



# *Somana Two: Michael*

Copyright © February 2010, Brenda Steele  
Cover art by Brenda Steele © February 2010

Amira Press  
Baltimore, MD 21216  
[www.amirapress.com](http://www.amirapress.com)

ISBN: 978-1-936279-00-5

No part of this e-book may be reproduced or shared by any electronic or mechanical means, including but not limited to printing, file sharing, and e-mail, without prior written permission from Amira Press.

## Chapter One

Michael ignored the buzz from his holo-phone in his pocket. He didn't have to look to know it was Willie calling to check up on him—again. Just because he didn't live in her pocket like all her other employees or jump to her commands, she had to bust his balls at every opportunity, call him until he was forced to turn his phone off. Like he did now.

He had been a fool to take a phone from her in the first place. The last twenty-plus years of his life had been spent on Earth, in a werewolf reservation managed by the agency. He had run free—or as free as they could in the reservation—and answered to no one. He hadn't wanted much out of life then. A warm, feminine body under him, food, a good hunt, that was all. Now, on the moon, living inside a space station that was fast becoming overcrowded, he wanted more.

Another holo-phone buzzed, and his brother Gabriel pressed a button to answer. An image of Willie projected up from the small contraption. "Willie," Gabriel grumbled, "let me guess. You're looking for my brother."

Not bothering to hide himself from her view or hearing, Michael called out, "Tell her I'm not here."

He turned his attention from Gabriel back to his brother's mate. From across the room where she worked her magic, by creating potions for her customers, Kelly's scent filled his nostrils. Her full breasts enticed him. In his fevered state, he remembered, before Gabriel had restored his mind, he had kissed her. She had tasted incredible then, but now she had changed. She was a werewolf, and not just any wolf, an alpha female.

An alpha female's scent could draw horny males from miles away, and without a doubt, Michael was one horny man. He had approached Gabriel about sharing her, if only for a single night, and the man had almost taken his head off. But Michael hadn't given up. This was their way. They shared lovers, most having two or three at a time. Gabriel might not have been brought up on the reservation, but their way was written in his DNA. He would come to his senses, or Michael would force him to.

Unable to resist a second longer, he took a step in Kelly's direction to have his vision of her blocked. He refocused to find his brother had stepped in front of him. "Don't make me kill you, Michael," Gabriel growled.

Michael bared his teeth, each one sharp like a blade that would rip his prey apart within heartbeats. His voice when he spoke was harsh and ragged. "Don't deny me what I have a right to have."

Gabriel's eyes turned almost black. "A right? To my mate? I must not have healed your mind as much as I thought, or the moon is still addling your wits. You have no rights here, and if you don't stop hunting my wife, I will forbid you to step foot in her shop again."

"Forbid me?" Michael shouted. He brought himself to his full height, still nose to nose with Gabriel, and gave in a little more to his transformation. "She's alpha. It's her duty to—"

Gabriel drove his fist into Michael's jaw, and Michael hit the wall behind him hard enough to put a hole in it at his elbow. Knowing his jaw was out of alignment, he worked it and spit out a mouthful of blood. Soon enough, he would heal.

Kelly interrupted. "Stop it. You two are family. You shouldn't be acting this way." Hanging from Gabriel's arm, she looked from one to the other of them.

Michael gritted his teeth at how her breasts pressed into his brother's arm. The low V-neckline showing off her cleavage drove him insane. Damn it, this moon was too much. Every minute of the day and night, he felt himself driven, the base instincts of the beast fighting for dominance inside him.

Michael reached out a hand toward Kelly's plump breasts, but before her husband could react, she changed, her canines lengthening and a growl rolling up from her throat. She moved around her husband while snarling at Michael, her eyes slits and menace clear in her stance. "If you lay one finger on me, you will live to regret it."

Kelly went beyond any werewolf he had ever known, male or female. She married magic and the beast in the most deadly of combinations. While Michael stared at her, judging her intent to attack, he sensed something pressing into his mind, similar to what Gabriel had done to reach him. But this was different. Strange images zipped through his head at lightning speed. He hit the floor, holding his head with one hand and bracing much of his weight with the other. The pain was almost too much to bear.

"Damn it," he muttered, the agony so great he couldn't push more than those two words past his lips.

"Honey, stop," Gabriel commanded her. She must not have heard him, because with his eyes closed, Michael heard the jangling of her hanging earrings as his brother shook her. "Kelly!"

"What?" she said.

The pain eased. Dazed and weak, Michael used the wall shelf to help himself up, and he stumbled toward the exit. Gabriel called to him before he could get through the door. He paused without turning and hated the embarrassment coursing through him at letting a woman—even an alpha—get the best of him. "What?"

"Don't come back until you're ready to respect me and my mate. And . . ." His brother moved up behind him. The hairs on the back of Michael's neck rose on end. "Whatever you have going with Willie, end it. Working for her is one thing. Spreading her legs is another."

Michael whirled around. How did Gabriel know about that? "I don't know what you're talking about. Besides, you don't dictate my life. If I was to fuck Willie, that's none of your business."

"You're a fool. Once she gets her claws in you, you won't have a say in your own life. Might be too late from the amount of times she calls me in a day looking for you."

Michael dared a glance in Kelly's direction and then refocused on Gabriel. He flashed his brother a cocky grin. "Maybe you're jealous, want her for yourself. See, that's what you get when you bite a woman and make her your mate. It narrows your choices, cuts your fun."

Gabriel jerked the door open and rested a hand in the center of Michael's chest. He gave a mighty shove that sent Michael head over heels into the dirty street. The door slammed in his face when he looked up. With a sigh, he rolled to a sitting position and ran his hand through his hair. Yeah, he definitely needed to make some changes, or do like Gabriel suggested—stay the hell out of the area.

Then again, that would be hard on Somana Two. The station wasn't but so big, and even if he was at one end and Kelly at the other, he'd still pick up her scent with a million people in between them. He stood up and staggered down the crowded street, not bothering to utter an excuse when he bumped others. Flared nostrils, narrowed eyes, and, when necessary, a growl, kept them from making an issue of it.

After walking around for a few hours, he came to Willie's house. The place was as close to a mansion as anything on Somana Two could get. He paused at the wall, which he knew hid a small courtyard to rival any on Earth. Sexual desire raged in him, and he knew that if he approached Willie, she'd invite him into her bed, but over the last few months, he had grown tired of sleeping with her, if that could be possible for someone like him. No matter how many times they were together, his cravings were not assuaged. Moments afterward, when he had worn her out, he had to stand in a cold shower.

If he had any sense, he would leave the moon. At least on Earth, the agency had provided an endless stream of prostitutes. There, he had a big appetite for sex, but it was not like this. Still undecided, he glanced up at the clock reflected on the dome and noted that it was two in the morning. The crowds at some point had thinned to one person here and there, but Michael knew on the seedier side of Somana Two. Often, people didn't go to bed until five in the morning or later. There, he should find a little more excitement, and although Somana Two didn't officially have prostitutes, he'd heard there were women who were willing to have the kind of fun he was looking for if a man bought her a drink. Not knowing why he hadn't considered it sooner, Michael turned from Willie's house just as his holo-phone buzzed, and he headed for the south side of the space station.

\* \* \* \*

As he had heard, this side of town was still wall-to-wall people. Cars zoomed up and down the roads, loud music spilled from a few bars and clubs, and even a movie theater was still open, showing an ancient film he had seen once called *An American Werewolf in Paris*. He smirked as he remembered the way werewolves were portrayed in it. Should have consulted one of his ancestors, he thought. With a few such alterations from his kind, the film would have screams coming from the theater for weeks.

When he rounded a corner, he stumbled and fell toward the ground. If he hadn't put a hand out, he would have been face-first for the second time tonight. This time, it wasn't from a shove, but a scent that had his head spinning one second and his pulse pounding the next. His mouth watered. Fierce, uncontrollable need rocked him to the core, all from the unmistakable smell of a woman. Not just any woman, he thought as he fought his way to his feet and resisted the urge to change into a wolf in order to hunt her. This woman was special, someone he had to see, someone he needed to possess.

Barreling around a final corner, he at last came upon her, thick blonde hair down to her waist, a tiny figure, with an ass he couldn't wait to get his hands on. She was leaning into the window of an aircar, her arms crossed and an earnest look on her face. She wouldn't win over a client with that attitude, he thought. But then he dropped his gaze down over her body. She wore black leather pants that hugged her sexy legs like a second skin.

He willed her to straighten and, as if she had heard his silent plea, she nodded to the guy in the aircar and stood up to point out something on the horizon. When she did, Michael groaned at the sight before him. Her breasts strained against the white T-shirt she wore, the black jacket accompanying it unzipped to her waist. Michael would have preferred something with a V-neck so he could enjoy a little cleavage, but his beauty was built to lasso a man with no more than a hint of what was beneath her clothes. He was hooked.

While the target of his desire bent toward the man in the aircar again, Michael moved up behind her and let her feel his cock rock solid against her ass. He braced a hand on either side of her on the hood of the aircar and leaned in to whisper in her ear. "Forget him. I'll give you whatever you want to spend the rest of the night in my bed."

She tried to twist around to face him, but Michael hadn't given her enough room. He moved back a half-step to let her turn, and then he pushed one thigh between hers and pinned her to the side of the aircar. He didn't give a fig what the other guy thought.

His beauty rested her palms on his chest and smiled up at him, blue eyes twinkling with amusement. "So, let me get this straight," she purred, which made desire ripple through him. "You're offering me—"

“A night of sexual pleasure at whatever price you set,” he finished and pressed tighter against her. He didn’t miss the catch in her breath as their bodies sealed together.

“Because you think I’m a . . .” She blinked in seeming disbelief. “You arrogant piece of trash,” she roared. “You actually think I’m out here selling my body, and to Joey no less.”

He frowned. “Joey?”

She crooked a thumb over her shoulder at the man in the aircar. “Joey.” Her mesmerizing eyes narrowed. “Now that you know you’re mistaken, you can get off me before I feed you your balls.”

Joey snickered from the safety of the vehicle. “I’d move, guy. She’s been known to castrate a man. Just a warning.”

Michael picked up on the fire in her eyes as she gazed at him, but he knew that fire wasn’t all for the fact that he had misjudged who and what she was. From the moment he slipped his leg between hers, his mystery woman was on fire for sex. Her natural scent was heady, no doubt, but with the proximity of their bodies, it had changed, deepened to something almost as wild as wolf packs back on Earth. The aroma filled his nostrils, making his head reel all over again. This was too good, too addictive. And addicted he was—with one inhale.

## Chapter Two

Chrissie could not believe the nerve of this asshole. He thought he could grab her, rub against her, and there would be no consequences? So she liked to dress sexy, on or off the job, so what? Did that give him a license to touch her? *Hell, no!* She should have already tied his dick in a knot or head-butted him in the chin, which she was likely to do. As Joey had said, she'd do whatever it took to put a man in his place. She had already delayed too long because the truth of the matter was, what she *wanted* to do and what she *should* do were two different things. She wanted to get her hands on his piece all right, but more so to feel whether it was as thick and long as it seemed to be pressed on her leg.

She longed to take his hand and guide it between her thighs to make him stroke her kitty, which had been neglected far too long because none of the men on Somana Two had what she was looking for. None of the ones she had met in the bars, that is. This man, who had to be six five at least, with shoulders wide enough to block out the dome clock, and cold, black hair hanging too long and tussled about his handsome face, was one she hadn't seen before. She would have remembered this one—and have sampled him by now if she had met him.

She repeated her threat and added, "You have three seconds."

He grinned down at her and flashed even white teeth, which put her in mind more of a dangerous predator than a loser looking for a good time. "That's plenty," he said, and then lowered his mouth to hers.

Chrissie gasped, but that gave him entrance between her lips. His tongue darted out and filled her mouth. Its thick, wet warmth had shivers tingling along her skin. He tugged her closer with his hands on her waist and pushed his tongue in and out of her mouth before running it along her bottom lip.

She told herself to turn her head, to crush his nuts, to do anything, but instead she gave as much as she got, forgetting everything around her in order to taste this man, to be consumed by him. She almost forgot herself enough to moan, but she bit it off and then, jerking away, swiped a hand over her lips.

A crack across his cheek left his face red and her palm stinging, but she didn't regret it. "Pig," she growled.

Proud of himself, he grinned but didn't release her. She raised her hand again, but this time, he caught her wrist and twisted it behind her. He would have zoomed in for another kiss, but Chrissie put up a knee to catch him in the balls. With lightning reflexes, he captured her leg between his and dragged her tighter to his firm form. Her body, to her utter disgust, sparked with lust.

"Let me go," she demanded. "You'll be very sorry if you don't back off right now."

"Funny"—he snickered—"I don't feel sorry in the least. You, however, feel amazing. Those breasts are just what a man likes under him, along with the rest of you. And I do appreciate the view, let me tell you."

Chrissie knew her face flared as bright as his did when she hit him. The bastard stared at the imprint her breasts against her shirt. "Pervert," she shouted.

Something flashed at the corner of her eye, and having seen it time and again, Chrissie identified it in seconds. Another of her partners had drawn his knife and was about to attack the man holding her hostage with his sexy body. She opened her mouth to warn him, for some reason not wanting to see the guy hurt, but before she could say a word, his eyes flashed an odd color, and then he released her to whirl around.

Riley was a big man in his own right, above six feet and at least two fifty, but he came up off the ground with one of her attacker's hands around his neck. Her partner in crime flailed about, swinging his knife and missing each time.

"Son of a bitch, put me down," Riley demanded.

"Drop it," the stranger commanded in a deeper voice than the one he had spoken in earlier. Chrissie shivered and hoped no one noticed.

She pulled herself together and stood up to the beast of a man. "Put him down. You've had your fun. Now move on." He had the nerve to ignore her, which pissed her off even more. "Did you hear me?"

After a long time, when they all seemed to be holding their breath, the stranger lowered Riley to his feet. Trying to get a bit of his own back, she supposed, Riley took a swipe at the man when he was free. The stranger sidestepped the attack and did a move too fast for Chrissie to follow. The clink of the knife hitting the ground confirmed Riley's complete humiliation. He sank to one knee and rubbed his wrist, breathing hard.

When the man swung back to her, she prepared herself for more trouble, but he flashed his now-familiar smile. "Your name?"

She rolled her eyes. "Excuse me?"

"I need a name to give to my dream girl."

She spun away, intent on dismissing him. "Yeah, *only* in your dreams, beast boy."

He chuckled and uttered low enough so that she just caught his words, "If you only knew."

"What was that?" She should forget that he existed and go about the business she had been trying to arrange for a few days from now. This man didn't warrant getting her off her schedule. If there was anything Chrissie Malvoy was known for, it was sticking to the plan. Hell, she'd force a plan through and complete it on time no matter what the obstacle. That's why she got the better jobs in her profession.

"Oh no, you don't."

The stranger caught her wrist for the second time and used the hold to force her back around to face him. She jerked on his grasp but found herself to be fighting a losing battle. The muscles she glimpsed rippling beneath his shirt were not just for show.

"I will kiss you again if you don't tell me your name."

Chrissie couldn't believe she stood there considering how great the punishment for not telling him would be. But then she would never admit that to his arrogant ass. She blew out a noisy sigh. "Fine. It's Chrissie. Now let me go."

"Chrissie what?"

"Chrissie Malvoy," she snapped.

He bowed as if this were the olden days or like she gave a crap who he was. "I am Michael."

She sassed him. "Just Michael?"

He winked and kissed the tip of her nose. She froze, steeling herself against the feelings his slightest touch evoked in her.

"Well, it was just Michael for a long time, but just recently, I took on my brother's last name. It's Michael Hunter. I'm extremely pleased to meet you."

"I'll bet you are." She watched four other men stroll up and gave them a slight nod. "Now that you've gotten the information and the free feels you set out to get, you can get lost. Hope I never see you again."

Chrissie signaled to her guys to follow in the aircar as she jumped into Joey's vehicle and the two of them zoomed off down the street. The last she heard of Michael was his bold



laughter as they put distance between her and him. She might have mouthed off that she never wanted to see him again, but the truth was altogether different. Just like he had called her his dream girl, Chrissie was pretty sure she'd have a hard time keeping him out of her nighttime imaginings—for a long time.

\* \* \* \*

On the outskirts of Somana Two, Chrissie looked over the personal transport ship that would carry her and her crew across the barren surface of the moon. She rested a palm on the dome and frowned. "Are we sure about your guy, Joey? He'll get us out with no alarms going off? If we blow this, we'll likely be either imprisoned or kicked off the moon. Somana Two has its issues, but it's home."

Joey fiddled with a small leather pouch in his hands that had seen better days. He did that whenever he was unsure of something. "Yeah, yeah. My contact said the guy who will be on duty that night at the gate will let us through with no paperwork, and the best part is we don't have to do it through the main exit where all the other ships launch from. We can stay hidden when we leave, and because there's no light extending past the dome, it'll be a dark ride unseen all the way to the site."

Chrissie moved from examining the dome to return to the transport. The vehicle would fit just four of her usual six men plus her, so this job was already shorthanded. And while traveling to their destination under total darkness was good for not being spotted by the agents, it was not good for safe navigation. They would have to rely on the transport's sensors. If anything went wrong, they might be splattered all over the cold rocks and craters. She shivered at the thought.

"Somehow, Joey, I'm not confident about your source." She pointed to his restless hands. "When you're not sure, you fiddle with that thing. What aren't you telling me? All our asses are on the line."

He jumped to his feet, his eyes wide. "No, Chrissie, I promise. Trust me. This guy is legit. He'll help us. I've known him forever, since we were pickpockets back on Earth and got sent up for it. He stuck by me that whole time and even got me out early with his connections. He gets in good with people, so a lot of them owe him favors."

She stood there staring Joey down. Joey had been with her for the last three years, and all of his connections had panned out. Except, she thought with trepidation, when he fiddled with that damn pack. She should call this job off, or at least postpone it. Nothing felt right, and she had learned the best way to survive in the thieving business was to follow her gut. It had kept her alive in too many dangerous situations. But this job meant a nice payoff, one that might get her that much closer to what she had been wanting for a while, a café. She was close, so close that she could smell it and see it in her mind.

Of course, she wasn't going to tell the others about her dream. They'd think she had gone soft, and she might lose respect in their eyes. That could not happen, not when she had fought hard to get it in the first place—a woman leading a group of hardened men, with criminal records every one? None was a killer, of course. A couple had been charged with assault, but that was as heavy as it got. They had forged a name for themselves on the uglier side of Somana Two and even into a few higher-up places on the north side.

In fact, rumor had it that the money behind this job was someone who had a reason to screw the new head of the agency that governed both Somana Two and Earth. Stick it to the man in charge, that was always a good thing in Chrissie's book. She laughed.

"Okay, fine. We'll do it. Everybody in?"

Her men all nodded, waving various weapons, eyes glittering in the dim light of the abandoned south docks where the salvage ships used to come in. Now they landed in a nice spaceship port on the other side of Somana Two. Miss Willie hadn't wasted time in restructuring things the way she liked them, which made this the perfect place from which to sneak out of Somana Two without papers, as well as for meeting to plan their next jobs. The place wouldn't be a good one for long once other groups found out about the advantages, but for now, Chrissie ruled the area, just as she liked it.

"Okay, then we meet here in two days at ten p.m. Joey, let your guy know we'll be at the gate no later than ten twenty-two. Got it? Everyone know what they need to do, or do I need to go over it again?"

Several grunts rent the air, which meant they were prepared. Chrissie narrowed her gaze on them and drilled every step into their heads for the fiftieth time anyway.

### Chapter Three

Michael used the key Willie had given him to get into her house. The place was quiet, everyone having turned in hours ago. He had spent the last few days searching for that woman he had kissed on the south side but had been unable to find her. Even questioning the bartenders and the patrons in a few bars had turned up nothing. From the looks he got, he figured they were lying about never hearing of her. They protected their own, he guessed, and he was not one of them.

Frustration made him more irritable than usual. Asking around for her had been a last resort since he had assumed he would be able to sniff her out. Her scent was forever etched in his memory, but even changing into his full wolf form had meant nothing. Only small traces of her in a few locations remained. He began to think she was no longer on Somana Two, but that couldn't be true. In the short time he had been here, he could recognize the diehards, the ones that wouldn't leave unless kicked off the moon. He did okay on the moon, but he still dreamed of returning to Earth one day.

For now, though, everything he wanted was here, all put together in one hot package—Chrissie Malvoy. Just as he knew would happen, he had dreamed of her writhing beneath him, calling out his name while he took her. His cock hardened at the mere thought of it. Her scent seemed to fill his nostrils again, and he fought for control before he burst right here in the hallway.

A light clicked on, and Willie stood in a doorway to his right with her arms crossed over her ample breasts. At one point, with her almost naked, wearing a sheer nightgown that showed off all her goods, he would have been panting to get her horizontal. However, with images of Chrissie dominating his mind, there was no room for lusting after Willie. The truth of it hit him hard, and he wasn't too sure he liked being that driven by a woman. Hell, Chrissie was human, for fuck's sake. He didn't have an excuse. However, he'd learned a long time ago, what the beast in him wanted, the beast got. Michael went along for the pleasurable ride.

"Is that for me?" she asked with a pointed look at his crotch. Her expression hardened. "No, it couldn't be. Because if it was, you'd have come home days ago and answered my calls. Who is she?"

He continued to walk by her, calling over his shoulder after he passed, "If there was a she, I wouldn't be hard."

"Don't play me for a fool, Michael. I've been around too long." She followed him to the room she had offered him six months ago, his own space even though he had spent little time there, preferring instead to be in her bed. That was about to change. "You didn't care that I was worried not hearing from you."

"Cut the crap, Willie." He spun around to face her after tossing a duffel bag on the bed. "You're not in love. In fact, I doubt you even like me. I do jobs for you. You pay me—with money and your body. Don't think for a second I don't know that you settled on me as your lover. You wanted the alpha, my brother. Since you can't have him . . ." He shrugged.

"You're packing. So it's over; is that it?"

"Yeah." He glanced at her, intending to soften if she showed even a hint of emotion. There was none, other than anger. He bet she was pissed that he was the one to end it and not her. Willie busted balls on a regular basis. She had men and women running around to do her bidding. She'd bought and sold dozens of them in one form or another. Her cold heart and blind ambition were what had gotten her to the position she was in now, the most powerful woman on Somana Two and Earth. He'd be a fool to stand against her, but what

the hell. A little danger kept life interesting. "There is no other woman. I've decided to move on. That's it."

"You owe me, Michael."

His eyes widened in disbelief. "Owe you what?"

In a flash, her belligerence was gone. She moved with sensual grace over to him and lined her slender figure with his. One hand slid over his chest down to his waistband. She would have ventured lower if he didn't stop her. "Aw, don't be mean, Michael." She pouted and brushed her hardened nipples against his arm. He wondered if she could produce that form at will. "I need you do some work for me."

Michael shoved her away from him. "You don't have to turn on the charm. I can still use the money. I'll work for you, but I won't share your bed. I've rented a room."

She glared but backed off. "Where?"

"That's none of your business. You can reach me on my phone. If I like the pay and the job, I'll take it. If not, I won't."

"You don't get to call the shots now, Michael. I don't know where you went off and grabbed a set of balls, but I don't appreciate it."

She rested her hands on her hips, and he realized why he often stayed away and didn't take her calls. Willie thinking she owned him, a werewolf, set him on edge. Too many times he wanted to prove to her that what he did, he did of his own free will. But that would mean violence, and with his blood feeling like it was just below boiling most of the time, he had to get away every now and then.

Irritated, he dropped his bag on the floor and crossed over to her. He raised a hand to her hair and tangled his fingers in it, fighting all the time for dominance over the beast. "Let's get one thing straight, Willie. You never did, and you never will own me. You may like rough sex, so you go after werewolves, but you're playing with your life." He moved in until his face was less than an inch from hers. "Don't fucking push me, got it?"

To her credit, Willie didn't register how he must have terrified her, but he smelled her fear. Willie had spent time on Earth years ago as a prostitute servicing werewolves on the reservation. Michael had come across her there and had even propositioned her, but she had been all about the Alphas, although there were few of those. Even then, he'd seen how she loved power, loved to be surrounded by it until she had it in her own grasp.

"I get it," she said at last, and he let her go. She put distance between them and straightened her nightgown. When she crossed her arms to hide her breasts, she was all business. "I need you to check a site outside of Somana Two for me."

He frowned. "Outside? What do you mean? As far as I know, there's only rock out there."

Her eyes seemed to sparkle with the joy she got from knowing something others didn't. "I've been planning it awhile, but because Somana Two is getting overpopulated, I'm funding an expansion." Her expression changed to one of disgust. "The south side is growing the most, the vermin leaking into this area more and more each day."

For some reason, Michael took offense at that but didn't address it. "So a Somana Three, I guess."

She waved a hand. "I'm not sure yet. I'm considering giving it a new name. I never liked the name Somana. Or I could just leave it at that and link the two somehow. That might not solve my problem. Whatever, the situation is someone has broken into the facility we have over at that site. I need you to go and check it out. If you catch the thief, I want him brought to me. I'll deal with him."

He flared his nostrils at her suggestion. "I may be a beast, Willie, but I do require oxygen, and I don't need to test it to know that those little space suits won't stand up to my claws."

"And I may be pissed at you, but I wouldn't send you to your death. You'd have to push me pretty far for that." Her eyes held a warning he ignored. "I find you useful. The facility has oxygen. We've stored supplies for the building over there, and the first thing I arranged for was security, but someone bypassed it and hauled out thousands of dollars' worth of equipment. I suspect it's not about the equipment but rather sabotage. I have enemies, believe it or not."

Michael smirked. "No way."

She glared. "Anyway, I need you to check it out. I want the person brought to me so I can question him. I have my suspicions of who is behind it, but I need to be sure."

"What will you do to the thief?" he asked out of curiosity more than interest.

"I'm not known for mercy, Michael. Screw me over, screw with your life. Period."

"Fine." He hoisted his bag to his shoulder and headed toward the door. "When the guy makes another move, I'll be there, and I'll bring him here."

"Not here, at my office," she instructed him.

He waved. "I'll drag him in, without a doubt."

\* \* \* \*

Michael watched them from the shadows. He had picked up their scent before he caught sight of the four men and one woman. It had been all he could do not to waltz over to the stealthy group and demand to know where Chrissie was keeping herself that he hadn't been able to pick up her scent before now. In truth, he just wanted to get his hands on her.

Then he recalled the job Willie had sent him to do—take down the thieves and bring them to her. Michael had no qualms about ripping into Chrissie's buddies, but he wasn't going to take her to Willie. For a human, the woman was astute. She'd pick up on Michael's attraction to Chrissie and set out to make the woman's life a living hell.

To see just what they were up to, he decided to tail them around the facility. Besides, another wilder scent reached him from the darkness. He believed he could identify what—or rather who—it was, but if he was right, that would mean taking extra care. He could be outnumbered if the enemy was still here. And, frankly, where else was there to go on this cold chunk of rock?

What Michael assumed would be a shell of a building with life support and nothing else had turned out to be a structure that put him in mind of a giant mall. From one end to the other, it had to be a few miles. Along the multiple corridors were smaller compartments, some with walls and doors, and others with just the framework. Throughout, lighting was minimal. Michael guessed the other uninvited guests could hide out for weeks, maybe months, in this place. That is, assuming they could find food and water.

As he moved from shadow to shadow behind Chrissie and her band of thieves, he tapped the holo-phone in his pocket. He considered calling Gabriel about the other intruders but changed his mind. Until he had solid proof, he didn't want to contact his brother. Gabriel was liable to think it was a ploy to get back to Kelly's shop. He grunted, amazed. Days had gone by, and he hadn't thought of Kelly once.

"What are we grabbing this time?" one of the guys asked around the imitation jerky hanging from his mouth.

Michael wrinkled his nose against the smell. Another drawback to the moon, he thought, no real meat. Just thinking about the word made his stomach growl. And then he was hearing it aloud. He touched his throat, wondering if he was hallucinating again like he had done when he first arrived here. No, he hadn't made the sound.

"Quiet," Chrissie snapped as if she heard it as well. She stopped walking and began to search the shadows.

Michael didn't move from the spot where he hid, even when her lovely eyes paused on him. Could she see him in the darkness? Or sense him? He breathed deep and didn't pick up anything unusual about her like before. Street smarts, he decided, a sort of honed instinct that went beyond what most people sensed about disruptions in their environment. Chrissie must have needed that and more to survive.

He grinned as he watched her thin figure twist this way and that in what he figured was her signature clothing: dark colors, formfitting. She liked to be sexy, nothing wrong with that. Taking in the roughnecks around her, he wondered how many of them had tried what he did when he first met her. The thought of another man touching her angered him, but then Chrissie could take care of herself, of that he was sure.

The defiance in her movements, her words, convinced him she could hold her own against anyone or anything. He cursed. Anything but *that*. The wolf came from the opposite side of the area where they stood. Two more joined it, heads low, growls rumbling up from their throats. Why hadn't he been paying closer attention? He'd been caught up in admiring Chrissie. Now, all of the humans were in danger.

Gabriel had told him months ago that a ship carrying three werewolves from Earth had never landed at Somana Two—and hadn't been heard from since. That meant they never received Gabriel's little "mind meld" to straighten out their heads after the moon fried their senses. These three must be them, and from the look in their eyes, Michael knew he'd be in one hell of a fight. If Chrissie wasn't there, he might let the wolves have the men, but there was no way he'd allow her to be the main course for starving werewolves.

"What the hell," Chrissie shouted.

From nowhere, she pulled out a gun. No one used weapons with bullets in them on the moon as everyone had sense enough to know, you don't want to shoot a hole in the dome and damage the compression. However, in this structure, they were inside steel and concrete. Chrissie held the newer weapons that, from what he had heard, had rolled off production not two weeks earlier. What would his employer say to that obvious theft? Still, the laser was a joke for the werewolf, painful, but it wouldn't slow them down.

His intended lover aimed at the nearest wolf. "Get out of here, guys. They look crazy and hungry."

"Not without you, Chrissie," one of the men called. He pulled a knife from his jacket and ran at the second wolf.

*Idiot.* Michael dropped back deeper into the shadows of another corridor and removed his clothes amid the shadows. Fighting in his human form wouldn't work. When he was naked, he transformed, ignoring the popping of his bones, the aching in the contracting and releasing of every muscle. Hair sprouted at all points, and his teeth sharpened. The scents of the three werewolves, the men, and especially Chrissie filled his nostrils. The hunt was on. Adrenaline pumped through his veins as he dug his claws into the floor beneath him. While he ran toward the fight, he caught the howls of pain from the man who had first run to a wolf with only a knife to defend himself. For a moment, the smell of blood distracted him, and he had a sudden urge to attack the man as well. But then Chrissie shouted and let off several laser rounds from her gun.

Michael swung in her direction in time to see the first wolf leap from the ground straight at her. Without a second thought, Michael went on the attack. He caught the other wolf in the side before it could pounce on Chrissie and sent it skidding over the slippery floor. Michael positioned himself between Chrissie and the wolf. The beast struggled to its feet while shaking its head. Infuriated that Michael had blocked its attack, it came at him instead, but Michael was ready. He ducked his head and shouldered the wolf hard until it hit the floor. Then, pinning it down, he bit into the thick fur at the neck.

“Oh, wow, I think that one is trying to protect me,” Chrissie shouted somewhere behind him. “Fuck!”

Michael picked up the sound of more shots just before pain ripped through his back. Damn, if she knew that he was on her side, why the hell was she shooting at him? But then he realized it wasn't Chrissie but one of the other wolves. Two against one.

The second wolf sent Michael flying much like he had done the first, and then they were both on him. A swipe across his muzzle filled his mouth with blood. Michael shook more from his brow, which had begun to drip into his eyes. He rolled away from another bite, but the wolves were coming at him nonstop. They were too crazed. He'd never beat both at this point with their ragged minds reducing to nil any restraint they might have had. And if the third wolf finished with the human and turned to Michael, he was done for—and so was Chrissie. He had no choice but to fight harder and win.

## Chapter Four

Tears filled Chrissie's eyes as she saw how the two wolves tore at the other one, but she swiped them away. This was no time to cry like a weak woman. No matter how many times she had fired at them, they did nothing more than flinch and kept attacking. When her gun jammed from overheating, she tossed it away and tore up her pants leg to get at her knife above her left ankle. The one above the right followed, and she went at the wolves.

Before she could get to them, her protector bumped her away with what looked like a gentle thump but instead knocked her on her ass. One of her knives skittered away, and when she went after it, the third wolf looked up from the mess he had made of Joey. Her partner lay unmoving. Chrissie screamed and went at the wolf, but a growl from behind stopped her. She swung around. The beasts had changed positions. She couldn't tell which wolf had been helping her. They all looked crazy and huge, bigger than she thought wolves would be.

Then it hit her, all late in the game. These were no regular wolves. These were werewolves. She'd heard like everyone else on Somana Two that a few were suspected of being here. That meant big trouble. The moon and werewolves. Her mind refused to do the math. Damn, this might be the end of her dream before it had even begun.

A snarl behind her made her spin around just in time for the wolf that had finished with Joey to launch onto her chest. Chrissie crashed to the floor, the breath leaving her in a *whoosh*. Her head smacked the linoleum, and try as she might, she couldn't get her vision to clear. Darkness closed in around the edges of her sight, but she was a fighter, a survivor. Tightening her fists to force herself to hold onto consciousness, she realized she hadn't dropped her other knife. One lay clenched in her palm.

With the wolf on her chest, Chrissie didn't think twice about the consequences. She brought the knife up under the wolf and felt it plunge into his chest. He howled and so did Chrissie at what she'd done, at the gore, and the exhaustion. When the creature stilled on top of her, she used the last of her strength to push it off and lay there trying to catch her breath. Another snarl began nearby. She was done for now because she had no more energy to fight.

\* \* \* \*

Chrissie opened her eyes to almost total darkness. The only light came from a bulb several feet away that flickered off and on. She tried to move, but every muscle in her body ached. With a moan, she flipped over onto her stomach. The scent of blood filled her nostrils, and for a moment, she thought it was hers. With hands shaking with exhaustion, she searched over her body for evidence of a gash, but found none. And then the memory of what had happened came flooding back. The wolves. They had been attacked. Joey was dead, but what of the others? She struggled to sit up. Bodies lay around her, those who had been with her for years.

None of the wolves was there. They got what they wanted. Chrissie choked back a sob, and then she saw him, the man lying close behind her, a barrier between her and the corridor leading into another area, as if he protected her. What jarred her most was that he lay naked with a pile of clothing lying near him like he'd been about to dress just before he collapsed.

Chrissie didn't recognize him with his head turned away from her, his wild hair covering the side of his face. She inched nearer. "Please don't be dead. Hey, are you okay?" she called to him.



His chest rose and fell, and then he coughed and groaned. She pressed a hand to her mouth. The gash on his side and across his neck looked serious. She would need to get him to a doctor fast, or he would die. Ignoring the pain, she forced herself up to her knees and crawled over to him. She tried to get the shirt that lay next to him onto him, but she found it difficult to get his limbs to bend in the right direction. She frowned. The man was huge, his muscled arms cut to perfection and his chest expansive.

“Well, at least I can cover his, um . . .” She averted her eyes from looking lower. It had been too long since she had had a man, and this was not the time to lust over an injured guy’s cock. Besides, those wolves might come back at any time, and she wanted to be nowhere around when they did.

First, she piled his clothing on top of him and then used strips of cloth from the others to rig a harness to drag the injured man back to her transport. Making slow progress, she put one foot in front of the other and concentrated on getting there. The howl from somewhere in the darkness stopped her dead. With a dry swallow, she glanced back.

“Shit.” A narrow trail of blood led from the attack area to the man she pulled. “We’re not going to make it.”

The second howl was closer. Her heart thundered in her chest. The thought of leaving the man ran through her head, but she had never left a comrade behind, and she wouldn’t start now. She didn’t know this man, but he had come from somewhere to defend her.

She got a firmer grip on the harness and dug her booted feet into the floor. With the last of her reserves, she shifted into a run. Just maybe the wolves would be preoccupied with finishing off the bodies back there. She hated that happening to her colleagues, but it was too late for any of them.

“What are you doing?”

Chrissie stopped and looked down. Familiar smoky grey eyes looked up at her. “You!” She dropped the harness, making him hit his head on the floor. He winced. “Sorry,” she muttered. “What are you doing here?”

He held onto his side with one hand and sat up using the other for support. “I could ask you the same thing. In fact, I did ask what you’re doing right now.”

“Trying to save your sorry ass.” She put her hands on her hips. “I don’t know where you came from, but now that you’re awake, you can take care of yourself. If you keep up, you can ride in my transport. If not, well, I’m sorry.”

She turned to leave, but he popped up to his feet faster than a man in his position should have been able to do. He took hold of her arm. “Hold on. You won’t make it without me by your side.”

“The hell I won’t.” She tried to shake him off, without success.

While she tried to ignore the feelings that were coursing through her from his hand on her arm and the obvious erection he sported at this inopportune time, he looked back the way they came and sniffed the air. She blinked. Who was this guy, other than a nut with no shame?

He bent to slip into his clothing, in obvious pain. “They do not want to leave anyone alive to tell that they are here.”

She frowned. “Who doesn’t?”

“The werewolves.”

Her mouth went dry. “You can’t be serious. Not on the moon. They’re not allowed. The theory is that if a werewolf were to come here, they’d go crazy and kill—”

“Exactly.”

Chrissie shivered. She had dismissed her earlier theory that they were werewolves, not wanting to believe it, but with Michael confirming her suspicions, she had to accept the truth.

“They’re picking up my scent and holding back because of me, but I don’t know how long that will work. We need to go to your transport together, or trust me you will not make it there alive. Period.”

She didn’t move. “I killed one of them, stabbed him in the chest, but he wasn’t back there at the attack site.”

“He’s not dead. You wounded him, yes, but he’s not dead.”

Chrissie’s heart did a wild tattoo in her chest. Were they indestructible? “Anyway, why would they hold back because of you? Who are you?”

“You break my heart, beautiful. Tell me you haven’t forgotten my name. It’s Michael Hunter, remember?”

“I remember your name, but you know what I’m asking. Don’t play games. Why would those beasts hold back because of you?”

He didn’t answer right away, and she began to think back to the fight, remembering the wolf that fought against the others. Her eyes widened, and she backed away from him, searching for her weapon. Too late, she recalled that she had left it behind. “You’re one of them. You’re a werewolf. B-But why aren’t you crazed?” She gasped and touched her lips. “I let you kiss me.”

His eyes darkened, which made her even more terrified than she was learning he was one of the wild creatures that had killed her friends and was hunting her now. She wondered if he was just slowing her down to make sure the others got to her. Of course, that didn’t make sense being that he had risked his life to keep them from tearing her apart. Chancing a glance below his face, she stared in shock at his neck and chest, visible because he hadn’t buttoned his shirt. The gaping wounds that had looked nearly fatal earlier were smaller. The blood flow had stopped, and the fact that he wasn’t passed out, having lost so much blood, had her questioning for the second time whether he was immortal.

“You’re with them,” she shouted and turned to run.

Michael caught her around the waist and dragged her back against him. She shivered at the contact despite herself and fought down a desire to reach back to stroke his cock. She must be out of her mind to think something like that right now.

“I won’t hurt you. I promise.” His breathing labored, he panted in her ear. Chrissie realized while his wounds weren’t as bad, they were not closed. He must be in intense pain. “Don’t fight me, because I can’t expend energy on you and keep them off our backs. We need to move.”

“But . . .”

“Save your questions for when we’re zipping over the moon’s surface,” he commanded.

Chrissie decided not to argue. She wanted out of this place bad, and no matter what the man said who had hired her, she would never return. Her next several jobs would have to be lesser-paying ones until she made up for this one. Then again, she had to live through the next few minutes. Michael took her hand in his large one, and together they ran.

Michael’s long legs ate up the yards like they were nothing, and twice he had to haul Chrissie to her feet when she tumbled because of the pace. With no moments to spare, they rounded the final bend to spot her transporter with the air-lock compartment leading out of the facility. Not until they were settled inside the vehicle did Chrissie, with one eye on the control panel and one on the area around the ship, wonder how Michael had gotten here.

Once outside the facility, she brought the transport about and locked in the coordinates for Somana Two. "Shouldn't you have a vehicle of your own? How did you get here?"

He sat back in his seat with his eyes closed, seeming to trust that she knew what she was doing. One of her men had piloted them to the site, but she had enough experience driving not to end up in a crater.

"Transport, same as you," he said. "Mine was on the other side of the structure, to keep from alerting you that I was there."

She gasped. "So someone sent you after us. Who?"

He still didn't budge. "Not important."

"It's important to me, damn it. If someone is on to me and my people . . ." Sadness filled her heart. "On to me, I need to know about it."

This time, he opened his eyes and stared into hers, which made her shift with discomfort in her seat. The man unsettled her, and not just because he was half-animal either, she hated to admit. His knowing gaze seemed to say he knew every thought that rattled through her confused mind. "I suggest you seek more honest work."

"Go to hell. My work is none of your business."

His hand snaked out to her from nowhere and wrapped around her wrist. Chrissie's heart thumped hard in her chest. He ran a thumb over her cheek and caught her under the chin. Chrissie tried again to get away, but he wouldn't let go. He drew her closer until his mouth was inches from hers.

"T-The transport," she whispered.

"The course is locked in."

She swallowed, struggling to get a grip on her emotions, her desires. Even if he was a beast and she was admittedly a bit afraid of him, her body went haywire with one touch from him. It was beginning to piss her off.

"Don't," she demanded.

He grinned. "Or what?"

She tried to turn her head, but he lowered his mouth and kissed her. Somehow he caught her tongue and sucked at the tip before drawing back. A shudder rocked her. She closed her eyes, dragging in a breath. "I don't do your kind."

Those words, it appeared, were a bucket of cold water to his desires. He released her and sat back in his chair, facing forward. She searched his expression for anger or any signs that he would attack, but his face remained blank. "I'll give you a warning. Someone very powerful doesn't appreciate what you've been up to back there. That person is also the unforgiving sort. If you're not careful, you will end up like your friends."

She slammed a fist on the panel beside her. "How dare you speak about them like they didn't matter! It was your kind who did it, and I'm still not convinced you don't know them or weren't in with them. Maybe you brought them there to kill us, but you saved me because, for some insane reason, you want to sleep with me."

"Don't flatter yourself," he bit out. "I don't know every werewolf just like you don't know every human." He looked her up and down. "And trust me, there are sexier women I can have."

"Asshole!" She raised a hand to smack him, but he caught her wrist and yanked her to him. Her breasts crushed against his unyielding chest, and it knocked the wind out of her. With her in a tight hold she couldn't escape from, he ran a hand down to her thigh, forced her legs apart, and cupped her pussy. One squeeze had her panting and fighting back a moan.

“Let’s get something straight. You want me inside you so badly it hurts.” He pushed one finger in the right spot, and if her pants and panties weren’t blocking the way, he’d have slipped up inside her. She was soaking wet. He was right, although she wasn’t going to admit it. She wanted him badly.

## Chapter Five

Michael kept his eyes on Somana Two as they neared the station. He had taken a huge risk touching Chrissie the way he had. The beast wanted to rip her clothes off and take what it had already claimed as its own, and all he had been doing was trying to make a point. She might call him a half-animal and cringe at the thought of him touching her, which pissed him off, but she couldn't deny the attraction between them.

"It's late," he muttered when they stepped out of the transport in the old salvage docks. "I'll see you home."

She rolled her eyes. "What is this, the twenty-first century? I can see myself home, thanks. Besides, I grew up in this area. I'd be safer than you, northsider. Well, aside from that other thing, you being a werewolf."

Michael thought he saw a slight grin on her face before it disappeared under the determination she seemed in the habit of displaying. He wanted to take her into his arms and let her know she didn't have to fight so hard anymore. He was there to protect her. That would get him a knee in the nuts, or an attempt at such, he was sure. He chuckled.

"I'll see you home. End of story."

When she turned and stalked off, he fell into step behind her, enjoying the sway of her hips and that curvy ass of hers. How he longed to get his hands around her waist, use it to drive her into his hard-on, and relieve the ache he had in his groin area. *Take her*, his inner wolf whispered. *She belongs to us.*

He'd had plenty of women in his time, but he'd found no reason to claim any of them. Why Chrissie? Was it because she was so fiery, so defiant? That wildness, so rare in the humans he had met, appealed to him. He knew that one day he would take a long-term lover, not a mate since that level of commitment had not appealed to him, but he had assumed it would be another werewolf because only one of his own kind could satisfy that deep hunger. Still, it would be interesting to test how much more Chrissie could stave off his rampant desires than Willie had. Watching Chrissie's luscious body in front of him, he couldn't imagine what he had seen in Willie. Hell, she had been willing. That was enough at the time.

"We're here. You can get lost now," Chrissie announced.

Michael looked up from her ass and glanced around. Chrissie had been telling the truth. She did live in a bad area. The buildings, erected close together, were little more than ugly stone squares with a window or two thrown in for good measure. Some had more than one story. Funny enough, the bars and clubs were fancier with blinking neon lights and artificial trees gracing the fronts. The falseness of it all made him miss Earth. He missed the mountains, the fresh air, and the forests. Sure, he hadn't lived anywhere but on the reservation for years, but the agency had not skimmed on the amount of land they had to run free over.

"Which one is yours?" Michael stopped and narrowed his eyes. He sniffed the air, and then with lightning speed, he grabbed a hold of Chrissie and dragged her back into the shadows of an alley. She wiggled in his arms, her ass rubbing his thigh and making him hard. "Keep still, damn it. Someone's here. Agents."

She stopped struggling, and Michael uncovered her mouth but didn't loosen his hold. He figured she wouldn't dart back into the street, but he liked holding her.

"You can let me go now," she muttered.

He grinned behind her head. "I could, but why?" He nuzzled her neck, enjoying her scent over that of the agents. None were nearby, and from the sounds he picked up around

them, they weren't moving either. They were waiting for someone, and Michael guessed it was Chrissie. But how had they figured out she was involved in the thefts before he made his report to Willie?

"Are you sure someone's out there? I don't see anyone, and there's my neighbor." She indicated a man leaning casually against a door frame. "He would have called me if I needed to lay low for a few days. We look out for each other."

Michael narrowed his eyes on the man. From their distance, he saw as clear as if the man were a foot away. Michael picked up on the guy's increased heart rate, the vein bulging in his temple, and his dilated eyes that had nothing to do with the low lighting in the area. This man was anything but calm. "What's your relationship with this guy?"

Chrissie stiffened. "None of your business."

He tightened his hold and leaned down to kiss along the side of her neck while never removing his eyes from the man. After some time of torturing her, making her tremble in his arms, he moved his lips to her ear. "He's sold you out to the agency, told them where to find you. Now he's waiting for you to show up so he can get paid."

She broke free of his hold and whirled on him. "That's a lie. I've known Mack for years. He hates the agency just like everyone else around here, and he wouldn't give up one of his own for their money."

Michael didn't move from where he stood when she flounced away. Let her go and find out for herself. He glanced down and felt his side. The wounds were just about closed. A good night's sleep would have him right as rain. He'd been torn up before and would be again. He'd become used to ignoring the pain and doing whatever he had to do. He didn't look forward to another fight, but these were mere men. The last agency leader was a magic user, and he had enabled his men to use it with limited results, but with Willie heading the law makers on Somana Two and Earth, no magic would be involved. He had only to be careful that he didn't forget himself and kill the bastards. Willie would have his head for that. As it was, she'd have his head anyway for keeping Chrissie from them. Whatever. This break between them was a long time in coming. He couldn't remain her lap dog forever with no real aim in life. How one small woman could get him in this much trouble so quickly, he didn't know.

The moment Chrissie strolled up to Mack, Michael sensed the agents moving. He willed her to get her sexy ass in the house, but she stood there talking and gesturing. From the shocked look on the man's face, Michael guessed that she was sharing what happened back at the other site. Mack rested a hand on Chrissie's shoulder, and Michael snarled from his position in the alley. He was gratified to see Chrissie step away from the touch with a casual movement. Good, he wouldn't have to rip the guy's arm out of its socket. He recalled all the men Chrissie worked with and now this guy. Did she not know any women? Did she ever wear dresses? He couldn't imagine her in one, but knew she'd look just as tasty as she did now.

The agents, all carrying laser weapons, swarmed on the street. Michael spat. Damn, he did not look forward to getting zapped. Too many, and he feared he'd have his brains scrambled. "Ah, well, live only once."

He darted into the street and engaged the agents. To her credit, his little spitfire gave them hell as well, sending more than one agent flying backward with a well-placed kick. When more agents descended, Chrissie spun to face her friend. "Let me hold your Glock, Mack."

In answer, he held up his hands and backed into his house. "Sorry, Chrissie. I'm sorry. They had my number. You know I need the money." She stared in horror when the door closed in her face, and Michael had to yank her out of the way of a shot fired.

Michael's side was killing him. One of the agents had squeezed off a couple rounds at that exact place of all the parts of his body he could have hit. He grunted, tucking Chrissie behind him. "Stay back while I deal with them."

"No way. I can fight my own battles, Michael."

She wouldn't be held back but gave it all she had. Frustrated because he couldn't watch her and take on twenty men, Michael cracked heads and drove his fists into jaw after jaw.

After twenty minutes, the numbers of their enemy were not lessening. Michael struggled up from beneath five men atop him. A whirring caught his attention. Reinforcements, if he didn't miss his guess. They needed to move and move fast, or he would find himself shipped off to the reservation on Earth, and Chrissie would no doubt be sentenced to jail soon after. With a final drive of his elbow into the gut of one man, followed by a kick in the groin of another, Michael looked for his and Chrissie's escape route. The road in both directions was fast filling with agents. He came to the swift conclusion that the only way out was through one of the houses. Kicking Mack's door in would give him great satisfaction for the guy betraying Chrissie.

Michael ran toward the house, grabbing Chrissie's hand on the way. She yelled a protest, but then she must have heard the aircars as well and stopped resisting. They hit Mack's door at a run, and Michael tore the hinges from the wall with one blow. Once they were inside, Chrissie led the way to the back of the house, both of them ignoring Mack's shouted protests.

At the back alley under cover of darkness, Michael took the lead again. "Stick close to me," he commanded. "I know a safe place."

"I can't see a thing," Chrissie protested.

"I can see. Trust me."

She held onto his arm and ran blindly at his side. Michael ran full tilt, shouting instructions to jump or move left to her all the way to avoid places where her neighbors had littered in the back alley. With the poor lighting and general condition of the area, Willie didn't give a rip about these people. This area was a stark difference from the north side, and if he ever got a chance to talk to her face-to-face again, he would speak his piece about the responsibilities of a leader. Then he chuckled under his breath. Up until he met Chrissie, he didn't give a rat's ass either, but not just about the poor citizens of Somana Two, about everyone and everything.

Shaking his head in disgust at himself, Michael at last led them out to light, and they stopped at the side of a crowded street to allow Chrissie to catch her breath. Michael hadn't broken a sweat. In fact, the run and the chase had invigorated him, made him long for a forest and his wolf form.

When Chrissie breathed easier, he took her hand, and they weaved through the crowd. He kept an eye out for agents while they headed toward Kelly's shop. Chrissie needed a place to lie low, somewhere she would be safe, and he hoped Gabriel wouldn't turn him away because up until now, he owned nothing, wanted nothing. Right at this moment, he would do anything to keep her safe. Thinking of his desire for her, he glanced back at her and caught her questioning look. He couldn't explain what he felt.

The beast whispered in his mind. "*She belongs to us. Claim her.*" Michael shook his head and spun away in time to spot a taxi. He flagged it down, and they jumped inside. He was about to wave his palm over the payment mechanism, but Chrissie stopped him.

“No, they can track us if you do that. You don’t know if they’ve identified you as the person who helped me escape.” She tugged the pack she had hanging from her back around to her lap and fished around inside it. When she brought out a small black card, Michael frowned. She winked. “I have several tricks up my sleeve.”

The scanner registered a Lexie Tanner, and he gave the driver the address to Kelly’s shop. Chrissie hadn’t ceased to amaze him since he met her. “So you always carry that kind of card? I’ve never heard of ID in card form instead of an implant. What else do you have in that bag?”

She pursed her lips. “Wouldn’t you like to know?”

He moved closer to her. “I’m more interested to know what you have under your clothes.”

She scoffed and turned away, but he heard her pulse quicken.

“Your mind is on one thing at all times.”

“I’m wolf. That’s what we do,” he explained.

She looked over and blinked at him. “Seriously? You have sex all the time?” Her cute nose wrinkled, which made him want to kiss it. “Remind a woman never to lose her heart over a werewolf because I suspect your kind isn’t faithful.”

Her words offended him a little, but he ignored the feeling. “Are you in danger of falling in love with me, Chrissie?”

“Reality, please.”

“Oh, we’re talking reality, my sexy little thief. More than you like to admit.” He slipped closer, and Chrissie moved tighter against the door to get as far away from him as possible. Michael wasn’t put off in the least. He would get her, all of her, no matter how much time it took, and, he suspected, it wouldn’t take very long to accomplish. He looked down at her leather-encased leg and rested a hand on her thigh. She shivered. With his fingers curved over between her legs, he slid his hand higher toward her pussy. She stopped him.

“Don’t.”

“You want it as much as I do.”

“Whether I do or don’t, Michael, doesn’t mean I have to give into what you want. I’ve got enough issues, and like I said, I don’t sleep with animals or even half-animals.”

This time, her words did get to him, and he flared his nostrils. Common sense told him she said it to piss him off in hope that he’d drop the seduction. True, his ardor cooled, but he wasn’t letting her get away with dismissing him in such a way. He’d bring his street-smart little burglar to her knees with an orgasm or three before it was all over.

They soon drew up at Kelly’s shop, and Michael stepped out of the vehicle behind Chrissie. He winced at the pain in his side and frowned at the wet red stain there. The laser weapons had agitated his wound. The one on his neck was in much better condition. As they walked up to the shop with a lighted sign above it, Michael noted that the place was closed and hoped Gabriel and Kelly were still there and hadn’t returned to their house. He didn’t want to have to catch another taxi and risk agents finding them on the street. As it was, coming here had been a risk, especially if the agents knew he had helped Chrissie, but he didn’t smell any of them nearby. Kelly, being a witch, kept a spell about her shop that made it all but invisible to agents. She hadn’t found a need to since Willie took over the agency as leader, but then he figured old habits died hard, and everyone knew Willie was all about her own agenda. She had no real loyalties to anyone.

Ahead of him, Chrissie stumbled, and figuring that she had stepped wrong, he reached a hand out to catch her, but when the full brunt of her weight came down on his hand, although it was slight because of her size, he began to worry. Her head dipped.



“Chrissie!” He tugged her close and flipped her around. She was unconscious. He searched her body but found no wounds. Tugging her up into his arms, he charged at the store and kicked the door a few times but not hard enough to destroy it like he’d done to Mack’s door. “Gabriel, open up.”

The door swung open, and his brother snarled at him. “What did I tell you, Michael? You haven’t been gone that long. I don’t intend to fight with you tonight.”

“Please,” was Michael’s simple reply. He raised Chrissie up into the light and caught Kelly’s gasp from behind her husband.

“Bring her in,” she commanded. “I’ll look at her. Stop being a bully, Gabriel, and help him. He’s hurt, too.”

Gabriel’s gaze dropped to Michael’s side. The disbelief and lack of concern was a blazing message in his expression and bearing, but he did step to the side and hold out his arms for Chrissie. Michael pulled her closer to his chest. “I have her. Just tell me where to lay her.”

Gabriel narrowed his gaze on Chrissie and sniffed. “Human, and you haven’t claimed her. What’s she to you? Another bed partner?”

“Go to hell,” Michael grumbled.

“Boys, stow it!” Kelly led the way into a back room she used as a clinic. She instructed Michael to lay Chrissie on a narrow bed she kept there and sat down beside Chrissie when he did. “What’s happened to her? Any wounds I need to attend to?”

Michael shrugged, running a hand through his hair. “I don’t know. She collapsed just outside. We were in a sort of . . . uh . . . fight, but she didn’t get hit.”

Kelly glared up at him. “Hit? What do you mean *hit*?”

He hesitated to explain, unsure if they would help if they knew what Chrissie did for a living. It wasn’t that Kelly was on the up-and-up all the time. The previous leader of the agency had passed a law stating her shop activities were illegal, and for all he knew, that hadn’t been changed. But for what it was, Kelly made an honest living, and Gabriel had aspirations to politics on a local scale, a sort of liaison between the citizens and the agency. Michael couldn’t guess their reaction to how Chrissie made her money.

Instead of answering Kelly’s question, Michael turned to Gabriel. “I have information on the missing werewolves.”

As he had hoped, the statement distracted his brother. He pressed a heavy hand down on Michael’s shoulder and guided him back to the front of the shop, leaving Kelly to care for Chrissie. Michael cast a glance at his soon-to-be lover, but Gabriel closed the door to the clinic.

“After I find out what you know about the werewolves, you can explain to me who she is and why you’re acting like you don’t want to be away from her. I won’t believe you’ve actually found your mate a few days after coming on to my wife.”

“Fuck you,” Michael grumbled.

Gabriel dropped into a chair behind the counter and swiveled it to face Michael. He crossed his arms over his chest, his low brows, narrowed eyes, and compressed lips giving off a forbidden attitude, one that said he would brook no BS from Michael. Michael didn’t give a crap how his brother viewed him at this point. He’d share what he knew of the wolves and get back to Chrissie. He didn’t owe Gabriel any more than that. Gabriel might be alpha, but Michael didn’t acknowledge him as *his* alpha. As far as Michael was concerned, he was a lone wolf—and would stay that way. So what if Gabriel had brought him back from the brink of insanity, something only an alpha could do? He wouldn’t owe his allegiance to him the rest of his life, older brother or not.

Michael strolled over to the front window and peered out into the night. “She keep a spell hiding this place?”

“What of it?”

Michael spared him a glance. “Does she or doesn’t she?”

“She does.”

He sighed and turned back to the darkness. “There’s a new facility about forty clicks southeast of Somana Two, an expansion project. The three werewolves that came in on a ship from Earth must have crashed nearby. They’re holing up in that facility. Just a matter of time before they make it here . . . and start a killing spree.”

## Chapter Six

Chrissie opened her eyes to a darkened room. Although she couldn't see a thing, she sensed she wasn't alone. Defenseless, she didn't make any sudden moves, and yet, she wasn't afraid either. Something told her Michael was the person lurking in the darkness.

"Where am I?" she whispered.

He answered right away. "In my sister-in-law's clinic."

"She's a doctor?"

"Of sorts."

She grunted. "Would you try not to tick me off, Michael, and tell me exactly where we are?"

He sat down on the bed, and she realized the room wasn't quite so dark. She made out his face in a dim pool of light. He ran a finger down her cheek, giving her chills of delight. She wanted more, so much more. Closing her eyes and turning her face into his palm, she tried to remember what happened and recalled the taxi ride to the shop and how she had lost all strength before blacking out. After that, she could recall nothing, but somehow she derived comfort knowing he was the one she woke up to.

"I blacked out," she announced. She sensed rather than saw his grin as he dipped his head toward her belly.

"Yes," he responded after a moment. "You have great fighting skills. I imagine more than one of those agents will think twice about crossing you in the future."

She tried not to blush with pleasure at his praise. It wasn't like her. Maybe she was getting soft, or at least soft on this half-beast. That was unacceptable, and yet, what he was doing now fuzzed her common sense and made her want to beg for more.

He nuzzled her stomach with his nose while breathing deep as if her scent was a drug for him. When his nuzzling turned to light kisses through her thin T-shirt, all she wanted was to sit up and strip so she could enjoy the feel of skin to skin. Resisting the ache to the point of not encouraging him, she couldn't make herself push him away. That fact seemed to give Michael the permission he needed to explore her body farther. He moved his kisses lower, and Chrissie gasped, resting a hand on the back of his dark head.

"Michael, what are you doing?"

He chuckled in the dim light but didn't raise his head. She shivered at the teasing of his nose at her apex, and Chrissie bit her lip. She told herself to push him away, but instead of a shove, she tangled her fingers in his hair to hold him in place.

"Michael," she said a second time, her breath so short, she could scarcely form the word. "Don't."

He paused a moment. "Don't what?"

Before Chrissie could elaborate, he landed a feather kiss at the top of her pussy. The leather pants she wore and her panties were nothing to keep the impact of such a caress from making her want to lose consciousness again, and yet, she dreaded it, too.

Michael opened his mouth over her intimate place and bit down without using his teeth. Chrissie chewed her lip to keep from crying out, and then a moan escaped her because Michael sucked the place his mouth covered. Of their own accord, her legs fell open wider. Michael took advantage of the move and followed his mouth's actions with a hand along her thigh. Chrissie whined and pumped her hips a little. She fought for control and wondered if she'd ever regain it.

"T-This isn't the place or the time," she told him in a desperate attempt to make him back off.

He lifted his head for just a moment to reply. "I can't help what I want, Chrissie. You're already inside me, and I must get inside you."

She struggled to sit up, panting and dislodging his head from between her legs at the same time. "Stop talking like that. It's not good."

"On the contrary, it's very good."

His hand glided up her thigh, squeezed between her legs a second, before he reached the button at her waist. She couldn't form the words to tell him to stop when he maneuvered his fingers to open her pants. Helpless to do anything but watch, she licked her lips as he lowered her zipper and slipped his hand into her pants, past her panties. The warmth of his palm against her wet pussy sent her head back and caused her to close her eyes. Her mouth dropped open, and she drew in a shuddering breath.

Michael slipped higher on the bed, his hip beside hers when he rested his lips at her earlobe. "You're already hot for me. I'm going to take what I want, Chrissie, and you can't stop me."

She put her hands up to his chest and curved her fingers against his bare chest. She wondered if he was naked from the waist down, but dared not explore. Who was this man to make her afraid when she had taken down men as big as he was for years without batting an eye?

"You'd force me?" she asked, hating the tremor in her voice.

He kissed her earlobe and snaked his tongue along its curve before he answered. "With the smell of your come in my nostrils and its silky feel on my fingertips, I couldn't stop if you told me no."

That terrified her, but he went on as if oblivious to her fears.

"But you want it as keenly as I do. That knowledge adds to my lust for you, smelling your desire."

She drew back a little from him to look into his eyes. She couldn't see their smoky depths with so little light, but something told her they had shifted, were darker. His deep voice matched, and she wondered if he had begun to change. This wasn't her. She didn't sleep with half-beasts, had no fantasies to do so. She'd heard the rumors of women on Earth, of prostitutes who craved nothing more than to offer their bodies for the werewolves' use, but she had found that depraved when she heard. Now here she was, wanting to throw herself on her back and plead with Michael to fill her. Were they all like this? Did they all have this command of a woman's body at the snap of their fingers? If so, she could see why they had been corralled. They were dangerous.

Michael removed his fingers from between her legs and licked her juices from his fingers. The growl that rose from his throat made her shrink back from him. With the same lightning speed he had displayed that first night she met him, his arm shot out to stop her from moving away. Strong fingers wrapped around her throat, not hurting her but no doubt capable of it. Chrissie shook from head to toe.

"You can remove your own clothes, or I can shred them," he told her.

For the second time, her jaw went slack before her anger took over. She tried to jerk away, but his hold didn't lessen. "You have no right to talk to me like that. Get your damn hands off me, Michael."

"What did I tell you?"

She remained silent but tried to pry his fingers off her neck. His hold tightened, still not enough to hurt her. Chrissie was about to cuss him out, but the sound of her T-shirt tearing stopped her from speaking. She blinked and looked down as Michael revealed her breasts.

Her bra soon followed, and she realized he had brought out his claws to get through the barrier of her clothes.

“You bastard!”

He pushed her to her back and flipped over her so that a thick, muscled thigh lay on either side of her hips, but he didn’t remove his hand from her neck. In seconds, her pants were on the floor along with her panties. She lay bare under him, and from the glittering in his eyes, she knew that he could see her clearly as if a light had been flicked on.

Chrissie had never been ashamed of her body. Sure, she had flaws just as the next woman, but she always felt that her pluses made up for it. Her line of work forced her to stay active, so she had a nice flat belly, and the fact that her breasts were full and hadn’t given into gravity yet pleased her. That they pleased Michael as well was obvious when he lowered his mouth to catch one stiff nipple into his mouth. He sucked hard, and it hurt just enough to feel amazing and make her want to come with that move alone.

She was still angry that he had said he’d take her against her will if she said no and went on to prove it by tearing her clothes off. If she told him she didn’t want this, that she wanted him to stop, this would be rape.

“So, the big, bad wolf stoops to rape, is that it?” she demanded in a less than steady voice.

He was busy kissing and licking first one nipple and then the other. He moaned in pleasure while Chrissie pressed her legs together and tried to resist what his actions were doing to her. At last, he raised his head.

“Rape is impossible.”

She rested a palm on the hand that held her down. “This is consent?”

He sat up and stilled, his expression inscrutable. After a moment, he released her and reared back on his heels. He shed the shirt he wore and tore off the pants as well, confirming that dressed or naked, nothing stood in the way of what he wanted. The man had been only waiting for her to wake up to take her. Maybe they liked their prey to struggle, got them off more.

She saw the beast in him when he crouched at the end of the bed, his head turned to the side a little while she sat up. With her caution, every muscle in her body tensed. She searched the room and spotted the door. Gauging the distance and his speed, she’d never make it there before he was on her. If she yelled for help, would his brother and sister-in-law come or had they known what he would do and were okay with it?

Chrissie edged to the side of the bed and let her feet down to the floor. The tile sent a chill up her legs, seeming to tighten her nipples more than they already were. Looking over at Michael, she saw that he noticed as well. He licked his lips, and it appeared to take all his strength not to grab for her. All of a sudden Chrissie knew why he was acting like he was right now. The thrill of the chase. He wanted her to make a run for it so he could reach out and grab her and drag her back to his bed. She longed for a weapon to plunge into his black heart, but for some reason the thought of hurting him to that extent sent a twinge through her. *Stupid weakness.*

She stood up, and Michael imitated her move. To her annoyance, she made the mistake of letting her gaze lower to his groin, and she gasped at the size of him. The man was massive and stiff. His cock mesmerized her and in an instant brought visions to her mind of seeing if she could actually wrap her lips around him. Those thoughts were followed hard by wilder ones of him filling her with that amazing tool while she screamed his name. *No!* She had to resist.

With effort she must have pulled up from her toes, she ran toward the door. Two or three steps away from it, Michael called out to her. She froze and looked back. She had been wrong. He wasn't going to pounce on her.

His eyes were narrowed. He stood like a man carved in perfection from the smoothest marble, with his hands in fists at his side, his chest expanded, his jaw firm. "Come here."

Her eyes widened. No man had ever given her orders, not even her father, but then he had abandoned the family before her birth. She suspected that even he wouldn't have if she was big enough to make him regret it at the time. Michael had never been intimidated by her, but then why should he be? The others had seen just how far she would go to fight for her independence, for respect. Something told her even that wouldn't matter to this man.

"I said, come here, Chrissie."

She turned in his direction but didn't move forward. For the longest time, they stood facing each other until she couldn't bear it anymore. With measured steps, she closed the distance between them and stopped inches from where he waited. He held his cock, stroking it from base to tip and tempting her with a force powerful enough to bring her to her knees. With that thought, she wondered if he would make her suck him, to prove who had the upper hand, but before the thought was fully realized in her consciousness, he dropped to his knees.

She cried out when he took hold of her hips and drove his mouth between her legs. Chrissie's knees gave at his tongue's first lap. He ate her with enjoyment and moaned as he sucked. She braced herself on his unyielding shoulders and raised one leg while pulling his head closer. His lips clamped around her swollen clit, and she was lost. She shouted her orgasm, but Michael didn't let up. He took all of her cream, laving in it like it was his life source, until she was dry.

When he finished, he stood and lifted her up into his arms to carry her to the bed. Chrissie was past fighting him. He might be an arrogant son of a bitch who thought he could boss her around, but damn it, she wanted to be taken by him, if just this once. No wonder those women on Earth kept coming back for more, but she wouldn't. She'd allow the weakness this time, but after that, she'd disappear into the night. Let him dream of the experience.

With that soothing thought, she welcomed him in the bed while she lay on her back. And then she pressed a hand to his chest when he would have lain atop her. "Wait, let me suck you. I know I can please you."

Shaking his head, he moved her hand and settled his heavy body over hers. "My control is gone. I need to be inside you now."

When he said his self-control was gone, he meant it. Chrissie had an instant to drag in a breath before he tugged her legs apart and filled her. She cried out and dug her fingernails into his arms. His grunt and the stiff way he held himself let her know he fought to hold still while her muscles relaxed. He moved in deeper, and Chrissie had a moment of panic thinking that thing would never fit. He'd rip her to shreds. Then pure, unadulterated pleasure took over, and she arched her back to push her breasts into his chest.

Michael took hold of her knees, pulled them higher and wider, and began his pump into her. His growl of satisfaction was animalistic, and as he quickened his pace, he muttered, "See how she feels? So good, so perfect, so . . . ours."

*Ours? Plural?* She hadn't a moment to consider who he was talking about or even if it was Michael speaking. He pumped harder, rough enough to sting a little, but feeling so right that she found herself ready to climax a second time. Michael ground his hips against hers, which made the bed creak in protest beneath them. He bent to suck and lick her nipples and then

moved to her lips to take possession of them. He filled her mouth with his tongue and for a few thrusts imitated what he was doing with his cock between her lips. She came screaming. Michael almost roared seconds after she did, and she shook at the warm liquid invading her passage.

Gasping for breath, Chrissie thought he would be spent and that they would need to rest, but he withdrew long enough to flip her to her belly and let his weight come down on her from behind. In the same gravelly voice, he spoke into her ear.

“I need it many more times. You are strong enough to take me?”

His words had been a question, but he entered her anyway, and Chrissie gripped the sheets under her. She shut her eyes as Michael took her over and over, pounding until her body was spent and she’d come half a dozen times more than she thought she ever could. What seemed like hours later, he pulled out of her and dropped to the side, but he kept a broad thigh braced over her ass. She didn’t attempt to get away.

At last, his voice went back to something that sounded human. “You need to rest.”

She frowned but didn’t turn her head to look at him. “Until the next time you decide to take what you want no matter what I say?”

He rolled to the edge of the bed and sat up. “I’ll arrange for you to stay somewhere safe. Get some sleep.” He bent to retrieve his shirt and pants. So, what was she supposed to put on?

“Sleep,” he commanded again, and he left the room.

Chrissie hated that she was tired as hell and needed to do just that, but she wasn’t giving him the satisfaction any longer. Her lust was good and satisfied for the moment, so she wasn’t as weak for sex with him as she had been earlier. She ignored the fact that she wanted to run after him and beg him to hold her while she rested. That must be tiredness talking, because what Michael and she had shared was physical and nothing more. Warm feelings of the heart hadn’t entered the equation whatsoever. In fact, she had vowed not to see him after this, and she still meant it. Let him find some other woman to do his bidding. Chrissie would never be the one.

With legs like jelly, she stood and tried to salvage what she could of her clothes. Her pants were pretty much shorts now, and she had to settle for a strip of cloth across her breasts for a top. With a sigh, she pushed her feet into her boots, only to wince at the soreness between her legs and the shaking in her limbs. The man’s lust was insatiable. As tough as she liked to think she was, could she handle a beast like that long term? And what was with him talking as if he was more than one person? That had creeped her out. She knew little about these werewolves, but the farther she stayed away from them, the better.

With near-silent movements, she inched over to the door, opened it a crack, and was glad to find that Michael hadn’t locked her in. The front end of a small store met her gaze, and between her and the exit were Michael, a man who looked so much like him he had to be Michael’s brother, and a woman. They were talking.

Chrissie considered how she would get out of there or if they would let her walk out the door without stopping her—until their conversation reached her ears. Michael’s brother was speaking. “We can’t let her leave here knowing about the werewolves. I’ll deal with our people. I don’t want them killed or corralled like wild animals as they do on Earth. I’ll have to take care of your little lover, Michael.”

Michael growled and faced off against his brother. “What the hell do you mean by ‘take care of her’? She’s mine whether you like it or not, Gabriel.”

The woman’s eyes widened. “Yours, Michael? You can’t mean—”

Michael nodded. “Yes, that’s exactly what I mean.”

The other man waved his hand. "Don't let your dick lead you around or fool you, Michael. Mates are extremely rare these days, and I won't believe you stumbled on yours a couple days after you were trying to fuck my wife."

Chrissie slapped a hand over her mouth to keep herself from crying out. She didn't know if it was the thought of Michael having sex with anyone but her, the fact that he'd tried to sleep with his sister-in-law at all, or that he thought *she* was his mate, whatever that meant. The man was psycho if he thought she belonged to him. The way he had said, "She's mine," pissed Chrissie off. Now that she was snapping out of the lustful spell he had seemed to cast over her, it hit her how badly he had treated her earlier, like she was his property to command. And to think he had admitted he would take her against her will. What was she still doing here, waiting for him to make good on his threat? No way.

She closed the door and looked around her. Maybe she had missed a window or something to escape through. While she waited for her eyes to adjust to the darkness after peering out at the lighted front of the store, she stretched her arms forward to feel her way around the room. Considering that the others assumed she was sleeping off her and Michael's activities, she might have a good two or three hours before they checked on her. She could be long gone.

Surprise filled her when she touched a doorknob at the back of the room, and her sight focused enough to make out the back door. She hadn't noticed it before when Michael was in the room. She fiddled with the lock, but it seemed welded in place. She stood back and stared at it while chewing on a fingernail. Then, as if it had never been unmovable at all, the lock slid open on its own, and the door sprung wide. Chrissie slipped out into the dark night, and the door closed behind her.

She made it several blocks away from the store before an aircar drew up in front of her. Two men jumped free of it with weapons in their hands. "Come with us quietly, miss, and no one will get hurt."

Chrissie considered fighting, but she didn't have a weapon and she was still weak. She would have to bide her time. She nodded and stepped off the curb to get into the vehicle. With a little rest, she would be out on the street again. She hoped that these men didn't have orders to kill her when they got her somewhere out of the public eye.



## Chapter Seven

Anger raged through Michael's being as he faced off against his brother. He was prepared to end Gabriel's life for even the threat of hurting Chrissie. Michael didn't give a rat's ass if his brother believed him or not that Chrissie was his mate. Gabriel's assertion that it was unlikely that Michael had stumbled over his mate in a couple days didn't matter to him. His beast knew when it had found the one woman who would complete him, corny as Michael had always found such sentiments. Chrissie *was* his. He didn't doubt if for a second, and he would defend her to his last breath.

With the open challenge and the promise of a fight, Gabriel's teeth had grown sharp, and his eyes were those of the wolf instead of a man's. He crowded Michael's space, but Michael wasn't backing down. In the long history of their people, the alpha male was always the most powerful, hands down. No other had overthrown him unless that person was destined to take his place. Michael had no illusions as to his status. He was not an alpha by any stretch of the imagination. Right now, that didn't matter.

"You realize you could never beat me?" Gabriel warned her.

"I will die defending her," Michael responded.

"Drop the dramatics, Michael. It doesn't suit you." Gabriel took a step closer to him so that they were nose to nose.

"You two stop this, Gabriel, Michael," Kelly pleaded.

She tried to inch between them but failed. Michael was unmoving. He found it funny how the brush of her soft body at his side did nothing for him when a few days ago, that touch would have driven him out of his mind.

He ignored Kelly's attempted interference and kept his attention on his brother. "No one can be happy except you. Is that it?"

Gabriel threw his head back and laughed, a creepy timbre given his partial change. "You don't have the capacity to be happy, brother. In the short time I've known you since we met up again, nothing pleases you. Nothing can get that chip off your shoulder. You're offended at everything, even what I said about your lover. That attitude is the only reason you're getting riled up, not because you care about her. You have your nose permanently bent out of shape. Tell me I'm wrong."

Michael narrowed his eyes and allowed his body to begin the change so he too sported sharpened and curved claws at the ends of his fingers. "You're wrong."

They flew at each other, locking arms, flexing muscles, and growling. Michael jerked his head to the side when his brother snapped his powerful jaws toward him and then returned the move. Kelly shouted to them to stop, but they ignored her until a second voice joined hers. Michael turned toward the back room at the same time that Gabriel did, and then they jumped apart, willing their bodies to return to normal.

"W-What was that?" Kelly's assistant asked in obvious terror.

Kelly let a curse fall from her lips and followed it with a spell and a wave of her hand. Her assistant's knees dipped, and her eyelids drooped. Gabriel darted across the room in time to catch the woman before she hit the floor. Thinking that Chrissie could have heard the commotion and been frightened by it, Michael headed for the back room where the assistant had come from. When he reached the doorway, his heart seemed to freeze in his chest. The bed was empty, and Chrissie was nowhere in sight.

He whirled around to cast an accusatory glance at his brother, who had settled the assistant in a chair. "Where is she?"

Gabriel frowned. "Where is who?"

“Chrissie! You know damn well who I’m talking about.”

His brother shook his head. “If you’ll recall, you’re the one who saw her last in the back room. I thought you said she was sleeping, and besides, Kelly keeps a spell on the back door. Only magic can open it. She didn’t come out this way.”

Michael swung to Kelly for an explanation. She hesitated, making Michael suspicious, but she denied helping Chrissie escape. “The only thing I do know at this point is that Chrissie had a spell cast over her, and its release is what may have caused her to collapse.”

“What!” Michael and Gabriel shouted at the same time. Michael ran a hand through his hair. “What do you mean a spell? She’s human. I know she is.”

Kelly smirked. “So am I, but I can whip up a mean spell, thank you very much. Magic runs in my family on both sides if you’ll remember.” He caught the disgusted expression on her face and guessed she was remembering her father who had tried to kill her to gain control of her gift.

Michael considered what Kelly had revealed while he rubbed a hand over his jaw. “I had been tracking her, or rather trying to. I couldn’t pick up her scent. Could she have used a spell to cover it?”

Kelly nodded. “Yes, if she really does use magic. I’m not convinced of it because if she did, why did she collapse after it was released, almost like she wasn’t expecting it. If she had been here longer, I could have pinned down the exact spell, but I wanted to talk to Gabriel about it first.” One of her eyebrows rose in accusation. “When you two started fighting, I forgot all about it.”

Michael turned toward the exit. “Well, I’m going to find her before Willie does. If the agents came after her, it’s likely she knows that Chrissie headed the—” Almost too late he remembered that he hadn’t told them everything that had happened earlier at the new station. “Never mind. I’m going to find her.”

Gabriel grabbed his arm before he could take more than a few steps. “I need you to help me with the werewolves over there, especially with their location. We need to take care of them before this gets out of hand.”

“Not before I secure Chrissie.”

“Damn it, Michael, the werewolves are more urgent than your piece of ass.”

Michael drove his fist into Gabriel’s jaw, sending his brother flying backward to land on his rear. That move had gotten him a little of his own back after Gabriel had tossed him out on his face the week before.

“Disrespect her again,” Michael warned him. “I dare you.”

“You’ll pay for that,” Gabriel promised.

“Boys!” Kelly blocked Michael’s view of his brother. She cast a glance in Gabriel’s direction and then faced Michael. “Can you pick up her scent now, or it is still blocked? If you can, you can find her within an hour or two, and *then* you can help Gabriel.” She turned toward her husband. “And you can wait. Stop antagonizing him. If his beast has chosen its mate, you know as well as I do there’s no keeping them apart, and rational thinking is impossible until he claims her. Give him time, Gabriel. Michael will get bored fast if she’s not the one, and you know it.”

Michael grunted. “Thanks a lot.” He turned to go outside and see if he could get Chrissie’s scent but paused when his phone buzzed in his pocket. His gut tightened. Something told him it was Willie. Sure enough, her face materialized on the tiny screen in his palm. “Willie?”

“Who is she to you, Michael, and don’t lie to me.”

His heart stuttered and started again. “Who is who to me? You need to be more specific.”

“Don’t play games with me,” Willie shouted. After a few minutes of silence, she cleared her throat, no doubt trying for calm. “So, that’s why you ended it between us, her? She’s small. A little thing like that can’t take care of a werewolf. Does she know what you are? Did you fuck her already?”

His resolve to pretend he didn’t know who she was talking about went out the window. Willie was playing with him, and it was a matter of time before she spewed the real venom that resided in the soul of a woman like her. No one screwed her over, and by Michael dumping her before she was finished with him, he had undammed the river. Michael’s one hope was that Willie had called because she had knowledge of who had stolen her equipment, not that she had Chrissie.

He feigned a bored sigh. “What do you want, Willie? I have things to do. If you’re just calling to see if I’ve found anyone new, then you’ll have to—”

“Her name’s Chrissie,” Willie blurted out. “You know people born and raised on the moon are paler than us earthlings. They bruise so easily.”

Michael growled loud enough to make Willie cry out in pain on the other end of the phone. Violence rose in him so fast that he had destroyed his phone before he knew what he was doing. In seconds, he tore from his clothing and was in full wolf form charging toward the door. Kelly made it there ahead of him and opened the door before Michael could rip it from its hinges, and Michael ran full tilt down the street. It was likely Willie wasn’t keeping Chrissie at her home, but if she were there, he’d rip her slender throat out if she didn’t tell him where Chrissie was. If she had hurt his mate in any way, he’d do that whether she confessed or not.

At Willie’s front door some minutes later, Michael slammed himself against the barrier. Agents surrounded him, peeling off laser shots, but Michael was too enraged to feel a thing. He rammed his bulk at the door again, hearing a crack where the wood began to give if not the lock.

From the corner of his eye, Michael caught someone sneaking up on him. He spun to face the bold fool who thought he could get the jump on him, but something touched his neck in the opposite direction. Thousands of volts jolted through his system, and he howled in pain. The person who had come up in the other direction stuck something in his side. The drug’s delayed effect allowed him enough time to leap on the guy’s chest. He lowered his head to rip the man’s throat out, but his vision blurred. He shook his head in an attempt to clear it and then went in for the kill a second time. Another needle stab prostrated him, and his world went dark.

*Please, don’t hurt her.*

## Chapter Eight

"I want you to tell Michael you don't want to see him anymore. Give him any excuse, that he's not your type, that he's too much for you, or whatever. Just make him back off."

Chrissie blinked at the blonde bombshell before her. Even on the rough side of Somana Two, Chrissie had heard of the new head of the agency, the corporation that made all the laws on Somana Two and Earth. This woman had clawed her way to the top, and from the looks of her, Chrissie suspected she'd used her body more than once to get there as well. The ruthless glint in her eyes told Chrissie she would stoop to murder to get what she wanted. In a different situation, they might have been friends. Chrissie smirked. Then again, maybe not. Chrissie had always had more tolerance for men than for women.

She rested a hand on her hip and took on a bored expression. "Why should I do that?"

"To keep your life."

Chrissie laughed, but the statement rattled her a little. "For a good fuck?" She let those words sink into Willie's mind. The redness in her cheeks let Chrissie know right off that there was one thing Willie wanted Michael for, and that was for sex. She had to admit that she knew how the woman felt. Chrissie might have told herself she wouldn't see Michael again, but since they'd been intimate, she couldn't get him out of her head, and even now, hours after she'd had time to rest, she wanted another round in the bed with him. She worried the experience would be just what Willie had said, too much for her, but she'd never been pleased by a man like Michael. Sure, he was wild and rough, taking what he wanted, but every stroke, every lick, suck, and kiss had her wet and eager. Remembering it made her crave him, and that must be what Willie was experiencing. Chrissie hated her for having slept with Michael and for having the power to ensure she had him again.

Willie marched across the fancy office that they occupied, fancier than anything Chrissie had ever seen. She'd never been off Somana Two and had visited the north side just once. Rumor had it that the agency's head lived lavishly, and some people on Earth lived the good life with nice things. Chrissie had never longed for more than her café. That was enough.

"So this isn't about who hired me to steal your equipment," she quipped. "This is about my lover?"

By the time Willie stopped in front of her, Chrissie had sassed the powerful woman with these words, and she suffered the consequences for her attitude with a stinging slap across the cheek. Never letting anyone get away with that, Chrissie raised her hand to return the favor, but a click to her left caught her attention. She glanced over to find an agent training a weapon on her. His cold expression seemed to beg her to give him an excuse.

She dropped her hand down to her side. She was no fool. If biding her time was what needed to be done, that's what she would do. She'd been in sticky situations before, maybe not with as powerful an enemy, but she had dealt with people who lacked principles, who got off on torturing others.

"It's just a matter of time before I track down the person who hired you. I didn't question you on it, because I've already had your go-between picked up," Willie informed her.

Chrissie gasped. "You're lying."

Willie grinned and turned away to head back over to her desk. "Am I? Know anyone by the name of Hawk?"

"Shit!" Chrissie bit down on her tongue to keep herself from saying something she shouldn't. That was the trouble with the bastards she dealt with on a daily basis. All of them were greedy as hell, and they'd sell their mothers out for an extra curan or two. Yet Hawk

had been different. He knew how to keep his mouth shut. That meant someone had sold *him* out. She had to believe Hawk wouldn't cave no matter what. Chrissie had no love for whoever hired her to steal the equipment, but she didn't want Willie having the satisfaction of knowing that.

"So you see," Willie began, settling behind her desk and straightening the thin material barely keeping her ample breasts in check, "I have all the information about your theft that I need right now. The only unfinished business between you and me is Michael."

Chrissie looked away out of the window, which overlooked a square of trees. Trees were rare on Somana Two, and Chrissie found the flora calming despite the circumstances. She needed to remain in control in order to deal with this woman, because right now, most of her men were dead, her neighbor had betrayed her, the man who got her the jobs was out of commission, hundreds of agents separated her from freedom—and one powerful, jealous whore had it in for her. Things were not looking good at all.

She rolled her shoulders and pretended to consider Willie's offer. "What will you give me in exchange for giving Michael up? After all, a man like that doesn't come along often to satisfy a woman the way she needs it." Chrissie couldn't help the dig. For the second time, the ache somewhere inside at the thought of him being with anyone other than her made her want to tear up. The last time she'd done that was at eight years old when her mother died.

"I said I'd give you your life," Willie reminded her. "That's enough."

"No, it's not." Chrissie tilted her head to the side and narrowed her eyes. "How about you throw in thirty thousand curans for good measure." If Chrissie made Willie think that she didn't give a damn about Michael, and that all anything amounted to was how much money she could make, then maybe Willie would let her go free. If Chrissie promised to let Michael go to save her own life, she would look weak, and Willie wouldn't believe that Chrissie could keep herself from a man like him, especially if Michael became pushy like he had been when they were last together. A werewolf, it seemed, didn't take no for an answer without launching an irresistible seduction. She tried not to squeeze her legs together thinking about it.

A wide grin spread over Willie's face. "An ambitious woman like myself. I can respect that. So it's not love. That's even better." She slapped her hand on her desk and sat forward. "Done! But if you go back on our agreement, you know what I will do without hesitation, right?"

Chrissie waved her hand and rolled her eyes. "I have more important matters to attend to other than him."

Willie opened her desk drawer and pulled out a checkbook. Chrissie frowned, and Willie noticed. "Cash, huh?"

"If you please."

The agency leader smirked. "Fine. I'll arrange for someone to deliver it to you tomorrow. Hmm, I think maybe I can use you, too." She tapped a fingertip to pouty lips. "Yes, you work for me now. I don't have many women in my employ, and I think you can get where the dumb men can't. You're not too bad looking."

Chrissie crossed her arms over her chest. "Thanks." She didn't bother telling Willie she didn't want to work for her. It would be pointless. Chrissie was privy to that information regarding Willie as well. At the drop of a hat, Willie would call up people who owed her favors to press them into a doing a job for her. Chrissie had never thought she'd be on the woman's radar. So be it. With the thirty thousand curans, she could at last open her café and retire from the thieving business. And she could hire a manager to run the place when Willie called. Respectability would be her middle name from now on. Well, on the surface anyway,

and if she kept her mind focused on reaching her goals, the fact that Michael was no longer in her life wouldn't be an issue. After all, when she left his sister-in-law's place, she had vowed not to see him again. The fact that Willie had pressed her into keeping that vow made it easier.

\* \* \* \*

No matter how Chrissie tried to convince herself that she didn't give a fig about Michael, the arrogant, pushy man entered her mind again and again on her way back to her place. Sounds, scents, and sensations of their time together tormented her. More than once, she stopped to lean against a wall and collect her thoughts and her body's desires.

With eyes closed, she ran a hand over her moist brow and struggled to calm her breathing. "It's lust, nothing more," she told herself. Michael could be replaced in a heartbeat. Countless men from her side of the station had propositioned her, and the one time she'd ventured to the cleaner side of Somana Two, she had gotten interested looks from men there as well. Michael *would* be replaced, she decided. After she received her payoff and settled with the owner of a particular spot she'd had her eye on for her café the last couple of years, she would turn her attention to finding a lover. No hearts needed, the guy would be for physical fun alone. She could throw herself into her business, gain customers. Let the northsiders deal with that werewolf issue. That didn't concern her one bit.

When Chrissie turned onto her street, she remembered how Mack had betrayed her. Now that she wasn't wanted by the agency, she had time to kick his ass for what he had done. He would pay, that is if the agents hadn't already turned on him. They were known for double-crossing those who thought they could make a deal with them. The thought gave her pause. Would Willie go back on her word after she gave her the money?

Chrissie glimpsed Mack's house next to hers. The place looked abandoned. The door and single window were boarded up. Perhaps Mack had taken his money and run, knowing she would come after him. She wouldn't put it past him. Many had done the same thing the second they got their hands on a few curans. If he was anything like the others, he would blow through the cash and come crawling back in a few months. One didn't often escape from this side of Somana Two.

She headed into her house. With a frown, she turned her thoughts back to Willie. The woman could try to come after her, but no one but she knew about the arsenal she kept in her basement, including a few experimental weapons. She had been holding them until Hawk found a buyer, but if she had to, she'd make use of them. The agents would outnumber her, but she'd take a lot of them down with her, fighting with everything inside her.

Tiredness coming over her after the ordeal earlier, even though she had slept several hours before meeting with Willie, she decided to get some more rest. She strolled into her bathroom and turned on the shower. Soon, the small space filled with steam and the scent of her favorite body wash. The stuff came at a steep price, but a girl had to have her luxuries.

Chrissie stripped out of her clothing, her hand skimming her nipple as she lifted her blouse above her head. The tiny bud pebbled, which brought to mind the feel of Michael's lips wrapped around it. An ache for his touch started in her core, and she groaned.

"Might need to find that lover sooner than later." She sighed and stepped under the warm spray. Water streamed over her heated skin, and she squeezed pink-tinted cream into her palm, lathered, and began to wash. She tilted her head back, closed her eyes, and almost

jumped at the clear vision of Michael that swam before her mind's eye. Her imagination had never been that fine-tuned.

Without realizing it until she felt the feathery touch on her clit, she ran her hand down between her legs, biting off a cry for Michael. Once, just once, she'd bring herself to an orgasm and then along with the suds on her body, she'd wash him out of her memory.

Her tender clit caught between a finger and a thumb, she gave a gentle pinch. "Ah! Michael, I want you." She braced a hand on the wall behind the shower head and tried to think of an old lover who pleased her, but none came to mind. "Michael, please."

His shoulders so broad and strong, his chest unyielding, and the rest of that body made her mouth water recalling how it felt to skim her hands over his flesh. How amazing would it be to have him here under the water, his skin wet, his hot mouth on her nipples, his hands on her hips while he lifted her to pierce her with his cock? She trembled and stroked herself faster. Bliss coiled in her belly, growing as she stoked the flames with a touch. Allowing her fingers to spread her folds and glide into her slick entrance, she pretended it was Michael, his thick, hard cock hurting just enough to drive her to the edge of insanity, yet feeling so good at the same time that she couldn't get enough, couldn't get him far enough inside.

Chrissie pumped her hips, worked her pussy with her fingers, and murmured his name until she almost believed he was there with her. "Make me come," she begged him.

*"Always,"* was his phantom response.

She rode his cock faster and imagined the pressure of his fingers gripping her hips, driving her toward him as he pounded into her. She screamed once bordering an orgasm, but she slowed the rhythm to plead with him to make it last a little longer.

*"Anything for you, my mate."*

Fear closed her throat, and she stopped at once, opening her eyes. Although she had stopped pleasuring herself, her body wouldn't be denied. She came all the same, the waves spiraling out from her core, making her shake and groan. She let it take her and sank to her knees in the bottom of the tub until the sensations passed. All previous times, she would bring herself to orgasm after orgasm until her fingers cramped and her muscles ached, but she didn't dare go for a second time tonight.

*His mate*, he had said. Michael thought she was meant for him, like what? Soul mates? That was crazy, and besides that, he was part animal. What would they have if they married and had kids, little half-beasts? No thanks. She wasn't looking for a husband—human or otherwise.

Feeling a bit stronger after easing her tension and dismissing Michael from her mind for the millionth time, she stood up, washed in lukewarm water, and turned off the shower. No doubt, she would get a warning letter in the next few days about going over her water allotment for the third consecutive month. If she kept it up, the agency would turn her water off, and she couldn't let that happen. They were likely to leave it off indefinitely to prove a point and punish her for breaking the law. If they knew half the things she had done to bend, stretch, and break the law, she would have already been exiled from Somana Two and sent to some Earth prison.

After Chrissie had dried off with a towel and wrapped a robe around herself, she headed to the kitchen. Hunger called above the lure of sleep. She would make a quick sandwich with imitation meat and a cup of hot tea. As she padded on bare feet into the kitchen, that thought reminded her that she intended talk to Hawk about supplying her café with real meat. Not everyone would get it, only those who could pay.

A few minutes later, she carried her food and tea to her bedside, ate at her leisure, and then dropped back on the bed. Her last thought before she slipped into unconsciousness was of Michael. What would he do when he found out she was gone?



## Chapter Nine

Michael opened his eyes and winced right away at the pounding in his head. He pushed himself to a sitting position while holding his head. What the hell happened to him that he hadn't healed yet? In his darkened surroundings with a familiar scent he couldn't quite pinpoint, he tried to recall. Then the incident came flooding back. He had gone to Willie's house to find Chrissie, but Willie'd had her goons drug him. His kind usually healed fast, but they must have pumped tranq after tranq in him for it to leave him this weak.

Finding that he sat on a cot, he swung his feet to the floor and stood on unsteady legs. Every muscle in his body cried out in protest against being used. Michael ignored them. He had to find Chrissie, to be sure she was safe. If Willie had killed her . . . No, he couldn't think that way. He had to believe she was fine. He'd found his mate after being alone for so long, and he wasn't even looking for her. This was fate, and he'd be damned if he let her slip through his fingers because of Willie's obsession with werewolves. The agency would be looking for another leader replacement if Willie left even a bruise on Chrissie.

He stood still, which allowed his vision to focus and his head to stop spinning. After a few minutes, the wolf's keen sight kicked in, and he made out his surroundings with ease. Wherever this room was, it couldn't be in Willie's home or her office. Willie made sure her environment exceeded the rough stone walls that all other Somana Two inhabitants put up with. The walls here matched that ugly plainness, constructed as if the mason cared nothing for style, just function. The floor was dusty, smooth, and unfinished with no carpet or even tile.

At the other end of the ten-by-ten room stood a door that appeared to be made of steel. Michael might have felt the hinges giving at Willie's home, but something told him this place would withstand his strength. He wasn't getting out of here until Willie was good and ready to let him out.

How long had he been here already? A day, two? To punish him, he didn't doubt she would extend it for days on end, and who was there to stop her? Gabriel? His brother didn't give a crap about him, especially after he had gone after Kelly. The only thing Gabriel wanted Michael's help with was containing the other wolves, but if he could handle them on his own, Michael doubted he would get a rescue.

Still, Michael had to give contacting Gabriel a chance, for Chrissie's sake. She had to be all right. He hadn't bitten her yet, and everything inside him craved being with her. Not just for the sex, but to have her at his side, to talk to her, to protect her. He knew that he had been made to do just that.

He dropped back on the bed and began to suck in and blow out deep breaths. He closed his eyes in order to concentrate. Gabriel was the one with all the skill in mind-to-mind contact, but Michael should be able to reach him, that is if his brother wasn't tossing up a barrier between them because he was pissed that Michael took off.

He opened his mind and drew on the beast's psychic ability, but before he got even beyond the room with his mental projection, the scrape of metal on metal reached him, and his concentration broke. As he glanced toward the door, he found a small open panel, and someone stood on the other side of the door staring at him.

"This isn't a show," Michael said, a warning in his tone although he was powerless to do a thing to the man.

"I have her on a holo-phone," came the response.

Michael didn't bother asking *who* he had on the phone. He stood, trying not to waver and show his weakness. "So? Are you going to open the door?"

The man shook his head. "No way. I'm not a fool. Your kind have killed many of our agents over the years. I'm not going to be the next."

"Yeah, that fact goes both ways," Michael snapped, "Agents killing werewolves like we're nothing more than animals. My brother might have been a free spirit all these years, but I got to see face-to-face what the previous agency leader did to my people. But for the fact that an alpha was my brother, and he wanted to use me to capture him, I'd have been experimented on and killed as well. All to bring about a madman's desire for more power, to use magic to control the werewolf mind."

Michael had no idea why he would bring up that old grudge, but being confined to this place had set him off, had brought back all the hatred. When Gabriel had restored Michael's sanity, he must have suppressed the lust for killing, the lust for revenge. That bastard, Kelly's father, had used her scent to fuel his desire to hunt and made her the target. That had been the only way he could control any werewolf because they weren't susceptible to magic in the same way that humans were.

He frowned. And yet, Kelly had said someone placed a spell on Chrissie, had used magic to keep her hidden from Michael. Could Willie have done it? Could she have employed a magic-user to keep Chrissie from him? No, at the time Michael was looking for Chrissie, Willie didn't know he had set his sights on her. Then again, he couldn't put it past Willie to have him followed in some way if the person had his scent masked too. Willie might have known just after he met Chrissie and about that first kiss.

He shook his head and ran a hand over his face. He was complicating this. "Let me speak to her," he told the agent.

The man stepped back, lifted the device in his hand, and pressed a button. Michael was somewhat startled to find instead of the small projection of Willie as a holo-phone usually displayed, a life-sized hologram of her appeared. He couldn't see more than her head and shoulders, but they were in proportion to how she appeared in person. She gave him her usual arrogant half-smile. "Hello, Michael."

Anger surged inside him at the sight of her. "Stop the games, Willie, and let me out of here. Your interpretation of what's legal and what's not legal is lacking. You can't hold innocent people prisoner without a trial or any type of formal arrest."

She burst out laughing. "You must have forgotten that I am the one who decides what's legal and what isn't. Besides that, you aren't an innocent person. You're a werewolf, or don't you remember that on Earth, your people have no rights at all."

He growled a warning, but didn't rise to her bait.

She went on. "You're an obvious terrorist, trying to break into the agency leader's home. To witnesses, there was no mistaking your murderous intent."

"Witnesses," he shouted. "You mean your lackeys?" He slammed a fist into the door, rattling Willie, if not the solid door. "Where is Chrissie? If you hurt her, so help me, I'll—"

"Ugh, what do I see in you, Michael, with all the repeating of yourself. You're a bore, but then it was never your brain that interested me." The look of lust she tossed his way made his stomach churn. Willie took on a dazed expression as if she had become lost in memory of their many nights tangled beneath her sheets. She had better enjoy those memories, because he would never be there again.

"I said, where the hell is she?"

"Spending her curans, I guess."

Michael frowned. "What do you mean by that?"

She paused, watching him in obvious relish of what she was about to say. "I paid her thirty thousand to stay away from you. I would have paid more to keep a prize like you to

myself, unless I was willing to kill her. But since you might go all werewolf on me and cause difficulties, I decided against it. Still, she surprised me. Chrissie named the amount. Talk about a cold bitch after my own heart.”

Michael slammed his fist into the door for the second time, and pain shot up his arm, but he ignored it. “You’re a liar! Chrissie’s not like that.”

“How would you know? I bet you didn’t do more than fuck her. I’m surprised you know her name.”

“God to hell, Willie. If you think I’m going to believe your lies, you’ve got another thing coming. I know the depths you’ll sink to, to get what you want, and drugging me and locking me in this room doesn’t come close to how low you will sink.”

Willie might instigate the depraved acts she committed on a daily basis, but she took offense to those who called her on it. Her beautiful face took on a mask of hatred Michael had never seen directed at him, and he paused in his tirade against her. Her pink lips thinned to slits, and her almond-shaped blue eyes narrowed. After a few moments of staring at him like she wanted to gouge out his eyes, she turned her head to the side to look at something outside of Michael’s view through the hologram. Without another word, Willie’s form disappeared to be replaced by another, smaller scene. It took a bit for Michael to realize what he saw. The projection was a recording of Willie’s office. He had visited there several times before.

Willie sat at her desk writing, and then she glanced up when someone must have come in. Michael couldn’t see who it was, but then the view swung a one eighty, and he was looking into the face of his mate. Just seeing Chrissie made the beast whine to be with her. Michael tamped the animal down to focus on the recording.

None of the words interested him much except to create a sense of pride that his sexy little thief was not intimidated by Willie in the least. However, when Chrissie asked for the thirty thousand, she might as well have slugged him in the stomach. She was a thief for cripe’s sake. Her morals were already not too high to steal from others, but Michael had fooled himself into thinking she was not like Willie, never like his former lover. How could his destined mate be that kind of woman?

Not that Michael was above bending or breaking the law, but to decide their mating had been nothing more than a means of increasing her finances was too much. Michael spun away from the door and walked back toward the bed. He rested his fists on his hips, staring into nothingness as he considered what this meant. The beast had to be wrong. A wolf and his mate were compatible, and even if she turned out to be human—an occurrence that had happened maybe a dozen times over the last few centuries—the human mates had experienced the same pull, the same need the wolf felt, even before she had been claimed with a bite.

His wolf was wrong. He had to be. That was the single rational conclusion that Michael could come to. With Chrissie taking the money, and he knew it wasn’t from fear of what Chrissie would do, it meant she felt nothing for him, no pull. She’d been just another horny woman, no more.

Michael closed his eyes. When he saw Gabriel again, no doubt his brother would say he told him so. He sighed and then spoke to Willie without facing her. “How long will I be in here, Willie?”

“Until you decide you’re done with her.”

“I could lie.”

“I’ve never known you to be a liar, Michael. Of all things that you are, that’s not one of them. Besides, I am banking on the fact that now you know the truth, you’ll want nothing to

do with her. I've always been up front about what I want from you. I don't ask you to marry me. You come and go as you please."

His shoulders slumped. "Promise me that you won't go after her. Let her enjoy the money if that's what she wants, but you stay out of her life, you and your agents. I have no more reason to see her. Deal?"

The delicate tinkle of her laugh irritated him. "Deal!"

A couple hours later, Michael walked along the street headed back toward Willie's house. Everything in him wanted to go find Chrissie. He had picked up her scent without trouble, especially given that he found the building Willie held him in was on the southside, nearer to where Chrissie lived. He guessed Willie had done it on purpose to gauge whether he would give in and track her down after Michael had given his word he wouldn't. Leave it to Willie to be two steps ahead of everyone.

Annoyed at the internal tug-o'-war, he jerked at his hair. "Stop it, damn you. You're wrong. She's not our mate!"

*"I know the one that is mine. Claim her now."*

"Fuck you!"

The beast raged inside him, drove images in his head of Michael and Chrissie in each other's arms. Even her scent permeated his nostrils, and the sound of her cries of pleasure made him grit his teeth to keep from changing into his wolf form to hunt her.

"How long will this go on?"

*"Until you bite her. We don't just desire her, Michael. We need her."*

Defeated, Michael trudged on. Maybe a night with Willie, or several, would drown out the voice of his inner beast, and his pathetic life would go back to normal. He could only hope so because it had not been that great before meeting Chrissie.

\* \* \* \*

Michael leaned against a pole with his arms folded over his chest. He had been coming to this particular spot for the last month to watch the café on the opposite side of the street. With citizens of Somana Two strolling past him and aircars whizzing down the street, sometimes obscuring his view, he never took his eyes off the wide front window of the building. The entire place from top to bottom had been coated in a deep forest green, at odds with its shades of gray environment. Even the window was not regulation in its size, which made Michael marvel that Willie kept her word about staying away from Chrissie. He had come here the first time, worried about Chrissie's safety since Michael had been unable to perform with Willie all this time.

The fact that he couldn't make his body cooperate brought him endless hours of shame. For all he knew, no werewolf in history had ever suffered this way. His wolf told him it was because of finding his mate and not claiming her, but Michael refused to believe it. Either way, he'd needed to be sure that since he couldn't satisfy Willie, she hadn't gone back on her word. So he had tracked Chrissie by her scent. That weird magic that kept him from finding her at first never resurfaced, and he dismissed it as a fluke.

*"Go to her. You know you want to."*

He ignored the beast and continued to stand there, watching her through the window. She smiled often and flipped a lock of hair from her eyes, a move that made him remember how silky it felt when he ran his fingers through it. She'd cut it, he noted with a frown. He didn't like it just past her ears, but he had no say in the matter.

With longing growing inside him, he allowed his gaze to trail her as she moved about the café, refreshing coffee here, setting a sandwich on a table there. Michael tamped down jealousy more than once when she bent closer to hear something a male customer said to her and at the same time exposing more of that luscious cleavage. Her penchant for dressing to make a man hungry to take her hadn't changed.

And the man she worked with, who was he? Did they have a sexual relationship, Michael wondered. Whether they did or didn't wasn't his business. He should leave and never come back. Instead, he found his foot stepping down into the street without him making the conscious command to move.

While he walked disregarding his safety, aircars blasted horns and swerved to avoid hitting him. A traffic droid whirled up to hover in front of him. "Violation. Crossing not allowed here," said the mechanical-toned bot.

Michael spared it a glance. "Get lost before I crush you."

These bots were simplistic in design, knowing nothing more than a few directives, all regarding the smooth flow of traffic. However, Michael wondered if it had learned self-preservation at some point. The proper procedure was for the bot to issue him a fine on the spot, but after his threat, it stopped speaking, studied him, and then turned to zoom back to its position at the crosswalk.

Michael shifted his focus from the droid back to the café and continued across the street. Without hesitation since he had come this far, he stepped up to the door and swung it wide. He paused in the entrance and took a second to survey the interior, when his gaze came to a stop on Chrissie. His heart pounded in his chest until it ached, and his cock was solid in an instant. The beast must have been right.

She looked up from her customer with a ready smile, but it froze in place upon her seeing him. Shock and fear passed over her lovely face before she pushed her shoulders back and lifted her chin. However, she didn't move from the spot where she stood, nor did she greet him.

Michael reminded himself of what she had done, how she betrayed him—these reminders helped to combat his desire to rush across the room and take her into his arms. Maybe he shouldn't be here. Maybe he should have left well enough alone, but now that he had come this far, Chrissie would give him answers. She would explain to him how the hell she could be so damned happy and content in this place. He could not define happiness, let alone feel it. Tonight, he would settle things once and for all with the beast that this woman—*this human*—was not the one.

## Chapter Ten

Chrissie wanted to sink to the floor or to run to the back and hide until he was gone, but she was made of sterner stuff than that. She'd expected him sooner than now. She'd expected him to fight for her, to show some kind of interest, but he had let her go, and to her disgust, that had hurt more than she liked to admit.

Now he showed up a month later, walking in like he owned the place. Angry that the sight of him had snatched away all the strength she thought was a part of her, she forced herself to turn away and head behind the counter. She grabbed up a cloth and began wiping down the already clean space in front of her to keep her hands busy. Through her lashes, she watched him saunter over and take a seat on a stool. Chrissie ignored him.

Kal came up and rested a hand on her shoulder. He leaned in close, his voice low, but casual. "Got someone for one of your specials, Chrissie."

Both of them heard the growl, but Chrissie pretended not to notice. Kal blinked and spun in Michael's direction. To avoid questions and a scene, she wiggled her shoulders, dislodging Kal's hand and shoved him toward the back. "You put it together, and I'll deliver it."

Kal hesitated, still looking at Michael with suspicion in his eyes.

"Kal," Chrissie snapped.

He nodded and went to do her bidding. The special he referred to was a sandwich with real meat. Just like Chrissie had planned, she smuggled in meat for special customers who could be discreet and who could pay the big curans for it. She had a good, steady flow of regular customers and a handful of the special ones. Her café was a success, and she couldn't be happier. At least, that's what she told herself each day until she returned to her apartment above the café and found that all she could do was pine for the bastard now sitting at her counter.

"Are you going to ignore me all night, Chrissie," he asked.

She glared at him. "What are you doing here, Michael? I thought we were through. I like it that way."

"Liar," he ground out. "Why are you trembling? Or are you afraid of me?"

"I'm not, and why would I be?"

He reached out, grabbed her wrist, and tugged her closer. Chrissie stumbled, catching herself before she bumped the counter. "Get your hands off me."

"And if I refuse?"

"Hey, Chrissie, you need some help over there?" one of the men who came each day just to flirt with her said. If Chrissie gave him the slightest encouragement, the man would have asked her out, but she wasn't interested. No, her stupid heart pounded with need for this fool.

"I'm okay," she called back, not removing her focus from Michael. "I don't want you here, Michael. I'm working, and you're interrupting. So, if you're not going to order, I suggest you leave."

He changed tactics, and instead of holding her captive, he began to run his fingers over the sensitive skin on the inside of her wrist. She closed her eyes to steel herself against the sensations that began to bombard her.

"Stop," she pleaded.

"I want you."

She almost moaned but bit it off. In desperation, she blurted out, "I'm seeing Kal. We're serious. I won't cheat on him like you're trying to cheat on Willie." Of course, it wasn't true.

Chrissie couldn't have gotten her desires to flow in the direction of another man if she stripped naked and jumped the other guy. When her fingers found her bud at night, her mind was overtaken with images of Michael. His name fell from her lips as she came, time and again, no matter how hard she tried to stop it. She had thought if she could replace him with another lover, he might fade from her memories, but the idea of another man touching her was revolting. All this time, she'd been in limbo, smiling on the outside but miserable in her heart.

At her words, Michael shrugged. "I have no qualms about killing him."

"You're not serious!"

He didn't retract his words. Instead, he changed the subject. "You and I need to talk. Is there somewhere private we can go?"

She tugged her hand free of his and picked up the cloth again. "I have nothing to say to you. If you're not ordering, excuse me while I attend to other customers." With that, she spun away and was surprised that Michael let her go. After taking the orders of several people, she chanced a glance toward where Michael was and found that he had moved to a booth. His gaze never left her.

When Kal came back with the special order, Chrissie snatched it from his hands. She needed to get out of there. "Look after things while I deliver this, Kal. Which one is it?"

He blinked at her and then peered at Michael. "Chrissie . . ."

"Don't," she muttered.

He sighed. "Okay, but remember I'm not just some imitation-burger flipper. I can help you. You just say the word."

Chrissie chuckled. Kal was one of the two men left alive with whom she had done her thieving. She knew him well enough to know he would do what he offered. He had been the muscle when needed to rough up those who required it, for added protection when Joey wasn't around. Kal with his scarred face from too many bar fights had surprised her when he agreed to quit the business and work in the café with her.

"Yes, I'll keep that in mind, Kal. Which customer?"

"Forty-eight," he said, referring to the numbering system she had set up to identify her special customers rather than speaking their names.

"Thanks. I'll see you later." She hurried out the door. Whatever craziness made her think Michael wouldn't follow dissipated when he fell into step beside her. She rolled her eyes. "I told you to leave me alone."

"And I said we need to talk."

"You don't want to talk, Michael. You want sex, and I'm not in the market for a new lover. Thanks for the offer."

He narrowed his eyes on her. "I wasn't offering."

His affirmation failed when his gaze shifted down to her breasts. Chrissie bit off a frustrated grunt when her nipples pebbled. The man should not have such command over her body. He didn't deserve it.

"Good, because I'm no longer attracted to you," she said, hoping he believed her.

Michael grinned as he tapped his nose. "It never lies."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

In answer, he pulled her to a stop and leaned over to run his tongue along the curve of her ear. Instant wetness pooled between Chrissie's legs, and her already taut tips began to ache. She hated his guts, she decided.

"I can smell your desire," he whispered in her ear. "It's so heady I could come just breathing it in. You want me just as much, and nothing you say can convince me otherwise."

Chrissie fought him. "You don't deserve me."

His eyes widened. "I don't? You've got a lot of nerve, woman, because it's you who don't deserve one of my kind."

She shrieked. "See? That's what I mean, all that damn arrogance. You didn't come after me because you expected me to chase you like Willie. She runs behind you, pleading with you to give her just one more night in bed. Well, you can forget about me doing that, buddy. I don't need you. I admit I'm attracted to you, but I choose my lovers, and you can believe they don't consider themselves too good for me. All you northsiders are just alike, human or werewolf. Get lost!"

She tried to continue walking, but Michael grabbed her arm and crushed her to him. Chrissie fought against his hold, but it was a battle she was destined to lose. She clutched his biceps and, trying to dislodge them, felt them flex, thickening and hardening under her touch. Even while she wanted to get away from him, she had to admire his build. She enjoyed running her hands over men with bodies cut to perfection, but Michael made them all look like imitations of the real thing.

To cover the pounding of her heart and the want churning in her belly, she glared at him with tight lips, pretending his nearness did nothing but disgust her. However, when she looked up to convince him of her dislike of him, it was to find his mouth descending on hers. All Chrissie's fight fled, and her mouth dropped open on a half moan, half sigh. *No, don't let this happen. Kick him, anything!*

His kiss was featherlight. He teased her bottom lip, pulled it between his, and sucked until she couldn't hold off a response any longer. In a reflexive motion, she squeezed his arms, thrilling in the unyielding steel, and stood on her tiptoes to deepen their kiss. Michael left her bottom lip to cover her entire mouth. His tongue penetrated her mouth to stroke hers and wrench the longing whine from her throat. He answered with a small growl then lifted her from her feet.

Someone nearby uttered the age-old "get a room," but Chrissie didn't want Michael to stop long enough for that. She wanted the kiss to go on, to light her body ablaze, and quench the annoying craving for him that had not let her alone for the last thirty days. Forgetting where she was or not giving a rip, she wrapped her legs around his waist, and her lover maneuvered his palms down to her ass. He scooped her tighter, almost making her cry out at the feel of his growing cock.

After a few moments, she realized they were moving, and she drew away with reluctance from his kiss. The fact that they were at the back of her café about to ascend the stairs to her apartment caught her off guard. Chrissie wiggled to get down from Michael's arms, surprised that he let her go.

"How did you know where I live and about the back entrance?"

He shrugged with no obvious intention of telling her. Chrissie wondered just how long he had known, and the anger at his not coming sooner resurfaced, but before she could tell him to get lost a second time, he started up the steps.

"I have a delivery to make," she shouted.

"We need to finish what we started, and we need to talk. Remember?"

He reached her door and tried the knob. She'd locked it. One couldn't be too careful in this area, a business zone, near the old docks, but just as unsafe as her old neighborhood.

"Michael!"

He rattled the doorknob like he was testing its give under his strength. Frustrated, angry, and no less horny, she stomped up the steps and let them both in. As she walked ahead of him, she bent to pick up stray clothes tossed here and there, kicked a shoe, and balled up



trash to deposit in the receptacle in her kitchen. She was no homemaker, that was for sure. The space was micro-small, but it was hers, and that's all that mattered.

Michael's bulk filling the apartment made it seem tinier. Although Chrissie stood several feet away from him, he appeared to tower above her, his hands inches from her. And her stupid body responded like she was his slave, a truth he must be well aware of from the knowing glint in his eyes. She ached to tell him she didn't want him and have it be true.

"Come here, Chrissie."

"Go to hell."

"I won't repeat myself."

"And you won't get me following your orders either." She crossed her arms, intending to turn her back on him, but she had pressed herself close to a table and bumped her hip on it. The turn had been a half one, so he was still in full view at her right side.

Michael stretched his arms over his head, and the next thing she knew he had removed his shirt. She gripped the edge of the table. He kicked his feet free of his shoes and then unbuttoned his pants. A striptease? A man was doing a striptease for her? She'd never experienced anything like that, and yet, damn it all to hell, it was working.

Chrissie turned to face him, holding onto the table with both hands now. Her eyes widened, and she locked onto his svelte body, followed the pants to the floor only to zip back up to will his boxers to do the same. "You have no right," she squeaked.

He had been looking down as if oblivious to her being in the room, but his gray gaze snapped up to meet hers and mesmerized her until she was sure she wouldn't be able to move if she tried. Was this their power? Were they like vampires, able to take control of a person with a look? No, she decided, this was just about her and Michael, about their unexplainable attraction to one another. He crooked a finger in her direction, indicating that she should come to him. She took two steps, intent to get her hands on him if not to obey, but then she forced herself to halt. Chrissie was no man's slave.

Two could play the game. She could argue all night that she had to get back to work and tell herself that Michael didn't deserve to have sex with her, but like she had a beast of her own inside, she wasn't going to be denied tonight. A fleeting thought passed through her mind about where her customer's sandwich had gotten to, but Chrissie dismissed it to loosen the ties of her apron. When that garment hit the floor, she started on the buttons of her blouse. The silky sides had scarcely parted to reveal her black lace bra beneath before Michael's nostrils flared, and he grunted. His cock twitched in reaction to the pale swell of her breasts. One couldn't get a tan living on Somana Two, but she was pretty sure she looked good enough for him. He almost drooled.

She wiggled free from her pants, and before she could step out of them, Michael was on her. He grasped her hips, lifted her up off her feet, and yanked her clothing the rest of the way off. She protested his roughness, but he ignored her.

"You dare tease me like that?" he complained. "You have no idea of what you're dealing with. My need is greater than what you can imagine. You cannot push me too far and be safe."

"What do you mean?"

She found it impossible to question him further because he ran his tongue over her nipple, then pulled it into his mouth and sucked. Chrissie's hands came down on his shoulders. She threw her head back and tried to gain control. However, it was gone. She'd made a good show, but she did belong to Michael—every quivering inch of her.

He hoisted her onto the table and stood in front of her. She yelped in surprise when he parted her legs, but rather than explore her with his fingers or his amazing cock, he stopped to stare down at her, a forbidding expression taking over his handsome features.

"Why would you take money to stay away from me? Are you truly no better than Willie? I admit I've never desired a mate, never cared whether the woman who shared her body with me was morally decent. That didn't matter so long as she satisfied the wolf. But . . ."

When he stopped speaking, Chrissie had to wonder if it was because he thought he sounded weak, admitting to how much it bothered him to think she had betrayed him. The bitterness she had harbored thinking he chose Willie over her eased just a little. She turned her head. "You're one to talk. You chose that dirty prostitute over the woman you claimed was your mate. Not that I believe in that BS, but you apparently do. You've been keeping her bed warm all this time. What, did she give the excuse of a headache tonight and you came sniffing around for second best?"

Michael took hold of her chin and forced her to look into his eyes. She was startled to find softness there rather than the normal arrogance or anger. He ran his palm down her cheek and cupped the side of her face almost like he cherished her. She didn't dare believe he—or any man—had that much sentiment inside him, definitely not a werewolf.

"I didn't sleep with her once since meeting you," he admitted.

She gasped. "I don't believe it!"

He took his hand from her cheek and lowered it to cover her fingers, and then he placed her hand on his throbbing cock. "*This* will not rise for anyone but you, Chrissie."

He kissed her, setting her heart to pounding when it had begun to settle down. His fingers closed around hers, making her squeeze him. A shudder went through his frame, and Chrissie watched in fascination as he closed his eyes, his head tilted back. Did she have that much of an effect on this powerful man-beast? Was she that special, that no other woman would do? If so, how long would it last? Would he grow bored after a few months—hell, a few days?

After a moment, he opened lust-filled eyes. "Tell me why."

He didn't have to explain what he meant. Chrissie knew he referred to her taking the money. He had allayed at least the most prominent of her doubts, so it was only fair that she settle his questions. "It's simple. I never claimed to be anyone other than a woman who can and will watch her own back. I took the money to make Willie believe that's all I cared for. If I just promised to stay away from you, she would have believed I was weak and that the first time you came after me—or even if you didn't—I'd give into my desire for you. If I told her I was not giving you up no matter what she said, well, you know her better than I do. What do you think she would have done?"

Michael frowned and then grinned. "So you had to be the cold-hearted bitch that someone like Willie could relate to, a woman in it for her self-interests and nothing else. Should I believe that? After all, you spent the money, bought the café with it, I don't doubt."

"I'm not a fool."

He chuckled. "No, my mate wouldn't be."

"I'm not so certain I am your mate."

His eyes blazed. "I am." With that, he lifted her from the table and carried her over to her bed, a few steps away since the second floor over her café did not use the entire square footage of the building. Her studio included a kitchen, bedroom, and a small eating area in close proximity to each other and no benefit of a wall to separate them.

Michael placed her on the bed and followed her down. He planted himself between her legs and cast a glance down at her heated pussy. An eyebrow rose in question. "I don't think he has the patience to eat you this time. We need to be inside you."

Chrissie opened her mouth to ask why he referred to the wolf like they were two separate people, but Michael pushed the head of his staff to her opening, and all she could do was close her eyes and moan. She welcomed him in, took hold of his hips, and wrapped her legs around his outer thighs. Soon Michael was buried to the hilt and began a slow rhythm of easing in and out of her silken heat.

"Fuck, you feel incredible," he declared.

His shoulder came down toward her, and Chrissie pressed soft kisses to his moist skin. Tears pricked her eyes at his gentleness, not believing that he was capable of such a thing or that his wolf would allow it. The first time they were together, Michael had been all about his pleasure even though she had come multiple times. Tonight was different. She sniffed and hid her face behind his shoulder. He drew back.

"You're crying? I'm hurting you?"

Embarrassed, she didn't answer but pulled him back down to her. What in the world was going on with her? No, she knew what it was even if she wouldn't admit it. She loved him. That fast and for no reason. It had happened in a flash, amid characteristics from him that would have never drawn her to another man. Maybe Michael was right. Maybe they were destined for one another.

"Michael," she murmured.

He rotated their positions and pulled her on top. When he squeezed her thighs, ground her deeper into his groin, she was helpless to fight the sudden orgasm that shook her. Their hips moved in unison, and Michael kept her tight to his chest as he explored her mouth with his. Chrissie found his flat nipples and pinched them before reaching behind her to tease his balls.

Michael stopped her. "You'll make me come too soon doing that."

Chrissie laughed. She sat up, shook his hand off, and continued to stroke him. "I'm taming the beast. You'll come for me now, wolf-boy, and as often as I want you to."

He chuckled. "Do you think you're woman enough to make the wolf do what you want?"

"I'm that and more. Don't you ever forget it."

To demonstrate her temporary control over him, she braced one palm on his ripped abs and rode him harder. His huge cock slipped in and out of her, making her feel so good, she almost forgot what she was doing. Her lids drooped and head bowed, but she fought to keep focused. A glance at Michael told her he wouldn't last long. She increased her pace and took his balls in her palm.

Michael shouted once, and then he emptied his hot seed inside her. For the second time, Chrissie came, right behind him, quivering and unable to keep her balance. He caught her when she fell toward him and flipped her beneath him. Michael lifted one of her thighs and stroked the underside while grinding into her. Chrissie grit her teeth. Her sensitive clit grazed his flesh while he pushed deeper inside.

"Michael!"

"I need it again, my love," he told her. "Surrender to me."

Before she knew what was happening, she came again. Michael didn't give her more than a few moments' rest for half the night, until she admitted that she could never control the wildness that was in him. He grinned at her, the superiority that was a part of his makeup shining in his eyes.

“Don’t worry. Soon you will be like me, and your drive will match mine. When that happens, you’ll be able to take me until we’re both worn out. That I promise you.”

Fear gripped her insides. Like him? What did he mean? A werewolf, but how? She swallowed and would have asked him, but an arrested expression came over his face. He rolled to the side of the bed and sat there with his back to her. Chrissie sat up. “What’s wrong?”

Michael stood and began to dress. Her heart sank. So he was tired of her already? What happened to all the promises? He turned to face her after he had sat down to tie his shoes.

“I have to go.”

“Why?”

“I have to take care of some business.” He leaned over and kissed her. “Don’t worry. I’ll be back.” With no explanation whatsoever, he strolled toward the door, grabbing the forgotten sandwich from a chair where she must have dropped it. “You don’t mind if I take this? See you later.”

And just like that, he was gone.

## Chapter Eleven

Michael downed the meat sandwich in a couple of bites, savoring the flavor. It had been months since he'd had anything like it, and as he hurried along the street where Chrissie's café was located, he wondered if maybe the best decision for him and Chrissie after he had turned her was to fly to Earth. At least there, they could hunt, and he had heard there were spots that were not controlled by the agency. Werewolves weren't allowed to roam outside the reservation, but he could find a way, somehow to keep Chrissie safe until Willie got over her obsession with him.

Thinking of keeping Chrissie safe, he frowned. *"Gabriel, are you still there?"*

*"I'm here. How long until you arrive?"*

*"Half-hour,"* Michael responded. *"So you're telling me you think Willie had something to do with why we couldn't find the three werewolves over at that other site? You've got evidence of that?"*

*"I wouldn't have interrupted your mating otherwise."*

Michael grunted. *"Just how long were you lurking in my head?"* Had Gabriel been listening in, maybe experiencing what Michael felt while he made love to Chrissie? Under normal circumstances, he would have sensed his brother's presence in his head, but not when he was half out of his mind with bliss.

*"Does it matter?"*

*"You know it does, damn it!"*

*"Fine,"* Gabriel answered after a few moments of silence. *"I was there long enough to know she is the one. She's your mate."*

*"I've been telling you that for a while."*

*"You're not like me, little brother. I would have claimed my mate by now. In fact, I'm pretty sure it didn't take a month for me to bite her."*

*"Kiss my ass."*

Gabriel chuckled and then sobered. *"We can discuss what this means for your life later. What we need to do is find those werewolves before they cause trouble."*

*"That is if they didn't return to their downed ship and die of starvation,"* Michael cut in. *"And you're not my alpha, so you can forget about us discussing what Chrissie means for my life."*

Gabriel didn't comment on that assertion. Michael already knew his brother considered all lone werewolves his responsibility, especially those that happened to land or were made on Somana Two. Michael had the disgusting privilege of seeing how Willie's cousin brownnosed his brother, since he was brand new to the fold. Okay, not exactly brownnose, but the man showed enough respect to Gabriel to make his brother's head swell. Michael wasn't falling in with that. He had been living just fine without a pack, and he'd continue to do so with Chrissie at his side.

*"Get here soon,"* Gabriel told him, and Michael sensed his brother break the connection between them.

Michael was a couple blocks from Kelly's shop when his brother rounded a corner ahead of him. His brother indicated a southeast direction, and Michael dropped into step beside him. *"So, what's the situation?"*

*"Their scent,"* Gabriel muttered, studying the ground as he strode. *"Don't you smell it? Funny thing is it wasn't apparent before today. Somehow I feel like someone's playing games with us, someone who knows a trick to keep us from tracking."*

*"Hmm, but it doesn't sound like Willie. She has a lot at her disposal, but magic-users, no. That's not been her style up until now."*

“Yeah?” Gabriel nodded to a point ahead of them. “So, why do our noses lead us to that place? You recognize it.”

Michael turned to look and gasped. The building where the werewolf scent was strong, not even hours old, was the same place Willie’d had him imprisoned. The likelihood that someone was using her building without her knowing it was slim to none. “We’ve been avoiding the obvious for Kelly’s sake, Gabriel, but what about her father? He is a powerful magic-user, and he disappeared without a trace with his cohort and her ex-assistant. He’d have the motive to do this, to frame Willie.”

Gabriel sneered. “Are you defending her?”

“Don’t be stupid.”

His brother jimmied the lock on the front of the building, and they both stepped inside the darkened space to search for evidence of their brothers. The odor was strong all right. They had been here not too long ago, which was odd. The werewolves would be out of their minds, not thinking reasonably. After being without the mental guidance that Gabriel offered, they would not have had the clear-headed ability to secure a transport and drive it to the Somana Two station from the other site, and then once they got here to find this particular building, which was not on the border of the station.

“I’ve been giving it some thought,” Gabriel announced from his position on the opposite side of the room. Michael made out his brother’s figure with ease. “I think we have more than one situation going on here. Remember, someone hired Chrissie to steal equipment from Willie’s pet project, that other site?”

Michael’s eyes widened. “How did you know that?”

“I make it my business.” His brother went on like it was no big deal. “That person may have a vendetta against Willie or a motive to destroy any progress she might make as agency leader. Maybe it’s not Kelly’s father. Maybe it’s one of his two henchmen or someone else. Whatever. Too, Willie may have arranged for the rogue wolves to be brought here. She had to have known about them even though you delayed reporting it to her. The site was cleaned up when you and I went to check it out, the bodies gone. If you’re thinking she couldn’t have done that, think about the fact that with enough drugs, she put you down for a while. We’re talking about starving wolves, weak. A group of agents could do the job.”

Gabriel was right. Michael couldn’t deny what it looked like. Not that he wanted Willie to be innocent. What he wanted was her to realize the two of them were done, but surely her replacement for him wasn’t one of the others. Even Willie wasn’t that crazy, to take on a wolf that had all but lost its mind.

“That was more than a month ago,” Michael whispered.

“Yeah, enough time for them to regain their strength.”

“In order to . . .” Michael’s heart hammered in his chest. “In order for them to seek out Chrissie. If she’s hurt, that bitch will die by my hands! Damn it, I should never have left her.”

Ripping his clothes, Michael shifted on the run. He tossed the threads aside, and his paws hit the ground to propel him forward at top speed. He had to get there in time. He’d die without her. Would Willie sink this low to maintain control? She might. He couldn’t take the chance. He had to be sure.

Gabriel had shifted as well, and when they rounded a corner to head south, his brother paused, sniffing the air. *“Two different directions. That bitch has sent one in Chrissie’s direction, and two in Kelly’s. I thought she was done with me. I have to go back, Michael. You can handle this. I don’t expect you will spare his life.”*

*“Like hell I will. If he has threatened her or even frightened her, he dies. End of story.”*

His brother bobbed his head. "*Be careful.*" Gabriel disappeared into the darkness.

\* \* \* \*

Chrissie rolled to her back and stared up at the ceiling. She couldn't believe he had walked out on her, not giving her a hint of why. Had it been that bad between them? She hadn't thought so at the time. At one point, Michael had paused above her, his gaze intent as he searched her face. For just that moment in time, she felt like he might love her, but now this. With a grunt, she sat up and ran a hand through her tussled hair. She hated feeling anything for him. Caring about Michael made her weak, desperate. Wanting him by her side pissed her off all the more when it was obvious that he desired to be elsewhere. On top of that, her stupid mind chalked up the reason Michael left to him missing Willie.

"This is not me," she grumbled as she stomped into her bathroom to take a quick shower before returning to the café. She didn't entertain insecurities. Her life had no room for them, and before that damn werewolf, she didn't give a flying leap what others thought of her. "Is this what love does to you?"

Defeated by the thought, she completed her shower and dressed. When she descended the stairs outside her apartment, all she could think about was that love was half of the problem. The other half, and maybe more than half, involved Michael being a werewolf, and what it meant for her.

At the bottom of the stairs, she paused at the sound of growling nearby. She peered into the darkness ahead of her, wishing she'd installed more lighting back here. The agency sure wasn't going to take care of it. "Who's there?"

Shadows shifted, and Chrissie bent to the side to slide her hand down her pants leg. Since returning home, she had replaced one of her knives, and now she gripped it in her palm.

"You have two seconds to show yourself," she warned.

The growling came again, and Chrissie thought she caught a glimpse of an animal. There were no dogs on Somana Two. Remembering the attack at the other site, she tried to wet her dry throat, to no avail. The beast inched forward, but before she could fully make it out, it shifted, and Chrissie found she was staring at a man, a sexy, naked man she had never seen before.

She wielded her knife in a way to threaten him. "Don't do anything stupid, buddy."

Then she noticed the eyes. They were almost coal black with a wildness in them that drove it home right away that the man was out of his mind. Chrissie might be bold and good with her weapon, but she knew that even with him in his human state, she was no match for this guy. She was in big trouble.

He leaped forward with an outstretched arm to grab her. Chrissie dodged to the side and swung her arm. Her knife found its mark and created a long gash in his flesh. If she expected a howl of pain, she'd keep waiting. He didn't appear to feel the cut but came at her again. This time, she dropped down to the ground so he hovered above her, but then she came up hard and fast to drive her knife into his stomach.

The man must weigh a ton, because when his knees buckled from the injury, he flattened her under him on the ground. Chrissie couldn't move her hand, let alone shove him off. The knife handle drove into her stomach, and she cried out at the pain.

"Get off me," she shouted.

He pressed his lips to her cheek and stuck his tongue out. Chrissie's stomach lurched in revulsion. She was sure she'd toss the contents of her stomach when she felt his erection. A

memory rose in her mind of someone saying werewolves were interested in few things during a full moon, and two of them were hunting for food and sex. *Not me, damn it!*

With all her might, she twisted her knife in the man's gut, and this time he did howl. He leaned back, raised a hand, and brought it down on the side of her head. Spots danced before her eyes, but she fought not to lose consciousness. Holding her down with one hand, despite how she struggled, he yanked the knife out of his stomach and tossed it away. Too late, Chrissie remembered how fast they healed. So he was both stronger than the average man and able to heal as if she had done no damage to him at all.

He wrapped his fingers around her blouse's collar and tore downward. Chrissie scratched and beat at him, but he ignored her struggle. Back here behind her café in the darkness, no one would see. No one would help. In fact, in this area, even if she screamed, everyone would ignore it. That had been the case all too often in the past.

She closed her eyes, fighting for calm but finding none. *"Michael, please help me. If you care about me at all. Help."*

No sooner had Chrissie called out the words in her mind than he was there. Michael came from nowhere, it seemed, and snatched the other man off her. He slammed him against the railing leading up to her apartment and then pummeled him with his fists.

"You dare touch my mate? I'll rip you apart for that!"

Chrissie scrambled to her feet and searched around for her knife, although she doubted she'd be much help. She had to trust that Michael could handle his opponent. When Chrissie's fingers closed around her weapon, she turned to find the other man tossing Michael into the alleyway behind her building. She bit off a scream and took two steps to follow them because she couldn't see what was going on back there.

"Go in the house, Chrissie. Lock yourself—"

He grunted, and the other man growled. Chrissie was sure he'd shifted, but then she heard an answering growl and knew Michael had shifted as well. However, she wasn't going anywhere, not until she knew he was safe.

The fight went on for what felt like hours, with Chrissie able to hear the growl, the cries of pain, even cracked bones as one or the other was slammed on the ground, but she saw nothing. At last, the sounds stopped, and she strained to pick up movement. Faltering feet came into view. She squeezed her knife between both hands, crouched and ready to spring if it was the other man. Instead, Michael stumbled forward, covered in blood and in his human form.

Chrissie ran to him and wrapped her arms around his waist. "Are you okay, Michael? Is he dead?"

He winced at her touch but didn't let her go when she would have pulled back. "Yes, he's dead. He won't hurt you ever again." Michael leaned back and with half-closed eyes began to search her body. "He didn't . . ."

She shook her head. "No."

He sighed. "Come, I'll make sure you're inside before I go."

"Go where?" She hated how her voice had turned whiny.

"I promise I'll be back."

"Michael!" He was leaving her again without an explanation? She wouldn't accept it. He was weak. She wouldn't let him leave until he healed and grew stronger. He couldn't fight her off at this point.

Her lover seemed to read her mind. Demonstrating just how strong he still was, he lifted her in his arms and carried her up the steps to her apartment. Although Chrissie fought hard



to get free, she couldn't. At last, she gave in and unlocked the door. Michael deposited her on her bed and stood over her.

“You don't leave this apartment until I tell you it's safe. Got it?”

She didn't bother to tell him to go to hell but sat there in silence, angry, hurt, and exhausted. Michael ran a hand over her cheek, and then bent to kiss her. Chrissie turned her head. He hovered a moment, but she didn't give into him. He left, the door clicking closed behind him.

## Chapter Twelve

A week had passed, and Chrissie had heard nothing from Michael. Of course she went back to work the very next day after sleeping for hours and soaking her aching muscles in a hot bath. Kal had asked questions about what happened to her, but she offered no explanation, not because it was none of his business, although it wasn't, but because she thought she might cry, and she had put those emotions behind her with determination.

She cooked, she cleaned, and she served her customers with as much vigor as she could muster, all with Kal throwing her knowing looks. She wasn't fooling anyone but herself, but who cared. She'd be fine without that bastard, one way or another.

The bell over her door rang, and Chrissie glanced up from wiping down one of the tables. She froze in place. Two tall, dark, and deliciously handsome men strode in with a beautiful woman curved along the side of one of them. They took a table in the corner, where there was a clear view of the front door and the back of the café. Chrissie considered sending Kal to take their order but decided she was not a coward.

She strode over to them with her pad and pencil in hand, all business. "Michael and family." She paused.

The woman grinned. "How are you, sweetie?"

She glared at her brother-in-law, and Chrissie guessed the woman didn't find it amusing that he hadn't contacted her all this time.

"I'm fine, thank you. What can I get you?" She couldn't stop her gaze from shifting to watch Michael, so she stared down at her pad instead.

"Chai tea all around?" Kelly responded.

Michael grunted. "Got anything harder?"

Chrissie leaped at the chance to insult him. "It's a café, asshole."

Michael scraped back his chair and stood. Before Chrissie knew what he was going to do, he grabbed her around the waist and hoisted her against him. She struggled to get out of his arms. "We need to talk."

"Jerk, put me down," she demanded.

"Hey, Chrissie, you need help over there?" a customer called.

She hadn't gotten her mouth open by the time Michael narrowed his dark eyes on the man and snarled a warning. The customer jerked back and whispered to his friends. Chrissie heard from her position behind Michael's wall of a chest the terrified comments floating around the room. "*Werewolf*." She imagined that Michael wouldn't hear the end of it from his brother who had seemed to want their presence on Somana Two to be a secret from the general population. And if his barbarian antics affected her business, she'd have his ass as well.

When they were in the back room out of sight of everyone, Michael set her on her feet. Chrissie crossed her arms over her chest and glowered at him. "What do you want?"

He touched her cheek, but she pulled away.

"You're angry at me."

"You think? You said you'd be back."

"I *am* back."

Chrissie tried shoving at his chest when he crowded her, but there was no effect whatsoever. Her stupid body ignited with his nearness. "A week ago. I expected you back that night or at the latest the next day."

"I had business to take care of."

"Yeah, business you didn't care to share with me."

Michael blew out a breath, scrubbed at the back of his neck, and put on an expression of apology that annoyed her all the more. "I'm sorry."

"You're not."

He rested his hands on her hips and lifted her to sit her on the table behind her. When he positioned himself between her legs, she shivered.

"This is unsanitary, Michael. I make food on this table."

He nuzzled her neck and kissed down to her shoulder. His hands moved from her hips to her sides, and his thumbs grazed her nipples. Chrissie resisted arching into his touch despite how she wanted more.

"I want you for my mate," he whispered.

She turned her head. "I don't know if I want that."

He drew back, his eyes widened in surprise. She wondered if he had expected her to fall into his lap upon command or for her to beg to be his. His expression darkened while he watched her. "You're telling me you don't love me, Chrissie?"

"Are you ordering me to?"

"Of course not. That's ridiculous."

"Well, you're acting surprised. It's not like you ever made any declarations to me. All you've ever done is tell me what I am, that I'm your mate. No, correction, you've told others. You told your brother and sister-in-law. You told that other werewolf you fought, but you never explained to me just what it means to be your mate and what it involves. Worse, you've never told me how you feel about me, other than looking at me like I'm your property, a fuck toy."

Chrissie blinked back tears and swallowed. She focused on the top button on his shirt to give herself time to collect her emotions. So far, it wasn't working. Michael caught her beneath the chin and forced her head up without hurting her. He planted a gentle kiss on the tip of her nose.

"I've been cruel. I didn't mean to be. I've held my emotions in check, deep inside. I guess it was something I picked up right after Gabriel set my mind right." At her questioning look, he attempted to explain. "You've heard how werewolves are not allowed on the moon because it's like a full moon all day and night? Well, if we come here without an alpha's help to center our minds, then we can go crazy, which is what happened to those other three who attacked us. Gabriel is an alpha wolf. He helped me after some craziness I'll tell you about later. Suffice it to say, after what he did for me, I wasn't too keen on letting myself go. You, my beautiful woman, make me feel like I'm losing myself."

"Thanks a lot."

He grinned. "That's not a bad thing. What it means is the moment we met you, the beast knew you were the one. He called to you, to make you mine. I took some time to believe it, but I came to realize I love you, Chrissie. Very much."

Her heart pounded, and tears wet her eyes. She sniffed but didn't let the droplets fall. Instead, she buried her face into his chest, breathed in his familiar scent. She didn't want to be apart from him again. That she knew without a doubt.

"You left me," she murmured. "Without telling me a thing. I thought you weren't . . ."

"Sweetheart, I'm so sorry I hurt you. I will do everything in my power never to do that again." He lifted her head and kissed her lips.

Melting against him, Chrissie savored his flavor, the rightness of his tongue sweeping her mouth. After a long time, he drew back, his breathing ragged.

"While I was fighting that bastard here, my brother was fighting the other two on his own. I had to go and help him. Willie had set them on our mates, maybe in a desperate

attempt to regain control since she'd now lost both you and me. I have no doubt she found out that I had gone to see you when I promised I wouldn't. Probably had me followed. Anyway, I had to take care of that, to be sure Gabriel and Kelly were safe when I knew you were.

"Next, Gabriel and I went together to face down Willie, but we found her gone. We did some checking and found out she has fled Somana Two. You never fuck over a werewolf if you want to keep your life."

Chrissie couldn't believe what he was telling her. "Willie's gone? Is she still heading the agency?"

"Not sure, although her cousin, Ace, is going to take over operations here for the time being. I have been assigned to fly to Earth to track her."

She saw resentment in his eyes.

"Gabriel hasn't gotten it into his head yet that he's not my alpha, but Ace and Kelly agreed to the plan, and I have wanted to go back. I miss it."

Chrissie took him by surprise so she was able to shove him away. He staggered back. "So you're leaving me again. Is that it? That why the whole troupe came here tonight? I don't need this crap, Michael. I was happy before you came into my life, and I can damn sure take care of things without you."

She jumped off the table and started toward the door. Michael slipped up behind her and wrapped his arms around her, keeping her from moving.

"That's not acceptable."

She beat at his hands.

He kissed her earlobe and then the sensitive skin behind it. A thrill zipped through her body. Michael tightened his hold. "I cannot live without you Chrissie. I won't. It's important that I find Willie because I can't be sure if she'll do something to try to hurt you again, but I also won't accept going to Earth without you. Tell me you will go with me."

"Are you kidding? Me? Earth?" He loosened his embrace enough for her to turn and face him. "I never imagined . . . I have never been able to afford it, and someone from my side of the station wouldn't have been given the paperwork to go." She chewed her lip. "But my business."

"That guy seems like he's got a good head on his shoulders." He nodded toward the front of the café. "Your partner."

She smiled. "Partner. Hmm, yeah, he might go for running the place long-term if I make him partner. Still, this café has been my dream for a long time."

"Are you saying I should leave without you?"

"Never!" She calmed herself. "I love you, Michael. I don't want to be apart from you either, but I'm scared of what it means to be your mate. I don't understand anything about it."

He held her close to his chest. "I will explain all. I promise I won't bite . . . uh, claim you until I've explained it in detail, what to expect. Do we have a deal?"

"Yes, we do. I'll be wherever you are from now on."

"The same goes for me, sweetheart. I'll never leave you again."

\* \* \* \*

Michael watched with half-closed eyes as Chrissie slid from the bed to cross over to the porthole. She'd been like an excited child when they arrived at the ship. To learn that she had never been off the moon, had been born and raised here, shocked him, although he

knew there were plenty of people like her. He enjoyed being the one to show her where he was from, and when he had made her like him, he would show her the thrill of the hunt as well.

Ace was investigating the suspected magic-user who had hired Chrissie and had kept her scent covered when Michael tracked her, and they suspected it was this same person who dispelled Kelly's spell that kept her back door locked.

Michael and Chrissie would conduct their own search for Willie once they were on Earth. However, for now, all Michael wanted to do was take his sexy little lover until she pleaded with him to stop. In a way, he wished he had already made her a werewolf, then he knew he could take their lovemaking to levels a human could only dream about, but he had promised to wait on that, and wait he would.

He tossed back the covers and stepped out of the bed. With stealth, he moved up behind her and rubbed his cock's head along her ass. Chrissie moaned and pushed back into the touch. Michael tightened all the more. He ached to get inside her, to feel her hot slick walls surrounding him, but rather than treating her like he owned her, he had been practicing being gentle. The experience was excruciating. "Are you rested enough to take me again?"

She laughed up at him. "You're asking? You usually just flip me over and drive in."

He frowned. "I've not been that insensitive."

"Uh-huh."

He grunted, dropping his forehead to her shoulder. Chrissie chuckled then took his hand and led him over to the bed. She shoved him so he landed on his back. Michael watched her prepare a small tub with a cloth. With soft hands that knew just how to work him into hardness within seconds, she began to wash him. When she finished, she leaned down to kiss his head. Michael almost erupted when her small, pink tongue darted out to circle his tip.

"Chrissie!"

She drew back. "Shh, honey, just enjoy it. This time, I'm taking control. You tell that beast to accept it or else."

Michael didn't dare ask or else what. He didn't care to deny her anyway. She swallowed much of his cock, and his hips came up off the bed. He had to grit his teeth to keep from pumping too hard into her mouth, but the suction from her sweet lips was his undoing. He flattened a palm on the back of her head, tangled fingers into her hair, and guided her up and down his length. A hiss escaped him when she picked up speed.

As if his cock were a Popsicle, she flicked it with her tongue. She teased his balls while taking him deep, and Michael let a curse fall from his lips. He was going to come if she didn't stop soon. "Chrissie, wait."

She cast an amused glance up at him and then sat up. Michael was about to switch their positions, but she pushed him down a second time and climbed higher over him. When her rounded hips lowered, he didn't have to guide his shaft home. It nestled between her thighs and glided up her hot tunnel. Chrissie appeared to make sure he watched her when she traced her dark pink areolas with the ends of her fingers and then settled on her nipples. She twirled the buds before raising first one breast toward her outstretched tongue. When the tips met, Michael could hold back no longer.

He convulsed once and gyrated deep inside her. His arm around her waist and drew her snug to him as he pounded her pussy. Chrissie screamed his name, sending the sensations, already violent in him, into a frenzy of pleasure. Michael sat up, tugged her closer, and rambled words of love in his mate's ear. She whimpered her responses, weak after having come with him.

“Chrissie, sweetheart, you are perfect. I’d do anything for you. Know that,” he said with intensity in his tone.

She sniffled. “Michael, do one thing for me.”

“Yes, my love, tell me, and I’ll do it.”

“Claim me. Claim me right now.”

With his heart bursting, Michael sank his teeth into Chrissie’s soft skin and made them one for all time.

The End

## *About the Author*

Brenda Steele loves all things out of the ordinary. She writes to gratify the cravings of her own sexual drive, and for her dear readers. Hopefully, the two won't be far apart and all who read her work will come away satisfied. Look for her hot "My Lover" series and her "Accidental Mates" series. Visit her on the Web at [www.brendastele.webs.com](http://www.brendastele.webs.com).