, usually, but he must be different. More powerful. Or..."

"Or?"

"Kimberlyn."

"Ye-es?"

His deep voice was casual. Too casual. "Do you feel anything strange when it comes to the vampire?"

She tilted her head, confused. "Strange?"

He cleared his throat, further mystifying her. "Anything like..."

"Oh my God!"

He jumped, causing the dangerously waving water to finally splash over the lip of the tub. "What is it?"

"You think he's our fifth." It exploded inside her, this thought. Suddenly it made sense—why she was so drawn to this vampire, this man. She repeated slowly, wondrously, "You think he's our *fifth*."

Chapter Fourteen

Elijah dug his nails into the cold earth and lifted his snout to catch the vampire's scent. Teasing his nostrils, it floated before him like a hand motioning him ever onward, closer to the man he had to bring back to Sanctuary because, as much as he hated it, he owed the vampire.

He'd waited until evening to go after the vampire. During the day, Malik would have found a lair in which to sleep, and there would have been no rousing him. If Elijah had found him, by some chance, and carried him into the light, the vampire would have died in his arms.

But when the debt was settled, he'd kick Count Chocula's ass. Bastard bugged him more than just about anyone he could think of, even Kimmy. The vampire got under his skin like a cactus spine, sticking and itching and bugging the shit out of him. He was going to get that bastard out if he had to destroy the fuck. After he'd lodged him back at Sanctuary, anyway.

A hint of danger brought him up short, and he growled, the low, rumbling sound starting in his belly and working its way out of his mouth. Maybe he should have brought backup. Nah, fuck that. He could handle Dracula.

And he wasn't going to tell the bloodsucker they'd never agree to help him in a war against his master. He'd have thought the vampire would have had enough sense to have realized that already.

The floor of the woods was littered with rotting logs, dead leaves, and deep, damp things more familiar to him than food. He'd been in these woods a long, long fucking time.

Slinking quietly through the trees, he let his nose guide him. The vampire knew Elijah was going to find him. He had to know that.

Strange thing was, Malik wasn't afraid. Elijah would have scented his fear. So why was he running? If there was one thing Elijah knew, it was that the vampire never did anything accidentally. Not a vampire as old as Malik.

Still, his nose followed the trail the vampire was making no attempts to cover. Bastard could have made it easy, but no. He had to play his fucking games.

He stopped and cocked his head, listening. The woods were quiet and felt empty. Of course they were not, and the wolf distrusted the expectant silence. It was as though the trees and the animals were waiting to see what was going to happen. Like they knew what was going to happen, and were watching with curious eyes and bated breath.

The cold bothered him not at all. His huge, shaggy body generated such heat that the cold air felt glorious. Invigorating. He wanted to stretch out his legs in a heart-thumping run, but not yet. He had to get the vampire back to Sanctuary.

It was what Logan wanted, even if he never said anything. There was a lot Logan wasn't saying lately, but Elijah sensed things. And from the way Andrew was acting, he could sense things as well.

Logan felt an attraction for the vampire.

It was wrong, yeah. But Elijah would be loyal to his alpha until the day he died.

So he'd bring Malik back because it was what Logan wanted. But mainly he was trotting after Malik like a faithful dog because he owed the bastard. And he didn't like owing people. Especially vampires.

He trotted on, picking up his pace. He was wasting time chasing the vampire when he could be home lying between Kimberlyn's soft thighs.

The gentle moonlight shone down, covering the bare trees in a silver light and the ground in a blanket bright to the wolf's eyes.

When Malik materialized right in front of him, he skidded to a halt, unwilling to shift to human form in case the vampire wanted to be stubborn. Malik was going back to Sanctuary, whether he knew it or not.

But Malik was calm and still as a stick. He made no move to attack, only stared at Elijah with a questioning brow raised. "What do you want, wolf?"

Dammit. Elijah pawed the ground and growled, then turned to trot away. He looked over his shoulder at the vampire.

"Yeah. I should run along with you, right into the trap your master has waiting for me."

Fucking idiot. Seeing no other choice, Elijah shifted. "There's no trap, Dracula. I owe you."

"Oh?"

Elijah glowered. "That vampire bastard would have taken Kimberlyn's head off if you hadn't killed him. You didn't have to. I owe you."

Malik looked uncomfortable. "I didn't do it for you."

Elijah shrugged. "I don't give a fuck who you did it for. Fact is you did it. Like I said, I owe you."

Malik inclined his head. "And you want to repay this debt how?"

"I'm taking you back to Sanctuary. We'll hide you from *your* master until you grow some balls and kill the fucker."

Malik refused to take the bait and only looked amused at Elijah's attempts to piss him off. "It's not up to you, wolf. It's up to your alpha."

"I'm Logan's partner, asshole. Now let's get going. I don't have time to stand around jawing with you."

Malik hesitated, but Elijah got the feeling the vampire had been planning to go with him all along. He also got the feeling Malik liked messing with him.

He began to feel a little uncomfortable standing in front of the slim, black-clad vampire without a stitch of clothing on. As soon as he thought it, his cock twitched and, to his utter horror, began to harden.

The only way to hide was to shift. He twisted into a fast turn, jumped into the air, and came down as a wolf.

“Impressive,” Malik said.

Elijah growled and stalked away. The wolf experienced little of the desperation or embarrassment the man felt, but deep inside, relief bloomed.

He knew without looking that the vampire followed in his tracks. His only desire now was to get back to Sanctuary, deliver the bloodsucker to Logan, and find Kimberlyn. For some reason, thoughts of sex were overpowering him. If he didn't reach Kimmy soon, he was going to hump a tree.

Knowing Malik would have no trouble keeping up, he sped through the woods. He wasn't going to tell Kimmy the vampire had saved her life. Logan and Andrew wouldn't tell her either. None of them wanted her feeling indebted to him.

Elijah growled at the thought. No way was a vampire getting a piece of her. Bad enough he had to share her with his alpha and Andrew.

The wolf shook his head, dislodging uncomfortable thoughts as he ran back to Sanctuary, the vampire right behind him.

Chapter Fifteen

Logan lifted her, cooling bath water sloshing around them, positioned his erection at her opening, and slid inside her.

She moaned and let her head fall back against his shoulder. “You do, don’t you?” Her voice came out strained and breathless and not only because he had his cock inside her.

“God,” he said, his teeth clenched, “help me, but I do.” He slid his big hands over her rib cage to squeeze her breasts, hard.

She was so accustomed to his stoicism that his ready admittance surprised her. Unsure of what he wanted from her, she stated cautiously, “You want him.”

“Would you fuck a vampire, Kimberlyn?” One of his hands left her breasts and delved between her thighs. He rubbed her clit fast, hard, not even trying for gentle.

She gasped and put a foot on either side of his legs and grabbed the lip of the bathtub, holding on as he fucked her. Suddenly wishing she was facing him.

“Would you?” she asked.

He wrapped his arms around her and rose from the water, striding from the bathroom with hurried steps. He threw her across the bed, face down, muttering a hurried apology to the surprised Andrew.

As though unable to help himself, he grasped her thighs, lifted her ass into the air and rammed his dick inside her, battering her with violent need.

She screamed at the sudden fierce intrusion. Turning her face toward Andrew, she met his gaze, and he slid down the bed to lie beside her, already hard.

Andrew didn’t try to kiss her; this wasn’t a time for kissing. His eyes dark, he closed his hand around his erection.

She groaned as she watched him, her orgasm building with every intense thrust Logan delivered. Burying her fists in the sheets, she took a deep breath, and her climax exploded.

The door slammed open, hitting the wall with a sound like a clap of angry thunder, and Elijah filled the doorway. Huge, naked, and panting, he charged into the room, kicking the door shut behind him.

He stood before the bed, shaking, clenching his fists, impatience visible in every line of his big body. His cock stood rigid and huge, red, angry head looking like it needed to do some serious damage. “Give her to me,” he said.

But Logan wasn't finished. His hands tightened and he thrust harder, faster, deeper.

She moaned as another orgasm rose to claim her, needing everything he could give her. Her moans seemed to make Elijah crazy. He turned in a half circle, his hands digging into his hair until it stood on end, his face white, jaw bulging as he clenched his teeth.

He was the most frightening sight she'd seen in a long while, and the thought entered her head that he might really, truly hurt her, if got his hands on her.

She moaned louder, panting short, harsh breaths, watching him.

Andrew slid from the bed. Before any of them knew what he was going to do, he dropped to his knees in front of Elijah, grabbed his hips, and took him into his mouth.

"Oh God," Kimberlyn whispered. It was the sexiest thing she'd ever seen. Her orgasm, so extreme she screamed, ripped through her. Claws shot from her fingers, and she half shifted as she watched, unable to take her gaze from Elijah in Andrew's mouth.

Elijah buried his fingers in Andrew's hair, his face a mixture of agony and helpless desire as the other man sucked him. His grip had to hurt, but Andrew never made a sound, just slid a hand from Elijah's hip to grasp his huge, hanging balls.

Elijah's hot, angry gaze met hers, then lifted above her to stare, she knew, at Logan. Then, as though unable to look at either of them, he closed his eyes, threw his head back, and let Andrew give him what he needed.

She watched Elijah's erection sliding past the kneeling Andrew's lips, her claws ripping the sheets and shredding the mattress beneath.

Elijah, looking exhausted from holding in his emotions, let go. His half shift was as seamless and effortless as breathing.

His wild beauty took her breath away. Wild and hulking, growls rolling from his mouth, he finally looked at her.

"Fuck," he said, his voice gravelly and rough as he fought to retain some semblance of his human self. Otherwise the sex might become a whole lot more dangerous.

Logan held her in a hard grip. Somehow he managed to fuck her with even more force, and with her gaze on Elijah and Andrew, she came again.

Logan roared his orgasm at the same moment Andrew brought forth Elijah's climax, and the room spun and swirled with power as lust and love collided like two wrestling giants.

The closed window shattered, and winter air rushed in to join them. As her orgasm loosed its hold on her, she calmed enough to stop midshift. In a rush of an after-sex high, she rolled around on the bed, tangling herself in mangled sheets, laughing.

Logan collapsed at the foot of the bed, his forearm over his eyes, his erection sticky and still hard. Rolling toward him, she took his cock in her hand, caressing it gently.

He jerked at the contact. "Too sensitive, Kimberlyn." He held her wrist and brought her hand to his chest instead.

Andrew dropped down on the other side of her, and automatically she tilted her head back, a smile ready for Elijah.

But all she saw was the door closing gently behind him.

None of them said anything. There really was nothing to say. Elijah would deal with it and would let them help him when he was ready to.

But Andrew, with a sigh, climbed from the bed. "I'll go talk to him."

"No," said Logan.

Andrew ignored him. "I'll be right back."

Kimberlyn sat up and grabbed his arm. "Logan's right. You don't want to face Elijah right now."

Andrew put his fists on his hips. "You'd like him to have to deal with this on his own."

Logan lowered his arms and caught Andrew's gaze. "That's what he wants, Andrew. He doesn't want to look at you right now. Lie down."

"Come on, love," Kimberlyn coaxed. "You need to rest. You're still healing."

But Andrew shook his head. "I'm going to take a shower and get something to eat."

"Andrew—"

"I'll leave him alone, Logan." But his voice was tight, tired.

Kimberlyn put her head on Logan's chest and wrapped her arm around his middle. "What's the matter with him, Logan?"

"What do you mean?"

"Don't do that."

He sighed. "He's angry."

"About what?" And why was she always the last to know these things?

"He doesn't want Malik back here."

She frowned. "Is Malik back here?"

He raised an eyebrow and turned his face toward her. "Can't you feel him? Elijah brought him back."

"For you."

"And for you."

"What do you mean?"

"Not anything."

Then why did she get the feeling he was lying? "Logan—"

“Andrew is afraid of what I feel for the vampire.”

So he was ready to have this conversation again. “And what is that, exactly?” She held her breath, waiting. She could understand Andrew’s fear.

“We talked about this, Kimberlyn.”

“So you really do think he’s our fifth?” She hadn’t actually thought they’d find him, or he’d find them, so quickly. And she didn’t feel it.

“It presents some problems.”

She pressed her lips lightly to his bare chest, darting her tongue out to taste his flat male nipple, smiling when he shivered. “Like what?”

“The others will never accept him. I’m having a hard time keeping the pack from sneaking up on him while he’s sleeping and ripping his head off.”

It would be an easy matter. Catch the vampire in the middle of the day while he slept the sleep of the dead, and destroy him. He was helpless during the day.

“He must trust you an awful lot.”

“I gave him asylum.”

“Still.”

“I think he feels something too, and that drew him to us.”

“You know he simply wants our power. Are you going to help him in his fight against Bonfils?”

He pushed her off him and sat up, running his hands over his face. “No.”

She frowned. “Do you want to talk about it? That no sounded weak.”

“Let’s eat. And get someone to fix the window we blew.”

She didn’t want to push him, not yet. She slid from the bed and looked for a robe. “Shower first, food after. I’m hungry enough to eat *you*.”

He grunted, then laughed. “Come on, woman.”

And hand in hand, they left the room.

Chapter Sixteen

Having eaten her food and half of Logan's, Kimberlyn curled in an overstuffed chair and stared into the flames of the fireplace. Wolves lounged there in the main room with her, some of them playing cards, a couple of them drinking beer and talking about the latest drama with their jobs in town. One of them, a young woman named Loira, was talking about how the love of her life had just dumped her, and how she was probably going to die without him. It was *that* special.

Kimberlyn snuggled down into her chair with a smile, content with her family. For the first time in her life, she belonged. She didn't want to be anywhere else. Her life was perfect. Well, as close to perfect as it'd ever been.

Logan was out with Elijah making rounds. They'd taken some of the younger wolves with them. Both of them took every opportunity to teach the young, as well they should have. Andrew lay in bed, still not 100 percent, and still, Logan said, unhappy with him for bringing Malik back.

Kimberlyn yawned, then roused herself to go check on Andrew. Maybe she'd keep him company, since he wouldn't come downstairs and sit with the other wolves. He wasn't in the mood to be social, he'd said. But that was a couple of hours ago, so maybe now she could convince him.

But as she left the room, determined to go to Andrew, her feet took on a mind of their own, and before she quite realized what was happening, she was going down, down into the bowels of Sanctuary. Down to where Malik was ensconced. Down to where, when daylight broke, he would be safe enough to sleep, secure in the fact that the sun could not reach him and Logan would keep his enemies away.

She couldn't help a shudder as she descended, remembering when she had been a prisoner of this level and had been forced at gunpoint to take a terrifying trip to the bears.

Shaking off the memories, she continued on, even as she told herself what a bad idea it was to even be down here. She walked on.

He opened the door but didn't invite her in. His face showed no surprise, no shock at her appearance, and she was pretty sure he'd known she was coming before she'd made it halfway down the hall.

Silent, he watched her, his eyes deep pools of darkness. Seemingly content to just watch her, he waited.

She wiped her palms on her skirt. "Malik."

His body vibrated with energy, though he remained as still as death. "Why are you here?"

Why *was* she here? She shook her head slowly. "I don't know."

A quick quirk of those beautiful, full lips. "You're an honest girl."

Maybe *he* knew why she was here. She wasn't about to ask him. "I..." She gestured helplessly, realizing she was about to give lie to his words of her honesty. "I just wanted to see if you needed food. You look...hungry."

"I am hungry." His gaze trailed over her face, hesitating on her neck before traveling down her body. "I've been hungry for a long, long time."

She pushed back her hair with hands that shook the slightest bit. "I'll ask Roxie to bring you a tray."

Before she could back away, his hand shot out, faster than her eyes could track, and grabbed her wrist. "I don't eat food."

Blood heated her face, and she nearly groaned aloud. He would think she was a simpleton. But he jerked her to him, his lips almost touching her face. "Not food," he said. His voice was a whisper of air against her hot skin.

And deep beneath the confusion and lust was a sharp stab of fear. Maybe Logan was wrong. Maybe he wasn't meant to be their fifth and would simply force her into the room and drain her. After he took whatever else he wanted.

The thought brought an icy-hot shiver with it. Maybe it was normal lust for a beautiful man, even if he was a vampire. Nothing special, just...lust. Sex was her drug.

Could vampires even have sex? Not that she really wanted to have sex with a vampire. That was just wrong. But she couldn't fight her body's betrayal. Her body wanted his sex and couldn't have cared less what her mind wanted.

God, he was so very sexy.

And if he was meant for the wolves' fifth, then didn't that mean she was *supposed* to have sex with him?

"Oh God," she said, groaning.

"Don't torture yourself."

She swallowed. "What?"

"Do I repulse you?" His voice was slow, sliding from between his lips like something she needed to taste, to bite.

"I don't know," she whispered. "Yes."

He skimmed his fingertips over her bare arm and grasped her hand. The small hairs on her arm stood at the contact, but before she could give that much thought, he pushed her hand against the front of his jeans. "You don't repulse me."

She tried to jerk away, but he held her, pushing his erection against her hand, thrusting in slow, languid movements as if he had all the time in the world.

“You don’t want to come looking for me if you don’t expect something to happen, kid. This is the only warning I’ll give you.”

She glanced up at him, wondering how old he was. But as with the sex question, which he’d already answered, she couldn’t ask him. With one last, hard jerk that would have taken a human’s arm off at the shoulder, she broke the contact.

Stepping back, she pushed her hair out of her face and glared at him. “Please don’t touch me again.”

He smiled, but his eyes stayed as stark and cold as the middle of December. “Go away, little wolf.” He shut the door gently.

She stood in the hall, shaking, wiping her palm on her pants. She wasn’t sure what she felt emotionally, but she could not get the feel of his cock, hard and thrusting, off her hand.

And her pussy throbbed. Her breasts ached, her lips parting as desperate pants forced their way from her lungs. She wanted him. She wanted the vampire.

She wanted a man who drank the blood of humans, who turned perfectly happy people into bloodsuckers just like him. She wanted to fuck a soulless, ancient, dead man.

With that thought, she was able to get her lust under control. “That’s right,” she murmured. “Just remember that. He’s old, he has no soul, and he drinks blood.”

And how was that different from her shifting and ripping into a rabbit or a deer, thrilled because it ran from her, chasing it down and devouring it? How was she so very different than the vampire?

“It’s much different. He devours *people*. I just...have dinner. And only when I’m a wolf.”

He nearly took the door off its hinges when he jerked it open again, his face paler than usual, his lips so red she couldn’t help but stare at them.

When his fangs dropped, she gave a surprised squeal and backed up, suddenly realizing she should have left the first time he’d asked her to. “I was just going.”

“Kid, I can feel your need. I can taste it. And no matter how much I want you, it’s not the right time, and it’s certainly not the right place. You need to leave. Now.”

She turned and ran, ran even as his hands were reaching out to grab her, feeling like she was in a dream and her legs were heavy, so heavy...

She ran with clumsy determination up the steps, back into the civilized part of Sanctuary, with the firelight and scents of cooked food and merry voices, and kept running until she reached her bedroom.

Shit. *Shit.*

“What the fuck is wrong with me?”

“What is it, honey?”

She screamed at the voice and whirled around, her hand to her chest. "Roxie! You scared me!"

Roxie raised her eyebrows, her eyes wide. Holding her palms up, she said in an overly exaggerated voice, "It's okay, Kim. It's just me, old Roxie. I won't hurt you."

Kimberlyn glared. "Stop laughing at me. Haven't I told you not to come in my room if I'm not in here?"

"Uh, well, no, sweetie. You haven't."

"Well, I'm telling you now. What are you doing in here?"

Roxie stooped to pick up a laundry basket. "The housework, darlin'. Just what Logan hired me to do."

Kimberlyn sighed and slumped onto the bed. "I'm sorry, Roxie."

"It's okay, honey." She put the laundry basket back on the floor and sat beside Kimberlyn. "Tell me what's wrong."

"I can't."

"Now, now. You know you can trust me." She took Kimberlyn's cold hand in her own, briskly rubbing some warmth back into it. "Go on, tell us."

Kimberlyn looked at Roxie and couldn't help but smile. The woman was as colorful as a cartoon, outspoken, funny, sweet. And sincere kindness shone from her eyes. Her outrageously high-piled hair listed precariously to one side, and her scarlet lipstick had somehow managed to smear halfway across her cheek.

And she wasn't a wolf. Kimberlyn sighed. "I think...or Logan thinks, rather, that the vampire—"

"Malik!" Roxie fanned herself, her hand flapping back and forth so fast it was a blur.

Kimberlyn laughed. "Yes, Malik." Despite her reluctance to spill, the secret was snapping at her insides, desperate to be let out. "Logan thinks he's our fifth, Roxie."

Roxie's heavily mascaraed eyes widened, and she put her fingers to her mouth, her gasp hard enough to nearly suck them down her throat. "You're fucking with me," she said. "You gotta be fucking with me!"

"I'm afraid not."

"Ohmylordhavemercyonmysoulasinner."

"Huh?"

"Oh, honey. What are you going to do? No matter how hot he is, you can't fuck a—" She broke off and jumped to her feet, staring at Kimberlyn with something akin to horror in her eyes.

Alarmed, Kimberlyn stood and grabbed the other woman's arms. "What is it, Roxie?"

“If the pack finds out you’re considering bringing a vampire to your group, as a...as a *leader*, they will kill you all. But first they will kill Malik. They want to anyway. I hear things...”

Kimberlyn took a deep breath. Oh God, why, *why* had she told Roxie before Logan had even had a chance to figure out what they were going to do? “You can’t tell anyone.” When Roxie said nothing, didn’t even appear to hear her, she shook her. Hard. “Roxie, hear me!”

“*Ouch*, honey. I hear you, I hear you. I won’t say a word. But...I’m afraid for you. For all of you. Something like this could throw the whole pack into chaos.”

Frowning, she walked from the room, forgetting to take the dirty laundry with her.

Kimberlyn closed her eyes. Shit, shit, *shit!*

Logan was going to be pissed. And Roxie, well, she was Roxie. Could she keep a secret like that? Really?

“I’m an idiot. An idiot.”

Unable to gather enough energy to so much as undress, she fell into the bed, pulled the pillow over her face, and went to sleep.

Chapter Seventeen

“Wake up, Kimberlyn. Are you okay?”

She opened one eye, surprised to see the bright daylight streaming through the window. “Andrew. What’s going on? How are you feeling?”

“Can I join you?”

She lifted the covers. “Please.”

Andrew slid in beside her and lay staring at the ceiling. She snuggled up against him, content to stare at his perfect face. Andrew was a strange mixture of innocence and wisdom, of humor and sorrow, of sensuality and, though they hardly ever saw it, coldness. That coldness allowed him to be uncompromising when it came to those he loved.

“I can’t let him do it, Kimber.”

“You mean...Malik?”

He snorted. “Yeah. I can’t let him *do* Malik.”

“Why does that thought bother you so much? You’re not jealous of Elijah. Or me.”

“You think I’m jealous?” He turned his face toward her, his expression incredulous.

“Well...aren’t you?”

“Is that what Logan said?”

She swallowed. “Andrew...”

He shook his head. “You don’t have to answer. I know he did.”

“If you’re not jealous, then what is it?”

“He’s a fucking vampire, Kimberlyn. We can never, ever fuck a vampire. They used to be our masters.”

“That was forever ago, Andrew—”

He growled at her, and she jumped, shocked. Andrew never threatened her. “Andrew!”

“It’s all a big plan, Kimber. Can’t you see that? He and his kind would like nothing more than to take over the wolves again. We suffered enough because of the *bears*, didn’t we? Do you really want to let the vampires take control of us?”

Had he gone mad? *Was* it jealousy? There were things at play here she didn't understand. "Let's not think about it right now." She slid her hand over his hard belly, squeezing his dick. "We haven't made love, just the two of us, for a long time."

But he grasped her wrist, to her utter shock, and set her hand away from his cock. "No, Kimber. I can't, not right now."

He swung his legs over the edge and stood, walking from the room without another word.

Whatever was wrong with Andrew, she knew it had to be bad. Logan had either not told her the whole story or didn't know it himself. He'd better figure it out damn quick, because Andrew was suffering. And another thing she knew—Andrew had suffered enough.

But if Malik was their fifth...there was nothing Andrew could do. It was up to Fate. And Fate liked to amuse herself at others' expense.

She wandered outside, determined to forget the drama. The solitude lasted for only a few minutes before she looked up and saw Logan standing against a tree, his expression somber as he watched her aimless walk.

"What are you thinking so hard about?"

She sighed. "About being tired of thinking so hard."

"I can feel your uneasiness, Kimberlyn. What's wrong?" His voice was quiet, his gaze so serious, so loving, she couldn't help but go to him.

That was one of the side effects of forming their power base. They could sense things about each other. The strength of that had faded over the months but would never be gone. It rose up like a huge mushroom cloud and enveloped her, Logan, Elijah, and Andrew in times of great distress, giving each of them information about the other.

"I'm worried about Andrew," she said. "I'm worried about Malik, and the vampires, and if we're going to die because of our association with him. I'm worried that if we don't help him, his master really will eventually destroy us, the humans, the world."

He pulled her against his chest and wrapped his arms around her. "Didn't I swear to protect you?"

She sighed against him. "I don't want you to have to take so much on your shoulders, Logan."

His arms tightened. "Kimberlyn."

"Yes. You did. And I swear to protect you."

"Where are Elijah and Andrew?"

She shrugged. "Andrew walked out on me earlier. He's really upset."

"We need to talk. Come on, let's go inside."

He sent a wolf to find Elijah and Andrew, and he and Kimberlyn settled in the main room to wait.

Roxie walked in, hesitated, then turned around and walked back out. She came right back in, and her gaze rested on Logan for a brief second, on Kimberlyn for a moment longer.

Logan raised a dark eyebrow. "What's wrong with you, Roxie?"

But Roxie turned toward the five other wolves lounging in the room. "Out, you lazy wolves! Go do something worthwhile. Jeremy, why aren't you at work?"

"I'm off today, Roxie," the young wolf replied, grinning. "Come outside with me and I'll prove to you I'm not lazy."

But Roxie wasn't to be amused by his teasing, not today. She clapped her hands and shooed at them like they were a bunch of hens sitting on eggs she needed to collect. "Let's go. Out! Out with all of you bums."

Logan half smiled, a quizzical look in his eyes. "Kimberlyn?"

She couldn't bring herself to meet his gaze, just shrugged and looked away.

"Out, I say," Roxie screamed when the wolves were slow in obeying her. "Let them have their talk in private."

The pack was going to have to hear everything sooner or later, but Logan let Roxie shove them out the door. Kimberlyn knew he'd call every single pack member in for a meeting soon, a meeting that might not go well at all. But first, the leaders would talk.

Elijah stomped into the room and threw himself into a big chair, avoiding Logan's gaze just as Roxie had done. But they knew why Elijah couldn't bring himself to look at Logan.

Kimberlyn flashed on him with his huge cock thrusting into Andrew's mouth, eyes screwed shut, his face a mask of reluctant need. Immediately she flushed, and a wave of desire swept through her, curling her toes and making her mouth so dry she couldn't swallow.

Logan and Elijah looked at her at the same time, Elijah sitting up slowly, his stare sharp. Before he could say anything, Andrew walked into the room, sullen, drawn, and pale enough to warrant a call to the doctor.

"Kimberlyn, do you ever get enough?" His lips turned up in a quick smile that never touched his eyes.

Elijah looked at Andrew, and Kimberlyn saw redness crawl up his neck. He caught her watching and as he always did, became an asshole to try to cover his embarrassment. "She's a bitch in heat. She'll never get enough. You could nail a pole into the floor and she'd—"

Kimberlyn growled and leaped at him, enraged. "Bastard!"

Laughing, he jumped up before she reached him and snagged her around the waist. She rammed her fist into his throat, and he gagged but didn't release his hold on her. He pulled her against him so tightly she could do little but dig her claw-tipped fingers into his sides, anger blinding her to all else.

Sheer reflex caused him to shove her off him, and she went spitting and clawing against the wall. The impact seemed to shake the entire house as it knocked the breath from her body. But she didn't need to breathe; she needed to hurt Elijah.

"Now, calm down, Kimmy girl," Elijah said, holding his palms up. "You need to do something about that temper."

Logan and Andrew wouldn't interfere, to a point. Kimberlyn hated more than anything when they stepped in to protect her when she was doing a fucking good job of protecting herself.

She rammed Elijah hard enough for him to go flying backward, but his big hands encircled her arms so that she went with him. She landed on top of him, punching him with everything in her, on whatever body part she could reach.

"Ow! Son of a bitch!" Elijah, starting to get angry himself, dug his hands in her long hair and forced her backward. Flipping her to her belly, he pulled her arms behind her back and straddled her.

Kimberlyn was strong, very, very strong. Elijah, though, was stronger. And she hated him a little bit for that. Frustrated, she fought tears as he nearly pulled her arms from their sockets.

"Shit, Logan," he said, "the fuck is wrong with her?"

And she knew he really didn't have a clue. That was enough to take some of her anger, though she still would have dearly liked to have kicked the shit out of him. "Let me up."

"You're a dick, Elijah, that's what's wrong with her," Andrew answered. "Now get the fuck off her."

"I wasn't talking to you, wolf," Elijah said, snarling. His grip tightened, and Kimberlyn shrieked at the pain.

Logan jumped to his feet then. "Get off her."

Elijah hesitated but wasn't willing to test his alpha that far. He got up, slowly, and finally released Kimberlyn's arms.

She couldn't move at first and just lay there, humiliated, furious, hurt. She was a healer, true, but unless she was willing to kill her wolves, she was always going to be the weak female. And she wasn't willing to kill Elijah. She just wanted to teach him a lesson. She wanted to be able, just once, to kick his ass in a fight. She wanted him to stop being such an asshole.

Elijah cleared his throat. "You okay, Kimmy?"

She could lie there and pout, and she wanted to, she really did. But she got up, trying not to groan when pain shot through her shoulders, and ignored him.

Andrew sat on a couch and held his hand out to her. When she took it, he pulled her down on his lap. But he wouldn't have done that with Elijah if Elijah had been the one pinned to the floor, so she slid off his lap.

Glancing at him, she almost explained herself when she saw the hurt in his eyes, but she didn't. Instead, she looked at Logan. "So let's talk."

He nodded slowly, and she caught a glimpse of approval in his smile. "Let's talk about the vampire."

Chapter Eighteen

Knowing that he believed Malik to be their fifth, Kimberlyn knew what Logan was about to say. Yet when he said the words, she felt nearly as shocked as the other two looked.

“I think we’re meant to help him.”

“Help him!” Andrew jumped to his feet, his fists clenched. “You can’t mean to!”

“Now wait a minute,” Elijah chimed in. “I brought him back because you wanted him here and because he saved Kimmy’s life. But I ain’t—”

Kimberlyn held up her hand like a schoolgirl, then immediately put it down again, glaring. “What do you mean he saved my life? He never saved my life. You’re delirious. Did I punch you too hard and knock something loose?”

Elijah looked at Logan and scratched his head. “Uh, anyway, yeah, I’m with Andrew. I don’t think we should help the bloodsucking bastard. Vampires are nothing but soulless parasites.”

Kimberlyn narrowed her gaze but let it go. Fine, if he wanted to ignore her, she could play that game. “Let Logan explain himself, Andrew. Just listen.” She put a hand on his arm. “Please.”

He sank down beside her, as if all the energy had been drained from him. “I can’t fight you all,” he murmured, sounding so lost she gave in and climbed onto his lap. Elijah be damned.

Logan stood and began pacing the floor, and Kimberlyn held Andrew tighter. If he was upset by Logan’s willingness to help the vampire, he was going to be devastated at what was coming.

“I think he’s our fifth.”

At first neither Andrew nor Elijah seemed to understand what Logan had said, both exchanging identical looks of puzzlement. Then it hit them.

Elijah’s mouth fell open, and while he was searching for words, Andrew stood, dumped Kimberlyn off his lap, and walked to the door.

“Andrew,” Logan said.

But Andrew, his body stiff, left the room. Kimberlyn couldn’t blame him. She looked at Logan. “Well?”

He rubbed his face tiredly. “Go after him, then.”

“I wasn’t asking your permission, Logan. I—”

He roared. “Not now!”

Dammit. Like Elijah, she wasn't willing to test her alpha either. Not when he was like this. Without another word, she left Elijah and Logan alone and ran after Andrew.

He needed her right now, whether he knew it or not.

"Did you know?" he asked when she caught up to him. "Did you know that the *vampire* is our fifth?" But he didn't wait for an answer. "Our fifth. A fucking vampire? It's not possible." He shook his head, his face parchment white, eyes dark holes of despair. "It can't be possible."

She walked with him over the frozen earth, shivering because she'd forgotten her jacket. Ever the gentleman, Andrew put his arm around her, pulling her close and warming her with his body. "It's not that cold," he murmured.

"You're used to this, Andrew. I didn't grow up like you did."

"No. And be thankful for that."

She knew he'd had a rough past, but he never wanted to talk about it. And now was not the time to pry. "Andrew, try to think about this without emotion clouding your judgment. What do you feel when you're around Malik?"

The sun shone weakly, trying to fight the bleak blanket winter had draped over the world, and Kimberlyn was happy for the daylight. Malik was sleeping while they discussed him, unable to interfere. Unable to...convince.

"It's nothing like when you came, Kimber. When you came, it was like..." He shook his head, searching for the right words. "It was like immediate knowing. I felt you." He touched his chest over his heart. "I knew you were our third without a single doubt. And even Elijah. When he joined us, it was right. But I don't feel that with Malik. Not at all."

She wasn't willing to admit that she didn't feel Malik as their fifth. It would have been, somehow, like taking sides. "So why does Logan, then? Could it be that you can't feel it because of...because of whatever happened to you?"

He stopped walking and stared at her. "What do you mean?"

Now it was her turn to shake her head as she looked up at him, hoping her eyes were clear, honest. Earnest. "I feel you too, darling. I feel something that isn't good. They hurt you, didn't they? In the past?"

His body started shaking, shuddering with emotion too long suppressed and smothered secrets he'd perhaps never allowed even himself to think about. And shame. She saw shame in his face, and it scared her, scared her more than his fear and his pain.

"Andrew," she whispered, "what did you do?"

Because suddenly she knew, knew with everything in her, that he hadn't been the victim. He'd been the abuser.

She didn't see images of what he saw, but his memories and the emotions from those memories slammed through her. She tried to get away from him, to get away

from the horror he was making her feel, but all she could do was stumble, fall to her knees, and gag.

She couldn't take it. She was being torn apart, ravaged by ugliness and fear. She couldn't turn the flashes of his feelings off; there was no button. Because of their connection and his distress, she was feeling what he felt. Feeling what he'd been able, until now, to stomp down, to hide in a deep, dark place and keep from rising.

How did he bear it? How did he live? Because he wasn't like her. He wasn't a healer. She threw back her head and howled, trying to force the anguish from her body through her lungs, but it was in her mind. Her only refuge was in the wolf, and she shifted, ignoring Andrew's wide, desolate eyes and his damaged psyche. Ignoring the hand he needed held, the heart he needed healed.

She fled. She caught a glimpse of Logan and Elijah running to her, their heavy wolves' bodies ready and eager to take on whatever threat she faced.

But it was only Andrew, and she couldn't stop to explain. She couldn't tell them she'd seen such a deep hole inside him, she was afraid if she looked any longer, she'd fall into it with him.

She loved him. She did. But right now she had to get away from him.

She ran until her mind had managed to spit out some of the horror it had witnessed, until her body was exhausted and shaking, starving and dehydrated. She ran until the day became the night, and until she was clear enough to try to think about what she knew. Or more to the point, what she didn't know but had felt.

What had he done?

The wolf ate, and replete at last, she shifted. She needed to think, and the woman did that better than the wolf.

Sitting naked by a stream, she shivered in the cold and wished she was home. She'd gone far, farther than she'd ever ventured in the woods of Sanctuary. She'd find her way home; that wasn't her worry. But what would she find when she got there?

Would Andrew ever forgive her for taking his despair, his pain, and running from it in horror? What the *fuck* had he done?

He'd hurt people. She felt that. And the healer part of her was more than appalled; it was revolted, disgusted, sickened. So why did she feel so bad for Andrew? Why, underneath the horror, did she feel such sympathy?

She had to go back, right now. She had to find him, to let him explain, and tell him that she loved him. Even if she couldn't bear feeling what he'd felt, it didn't mean she didn't love him enough to listen.

"I *know* Andrew." Her voice, fierce and loud in the quiet, cold woods, gave her encouragement. She did know him. Andrew wasn't the type of man to prey on others, to torture people. There were things she didn't understand. She hadn't been there. And she owed it to him to listen.

Carefully, groaning at how stiff her limbs had become as she'd hunched there in the cold, she stood.

She intended to shift and run back to Sanctuary like a good little girl, she really did. But then Malik appeared like a specter right in front of her. One minute the area was clear, and the next he was just there.

She hadn't even scented him, but she did now. Thankful that she hadn't screamed, she crossed her arms over her breasts and frowned. "Are you following me?"

He shrugged, casually handsome and silkily dangerous, his eyes too dark and bottomless to allow him to even pretend to be anything other than a lawless, cold vampire whose attempts at civility could not disguise the savagery within him. It was a thinly applied veneer of polish worn thin in enough places to show the barbarism hidden beneath. "Yes."

Thrown off balance by his quick admission, she pursed her lips, wondering if she should be offended, not sure why she wasn't. "What do you want?"

Looking suddenly exhausted, he sighed and leaned against a tree, as if he could not stand on his own for another minute. "To see an innocent face. To have conversation not laced with riddles and innuendos. To not have to weigh every word before it falls from my lips."

Her gaze dropped automatically to his lips at the mention of them. She shivered, an uncontrollable tremor that shook her entire body.

"You're cold," he said and shrugged off his long black coat.

Not about to argue, she reached for it, but he brushed her hands away and slung the coat over her shoulders.

If he had stopped then, she would've been fine, but he didn't just drape the coat across her shoulders and step back to his tree.

With his arms still around her, he smoothed the material over her spine. So close she could have lifted her face and kissed his smooth throat.

Trembling, helpless to stop him, she forgot to breathe. Almost moaning aloud as his hand swept over her back and lower to lie, warm and heavy, on the rise of her buttocks.

It was terrifying. He had a dark power over her, a velvet hold she hadn't asked for and didn't want. Her willpower bled from her by a simple touch and an enigmatic look from the deepest, most captivating eyes she'd ever seen.

If Logan was right, what could it hurt to taste this man, this vampire she so desperately wanted? That was what was wrong. The fact that she wanted him so desperately was enough to make her run away, far and fast and resolute.

No good could come of this meeting. And she couldn't trust him. She stiffened in his arms, tilting her face up to him. His breath fanned her forehead and nearly undid her, so she pushed against his chest until he loosened his hold around her.

"I have to get back."

He didn't touch her, but his presence was overwhelming, his scent drifting up to tease her sensitive nostrils.

"Wait."

Half poised to bolt she hesitated, even though her mind told her to just run. "What is it?"

"I need your help." He turned away from her, his words reluctant, slow.

She raised her eyebrows, though he wasn't looking at her, the tension easing a little. She could breathe again. "Explain."

"Come with me. I want to show you." He turned back toward her then, holding his hand out to her.

Right. Like she was going to go blindly following a vampire who had something to *show* her. She swallowed past the dryness in her throat. "I don't need to see anything." And she turned to go.

Something whizzed by her face, missing her by a whisper. She didn't move for a fraction of a second, confused, until something scraped her cheek.

"Run, kid!" Malik shoved her, his hand between her shoulder blades sending her several feet before she tripped and sprawled on the frozen ground.

Behind her was chaos. Moving in slow motion, she got to her knees. Pushing her hair out of her eyes, she then wiped at the stinging wetness on her face. She was bleeding.

Malik fought small dark shapes darting at his head and away again, and the whir of fast wings filled the night sky.

Bats. What looked like dozens of tiny, bloodthirsty bats dive-bombed Malik, and before he could use his incredible speed, they brought him down. It was over in seconds but seemed like an eternity as she struggled to her feet, her shocked gaze on the scene before her.

She ran to him, shrieking at the bats, waving her arms madly, unthinking of the danger to herself. Her only thought was to reach him, to save him.

But she couldn't. She couldn't reach his pain, couldn't soothe it away, couldn't heal him. The bats flew off, and the clearing became as quiet as if nothing had happened. As though no savagery had occurred there just moments earlier, as though no blood dripped from her torn cheek. And as though the vampire didn't lie on the hard ground, silent, still.

She fell to her knees at his side, gasping. The dark blood dripped from his brutalized form, painting the earth with pain.

Her life was destined for brutality and blood, it appeared. She pulled Malik from his side to his back so she could see his face.

"Oh God."

His face was a shapeless mask, blood from a recent feeding pooling in deep cuts and gouges. He was suffering, she knew, but he lived. It'd take more than

vicious, snapping teeth to do him in, but she couldn't understand how they'd disabled him so easily, so quickly. He hadn't even seemed to try to fight or to run.

"Malik, Malik, can you hear me?" Grasping the hem of his shirt, she pulled it over his abdomen to wipe some of the blood from his face, then lifted his head to cradle it on her lap.

When his eyes shot open, she shrieked, so shocked to see him conscious in the midst of such destruction. "What can I do, Malik? Tell me what I can do. Can I run for help or—"

He grabbed her wrist in a surprisingly strong grip. "No," he managed, his voice sounding as mangled as his face looked. "I won't survive that long."

He must have been more hurt than he looked, and that was saying something. "What happened?" she asked. "How could bats destroy you?"

"He sent them. Those are..." Then his hand fell away from her arm, and his head listed to the side.

She glanced around, fearful the killer bats might return. Tempted to shift and run for her life, she nonetheless stayed put, unable to abandon a dying man.

"Malik?" she whispered.

At last he opened his eyes again, slowly, and it was difficult for her to look at the pain lurking there. "I need your blood, kid."

She leaned closer to his mouth, sure she'd misunderstood his whispered words. "Pardon?"

He swallowed and winced as though the words were regurgitated nails scraping his throat with every one he spoke.

"I need your blood. I have to bite you."

Chapter Nineteen

Oh *hell* no.

“I... No. Gross. Ouch!” She realized she sounded a little insane, but that was all she could manage. Carefully, she started to slide out from under him, hoping he wouldn’t die before she could run to get help.

His moan was hideous and so filled with pain that she froze. “Oh shit! I have to go get someone, Malik. I can’t *fix* you!”

“You can heal me with your blood.” His words were halting, and the effort they caused him was obvious. The gashes on his face continued to ooze, and in the moonlight looked like black craters against the extreme pallor of his face.

He started to lift a shaking hand to touch her, but after a moment let it fall to the ground. “Don’t let me die here, kid.”

She had no choice. If he was sure her blood would heal him, she couldn’t deny him. She was a healer, and no matter how she kept him alive, the important thing was that she did.

“May I?” he asked, his eyelids fluttering. He slid his hand up her arm, then up to cup the back of her neck to pull her, slowly, so slowly, to him. “Please. Please.”

She couldn’t breathe. One second she was on her knees beside him and the next she was on her back looking up at him.

Blood dripped from his wounds, falling like scarlet teardrops onto her face. “Malik—”

“Relax.” He slid a hand to the open flap of her borrowed coat and rested his fingers on her ribs, right below her breasts.

The mere thought of taking her blood seemed to have revived him, and he stared down at her with shadowy eyes. His fangs dropped, gleaming in the ruin of his face.

She gasped, fear coiling inside her stomach. She couldn’t do this. “I changed my mind—”

He struck like a cobra, quick and deadly, holding her against her struggles, and then her throat was on fire. She screamed, or thought she did, and tried to claw at him, but her body refused to cooperate.

She was paralyzed, helpless. Truly helpless.

Plump threads of agony suddenly blossomed. Blossomed into colors she could taste, into scents she could see. From anguish to bliss in seconds. It was a million

orgasms at once, and she knew she'd never be able to describe it. Or explain it to Logan.

What had she done?

She willed her hands to move, her mouth to speak, but her brain would not obey her. Her body lay in his arms, limp, boneless but incredibly sensitive. The skin of her belly contracted as his shirt rasped across her skin. His arm sliding against her breasts brought her nipples to painfully hard points.

And endless rapture screamed with gleeful freedom through her entire body. She was high, high on a vampire bite. Though she couldn't move any part of her body, vibrations of ecstasy shook her.

She might have floated to the heavens as euphoria buoyed her spirit, but he brought her back to him by slipping his fingers between her thighs.

The vampire had lived untold years and had learned how to touch, how much pressure he should use, how to read a woman. His fingers proved he knew exactly what to do.

Her frozen, weighted limbs could not move. She couldn't have opened her legs had she wanted to.

But he didn't need her cooperation. With languid, heavy strokes, he slid his fingers over her clit.

How far would he go, the vampire? How far?

The new wound on her neck itched with ecstasy. His sucking mouth pulled pleasure from its hiding place deep inside her, pleasure she hadn't known existed. It was *different*. Her entire body was slammed with overwhelming orgasm after orgasm. The vampire took her into his world with a touch, a bite.

Somewhere in the back of her weakening, floating mind was the knowledge that he was draining her, emptying her of that which made her body live, but then he plunged his fingers inside her, and she ceased to care.

She heard a popping sound as he pulled his mouth from her neck, and felt between the wound and his lips a stretch of sticky pleasure that did not want to be severed.

His eyes were dazed, glowing orbs as he stared down at her, his fingers still massaging feverishly on her clit, then pushing into her overheated, swollen pussy with harsh, deep thrusts.

The separation of his mouth from her neck returned to her a sudden, shocking control of her body, and at first she didn't realize. When she did, she threw back her head and howled, giving voice to the never-ending, overpowering orgasm his bite and fingers had forced upon her.

Her clitoris vibrated with aftershocks, and her pussy throbbed as the orgasm localized, became something she could better understand.

Fear, anger, and bliss clashed within her, and all she could do was yell as she climaxed.

“Calm down, kid. The wolves are coming.”

Oh God, oh no, oh no. Logan was coming. What had she done?

She began to cry as she came down. Too many emotions bit at her psyche with razor sharp teeth. She'd been somewhere she'd never been before, and she'd gone there with a vampire.

It was a hideous betrayal of her pack. But especially of her men. Andrew would not forgive her.

Finally, when her sobs refused to halt, Malik gathered her into his arms and lifted her to his chest. The cold hit her, seeped into her very bones, and uncontrollable shudders shook her body.

Something drastic had happened. Something terrible.

She could feel it as well as she could feel the ground trembling beneath the thunderous paws of her pack coming to save her.

To *save* her.

And if they found the vampire with her, he'd die before even he could get away. Not that they wouldn't hunt him down anyway when they discovered his bite, but at least he'd have a chance.

“They'll kill you,” she whispered, her voice weak. She was so *tired*.

He glanced down at her and back up, his gaze searching the dark shadows. Then the wolves burst into the clearing. They would surely have torn him limb from limb but for the fact that he held her so tightly against him.

Logan ran at him anyway, his jaws snapping, and the wolves surrounded the vampire, waiting for Logan's signal. Eager for it.

Malik released a sound of pain and jerked, and Kimberlyn knew he'd been bitten.

He turned in a tight circle, limping, his words clear, loud, and serious. “Back away or I will kill her.” His arm lay heavy between her breasts as he wrapped his hand around her throat. “I can snap her neck before you can move. Stand down. Logan, control your wolves.”

She was so weak, so very weak. Her body lay heavy and lax in Malik's arms, and no adrenaline coursed through her to lend her energy.

The wolves growled, menacing sounds that wrapped around her, urging her to shift. But she hadn't the strength to shift. Malik's bite had given her everything and had taken everything. She was nothing at that moment.

Nothing at all.

Chapter Twenty

Logan spoke, having shifted without her even being aware of it. “Kimberlyn.”

She closed her eyes, wishing she could fall asleep and awaken back at Sanctuary, and this would all be a terrible dream. “I’m okay, Logan. Just weak.” Her words were whispered, and even she could hear the shame in them.

“You bit her,” Logan said, and she’d never heard him sound so cold.

“I did,” the vampire answered.

“You’ll die for that.”

“No, I won’t.” And he waited for Logan to ask the question.

“Why should I let you live?”

“You should not only let me live but should help me defeat the one who will destroy me otherwise.”

“No. I thought to help you, but I was mistaken.”

“Without your commitment, I wouldn’t make it far in a war against the vampire master.”

“I understood that.”

“You wouldn’t have kept me alive, Logan. Your pack, your lovers...they would not have accepted it. Rather than war with your own, you would have turned your back on me, no matter what your promise.”

She could hear the truth in Malik’s words, and Logan must have too. He didn’t argue with the vampire.

“It doesn’t matter what might have happened,” Logan replied. “Only that now, you have gone too far. You can’t hold her forever. When you put her down, you will die.”

Malik hoisted her in his arms. “Then you will kill her as well.”

Andrew’s low voice came from the darkness. It was smothered in dread and a terrible understanding. “You’ve made her your servant.”

“Almost,” Malik replied. “Enough so that if I die, she will eventually fade and die as well.” He glanced down at her horrified gasp, his face bearing a look she translated as guilt. “I’m sorry, kid. I had no choice.”

His face still bore marks of the cruel bat attacks, but they looked less severe than they had a mere moment earlier. He was healing rapidly.

“Your master didn’t send the bats, did he? You set me up so you could take my blood.”

“I began the process of making you my servant, kid. I had to tie myself to you.”

“And he had to have your permission to do so,” Andrew said, his voice flat. She ignored him. She couldn’t think about Andrew right now.

“How could you?” she whispered, still staring at Malik.

His shrug was surprisingly casual. “I do what I have to do to survive.”

But she didn’t think he was quite as cool as he pretended to be. Deep down, she sensed fear, true, smothering fear. His master terrified him.

“What do you want, Malik?”

He looked away from her. “I want to be part of you, Logan. I want you to have a reason to help me. A reason to keep me alive. Something you can’t walk away from.” Again he bounced her in his arms. “Now I have it.”

“I would have helped you,” Logan said.

“No, you would not have.”

“You will never rule by his side,” Andrew said. “No matter what, you will never rule the wolves. Not even if we have to let her die.”

“Andrew!” Logan said, his voice harsh.

At last, Kimberlyn turned her head to look at Andrew, who’d shifted and stood naked and glorious and perfect. “Don’t turn on me because of your past, Andrew.”

He had the grace to look away.

“I need my wolves,” she murmured. “I need your touches to restore me.” She glanced at Malik. “And to get the taste of the vampire out of my system. It sickens me.”

Logan stalked to the vampire. His face was a mask of fury, tightly reined and carefully mastered. “Give her to me.”

“Tell them,” Malik said, inclining his head toward the wolves.

“They will not kill you,” Logan said, his voice carrying, commanding. “Until I give them the order. We value our healer too much to let you destroy her.”

Malik gave a sharp nod and handed her over to Logan. “Thank you.”

“Elijah,” Logan said once he had Kimberlyn in his arms.

“Right here, boss.”

“Kick his ass. And make it good.”

And as he walked away with her in his arms, Kimberlyn heard the sounds of the wolves closing in on the vampire. They wouldn’t kill him, but they might make him wish he was dead. She sighed. Malik had made a huge error.

Logan could keep him captive forever in the bowels of Sanctuary. As long as he lived, Kimberlyn would live. It didn’t matter how or why he lived, only that he did.

She whispered as much to Logan.

“No, Kimberlyn. His people will follow him. I don’t want to be in the middle of a feud with the vampires forever, which is what will happen if we imprison him. We’ll have to help him destroy his master. Once Malik is master of his clan, he’ll go to them and leave us, and you, alone. And in the meantime, I need to figure out a way to break his hold on you.”

“Do you still think he’s our fifth?”

His voice was dark, harsh. “I want him,” he replied. “Maybe that’s all it is. I want the fucking vampire. It’s my fault you were bitten.”

She swallowed her tears, her face bouncing against his chest as he walked. “No, it isn’t. It’s not your fault I was stupid enough to think I had to save his life.”

He said nothing. His gaze was distant, and she knew he was already thinking of the wolves’ options.

“Let me down, Logan. I need to...recover.”

She could still hear sounds of the torment Malik would have to endure because of his desire for a connection with the wolves. With her.

And she didn’t feel one hint of sympathy. Bastard deserved everything they were going to give him.

Chapter Twenty-one

“If he decides to become our enemy, we’re dead,” Andrew said, pacing across the floor like a pent-up, angry wolf.

“Just because we need him alive doesn’t mean we can’t kill every bloodsucker he sends our way,” Elijah said, sitting in the corner like a bad boy, pouting.

“Elijah’s right,” Kimberlyn said. “We need to keep Malik alive, not every vampire we meet.”

Andrew wouldn’t look at her. He’d been avoiding her ever since Malik had bitten her, like she was tainted or something. He looked at Logan instead. “So what have you decided we should do about our *fifth*?” His voice was scornful, so full of anger.

Logan stared at him for a long, hard second. “Careful you don’t push me too far, Drew.”

Andrew didn’t seem to care about the threat Logan posed, or perhaps he just didn’t believe Logan would really carry it out. Gaze bitter, he spat, “*fuck* you.”

Unaccustomed to Andrew behaving in such a way, Logan was a second slower than he might otherwise have been. Kimberlyn had time to jump in front of him before he reached the careless Andrew.

She put a hand on Logan’s chest. “No, Logan. He’s not himself.” She shot a glare of scorn at Andrew. “Right now he’s living in the past, and his self-hatred is smothering him. He’s everything he despises.”

Andrew stood. “I would rather *you* didn’t defend me. All of this is your fault.”

“You need to grow up, Andrew. I know you have a lot of shit to deal with, but it isn’t right that you take it out on those who love you.” She wrapped her arms around Logan and laid her cheek against his chest. “And I already know it’s my fault.”

Logan sighed, his anger, for the moment, gone. “Andrew, I’m going to put you in solitary to think. When you decide you want to talk to us, to let us help you, we’ll be waiting. Elijah.”

Elijah, who would always be Logan’s wolf first and foremost, stood. “Come on, buddy. I’ll lock you in.”

Kimberlyn was glad Elijah’s bout of embarrassed avoidance of Andrew seemed to be easing. “Things are so fucked-up right now.”

Logan ran his hand over her hair. “It’ll be okay.”

Andrew put up no argument and looked neither at her nor Logan as he passed them. She couldn't help but feel that something about him had changed so drastically, the old Andrew was gone for good. "He hates me."

"He hates himself."

"Do you know about his past with the vampires?"

His hand stilled in her hair. "How do you know?"

"I...glimpsed something in him. That's why I ran." *Right into the traitorous arms of Malik.*

"He only did what he had to do but refuses to forgive himself. Or them. Any of them."

"Will you tell me?"

"No. That's Andrew's story to tell, if he should decide to."

She nodded. "I hope we get him back."

"He's still Andrew."

"I miss him, somehow."

"I know."

Elijah didn't come back to the room, but Kimberlyn spotted him running across the field a few minutes later. He looked pissed. And Andrew was down below, on the same level as Malik. Malik still hadn't healed after the punishment he'd taken from Elijah and the wolves.

Her neck was a mess. It sported a swollen, angry-looking wound that continued to seep even after she'd shifted, even after she'd attempted to heal it. She reached up and patted the bandage, tempted to rip it off and dig her nails through the wound. It itched like the rest of her body.

This morning she'd woken up to it, this terrible itching, sure her skin was going to crawl right off her bones. She'd sat up in bed and felt within herself to see what she could possibly have to heal, but there was nothing. Nothing was wrong. Still, that terrible itching and crawling sensation had continued.

She'd told no one, determined to wait it out and not add another crisis to the already overwhelming problems the pack faced. Her itching was minor compared with the upcoming battle against the vampires.

She held her hand out and watched it tremble. Now she was not only itching but shaking, her insides as jittery as a mouse in a lion's cage. She'd go for a run. Shifting changed everything. It made everything seem better. The wolf could handle things the woman could not.

She was sick. Sick because of the vampire's bite. And she couldn't bring herself to tell anyone. The wolves looked at her with sidelong glances of either mistrust or disgust. Her men were fighting and hurting, and she was sick with something she couldn't cure.

All because of Malik. She should have let Logan kill him when the vampire had holed up in her basement.

Now that she'd been bitten by Malik, a master in his own right, she could die if he were to die. So Logan and Elijah and even Andrew would do everything they could to keep him alive.

Thinking of Malik caused her to clench her fists. He'd tricked her, manipulated her into giving him her blood to heal him. Only he hadn't needed healing. He'd needed to tie the wolves to him.

So clever, this vampire. So cold.

He couldn't be their fifth. It wasn't possible. Logan lusted for the vampire and needed a logical excuse for it. *She* lusted for the vampire but didn't feel him as their fifth.

"How did everything get so screwed up, so fast?" But there was no one there to answer her murmured question.

She left the house, more eager than ever to shift and run. Her skin was crawling and itching and only getting worse with each passing hour. The wolf shrugged it off as though it were nothing more than a minor annoyance, and Kimberlyn sighed with relief.

If she had to, she'd stay a wolf until the itching had run its course.

But scarcely twenty minutes later, Elijah caught up with her and nipped her flanks until she stopped running. She shifted at the same moment he did, furious. "What the fuck do you want?"

Taken aback, he held his hands up. "Whoa, missy. The fuck you screaming at me for?"

She closed her eyes and clenched her fists, cold, angry, itching. "What do you want, Elijah? Can't I just get away for a while without someone chasing me down?"

"I just wanted—"

"I know what you wanted. But I don't want to fuck. I don't want your cock anywhere near me right now, because the way I'm feeling, I might bite it off."

He frowned. "Are you okay, Kimmy?"

"Don't call me Kimmy. It's pathetic and makes me feel about twelve fucking years old. Now go away and let me run."

"Logan wants you." Still frowning, he looked her over.

"Oh gee, then, if Logan wants me, I guess I should just go running right now. God knows we all have kissing Logan's ass down to a science."

He stared at her for a long, long minute. "Kimmy, why are you scratching at your arms like that?"

She grinned and could feel the skin of her face stretch like a dry mask. "Don't worry about it. Go back and tell Logan I'll be there when I get there, all right?"

All she wanted was to shift again, to become the wolf who didn't feel the trembling, the anger, the itching, the awfulness. She realized the feeling had magnified a hundred times in just the few minutes since she'd left the house.

Elijah reached for her, but she slapped him away, angry, so angry. “Get away from me!”

But Elijah had never listened to her and wasn’t about to start now. He grabbed her shoulders and jerked her to him. “Calm down, baby girl. I’ll get you some help.”

“There is no help,” she said, crying. “I can’t even heal myself.”

His clumsiness would have made her smile if she hadn’t been so miserable. “Now, now. Just...just shut up,” he said, as soothingly as he knew how. “I’ll take care of it.”

He ran with her all the way back to Sanctuary, to the only person who’d ever been able to fix the broken among them. “Logan,” he said and held the shuddering, sobbing Kimberlyn to their leader. “Help her.”

Chapter Twenty-two

“This is a familiar position,” she said, trying for humor. It didn’t quite work as Elijah and Logan stared down at her with twin expressions of worry.

Logan smoothed her hair away from her forehead. Elijah leaned over to fluff her pillow and nearly punched her in the face.

Neither of them knew what was wrong or what to do about it.

“I sent for Jericha. She’s on her way.”

“She can’t do anything for me, Logan. If I can’t heal myself—”

“You never know,” he interrupted.

She squirmed on the bed, trying to escape what felt like a thousand worms crawling and wriggling under her skin. She was less irritable with two of her wolves standing there watching her, their worried, dear faces all serious and scared. Her self-control was amazing, because all she really wanted to do was scratch her skin right off her bones.

“Can one of you get me some water?”

Elijah practically ripped the door off its hinges as he ran for water. “I’ll get some,” he yelled, already halfway down the stairs.

“He’s so uncomfortable,” she told Logan.

“Yeah.”

“Logan.”

“What?”

“The vampire bite.”

“What about it?”

“This itching and the other...problems. They didn’t start until after I’d been bitten. Maybe we should bring Malik up. He might know what to do.”

His jaw tightened. “Let’s see what Jericha can do before we think of the vampire.”

“She’s right.”

Logan stiffened, and Kimberlyn raised her head to look at Andrew lounging against the door frame, watching them. When they said nothing, he sighed and walked into the room. “The vampire bite has caused her problems. I had hoped it wouldn’t manifest after one bite, but our Kimber is extremely sensitive and

vulnerable.” He stood beside Logan, not touching him but close enough to do so, and looked down at Kimberlyn.

“You’d hoped what wouldn’t manifest so soon?” she asked, half afraid of the answer.

He sat on the bed beside her and reached for her hand. “I’m sorry for being a dick, Kimber.”

She smiled and squeezed his fingers. “You were entitled to be upset, Andrew. I’m just glad you’re okay. You are, aren’t you? Okay, I mean.”

He smiled, looking so much like the old Andrew that she nearly cried. “Yeah.”

Logan cleared his throat. “As glad as I am to hear that, answer her question, Drew.”

Andrew swallowed and looked away from her. That scared her more than anything he might have said. “Andrew?”

“You’re having withdrawals, Kimber.”

She wrinkled her nose. “Huh?”

“You’re withdrawing. When Malik bit you, his saliva acted as a drug in your bloodstream. A very, very potent drug. You’re addicted to the vampire bite.”

“Oh my God,” she whispered. “Does this mean... What does this *mean*?”

“What happens if the drug is withheld from her?”

At last, Andrew looked at Logan. “She’ll suffer. She’ll suffer badly. And she may live, but...” He shrugged and continued, his voice so low she could barely hear him. “She may not. And even if she does live through it, she’ll wish she were dead long before it’s over.”

“I’ve never seen anyone actually addicted to a vampire,” Logan said, almost as if he didn’t believe it. But he did; she could see it in his eyes. He believed.

“This is crazy.” But even as she spoke the words, a bout of nausea overwhelmed her and she put her hand over her mouth, dizzy. “I’m so thirsty. Where the fuck is Elijah?”

“I’m here,” he said and sidled into the room. “Roxie’s bringing up ice water.”

Before he’d finished speaking, Roxie bustled into the room, her face grim. “If we can’t keep one little girl alive, how the hell do you all expect to keep yourselves alive when the vampires come?” She shuddered, nearly spilling ice-cold water all over Kimberlyn.

“The vampires aren’t coming, Roxie.”

“No?”

Logan raised an eyebrow and leaned against a bedpost. “No. We’re going to the vampires.”

She thought a minute. “Oh. Well. I’ll expect you not to get yourselves killed.”

Jericha arrived, finally, and Elijah pushed her toward the bed. “She’s addicted to vampire spit,” he said, his gruff voice unable to hide his worry.

“Well thanks for the heads-up, Elijah Berry. Now get your bumbling bull’s body away from me so I can see for myself.”

Elijah huffed but stepped away. Jericha simply looked at Kimberlyn for a moment, taking in her appearance, her tremors, her exhaustion. “Get me a wet cloth, Logan. She’s sweating like a pig.”

Kimberlyn refused to look away when Jericha met her gaze. “I thought he was dying, Jericha.”

Jericha shrugged. “Not my business. I just patch you all up.” But her body was stiff with disapproval. She was silent while she wiped Kimberlyn’s face with the cloth, but was too outspoken to keep quiet for long. “Although letting a vampire die—especially when he’s dead anyway—would seem to me a better idea than letting him suck the blood from your body.”

“Enough, Jericha,” Logan ordered. “Can you do anything for her or not?”

Jericha stood. “Not.”

“Jericha—”

“I wouldn’t let her die if I could do otherwise, Logan, you know me better than that. It’s out of my hands. There is no medicine in the world to cure what she’s got. You’ll just have to let her fight through it. She’ll break the addiction, or she’ll die.”

“Try not to be so caring, Jericha.”

“Hush with your sarcasm, Andrew. I do care. I might be pissed, but Kimberlyn knows I care.”

Kimberlyn did know. But right now, she was the one who didn’t care. She turned her head to the side and vomited up the small amount of water she’d drunk. The room started spinning, which made her sicker, and she threw up until all she could do was dry heave as her people stood watching, helpless.

“I’m so hot!” she managed between bouts of gagging. She was burning up. Sure she was going to set the sheets on fire with her heat, she grasped Logan’s hand.

“Put her in a cool bath,” Jericha said. “If you don’t get her temperature down, she’s not going to make it through the night.”

“Bring me the vampire,” Kimberlyn begged. “Bring him to me.”

Logan’s voice was hoarse. “What will happen to her if he bites her again?”

“She’ll get what she needs and be better,” Andrew said. “In one way. She’ll have to continue letting him feed from her in order to feed her addiction. And with the third bite, she will be his servant with no turning back.”

“I thought he’d already made her his servant,” Elijah said.

“He started the process. Even one bite from a master would make it risky for her if he should die. But when he’s fed from her three times...”

“What, Andrew?” Logan’s voice was impatient but seemed to Kimberlyn to be coming from far, far away.

“She’ll have to stay by his side. She’ll think of nothing but Malik. And if he dies, she will die.”

She still didn’t care. All she wanted was relief. She’d care when she was better. Pain descended and squeezed her brain, red-hot agony she would have done anything to stop. “My head,” she said, moaning. “Oh God, my head!”

The room became fuzzy, and she must have passed out, because the next thing she knew she was lying on the floor and too many bodies were pressing in on her.

“It was a seizure,” Jericha said, but Kimberlyn couldn’t for the life of her figure out what a seizure was.

“Water,” she begged. “I’m so thirsty.”

“I’ve never seen it happen like this,” Andrew said, his voice tight, thick. “Not this intense so quickly.”

The room went dark, and panic hit her so hard she screamed.

“What’s wrong, Kimber?” She heard the tears in Andrew’s voice, felt him grasp her hand. “What is it?”

“I can’t see! I can’t see!”

Logan roared, his agony hurting her ears and her heart. “Get the fucking vampire!”

Roxie’s voice was quiet but strong. “Elijah went to find him five minutes ago, Logan. He’s on his way.”

Chapter Twenty-three

The world went quiet, but in her darkness, the sound of her heart thudded a sluggish, steady beat. In ominous harmony, the sound of her blood rushed through her ears, a roaring proof of life she could no longer see, touch, or hear.

Malik! Help me...

She thought for a moment that she was dead, just caught between worlds, but then she felt *him*, the vampire, rushing toward her like a cyclonic being whirling down a too-small tunnel. Coming for her.

Her need was a power not to be denied, and mentally she held her arms out to accept him, impatiently counting his footsteps thumping in odd, echoing synchronicity with her heartbeat.

Malik. And she screamed for him. *Malik!*

He crashed into her, a huge, powerful tidal wave, greedy and destructive and so strong.

She lived once more in the world; the room's light was vivid in its bright colors, the sounds of those present like a thousand rustling whispers of old trees, dead leaves rubbing together in glee.

Malik covered her face with his cold palms as though to shield her from the reality his bite had wrought, and she had neither the strength nor the will to fight him. She needed him, *craved* him. He could have done with her as he pleased as long as he shoved himself inside her and stopped the pain being without him caused her.

"Malik," she moaned, and her voice had colors, colors she could taste, see, feel. God, what this vampire did to her. What he did *for* her.

Right now she couldn't care that he was the cause of her addiction, that he'd bound her to him more surely and harshly than any pill or powder could ever have done. Right now all she wanted was an end to the pain, an end to the hideous craving, to the need that ate her alive, burned her up and left nothing but ash in her place.

With his body on hers, the craving turned to sex, something almost more manageable. Almost. She calmed.

"Malik," she whispered.

His voice was warm and moist against her ear. "I'm here, kid. Do you want me to bleed you or fuck you?"

“Fuck her?” Elijah’s roar was half rage, half disbelief. “*Fuck* her? Take her blood, asshole. Her pussy is mine!”

Malik laughed but silently. She felt the tremors in his body. “Does he really not understand that you belong to me now?” He lifted his face to look at her.

She gasped at his vivid eyes, filled with a warm color she’d never before seen in him. Sex swirled in a symphony of heady power, playing across her body with a music so beautiful, so strong, she couldn’t bear it.

“Do you feel that,” she said, marveling. “Can’t you *feel* that?”

The vampire’s look was arrogant. “Sweetheart. I *am* that.”

She parted her legs for him, craving his touch. “Then fuck me, Malik.”

“Kimmy!”

She ignored Elijah. There was no room inside her for possessive men. Nothing mattered but her addiction, and she was going to have her fix.

Malik’s body was so cold it burned her skin, and after a moment she couldn’t tell ice from heat. But she understood. “You need to feed, Malik.” And she bared her throat to him.

His gaze sharpened even as his face softened. “There are more ways than one for me to feed, kid.” He shifted his body slightly and slid his hand over her ribs, then lower to rest lightly on her belly. Temptingly close to her core.

Restless, she moved her legs. “Do it.”

“I’ll make you better. Stronger.” He leaned to whisper in her ear, as though he’d forgotten the wolves could hear even the thought of a whisper when they were so close. “You’re meant for this, kid.”

And as slow as thick syrup, he slid his fingers between her legs. He grasped her clit with his fingers, watching her expression. His carved face warmed, his skin blossoming with light color. The color of life. He was feeding from her desire, from her need of him.

Distantly, she heard Elijah’s rage-filled roar, and Logan’s calming voice. Their words never registered, not to her. She was drowning in the waves of sensations Malik’s fingers caused.

But the vampire had more control, more forethought. “Join us,” he said, taking his gaze from her to look at the wolves. “You should be part of this union.”

They wanted it; even over her consuming lust, she could feel the heaviness of their longing.

“Join us,” Malik urged. He took his fingers from between her legs and held his hand to her men. “Come.” And then, as though he knew they needed a reason, he gave them one. “She needs you. Give her what she needs.”

And when he said it, she realized how true it was. “Logan,” she called, her voice thin, weak. “Please.”

The room was stifling, hot and close from too many bodies trying to stuff themselves into such a small space. “Outside,” she whispered. “I need to breathe the night and see the moon. Take me outside.”

“Yes,” Malik said, but after he’d risen from her body, it was Logan who lifted her off the floor. She would have died before she told Logan, but even that break of contact with the vampire hurt her. Snuggled against Logan’s warmth, she held her hand out, sighing when she felt Malik take it. That was better.

Logan was not a fool. “I understand you need him, Kimberlyn.”

Quick tears sprang to her eyes, but she smiled. “I’m sorry.”

“Out,” Elijah yelled, clearing a path through those members of the pack who had managed to squeeze themselves into the room. “Out of the way!”

They made way but reached with eager hands to touch some part of her as she passed. They bathed in the power and lust that shone from her body like a new moon, unable to resist though they hated the union that created it.

Elijah was having none of it. Bad enough he had to share her with the vampire. He grabbed a wolf’s hand before it made contact with her, squeezing so hard Kimberlyn could hear the bones crack.

“She makes us feel good,” another wolf shouted, furious they might be denied this small part of the gift so blatantly held before them.

“Elijah,” Kimberlyn managed, “leave them alone.”

And surprisingly, he did as she asked. But unable to totally give in, he pushed his way to her side, grabbed her chin, and made her look at him. “I don’t care what happens tonight. You’re still mine.”

She smiled at him, hoping he could see that she loved him. “Always.”

Nodding once, he let her go.

They were outside, beneath a canopy of stars and that precious, round moon, before Kimberlyn noticed who was missing. “Andrew?”

“He’s not coming, Kimberlyn.”

“Logan...”

He placed her gently on the cold, hard, perfect ground. Barren trees rose above her, stretching naked limbs toward the sky. “He’s not coming.”

But it was wrong without him. He had to be here, he had to be part of them, or she was afraid he’d be lost forever. “Send for him, Logan.”

“Kimberlyn—”

“She’s right,” Malik said, still holding her hand. “He needs to be here.”

“We’ll have to do without him,” Elijah said, leaning down to grab her other hand. “He can’t stand the sight of you. Especially with her.” He nodded toward Kimberlyn, as though they might not understand who he meant.

The vampire looked at Logan, and only Logan. “Have him brought out. I’ll forgive him.”

Logan frowned, and even Kimberlyn fought her way through the haze of lust to listen. “What do you mean?”

“It’s a small world,” Malik said, “and up to him to explain the details. Suffice it to say Andrew and I have met before. And I will forgive him. Just bring him out. He needs to move on.”

Logan stared at him for an endless moment. “So we *are* all connected.”

Malik’s eyes never wavered. “We are.”

Logan sighed. “Of course we are.”

“No one can force him out but you, Logan. We’ll wait for you.”

Logan narrowed his eyes, and his deep voice left no room for misunderstanding. “You’d better, vampire.” Then he glanced at Elijah. “See to it, Elijah.”

Elijah squeezed her hand and lowered his big, muscled body to the ground beside her. “Yeah, boss.”

Logan trotted off, lost in the darkness in seconds. Kimberlyn had no doubt he’d be back in short moments. And Andrew would be with him.

“Get blankets for her,” Malik said, looking at the pack that circled them like silent sentinels.

“I don’t need them,” she said.

Elijah grinned. “She likes a bit of roughness beneath her. And on top of her.” He stretched out beside her, his nude body perfect, hard. “And inside her.”

She trembled at his low, rough voice, knowing exactly what Elijah could do when inside her. “I can’t wait much longer.”

Blankets were sent for anyway, and Kimberlyn conceded. If the vampire wanted blankets for her tender body, she wasn’t going to waste time arguing. And when she rolled herself onto the soft, thick nest of warm blankets, she had to admit she appreciated them. The warmth of them softly cradled her even as the cold air caressed her skin with frigid fingers.

“Cold, baby?” Elijah put his huge palm on her thigh and grinned, running his hand up and down her leg, warming her.

She shivered and let her legs fall open, just enough so that if he wanted to, he would read the invitation and ease some of her suffering.

Then Malik was there, his darkness competing with the night. The moon loved him, shining its light on his body, painting him with silver. “I promised your alpha we would wait for him.”

Elijah looked at the vampire, his eyebrows raised, still smiling. In obvious challenge, he skated his fingers up Kimberlyn’s leg and, still watching Malik, slid his fingers between her thighs.

She cried out, arching her back as he rubbed her clit, and reached for Malik. Her thought was that if Malik joined them, he wouldn't be so anxious for Elijah to stop touching her.

Elijah's fingers moved faster, and she bent her knees, letting her legs fall open. When Malik didn't move, she stopped reaching for him and instead squeezed her breasts, pinching her hard nipples into aching, needy points.

"Elijah, oh God!" It felt so good she didn't want to come, but the pressure of her climax was growing into an uncontrollable thing.

The people surrounding them moved closer, low growls coiling into the air. She could feel their desire; it fueled her own, as hers fueled theirs.

Elijah pinched her clit, hard, between his finger and thumb, no longer watching the vampire. He panted, his intense, hot gaze all for her.

Malik stepped onto the blankets, and she wrapped her arm around his calf, unsure whether to pull him to her or push him away.

"Get up, wolf."

To her dismay, Elijah's fingers slowed, and he glared at the vampire with narrowed eyes. "What did you just say, fang face?"

Malik leaned toward them, resting his hands on his knees. "I said to get the fuck up, wolf."

Elijah took his fingers from her and climbed to his knees, and she dug her fingers into his forearm. "Elijah, no!"

"I'm not going anywhere, Kimmy girl. Dracula needs to learn he can't tell a wolf what to do."

"You wish to fight, then." Malik straightened back up and smiled, but his fangs dropped with a *pop* that sounded like a bomb in the now silent clearing.

Elijah pushed her legs open with a rough, angry hand and slid her around so a leg was on either side of him.

"You don't want me to do this, Count?" he asked and pushed a finger inside her so hard she lost her breath. Then two fingers, and he pulled them, pushing them back in, smiling the whole time. "Or this?" And grabbing the backs of her legs right below her ass, he jerked the lower half of her body into the air. Leaning toward her, he threw one more challenge at Malik. "Her pussy is like a juicy piece of fruit, bloodsucker. Watch me. You might learn something."

He slammed his mouth against her sex and ate her pussy, his rough enthusiasm everything she'd always wanted from him, and more.

Lips smacking with messy enjoyment, he moved his open mouth between her legs, his tongue probing and licking, his firm lips nipping.

She threw her arms back over her head and screamed as her orgasm claimed her, bucking against his mouth like a wild horse. Pleasure claimed her, striking all else from her mind. All except Malik's presence, which lent to her body a whole

other dimension of pleasure, and even though she knew she shouldn't, it was his name she screamed.

Still deep in the throes of her climax, she was barely aware of the vampire and the newly shifted Elijah slamming into each other.

The fight was on.

Chapter Twenty-four

The pack stood frozen, drugged by the aftereffects of power-filled sex that continued to float into the night. But they knew Elijah. He'd kill any one of them for daring to deal him the insult of aiding him in his fight against one lousy vampire.

Kimberlyn, still sluggish from her orgasm and from the earlier withdrawal, climbed to her feet and shook her head, trying to dislodge the cobwebs that had gathered in her mind.

The vampire and the wolf fought on, savage and raging, each wanting to outrank, out-badass, and out-fuck the other.

"Dammit." Kimberlyn shivered and reached down to snatch a blanket and wrap it around her body. She still throbbed from her incredible climax and felt so much better, though pissed that it'd been interrupted by the raging hormones of a couple of stupid males. She tapped her foot as she waited. There was little else she could do, little else she *would* do, as deep inside she still felt the pain of Malik's neglect, knew it could rise up at any second and grab her by the throat.

And she had no idea what to do about it. How to break the hold the vampire had over her, the hold that would only become stronger if she let it.

She would die if she refused him. And her will didn't seem as strong as her body's lust.

Malik seemed to be teasing Elijah; Elijah was the enraged bull who charged with little thought other than catching, and killing, his enemy. Malik was clever, and slippery as an ice cube. He was also faster than the wolf. At least this one.

Kimberlyn had a feeling they would fight until the end of time if something didn't break them up. And just as she thought it, she fell.

She lay on the ground amid the panicked calls of the pack and didn't move even when someone stepped on her hand, and someone else—someone she would most certainly deal with later—stole a hard kiss from her unresponsive lips and copped a quick feel of an exposed breast.

Then Elijah was there, naked and hulking, the wolf still lurking in his worried eyes. "The fuck, Kimmy?"

And Malik knelt on her other side, taking her hand in his, a move Elijah didn't even try to block. Both men were a little worse for wear; Elijah's right eye was swollen below a long, bloody gash on his forehead, and Malik held his left arm close to his chest, grimacing. It could have been much worse.

“What’s wrong, kid?” Malik looked up, searching the gathered wolves. “What happened to her?”

“She just fell over,” someone said.

“She yelled out for help before she fell,” someone else offered.

“Now that’s just wrong,” Kimberlyn said, sitting up, frowning at the pack. “I did *not* yell for help, and I didn’t fall over. I just collapsed. Melted like an ice sculpture on a hot day.” She smiled at Elijah and Malik. She was rather proud of herself.

Elijah sat back on his heels and glared at her. “Tricky bitch.”

She only grinned.

Malik sighed. “How are you feeling, Kimberlyn?”

“Impatient, Malik. That’s how I’m feeling. And crawly. I really, really hate you for what you’ve done to me.” *But better for just having tasted you, for having you near...*

Elijah looked on with a satisfied smirk, and Malik merely raised his dark eyebrows. “I did what I had to do to survive. It’s why I’ve lasted this long.”

“At everyone else’s expense, Malik.”

“I’m sorry.”

She snorted. “No, you’re not.”

But suddenly the light in his eyes changed. “Yes. I am.”

She believed him. Maybe it was the way his face looked, sad and tired, or maybe it was the torment deep inside those vivid vampire eyes. Whatever it was, she believed him.

“Not that it matters now,” she said, unable to break away from his gaze.

“No. I don’t suppose it does.”

“You two going to stare at each other all night?” Elijah’s voice was impatient and, deep down, a bit afraid. He understood the power the vampire had over her.

At last Kimberlyn looked away and gave Elijah what she hoped was a reassuring wink. “You two going to kiss and make up?”

“Not fucking likely.”

Malik only shrugged.

And she knew that, for now, she had them both back and calm. But her newly acquired demon had grown tired of lurking and roared to life inside her.

Logan strode back into the clearing. At his side was Andrew, his face drawn, pale, and so reluctant.

She hated that he had to be forced to come out but knew it was time for him to conquer his demons. They were destroying him.

The vampire released her hand to stand in front of Andrew. Logan hesitated, then backed away to watch. Her stomach tightened as she watched them face off. Andrew was so damaged already. She feared for him.

“Andrew?” she said.

Elijah squeezed her hand. “Hush, Kimmy.”

Andrew looked at her. “Kimber,” he pleaded.

But she could not help him, not really. “I’m here for you, Andrew. We all are. But you have to deal with this.” Selfishly, she hoped it wouldn’t take long. She hadn’t had enough of her drug, and she needed him. Needed him badly. “Hurry,” she couldn’t help but whisper.

At the sound of her voice, Malik turned toward her. “Are you okay?”

She nodded, but her mouth refused to agree. “No.”

“All I ask,” Malik said, looking at her but speaking to Andrew, “is that you watch. Just be here so she can feel you.” Finally he looked at Andrew. “And know that I, and the others, forgot you a long, long time ago.” He actually smiled. “In our long lives, you were but a tiny pinprick of pain. It is forgotten, and you are forgiven. I swear this.”

Andrew stared at the ground, tears colored silver in the moonlight creating a slippery path of regret down his cheeks. He said nothing.

“You must now forgive yourself, Andrew. After I have taken care of Kimberlyn, if there is time, we will talk. We will go off alone and we will have it out. But right now, your woman needs you. And if you love her, you will go to her.” His dark, hypnotic voice slid across her skin, raising goose bumps and stealing her breath.

Slowly, Andrew met the vampire’s gaze. “I’m sorry.”

“I know.”

Malik offered Andrew his hand, the hand that Kimberlyn would have given much to touch. Andrew hesitated. A few words would not heal his wounds, would not make everything better. Carefully, he took Malik’s hand.

It was a hell of a start.

Chapter Twenty-five

Kimberlyn was proud of her control, but she'd had enough. "Malik!"

He released Andrew's hand. Before the vampire came to her and blocked her view, she saw Logan step up beside Andrew and take him in his arms. It would be okay. Andrew would be okay. He had to be.

She stretched out on her blankets and reached for Malik with one hand, as Elijah refused to relinquish the other one. "Now." She wasn't in the mood for another interruption. "I'm so *sick*." And she was, even though the proximity to the vampire had gone a long way toward helping her. She wanted him more than she could ever remember wanting anything. And at least she could see.

"You're fucking sex-starved," Elijah grumbled.

She guided his hand between her legs. "So? Do you mind?"

He grinned. "Not even a little bit."

But his expression dimmed when Malik crawled onto her makeshift bed with her. Kimberlyn recognized her selfishness even as she shrugged it off and turned to Malik. Elijah would understand. It wasn't that she loved the vampire, but he'd seen to it that she would want him. Need him, like she needed water or air or food.

And if that was worse in Elijah's eyes, she couldn't help it.

But the thought of having no choices is what finally got to her. That, and the fact that she felt better.

"You're getting angry again," Malik said, covering her breast with his cool hand. "I can see the storm coming in your incredible eyes."

She said nothing. There was really nothing to say. He knew what he'd done. She closed her eyes and let herself feel his touch, let herself bathe in the sensations he gave her.

Drawing in a deep breath, she groaned. "God. That's better. That's so good." The bubbles of sensation burst upon her icy skin, a million tiny droplets of warm, crystal water, coating her body with ecstasy.

"Malik," she whispered, and his name slid over her tongue like thick, melted chocolate. It tasted so good she had to say it again.

"How do you do that to me?" she murmured, genuinely curious. How could one being cause such a reaction in another merely by touching them?

"He's not that great," she heard Elijah say, his voice tight, angry. "You only think so because he got you addicted."

“He did what he had to do to survive,” she replied, her fingertips tracing the vampire’s carved face. Then she hesitated, realizing what she’d said.

“Never mind,” Malik said. “Let it go, kid.”

So she did. It was too easy to do as he bid. She wanted nothing, not even her thoughts, to distract her from the heaven she’d found in his arms.

He wasn’t so bad.

She dropped her hands to his shoulders. “How often will I...will I need this?”

“I’d like the answer to that myself,” Elijah muttered.

“Probably once every week or so. If you were anyone other than who you are, I would say once every month. But you...”

Moving his fingers gently on her breast, he lowered his mouth to hers. His lips were so warm, warm as the sunshine he never saw. The cold, winter air didn’t stand a chance beneath his heat.

Her nipples stiffened into painful points. She tugged her hand free from Elijah’s grip and buried her fingers in Malik’s hair as he kissed her, wishing he would stretch out on top of her, sink into her, plunge inside her.

Every week. Every fucking week.

She fought his gentleness, urging him with fingernails and moans to give her what she wanted. But he seemed in the mood to torture her and ignored her attempts to force him into losing control.

Malik drew her deeper and deeper into a space where nothing mattered but his next touch. She took everything he had and finally understood what it meant to feed from someone. It was as though she’d become a vampire herself.

Her body was a long stretch of sensitive skin, with nerve endings that were magnified a thousand times. Malik moved his lips against hers, swallowing her groans. He slid his tongue into her mouth, and she met it eagerly, grasping at his smooth, bare back. She hadn’t even realized he was naked.

As it always did when the two of them came together, the magic began to pulse a seductive beat, dancing into the air to tease those close enough to touch.

Malik broke their kiss and slid on top of her, dipping his head to take a nipple into his mouth. She arched her back, crying out, embracing his body with her legs. His body warmed as she held him, his skin silky heat against her skin.

The vampire was at long last going to be inside her, going to fill her up, saturate her very cells with his essence.

She was ready. She hoped.

The air around her seemed to thicken, her limbs pushing sluggishly through it as they moved beneath him. She cried out, and his body, now slick with sweat, slid over hers. Slippery and smooth, he squirmed between her legs, his body pushing against her pussy with moist pressure. Her clit throbbed so hard she was sure he could feel it beating beneath him. Every intense sensation she experienced came to

rest in that little nub of flesh, and she had never wanted anything as much as she wanted that pressure relieved.

“Touch me,” she demanded, biting his shoulder. But suddenly she had to see him, had to see his face. “Malik?”

He lifted his face to stare down at her, his beautiful, vivid eyes shining with a light she could almost feel. “I’m here, little one.”

Her vision dimmed and tunneled, and all she could see or think about was Malik and her need.

Then: “Don’t forget your wolves, love.”

Logan’s whispered voice in her ear jerked her back, just a little, to earth. For an instant, Malik’s gaze hardened, but it was there and gone too quickly for her to interpret it. And really, she didn’t care. “Logan...” His name was all she could manage, but her other two wolves knew she needed them as well, and they responded, putting strong hands against her skin, the contact bringing to full force the bond Fate had created long ago.

She smiled a smile meant for the wolves but aimed at Malik.

He closed his eyes for a brief moment, as if to shut her out. “You’re so fucking beautiful, kid. So...fucking beautiful.”

She slipped a hand between their bodies. He flinched as she touched him, and she knew he was bursting with the desire she herself felt. “Vampire, come inside me.”

Logan, at her head, skimmed a hand over her throat and to her breast, his icy heat causing goose bumps to pebble her skin. She shivered, welcoming his touch.

Malik took his gaze from her face to look at Logan. “My pleasure,” he replied, and as if time had decelerated, his cock probed at her opening with tortuous slowness.

She held her breath, waiting, waiting, and finally he slid inside her. She sighed. At last, she had him.

Her pussy tightened around him, and she tilted her pelvis as he sank deep inside her. “This,” she whispered, “*this* is what I’ve been waiting for.”

Malik’s lips parted, the tips of his fangs gleaming like tiny twin swords of danger between them. He teased her, fucking her with short, slow, circling thrusts, when he knew she wanted so much more. “Logan,” he murmured.

Above her, Logan moved with lightning speed. His hand shot out to hook behind the vampire’s neck, and their lips met in a collision of shared need.

It took her breath away. Inside her Malik swelled and seemed to harden even more. He pulled almost all the way out of her, then slammed into her with such force she dug her fingernails into his skin and wrapped her legs around him, holding on.

The two alphas kissed above her, their desire coiling into the air to join hers, wrapping them in a cocoon of magical lust, incomprehensible and heady.

Andrew put a hand on her left shoulder and kissed her arm.

“Andrew.”

He looked at her with a soft smile that never quite reached his grave, dark eyes. “I’m here, Kimber.”

She held his gaze as the vampire fucked her and kissed Logan, held his stare even as her body exploded in that first, inconceivable, incredible orgasm.

“Ah God,” Andrew cried, his teeth clenched, and came with her.

On her other side, Elijah dug his fingers into her thigh, a grip that would leave bruises she’d sport for days. She welcomed his knowing touch and cried out his name as her orgasm somehow became more, shattering the walls of her mind like delicate glass.

Malik fucked her hard, so hard, and her orgasm went on and on as his cock thrust into her with a hot, slippery friction.

One climax ended, only to allow another to begin. There wasn’t time to so much as breathe or prepare or fear.

She squeezed the smooth, firm mounds of his ass, urging him on with her cries. Digging her heels into the blankets, she met his thrusts with hers, dancing with him in a passionate harmony and powerful rhythm.

She felt it then, an unbreakable, mystifying bond that would, she knew, last for as long as she lived. She was part of the vampire.

She was his.

“Nooooooo!” she howled, even as another orgasm splintered her will, drained her strength, and drowned her in unforgettable pleasure.

She belonged to the vampire.

Chapter Twenty-six

Malik slid through the woods, knowing instinctually where to go. He and his clan had been living in these woods in near secrecy for a decade, and he knew every inch of it. He could barely keep his shaded eyes from the sun, though that yellow orb seemed determined to burn him. He was in love with this golden enemy who no longer had the power over him it once boasted.

And he had Kimberlyn to thank for it. She'd freed him. Too bad he couldn't tell her that.

Silently, he slipped behind a huge oak and listened. It was then that it sank in. He walked in daylight. His master slept.

The sun, his new ally, would boil Seith like a lobster should Bonfils be stupid enough to challenge it.

He wanted to shout his new power to the world, but Malik was not a stupid vampire. His ability to do whatever it took to survive was what had gotten him this far.

If the vampire world discovered his secret, they would stop at nothing to destroy him. Vampires didn't like different. They especially wouldn't like that he now held power over all of them, could sniff them out in the daylight hours and destroy every last one of them. Not that he would do that, but his enemies...

Yes, his enemies he would destroy. Enemies like Bonfils. Oh the rapture, so much power.

Closing his eyes, he sent out his internal sensors, honed over long, hard centuries. No one was around, no one watched him. Quickly, he stepped to the hillside and began climbing, climbing to where the caves were thick and dark and the vampire lived deep inside the earth, where the sun would not burn them and the enemy would not scent them.

He smiled, feeling the burst of almost uncontrollable excitement in his belly. His dick hardened, and the recently ingested blood sang with glorious abandon through his body. He shook with the truth of his exquisite new existence.

He walked under the sun.

At last he reached his destination, the point where the earth, if one knew where to look, opened to a deep, vast village of nests where the vampire lived. Where they dragged their victims, their loves, their food. Where they slept and fought and cried and dreamed, almost like the humans who had yet to really

discover them, and the other beings who hated them. The vampire was accepted by no one.

At night the vampires took over the world, coming to the surface for a few hours of hunting and killing and feeding before the sun came to chase them back into the uncaring womb of a cold, dark mother.

It didn't have to be that way. And once Bonfils was out of the way, Malik was going to change the dreadful, hidden existence of his people.

He was tired of hiding. He was too strong to hide. He was the vampire who walked under the sun.

He had to force himself to descend into the narrow, dark passage, after one last, lingering look into the day-lit sky. Accustomed to darkness, his eyes still took longer to adjust than usual, which didn't upset him in the least. The reason behind that slow adjustment was too glorious for words.

Down below was still as death, and he reached it in short moments. Such a steep drop would have worried most, but the vampires, with their dizzying speed, simply flew down the sharp shaft to the bottom of the hole they'd created, to the place they called home.

At the bottom, he stood in the thick darkness and gathered himself, trying to shake off the remembered gloom. The insidious cold clutched at his body with icy claws in wicked welcome. He didn't want to be here.

"I've been away too long," he whispered in the hope that his voice might chase away the despondency. But only the sun could do that, and his taste of it had made him nearly unable to go back to the well-known despair that was part of the vampire's existence. Little wonder they were so vicious.

The sharp scent of old blood greeted his nostrils as he pushed through the long tunnel that opened up into a whole world, his world.

The vampires slept on, unaware that he slipped among them, secure in the belief that they were protected in their hellhole. He shivered with the realization that they could awaken. Chances were they wouldn't, but this far below the surface, the sun but a memory on the outside, they could awaken. And if that happened, he would die.

But reaching Kali was more important than a small chance he might be discovered. His allies had told him what she was suffering. She was dying. And Bonfils, who so obsessed over her, would not stop until he got her back. Unless, of course, he was dead. So very many reasons that vampire should die.

And Malik would not rest until he ripped her from the claws of his master.

It was his fault, after all, that she was here. He'd known better than to maintain ties to the girl but couldn't resist. Her mother had once saved his life. Not only had she saved him, but she'd *loved* him. He'd never been loved the way little Mary had loved him. She loved all of him; she loved everything he was.

When Mary died, killed by a human looking for a trophy, he'd felt responsible for her little girl. Kali never knew about his time with her mother. Never knew him at all, really. He'd made sure—from a safe distance—that the girl was cared for.

But she grew up, and despite his best intentions, he'd befriended the girl. It was nearly impossible to resist talking to her. She looked so much like Mary.

And that was his first mistake.

Bonfils discovered his odd feeling of responsibility for the girl, then discovered how special she was. That was the beginning of Seith's obsession.

She was still alive, that he knew from his spies. Kali was one of the strongest women he'd come across in his long life, and that was saying something. But even she could be broken. She'd been kept underground, from all that she needed, for too long.

The wolves would take her. Kimberlyn might be a problem. The girl was as territorial as they came and didn't even realize it. Her men did, though. It would be interesting to see their reaction to Kali.

There were seven main rooms in the underground honeycomb, and he bypassed those for the smaller branches used when Bonfils wanted some privacy, which happened rarely, or when he wanted to house a prisoner away from everyone else.

He could feel her. Her unusual, incredible spirit stood out like a lone star in a vast black sky. She was still alive then. Knowing this for sure caused his stomach muscles to unclench just the slightest bit.

He stood outside the door leading to Seith, the desire to kill the bastard in his sleep overwhelming him. He probably would not succeed; Bonfils was ancient. In the vampire world, the older you were, the stronger you were. Still, he could be destroyed. Right now he was at his most vulnerable.

But he couldn't do it, not yet. The entire coven would be brought awake and would not hesitate to kill him. It wouldn't be Malik against Bonfils. It would be Malik against Bonfils's men.

Under control and full of purpose once more, he slid through the darkness like a sinister shadow. He would save Kali. That he could do. And it was about damn time.

Her breathing was a labored beacon in the dark, and it led him straight to her. Easing the door open, he stepped inside the room and gently closed the door behind him. Kali was Seith's trigger. If he so much as got the sensation of her thoughts, it would all be for naught. There would be no rescue this night.

He crept to her side and could tell by the way her breathing stopped, then came back, soft and too steady, that she was aware someone was in the room.

"Kali, don't make a sound."

A quick gasp of shock. "*Count?*"

He didn't bother chastising her for her choice of nickname. If she hadn't stopped calling him that by now, she wasn't going to. She would get along fine with Elijah. Either that, or they'd kill each other.

"Hold still," he whispered, cursing silently as he felt the irons circling her wrists. He was going to have to take her out with the cuffs attached. The chains he could break.

The problem was breaking them with a minimal amount of sound. In a fight tonight between Seith and Seith's men and Malik, Malik would lose.

He slipped off his shirt and wound it around the chain. "Hold still," he said again.

"Does it look like I'm line dancing?"

Her whispered sarcasm was a little louder than he would have liked, but still, he was glad she was being her usual irritating self. "Shhh..."

The chain didn't take much effort. It wasn't meant to withstand the strength of a vampire. "I'll get the cuffs off you once we're out of here," he told her.

"I can deal with them. They go with my outfit. Silver bracelets and a birthday suit."

"Hush, Kali. Shall I carry you?"

"You're kidding me, right?"

He sighed. "Then stay right behind me. Do not make a sound, because if Seith awakens—"

"I'm not an idiot, Count. Let's go."

She'd been imprisoned here for weeks, but her spirit was as unbroken and lively as ever. A spark of admiration shot through him. He would not have remained as cheerful. Of course, Seith would have been harsher with him. He had restrained himself with Kali, but that could change the second Bonfils lost his temper.

Kali grabbed a handhold on the back of his pants. "I'm ready. I'll be quiet if you'll try hard not to get us killed. Deal?"

He led her back the way he'd come. If he'd been human, he would have held his breath. As it was, his stomach muscles clenched so hard he'd be sore for a week. The silence was overpoweringly dead. Crushed beneath its oppressive weight, he crept through the darkness.

They were almost to the exit when one of the prisoners screamed, a long, long howl of agonized hopelessness that wrung from Kali an empathetic moan, quickly cut off as she pressed her mouth against his bare back.

"God, Malik," she whispered.

And from the depth of the honeycomb of misery, another sound. But this one was the sound of a master vampire's eyelids fluttering. The sound of a questioning grunt as Seith realized something was amiss, that his golden goose was about to be snatched from his iron grip.

For a second, Malik froze. Such was the hold of Bonfils on his psyche. But Kali dug her nails into his back, and the pain wrenched him to action. Not pausing or asking her permission, he turned to yank her into his arms. Without even attempting quiet, he fled.

If Seith discovered him, if he knew beyond a doubt that Malik had been the one to rescue the girl...his newly won power would be secret no longer. He couldn't let that happen.

He might have even given Kali up to keep that secret but didn't have to find out. The exit loomed, and as he felt the master rise in his nest and shake the cobwebs of death from his brain, he flew up the tunnel, toward the sun.

His feet skimmed against the rough, uneven walls, fear chasing behind him. He burst out of the hole of hell, Kali held tightly against his chest.

Dropping her to the ground, he looked around wildly, disoriented for a horrifying moment before he realized it was just daylight, just the sun that made the world so different.

But Kali screamed, jumping to her feet to shove him with all her might back into the hole. "You'll burn, Malik!"

"Kali!" He grasped her thin arms and held her still. "Stop. I'm not going to burn."

But she couldn't comprehend and fell back to the ground with her fists pushed against her eyes. "Oh God no, it's a dream, it's a dream..."

"Sweetheart, sweetheart. It is not a dream. Look at me, Kali. Look at me."

At last she did, but her face was so pale, so bloodless, her eyes narrowed against the bright light of the sun but dead from hopeless disappointment. "It can't be real. He's finally driven me mad." Then she shook her head, her eyes becoming the fierce orbs he was accustomed to seeing. "But that's good. If I think this is real, then that's just as good, right? I'm here. In my mind, I'm here."

He sat beside her. He gestured at the sun. "This is real, Kali. I've been given this gift by a..."

His hesitation, more than anything, got her attention. She cocked her head, then closed her tearing eyes against the day. "Go on."

"A wolf. A healer. A woman." He smiled, but only because he, a vampire, could bathe in the light of the sun and she, a woman, had to shield her eyes from it.

"Well, which is it?"

"She's all those things."

"Wait..." She looked around, her eyes wild, then pinched her naked thigh. "Ow!"

He lifted an eyebrow. "Better?"

"How could anyone make a vampire not burn in the sun?" In spite of her desperate wish to believe, her voice was skeptical. She narrowed her eyes to watery slits, wanting the sun but unable, yet, to accept it.

“I don’t know. I’ve lived a long, long time. I’ve never heard of anything like this.”

“My God, you’re serious? For real fucking serious?”

“Yes.”

“Then...” Slowly, she climbed to her feet. “I’m free? I’m really free?”

“Yes. And no.”

She glanced at him, her gaze as sharp as a shard of glass. “What?”

“You’ll be free when Seith is dead, Kali.”

“I didn’t think he was going to let me go easily, Count. I’ll hide. I’ll take off to Alaska or Africa or—”

“Kali.” He stared at her, waiting for her to admit the truth to herself.

“What am I supposed to do, then?” She spoke roughly, angrily, her hands clenched into fists. “What the fuck am I supposed to do? *I* can’t kill the bastard, much as I’d like to.”

“No. But with the help of the wolves, I can.”

She sank back down beside him, looking exhausted, sick. “How?”

“Not now. I’ll explain everything to you later. Right now, I’m going to get you to them, and get you...” He let his gaze rake her naked, battered body, and she didn’t attempt to hide. “And get you healed.” He knew that once the adrenaline and the shock wore off, she was going to crash, and crash hard.

She refused to let him carry her but walked beside him so slowly, he was tempted to override her rejection and pick her up anyway. “A healer, eh?” she asked. “You did say that, right?”

“Yes. Her name is Kimberlyn, and she can heal. Anything living, that is. Even the newly dead.”

“She can’t heal vampires.”

“No.”

“Sucks for you.”

Kali was a strange mix; she was by no means innocent in any sense of the word, but she believed what he said. A healer existed who could heal. But then, she’d seen stranger things. Like the fact that a vampire stood beneath the sun and the flesh didn’t melt from his bones.

“It’s amazing what a person can miss when they’ve been underground for a few weeks.”

“What’s amazing is your strength, Kali.”

“Shut up, Count. Sheesh.”

But he could see she was pleased. Ragged, torn, hurt...and pleased.

“I hope she likes you,” he murmured, quite without intending to.

“Wha—” She gaped at him for a moment, her mouth opening and closing like a hungry fish. “*What* did you just say?”

And when he refused to answer, she continued on, needing no help from him. “Did you just say you hope she likes me?” She grabbed his arm tightly. He was sure it was to keep her stubborn self upright, though she pretended it was to make him look at her.

At his smile, she dug her nails into his arm. “I would have gotten myself out of Bonfils’s clutches eventually, Count. Don’t you dare think I owe you for that. And let me tell you something, buddy.” She paused to take a deep breath. “You’d better hope *I* like *her*.”

Anger was the only thing keeping her going, and eventually that played out. When she would have fallen, he hefted her into his arms and ran the rest of the way to Sanctuary. The sun began to dim, and he watched it with a regretful fear that he might somehow not get it back. But a new day would dawn, and it was his for the taking.

And now with Kali...Kimberlyn was sure to see, as they all were, that he was giving them a gift like no other.

The wolves would accept her, and they would protect her. They would. And if he made it to Sanctuary with her before the sun had completely set, then so be it.

Damn, but it was difficult to keep a secret in the woods of Sanctuary.

Chapter Twenty-seven

“Here, Kimmy.”

Kimberlyn started at Elijah’s voice and turned to see him holding out a rather crudely wrapped brown paper package.

“What’s that?”

He shoved it against her chest, nearly pushing her through the kitchen wall. “Take it.” He cleared his throat and stared at the ceiling. “It’s for you.”

Mystified, she watched him for a second, then hefted the package. “A present?”

“Yeah, yeah. Just—” Then his voice cut off abruptly, and he turned on his heel and practically ran from the room.

She was too surprised to laugh. She was not accustomed to Elijah being so clumsily sweet. She sat at the little corner table, glad to have the kitchen to herself. Even happier at having something to take her mind from irritating thoughts of Malik. To help her forget for a few moments that her body had begun to burn once more for the vampire’s touch.

He’d left two days ago, just walked away, and she hadn’t seen him since. Made him hers and then went off and left her. Bastard.

That he’d be back, she had no doubt. He needed them, after all. But if she was all he had to come back for, she wasn’t sure he would. She shivered at the thought. If he didn’t come back, she would suffer. She might live, but the unrelieved need would drive her mad. She’d already had a taste of what it would be like to be denied him.

He didn’t love, not like humans, not like wolves, she was sure. Vampires were different—hardened by centuries of existing in this world, by what they’d seen, experienced, lived through...

She shook her head when she realized that once again her mind had drifted to the vampire. And with a perfectly good, mysterious present right in front of her, just waiting to be opened. “What on earth?” She turned the small package in her hands, smiling. He’d wrapped it in a brown paper bag, then wound a couple of thick, red rubber bands around it. On one side he’d hastily scribbled her name.

Carefully removing the bands, she placed the package on the table and pulled open the paper. Nestled inside was a beautifully carved figure of a wolf. Her wolf.

“Oh, Elijah...”

She lifted her gift, wrapped her fingers around its smooth, golden warmth. It was perfect. The detail was incredible. Elijah had left nothing out, no matter how minute. It looked almost real. She imagined if she closed her eyes and squeezed it, the wood would mold like putty, squishing out between her fingers.

How long it must have taken him to create this perfect treasure; how intensely he must have worked to carve it so perfectly. For her. The others had given her presents, but this one was special. He'd made this for her, had labored over it.

Not that she didn't appreciate the things Logan and Andrew gave her, but this little wolf was sprinkled with special sauce; not just because it was handmade for her, but because *Elijah* had made it. Who would have thought?

They had gone into town now, Logan and Andrew, to tend to business. Though they kept up a pretense of normal life with the townspeople, Kimberlyn had hidden herself away in Sanctuary, unwilling to share herself with humans after discovering the freedom of her wolf.

It wasn't wise, she knew. The one call she'd forced herself to make had been to her Realtor, months ago, to stave off the search party that would have been assembled had she simply disappeared.

"I'm becoming a hermit," she said, her voice heavy in the evening silence of the big room. "A hermit wolf." And suddenly she missed people. She'd grown up with humans, after all. Next time Logan went into town, she was going with him.

She picked up the wooden wolf, then went to find Elijah.

Out in the cold evening air, she shivered, longing suddenly for summer. Halting, she scented the air. Something—or someone—was coming. She could feel Malik, but he was not alone. Running straight toward her but not for her.

She grabbed a wolf as he passed her. "Ford, where's Elijah?"

"I seen him going in the house 'bout a half hour ago, honey. I ain't seen him since."

"Thanks." She ran back into the house, slamming the door behind her. "Elijah!"

He came running, his big body making the house shake as he clomped down the stairs. "What is it?"

"Someone's coming." *Malik's coming.*

"Get up to your room, Kimmy. Don't come out until I—"

"Are you serious?"

"I'm to protect you, girl. Logan—"

She knew they were afraid of losing their healer, and yes, they loved her, but she wasn't about to be sent to her room like a child. "I'm standing beside you, Elijah. If you want me upstairs, you'll have to force me, and I don't think there's time for that. Have you caught their scent?"

He sniffed the air, gaze darting, face hard. "Malik?"

"Yes. But someone is with him."

He ran outside, and she stayed right beside him. “Not a vampire.”

“No. I can’t smell vampires...except for Malik. But the man with him... What the hell *is* that?”

Elijah stared toward the woods, his eyes narrowed. “I don’t know. Never smelled anything like it.” He shifted almost before he’d finished speaking and, lifting his nose to the sky, called for the pack.

“Whatever it is, it’s sick. I smell disease like a—” Then she gasped, her hands flying to her mouth. “My God, Elijah! How can it be Malik? The sun hasn’t set.”

Elijah stared at her, tilting his shaggy head like a curious pup. She started to shed her clothing and shift but realized she still held Elijah’s gift in her hand. She dropped to the ground and wrapped her arms around his neck. “I love the carving, Elijah. Thank you.”

Then she set it on the porch railing, and with the scent of something new stronger with every passing second, she dropped her clothes and shifted. The pack gathered and, howling to the fast approaching moon, raced off into the woods. Whatever the threat, the wolves would be ready for it.

But the vampire shot past them, a mere blur, and for a moment the wolves milled in confusion. Elijah roared his ever-present rage and blasted into the air, and the pack, including Kimberlyn, followed.

Elijah ruled with brawn and brute force in Logan’s absence, and without Andrew to even things out, Kimberlyn prepared herself to be the calming force. Someone had to keep the wolf from trying to kill the vampire. How apt that it should be her, the woman they both wanted, needed. But without a doubt, if it came to a choice between Elijah and Malik, she wouldn’t hesitate. She’d choose Elijah. Every fucking time.

Malik waited on the huge old porch, standing still as death above a figure lying in a dark pool at his feet. As the wolves approached, he held up his hands, palms out.

“She is no threat. We need your help.”

The wolves milled, growling, waiting for Elijah’s signal. They would do whatever he told them to do. Kimberlyn wasn’t going to give the big wolf a chance to make the wrong decision. Elijah didn’t need much of an excuse to kick ass.

As soon as she’d shifted, Kimberlyn felt the female. Her body radiated great waves of distress, the power of which nearly knocked Kimberlyn off her feet. The damage inside the stranger screamed out for help, and the healer answered.

She walked toward Malik, no longer afraid, no longer thinking of anything but the damages she alone could heal. It wouldn’t have mattered if the girl had been a snake about to strike.

Malik offered his hand to help her up the steps, but she barely noticed him. The cold was but a minor nuisance, one the wolf in her shrugged off and the woman was fast becoming accustomed to. The nudity might have bothered her more had it

not become very nearly a way of life. When you shifted as often as the wolves did, you soon purged yourself of the useless need to be modest.

Kneeling down beside the woman, Kimberlyn placed her hand against the rapidly rising and falling chest, her fingers lying against a throat so pale it made even Kimberlyn's winter skin look golden.

Malik knelt on the other side of the girl. "She's been Bonfils's prisoner for—" "Keep quiet, vampire. She needs to concentrate."

Kimberlyn spared a quick smile at Elijah's gruff voice. He was right. She didn't need an explanation of the woman's woes. She just needed to find them and make them better. And for the first time, she realized that she craved healing like she craved Malik's body. So many addictions, but at least this was a positive one.

"What's her name?" she whispered, as though the sound of her voice would intrude upon the healing magic. But she knew. She somehow *knew* this woman, and she knew her name.

"Kali," Malik replied, his voice just as soft.

Putting her other hand on Kali's stomach, she took a deep, cleansing breath and let the healer inside her take over.

Kali was a mess, but it wasn't anything so dire she couldn't be healed. Still, the woman had been through some awful things. And...what *was* she? Not human, not wolf, certainly not vampire.

A question for another time. Kimberlyn sank her healing hand carefully into the woman's body, searching, finding, healing. Mainly she was dehydrated and half starved. Apart from a few serious wounds which she repaired quickly, there appeared little wrong with the woman, and nothing that would explain why she was lying on the floor unconscious and only getting worse.

Something was seriously wrong. Something the healer had never encountered before. She sank deeper, and it was like stepping into quicksand. The weight of disease pulled her into its depths, choking her with rot and desolation. She couldn't breathe but couldn't leave. This woman was dying, and no one knew it...except maybe Kali.

She needed something, and Kimberlyn had no idea what it was. *Relax. Feel what she's feeling. Need what she's needing.*

She let herself become Kali. Let herself feel the body's need. The world disappeared. There was no sound other than Kali's heartbeat and the blood rushing through her veins. Nothing but—

Kimberlyn gasped and nearly withdrew. She opened her eyes and came back to earth with a crash. "Malik, how long has she been underground?"

He blinked. "I never said she was underground."

"I'm not stupid, vampire," Kimberlyn snapped. "Where else would a vampire keep her, a motel? Answer my question."

He shook his head, not in denial but as though he was shocked. “You sounded like her, Kimberlyn. Is she...inside you?”

“Malik, how long has she been underground?”

He rubbed his face. “Many weeks.”

Kimberlyn pulled her hands from Kali, frowning. “I’ve healed her injuries.”

“Why is she still lying there?”

“Because she needs something more than I can give her.”

He stood. “Tell me. I will find it.”

“She’s been deprived of sunshine and air and water. She needs a...a transfusion of sorts.”

He stared at her. “I know what it is to be deprived of sunshine.”

“You’re a vampire. It’s not the same. She’s not...” She shook her head, unable to explain. “She’ll be okay. She’s very strong, just exhausted. I think she’s been deprived of sleep. But at first light, bring her outside and let her soak in the sun. She needs it to live.”

He looked at the darkening sky. “I will.”

“What is she, Malik?”

He hesitated. “That is for her to tell you.”

“Really.”

“Bonfils desires those who are...different.”

Kimberlyn stared down at the silent Kali and nodded, slowly. “He is collecting them.” Where the hell had that thought come from?

“What did you say?” Malik asked, though as far as she knew, vampires were not hard of hearing.

“You—”

But then Kali stirred, interrupting her. “Count?”

He swooped to pick her up, and for the life of her, Kimberlyn couldn’t help the quick spark of jealousy lighting up the dark corners of her mind. She was tired, that was all. But at the same time, she wanted to reach out and snatch the girl from him and to herself. She shoved her immediate, strongly possessive reaction to the girl away.

“Where can she bed for the night?” Malik asked. And at Kimberlyn’s hesitation, he added, “Please. She has no other place to go. Bonfils can’t touch her here.”

Kimberlyn looked around her, remembering the pack. And Elijah. He stood with his arms folded, watching her. “Elijah?”

He shrugged. “Doesn’t matter to me. It’s not like she’s a threat.”

“Follow me,” Kimberlyn told Malik, glaring for only a second at Elijah. If Kali had been male, she had no doubt Elijah would have argued. “She’d better not make me regret this.” And she led Malik into the house.

Her hand shook as she pushed her hair back from her face, the weight of Malik's stare heavy on her bare bottom as she went ahead of him up the stairs. But she couldn't think about that right now. There were more important things to worry about.

Wild horses couldn't have dragged from her the thought she could barely admit to herself. What she'd found, searching inside Kali's body, wasn't the truth of what the girl was. But she'd found something else.

Malik was tied to the wolves in unimaginable ways, especially to her. But Malik wasn't their fifth.

Kali was their fifth.

Chapter Twenty-eight

“What’s wrong, Kimberlyn?”

She turned away from the window when Logan flipped on her light switch. “It’s snowing.”

He leaned against the doorpost. He stuffed his hands in his pockets, silently watching her, waiting.

She sighed and rubbed her upper arms, cold. Maybe it was the snow. It drifted past her window in big, fluffy flakes, and already the ground was covered. “Nothing is wrong. I’m just overwhelmed by everything that’s been happening lately.”

He raised an eyebrow. “Kimberlyn.”

She looked everywhere but at him, unwilling for him to read her mind. Desperate for him not to read her mind. Sharing her men with another woman? *No*. She couldn’t. She wouldn’t. There had to be some way around the fact that this...this *Kali* was their fifth. She would not have it.

“Nothing, Logan. Please. Just don’t.”

He straightened and dusted some imaginary lint from his shirt. “Come downstairs, then. The girl wants to meet with us.”

Her stomach lurched like she was on a rickety boat in the middle of the sea. She clutched her middle, staring at Logan in horror. “What?”

He frowned and walked to stand in front of her, peering down at her face. “What’s wrong with you, Kimberlyn? Are you okay?”

No, she was not okay. He was about to go meet the woman as destined to be with him as Kimberlyn was. Kimberlyn had just gotten to him first. She was *not* okay.

“Can we stay up here, Logan? Can we just...go to bed?” *Forever?*

“What’s going on, sweetheart?” He pulled her into his arms.

She rubbed her face against his chest, holding him as tightly as she could. Like she was going to lose him. “I’m scared to death,” she said and realized just how true that was.

“I will never let anything happen to you.” He tightened his arms around her.

He smelled so good, so fresh and familiar. Sunshine and male, sex and power, wolf and man. Her man. And she wasn’t the type to share. “I won’t share you.” She hadn’t meant the words to escape, but once they did, they hung in the air like accusing eyes, staring her into shame.

“What?” He half laughed, pushing her back so he could look into her eyes. “What are you...” Then he frowned, his eyes narrowing, all hint of humor fleeing. “You can’t be asking me to give up Andrew?”

“I notice you never mentioned Elijah,” she said, hearing her petulance, unable to stop. “And what about Malik? You have it bad for him.” But still, it didn’t gnaw at her gut like the vision of him with a woman, *that* woman, did.

“Kimberlyn, explain. My patience is running thin.”

But she couldn’t explain. “I’m not... I don’t mean anything. And no, I don’t want you to give up Andrew, of course not. I love him as much as you do. It’s just...I don’t want to share you with another woman.”

He sat on the bed and pulled her onto his lap. “Are you jealous of this new woman? What would make you think she’s a threat to you?”

And still, she couldn’t tell him. Could not speak the words. Maybe if she didn’t speak them, they wouldn’t be true. “You haven’t seen her yet.”

Kali had taken her air on her little third-story balcony, and as far as Kimberlyn knew, the girl never left her room. Food was taken to her, and she had her private bathroom. Until now, she’d never made a peep. But it’d been only four days.

“Kimberlyn, come on. Let’s go meet her. Malik is waiting to speak with us as well.” He pushed her gently off his lap and stood, his arm around her shoulders, and walked her to the door. “I never thought I’d live to see the day when a vampire could withstand the sun. You did that for him.” He eased her through the doorway. “Remind me to keep you away from the other vampires. They don’t need that edge along with every other strength they hold.”

She knew he was prattling on to distract her. The fact that she’d given the vampire the power to walk under the sun was a serious, startling event. One they hadn’t really discussed yet. But they would. They would have to face the ramifications of that act sooner or later. Funny how that bothered her a whole hell of a lot less than the fact that a woman was their fifth.

As they walked down the staircase, she realized something. Logan and Andrew had recognized her as their third as soon as they’d seen her. Why should they not also recognize Kali?

But on the other hand, they hadn’t recognized Elijah, who had been with them for many, many years. And Elijah hadn’t had the slightest idea he was meant to be part of their special circle. He still hadn’t, quite.

She closed her eyes in a long, slow blink. *Please, please don’t let them feel her.* But what if Kali recognized *them*?

Logan flinched when she dug her nails into his palm. “Kimberlyn?”

“Shit!” she cried out. “Shit!”

Logan merely sighed.

She was happy that Kali hadn't made her way to the meeting room yet. Malik sat in a deep armchair, his gaze too penetrating for her comfort.

Elijah and Andrew stood together, Andrew drinking wine and looking almost as ill at ease as Elijah.

"I wonder what they've been talking about," Logan murmured.

Again she got the feeling he was trying to get her mind on something other than her worries. It wasn't working.

She walked to stand against the wall farthest from the doorway and waited. She'd hear Kali coming. Being their fifth, their communication and connection with each other would grow and strengthen with time and touch, but even now, Kimberlyn could feel *something*. And then Kali made her appearance.

She swept into the room like an exotic, fierce windstorm, bringing with her chaos and confusion. Kimberlyn understood one thing in a single instant.

The woman was the exact opposite of her. She understood something else but pushed the thought away before it had a chance to bother her too much.

She glanced at her men.

Logan's eyes gleamed like pieces of broken glass in the sun as he watched Kali.

Andrew attempted to set his glass down and missed the table.

Elijah grinned, his lascivious stare sending twin beams of lust at the woman's body.

Malik caught Kimberlyn's frowning glance, and one side of his mouth quirked. Quickly, she settled her face into stoic lines, unwilling to let any of them see her thoughts.

Bastards, all of them, panting over any piece of ass that walked into the room. They didn't seem to mind that she wasn't a wolf, though you'd have thought Malik was Satan with a poison-tipped tail the way they carried on about *him*.

"Well, Malik." The woman stood in the middle of the room, her hands planted on her hips. "Introduce me."

She had purple eyes. Fucking *purple* eyes. Kimberlyn realized she was once again frowning and forced her face to relax.

Malik didn't rise, just slid farther down into his chair, clasped his hands over his middle and looked like he was ready for a good show. "Everybody, this is Kali. Kali, Logan, Andrew, Elijah"—he paused and again, his calm gaze slid across the room—"and Kimberlyn."

She found an excuse to look away from him when the weight of Kali's stare began to get uncomfortably heavy. Sighing, she looked at the other woman.

Kali cocked her head. "Hey."

Kimberlyn nodded. "Hello."

Kali walked back and forth, as though unable to stay still for more than a minute or two. She stopped in front of Andrew, her eyes dark amethyst in a heart-

shaped frame of incredible bone structure and pale skin. “You’re a pretty one. You’re Andrew.”

He smiled at her, but his gaze was cautious.

Next, she stared at Logan but walked to Malik, plopping down on his lap. “What are you all staring at?”

Logan crossed his arms and leaned against the wall, obviously content to watch the beauty in silence.

Elijah, perhaps miffed at being ignored, stood to his full height and stuck his hands in his pockets. “Your tits.”

That got her attention. “Obviously, you’re Elijah. Malik, you were right. He’s an idiot.”

Kimberlyn’s nails bit into the palms of her hands. Yeah, he was an asshole, but he was *her* asshole, and she wasn’t about to have this new bitch walk into their home and insult her men. She growled and unclenched her hands, claws shooting from her fingertips.

“Kimberlyn,” Logan said, a subtle warning in his voice.

She didn’t hear him, not really, and took a step toward the slowly straightening female.

“Kimberlyn!” Logan’s voice snapped over her like a whip, drawing her attention at last. “Back down. Now.”

She hesitated, trying to think through the red haze in her mind. Was protecting Elijah’s idiocy really worth a battle right now? No. Taking a deep, soothing breath, she swallowed her angry pride and let it go.

Kali looked at Logan and bared her teeth. “I may have to crash here for a while, but you ever speak to *me* that way and I’ll rip your dick off.”

Oh shit.

Before Logan could react, Malik did what he could to diffuse the situation. He shot to his feet, dumping Kali on the hard floor. When she started to rise, he showed his fangs, shiny, sharp things that could have punctured cement. Even his voice changed, becoming harsh and deep. “Apologize.”

Kali snarled, rage in every stiff line of her body. “No. You can kiss hairy wolf ass all day long, but—”

He wrapped his hand around her throat, then forced her to stand, nose to nose with him. “You are an embarrassment. You are a guest here and will apologize to Logan.”

She could only hang on to his arm, her face blooming with color, her nails digging into his skin. Malik’s face was as hard as stone. Finally, she spoke, her voice raspy, whispered. “Yes.”

Still, he held her. “You jeopardize this one more time, and I’ll personally give you back to Bonfils.” He opened his hand and let her fall to the floor, where she sat, dark curls hiding her face, fingers to her throat.

Kimberlyn stood undecided, watching. Something stirred deep inside, something ancient, and she wanted to hang every man in the room and stand with the female.

But Kali was far from beaten and obviously accustomed to being taken to task for her lack of manners. “Fuck you, Malik.” She laughed, her beautiful eyes glossy and dark as she peeked through her hair. “I’ll play nice, or as much as I can, but I don’t take shit.” And so saying, she punched Malik in the balls. Hard. “From *anyone*.”

Andrew moaned in commiseration as Malik bent double, grimacing. He looked more embarrassed than hurt. Kimberlyn bit her lip, hiding a smile. Elijah whooped, and Logan did nothing. Not so much as a twitch.

Straightening up, Malik shrugged. “She’s always been like this. I hope you can...somehow excuse her.” He spread his arms, looking as helpless as Kimberlyn had ever seen him.

Elijah scoffed. “She’s just a girl. You know what your problem is, bloodsucker?” He stalked into the middle of the room, looking down his nose at the vampire. “You got no balls. If she’d have punched me like that, I’d still be rolling around on the floor.” He glanced at the girl, almost apologetic. “But when I got up, she’d be one sorry little bitch.” Looking back at Malik, he grinned. “That’s because I got some huge nuts. You’re standing there like she barely touched you.” He grinned at the other wolves.

Kali scooted back against the chair, her quick purple gaze darting back and forth between the hulking wolf and the slender vampire.

Malik held his hands up, palms facing Elijah. “Insult me all you wish. I am not going to fight with you tonight, wolf.” So saying, he sat back down and yawned.

Kimberlyn couldn’t stop looking at her. A *female*. A female in their circle. A female as their fifth. Things couldn’t get much worse.

But then Elijah started toward Malik with bloodlust in his hawkish stare, and she remembered: things could *always* get worse.

Chapter Twenty-nine

Before Elijah could reach the vampire, Kali jumped up and stood in his way. “Leave Malik alone, Wolfman.”

Malik didn’t try to reason with Elijah; he obviously knew he was the last person the wolf would listen to. Instead, he turned to Logan.

“Don’t let him upset her. You’ll all regret it.”

“You say that,” Kimberlyn said, “when you nearly choked her to death?”

He shrugged. “I am immune.”

“Immune to what?” Andrew asked.

Malik smiled. “Her...charms.”

Elijah snorted. “Yeah. I’m scared.”

Malik looked again at Logan. “You should control him before he—”

“Let me worry about my wolves, vampire.”

Malik raised an eyebrow. “As you wish.”

Elijah was determined to provoke Kali. “You want to try to bust my nuts, girl? I’ll take you on.”

“What’s wrong with you, fur face? I haven’t done anything to you.” Kali tilted her head, thinking. “Oh. I ignored you. You can’t stand the fact that a woman might be more attracted to your stud of an alpha than to his bodyguard. Right?” She sighed. “Now your pride is damaged, and you want to teach me a lesson. You need to grow up.”

Every eye was on Kali. Kimberlyn dug her fingernails into her thighs. The tension was thick, as goopy as melted bubblegum. “What are you?”

Kali took her stare from Elijah and planted it on Kimberlyn with such force that Kimberlyn stumbled backward. Andrew jerked away from his place against the wall to steady her. “You okay?”

Kimberlyn shook her head, still watching the new female. “I’m fine.”

“I’m a woman,” Kali answered. “Just a woman.” Her intense eyes gave lie to her words.

“No, you’re not.”

“Great,” Kali replied. “Are *you* going to want to fight me now?” She gestured in Elijah’s general direction. “Get in line.”

“Elijah isn’t going to fight you,” Kimberlyn said, shrugging off Andrew’s hand, “and neither am I. But you’re here. You want our protection. The least you can do is tell us exactly what is it we’re protecting.”

“Kimmy, you know better than to speak for me. I’m not planning on hurting the cow.” His gaze dropped to Kali’s breasts. “Much.”

“You’re a crude ass,” Kali said. “I’ve had enough of you.”

“Oh, honey, you won’t ever have enough of me. Not once I show you what you’ve been missing all these years. Just ask Kimmy here.”

Kimberlyn glared. “Elijah, shut up.”

He wiggled his eyebrows and grinned, but Kimberlyn could see a flash of offended wolf deep in his eyes. She didn’t care. Sometimes Elijah was just a pain in the ass.

Kali pursed her little red lips. “You want me to take care of him?”

“I don’t think you know what you’re asking. Elijah’s a wolf. A strong one. He could swallow you whole and not even realize he’d done it.” She tried to keep her voice level, but the fact that the new female thought she could win Kimberlyn to her side by offering to take out one of Kimberlyn’s wolves just pissed her off.

Elijah smiled, pleased. “You’d better listen to Kimmy, new girl. She knows what she’s talking about.”

Kali shrugged, still looking at Kimberlyn. “I just wanted to help. We girls should stick together.”

“Oh? And why is that?”

At last Malik spoke. “Kali, you won’t ever get Kimberlyn to betray her own. Please be quiet before you alienate them further.”

Kimberlyn didn’t glance at Malik but kept her gaze trained on Kali. “If you’re not going to tell us what you are, I think this meeting is over. We’ve wasted enough time.”

Logan walked to stand beside Kimberlyn and Andrew. “I agree with Kimberlyn.”

Kimberlyn swallowed, relief pouring over her. She wasn’t ready to accept this girl. She wasn’t ready for her *men* to accept this girl.

Kali put her hands on her hips, appearing neither contrite nor intimidated. “Fine. I’ll tell you what I am, if it’ll make you all feel better. A girl can’t have secrets around here, I can see that.” She smiled, and for the first time, Kimberlyn silently acknowledged the effect that smile had on her.

Malik stood slowly. “Kali.”

Kali glanced at him. “Yeah?”

“Tell them.” He shook his head slowly. “Don’t *show* them.”

Elijah crossed his big arms, muscles bulging. “Hey, shut the fuck up, vampire. She can show me anything she wants to show me.” He raked her body with his gaze, grinning.

Kimberlyn didn’t miss the exchange of sharp glances between Kali and Malik. She knew suddenly that whatever Kali showed them wasn’t necessarily going to be a good thing. And she was fed up with Elijah’s mouth. A flare of jealousy lit her insides each time he made a sexual remark to the girl. “Since Elijah wants to be shown so badly, Kali, then I think you should show him.”

Kali’s smile brightened her entire face. Even her eyes seemed to change, brighten. “Yeah? You want me to *show* him? You wouldn’t shit me, would you?”

“Only if she ate you,” Elijah said helpfully.

Both women ignored Elijah. “Yes. I think I do.”

A spark leaped between her body and Kali’s, and she sighed even as Kali frowned.

Kali clutched her middle. “I felt...”

“You felt what?” Logan asked, his voice soft.

Kimberlyn stared at Kali and stared hard.

“Nothing,” Kali answered. “Nothing at all.” But she looked at Kimberlyn for a moment longer.

“Show him,” Kimberlyn said. “Show Elijah what you are.”

“I hope it involves you getting naked,” Elijah told her.

Wishing that Kali’s big reveal would somehow kick Elijah’s ass, Kimberlyn folded her arms. “Go on, then, Kali.”

Elijah stalked to the middle of the room, hands on hips, grinning down at Kali. “Bring it, little girl,” he said.

She reached up and grabbed his cheeks. “You got it.” Her eyes began to change, to brighten, to glow.

“Look away,” Malik said, stepping in front of Kimberlyn. He looked at Logan, then Andrew. “Look away.”

Kimberlyn could almost hear the snap their eyes made when they did Malik’s bidding, but she was too fascinated to look away. “Oh my God. Look at her eyes...beautiful.” She stepped around Malik to get a closer look at Kali.

Malik grabbed her arm, yanking her to a stop. “No. Kimberlyn, look at me. Can you look at me?”

She cocked an eyebrow. Glancing at him, she shrugged his hand off her arm. “Of course I can look at you, Malik. But I want to look at her. *Move.*”

His jaw dropped, but she was too interested in Kali and Elijah to ask him why he was acting so strangely. Stepping smoothly past him, she left him mumbling to Logan and Andrew and paused beside Elijah to peer into Kali’s face.

Elijah appeared to be helpless in Kali's grip, his eyes popping as he kept his gaze trained on Kali's. "Uh..." he mumbled.

Kali's eyes were hypnotically beautiful. They swirled with colors so deep and exotic that the ocean would have been shamed in comparison. If Kimberlyn concentrated, the eyes were all she could see. They took up Kali's face, intense and wondrous, and Kimberlyn understood in an instant they could also be terrible and very, very frightening.

She laughed. "Unbelievable. You can enchant people with your eyes. Hypnotize them." She turned to look at Malik, who still stared at her with his mouth agape, and Logan, who stared intently at Andrew as if to do otherwise would be his downfall. "That's an amazing gift. It appears I am immune as well. Exactly what kind of person do those eyes work on?"

"You're about to find out," Malik said, finally gathering himself enough to speak.

Kimberlyn whirled back to look at Kali and Elijah. Yes, she was pissed at Elijah, but still—

"Don't you hurt him," she told Kali.

"Wouldn't dream of it." Kali's voice was breathless and low, and as she spoke, Elijah shivered.

"You okay, Elijah?" Kimberlyn put a hand on his arm, frowning at the rigidity of his muscles. "Elijah?"

"He can't answer, Kimberlyn," Malik said, gliding to her side. "He can't do anything except what she tells him to do."

Kimberlyn was impressed, but only until she realized that Elijah was fully aware of what was happening and was helpless to break free. "Let him go, Kali."

But Kali only smiled. "Elijah, on your knees."

He fell to his knees immediately and stared up at her, waiting.

"Apologize to me, Elijah. And I want you to remember, after I've released you, that I can control you anytime I want to." She bent down, pushing her nose against his until Kimberlyn knew he was drowning in Kali's eyes. "All I have to do is catch your eyes. You will treat me with respect."

"I'm sorry," Elijah said, his voice thin, desperate. "I'm sorry."

Kimberlyn flinched. It broke her heart, watching the huge, proud wolf grovel. With a growl, she shoved Kali, reaching for Elijah even as Kali hit the wall.

"No, Kimberlyn!" Malik grabbed her from behind, wrapping his arms around her waist and spinning her away from Elijah.

She kicked and scratched and would have torn his arm off, but finally, his words penetrated her brain.

"If you don't let her release him, he will be stuck there forever."

"If she doesn't let him go right now, I will kill her."

Malik tightened his arms around her middle. "Look. She's back with him. She's reconnected, and he will be fine. But if you break a methuskein's bond with her victim, within a few seconds he will go mad. Do you understand?"

She felt the blood drain from her face and called for the only person she completely trusted to make everything all right. "Logan!"

He stood in front of her. "I'm here."

"Get Elijah. Get him."

But Elijah was fine. He stumbled past them, ignoring her as she reached for him, and left the room. Silence reigned. No one knew what to say or quite what to do.

Kimberlyn stayed sandwiched between the vampire and her alpha, aware of Andrew to her left and Kali to her right.

Finally, she spoke. "Methuskein. What the *fuck* is a methuskein?"

Chapter Thirty

“Where does she come from?”

“Ask her, Kimberlyn.”

Kimberlyn gave Malik a hard stare. “I’m asking you.”

Kali grunted and pushed herself away from the wall. “She’s going to be too pissed to talk to me for a while, Count. Tell her whatever the fuck you want. I’m going for a walk.”

Kimberlyn glanced at the other woman. Kali looked pale, sick. Sweat shone on her skin in a slick layer, and her unusual purple eyes were dull, lifeless. Her thick hair hung in damp strings, and her hands shook when she lifted them to rub her eyes.

For a moment, Kali met her gaze, but Kimberlyn was quick to look away. She couldn’t feel sorry for Kali.

Elijah was never going to be the same. Logan and Andrew had gone to find him, to see to him, and had left her here with the vampire and their purple-eyed fifth. Elijah wouldn’t want to see Kimberlyn. Not yet. She closed her eyes, sadness tying a deep knot in her stomach. Maybe not ever.

No. She couldn’t feel sorry for Kali.

Still...

“You want to help her.” Malik’s voice was just a whisper.

She snapped her gaze from Kali’s retreating form to glare at him. “I’m a healer.”

His dark eyes softened. “Yes.”

“But what she did to Elijah...”

“You told her to do it, kid.”

Her fingers itched to slap him. “Oh, so you’re blaming me now. I didn’t know what she could do.”

“No. You didn’t.”

She licked her lips. “It doesn’t matter now. What matters is that we can’t continue keeping such a...a dangerous person here.”

Malik turned away from her. “You can’t turn her out. She won’t ever use her eyes on any of you unless you specifically invite her to.” His unspoken accusation hung in the air. “And I don’t think any of you will, now that you’ve seen her power.”

She only uses her eyes when not to do so would mean her death. As you can see, it wears her out. Saps her strength. And when she's not well anyway, it's very nearly too much for her."

She believed him. Maybe it was her tenuous connection with the methuskein, but she knew Kali would not release her power upon any of the wolves just for the hell of it.

"Okay. It was my fault that Elijah was hurt, but admitting that doesn't solve anything. And let me make this perfectly clear: Elijah will never allow her to stay."

"He can't make that decision."

"Surely you know that Logan and Andrew and I will definitely respect his wishes."

He smiled, then laughed. "Kimberlyn, my love."

She could feel her face pale. "Don't call me that."

He turned from the window and casually waved a consoling hand. "Nevertheless. We are linked, you and I. I have lived for a long, long time."

"So?"

"I would know how you felt about our lovely Kali even if we were not bound together."

She bit her lip, hard. "You're imagining things."

"I don't think so."

"I'm bound to way too many people, Malik. I don't know why. I don't want it, this...slavery. I don't want it."

He nodded, and she watched his hair swing against his jaw. "I know, sweetheart. But there is a reason. Right now you're a princess. But someday, you'll be a queen."

She sighed deeply, not understanding his cryptic words but not caring enough to ask for an explanation. Forgetting even Kali beneath the onslaught of her need for him, never far from the surface.

He slid his hand to her lower back and pulled her unresisting body into his arms. He kissed her temple. "Let me make love to you. Only me."

She hugged him to her, rubbing her cheek against his thinly clothed chest. His request brought to the surface the heavy need she had for him. It roared inside her, excitement, desire, overwhelming her with need that smothered the hate. "Only you, vampire."

Did it matter that Logan wasn't here to say yea or nay? Did it matter, when Malik's touch quieted the pain inside her, quelled the need, fulfilled her desire? Her body wouldn't let her care. It was like...taking medicine to save her life. Yeah.

"I don't know if I hate you, or if I..."

He lowered her to the thick carpet. "How you feel about me doesn't matter, kid. What your body needs will keep you close to me forever."

“Why, Malik? Why do you want me with you? It can’t just be because you need the wolves as allies. It can’t be.”

He looked down at her, opening his mouth just enough for her to see his fangs dropping with a slow slide. “Of course not, sweetheart.”

A tear slid from the corner of her eye, making her skin itch. She could feel the lie. “I don’t believe you.”

His body was heavy atop hers. “You don’t want to believe me.”

“I don’t think you’re a monster.” She didn’t *want* to think he was a monster.

“I am what I am, kid. I take what I need. You don’t fault me for that. It’s survival. You said you understood that.”

“I lied.”

“I’m sorry.”

As her heart rebelled, her body called for him. She knew they couldn’t be together. Knew she had to find a way to be able to live without him. Because she’d decided right then and there that she would die before she let him control her.

After this one last time. She’d get her fix, then figure out a way to live without him. She would.

“It doesn’t mean I don’t love you now, Kimberlyn. But in my world, love is just not...” His voice trailed off, as if he had no idea what he meant.

Now it was her turn to say it. “It doesn’t matter, vampire.”

“Kid...”

She lifted her hands to hold his hair back, so she could better see his too-thin, beautiful face. “I *will* rid myself of you, for several reasons. But do you know what the most important reason is?”

“No.”

“You’re the bad guy.”

“That’s very...black-and-white of you.”

“You don’t deserve a shade of gray.”

He looked so unhappy that, for a moment, she wanted to retract her words. “Things can’t always go the way we’d like them to go, kid.”

“Just...shut up.” Her tone was more tender than she liked, so she pulled him to her roughly, her force causing the tip of one of his fangs to cut her lip before he could retract it.

His eyes changed, just that fast. The scent of her blood was sharp, and he drew back, his gaze fixed upon her torn lip. Like a cobra, he struck, drawing her lip into his mouth.

Sucking too hard, he pulled the blood from her lip, ignoring her hands beating his chest, her nails digging into his skin.

She couldn’t pull away and couldn’t make him release her lip, which was swelling, blossoming with red-hot pain.

At last, he released her.

She stared at him in horror, her fingers against her abused mouth. He looked different—fierce, almost evil.

“If I am the *bad guy*, I should act the part.”

Her lip throbbed with angry pain, bringing tears to her eyes. “You’re a fucking monster.”

He gestured with contemptuous impatience at her mouth. “Heal yourself, Kimberlyn. It’s hardly a serious wound.”

But it hurt, damn him. It hurt, and not in a good way. Closing her eyes, she caressed her torn lip, bringing to it a cool, soothing repair. “Damn you, Malik.”

“I’ve been damned by scarier folk than you, sweetheart.”

She understood how naive she’d been, how stupid. She blinked back tears and matured a little more, right there on the spot.

“I can see the innocence in you dimming,” Malik whispered. He put his cool fingers against her flinching face. “Kid. I *am* sorry. I didn’t want to hurt you. I didn’t want to make you different.”

She pushed him off her and stood, carefully, slowly. “The only thing you made me was addicted to the drug of your body, vampire. That’s all.”

He nodded and climbed to his feet. “And even now, while you shrink from me in disgust and rage, you want me.”

Suddenly tired, she sighed. “I don’t want you, Malik. I want to ease the pain inside me. I would beat myself in the head with a rock if it would bring about the same result.”

“And I want you,” he continued, ignoring her words. “Perhaps more than I’ve ever wanted any woman, in all my long, long life. You stand there, so beautiful and bright in your righteous indignation and the huge glow of what you will someday become, and I want you.” He ran a hand over her throat, down her belly, to gently thrust his fingers between her legs. “And it has nothing to do with magic or drugs or fate. It is just because I want you. You chase back the shadows and the bleak depression.” He shook his head, his eyes so serious, so hopeless. “When I am near you, I feel almost human again.” Scarlet-tinged tears ran from the corners of his eyes, cutting a path of pain down his cheeks.

She cried with him, full of his sorrow. “I wish I could fix you.”

The lines of his face eased. He smiled. “I know you do, kid. No matter what you’ve gone through or what I’ve done to you, you would still help me if you could.”

But that was all the tenderness either one of them was willing to feel. Kimberlyn wasn’t sure about him, but she needed to shake off the cheerless, heartbreaking gloom.

She couldn’t bear it any longer. She preferred the pain of a torn lip to this. *That* she could ease. She drowned in empathy for him and simply could not bear it.

“Malik, Malik, please...”

“You gave me the sun,” he whispered. “And I made you my servant.” But he didn’t sound ashamed. He sounded...glad. “Now, Kimberlyn, now I have everything.”

She closed her eyes and leaned back against the wall. Exhaustion covered her psyche with a heavy blanket of confusion and worry. She was tired. Tired of the roller coaster of emotions Malik created inside her, tired of being unable even to figure out how she should feel.

His touch was gentle upon her healed lip. “That was the second bite.”

Her eyes flew open as she understood. “Oh God!”

But he shook his head. “Kimberlyn. I will not bite you again. I will not tie you to me so finally that you cannot free yourself. That is my gift to you.” He smiled. “You have given me life. It’s the least I can do.”

“Big gift,” she said, her words thick with tears. “Big gift when I already can’t live without you. When your death would mean mine. When my body craves you so much that I will likely die from withdrawals if I can’t get to you. What is the difference?”

“Oh, sweetheart. There is a difference.” He pulled her to him, holding her, his voice moist and warm in her ear. “With the third bite, you will lose yourself. You will willingly do anything I command of you, and you will be unable to leave my side. If you do anything that requires punishment, I will simply send you away for a few days or a day or an *hour*, and it will be the most agonizing thing you can imagine. You will absorb my pain, so I will have less. My wounds will transfer to your body. And Kimberlyn...you will no longer heal. Simply because you will not care about anyone or anything else but me. Do you begin to understand?”

She could not breathe. “No...no!”

“That is my gift to you. Now, you will see that it is indeed a big gift. I would not like to see you as a mindless, begging shell of yourself. As I said, someday you will be a queen. Not my animal.”

But how easy, how so very easy it would be to become his servant. One bite. One little bite. She pushed him away, horrified. “Please don’t come near me again. If you understand that you owe me—and you *do* owe me—please don’t come near me again.”

She left him standing there with the fading tracks of blood tears on his cheeks, and she ran.

Chapter Thirty-one

“Kimberlyn, it’s not something you can fight. You could easily die. I’m sorry, but...” Logan spread his hands, helpless. “We have no choice. You have no choice. You’ll have to feed the addiction.”

Kimberlyn started shaking her head and couldn’t stop. “Did you hear any of what I said?”

“If he said he won’t bite you, he won’t bite you. You’ll have to trust him. You cannot fight this addiction.”

“I don’t trust him, Logan. One more bite and I’m a...a slave in the worst way. Actually, as his servant I’d just be dead anyway. I’d rather die from fighting than die because I’m afraid to fight.” She looked at Andrew, desperate. “Andrew, make him understand.”

Andrew reached for her hand across the kitchen table, his grip hard. “Kimber, we can’t lose you. We can’t.”

“Elijah?”

Elijah looked away. “Kimmy... It’d be suicide. Besides, when your body is screaming for the bloodsucker, you won’t be able to fight it.”

She raised her chin. “No, I won’t. That’s why I need your cooperation. You have to lock me below. Put some food in the fridge, and don’t let me out again until the addiction is broken or...I’m dead.”

Logan shuddered, and Andrew tightened his grip on her hand. Elijah stood so quickly his chair tipped over.

“No! And we don’t need to talk about it again.” He shook his finger at her. “No more talking about it! When the need hits you, you’re going to have the vampire if I have to hold you down myself.”

“Kimber, like Logan said, if he swore not to bite you, he won’t.”

“Andrew, do you really believe that?”

“We have to believe that,” he whispered.

Logan hit the table, causing the plates to jump. “I wish I’d killed the bastard when I had the chance.”

“That was my fault,” Kimberlyn said. She couldn’t even meet his gaze. “I’m sorry I brought all this upon us.”

There was really nothing more to say.

Logan left his chair to pull her into his arms. "I don't want to see you unhappy, baby. It rips my heart out."

Startled at his uncustomary confession, she wrapped her arms around his waist and squeezed. "God, Logan, I love you. I love you so much. But you can't fix this. You can't take it away, not this time."

"I will," he said, his voice tight. "I swore to take care of you, and I will. I'll stand over his thrusting body myself. If he bites you, I'll rip his heart out."

"But by then, it will already be too late," she whispered.

Andrew stared at her, in his eyes a look of hopelessness and pain. "Kimber."

"It's true," Elijah said, his voice loud, angry, and mostly, afraid. "We have to find another way to protect her." Then he thumped the table. "I have it!"

Kimberlyn sniffed and pulled away from Logan. "What, Elijah?"

"We'll bring a dentist in and rip the fucker's teeth out." He looked at them all, his eyes lit with excitement. "Well? *Well?*"

Logan sighed. "Elijah, he can cut her with a stone as long as he connects to her wound with his mouth."

"Fuck!" Elijah thought for a minute. "We can tie a gag around his mouth—"

"Elijah, enough."

"Dammit, boss, there has to be some way..."

"There is," Kimberlyn said. "You need to lock me in until I break the addiction."

"It's almost tempting, just so afterward I could have the satisfaction of hurting him," Elijah said. "Hurting him so bad he'd wish he'd never attempted to use the wolves as his personal army. The fuck."

"Kimberlyn's right."

They all looked toward the voice, and Kimberlyn pulled away from Logan to stare at Kali, who'd walked into their kitchen as though she belonged there.

"She's not right," Elijah said, snarling. He turned his face to the wall, unwilling to so much as look at her. "You don't know what you're talking about."

"It's not your business," Logan said, but his voice was kinder.

"You're the vampire's friend," Andrew added. "We can't trust you any more than we can trust him."

Kali wandered farther into the room, her gaze on Kimberlyn. "There is a good chance you can break his hold. You're strong. You're a wolf. Why shouldn't you have a chance?" She looked at each man in turn. "You need to have a little faith in your healer."

"You didn't see her," Andrew said, waving a dismissing hand. "When the addiction hit her—"

"I've seen the addiction," Kali cut in, her voice angry. "I've seen a lot of fucking things. I've lived with the vampires."

“And how many of those addicted fought it and lived?” Logan asked, his voice smooth. “How many even attempted to fight it?”

She walked to stand in front of him and Kimberlyn, her beautiful eyes glaring. “I’ve seen more shit than you can imagine, wolf. And one thing I saw was a very nice human become a vampire servant.” Her gaze was full of nightmares. “Believe me, if you love this woman, you’d wish her dead before you’d let her become the servant of a vampire. I care for Malik, but...” She shook her head. “No, that’s one fucking fate a whole hell of a lot worse than mere death.” She snapped her gaze from Logan to Kimberlyn.

Kimberlyn nearly backed away under the weight of that stare but forced herself to stand her ground. The guilt of knowing the woman was their fifth made it difficult, but she managed. “Why do you care?”

For a second, Kali looked confused. “I don’t really know why. I just know I do.” Now uncomfortable herself, she studied her fingernails.

“Bitch, this is pack business. Get out of here. Go...bedazzle your vampire friend or something.” Elijah glared at the wall.

Kimberlyn blew out a hard breath. Poor Elijah, he’d gone through enough when he’d thought the vampire was their fifth. What was he going to do when he discovered that Kali was going to join them? After this latest catastrophe was decided upon, she’d tell them. After all, if they locked her in a room and she died, they were going to need someone to take her place. Pain lanced her gut at the thought, and she gasped, grabbing her stomach.

Logan took her arm, peering into her face. “Kimberlyn? What’s wrong?”

“It’s the fucking addiction! It’s time for it. Someone go fetch Dracula and a pile of rags. I’ll stuff them down his—”

“Elijah!” Andrew half shouted. “Be quiet, would you?”

In truth, it *was* time. She’d felt the addiction raising its ugly face earlier, and it hadn’t gotten any easier. But it was bearable. Later on, it wouldn’t be so easy. “It’s not that, Elijah. I’m okay. Just...stressed.”

She looked around at her men, her wolves, and realized that more than anything she wanted to be with them before she became incapacitated by the need. It might be her last chance. Her last moment.

Shoving off the sadness, she smiled at all of them. “I love you, my wolves. Becoming a member of this pack was the best thing that ever happened to me.”

“Kimmy, don’t.”

She looked at Elijah. “I just wanted you to know.”

“We do,” Andrew said. And he put his face in his hands.

“Drew,” Logan murmured. “I won’t let anything happen to her.”

Most amazing of all was Kali, her big purple eyes glowing, wet with the sheen of tears. “My God!” she said when they looked at her. “This is fucked-up.” She turned and fled the room.

Logan looked after her, something close to worry on his face.

Kimberlyn frowned. "Logan?"

He shook his head slowly, confusion in his eyes. "I don't know."

But *she* knew. Why they didn't was a mystery to her. Maybe they were afraid of giving voice to something so extreme. Either afraid Kimberlyn would tear them limb from limb or, more likely, afraid that by voicing it, they'd make it true.

None of them wanted the methuskein to be one of them. She was Malik's, and she was...fucking dangerous. To say nothing of the fact that Elijah hated her.

"I don't want to worry about it right now," Elijah said. He picked her up and threw her over his shoulder.

She squealed with surprise. "Elijah!"

She could hear the grin in his voice. "Come on, boys. Let's make our Kimmy forget her problems. We can do that for her, can't we?"

Obviously, they all figured they could and followed him up the stairs.

Chapter Thirty-two

Kali's first thought on getting out of the kitchen was simply to run upstairs and hide like a coward until her emotions were under control. She wasn't a wimpy baby, but she'd have a hard time convincing the others of that fact, now that they'd seen her bawling like an idiot. The thought of those big wolves staring at her like she'd grown two heads made a renewed flush of humiliation heat her cheeks, and she hiccupped loudly.

To her utter dismay, fresh tears started, and at the same time, she heard loud footsteps headed her way. Leaping into the first room she saw, she stood holding her breath until she realized with horror that the footsteps were heading right toward the room in which she stood.

Looking around, she spied the closet and dived into it. She'd nearly pulled the door closed when they entered the room, all four wolves, Elijah packing Kimberlyn over his shoulder like a bag of potatoes.

Kimberlyn's scent surrounded her, and she realized in whose closet she'd had the misfortune to hide. And she couldn't very well come out now. She stuffed her fist against her teeth and prayed to God they wouldn't scent her.

With so many smells in this house, and so many different people, she was pretty sure she was safe. If they found her, hiding in Kimberlyn's closet, spying on them...

She shuddered and peeked through the crack in the door, waiting for her chance to crawl out and make for the exit.

But she was probably not going to get that chance for a long, long time.

Elijah dumped Kimberlyn on the bed, and for a moment, all three men stood in a line at the side of the bed, staring down at her.

Their faces changed in subtle ways; Logan's gaze was sharp enough to cut glass and so hungry that something in Kali's stomach clenched in fear. And she didn't feel fear often.

Andrew, the sweetest of the bunch, shot Kimberlyn a half smile, and Kali melted. Why didn't she have someone who loved *her* that much? Was she really that difficult? Maybe she was just that hard to love.

And Elijah...oh, that Elijah. He was a fucking asshole, but something about him made her clench her thighs together and caused her breath to come faster. Fucking Elijah. The big jerk.

Then the wolves kicked off their shoes and, as one, began to remove their shirts. She gave a silent, heartfelt sigh. They were...*hot*. Even Elijah. She held her breath as they slowly, as though teasing the lucky Kimberlyn, unfastened their pants and let them fall to the floor.

Kimberlyn fluffed her pillow, put her hands behind her head, and smiled. Yeah, she had good reason to smile.

Kimberlyn didn't like her, and she thought she knew why. Girl saw her as a threat, and Kali couldn't really blame her. She'd be protective of men like these herself, if they belonged to her.

She realized her stare was staying a bit too long on Kimberlyn and jerked her gaze away. Kimberlyn might feel her attention. Whenever she looked at Kali, it was like she knew everything Kali was thinking. Not good.

Suddenly uneasy, she started to step back and sit in the corner, wait them out. It wasn't like she hadn't seen people having sex before. It wasn't that big a deal. But she made the mistake of taking another peek.

A beautiful, naked bounty of gleaming muscle, sleek, hard bodies, and jutting cocks, the men stood before Kimberlyn, letting her look her fill.

Kali nearly swallowed her tongue.

Kimberlyn sat up and reached for them, taking Elijah in one hand and Andrew in the other. Logan climbed onto the bed with her, his firm ass and hanging sac making Kali so weak she sank to the floor to watch.

"Tonight, we don't want you to do anything but come, Kimber. Tonight is all about you."

"We want to make you forget everything."

"All you have to do is lie there and feel us, Kimmy. Feel what we're doing to you."

Kali wondered if they could hear her swallow, or the roaring in her ears. What she wouldn't do to trade places with Kimberlyn right now. She'd never been so affected by the sight of naked bodies. Fingers sliding over smooth skin. Long, bare limbs entangling on silky sheets. Whispered male voices and long, deep kisses...

Oh God. She wasn't going to make it. She wanted to burst out of the closet and demand they allow her to join them. Her hands shook as she leaned forward a little more, unwilling to miss a single thing.

The men were like ants on a pie left too long on a windowsill, crawling over Kimberlyn's body with busy hands and eager mouths. She groaned and arched her neck, and Kali could feel her desire.

Elijah was the most surprising. When he wasn't talking, he was actually kind of nice. The look on his face was pure love for the woman, and maybe, though she was sure he wouldn't admit it, for the men as well.

Elijah tossed Kimberlyn's panties to the floor, and Logan unhooked her bra, tossing it after the panties. Andrew lay behind Logan and stretched his arm around

Logan to run his hand up Kimberlyn's thigh, and Kali found herself mesmerized. Unable to take her stare or attention off that slow, smooth motion, she held her breath, waiting.

She could feel his touch as though it caressed her skin, her leg. Thoughts that weighed heavily on her mind a few minutes earlier disappeared, and all she saw or thought or cared about was right there on that bed.

She should be one of them.

Knowing it completely, suddenly, surely; she should be one of them. She didn't know why or how or if it mattered what she thought, but the thought that she should be—was—one of them nearly sent her out of the closet and onto the bed with them. Damn them for leaving her out. *Damn* them.

With her gaze still glued to Andrew's hand inching up Kimberlyn's leg, she shook her head, hard. Her time imprisoned with the vampires had skewed her thinking a little. Understandable, but damn. The feeling of belonging was so real.

Not good, though. She had other plans, plans that involved ditching Malik's protective grip and taking off to parts unknown. Bonfils couldn't cover the whole world. She'd get away. He'd never find her. And she'd make sure she never used her fucking gift when there might be witnesses to carry tales.

Her thoughts flew out of her mind like so much fluff when Andrew's fingers finally reached their destination, coming to rest on the mound between Kimberlyn's legs.

She felt like she had a mouthful of crackers. Wishing desperately for a drink of water, she tried to swallow past the dryness. Her throat clicked like a time bomb, and she tensed, waiting for them to discover her. Suddenly thinking that if they did, it might not be the worst thing that could happen.

But the wolves were way too involved in what they were doing to hear any slight noise she might have made. And she couldn't blame them a bit.

It was a feast for the eyes, and she couldn't decide what to look at first. Kimberlyn bent her knees and let her legs fall open beneath Andrew's fingers, and Kali nearly moaned as she watched him run his index finger over her clit.

Not many knew that while a methuskein's eyes could be lethal, they were also as sharp as an eagle's gaze. She could zoom in and see the goose pimples on Kimberlyn's skin.

She shuddered and, with as much quiet as she could muster, slipped her hand beneath her skirt, inside her panties, and closed her eyes for a brief, delicious moment as she found her own excited clit. She rubbed it slowly as she watched the wolves, biting her lip against the moans that wanted to escape.

Their movements were languid and silky, as if they had all the time in the world to play and no worries to speak of.

Logan lowered his lips to Kimberlyn's breast, drawing her stiff nipple into his mouth. His fingers plucked at her other nipple, and she arched her back, moaning.

Elijah, not to be left out and a little rougher than the others, joined Andrew at Kimberlyn's pussy, thrusting two long fingers inside her as Andrew massaged her clit.

The two men exchanged a quick look, and to Kali's surprise, redness climbed Elijah's face. He shifted his position, not succeeding entirely in hiding his almost scarily enormous erection from Andrew's roaming gaze.

Kimberlyn's nipple popped from Logan's mouth, and he kissed his way up her throat to capture her parted lips.

Kali slowed her fingers on her clit, unwilling to come. Not yet. Instead, she swirled her finger around her opening, then dipped inside to mimic Elijah with Kimberlyn.

As though no speech was needed to communicate, the men moved as one. Logan stretched out beside Kimberlyn on his side, still kissing her. He moved one of his big hands to her breast, squeezing, massaging, running the pad of his thumb across her red nipple.

Kali swallowed as her mouth watered, happy enough that her mouth was no longer dry. No, now she nearly slobbered with the imaginary taste of a swollen nipple in her own mouth.

Despite the wolves' words to care only for Kimberlyn's needs, Andrew moved his hand to Logan's cock, taking time to palm the heavy-looking sac before enclosing the luscious dick in his fist.

Then Kali realized this *was* Kimberlyn's pleasure. She liked to watch the men together. Kimberlyn rose up on her elbows, her hot gaze joining Logan's as they watched Andrew masturbate the alpha.

"Do Elijah," Kimberlyn said.

Logan and Andrew looked at Elijah, who now had Kimberlyn's pussy to himself. He massaged her clit, causing Kimberlyn to move her legs restlessly as little pants escaped her mouth.

Elijah ignored them, but his fingers worked faster, and Kimberlyn let her head fall back, her mouth open. "God!"

Andrew dragged his hand from Logan's sex, getting up on all fours. Kali got a perfect view of his firm ass, his hanging sac just begging for a touch. Ass in the air, he leaned forward, taking Logan deep into his mouth.

Kali thought she'd like nothing more than to bite his ass, to sink her teeth into that bit of smooth, male flesh, but then Elijah sat back on his heels to watch the other men, and Kali's stare was sidetracked by Kimberlyn's bare, pink pussy.

Holy shit, she mouthed.

Sex floated in the air like magic, and with her eyes on Kimberlyn's swollen clit, Kali almost missed Andrew stretching his hand out, searching for Elijah's cock.

At first Elijah batted his hand away, but beneath Kimberlyn's urgings, he closed his eyes and let Andrew touch him. His groan was loud, almost angry, as he gave in to urges he had perhaps fought before.

"Yes," Kimberlyn whispered. Then, "Suck him, Andrew."

Elijah's eyes flew open, and he grasped Andrew's wrist. "No, Kimmy."

She grinned. "It's okay. Let him do it. We all love you, Elijah."

Kali didn't know them that well, but she knew without a doubt that if Elijah really had not wanted Andrew's mouth on his cock, he would not have allowed it. But he did.

Logan sat up, bereft of Andrew's mouth.

Andrew crawled to Elijah like a sleek cat, taking a moment to rub his face on Elijah's big leg. Elijah ignored him, his gaze glassy, stony as he stared somewhere over Andrew's head. But his dick seemed to swell, to grow even larger and harder in anticipation of what was to come.

Kali lost her breath, and her fingers slid through liquid heat to pluck once more at her throbbing clit. She was afraid that when she came, she was going to be unable to keep her mouth shut. Her climax was looming, heavy and wet, her heartbeat galloping like she'd just sprinted a mile in the snow. Fucking wolves...

"Where do you want to be," Kimberlyn whispered to Logan. She cupped her breasts, squeezing hard, her stare planted firmly on Elijah's cock.

"In your beautiful ass," Logan replied.

Kimberlyn gasped, her gaze darting to Logan's oversize erection. "Oh..."

Logan turned over to rifle through the nightstand drawer, then began slowly rubbing his cock with shiny lubricant.

Kimberlyn eyed him fearfully, but Kali could see her excitement. Or maybe it was just her own; she could no longer tell. Kimberlyn dropped a hand from her breasts and worked her fingers feverishly on her clit, her gaze darting from Logan to Elijah and Andrew, seemingly unable to decide who to watch.

Kali knew the feeling.

As Andrew inched his mouth toward Elijah's cock, Logan lifted Kimberlyn and slid beneath her. "Raise up," he murmured.

She got her heels beneath her and reached behind her to wrap her arms around his neck, lifting her ass.

He reached between her legs and began rubbing her asshole with the lube, slipping a finger inside her to help get her ready for him. Though he wasn't as huge as Elijah, and Kali had never seen any man who was, Logan's cock was *big*.

She wanted to be the one he touched, the one he was preparing to fuck. She shivered as a premonition lit her mind. Someday, she *would* be on that bed.

Andrew waited until Logan lifted Kimberlyn and positioned himself at her ass. Logan nodded, and at the same time he thrust himself into Kimberlyn's ass, Andrew slid his mouth over Elijah's enormous cock.

All four wolves cried out, and Kali could hold back no longer. Massaging her clit wildly, she clenched her teeth together to keep from yelling, and her orgasm exploded.

She was suspended in space, her pussy throbbing and quivering with pleasure she'd never before imagined, and it seemed like the wolves' magic took on a physical form, floating through the crack of the closet door to cover her gently.

Chapter Thirty-three

Kimberlyn couldn't help her squeal of pain when Logan pushed himself inside her, but it was forgotten when Andrew knelt before the hulking Elijah, sliding his mouth over Elijah's huge erection.

She cried out, her voice joining a symphony of ecstasy sung by her men, her orgasm close enough to reach out and grab.

Digging her heels into the bed, she met Logan's short, hard thrusts with her own, her hands playing over her pussy. Logan held her breasts in his big hands, his grip almost too hard.

"Fuck," he said, then groaned. "Oh God, Kim..."

Elijah buried his hands in Andrew's long hair, thrusting into the younger man's mouth with his eyes still closed. His grunts sounded almost like he was in pain, and Kimberlyn imagined that, in a way, he was. Elijah was finally giving in. How much, only time would tell, but he was enjoying the hell out of Andrew sucking his cock.

And the very sight of it drove her crazy. She lifted her ass and pushed herself onto Logan's erection as hard as she could, reaching for that sweet spot so close to pain, so close that the pleasure overwhelmed her.

Logan pinched her nipples, and she cried out, wanting more, wanting everything. She wasn't going to hold back her orgasm; it built like the pressure in the eye of a tornado, quiet, deadly, promising her whole world was going to be thrown upside down.

Andrew cupped Elijah's balls, making little whimpering sounds of bliss as he sucked, harder, faster. Elijah yelled, finally opening his eyes to look down at the man pleasuring him. That seemed to be what put him over the edge.

"Oh fuck!" he yelled, and Kimberlyn could almost feel the hot, violent stream he sent down Andrew's throat.

She let her head fall back against Logan's shoulder as he fucked her, and massaging her swollen clit with busy fingers, she climaxed.

It was at that moment she felt their fifth watching, knew without a doubt that somehow, somewhere, a part of Kali participated in the pleasure.

It was those damn purple eyes of hers. For all Kimberlyn knew, the girl had X-ray vision and was watching them through the walls. Or perhaps, being their fifth, she had a video running through her mind.

“Come here, Drew,” Logan said.

Seemingly exhausted, Elijah yelped when Andrew let his satisfied cock pop from his mouth. Elijah dropped to his belly on the bed, reaching out his hand to lie in contented contact with Kimberlyn’s thigh. He turned his face away, but Kimberlyn wasn’t worried. He’d be okay. He’d be better than okay. He’d accepted them, whether he’d admit it or not.

Logan, his thrusts short and hard inside Kimberlyn, took one of his hands from her breast and held it out to Andrew.

The bed dipped as Andrew crawled to his alpha. He bent to give Kimberlyn a quick kiss, then smiled at Logan. His erection stood proud and stiff before him, as he and Logan had yet to climax.

She turned her head to watch as Andrew took Logan’s lips in a deep kiss, and pushed Elijah’s hand a little farther up her thigh.

Elijah moved his fingers lazily over her pussy, finding and rubbing her clit as she watched Logan and Andrew. And because it was so temptingly close, she couldn’t resist taking Andrew’s erection in her hand, squeezing gently. She wished he would straighten up and move closer so she could taste him.

She tugged at his cock. “Andrew.”

He dragged his mouth from Logan’s and peered down at her, his half-closed eyes dark and hot.

“Come here,” she urged and tugged his cock again. She opened her mouth and wiggled her tongue, and he laughed.

“Kimber,” he said. “I can’t resist an offer like that.”

And sitting on Logan’s dick with Elijah picking up the pace of his fingers, she took Andrew in her mouth. Logan slid down in the bed, and his thrusts became longer, harder, and deeper.

Andrew groaned as she took him in her mouth, burying one hand in her hair, plunging into her mouth.

Quick as a snake, Elijah moved, positioning himself between her legs to use his wicked tongue, and she wasn’t about to argue.

Andrew was the first to come, his yells bouncing off the walls of magic surrounding the bed, the magic that Kimberlyn was so accustomed to she barely noticed anymore. It was all part of the special pleasure, the incredible beauty the four wolves created when they were together.

Elijah pulled her clit into his warm, moist mouth, twisting his tongue across it with a fierceness that had her screaming her orgasm around Andrew’s pulsing cock. Logan’s hard fingers bit into her hips, and he rammed himself inside her, groaning out his own climax.

And together they lay waiting for harsh breaths to quiet, for pounding heartbeats to slow, and fell asleep in each other’s arms.

Kali crept from her dark hiding place and crawled from the room, her heart in her throat. Not only from the fear of being caught, which really didn't bother her that much, but from what she'd witnessed. What she'd felt.

Malik was waiting for her. "You smell of sex and magic and wolves. What have you done?"

"Oh, relax, Count. Nothing that's going to get you in trouble."

"Kali, I need you to understand how precarious our position is here—"

"Fine, fine!" She paced the floor, wanting more than anything to be left alone to think. "I hid in a closet and watched the Big Four fucking. They were too busy to realize I was there."

He recoiled, looking, of all things, disgusted. "You what?"

"Stop acting like a Goody Two-fangs. You've done a lot more than watch."

"That is not the point. You hid in a...a closet and watched them having sex. What if they'd scented you? If they'd found you hiding among shoes and belts like a brainless twit, we'd be kicked out of Sanctuary for good." He grabbed her arm and jerked her around when she stared out the window and ignored him. "Kali—"

"Jeez Louise, Count! Relax already. What the fuck is wrong with you? And more to the point...what the fuck is *wrong* with you?"

He closed his eyes and sighed. "Just try, Kali, for me. Please. The wolves don't trust you yet. They don't trust me yet. And we're both dead if I can't get them to take out Seith soon."

And to get him to shut up and leave her to think, she heaved a fake sigh and pasted a fake contrite look on her face. "Okay, Malik." He narrowed his eyes and opened his mouth, but she spoke before he could say a word. "Now get the fuck out of here and leave me alone, huh?"

She felt a foreign pang of guilt when he left the room, his head down. She knew Malik had saved her life, but she also knew it was his fault she came under Bonfils's radar to begin with. Malik had a crazy-cold soul, but somehow, he managed to have his share of...compassion.

Even to her, Malik was a puzzle. But one thing she did know about him. Malik was using the wolves for his own gain. He needed Seith dead because he wanted to rule the city. As far as vampires went, Bonfils wasn't any worse than Malik.

She chewed her lip. Bonfils had to die if she was ever to be free. The man was obsessed with her. It would have been a bit more flattering if he didn't think of her as a piece of unique porcelain to go on a shelf.

But Malik...he was doing the same thing to Kimberlyn. Once Bonfils was dead and Malik took his place, Kimberlyn would be forced to be in his damaged life forever. Especially if he bit her again.

A tiny, excited smile played at the corners of her mouth. She was part of the wolves. She'd never felt more sure of anything in her life. It was a sensation that started in her brain and slowly slid down her entire body. A feeling of familiarity, of

ancient, built-in knowledge. Especially since the sharing of sex and magic she'd not only witnessed, but been touched by.

She clutched her stomach, gaze turned inward. She was theirs, and they were hers. This was her fate.

And she didn't want to be anywhere else.

At long last, she inhaled deeply and wrapped her arms around herself.

She was going to help Kimberlyn break her addiction to Malik. And God help her if he discovered her intentions.

Because as much as he loved her—and he did love her—Malik would kill her before he let her stand in the way of his plans.

But she had her own plans. She wanted to share power with the wolves; she wanted to be one of them. She didn't want the pack torn apart because Kimberlyn had to go live with the vampires. She didn't want the vampires in the pack.

In *her* pack.

Chapter Thirty-four

“Logan, you’ll have to lock me in now. Please, if you care about me at all... I can’t resist much longer!”

Kimberlyn buried her face in her hands and wept, not only because of the pain and the need, but because of the hopelessness of her situation. To live with this addiction, for the rest of her life. No. “I’d rather be dead,” she said, lifting her face. She glared at Logan. “I’d rather be fucking dead.”

Logan shook his head slowly. “I can’t, Kimberlyn. I can’t put you in a locked room and watch you suffer unbelievable pain until you die. I can’t.”

She closed her eyes. “I can’t resist without help.”

“You shouldn’t resist. Go to him now, before it gets worse.”

She stood and wrapped her arms around her middle. “You’re doing the one thing you said you would never do.”

“What do you mean?”

“You’re letting a vampire rule this pack.”

“You know that’s not true.”

“No? He is not dictating things right this second? He is not my master? *Your* master?”

He turned away from her. “I’m going to figure out what to do, Kimberlyn. I will make it right.”

“You can’t, Logan,” she said, but her voice softened. All this was her fault, not his. “You can’t kill him or you’ll kill me. You can’t bear to lock me away because of the chance I might die. If I die, we might all die. You have to keep the vampire alive, because again, if he dies, I die. And if I die...” She laughed, and he shot her a sharp look. “Oh, Logan, it’s almost funny, the way we’ve gotten all tangled up with each other. I mean, really, isn’t it?”

“No.”

Malik walked in then, as though summoned, and she watched him sniff the air. “You need me, kid?”

Neither she nor Logan said a word, but she was sure the vampire could feel their helpless rage. Their hatred.

“Kid?”

She stared at him, hoping he didn't see the hunger in her eyes. Oh yes, she needed him. She wanted him. And it was only going to get worse. For the rest of her life. This *was* her life.

Tears cut a warm trail down her face, and she didn't care that he watched her cry. "Why did you do this to me, Malik? Why would you hurt me this way?"

Logan's groan ended in a growl, filled with pain for her and rage toward Malik. "Because he's a fucking monster," Logan said.

Malik turned to face him, his gaze carefully empty. "Logan—"

But Logan wasn't listening. He smashed his fist into Malik's face, and Kimberlyn couldn't help but feel a small amount of satisfaction watching the vampire rebound off the wall to fall in a heap at her feet. She wanted to kick him.

She hesitated, realizing that a few short weeks ago, that thought would never have entered her head. She would have thrown herself at Logan, demanding he calm himself, and would have fallen to the floor to see to the vampire.

But not now. Not ever again.

She didn't kick him but didn't help him either. She could feel an insidious coldness seep into her soul and knew she was changed forever.

Reaching for Logan's hand, she urged him from the room with not even a single look back at the fallen vampire.

"Kimberlyn—" Logan started, but she shushed him with a look.

"Not now. I will hold out as long as possible. Don't take that from me."

He picked her up, and she wrapped her arms around his neck. They stood that way until the pack began trickling into the house, ready for their supper.

"Come have some dinner, Kimberlyn."

"You go on in, Logan. I'll be there in a few minutes."

She was halfway to her room when Elijah trotted up beside her. "How are you feeling, Kimmy?"

"Not great, but not as bad as I will be feeling."

"Logan's not going to help you."

"No." She walked into her bedroom and sat on the bed, dejected. "And I'm not even sure if he should. What if I do die? Then you, Andrew, and Logan could die as well."

"That's a slim chance and a weak reason not to help you."

She tilted her head. "What are you saying?"

He glanced behind him, then gently shut the door. "Kali talked to me."

She narrowed her eyes at him, suddenly angry. "What were you doing with Kali?"

He lifted one eyebrow. "Talking?"

"Why?"

He shrugged. "I know it seems off, seeing as how I hate the bitch for...for what she did to me. But I guess I asked for it." He scratched his chin and looked away.

"Elijah!"

"It's true, Kimmy, and you know it." Then he grimaced and waved his hands. "That doesn't matter. What does matter is that she wants to help you. And so do I."

"Why does she want to help? And what exactly is she offering to do?"

"She said you can withstand her power, because you're one of the few who is...immune." Again he waved his hands. "Something like that. Thing is, if you let her in, she can use her eyes to make you forget you were ever addicted to the vampire in the first place."

She laughed, but it was a hollow sound. "It's not my mind. I don't need to forget. It's my body, and I need to be stronger than the addiction. I need to fight it until it's either gone or I'm dead. Simple as that."

"Kali says it's a mind thing."

"*Kali* says. Kali knows nothing about it."

"She says she does. She said she learned a lot of things while she lived with the vampires, but even before that. She says—"

Kimberlyn jumped from the bed. "Gah! I'm so sick of hearing Kali says this and Kali says that."

"Now, Kimmy, you can't let your jealousy keep you from listening to her."

She turned on him so quickly he stumbled backward, his hands held up as if to ward her off. She swung at him and missed, which only made her angrier. "I'm not jealous, you moron!"

"Yeah, whatever. But, Kimmy, I think she knows what she's talking about. And if Logan won't help you, what other choice do you have? Even if her eyes won't do the trick, you wanted to be forced to stay away from him, right?"

She hated it when he was right, especially when she was pissed. "So?"

"So you're going to have to let us help you."

"Logan won't let you lock me away. And besides, what if he's right? What if my death would mean your death? And Logan and Andrew's death?"

"Look. I know you will probably die if the bloodsucker dies, because it's a known fact that servants follow their masters to hell. But Logan doesn't know for sure what will happen to the rest of us if one of us dies. We don't know that for sure. And I for one think it's worth taking a chance." He grabbed her upper arms and stared into her eyes. "Look at you, Kimmy. You're shaking and pale and sweating...and we both remember what happened the last time you didn't get your fix. Do you want this to happen to you every few days for the rest of your life?" He shook her lightly. "Do you?"

"You know I don't," she whispered.

He pulled her to him, wrapping his arms around her. "Then let us help you."

She inhaled deeply of his scent. "How?"

She could feel his relief and his fear. "We're going to get you away from here. We'll see to it no one gets to you, and you get to no one."

"We?"

"I'm coming."

"Logan will..." She shook her head against his chest. He didn't need her to tell him what Logan would do. "Besides, you're his wolf."

"Yes, I am. But I also know when he's wrong."

She was touched but would never allow herself to be the cause of more pain and strife. Not with her wolves. "No, Elijah."

"We have no choice, Kimmy."

She sighed. "I think we do. I'll talk to Logan again. I'll tell him of Kali's thoughts, and something else I've been keeping from all of you."

He drew back and looked down at her, frowning. "Like what?"

"Let Andrew and him enjoy their meal. You too. Go join them. Bring them up after dinner, and I'll explain to all of you."

But she wouldn't explain to Kali. Not yet. She couldn't bring herself to. It was bad enough having to admit it to the men.

Her men.

And scarcely an hour later, Andrew placed a tray of food carefully on her dresser. "There. Since you wouldn't come down and eat, I brought you your dinner. Eat, Kimber."

She clasped her hands behind her, watching the men file into her room. The bedroom was big and airy, but with the three huge wolves filling it, it looked tiny. To please Andrew, she retrieved the tray, sat down, and began to eat. She wasn't stupid. The last thing she needed to do was deprive her body of food. She'd need all the strength she could get.

Elijah leaned against the wall, nervousness apparent in every stiff line of his body. Andrew and Logan sat on the bed.

"Elijah said you wanted to speak with us, Kimberlyn."

She finished chewing her food and nodded. "I did."

"If it's about locking you up again, my mind is made up. I won't do it."

She put her tray on the floor and stood. She couldn't sit there calmly eating when she told them. "Kali can help me."

Logan raised a skeptical eyebrow. "Kali? What has she got to do with anything?"

"She can help me, with her eyes."

"And you know this how?"

"Because, Logan, I just do," she snapped, then wound a strand of her long hair around her finger, a sure sign she was nervous. "Because...she has a gift."

Andrew looked confused. "But what makes you think her gift can help you through your withdrawals, Kimber?"

She glanced at Elijah, who studiously avoided her gaze. *Chickenshit*. But she understood. "She told...me. She told me she'd discovered certain things about the vampire bite addiction, and she thinks she has an excellent chance of helping me through this."

Logan gestured dismissively. "You forget, we saw you when she took Elijah with her eyes. You were immune."

"Because I can resist. I can just as easily let her in. And that's how she'll get me through this. Her eyes will make my mind think my body is not hurting, not craving, not needing the vampire, until he's out of my system."

Elijah straightened. "Yeah! That makes more sense when it's said that way."

Logan frowned. "Makes more sense than what?"

"Errr..."

"Logan, listen to me," Kimberlyn said, taking his attention from the bumbling Elijah. "I really think this will work."

Even Andrew was looking convinced. "Maybe it would, Logan. It does seem somehow...obvious."

Logan stood. "I don't think so. We can't, for one thing, trust that woman."

Kimberlyn closed her eyes in a long, slow blink. "But we can, Logan."

He crossed his arms. "So all of a sudden you're best buddies with the methuskein?"

"No," she whispered, then cleared her throat and spoke up. "No. But..." Dammit, why was this so hard?

"But what, Kimber?"

"I should have told you from the beginning, but I couldn't. I just couldn't."

Logan was impatient. "Kimberlyn."

"I have something to tell you all."

"Obviously."

She couldn't even look at them. "It's about Kali. Something I discovered when I was inside her, healing her."

Elijah came to stand beside his alpha. "Yeah? *Yeah?*"

Kimberlyn held her hand out to Andrew, needing his steady, sweet touch. He came to her immediately. "You okay, sweetie?" he asked.

"What's this about Kali?" Elijah asked, ever impatient.

"What did you discover, Kimberlyn?"

Finally, she lifted her gaze to meet Logan's. "I discovered that she's our fifth."

Chapter Thirty-five

All three men simply stared at her, eyes blank.

“Didn’t you hear me?” She tightened her grip on Andrew’s hand, glad she’d told them but sick of what might now be.

Comprehension dawned, and she could see that what she’d known from the beginning was finally clear to them as well. It was as though a switch had been thrown inside their brains. They *felt* it. They felt Kali.

“Holy shit!” Elijah yelled, a mixture of abject horror and extreme awe in his voice.

Andrew gaped, then murmured, “I’ll be damned. She is, isn’t she?”

Logan sighed. “It’s all clear now. How could we not have seen it?”

Kimberlyn shook her head. “I don’t know. How this all works isn’t clear to me.”

“You were worried about sharing us with her,” Logan said, his gaze soft and a little too amused for her peace of mind.

“Don’t you take this lightly, Logan.” She took her hand from Andrew and crossed her arms, glaring. “We have a real problem here.”

“What problem, Kimmy?”

“Elijah, don’t be an idiot.”

“What? You’re pissed that we’ll now be having sex with the methuskein? Damn woman, I’ll have to put a bag over her head before I can fuck her.” He laughed and held a hand out to Andrew for a high five.

Andrew sighed and stared at him. “Elijah—”

Elijah dropped his hand. “Yeah, yeah.”

Kimberlyn stared at Logan, her heart in her throat. “Logan?”

His touch upon her cheek was as soft and gentle as a whisper. “She must complete our circle, sweetheart.”

She looked down, but he slid his hand to her chin and forced her to meet his gaze. “She will never be as much to me as you are. Never.”

“Well, shoot, Kimmy. You have to know I feel the same way.”

“Kimber...I love Logan, but that doesn’t mean I love you less because I love him. You understand, don’t you?”

Suddenly she felt like a child and blushed in confused embarrassment. “I know. I just... I was afraid. For a second. I hated the thought of any of you with her.” But it was Logan she looked at.

“Time will make you less worried, Kimberlyn.”

She hoped so.

“We have to tell her,” Andrew said.

Kimberlyn shook her head. “I’ll tell her tonight, when we’re locked in together. You will allow that to happen now that you know, right, Logan?”

He rubbed his face. “I don’t know.”

Long, thin fingers of unease scratched at her insides, more insistent by the minute. “The withdrawals started awhile ago, Logan. You need to let me do this.”

“Kimberlyn—”

“It’s what I want! This is still my life, Logan, and it’s what I want, what I need.”

“She’ll be all right, Logan,” Elijah said. “You know I wouldn’t agree to let her fight it if I didn’t think she could win. She’s right.”

“I agree,” Andrew said.

Logan threw both his wolves a sharp look, but neither backed down. “And if she dies?”

“She won’t, boss,” Elijah answered, his stare steady upon his alpha. “She won’t.”

“Don’t tell Malik,” Kimberlyn said, whispering for fear the vampire would hear through the walls. “He’ll try to stop me.”

Logan jerked her against his chest. “Go find Kali. Both of you.”

When they were gone, his arms tightened around her. “Don’t you die, Kimberlyn. Don’t you die.”

“I won’t.”

“I couldn’t live through losing you,” he said, as though she might not understand.

She wrapped her arms around him and put her cheek against his chest, taking comfort in his solidly beating heart. “I swear.”

“I’ll have to trust you.”

“Yes.”

“I’ll make sure someone is at the monitors constantly.”

“Okay.”

“If I think it’s not going well, I will drag you out of there and put the vampire’s dick in you myself.”

“Agreed.”

“Damn you, Kimberlyn.”

"I'm sorry."

"I love you."

"I love you too."

"Kimberlyn..."

"Give the key to Elijah, Logan."

"What?"

"You know it's best. Elijah will be better able to withstand my..." *Pleas. Suffering. Begging.*

He shrugged. "I'll give him the key."

"Thank you." She knew he did so to appease her, but what he didn't understand was that Elijah would run for the hills and hide out if he thought Logan was going to force him to give up the key. That key would be safe with Elijah. Logan would run in like an enraged bull at the first hint of Kimberlyn's evil addiction showing its ugly face.

She knew him, perhaps better than he knew himself.

"We have her, Logan."

Kimberlyn pulled away from Logan to see Andrew and Kali standing in the doorway, with Elijah's hulking body shifting from foot to foot behind them. Kali stared at her, her eyes calm.

"I'm glad you're giving yourself the chance to break free, and trusting me enough to help you," she said, sounding more adult and less tough than Kimberlyn had ever heard her sound.

She knew this woman, had been inside this woman, and she knew her words were earnest. "Thank you for offering your help."

"Do you really think you can get her through this with your power?" Logan wasn't ready to give in, not quite.

"Yes," she answered. "I really do."

Logan set his jaw, his eyes dark. "If she dies, I will hold you responsible."

Kali shrugged. "Whatever."

Kimberlyn sighed, Elijah snorted, and Andrew raised an eyebrow. "Kali," he said. "Maybe you oughtn't be so flippant with Kimber's life at stake."

She glared at him. "Don't pretend you know my thoughts, wolf. I said I'd take care of her, and I will."

Andrew backed off with raised palms.

"Are you sure you wouldn't rather wait, Kimberlyn?"

She smiled at Logan but was sure her eyes were sad. "No, Logan. It'll only get worse. If she can head it off before I go blind or deaf or whatever else this damn addiction is going to cause me to do, I'd rather start now." She glanced at Kali. "Besides, it'll give us a chance to talk. To get to know each other."

Kali raised her eyebrows. "Yeah?"

When Kali discovered what she meant to the wolves, how would she react then? “Yeah,” Kimberlyn answered. And because she was not one for long good-byes, she motioned to Logan. “Let’s go. Oh...and Elijah?”

“Yeah?”

“When Logan fetches the key, he’s going to give it to you.” She stared at him, hard.

“Gotcha.” And she knew he understood. The door to that room would not be opened until she was either cured or dead.

“Andrew,” Logan called, and there was the slightest tremor in his voice. “Have the room prepared with everything they might need.”

“It’s always stocked with food and necessities,” Andrew replied. “What else is there?”

Kimberlyn put her hand on Logan’s arm. “Everything is ready, Logan. I’ll be fine.” It hurt her to see him so worried, and for a second she found herself reconsidering. But only for a second. This was the way it had to be.

Kali followed them down with not even a whimper, and Kimberlyn supposed that after having been a prisoner of the Bonfils, this was a walk in the park.

She kept a worried watch for Malik, too afraid that her traitorous body would be unable to resist him, but she noticed her men kept throwing somewhat nervous, fascinated looks at Kali.

If Kali noticed, she pretended not to.

So did Kimberlyn.

They walked down, down into the dark coldness below, where the only key to free them would be held securely in Elijah’s meaty fist.

The sound of clicking heels behind them brought the wolves and the methuskein to a halt.

“Yoo-hoo! I’ve got your key, Logan. Hold up, gang, I can’t run in these heels!” Roxie half ran toward them, her piled, teased hair looking like it could easily be home to a dozen or so birds.

Kimberlyn laughed, and it felt so damn good, she did it again. “Roxie.” For some reason, she was incredibly happy to see the housekeeper before going into the room.

Roxie held a hand to her chest, panting. “Logan, you’re going to have to put an elevator in this place. I can’t run like I used to. I haven’t been getting as much exercise as I got before our Kimberlyn made her appearance.” She looked at Elijah and waggled her eyebrows.

He grinned at her. “Gimme the key, Rox.”

But she shoved the key against Logan’s chest. “I give it to the boss man, Elijah. He can give it to you if he wants to.” Then she turned to Kimberlyn and pulled her into a bone-crushing hug. “I’ll see you in a couple of days, honey.” She sniffed and then hurried away, wobbling and unsteady in her high, high heels.

And there were no more delays. The steps were steep and old, and the farther down they went, the darker and colder it got. Kimberlyn shivered, and Elijah hoisted her into his arms.

She snuggled against his warmth, forcing down the nausea the withdrawals called forth.

He squeezed her gently. "Are you sure, Kimmy girl?"

"Yes. I am. And keep that in mind when you're tempted to let me out."

"I won't open that door. That's why I want you to be sure."

"Just...take care of Logan."

"I'll do what I can." And he let her slide from his arms. "We're here, Kimmy."

The hall was long and too dark, lit only by the dim, spaced lights in the ceiling. Four doors lined this hall, each of them containment rooms for very strong and usually very bad prisoners. Once you were in, you didn't come out unless someone on the other side opened the heavy, reinforced-steel door. No windows brightened the rooms, no pictures adorned the walls.

Kimberlyn followed Kali inside, then turned to face her men. They watched her, gazes serious and sorrowful. "Stop it, guys. I'll be fine. I'll come out of here stronger and better than ever. You've all seen what I can do." Hell, yes, she was proud. "I'll win this battle. So relax."

Andrew clenched his fists. "And when you come through this, I'm going to find Malik and—"

"And nothing," Kali cut in. "Just because she beats the addiction doesn't mean she cuts all ties."

Logan's expression didn't change. He already knew. He simply pulled Kimberlyn to him and lowered his mouth to hers. "I'll be watching," he murmured against her lips. "I won't let you die."

She knew he'd force Malik to stay available the entire time she was in the room. If it appeared she might actually die, he'd demand Elijah open the door and drag the vampire to her.

But Elijah wouldn't open the door. For that, Logan would kill him, but Elijah wasn't stupid. He'd hide out until it was safe.

"I'll be back to normal in a couple of days, Logan."

He nodded and kissed her forehead. "I know you will, love." And then he walked from the room. He didn't look back once.

Elijah pulled her into a bear hug. "See you soon, Kimmy." His kiss was quick and hard, and as though he couldn't bear to stay a moment longer, he started to flee the room.

"Elijah! Wait..."

He turned at the door but refused to turn to face her. "What?"

She fished in her pocket and pulled out the little wolf he'd carved. "I brought your gift with me. I'll have a piece of your strength and love with me the entire time. I just wanted you to know."

He stood silent and still for a long moment, then cleared his throat. "I love you, Kimmy."

And the only person remaining to say good-bye to was Andrew. "Drew, come here."

He wrapped his arms around her, his long hair shielding her from the world. "Kimber. My Kimber."

"Remember to take care of Logan. He's not going to do well when it gets rough."

"I know. Don't you worry about us." He glanced up at the silent Kali, who sat on the bed watching the wolves. "Take care of her."

"I plan on it. Now get on out of here, wolf." But her voice was soft.

Kimberlyn clenched the carved wolf in her hand and watched the last of her men to walk from the room.

The sound of the door closing seemed extraordinarily loud, and the key turning in the lock was so final she pushed her fist against her lips, her breath stuck like a lump of clay in her throat.

It was done.

Chapter Thirty-six

“How are you going to bear being stuck down here, Kali? I know you need nature to live.”

“Honey, I was stuck with Bonfils for weeks. I think I can manage a couple of days.”

“Still, it won’t be easy.”

“What did Logan mean when he said he’d be watching?”

Kimberlyn pointed. “There in the corner. A camera. There’s one in the bathroom and kitchenette as well.”

“Kitchenette might be stretching it a bit,” Kali said, standing and peeking into the tiny attached room. “More like closet.”

Kimberlyn shrugged. It boasted a small fridge and shelves of food, but no stove. Anyone confined to these rooms couldn’t be trusted with anything that could create fire.

But Kimberlyn knew that cold food for a couple of days was going to be the least of their worries.

“Why are you doing this for me?”

Kali turned, her gaze unsurprised. “Because I can.”

“Why would you go to the trouble?”

Kali sat on the bed beside her. “I felt I should.”

Kimberlyn could be as stubborn as anyone. “But why?”

At last, Kali looked a little uncomfortable. “I don’t know... I just feel like I should. Like I *need* to.”

Kimberlyn sighed. “You feel a connection to us.”

“Yes.”

But Kimberlyn just wasn’t ready to share. Not yet.

“How do you feel?” Kali asked.

“Okay. Not great.”

“Upstairs, with Malik nearby, you had a tenuous connection with him. Down here...there’s nothing. The bad stuff will come quicker.”

“Maybe it’ll leave more quickly, as well.”

“Maybe.” Then, “You’ll have to let me in, you know.”

Kimberlyn knew. "I'll try."

"There's no trying, Kimberlyn. You'll *have* to let me in."

"I said I would try."

"You don't like me."

Kimberlyn stood, roaming the small room, trailing her fingers along the brick wall. "It's not that I don't like you."

"It's that you don't know me?"

"No, not that either. I learned a lot about you when I was healing you."

"Then what? Is it as simple as being territorial? I'm a woman, you're a woman, you have all those gorgeous men..."

Kimberlyn faced Kali and raised an eyebrow. "You think being territorial is simple?"

Kali waved her hand. "Yeah, I do. I'm not here to steal the men, or take your place as...whatever it is you are to the pack. I'm just..."

"Yes?"

"Just hanging out." Kali grinned and threw herself back on the bed, staring at the ceiling.

The girl was lying about something, or maybe she was just unsure about her life, her future. "It doesn't matter what plans you have, those will probably change," she couldn't help but say.

Kali frowned and hooked her dark hair behind her ears. "Huh?"

Kimberlyn laughed. "Never mind. That was just me being cryptic."

"You're pale. Can you eat a little? It might help."

"I'll try. I know I need the energy." Her stomach rebelled at the thought of food. "On second thought, I don't think I can keep it down."

"I'll just get you some crackers and juice." Kali hopped off the bed, so full of life and sunshine that Kimberlyn felt like a sick old lady beside her. "But first, let's get you into your pajamas and comfortable in bed."

Restlessness gnawed at her insides. "I don't think I could lie still. Not yet."

Kali stepped in the small kitchen to get the juice, and Kimberlyn paced. Missing her wolves already, she went to the camera, peered up into it, and waved. *I love you*, she mouthed and knew that one or all of her men would be watching. One thing that would keep her strong was thinking of their worried faces, gazes glued to the monitors as they watched her fight for her life.

"What do you want to do?" Kali asked, bringing an ice-cold glass of orange juice and a plateful of peanut butter crackers. "Feel like watching a DVD?"

Kimberlyn shrugged. "Sure." She took a sip of juice. "Thanks."

"No problem." The small TV was placed against one sparse brick wall, and she knelt before it to select a movie. "How about *Tombstone*?"

“I don’t care.” Irritability was making itself known. A small part of worse things to come. “Stop asking so many questions and just do what you’re going to do.”

Kali only laughed. “Not a problem. You’re going to be a real asshole, aren’t you?”

“You have no idea. But I think you can deal with it.”

“Do you really think so?” Kali coated her voice with so much sugar it could have rotted every tooth in her mouth. She hugged herself and danced around the room. “Oh...*goody!*”

Kimberlyn watched for a moment. “That’s not funny.”

Kali came to a stop directly in front of Kimberlyn. Bending so she was nose to nose with her, she grabbed Kimberlyn’s cheeks. Her purple eyes became brighter, swirling with the same beautiful colors she’d used on Elijah. “Little Kim, little Kim, let me come in.”

Kimberlyn tried. She focused on those beautiful amethyst eyes, trying to lose herself in the deep, swirling depths. It was like being caught in a silent but vicious storm, like being tossed on deadly, dark waves. But still...

“Nothing,” she said.

“Relax, Kimberlyn. Let yourself go. Let me *in*.”

Kimberlyn took a deep breath and let it out slowly, thinking of nothing but Kali’s hypnotic stare. The twinges of something strange started to cover the clawing of the addiction, but as soon as she thought it, it faded.

She pushed Kali away. “It’s not working.”

“It will.”

But Kimberlyn wasn’t so sure. “I hope so.”

“Will I have to fear for my life when the withdrawals get really bad?”

“What do you mean?”

“Will you shift and kill me?”

“Oh. No. These walls are strategically lined with silver. I won’t shift.” They helped drain her energy too. Not a good thing when she needed her energy the most. She shrugged. “After awhile I get too sick to shift anyway.”

“Good to know.”

For the rest of the day, they busied themselves reading and watching movies, and Kimberlyn tried to prepare herself for what was to come. She didn’t want to talk, and after a few unsuccessful attempts, Kali left her alone.

The clock inched its way toward midnight, and Kimberlyn found it nearly impossible to concentrate. She got up and paced the room, wiping sweat from her face with a wet cloth.

She didn’t think about how the touch of Malik would ease her pain, would end the need. She knew if she was tempted already, she’d not last the night. She was strong. She’d beat the son of a bitch.

It was as she was pacing that the walls began to close in on her, and claustrophobia mowed her down like a bully on a playground.

She held a hand to her chest and struggled to get air to move past the lump of panic in her throat. She couldn't breathe. Terror ruled her, and she tried to scream but had no voice. How had she gotten here? She was going to die. This was her last moment. She was going to die, and she was not ready to go.

Her body needed his. Her mind needed his. *Malik! Help me! I don't want to die!* She did not want to be alone. Her body cried out for his touch; her mind cried out for her wolves.

Logan!

And she could feel him, her alpha, roaring in rage and drowning in his helpless, useless promises. She fell to her knees, gagging, struggling to breathe.

Then Kali was pulling her to her feet, her face calm. She urged Kimberlyn to the bed, her mouth moving as she spoke, but Kimberlyn couldn't hear her over the roaring of blood in her ears.

Her mind zoomed in on her panic and would think of nothing else. It consumed her, ate her from the inside out, controlled her. Her mind would surely explode. There was no way one person could bear such overwhelming terror. Her mind would splinter like old wood beneath the onslaught.

God!

Kali pushed her onto the bed, then drew back her hand and slapped her. Hard.

Kimberlyn was stunned at her nerve, and for a brief moment, anger and terror battled. Anger won, breaking the hold panic had over her mind.

With a cry, she realized she could breathe again and sucked in great gusts of precious, sweet air, thoughts of kicking Kali's ass forgotten.

"You're welcome," Kali said and put her hands on her hips, satisfaction lighting her face.

Kimberlyn lay back, too exhausted to even lift her legs to the bed. But exhausted was better than panic. She looked at the camera and waved weakly, though she was sure the men were long gone. Elijah would probably have shifted and escaped to the woods, the key well hidden. Logan would be hot on his trail.

Andrew might have gone after them, hoping to talk sense into Logan, or maybe he'd decided to help Logan catch Elijah.

And Malik... She closed her eyes and sighed. Damn him.

"Up we go. Let's get you comfortable."

"I'm not a baby," Kimberlyn replied, hating her weak, breathless voice.

Beside her, Kali was bursting with energy as she bustled about like little Miss Nightingale, cheerfully fetching everything she might need for the long night ahead of them.

Kimberlyn appreciated it, she did. But something about Kali being so...so happy just pissed her off. Still, better pissed off than having a severe panic attack.

Kali leaned over to fluff her pillow. “Comfortable? Yes? Then let’s get you naked.”

“What?”

“I have a nice clean sleep shirt for you, but first I’ll sponge you off. You’ll feel much better after being covered in sweat.”

But as she spoke, Kali avoided her gaze and seemed strangely shy. This made Kimberlyn suspicious.

“What’s wrong?”

Kali pulled off her shoes, then with a hesitancy unlike her, reached for the waistband of Kimberlyn’s pants. “Nothing. What do you mean?”

“You’re acting really weird.”

“No, I’m not. It’s your imagination.”

“Hmmm.” Kimberlyn lifted her hips, the cool air caressing her as Kali rid her of her clothes.

“Raise your arms,” Kali said, and Kimberlyn obeyed automatically, helping Kali ease her shirt off. Weak, she let her arms fall to the bed, unconcerned with her nudity.

Unconcerned until she caught Kali’s glance and realized suddenly just why Kali was acting like a virgin on her wedding night.

And at the thought, her nipples pebbled, goose pimples burst upon her skin, and her heartbeat began to gallop. This was not a good time to be tempted by the girl. She needed Malik, but her body wanted sex. Though it wouldn’t cure her, it would help her.

Kali pulled the small cart to the bedside, wringing out a sponge she’d dipped into the soapy water. “Did I hurt you?” She grasped Kimberlyn’s wrist and dragged the textured, damp sponge over her arm.

“Pardon?” Kimberlyn asked, her stomach tightening.

“When I slapped you. It was necessary to break your concentration. You were really nuts.”

“Thanks,” Kimberlyn replied, her voice dry. “And no, you didn’t hurt me.”

“I’m glad.” Kali met her gaze for a brief second, as if afraid Kimberlyn would read what was hidden in their depths.

It was the strangest thing, seeing the outspoken, tough Kali all vulnerable and unsure of herself. It made Kimberlyn feel even stronger.

Carefully, Kali washed Kimberlyn’s other arm, leaning across her to do so. Kimberlyn closed her eyes in a long, slow blink as she waited for the touch of the sponge on her stiff nipples.

If her men were watching, she could imagine them with hot gazes glued to the monitor, panting in anticipation. She almost smiled.

Slowly, and so carefully, Kali ran the sponge over Kimberlyn's chest, then began to wash one eager, quivering breast. Rubbing the sponge over her breast like it required her utmost concentration, Kali blew a strand of hair out of her eyes and finally, *finally* dragged the sponge across Kimberlyn's aching, swollen nipple.

Kimberlyn gasped, watching Kali as she continued the sponge bath. Kali lifted her breast and washed under it, squeezing it slightly.

The room breathed cool air upon her damp skin as Kali moved to the other breast, showing it the same careful attention. "How do you feel?"

"Better," Kimberlyn whispered. It was difficult to concentrate only on her agony when Kali was making her feel so good. "Thank you."

Kali did meet her gaze then, biting her lip and smiling so slightly that Kimberlyn was sure Kali wasn't nearly as shy as she pretended. Kali played her body like it was a violin and she was giving the performance of her lifetime.

Kimberlyn just closed her eyes and listened to the music.

Each time the insistent pangs of withdrawal arose in Kimberlyn's body, Kali beat them back with a slow, sensual touch. And with each touch, the tenuous connection between the wolf and her fifth became stronger.

Surely Kali felt it.

Kimberlyn opened her eyes as Kali drew the sponge across her abdomen. The cooling water seemed to sizzle on her hot skin, and Kali's entire body began to emit a soft, sunny glow.

"That's incredible," Kimberlyn whispered. "You've brought the outdoors in here with you." She could easily imagine being on a tropical island somewhere, with the blue waves lapping at her feet, the sun shining on her skin, warm sand beneath her...

She sniffed the air. Kali even smelled of sunshine and summer. Kali sent a dazzling look at Kimberlyn, a half smile teasing her lips. "You bring a lot of things out in me. And I don't even know why."

I do. Kimberlyn didn't say a word.

"Open your legs so I can wash between them."

Holding her breath, Kimberlyn parted her legs. At the first touch of the sponge, she groaned, her fingers digging into the sheets.

Kali skimmed her hand over Kimberlyn's pussy, using her fingers to part the labia before sliding the sponge over her exposed and sensitive clit.

Kimberlyn arched her back, crying out at the pleasure. And at her obvious approval, Kali tossed the sponge into the water, pushed the cart out of the way, and replaced the sponge with her fingers.

She lightly pinched Kimberlyn's clit between her long, soft fingers, massaging gently. Hers was such a different touch than when the men made love to her, and Kimberlyn held her breath as she let the sensations bathe her body.

“This will help chase the pain away, Kimberlyn. And when you climax, look into my eyes. You will never be as open as you are at that moment.”

She lifted her free hand to Kimberlyn’s breasts, running her fingers lightly from one nipple to the other. Then, leaning forward, she slipped a nipple into her warm mouth, twirling her tongue over the stiff point, sucking gently.

Her fingers kept up a steady pressure on Kimberlyn’s clit, plucking at it, massaging it, rubbing it with the liquid heat she gathered from Kimberlyn’s opening.

Kimberlyn moaned as her clit swelled, pulsating with a heavy pressure that she wanted to give in to but also wanted to delay so the terrible, wonderful sensations would continue.

Kali’s lips were soft upon her breast, tongue bathing her nipple in pleasure, and when she thought she couldn’t hold off her climax for another second, the magical connection she had with her men expanded to include her fifth.

And just like that, all her jealousy, her worry over sharing her men with this girl evaporated, leaving in its place an eagerness to include them in this new addition to their lives.

She glanced at the camera and smiled, burying her fingers in Kali’s thick, dark hair, thrusting her nipple farther into the methuskein’s mouth.

“Do you feel it?” she asked.

Kali started to pull away and answer, but Kimberlyn didn’t need an answer, not really. She knew Kali felt it. Holding the girl’s head steady, she refused to let her stop sucking long enough to speak.

She moved her pelvis in time with Kali’s fingers, her little sounds of pleasure becoming louder as her orgasm neared.

Kali pulled her mouth from Kimberlyn’s swollen nipple. “Look at me, Kimberlyn. Look into my eyes. I will break the vampire’s hold. Let me in.”

She rubbed Kimberlyn’s clit harder and faster, her gaze planted firmly on Kimberlyn’s, waiting, waiting...

Kimberlyn reached behind her to grip the headboard. “Kali!”

“Shall I lick your pussy?” Kali asked.

Her words sent Kimberlyn over the edge. With a scream, she came, the headboard creaking beneath the strength of her pleasure.

Kali gasped, and for a second, confusion lit her features. But then she pinned Kimberlyn’s gaze with her own, and Kimberlyn let the methuskein inside.

Inside Kali’s eyes there was no pain. Kimberlyn could barely remember who the vampire was; all that mattered right now was an orgasm that radiated from her pussy to her entire body, swirling with her in the amethyst eyes of the woman whose knowing fingers played upon her sex.

A willing captive of the methuskein, she let herself go, flying through a purple-tinged vortex of pleasure. In that vortex, a final bond was forged, and though she

dimly realized she might forget later, Kali's memories seeped into her psyche, and she knew the woman. Knew her, and trusted her. Wanted her. The methuskein completed the circle.

But there was a gaping hole that kept the bond incomplete. The wolves. Her men. She needed them; Kali needed them.

Still, there was the pleasure, and she soaked in it, let it seep into every pore of her body, her mind, let it hunt down the parasite that was Malik's addiction and crush it beneath the force of her will.

The stubborn vampire bug did not go easily, and when she floated back down from bliss to the holding room, she knew a piece of it still lived.

But it was nothing she could not handle.

Panting, she gripped Kali's beautiful face between her palms. "Get my men, Kali. Get *our* men. We need to include them for our bond to be complete."

And though she would still carry the ties with Malik, she could laugh at the now puny hold his addictive vampire body held on her.

The desperate, echoing cries of the vampire bounced off the walls of her mind, and she knew he felt it. His servant was changing the rules.

Chapter Thirty-seven

That her men would be afraid to answer her summons was a given, so she sent Kali to the camera.

Watching her, Kimberlyn let her fingers trail over the light film of sweat on her breasts, over her ribs, and lower to move with languid pleasure between her legs.

“Can they hear me?”

“The volume is probably down on the other end, but once they see you trying to communicate, they’ll turn it up. I think.”

Kali acted as though she’d never seen a camera before, staring at it in some consternation. Slowly she crooked a finger at the camera. “Come to me,” she intoned. “Come to us. Come...come...”

Kimberlyn laughed. “Kali, you’re not trying to summon the demons from hell.”

Kali glared. “Logan, if you can hear me, get your hairy wolf ass down here. Kimberlyn’s fine. She just needs you guys to...to...” She trailed off, casting a glance at Kimberlyn. “What did you say you need them for?”

Kimberlyn sat up. “I have something to tell you, Kali.”

“Yeah?”

But Kimberlyn wanted to wait for the men to arrive before she told Kali that, whether she wanted it or not, she was now part of the wolves. “Try to get them again. I’ll explain when they’re here.”

But no one answered, and at last Kali gave up. “I’ll try again later. Once they see you’re not on the floor with your tongue out and your eyes rolled back in your head, they’ll believe us, right?”

“Yes.” But threads of unease ran through Kimberlyn’s body. Why were the wolves not answering? Her stomach began to hurt, and it had nothing to do with withdrawals.

Something was wrong.

She stared at the camera as the feeling became stronger, silently cursing herself for insisting on being locked in a room where she would remain until someone decided to let her out. Her wolves needed her. She could feel it.

“Something’s wrong,” she told Kali. “I need out of here.”

Kali sat down beside her, frowning. “The addiction—”

“No, no, not that.” She waved impatiently. “Something’s going on. With my people. I’m really worried.”

She had a connection with her men. They would have to hear her if her yells were loud enough. Closing her eyes, she lay back and brought Logan’s face into her mind.

Logan!

But she got nothing. It was as though he’d deliberately closed himself off from her, had put up his walls so high and thick she’d never be able to get past them. And there was only one reason he’d do that.

The wolves were in trouble, and he didn’t want her to know. He wouldn’t want to worry her poor little sick self. She groaned. “Stupid. I was so stupid.” She sat back up, once again staring at the camera.

Kali shoved her dark hair out of her face, still frowning. “I feel your pain. I felt a connection to you before, but now, it’s like it’s stronger.” She reached out and idly toyed with Kimberlyn’s nipple. “You’re like...a new toy. The fuck’s going on, Kimberlyn? Really?”

No matter what her emotional state, Kimberlyn’s body always welcomed a touch. Her nipples stiffened, and she sighed. She lifted her left hand toward Kali, palm up. “See this mark?”

Kali stopped playing with her breast and instead ran her fingers over the mark on Kimberlyn’s palm. “Cool. What *is* that?”

“Proof of the connection I have with my men. It’s...magic. This is the power I’m sure you’ve sensed with us. Fate has decided to connect us, and we’re stronger than any of the other groups. See? It’s a starflower with five petals.” She raised her eyes to Kali’s face. “One for each of us. Logan, Andrew, and Elijah have the same mark.”

“Wait. There are five petals. Did I forget how to count, or is someone missing?”

Elijah’s mark had appeared after the first time he’d lain in bed with the three other wolves; though he had not then had sex with the men, the connection had seared its will upon his palm when he’d been touched by them through Kimberlyn.

“You’re the fifth, Kali. You’re the one we’ve been missing.”

Kali laughed, then snatched up her own palm. “Lies. There’s nothing on my hand.”

“There will be. Don’t tell me you don’t feel it.”

Kali shook her head, her gaze wide upon her palm. “That’s crazy.”

“I fought it at first too, Kali. But it’s true. You don’t have to believe it. It just is.”

“I felt like I belonged, for the first time in my life.”

Kimberlyn had to lean closer to hear Kali’s whispered words. Though surprised that Kali seemed to be mulling over the possibilities so quickly, she kept her voice calm. “Once you’ve connected with all four of us, you’ll have no doubts.”

Kali darted her gaze at Kimberlyn, her eyes bright. “What will this do for me?”

Kimberlyn laughed, half surprised, half resigned. Kali was...different. "I don't know. I've gotten stronger, gotten some strengths and powers that come out in times of stress, like life-and-death situations. I also discovered how to heal any living creature. But that was after I...after I died."

Kali cocked an eyebrow. "You died?"

"Yes." Kimberlyn didn't care if the girl believed her or not, so she didn't bother trying to explain. "I did."

Kali pursed her lips and looked once again at the raised design on Kimberlyn's palm. "It looks like a burn. Are you saying I'm going to be fucking the men? Fucking *Elijah*?" She wrinkled her nose. "Living here? Being one of the wolf pack?" She laughed, but Kimberlyn could feel her hope, her excitement.

Kimberlyn waited for the feelings of jealousy and pain to rip through her, but she waited in vain. She smiled, relieved. "Yes. At least...I hope you will. This *is* where you belong."

Kali stood and folded her arms, pacing the small space like she had excess energy she had to get out. "I don't know about Elijah. Ugh. He's so...asshole-ish."

Again Kimberlyn laughed. "Yes, but he'll grow on you."

"If this is all true, what's the reason for it? What's the purpose?" She shook her head, frowning. "I mean, why are we...needed?"

"I haven't figured that out yet."

"There has to be something. Some big event that's going to happen in the future that we'll be called to take care of." She thumped her chest. "Warriors! The wolves and the methuskein! Maybe we'll save the world."

Kimberlyn shrugged. "Maybe."

"Do the others know?"

"Yes."

"This is so fucked-up."

"You saved my life, Kali."

"What do you mean?"

"You helped me break the vampire's hold."

"It's really gone?" The methuskein's eyes were bright above a pleased smile.

"Most of it. I can handle it now without throwing myself on Malik. But the ties that bind us together as servant and..." She couldn't say it.

"Master?" Kali offered helpfully.

"Whatever. Those are still there. I can feel it like a piece of fishing line cutting into my organs. I don't know how to get rid of that."

"I don't think there's a way. But if you can handle the withdrawals, that's a huge step forward, right?"

“Yes.” It most certainly was. “Without the addiction, I have a much bigger chance of fighting off that last bite. And Malik did promise he would never deliver the bite that would seal the deal, so to speak.”

Kali looked away. “I wouldn’t place a hell of a lot of faith in Malik’s promises, Kimberlyn.”

Kimberlyn knew she was right but still felt a deep cut of pain at remembering that Malik was not the man she’d so wanted him to be. She’d been a fool.

“Vampires are a whole different being. Just don’t expect them to be like us. That way you won’t be disappointed when you realize they can’t be. Did you love him, a little bit?”

Kimberlyn shrugged but knew it wasn’t as casual as she would have liked. “There was something.”

“He loved you a little bit too. He’s not evil. He’s just a vampire. What’s hurtful to you is just the way it is to them. Do you understand what I’m saying?”

“You’re saying that Bonfils is not worse than Malik, and we shouldn’t help Malik destroy him.”

Surprise lit Kali’s face. “Huh. Maybe I am.”

“You don’t want Bonfils dead for what he did to you?”

“I’ll never be completely free as long as he’s alive. The dude is obsessed with me. But if I died because he kept me underground, he’d just curse at the fact that his treasure was rotting and have my remains taken away. Then he’d get another treasure. Maybe one of my people, maybe a new obsession. But I never held him to higher standards. I never fell in love with the man.”

Heat climbed Kimberlyn’s cheeks, but she ignored Kali’s insinuation. “Tell me about your people. Where are they? And why are you not with them?”

Maybe realizing Kimberlyn needed a tale to take her mind off her worries, Kali settled back on the bed, hands beneath her head. “It’s a long story, but it looks like we have time. My people—”

But then she popped up like a jack-in-the-box, and Kimberlyn leaped off the bed. The sound of the key turning in the lock was loud and sure.

Andrew stepped through the doorway, and Kimberlyn threw herself into his waiting arms.

Chapter Thirty-eight

She buried her face against the warmth of his neck, then pulled away and stared into his eyes. “Andrew.”

“You’re really okay, Kimber?” His worried, tired gaze searched her face as if she might lie to him.

“I am. Were you not keeping watch?”

His smile was fleeting but there. “I saw enough.” His gaze went to Kali.

She frowned. “Where are Logan and Elijah?”

He let her slide down his body. “They’ve gone to fight the vampires, Kimber. To destroy Bonfils.”

“Oh my God!” Kali said and came to stand beside them. “What the fuck for?”

Kimberlyn closed her eyes in a long, slow blink. “Andrew. What’s going on?”

“Malik discovered what you were doing, somehow, and he swore to Logan to break all ties to you if Logan would use the pack to help him kill Bonfils.”

Kali’s voice was flat. “That’s impossible.”

“I know. But Logan wouldn’t listen. He said if there was a chance Malik would do as he promised, he was going to try. He said in order to keep Malik alive, and therefore keep you alive, Bonfils would have to die anyway.” He shrugged. “Might as well do it sooner as later.”

“He’s making a mistake,” Kali said. “As vampire master, Bonfils will leave the wolves alone. He’ll also keep the vampires as the covert group they’ve always been. Malik will not. He hates that the vampires have to hide, that they are...inferior to humans. Malik will cause so much trouble you’ll wish you’d killed *him* instead of Bonfils.”

“Except they can’t kill Malik,” Kimberlyn said, her voice tight. “To kill him would mean my death. All this...it’s my fault.”

Kali waved an impatient hand. “We can’t have a pity party right now. I didn’t bring the cake. Let’s just go join the fight. You want to help your pack, right?”

Kimberlyn wasn’t sure whether to be pissed or to let it go. She let it go. “I’m going upstairs to get ready. I’ll meet you both out front in fifteen minutes.”

“Kimber—”

She held a hand up to stop his protests before they started. “Don’t, Andrew. I’m going.”

The house was eerily silent with the pack out hunting vampires, but it helped that Roxie bustled around, her mood alternating between relief that Kimberlyn was alive and worry for the wolves, some of whom would not make it back alive.

“Damn it, Logan.” Kimberlyn hurried to get ready, taking advantage of the health she’d reacquired by quickly eating everything Roxie placed before her. She’d need the energy.

Logan must have been feeling such desperation to take on the vampires without her and Andrew. Without the two of them by his side, their power would be diluted. He would be nowhere near as strong.

If Malik got Logan and Elijah killed, Kimberlyn would hunt him down and kill him like a rabid dog. If—and it was a *big* if—she managed to live with her ties to Logan and Elijah so severed. She didn’t know that much about the power she and the men shared.

Kali and Andrew were waiting for her on the front porch, Andrew restlessly pacing, already shifted to his wolf. She could feel his energy. It burst from his tightly coiled body, expanding to surround her, calling to her own wolf.

Unable to resist his call or the shining beauty of the moon, she threw off her useless clothing and joined him.

Kali watched, her eyes bright with excitement. “Wait!” she called as they shot across the yard. “It’ll take me forever to get there! And besides...where the fuck am I going?”

Kimberlyn didn’t care. Getting there was the puny methuskein’s problem. Kimberlyn the wolf was off to jump into the fray of blood and violence with her men. Her pack.

But in the back of the wolf’s mind was the niggling worry that they needed Kali. Kali was part of them. The wolf shrugged it off. She couldn’t wait. She had to reach her men. In her shifted form, she could feel them, could hear them. They needed her strength, and she was going to give it to them.

Side by side, she and Andrew rushed through the cold woods like two nearly silent shadows, connected by a power and destiny that neither of them really understood. Their huge bodies cut through the wintry air, heat-seeking missiles locked on to the wolf pack, no mere instinct guiding them.

Logan would feel them coming.

And Malik...Malik would feel *her* coming. The bastard would surely feel her rage. Rage at not only his betrayal and his vampire selfishness but at putting her men in such danger. They could lose their lives this night. Malik knew that with her ties to them, that could very well kill her as well. Obviously, he cared not even a little bit.

Despite her anger and fear for her pack, she felt free. Running through the night without the pesky addiction eating at her gut was incredibly liberating. For the first time in what seemed like forever, she remembered what it was to be

completely and utterly healthy. She hadn't quite realized how heavy the addiction weighed until it was gone.

Not giving in to the temptation to stop and play with Andrew upon the frosty ground, she let herself be guided to where she was needed. By her alpha's side.

She shot through the dark, a sleek, angry bullet, and long before she'd tired herself out, sounds of the battle teased her sensitive ears.

Andrew drew ahead of her, and gathering up all the speed she could call forth, she caught up with him and blasted straight into the midst of a vicious, terrifying battle.

To the ears of the wolf, the sounds were somehow thunderous and shrill at once, and for a second, she shrank from the pain of it. A cacophony of chaos and crushing bodies dazed her, and even the wolf realized she'd been here way too often.

This was her life.

Not only did the wolves have to contend with the vampires, but also with the menacing clouds of eager, thirsty bats flying at the vampires' backs. And Kimberlyn knew well the kind of destruction they could cause.

The wolf could not shake off the subtle influence of the healer, who, as at every scene of death and pain and senseless violence, would rear her disapproving head and usually stomp the wolf's own instincts down as she sought to care for the wounded.

Before she could adjust herself to the healer's voice and the confusion around her, a hand sank into the fur at the back of her neck. She was lifted as though she weighed nothing and flung headfirst into a tree.

Fuck 'em. Even the healer was pissed. Shaking her head, she faded into the background and left the wolf to it.

The wolf threw herself into the midst of the fighting with bared teeth and an angry satisfaction, smelling blood and longing to sink her teeth into the enemy.

Vampires were everywhere, and they did not give way easily beneath the onslaught of the powerful wolves. But with the arrival of Kimberlyn and Andrew, the power within them exploded outward and joined the power of Logan and Elijah. The circle may not have been complete without their fifth, but it was a hell of a lot of power.

It rolled through the crowd, touching the pack with long, misty fingers, and their howls gave voice to its authority. When some of the vampires tried to run, the wolves brought them back with an almost playful ferociousness.

The vampires' sudden fear was a palpable force that served to feed the wolves' raging hunger, egging them on to an unstoppable, greedy need. They would defeat the vampires. They would kill the vampires. Age-old knowledge and memories reminded them that the vampires had once mastered them, and as one, the wolves avenged themselves.

Kimberlyn sought out Malik, uncaring in her reckless, scorned fury that by killing him her own life might end. She was the wolf, and in the heat of the

moment, the wolf didn't think about ties or consequences or even her death. She wanted his blood.

But he eluded her. She could not catch his scent with so many other, stronger scents polluting the air and could not sight him in the crowd of muscled, furious wolves and the blurry, sliding vampires with their flying, sharp-toothed helpers.

And Bonfils. Would she know him if she saw him? She would surely know him by his air of authority. It would be similar to Malik's.

Logan rolled past her, tangled in a tight embrace with a screaming, long-haired vampire. She could not see Elijah or Andrew but did not seek them out.

The wolves could have let the vampires go. They were beaten, after all, and tried to save themselves by escaping the encompassing enemy power in which they were enclosed. The wolves would not let them. Power-drunk and elated, they were going to destroy every vampire they saw.

Surely Malik, having understood this, would have fled long ago. Perhaps Bonfils, as well. They had abandoned their people to a sure and swift death.

But Kimberlyn was aware of how quickly things could change. Sounds of revving engines and human shouts reached her ears, bringing her to an immediate halt. The wolf was confused, but the sounds were familiar.

The fighting paused as the battling wolves and vampires realized what was about to happen. Bright headlights twinkled in the woods like Christmas lights, coming closer by the second.

The humans had come. Most likely cops on all-terrain vehicles and motorcycles, with guns strapped to their bodies, prepared to bring in those they could and take out the rest.

"What the hell?" murmured a slashed vampire. "What the hell?"

Kimberlyn realized suddenly that this had probably been building for a while. The woods were being watched as the human law enforcement waited, biding their time. They'd somehow known something was going on in the woods of Sanctuary.

Something was terribly, terribly wrong. She didn't know exactly what had happened to draw the attention of humans, but something had.

They scattered, the vampires and the wolves, and no one had a thought other than to escape the reaching grip of the humans. Running side by side, the vampires and wolves united and fled the scene of carnage. In seconds, they left the humans behind.

And what would the humans find there? Kimberlyn felt fear deeper than any she'd ever known. She'd been too long away from the human's world. There was nothing there for her now. The thought of being a prisoner of them now, to be poked and caged and tormented, lent her feet an extra fleetness.

She had to reach Sanctuary. Sanctuary with her men, her pack, her safety. But deep down was the knowledge that it was only a matter of time before the humans invaded that precious space as well, came with their guns and radios and

excitement, and Sanctuary would fall. Fall beneath the heavy, eager boots of the humans.

What would become of them then?

Chapter Thirty-nine

The pack gathered in the great room, uncustomary silence reigning. Logan stood, exhausted, his profile sharp and stark as a barren cliff.

“Who is missing?” he asked. “How many of us were left behind for the humans to find?”

Kimberlyn shivered at his hoarse voice, somehow feeling every hopeless word he spoke. Elijah stood beside him. Though he didn’t glance at Kimberlyn, he reached a hand toward her. She took it and was comforted by his reassuring squeeze.

Andrew leaned against the wall across the room, his dark gaze sweeping the wolves. “Four,” he said. “Mary, Roger, Mark...and Ford.”

Kimberlyn jumped up. “No!” Not Ford. The others were bad enough, but she had such a soft spot for Ford. “God!” She turned in a tight circle, needing to do something but having no idea what. “Was he dead?”

Andrew shook his head. “I don’t know.”

“We have to go back,” she said, looking at no one in particular and everyone in general. “We have to go *back*.”

“Kimberlyn,” Logan said, his voice tired but soft. “There will be nothing left to go back for.”

She knew he was right. The humans would be crawling over the woods like an army of ants, calling in more humans, and they would cart off everything and everyone they found there in that circle of trampled forest. The FBI would be there, and God only knew who else. The media, if they’d gotten wind of this new, bizarre development in these private woods of Kentucky. Private no more, though.

“What will we do?” she asked.

“Leave,” someone said, and Kimberlyn turned toward the doorway. The tired wolves made way for Malik, but their low growls greeted his arrival. “You’ll have to leave.”

Surprisingly, Logan said nothing. It was Kali who pushed away from the wall and glared at him, hands on her hips. “Don’t, Malik.”

“He’s right, though,” Elijah said. “These woods no longer belong to us.”

“Leave,” Kimberlyn said. “No.”

Finally Logan sighed and spoke to his waiting pack. “We have no choice.”

“You can’t mean to leave Sanctuary.” Kimberlyn nearly tripped in her haste to reach him. She dug her fingernails into his muscled forearms. “We can’t leave Sanctuary, Logan.”

He looked down at her and wrapped his big hands around her upper arms. “We have no choice, Kimberlyn,” he repeated gently. “We’ll make a new Sanctuary.”

Of all the things that had ever happened to her, this was perhaps the most devastating. “When?”

“Within the week. I have to...figure everything out. Where to go, what changes will be made...”

His eyes were dark, bottomless holes, and pronounced lines decorated his face. His pallor concerned her, and she realized that, as usual, Logan thought he had to carry the weight of the world and the worry of his pack on his shoulders, alone.

She stiffened her spine. “We’ll figure it out, Logan. All of us.” Ashamed she’d only added to his worries instead of standing steady with him, she forced herself to calm. “We’ll be okay.”

He smiled. “Yes.” He raised his gaze to his pack. “Those of you who think you are safe in town and wish to stay...that’s your choice. Those of you who wish to come with us and start over, clean up, rest, eat. We’ll meet here tomorrow afternoon to talk.”

“What will they find, Logan?” Kali asked. “The humans. What will they find there?”

“They will find a lot to study,” he replied. “Probably one or two of our wolves died while shifted or partly shifted. Does anyone know how many vampires died?” Then he waved his hand. “No matter. At dawn, those vampires lying there will burn, and the humans will know for sure. They’ll have their proof, and the world, or at least this part of it, will go a bit crazy. I wouldn’t want to be here when it all blows up.”

“Should we wait a week?” Kali asked, her eyes big. “Maybe we should haul ass like, right now.”

Elijah raised an eyebrow, taking, as usual, any opportunity to scoff at the methuskein. “Well, look who’s shaking in her boots.”

She only shrugged. “I’ve been up against a lot of bad-ass people, wolf, and the freakiest of them all is a scared human. I’m ready to get the hell out of Dodge before the pitchforks and torches start heading my way.”

“So you’re planning to come with us?” Logan didn’t sound like he cared one way or the other.

Andrew finally pushed himself away from the wall and joined them. “She must, Logan. She’s our fifth, after all.”

“We did okay without her,” Elijah said, “there in the woods. Did you feel that power? It was stronger than ever.”

“Because of me,” Kali said, lifting her chin, her purple eyes flashing. “I didn’t have to be there in person. I’m one of you now. The power knows that.”

“She’s right,” Kimberlyn said. “And I guess you’ve figured out by now that my bond with Malik”—she nodded toward the vampire, off by himself in a corner of the room—“at least the addiction, has been broken. Kali helped me with that.”

“You’re no longer tied to him?” Logan asked, his gaze sharp with hope.

“Sorry to disappoint,” Kimberlyn said. “I can feel the bond still there, but the addiction is under control.”

“So you won’t need to fuck him or let him bleed you, but you’ll still die if he dies?”

“Go to the front of the class, Elijah,” Kali said. “Get yourself a fucking gold star.”

“That’s about right,” Kimberlyn admitted. “But it’s a whole lot better than being in agony constantly because I need him inside me.” She looked at Malik. “Now I don’t need him. Not even a little bit.”

Malik shrugged, and the corners of his mouth lifted in a tiny smile, but his eyes stayed sober. She turned away, but his voice followed her. “Bonfils will hide out and regroup. He’ll find me—*us*—eventually. We need to be prepared for that.”

“Stop saying we,” Kimberlyn said. “There is no we.”

“I’m going where you go,” Malik said.

She swung toward him, suddenly furious. “Why? Why would you want to do that? I told you I don’t need you anymore. Just...leave us alone, won’t you?”

He folded his arms and, at last, dropped his gaze. Studying the floor, his voice quiet, he spoke. “I can’t.”

“I can help you stay away,” Elijah said, his eyes narrowed.

“I’m going where the pack is going,” Malik said, his voice firm. Still, he looked everywhere but at Kimberlyn. “I’ll gather the surviving vampires, and we will follow you to a new city. I have plans for my people. It’s the beginning of a new time. A fresh start. I know how to make it happen. I *want* to make it happen.”

“I thought you said you couldn’t gather your people and go somewhere else,” Kimberlyn said, angry. “Back when that was suggested to you, it wasn’t even something you’d consider.”

“Things have changed. I will now lead my people, and we will follow you out of here.”

“Wait a minute,” Andrew said. “You mean you’ll follow Kimberlyn, don’t you?”

Malik stared at the wolf, his gaze steady. He remained silent.

“I don’t get it,” Elijah said.

“I do,” Kali said, but she didn’t sound happy. “Malik tied himself to Kimberlyn when he bit her. She was able to escape his addiction, but he isn’t able to escape hers.”

“I am an addiction?” Kimberlyn asked, shocked. “I can do that?”

“Is that right, Malik?” Logan’s voice was soft. He sounded almost sorry for the vampire.

And Malik’s silence was his admission.

“Oh, Count,” Kali said. “You poor, sorry idiot.”

“We need to talk,” Logan said, looking from Elijah and Andrew to Kimberlyn. “Roxie, send up some food when you get a chance. We’ll be in my rooms.” Logan’s suite was huge, which was a good thing since the leaders’ numbers had grown to five.

But when they trailed from the room, Kimberlyn glanced back to see Kali standing still, an uncertain frown on her face, her gaze wistful as it followed the other four. Malik watched them, as well, his own expression unreadable.

Kimberlyn ignored him and held her hand out to Kali. “You coming?”

Kali’s smile could have lit up a dark room. “Yup.” She hurried to take Kimberlyn’s outstretched hand, walking with them from the room.

The remaining wolves watched them go, obviously too tired to ask why their leaders were taking the methuskein to Logan’s rooms. They’d find out soon enough.

“Why don’t we have to do a ceremony again, like we did when I first joined the pack?” Kimberlyn asked. They hadn’t when Elijah had joined them, and no mention had been made of a ceremony with Kali either.

“When the power touched them, it recognized them as ours,” Logan said. “At least, that’s my take on it. We don’t have to repeat it.”

“Ceremony?” Kali asked. “What kind of ceremony?”

Kimberlyn smiled. “I’ll tell you about it sometime.”

When they reached Logan’s room, Elijah picked Kimberlyn up into a bear hug that nearly squeezed the breath from her. “Things are changing. I don’t like it.”

“I know what you mean. Now ease up before you break a rib.”

“Are we going to let Malik come with us?” Kimberlyn cursed herself for caring, after everything.

“We need him close so we can watch him,” Logan answered. He trailed the back of his hand over Kimberlyn’s face. “So we can help the bastard stay alive.”

“I’m afraid, Logan. The humans—”

“We’ll be gone before they get here, Kimberlyn.” He encircled her upper arm with his big hand and pulled her to him.

“It’s exciting when you think about it,” Andrew said, and Kimberlyn couldn’t tell if he was serious or just trying to make her feel better. “A new world for us.”

“Yes!” Kali said, practically dancing. “I do love a good adventure.”

“You’re all fucking crazy,” Elijah said, lowering his body into an enormous armchair. He patted his leg. “Come here, Kimmy.”

She tightened her arms around Logan’s waist. “In a minute.”

“Kimmy—”

“I’ll sit on your lap, fang face.”

“Keep away from me, purple-eyed freak. I don’t want you anywhere near my manly parts.”

“I find it hard to believe you have any manly parts.”

“I’d show you, but then I’d have to kill you.”

“I’d *rather* you kill me.”

“Right. I see the way you look at me, all dreamy-eyed, slobbering like a hound after a rabbit.”

“Gosh, now there’s a right smart turn of phrase. Got me all hot and bothered with that one.”

“Who said I wanted to get you all hot and bothered?”

Kali snorted. “You’d try to get a stump all hot and bothered if it had a hole in it. A small enough hole,” she added, snickering.

“Better a stump than a stick,” he replied, eyeing her slim body.

Kimberlyn sighed and grinned at Logan. “This is how they’re going to be for a while, isn’t it?”

His smile was rueful. “I think so.”

“Do they think they’re hiding the attraction they feel for each other?” Andrew asked, wrapping his arms around Kimberlyn and Logan.

Kali and Elijah shot dark, incredulous looks at him.

“Attraction!” Kali said and gagged.

“I’d be more attracted to a shoe,” Elijah said.

“You probably tried a shoe,” Kali said, crossing her arms, “when all the women ran screaming.”

“I could make *you* scream.”

Kali backed away. “Hey look, there’s a shoe.” She pointed to the left.

Elijah looked.

Their laughter filled the room, and heavy hearts suddenly became lighter. Elijah grinned sheepishly.

Kimberlyn felt the power rise like a gentle gust of wind, encircling them, caressing them, forging them together in a mystical circle.

She shivered.

“Do you feel it?” she asked them. “Isn’t it good?”

“What do you feel, Kimberlyn?” Andrew asked.

Again she shivered. “Maybe... Sex... Need. But it’s so good.”

“I feel strength,” Logan said.

“I feel hope,” Andrew replied.

They all looked at Kali and Elijah. Elijah looked uncomfortable and said nothing, but Kali shook her head, her eyes big. “I feel it. And to me it feels like...protection. I feel invincible.”

Kimberlyn was awed. “Elijah? What is it to you?”

He cleared his throat. “I don’t feel anything.”

Everyone in the room knew he was lying, and he knew they knew. But they also knew Elijah didn’t like admitting to emotional things. Or softness. He liked to pretend he was the asshole he portrayed, but those who loved him knew differently.

So they let him keep his secrets.

Chapter Forty

“It doesn’t matter where we go,” Kimberlyn said. “We’ll be together.” She wasn’t sure she actually meant it.

The others seemed pretty sure she didn’t and looked on in surprise when Kali put her arms around Kimberlyn. Kimberlyn let the methuskein comfort her, realizing how quickly her attitude about Kali had changed. She already thought of her as one of them. As their fifth.

But sadness overwhelmed her. “I don’t like change.”

“You’ll adjust. You’ve had to do that a lot in your life, haven’t you?”

“Just like everyone else,” Kimberlyn said. “But that doesn’t mean I like it.”

“Things can never stay the same forever.” Kali smiled, and her hands tightened around Kimberlyn. “That’d just be boring.”

Logan stepped toward them. “We will secure the circle. It needs to happen now.”

Kimberlyn pushed away from Kali. “What is it, Logan?”

His eyes were serious. “It won’t be long before they’re upon us. I don’t want my people here when they arrive.”

“Have you found anything out about the ones left behind?”

“I can’t feel them,” Logan answered, and that was all he needed to say.

Kimberlyn closed her eyes, Ford’s face appearing in her mind’s eye. He was the gutsiest, sweetest wolf she’d ever known.

“Secure the circle?” Kali asked.

“He means we need to fuck you,” Elijah said helpfully. “Not that I want to.” Then he shrugged and sighed deeply. “It’s a dirty job, but—”

“Elijah,” Kimberlyn said, rolling her eyes, “please shut up.”

Kali’s expression showed that she’d been pretty sure about what Logan meant but wanted to hear the words. “Well,” she said. “Huh.” And she cleared her throat.

She reminded Kimberlyn so much of Elijah that Kimberlyn couldn’t help but laugh. “You two are so much alike.”

“Us two who?”

But Kimberlyn knew better than to say. Elijah would have thrown a fit, and from the sense of urgency she got from Logan, they hadn’t time.

Kali trembled with eagerness, and that gave Kimberlyn pause. Maybe the methuskein was more like Kimberlyn than Elijah.

But her thoughts were diverted when Logan reached for Andrew. Their love, strong and sure, encompassed the others. At once, they sobered. Even Elijah switched off his cocky persona and became in a second the Elijah of old, the protector of his alpha.

Eyes watchful, he stood at Logan's back, out of pure habit. There was no danger in this room, and the humans had yet to arrive.

It softened Kimberlyn's heart to a gooey mess, and she had to swallow hard to dislodge the lump in her throat. As though feeling her emotion, Elijah met her gaze.

I love you, she mouthed.

He smiled.

Logan lowered his lips to Andrew's, and Kimberlyn's mouth watered with desire. Her vision tunneled down to just those two, her beautiful alpha and his love. *One* of his loves.

"Can I—"

Kimberlyn grabbed Kali's hand as she reached toward Logan and Andrew. "No." She knew her face would be slightly cool but couldn't seem to help it. "Don't touch them. Not yet."

Kali's gaze hardened, but she withdrew her hand. "Whatever."

Elijah glanced at them but said nothing.

Unsure why she'd restrained the methuskein, Kimberlyn frowned. Then when Logan, still kissing Andrew, held his hand out to her, she understood. Still a little territorial, she wanted to touch them first. It wasn't that she was jealous, only that she was...

Then she mentally shrugged and took Logan's hand. It didn't matter. It was what it was. She refused to give it any more of her attention.

Logan gathered her to him and, pulling his lips from Andrew's, stared down at her for a heartbeat before gently, slowly covering her lips with his.

Enclosed in both Logan's and Andrew's arms, she knew there was no place she'd rather be. She floated in Logan's silky kiss and barely realized he walked them backward into Elijah's strong arms. The four of them stood in a tight, loving embrace, but a niggling, uncomfortable thought refused to let her lose herself completely.

Kali.

She wouldn't feel right until she called the methuskein into their circle, where she belonged. As Logan had done for her, she offered her hand to Kali.

She felt Kali's soft hand in hers and drew her to them. Taking her lips from Logan's intoxicating kiss, she squeezed Kali's fingers. "I'm sorry."

Kali squeezed back. "Don't worry about it."

Kimberlyn smiled. "What do *you* want? This is your...initiation, so to speak. What do you want?"

Kali stared up at the wolves, and her breathing came faster. "The boys. I want to first watch the boys."

Kimberlyn didn't blame her a bit but thought the girl had a mean streak a mile wide when Kali bit back a smile and glanced at Elijah.

Logan smiled as well and pushed them to his enormous bed. "Then we should give her what she wants."

Elijah's face darkened. "I hope you don't expect me to be with the *boys*. If so, you're going to be mighty disappointed."

Kali glanced at him and waved airily. "Do what you want, fur face. Actually, I wasn't thinking about you at all."

Elijah's eyes narrowed. "Then maybe I ought to give you a little something to think about."

But her gaze was on Logan and Andrew, undressing beside the bed. "Oh don't you worry about me. I have plenty to think about."

His voice angry, he grabbed Kimberlyn. "Come here, Kimmy."

She slapped his face. "Don't you *dare*, Elijah. Don't you dare ever grab me when you want some other woman and figure *I'll* do in a pinch."

He raised his eyebrows. "You sound like you were born a Kentuckian, Kimmy."

"What the fuck?"

He hooked her around her waist and dragged her against his hard chest. "Don't be jealous, baby girl."

"Jealous!" She struggled in his arms, succeeding in doing little but making him more excited. "I'm not jealous, you moron."

"Right," he said.

She didn't know which was worse, Elijah thinking she was jealous or Logan and Andrew stripping slowly between touches, all for the methuskein.

Dammit. Maybe she wasn't as over her jealousy as she'd thought.

"You don't like not being the center of attention, and that's perfectly understandable," Elijah said, his voice so reasonable she wasn't sure if he was trying to make her mad or really believed he was helping.

"Ah, you bastard," she said, opting for the former. "Let me down."

"Nah." He held her securely against him with one hand and slid the other one down to squeeze her ass.

She thought she heard Kali move and wondered if she was even now sandwiched between the nude, silky bodies of Logan and Andrew. Elijah refused to let her look.

"Shh," he whispered. "Calm down, Kimmy girl."

She struggled harder. If only she could manage to pop him between the legs, he'd drop her in a hurry.

"Don't even think about it," he murmured. "Don't make me spank you."

She growled, but he only laughed.

"Kimberlyn?"

She found some relief in Kali's voice at her back. At least that meant Kali wasn't playing with her men while Elijah held her captive. "What?"

"Do you need some help?"

Elijah grinned. "I'll take you both on. But don't worry about our Kimmy. She likes a whole lot of things you probably wouldn't understand, little purple-eyes."

Kimberlyn could practically feel Kali scoffing. "You have no idea what I like, wolf."

He squeezed Kimberlyn but spoke to Kali. "Want to show me?"

She considered. "Sure, if you're not too scared to let me restrain you."

"Tie me up? You don't have anything strong enough to restrain me."

"Yes, I do. They're called silver cuffs. Maybe you've heard of them."

Elijah's cock seemed to grow even harder against Kimberlyn's body. She stopped struggling when the thought hit her that Elijah liked the idea of being dominated as much as she did. How had she missed that? Maybe it was just a curiosity with him. A one-time thing he might not like as much as he imagined he would. She waited for his answer.

"I'm no pussy, girlie."

"Prove it."

His breath came in quick, hard pants. "Maybe I will." And he loosened his grip on Kimberlyn. "But only if Kimmy here will join in the...torture."

"Sweet torture," Kali murmured, and they both looked at Kimberlyn.

At last Kimberlyn was able to look at Logan and Andrew. To her surprise, they both stood in a loose embrace, naked and shining, their stares on Elijah. Intense eagerness shone from both of them, and Kimberlyn shivered.

"Yes," she said.

The room seemed to breathe again.

Elijah gave a huge shudder, and doubt entered his eyes, but she knew Elijah. Once he said he'd do something, he would do it. For the first time since she'd met him, Elijah was about to become as helpless as a man could become, giving himself over completely to his lovers and whatever they might decide to do to him.

She knew it was the only way he could truly justify, to himself, giving in to what he wanted. Logan and Andrew. As she watched, he met Logan's gaze.

Logan's mouth moved, just the tiniest lifting of the corners, and he nodded. "Get the cuffs, Kali."

Chapter Forty-one

It was as though in that moment, each one of them let the fears and worries of moving, of their discovery by the humans, and the enormous uncertainties go. There was only this moment. They needed this time, with a desperation none of them wanted to admit to feeling.

“Party!” Kali sailed back into the room, dangling huge silver cuffs from her slender fingers. She grinned at Elijah, her unusual eyes dancing with something a little too wicked for Kimberlyn’s comfort.

Kimberlyn leaned against Logan’s bare back, her arms around his waist. “Is this a good idea?”

Andrew glanced at her. “I think it’s a very good idea, Kimber.”

“I just don’t want it to...change him. To make him regretful later.”

Though her voice was low, Elijah looked away from the sparkling cuffs to throw a glare Kimberlyn’s way. “Look at me, Kimberlyn.” He stood straight and thumped his enormous chest. “Do I look delicate to you?”

She couldn’t help but laugh. “No, Elijah. Not even a little bit.”

“Damn straight,” he said. “Now get your fucking clothes off. Give old Elijah a little treat, will you?”

“You’re about to get a whole truckload of treats, wolfie.”

Elijah raised his eyebrows at Kali. “Wolfie? Seriously?”

She shrugged and shook the cuffs. “Take off *your* clothes, fur face.”

Kimberlyn walked to Elijah. “May I?”

He looked down at her, and she could see, despite his bravado, a tiny gleam of uncertainty deep in his eyes. He smiled. “You ask, Kimmy?”

She reached up to stroke his cheek. “Yes.”

He spread his arms wide. “Have at it.”

An air of suppressed excitement floated through the room, touching everyone in it with a heavy, fateful caress. This was the night they would all join, and the circle that had begun when Kimberlyn had found them would now be complete with the discovery of this final element. Kali.

But not only her. Elijah’s acquiescence, his submission and acceptance of the men, played a huge part in tying up the remaining loose ends in this circle of power.

Kimberlyn hugged herself, realizing what this meant. “We’re going to change after tonight,” she told them. “Can you feel it?”

They nodded, somber. “Elijah has been holding back, and Kali was missing,” Andrew said. “But now...”

“Yes,” Logan said. “The circle was never going to be complete without Kali, but the power would never have been complete without Elijah’s acceptance.”

Elijah grunted but said nothing. He knew. He kicked off his boots and left the rest up to Kimberlyn’s nimble fingers. Eager and ready, she unfastened his jeans and pushed them over his hips, barely giving him time to kick them away before she tore his T-shirt from his body, her fingernails catching his chest in a light scratch.

He never complained, simply watched her with dark eyes. She felt the others at her back, their own eagerness pressing in on her, making it hard for her to draw a deep breath.

When she turned, clutching Elijah’s muscled arm, Logan and Andrew stood side by side at the foot of the bed, and Kali waited at the head, cuffs swinging from her hand. They only needed to cuff Elijah’s wrists. They needn’t worry about his legs. The silver would sap from him the wolf’s strength and ability to shift. He would be like a human man or very nearly. Not that he still couldn’t do damage, should he decide to, with those legs...but Elijah wanted the illusion that his choices were taken from him.

“They’re made with only a shot of silver,” Kali said as if reading Kimberlyn’s thoughts. “They won’t hurt him.”

“I know.”

“This is our ceremony, isn’t it?”

Kimberlyn smiled at Kali. Sometimes the girl was just sweet. “Yes. For you.” She looked up at Elijah. “And you.”

“You’re wrong,” Elijah said, but his voice was mild. “It’s for us.” He looked at the men. “All of us.”

Again Logan smiled, pleased. “Come here, shield.”

Kimberlyn paused, surprised. She’d never heard Logan refer to his bodyguard as shield. It was right and almost formal. She let Elijah go to his leader alone.

They stood face-to-face. “Are you ready?” Logan asked.

“I am, alpha.”

Logan gripped Elijah’s forearm. “I am happy you were chosen.”

Elijah nodded, his face so serious that for a brief, frightening moment, Kimberlyn didn’t recognize him. “Elijah?”

But he ignored her, if he even heard her, his gaze steady upon his alpha’s. Andrew glided toward her, pulling her into his comforting embrace. “Hush, sweetheart.”

Kali watched them all, her eyes holding a quickly changing array of impatient emotions. Patience was definitely not one of her strong points. Quietly, she busied

herself attaching the cuffs to the bedposts, where they dangled with a tempting gleam.

Kimberlyn couldn't help but follow the girl's body as she leaned across the bed, remembering the softness of the methuskein's touch.

"Kimberlyn," Logan said. He held out one hand to her, the other to Andrew. "Andrew. Come here."

Kimberlyn mentally shook her head, her fingers entwined with Andrew's as she walked to their alpha. She took Logan's free hand in her own.

Logan looked over his shoulder. "Kali."

Looking almost surprised that he'd called her, she closed the circle. They joined hands and just stood, reveling in their closeness. The power flowed from one to the other through their clasped hands, as teasing as a sweet breeze on a hot summer night.

No one said a word, but they moved as one, turning Elijah toward the bed. He lay down without a sound, allowing Kali to fasten the cuffs around his wrists.

They gathered around the bed, gazes feasting upon his big body. Under their regard, his cock began to twitch. He groaned.

Kimberlyn started in surprise when Kali began to undress her but made no move to halt her eager fingers. The men watched as Kali freed Kimberlyn's breasts to their gazes and took time to caress the bare globes before moving on to her pants.

The heat from Logan's dark eyes seared her skin, his growing erection proof of his desire.

"Come over here so I can see," Elijah demanded.

Kali pushed Kimberlyn to Elijah's side. "What do you want me to do now?"

"Is he suddenly in charge?" Kimberlyn asked.

"Yes," Kali breathed. "As long as he wants the right thing."

"Touch her," Elijah said.

"That's the right thing," Kali said. Still behind Kimberlyn, she slid her fingers over Kimberlyn's breast, over her belly, then lower, where she let them lie.

"Do it," Elijah said.

Kimberlyn parted her legs, breathless. A heavy, melting heat slid over her body, gathering between her thighs. "Do it," she echoed.

Logan and Andrew watched, Logan with clenched fists and Andrew with a slight smile. "Do you need some help?" Andrew asked.

Kali whispered, her breath stirring Kimberlyn's hair. "Not just yet." Kali tightened her arm around Kimberlyn's middle, and with torturous slowness, she slid her fingers into the slit between Kimberlyn's legs.

Kimberlyn gave a sharp, gasping scream when Kali rubbed her clit, her finger moving in little circles.

"Like the show, boys?" Kali asked, her voice husky.

“They’d like it better if you weren’t the only one dressed,” Kimberlyn managed. “I’d take my clothes off, but I don’t want to stop touching you.”

“She isn’t going anywhere,” Elijah said. “Get naked, honey.”

Andrew moved away from Logan, pulling Kali away from Kimberlyn. “Let me.”

Kimberlyn, her clit throbbing with a painfully eager beat, was torn between running to Logan and sliding Elijah’s cock into her mouth. Logan decided for her, pulling her smoothly into his arms.

He bent her backward over his arm and kissed her hard. He slipped his tongue into her mouth, his dick pressing insistently against her, and before she could get her bearings, he picked her up and laid her on the bed beside Elijah.

Elijah’s big warm body felt like smooth heaven on her skin, and she wriggled against him, moving her legs restlessly on the cool sheets.

“Baby girl,” he said, “give me some attention.”

She was more than happy to oblige. Climbing on top of him, she smiled as she rested on his mountain of a chest. Elijah restrained was something she’d never thought he’d allow. Not on purpose.

“I can do anything I want to you, and you can’t do a damn thing about it,” she told him.

“Just keep in mind, Kimmy, that I won’t always be tied up.”

She shivered at the implied threat, her nipples tightening. Breathless, she whispered, “I’m counting on it.”

“Kiss me, Kimmy.”

“You don’t give orders, Wolfie,” Kali said, appearing suddenly, minus her clothes.

Elijah’s sharp stare left Kimberlyn’s face to hone in on Kali’s body.

“It’s not nice to stare,” Kimberlyn told him.

“Kimmy, has anyone ever said I was nice?”

“Well, no. Not so much.”

“There you go, then.”

Kali leaned toward him, resting her weight on her palms. She rubbed her nipples over his lips, and when he opened his mouth, she pulled away.

“Don’t tease me, girl.”

“You’re going to be teased a lot tonight, big E.” She looked at Kimberlyn. “Looks like plenty of room up there. Mind if I join you?”

Kimberlyn scooted forward. “Hop on.”

Kali climbed up behind her, straddling Elijah with an eagerness that made Kimberlyn raise her eyebrows.

“Girls, Captain Candy is feeling neglected. One of you give him a squeeze, would you?”

“Captain Candy.” Kali laughed.

Logan and Andrew slid onto the bed, and Elijah went quiet and serious. Kimberlyn could hear him swallow. She leaned forward, resting her mouth against his throat.

And though she'd half expected it, fingers sliding against her exposed ass caused her to jump, and she clamped her teeth a little too hard on Elijah's neck.

“Easy, Kimmy,” he murmured.

Logan stretched out beside Elijah. His biceps bulged as he laced his hands behind his head, looking for all the world like he was readying himself for a nice long nap. Only his cock betrayed him, its hard length rigid above his firm, heavy balls.

Kimberlyn skimmed her hand across his hard abdomen, meeting his heated gaze. She smiled. “Hi.”

Andrew reclined on the other side of Logan, his stare on Kali, who lazily and lightly toyed with Kimberlyn's sex.

Kimberlyn's body was weighted down with pleasure, her limbs growing so heavy she could barely bring herself to move. Her pussy throbbed, heat gathering in a melting, liquid rush. Kali's probing fingers stole her breath as they massaged the tender flesh.

Then Andrew rose to his knees, reaching across Logan to snatch Kali from Elijah's body. He pinned her beneath him, and for a brief second Kimberlyn had to force herself not to cry out for him to stop.

Logan watched her, then with a quick smile, sat up. He pulled her from Elijah and cradled her in his arms. “Okay?”

She nodded. She really was okay. Just...

“Kimberlyn.”

She slid her gaze to Andrew. Kali had wound her arms around his neck, her lips melded with his.

“Hey,” Elijah said. “The fuck? Did you all plan on tying me up and ignoring me? I'm not finding this nearly as fun as I thought I might.” He gave an experimental tug on the restraints. The whole bed creaked, and Andrew at last pulled his lips from Kali's.

“We're just getting warmed up,” Andrew said.

“Well, hell. Kimmy, get over here.”

Logan tightened his arms around her and looked around at all of them. “Elijah's a big piece of candy. We're ants. Get busy.”

Chapter Forty-two

His voice, his command, was what they needed to pull together. The very air changed, became charged with power thick enough to swim in. Their minds touched, and their hearts recognized and embraced the love they had for each other.

Kimberlyn's hateful, recurring urge to keep the men to herself was gone in an instant, and she bathed in Kali's generous, bright light and beautiful purple gaze. And the men, her gorgeous wolves...

She paused to allow herself to stare at them. Bare, smooth flesh, pearly in the waning light, gracing the huge, soft bed. Tangled limbs and long hair, hot gazes and proud, hard cocks.

Andrew crawled across Elijah, dragging his body with deliberate slowness across the other man. Once on Elijah's right side, he slid down and rested his head on Elijah's ribs.

He placed his palm on Elijah's huge leg, fingers barely moving in a light, sweet touch.

Elijah closed his eyes.

As though that was the signal, they all moved, eager to touch some part of Elijah's body. Still, something felt off.

Kimberlyn sat back on her heels, frowning. "Something isn't right."

"Kimberlyn, what it is?"

She lifted an eyebrow at Logan's impatience, then realized exactly what was bothering her. She pointed at Kali. "Lie down, Kali. You need to be part of the...ceremony too."

Andrew lifted his head. "Ceremony?"

Logan nodded. "I think so. Elijah never had his. Kali is new. We'll initiate them both."

"Not before the pack like you did with me?"

"No," Elijah said, without opening his eyes. "Not with me."

"I don't think we'll have to," Andrew said. "They'll feel our strength anyway. The power will touch them."

"We're that strong," Kimberlyn said, hearing the pride in her voice.

"I hope so," Elijah said, his voice low and grumbling. "Because if you open that door and let them in, I'm breaking this bed apart and running for the hills."

Kimberlyn laughed. "Shut up, Elijah." But her voice was tender.

"Elijah is losing his erection," Andrew said, once again lying with his cheek against Elijah's abdomen. "All of you shut up."

"Where do you want me?"

Logan moved at Kali's voice, urging her to lie down on Elijah's left side. Once settled, she gripped Elijah's thigh. "Nice."

Elijah grunted, giving a gentle pull at his restraints. The bed creaked like an old man's back, but Kimberlyn knew Elijah wasn't really testing the restraints.

Her attention was diverted when Andrew leaned across the big man's body, buried his fingers in Logan's hair, and pulled him in for a deep, hard kiss. Muscles bunching, the two men embraced, bare flesh against bare flesh.

She would have been content to watch them all night.

Quite sure Elijah had closed his eyes once again, she reached between the V made by Logan and Andrew's bodies and took his cock in her fist.

"Wake up, Elijah."

"He's not asleep," Kali said, "but he has his eyes screwed shut so tightly I'm wondering if he isn't in some kind of pain."

Logan growled and dug his fingers into Andrew's hair, pulling him even closer. Andrew whimpered, but it was a sound of pleasure, not pain.

"Fuck," Elijah muttered, and his was a sound caught somewhere between the two. Though he'd made his choice, he was still in for a battle. A battle against himself.

They would help him.

Kimberlyn crawled between Logan's and Andrew's leaning bodies and lay atop Elijah, her mouth to his warm throat.

"Girl," he said, his voice a rumbling growl vibrating against her lips.

"It's okay, Elijah. It's okay to let go."

She slid farther up, straddling his ribs, and put her lips against his. She didn't have to look to know that Andrew and Logan were beginning a slow, careful wooing of Elijah's body.

Kali moved closer and put her face against Kimberlyn's. Cheek to cheek, lips meeting and tongues softly investigating, they kissed Elijah together. Kimberlyn nibbled on his lower lip as Kali pulled his top lip into her mouth.

His breathing quickened, a moan barely leaving his throat.

Kimberlyn slid off him without breaking contact with his mouth and ran her fingers over his ribs, lower and lower still, until her questing fingers were stopped by another mouth. These lips were wrapped around Elijah's cock. In a caressing move, she followed those lips up and down Elijah's erection in a smooth, slow motion.

The bed dipped as someone moved in behind her, hard body firm against her back. She knew from the lighter touch of him that it was Andrew, which meant her alpha was the one with Elijah's cock deep inside his mouth.

She shivered at the thought, unable to resist pulling her lips from Elijah's and looking down the length of his body at Logan.

As if he knew she was watching him, Logan rolled his eyes up and met her gaze, his own so hot, so dark she shuddered again. His mouth encasing Elijah's huge sex brought a heavy, melting heat to her pussy, and she welcomed Andrew's fingers sliding around to caress her swollen breasts.

Elijah's deep, tortured moan caught her attention, tearing her gaze, reluctantly, from Logan.

Kali captured Elijah's chin and brought his face around to hers, her eyes almost bright enough to blind, and Kimberlyn glanced back to Logan.

He cupped Elijah's balls, and as though it was her body he played over, Kimberlyn could nearly feel the swirl of his tongue, the pull of his lips as he sucked...the warm moistness of his mouth.

She swallowed, her legs moving restlessly. "Andrew."

His hand left her nipple and traveled with tormenting sluggishness down her belly before slipping easily into the slit between her legs. He rubbed her clit, and her groans joined Elijah's.

Logan skimmed his free hand up one of Kali's legs, and she parted them readily for his touch. Kimberlyn longed to slide her tongue into Elijah's mouth but couldn't bring herself to stop watching his cock slipping in and out from between Logan's lips.

Surprising her and probably himself, Elijah pulled away from Kali and joined Kimberlyn in watching Logan. His flushed face bore a light sheen of sweat, his eyes half-closed and so very hungry.

He panted, pulling at the restraints as though he really wanted loose. "I'm going to..."

He let his voice trail off, but they knew what he meant to say. Logan immediately stopped sucking him, rising to his knees between Elijah's parted legs.

"Andrew."

Andrew smoothly pulled his fingers from between Kimberlyn's legs.

"Hey!" she complained.

"Be right back, sweetheart," he said, and she could hear the grin in his voice. He rolled away from her and was back in five seconds with a half-empty tube of lubricant, which he tossed to Logan.

"Oh my God," Kimberlyn whispered. "Is he...?"

"Hush," Andrew said. "Elijah would never have allowed himself to be restrained if he hadn't wanted this to happen."

Kimberlyn watched with fascinated lust as Logan rubbed himself with the lube, and under Elijah's half-scared, half-excited regard, reached beneath the other man's heavy sac, his fingers moving slowly.

The two men stared at each other. Kimberlyn's breath hitched, and the beginnings of an orgasm she knew she'd not be able to delay started in her pussy and spread through her body.

Andrew crawled toward Logan, and Kimberlyn felt Kali take her hand. They needed the contact for what was to come. She knew they all felt it, like an electric, nervous feeling in the stomach when a fierce storm was brewing.

Logan slid his hands under Elijah's thighs, lifting his heavy legs. Andrew took one leg, holding it up for Logan as the alpha, his stare still glued to Elijah's, took his cock in his hand.

Kali moved to Kimberlyn's side, and without being asked, they wrapped their arms around Elijah's leg, freeing Logan from holding it.

"Damn you!" Elijah yelled but didn't even attempt to shake them loose. He didn't close his eyes, either, as Logan leaned over him.

Kimberlyn rubbed her lips on the skin of his leg, barely able to breathe as she waited for Logan to sink inside Elijah. She wanted it to be her, but her sex throbbed as she watched the men.

She knew the moment it happened. Not only did Elijah roar and pull on his restraints so hard he ripped his hands free, but the power claimed them all.

It jumped from each of them like a hopping, zinging current of electricity. Kimberlyn knew it very well, like an old friend she never quite got accustomed to, no matter how many times she welcomed the friend into her home, her heart.

Kali screamed, her head back, the cords of her neck standing out in stark relief. Gooseflesh covered her body, and Kimberlyn smiled, understanding what it was like for the methuskein. All that power for the first time. It was overwhelming.

Kimberlyn climaxed, climaxed with the ghost fingers of the power between her legs, came as she watched Elijah's face contort with his own orgasm, as Logan pumped his hips, thrusting inside him.

Something snapped inside her, and for a moment she was filled with a pleasure not unlike an intense pain, only so very much more.

She knew they would all be changed, in ways they might not fully realize for days or weeks or months. Something had happened. Something had changed.

The power grew, swelling like a giant tidal wave. It embraced them, growing beyond anything she'd imagined.

And at the edge of her mind, she felt a vampire's bloody tears and hated herself, just a little, for caring. Hated herself for wishing him with her, his teeth at her neck, his cock between her legs.

Damn him.

Would she ever really be free?

Chapter Forty-three

In the days following their discovery by the humans, the wolves had little time for anything other than making decisions and plans. They finally settled on the hills of West Virginia. None of them could bear the thought of city life, with no place to run or hide or be themselves. In West Virginia, all that was possible.

Two of the wolves, brothers named Kevin and Clyde, had relatives in West Virginia. One of them, an elderly uncle, was willing to sell Logan sixteen acres of land deep in the hills, upon which sat the bones of an ancient cabin. They would build. They would begin anew.

Some of the wolves would integrate themselves into town life, just as they had here. Money was never a problem. The problem was staying safe. Keeping the humans in the dark.

“West Virginia scares me,” Kali had said.

“You say that when you live in the backwoods of Kentucky?” Andrew raised an eyebrow, a gleam of humor in his eyes.

“Come on, Kelly,” Elijah replied. “No reason to be afraid. We won’t let West Vagina hurt ya.”

“You know my name is Kali, jerk.” But her voice was mild, her gaze considering as she looked at him.

He shrugged. “Whatever.”

Kimberlyn sighed. “We’re going, and that’s that. Kali, you’re not really afraid of living in West Virginia, are you?”

Kali grinned. “Nah, I guess not.”

The pack concurred. If they had to leave the woods of Sanctuary, the hills of West Virginia were a good choice. Things could be hidden there.

Malik skulked around like a dark shadow, never welcome but never completely cast away either. He was a necessary evil, one the wolves knew would probably bring them more trouble in their new home. But there was nothing they could do about it. Yet. When trouble came, they would be prepared.

Kimberlyn knew they waited in an imaginary line for the chance to take Malik down. She wasn’t sure she could let them. Even after all he’d done to them, to her, there was still that tenuous, silken link, and she remembered what he could do for her. And *to* her.

But now, there were other things more pressing to think about. Like their imminent move. Their new home.

“We have to name it,” Roxie told the wolves. “We can’t go off to a new place and not have a name for it.” And there were tears in her eyes as she spoke. She crossed her arms and glared at the others, as if someone might argue with her.

No one did.

“How about Sandstone,” a young wolf volunteered. “That’s a good name.”

Roxie considered it, her eyes narrowed and a scarlet-tipped finger on her chin. “Nah, that’s not right.”

“I like Haven,” Jericha said.

Kimberlyn smiled at her, relieved beyond words that the wolves’ doctor had agreed to move with them. “That’s nice.”

But again, Roxie shook her head. “Nope. That one’s not right either.”

“Who made you the goddess of names, Rox?”

“Don’t you start on me, Elijah Berry. I made *myself* goddess of names. Any of you want to fight about it?”

Of course any of the wolves present could have taken Roxie down with a single swipe of a big paw, but no one dared get on her bad side. No one said a word.

“I didn’t think so,” she said. “Next?”

“How about Serenity?”

Roxie looked at Kali. “Hmm...Serenity. Serenity.”

“I like it,” Kimberlyn said.

The wolves nodded and murmured amongst themselves. Roxie whispered the name, her gaze distant. Trying it out, trying it on.

“Some of you don’t know that I was born and raised in West Virginia,” she said finally. “Serenity. The Hills of Serenity.” At last she gave a sharp, final nod. “Yes. That’s it. Our new home. Serenity.”

It held hope, that word.

☪ THE END ☪

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