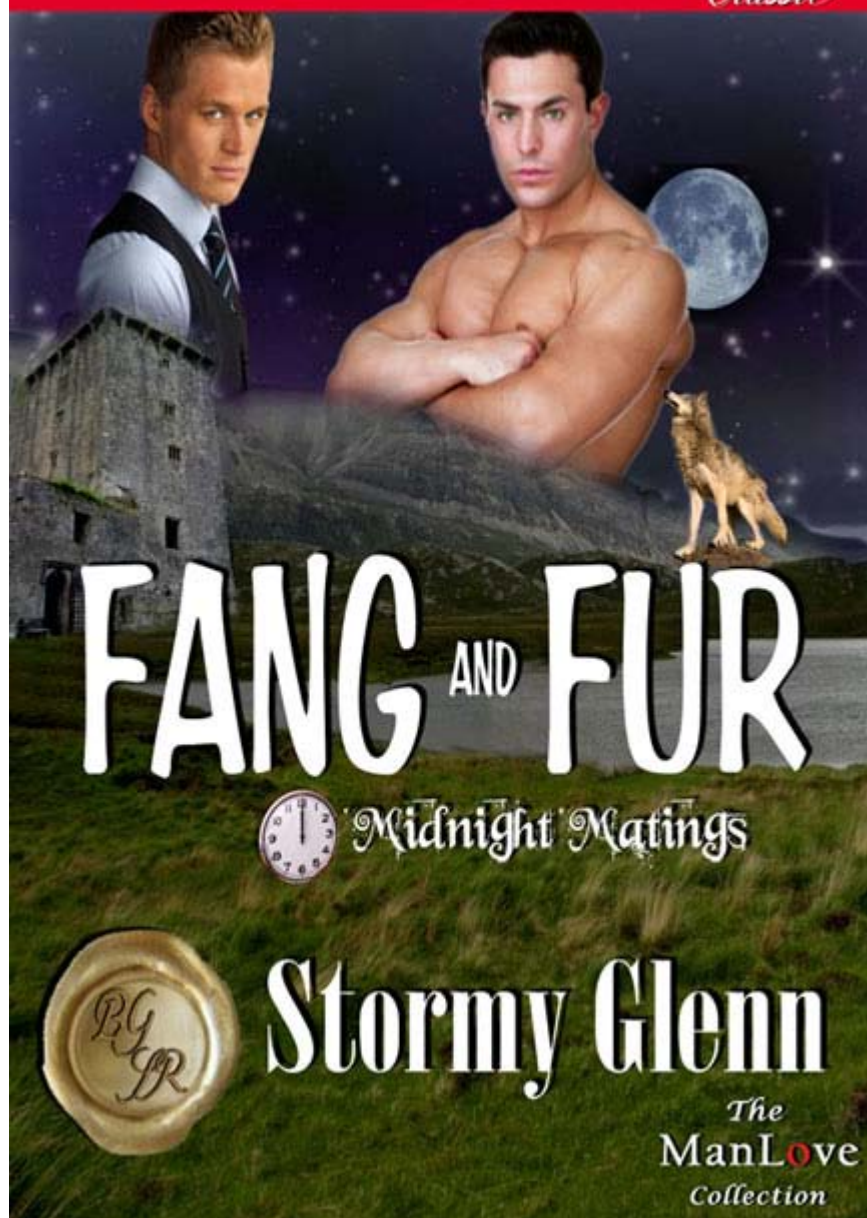


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Midnight Matings

Fang and Fur

The Gathering is called. The spell is cast. There is no escaping the Midnight Matings.

Sterling Roane has a job to perform. He is the personal bodyguard of a vampire coven leader. When the council of elders decrees that everyone needs to find a mate, Sterling isn't interested, but he can't deny the mating heat sweeping through his body.

Still, he has a mission to complete and a coven leader to protect. When a wolf shifter interferes with that duty, the fight is on. Before Sterling knows it, he's accidentally mated to the Alpha of the Pacific Northwest Region. It's just too bad that his new mate swears he isn't gay. It gets even worse when Sterling finds out that Beau is engaged to be married.

Heartbroken, Sterling drops Beau off in the middle of nowhere and flees back to New York only to find out that the hell waiting for him there is worse than what he left in a Wyoming airport. Someone is trying to claim him, and it's not his mate.

Genre: Alternative (M/M or F/F), Paranormal, Vampires/Werewolves

Length: 39,307 words

FANG AND FUR

Midnight Matings

Stormy Glenn

**EROTIC ROMANCE
MANLOVE**



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FANG AND FUR

Midnight Matings

STORMY GLENN

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Chapter 1

“Welcome. I am Elder Burke.” The elder paused as if waiting for something. “I want to thank you all for being here tonight. This is a momentous occasion for us. It’s been twenty-five years since the Great War between paranormals ended, taking a large portion of our population from us.”

The silence was deafening in the large room, which Sterling Roane found strange considering how many people stood there listening. The ballroom was filled nearly to capacity. Still, when the elder paused in his speech, not a sound could be heard.

“I would like you all to drink a toast with me in memory of those we lost.”

Sterling held up his glass. He was bored out of his mind but knew he’d hear about it if he didn’t stick around and listen to what the elders had to say. Besides, these Great Gatherings only happened once every four years, on February 29th. He could put up with it for a little while.

“May we never forget them,” the elder said.

Sterling took a sip of his champagne. Damn, it was some of the good stuff. He took another sip, then another, until he realized he had swallowed everything in the glass. He felt his face flush as he quickly

glanced around. Then he realized everyone had done the same, and felt a little better.

“As I have said,” Elder Burke continued, “this is a momentous occasion for us all. In the twenty-five years since the Great War between Paranormals ended, the United Paranormal Alliance of Cooperation has watched and waited. We will wait no more.”

Sterling cocked an eyebrow. Huh?

“The fighting between species must stop,” another elder in a long white robe said as he stepped forward. “We are known to the humans, and they have learned to accept us in their midst. However, their tolerance will only last so long. The constant fighting among the paranormal communities has come under scrutiny. We no longer have the luxury of watching you solve your own disagreements.”

“Elder Lucas is correct,” Elder Burke said as he gestured to the other elder. “We no longer have the indulgence of waiting for you to end your petty squabbles. As such, we have taken measures to insure that you take your place amongst our society.”

Sterling felt the crowd grow restless. He glanced around and found the same confused looks on everyone’s faces. He didn’t like the cold chill that shot down his spine when Elder Burke gestured to the glass he had set down on the table.

“You’ve all taken a toast with me. As such, you are now bound by the covenants we put before you.”

Covenants? What fucking covenants?

“Each of you have twenty four hours to find and claim your mate,” Elder Lucas said. “If you fail to claim a mate in twenty-four hours, and bring him or her before this council to be recognized, you will not have a mate. You will go feral inside of a week.”

Sterling gasped. “No fucking way,” he whispered.

Both elders stepped back from the edge of the dais that stood on. They knew the crowd was angry. The tension in the air was thick and menacing. There was also a hint of arousal starting to build.

“Because of your continued squabbling between races, you may not claim a mate of the same race,” Elder Burke said. “You must claim a mate outside of your own species.”

“If you fail to bring a mate before this council by the stroke of midnight tomorrow night, you will be hunted down and executed as a rogue paranormal.”

“To ensure that you will find a mate, something special has been added to the potion that each of you drank. It will ensure that the need to mate outweighs your need to fight. It is a particular additive that induces the mating heat in each of you. You will not be able to deny the need to mate.”

“And just in case you think to try and break this spell,” Elder Burke said, “we have added a special clause. Anyone that attempts to negate the covenants of this spell will instantly be cursed as befitting their race. Vampires will no longer be able to drink blood. Shifters will no longer be able to shift. Magic users will have no magic, and so on. I’m sure you get my point.”

The two elders went to stand back with their fellow elders and turned back to face the crowd. “Now, children, good luck. We expect to see each of you in twenty-four hours. May your hunt be successful.”

The mating heat hit Sterling like a freight train. He groaned as his fangs dropped down without his permission. Unimaginable heat flooded his body, and he had the intense urge to bite something, anything. He needed blood. He also needed to fuck something. He was so horny he could have humped a hole in the wall.

He clenched his hand into a fist as need swamped him. The glass champagne flute in his hand shattered. Sterling didn’t even feel the pain as glass shards cut into his hand. He just shook his hand and dropped the remains onto the floor.

He was too intent on finding a donor, willing or not. He didn’t know what the elders had given him, but he felt like his head was

going to blow off—or his dick. He couldn't remember being this horny in his life, and he had lived a long life.

“Sterling, do something.”

Sterling rolled his eyes and turned to look at Vladimir Vlad, his coven leader. The guy was a wuss. Hell, even his name was wimpy. Unfortunately, he was also Sterling's coven leader, and as such, Sterling had to give the man his respect, but just barely.

“And just what would you like me to do, your highness?”

“Save me!”

“And just how would you like me to do that?” Sterling waved his hand toward the dais where the elders sat. “I don't think they are planning on changing their minds any time soon. You need to find a mate.”

“This is unacceptable!” Vladimir shouted.

“Just choose one of your little toys and get it over with.”

Sterling looked at the three little twinkies cowering beside Vladimir. He liked them even less than he liked Vladimir, and he really didn't like Vladimir. How the man ended up the coven leader would always be a mystery to Sterling. The man was a joke.

Sterling tried gritting his teeth, but it was impossible with his fangs dropped down the way they were. He just growled instead. The need to bite someone was growing stronger. He was surprised that Vladimir didn't feel it. The man just looked panicked, not horny.

Sterling knew he would have to do something when the room erupted into chaos. No matter how much he hated Vladimir, it was his duty to protect the coven leader at all costs.

“Come this way, your highness.” Sterling gestured with his hand.

Vladimir and his entourage of twinkies and ass-kissers hurried over. Sterling pointed them toward the emergency door on the side of the ballroom. The place was going to hell, and damned if the coven leader was going to do the same on his watch.

Sterling dodged flying objects and flying people as he tried to get Vladimir to the escape door. It wasn't an easy feat when everyone

seemed to be losing their minds. Sterling wasn't sure he wasn't one of them.

His fangs ached. He was thirsty, like he hadn't had any blood in weeks. Each person they passed was starting to look like a meal on legs. His cock ached so much he thought for sure it was going to explode on its own. One stiff wind would have done it.

Sterling almost had Vladimir and his crew to the emergency door when the coven leader cried out and cringed. Sterling felt his claws extend both from disgust at his coven leader's cowardice, and because some damn shifter was trying to bite the man.

Vladimir might be history's worst man for the job, but he was still the coven leader. Sterling had a duty to protect him, one given him by Elder Lewis. He took that duty very seriously.

Sterling growled as the shifter tried to bite at Vladimir again. He grabbed the shifter by the nape of his neck and slammed him into the wall with such force that the sheetrock split right down to the floor. The shifter grunted once then slumped.

He dropped the shifter to the floor and reached for the emergency exit door. He flung it open and shoved Vladimir through it. He could care less if the rest of them made it through. His duty was to Vladimir, not his little fuck toys.

Still, he'd never hear the end of it if something happened to them. Sterling grabbed the first one and shoved him out the door after Vladimir, then the next and the next.

Just as he started to go through the door after the last twink, someone grabbed him from behind. Sterling had just enough time to close the door behind Vladimir's little group and rip the door handle off before he was pulled away and slammed into the wall.

The air rushed from his lungs as his head hit the wall, and spots swam before his eyes for a moment. He shook his head. When his vision cleared, all Sterling saw were teeth, very sharp teeth, and they were coming right at him.

"Oh hell no!" Sterling shouted.

He raised his arm in front of him. Shards of pain flooded him when the teeth sank into his skin just above his wrist. It hurt so bad Sterling's eyes watered. It had been a long time since he had felt that level of pain. It made Sterling angry.

He swung out with his claws, striking the shifter across the shoulder. It wasn't a lethal wound, but it did dislodge the teeth in his arm. The shifter's glowing golden eyes glared at him. Sterling glared right back.

"Get... the... fuck... off... me!"

The shifter grinned and lunged again. Sterling cried out when he felt those long sharp teeth sink into his skin right between his shoulder and his neck. The damn shifter was going for his jugular vein. Well, two could play at that game. If he was going down, he was taking one hairy ass shifter with him.

Sterling dug his claws around the shifter's neck for leverage as he leaned forward and sank his teeth into the corded muscles of the man's neck. He groaned as sweet, hot blood flooded his mouth. It was the sweetest blood he had ever tasted, like dark chocolate and cognac all rolled together. Sterling loved cognac.

His cock hardened into steel. Sterling was disgusted with himself. And angry with the elders. He didn't know what they put into the champagne, but he wanted to beat each and every one of them into pulps. He felt like he would explode if he didn't get some relief soon.

Sterling's eyes widened when he realized he was pushing his hips against the shifter's, rubbing off on the man. He groaned, totally appalled, but he couldn't stop if his life depended on it. It just felt too damn good. So did the hard length pressing back against him.

The shifter pinning him to the wall suddenly stiffened and roared. Sterling winced as his ears rang. Vampires had sensitive ears, and the shifter had shouted right next to his. Large, strong claws dug into his sides as a surprising wetness suddenly covered the front of Sterling's pants.

The unmistakable scent of the man's seed floated up to him, driving Sterling crazy. He started jerking, shoving his cock against the man harder and harder. He needed relief more than he needed his next breath.

Two things happened simultaneously, two things that changed Sterling life forever. An orgasm of mind-blowing proportions ripped through him, and the man in his arms started to slump toward the floor, ripping Sterling's fangs from his neck.

It wouldn't have been so bad if Sterling hadn't instinctively tried to catch the guy, but he did. When his injured and bleeding arm brushed against the bite mark on the man's neck made by Sterling's fangs, a white light blinded Sterling for a moment.

He felt the exact instant his blood entered the shifter's bloodstream, and he felt the bond between them snap into place even as he cried out in denial. But it was too late. His entire body was flooded with sensation, every cell binding itself to the shifter in his arms.

No matter where he went or what he did, Sterling would be forever bound to the man. He would know when he was hurt, when he was in danger. He would even know when the shifter was experiencing pleasure.

Sterling growled at that last thought, a sudden possessiveness flowing through him unlike anything he ever felt. He saw red, rage building inside of him until he wanted to tear something apart, anything. The shifter, whoever the fuck he was, belonged to him now. If anyone, or anything, ever tried to come between them, Sterling would turn into the thing of nightmares.

Sterling sank down onto the floor as he cradled the large shifter in his arms. He felt tears of tenderness well up in his eyes as the wolf shifted back into a man. He gently brushed the dark brown hair back from his chiseled face.

Well, if he was going to be mated, at least the man was a looker. Hell, at least the man was a man. Even thinking about being mated to

a woman made him shudder. He wouldn't know what to do with her girl bits.

The shifter, however, had all the right bits in all the right places. The man was huge, nearly a foot taller than Sterling, and he had the muscles to go with that larger size. Hell, he had muscles everywhere.

Sterling had muscles, but they weren't quite as defined as the shifter's. His were more understated, like a swimmer. It was one of the reasons he made such a good bodyguard. No one ever saw him as a threat.

Sterling suddenly remembered Vladimir and started laughing. He was mated. The rules for vampires were a bit different than they were for other paranormals. They couldn't just up and leave their covens. They had to have a good reason and then permission, or they would be branded lone vampires. And lone vampires were executed on sight.

Being mated, Sterling no longer had to have a reason to leave Vladimir and his coven. Now that he had bonded with his mate, he could go anywhere his mate was. The shifter was, for all intents and purposes, his coven.

Sterling growled and tightened his grip on the shifter when someone stepped closer. He didn't care who the man was. He belonged to Sterling. He wasn't going to let anyone interfere with that. He needed to get their mating registered, and then he could wake the damn man up.

Sterling stood up and tried to lift the shifter. He sighed deeply and rolled his shoulders when the strain became too much. There was just no way he could lift the man and take him to the elders.

Sterling rolled his eyes and grabbed the shirt at the back of the man's neck and started pulling him across the ballroom floor. He was thankful the hardwood floor was recently waxed. The shifter was much easier to drag.

But the man was huge. By the time Sterling reached the dais, he was panting from overexertion. He dropped the shifter's shirt and

rested his hands on his knees, bending over to take several deep breathes.

“Sterling?”

Sterling glanced up then straightened when he saw who was speaking to him. He smoothed his shirt down then nodded respectfully to the elder. “Elder Lewis, I’ve come to have my mating recorded.”

“You’ve mated, Sterling?”

Sterling frowned. Why was that such a surprise to the man? “I have.”

The elder stood up and walked to the edge of the dais to look down at the unconscious man on the floor. Sterling growled in warning. He was in the midst of a mating heat. Elder Lewis should have known that. Stepping too close to his mate could have dire consequences for both of them.

Elder Lewis quickly raised his hands and backed up. “I have no designs on your mate, Sterling. I just wanted to see who he was.”

Sterling glanced down at the man, a small furrowing working its way between his eyebrows. “Who is he?”

“You don’t know?” Elder Lewis sounded surprised, and amused.

Sterling growled again and snapped his eyes back to the elder. “I didn’t ask. I was too busy trying to keep my head attached to my shoulders.”

Elder Lewis threw his head back and laughed until Sterling started clenching his hands into fists. Anger surged through him again. The elder was clearly enjoying himself, which made Sterling wonder just who he had mated.

“Who?” he demanded.

“Oh, my boy,” the elder said, “you’ve mated Beau Garret, the alpha of the entire Pacific Northwest Region.”

Sterling swallowed past the lump that suddenly developed in his throat. “The entire Pacific Northwest Region?”

“Idaho, Washington, and Oregon, Beau governs them all.”

“That’s just fucking perfect!” Sterling pushed his hand through his hair. It took everything in him not to yank on the ends in frustration. He had gone from one egotistical bastard to another.

“Do you still want to register your mating?”

Sterling rolled his eyes. He placed his hands on his hips and glared up at the elder. “You know it’s too late to change anything.” He grimaced and looked down at the man on the floor. “We’ve already mated.”

Elder Lewis chuckled. “Just try not to kill him, hmm?”

“He’s an alpha,” Sterling replied. “I’m sure one of us will be dead inside of a week.”

The elder chuckled and turned back to a table where another elder sat, a large book in front of him. “Register Sterling Roane and Beau Garret as mates.”

The man nodded. He had no more started to write something down when Sterling felt a searing pain at the top of his ass that dropped him to his knees. “Fuck me!” he panted, rubbing at the spot. Once he caught his breath, Sterling pushed the back of his pants down and groaned.

He turned to stare up at the elder. “A tramp stamp, really?”

Elder Lewis barked with laughter. “The mating mark appears where it is most needed, Sterling. Apparently, your ass needed it most.”

“So.” Sterling pointed to his mate. “Where’s his mating mark?”

“I’m afraid I don’t know.” The elder shrugged. He still had an amused twist on his lips. “Like I said, Sterling, the mating mark appears where it is most needed.”

Sterling was thankful when his fangs receded. He needed to grit his teeth something fierce. He was angry at the world, and that world included one fucked-up coven leader, one amused elder, and one sexy as sin alpha. He was so fucked.

“I’m going to need directions to his place,” Sterling said, gesturing to Beau. “I’m from New York. I haven’t the foggiest idea

how to even find the place. Isn't the Pacific Northwest like the last frontier or something? Do they even have electricity?"

Elder Lewis chuckled. "Yes, Sterling, they have electricity. They even have flushing toilets and running water."

"Indoors?"

"Yes, Sterling, indoors."

Sterling rubbed the bridge of his nose then glanced around. The room looked like a war zone. Furniture was broken and lay littered all over the place. The people that remained in the room were either fighting or fucking. It was like a free-for-all.

"Can I borrow a couple of your guards to carry him to my car?" Sterling asked as he looked back at the elder. "I have a jet waiting for me at the airport. I'd prefer to get the hell out of here before anything more challenging happens."

"Of course, Sterling." The elder waved two guards over then reached behind him and grabbed something off the table. "You will need these. They are your mating instructions."

"My what?" Sterling asked as he took the envelope. It had the official UPAC seal on it. A chill ran down Sterling's spine.

"Your mating instructions." Elder Lewis wagged his finger at Sterling. "Make sure you follow them, Sterling. You won't like the outcome if you don't."

Sterling frowned and tore the envelope open. He opened the paper and started reading. Sterling's mouth slowly started to drop open the more he read. The elders had to be out of their flipping minds.

"Are you serious?" he asked as he looked up at Elder Lewis. Sterling felt the blood drain from his face as the man nodded. He suddenly swallowed hard. "What happens if we don't have intercourse every twenty-four hours?"

"Beau will lose his ability to shift, and you will lose the ability to drink blood."

Sterling gasped. "We'll die."

“So make sure you have intercourse at least once every twenty-four hours, and it shouldn’t be a problem.”

Sterling wanted to argue but he knew the conversation was over when Elder Lewis turned away. He crumbled the letter in his hand and glared down at the man at his feet. “You’d better be worth this fucking shit, fur ball.”

Chapter 2

Beau sniffed the air before opening his eyes. It was an instinctive gesture. The most delicious scent he had ever smelled filled his senses. He inhaled deeper, needing to wrap the sweet scent around himself. He had never smelled anything more arousing in his life. It was overwhelming.

Beau felt achy, needy. His cock was harder than it had ever been before, and the more of the sweet scent he sniffed, the harder it became. He tore at the buttons on his jeans, trying to rip them open. He was ready to fuck the air if that's what he needed to gain relief.

"Hey now," a soft voice whispered, "you're going to hurt yourself like that. Let me help."

Beau groaned when he felt something brush against his jeans. A moment later, the cool air blew across his exposed cock. The soft breeze just made him ache more. Beau groaned again, humping his hips into the air.

"This is a very nice cock, Beau."

A shudder of need rippled through Beau when he felt the briefest of touches stroke down his cock. "More," he begged as he opened his eyes.

Beau's eyes widened as he took in the handsome man bending over him. The pale skin didn't detract from the man's high cheekbones and sensual eyes. He was sex on a stick. Beau felt pre-cum leak down the side of his cock when the man licked his lush full lips.

Fuck, what he wouldn't give to have those lips wrapped around his cock.

“My pleasure.” The man grinned as he lowered his head.

Beau’s cry filled the small room as the man’s lips wrapped around his wide girth. Beau quickly pushed his pants down the rest of the way and kicked them off his bare feet. He’d wonder later why he had bare feet. Right now, he was more interested in the mouth sucking him in.

He had never felt anything so wonderful. It was like having heaven wrapped around his cock. He could feel every movement, every lick, every sweet caress.

He felt something brush against his balls and spread his legs, giving the man more access. He loved having his balls played with, sucked on, tugged, anything. He didn’t even mind when the man’s fingers pushed past his balls to stroke against his asshole.

It was a soft stroke, so Beau didn’t mention it. He was not a man that liked having his ass played with it, although a few women had tried in the past. He just wasn’t into that. When a slick little finger grazed his hole again, Beau tensed. That time hadn’t been a mistake, neither was the finger that started to push into his ass.

Beau opened his mouth to protest when the man suddenly deep-throated him. Beau growled as he felt the tip of his cock hit the back of the man’s throat. His hands tangled in the man’s sandy blond hair, holding him in place as he fucked the world’s most perfect mouth.

Oh sweet hell, the man could deep-throat. Beau forgot about the ass play and how uncomfortable that made him feel. He forgot that he had no idea where he was or what was going on. He even forgot about the fact that he was getting blown by a man. Beau forgot everything but fucking the sweet mouth wrapped around his throbbing cock.

“Fuck,” Beau shouted, “don’t stop.”

“Mmmm.”

“Oh, geez,” Beau whimpered as the man’s voice sent small vibrations down his cock. He started panting heavily. He could feel his balls drawing up close to his body. He knew he was on the edge of

an intense orgasm. He just could seem to fall over that edge. The pleasure just kept going higher and higher.

“Please, need—” Beau stopped breathing when the fingers in his ass curled inward and hit something that sent his lust level spiraling out of control. Beau started moving, thrusting into the mouth wrapped around his cock then back onto the fingers in his ass. “Again, please again!”

Something suddenly surged through Beau, something unlike anything he had ever experienced before. He couldn’t even begin to say where it came from. He just knew he needed it.

“Bite me!”

Beau felt the man’s momentary pause, and then something sharp sank into his cock. Beau screamed as the most intense orgasm of his life ripped through him. Pain and pleasure interlaced over each other until he didn’t know which one he wanted more.

Time had no meaning, just the pleasure-pain ripping through him. Beau’s brain melted, unable to process the twin sensations. He almost whimpered when the teeth left his cock and the man pulled away. When the man tried to pull his fingers free, Beau clamped down on them.

“No, please,” he whispered, “need—”

“I have you, honey,” the man whispered back.

Beau jerked and whimpered when long thin fingers wrapped around his sensitive cock and pumped it several times. He didn’t think he had another orgasm him. He was absolutely certain there wasn’t an ounce of cum left in his body.

Beau glanced up through hazy eyes as the man leaned over him. Even as foggy as his brain felt, he knew the man was handsome. Beau wasn’t into men, but if he was, this would be the type of man he’d want to fuck.

“Gorgeous.”

The man smiled. “I’m glad you think so.”

Beau grinned back and reached his hand up. His fingers trembled as they trailed over the man's high cheekbones and cut jawline. The guy even had a cute nose, all pert-like, the end tipping up just a bit.

"I hope you like this just as much," the man said.

"Wha—ahhh!" Beau cried out as something incredibly thick and slick filled his ass in one stroke. His hands clenched and reached out to frantically grab the man's shoulders. He couldn't breathe. He couldn't... "What are you doing?"

"Fucking you, sweetheart."

"No, you can't. I don't—oh god!" Beau's voice rose with each word, with each slow thrust of the massive cock being pushed into his ass. His ass ached, the burn from each thrust intense. He started to struggle, needing to get away. He didn't do this.

"Shh, sweetheart, I won't hurt you."

Beau shook his head.

"Just feel, Beau."

Beau's legs were grabbed and pushed up to his chest. Suddenly the cock in his ass that had been moving slowly and carefully started pounding into him. Beau's eyes crossed as his prostate was nailed each and every time. Not even the blow job felt this good.

He started to whimper when his senses became overloaded. His hands flailed around as he searched for something to hold on to. They were grabbed and pressed against his thighs, the man's hands covering them.

Beau heaved a sigh of relief. He felt like he was falling apart. He needed the connection to something other than himself. His entire world was being altered, and he didn't understand this new one he was moving into.

The burning sensation in his ass ignited. Beau inhaled sharply when intense pleasure began to zing through him, spreading outward from his cock to envelop his entire body. He started moaning, unable to stop himself.

His eyes locked on the man's smoky gray ones. As he watched, they darkened, turning silver. He couldn't look away, not even when the pleasure coursing through his body exploded in a downpour of sensation.

Beau cried out as that intense sensation settled in his balls then moved up through his cock, exploding out of the top of his cock in great spurts of white. His strength gave out. His body trembled.

Something that was a cross between shock and pride roared through Beau when the man above him suddenly growled, baring his fangs. The man's fingers dug into Beau's skin as he came, filling Beau's ass with his release.

The sight was breathtaking. The man's lips were pulled tight across his face. His eyes almost glowed with intensity. Beau could feel each hot spurt of seed shoot into his clenched ass. He was stunned to realize it actually felt good instead of disgusting. He kept squeezing his ass muscles, milking more and more out of the man's massive cock.

Finally, his legs were released, and the man pulled away. The minute the man stood up, grabbed a washcloth, and started cleaning himself off, Beau freaked. He scrambled back as far as he could go, realizing he was on some sort of lounge couch type of thing.

"Who the fuck are you?" Beau snapped.

"Sterling Roane." The man glanced over at Beau, his lips twisting together in a smirk. "But you can call me honey."

"I don't fucking think so."

"Sweetheart?"

"No!" Beau shouted.

"Darling?"

"Hell no!"

Sterling sighed as he zipped up his black slacks then tucked his white dress shirt into his pants. "Fine, you can call me baby but only when we're alone."

"I'm not going to call you baby or sweetheart or darling or even snookums." Beau's hands clenched. "I'm not going to fucking call you anything. I want to know what the hell is going on here, and I want to know now, damn it."

Sterling's head tilted to one side and a peculiar expression came over his face. "You do like to swear a lot, don't you?"

Beau jumped up and stomped his foot, outrage coursing through him. "Do you have any fucking idea who I am?"

Sterling's lips twisted again, and the sexiest grin Beau had ever seen came across them. When Sterling's eyes roamed down his body and he arched an eyebrow, Beau realized he was standing there with his dick swinging in the wind. He quickly reached down and covered his genitals.

"Let's see if I remember how Elder Lewis put it." Sterling tapped his chin. "Hmm, oh yes. I remember now. Your name is Beau Garret. You're the alpha of the entire Pacific Northwest Region."

Beau blinked in surprise. "Uh, yeah."

"Big fucking deal." Sterling turned and started to walk out of the room without another word.

Beau was incensed. He was the alpha of the Pacific Northwest Region. That was a lot of region, all answering to him. He deserved more respect than he was getting. He deserved more...

"I'm not gay," Beau shouted.

"You are now, sweetheart," Sterling called out over his shoulder as he left the room. The door slammed closed behind him.

Beau just stared. His mind couldn't grasp all of the thoughts floating through his mind. He was confused and shocked, bewildered and... and... and horny as hell. His ass ached, and he didn't think it came from the pounding he'd just received.

Beau sat down on the edge of the couch and cradled his head in his hands. He still couldn't figure out what exactly had happened beyond the fact that he had allowed... hell, he had begged some stranger to fuck him.

How in the hell did something like that happen? He was straight. He'd always been straight. He never even looked at another man. Men were... men. He wanted to cuddle and snuggle and dominate whoever he was with.

He didn't want to get fucked in the ass then left. Beau growled and jumped to his feet. This was all Sterling's fault. Sterling had done this to him. Sterling had aroused him until he was out of his mind then fucked him. He probably gave Beau some sort of drug, too. It was the only way to explain how much he craved another touch of the man's hand. He was still drugged.

Beau grabbed the washcloth and cleaned himself up, wincing when he moved the cotton cloth between his ass cheeks and over his sensitive opening. Beau bit his lips and quickly glanced around to make sure he was alone then trailed his finger over his hole.

"Fuck me," whispered as he sank to his knees. His entire body shuddered as ripples of pleasure rolled through him every time he his finger grazed across the hypersensitive circle of muscles. His cock was achingly hard. He thought it might explode.

Beau spread his knees a little farther apart then pressed his finger against his ass. Shock rolled through Beau when he realized that not only had his ass sucked his finger right in, but it felt damn good.

He pushed in a little further and nearly screamed when his finger brushed against something deep inside his ass. Beau pressed his lips together to keep from crying out, and did it again. The same intense pleasure rocked through him.

Beau's eyes closed and his head fell back on his shoulders as he pushed another finger into his ass and searched for that special button. He grabbed his throbbing cock with the other hand and started pumping it.

Every time his finger stroked across that walnut-sized gland, his fingers tightened on his cock. Beau started panting, bouncing up and down on his fingers. Despite having his lip caught between his teeth, little moans started escaping.

Beau knew he had to hurry before his moans became screams, or someone walked in. He gripped his cock, locked his legs in place, and shoved two more fingers into his ass. The burning sensation combined with the pleasure reminded Beau of Sterling's large cock in his ass.

And then he could smell Sterling—that sweet, wonderful smell. Beau remembered what Sterling did and curved his fingers in the same way. Lightning hit every nerve ending in his body.

Beau cried out and humped his hand, driving his cock through his tight grip. Ropes of pearly white cum shot out of his cock and splattered on the floor. Beau fell forward, his arm shooting out. He barely caught himself before he hit the floor.

He groaned as he pulled his fingers from his aching ass, which truly ached now. Bracing his body on both of his hands, Beau drew in a deep breath and tried to accept the fact that he had just fucked his own ass, and he had really enjoyed it.

Clap, clap, clap.

Beau swung up then felt his face flood with color when he found Sterling standing in the doorway. He was slowly clapping his hands. The smirk on Sterling's face and the knowing glint in his eyes filled Beau with shame.

"Very nice, love." Sterling chuckled. "And you said you weren't gay."

"I'm not!" Beau growled as he climbed to his feet. He tried to ignore Sterling as he grabbed his pants and yanked them up his legs. It was nearly impossible. He could feel Sterling watching him. When he was all dressed, he turned on Sterling. "What the hell do you want?"

"Why are you fighting it, Beau? You know you enjoyed it."

"I don't want to talk about it."

Sterling's lips twisted together as he leaned against the doorframe. "Fine, then what do you want to talk about?"

"Why do we have to talk?" Beau swung his hands up on the air. "Why do we even have to look at each other? Just go away."

“Sorry, sweetheart, not possible.”

“Stop calling me that!” Beau shouted.

The smile fell slowly from Sterling’s lips, and he stood up straighter. “I was trying to be nice here considering I just fucked you but—”

Beau cringed. “Don’t say that!”

Sterling’s eyes narrowed. The gray in them started to darken. “Why? You don’t want anyone to know that you got fucked in the ass? Or is it that you don’t want them to know how much you enjoyed it?”

“I’m not gay!” Beau shouted.

“Then you’d better learn to be real fucking quick, jackass.” Sterling reached into his pocket and pulled out a crumbled piece of paper. He tossed it at Beau. It hit him in the chest and fell to the floor. “We’re mated.”

Chapter 3

Sterling sat in one of the high-backed chairs and angrily flipped through a magazine. He wasn't really looking at the pictures, just kind of flipping through the pages to give himself something to do.

It was obvious to him now what he had missed before. He had screwed the pooch, literally, except, the pooch didn't want him. He understood that Beau was an alpha. He even got it that the man might never have been on the receiving end.

He did not understand Beau's denial.

Sterling sighed and reached up to rub the bridge of his nose. The headache that was coming on promised to be a doozy. He could feel it edging around his temples and moving across his eyes. He didn't need this shit.

"Is it true?"

Sterling looked up. Beau stood in the doorway, his hands shoved deep into his pockets. He looked... lost.

"Is what true?"

"The letter and..." Beau pressed his lips together and pretty much looked everywhere except at Sterling.

Nope, Sterling so did not need this shit. "Yes, the letter is true. Elder Lewis gave it to me himself, right after he recorded our mating."

"Shit." Beau sat down suddenly in one of the chairs on the other side of the aisle. His head dropped down into his hands. He rubbed his face several times, then a long frustrated growl came from him, and he flipped his head back. He looked directly at Sterling for the first time since walking into the room. "I'm engaged to be married."

Sterling was grateful that he was sitting down. He didn't think his legs would hold him up. Everything he thought he would have with his mate flew out the window with the utterance of five little words.

He could feel his heart imploding from the agony that filled him. It was no wonder Beau didn't want anything to do with him. He was in love with someone else. And now, no matter how much of a bond they had between them, Sterling knew he would never have the love of his mate.

Sterling's hands trembled as he went back to flipping through his magazine. He wasn't going to let Beau know how much his words hurt. It wouldn't do him any good anyway. He doubted Beau would care. The man was just worried that people would think he was gay.

"Fine."

"That's it?" Beau asked. "That's all you have to say."

"Is there some other response you would like from me?"

Beau growled. "Look at me, damn it!"

Sterling paused in flipping through the pages of his magazine and looked up. He arched an eyebrow at Beau. "Better?"

"God, you're a smug bastard."

"There's a shocker," he said sarcastically then went back to flipping through his magazine.

"What in the hell is your problem?"

"My problem?" Sterling's head snapped up as red hot anger surged through him. He was so enraged, his fangs dropped down as if readying for a fight. Sterling tossed the magazine aside and jumped to his feet, advancing on Beau. Some part of him took glory in the fact that Beau looked totally shocked as he was lifted into the air by a hand at his throat.

"I didn't ask to be mated. You started it, jackass, when you attacked me. But I accepted it. I mated with you, and I bonded with you. And now you insist that you're not gay, even though you let me claim you? To top it all off, you're engaged?"

“You are my fucking problem.” Sterling growled as he tossed Beau away. He pointed his finger at Beau. “Stay the hell away from me. Don’t talk to me. Don’t look at me. Don’t even think about me.”

“You know I can’t do that,” Beau whispered as he rubbed his throat. “You read the letter. If we don’t have intercourse at least once every twenty-four hours, we’ll go feral.”

“Then we go feral.”

Sterling spun on his feet and stalked out of the room, heading toward the front of the plane. There wasn’t far he could go. He was on a freaking jet. But he could tell the pilot to land at the closest airport. And that’s just what he did.

When the plane started to go in for a landing, Sterling had no choice but to head back into the main cabin. He walked right past Beau and sat down, buckling his seatbelt. He did his best to ignore the man, but it wasn’t easy. He could still smell Beau, and he smelled of sex.

“Are we landing?”

Sterling closed his eyes and gripped the armrests. He was not going to answer Beau. He wasn’t. He tightened his grip on the armrests.

“We are landing.” Beau sounded flustered. “Why are we landing?”

Sterling couldn’t stand it. He could hear the panic in Beau’s voice. No matter how angry he was, Beau was still his mate—for now. Sterling opened his eyes and looked across the way to Beau. The man’s eyes were squeezed shut. His fingers were white as he gripped the armrest.

“Yes, we’re landing.”

“Why?”

“What goes up must come down?”

“Sterling!”

Sterling inhaled sharply. This was the first time Beau had ever said his name. It was probably going to be the last, too. Sterling closed his eyes again when tears began to prickle the corners.

"I told the pilot to land at the nearest airport. We should be down in about five minutes, and then you won't have to worry about being in the air."

"If we were meant to fly, we would have been born with wings."

Sterling chuckled. "Bird shifters have wings."

"I'm not a fucking bird."

"No, no you're not."

The next few minutes were nerve-racking for Sterling. Everything in him screamed for him to comfort his mate. He just couldn't. Beau wasn't gay, and the man was going to be married. They were better off if they just went their separate ways.

Beau yelped when the wheels touched down. They flew down the runway then slowly came to a stop. Sterling opened his eyes and glanced at his mate. Beau was leaning back in the seat. His chest rose and fell rapidly. His fingers still gripped the armrests.

"We've landed, Beau," Sterling said as he unlocked his seatbelt then stood up. He walked over and shook Beau. The man jumped, his eyes snapping open.

"We're down?"

"Yep."

"Geez." Beau inhaled deeply. "I hate flying."

"Come on." Sterling stepped over to the door and turned the large handle. The door popped open and steps extended to the ground. Sterling stood by the door then turned to look at Beau. "Come on, Beau, you're going to feel better with your feet on the ground."

Beau nodded and unbuckled his seatbelt. His legs seemed a little shaky as he stood up and walked over. He stopped at the door and glanced out. "Where are we?"

"I believe we are somewhere in Wyoming, not too far from your home, I imagine."

Sterling gave Beau a little push. Beau started down the steps. When he reached the tarmac, Sterling stepped closer to the edge of the doorway and grabbed the handle that would pull the stairs back up.

“Have a good life, Beau Garret.”

Sterling saw Beau’s shocked face as the man swung around. He pulled the stairs up and locked the door before Beau could react. He could hear Beau yelling and pounding on the side of the plane. He ignored it.

Sterling slapped the pilot’s door as he walked by and went to sit down in one of the chairs by the window. The engines started winding up for takeoff. Sterling stilled himself for what he’d see and glanced out the window.

Beau was standing several yards from the plane, his legs slightly apart and his arms crossed over his chest. Even from where he sat, Sterling could see the clench of Beau’s jaw. The man was pissed.

Too fucking bad.

As soon as the plane was in the air again, Sterling picked up the phone and dialed the cockpit.

“Yes, sir?”

“Head for home, Tony.”

“Yes, sir.”

Sterling disconnected from the pilot and dialed another number. He nervously tapped his knee with his fingers as he waited for someone to answer. This conversation was sure to be a doozy.

“Hello?” a voice finally answered on the other end.

“Elder Lewis, please. This is Sterling Roane.”

“Right away, Mr. Roane.”

Sterling rolled his eyes. He hated ass-kissers, and Elder Lewis’s secretary had seriously puckered lips.

“Sterling, my boy, how nice to hear from you.”

“I don’t have time for small talk, Uncle Lewis,” Sterling growled. “You can either figure out a way to fix this damn curse you’ve placed me under, or you can come collect my dead body when I go feral.”

Sterling snapped the phone closed before his uncle could reply and replaced it in its cradle. He heard it ring a moment later but ignored it. He also ignored it when it rang several times over the four hours it took for the plane to land in New York.

He was totally drained by the time he set foot on the ground. He was never so grateful as he was when he stepped out of the plane and saw his limo waiting for him. He just wanted to go home and climb into bed, sleep for a week, or at least until he stopped thinking about Beau.

“Take me home, Andre.”

* * * *

Sterling smelled Vladimir before he even opened the door of his penthouse. He grimaced as he walked in. He so did not want to deal with the man right now. He was tired, dirty, and hungry. He just wanted to be left alone.

Vladimir and one of his boy toys were sitting on Sterling’s nice black leather couch. Well, to be truthful, Vladimir was sitting on the couch. The little twink was kneeling between his knees, Vladimir’s cock deep in his mouth.

Sterling rolled his eyes. He really didn’t need this shit, and he certainly didn’t need the visual. Now he would need to burn his couch. He really liked that couch, too. Sterling tossed his keys and cell phone down on the entry table and slammed the door closed.

Vladimir’s head popped up, but the man didn’t move from where he was. “Sterling, I’m so glad to see you back. I was growing quite worried about you.”

“What are you doing here, Vladimir?”

“I came to check on you, of course.”

Sterling waved his hand at the man between Vladimir’s legs. “And you had to bring him along?”

“I was lonely without you, Sterling.”

Sterling rolled his eyes. He seriously doubted Vladimir even knew he was gone. The man lived in his own little world, a world where only his wants and needs existed. The only reason he might have missed Sterling was because no one protected his dumb ass better.

"You've seen me now, and I'm fine," Sterling said with a sigh. "Why don't you take your little toy off somewhere and fuck his brains out. I need to get some sleep."

Vladimir waved the twink away and stood up. He pulled his zipper up and stepped over to Sterling. A wave of loathing rolled through when Vladimir reached out for him. He quickly stepped back, not wanting to feel the man's hand touch his skin. It just felt wrong for someone else besides Beau to be touching him.

"Oh, my poor baby," Vladimir crooned. "You look all worn out. Maybe you should just let daddy take care of you."

Sterling was too tired to hide his shock. His eyebrows shot up even as his jaw dropped. "Daddy?"

Vladimir grinned and gave Sterling a look he had only ever seen aimed at people the man intended to seduce. Apparently, he thought it was sexy. Sterling found it nauseating. Sterling stepped back even further.

"I don't think so, Vladimir. I have a daddy, thank you very much. I don't need another one."

Vladimir's face darkened and turned red in the blink of an eye. His eyes narrowed to small little slits. "Who is he?" Vladimir shouted.

"Who is who?" Sterling asked, surprised that Vladimir even asked something like that. He stiffened in shock when Vladimir grabbed him by his arms and slammed him against the wall. "What the fuck are you doing?"

"I want to know who he is," Vladimir growled.

"Who who is?"

"Your daddy!"

"Darius Roane, you know that."

Sterling grunted when Vladimir slammed him into the wall again. He could feel his fangs threatening to drop as anger filled him. He really did not like being manhandled. Sterling grabbed Vladimir's hands and tried to peel them off of his shirt.

"Let... me... go!" Sterling growled.

Vladimir was like night and day. Sterling was a little afraid that the man might not have been all right in the head. Vladimir's features suddenly softened. He loosened one of his hands and started stroking the side of Sterling's face.

"Oh, my beautiful little boy," Vladimir whispered reverently. "There's no need to fight daddy. I just want to take care of you."

Sterling blinked. He had never heard Vladimir talk to him in this manner. Sure, the man had always liked having him close-by, but Sterling assumed it was because he served as Vladimir's bodyguard. This shit was crazy.

"Why don't you just let me go, and we can talk about it, hmm?" Placating a madman was not easy. Sterling would rather just punch the guy, but he was still a coven leader. Attacking Vladimir could have dire consequences.

"You're not listening to me!" Vladimir shouted, going angry again.

Sterling cried out when he was suddenly tossed through the air. He was surprised by Vladimir's strength as he flew across the room and slammed into a wall. He grunted as he slid down and hit the floor.

Sterling pushed himself into a sitting position and wiped his hand across his mouth. When he looked down, he was surprised to see blood on his hand. He glared across at Vladimir. "What the fuck was that all about?"

Vladimir raised his arms in the air and clenched his hands into fists as he roared at the ceiling. The little twink that came with Vladimir squeaked and scurried under a nearby table. He held onto one of the wooden legs, trembling, never taking his eyes off of Vladimir.

Sterling frowned. The smaller man was clearly terrified. He had never actually seen Vladimir mistreat one of his little toys, but then he tried to avoid them as much as possible. Maybe he should have taken a closer look. The twink's reaction told Sterling that he had seen Vladimir like this before, and it scared him to death.

Sterling put one hand on the wall and stood to his feet. He kept his eyes on Vladimir as he slowly pushed away from the wall and moved around the room. He purposely placed himself between the madman and the scared man hiding under the table.

If there was more going on here than Vladimir simply losing his mind, Sterling couldn't allow an innocent to be hurt. He'd been trained from a very early age to protect those weaker than himself, even from a coven leader.

"What are you so upset about, Vladimir?" Sterling asked. He had to keep the man talking until he could figure out a plan. He needed to get Vladimir out of his penthouse without losing his head or the man under the table.

"You mated!" Vladimir shouted. "I can smell him on you."

"It was required by the elders. You know that. You were there." Sterling frowned. "Didn't you find your mate?"

"No, I waited for you!" Vladimir's red eyes glared into Sterling. "You were supposed to be mine."

Sterling's eyebrows shot up. "Excuse me?"

"You were to be my mate!"

"Uh, I don't remember agreeing to this." Sterling shuddered. No way, no how. Vladimir would be the last person Sterling would mate with. He'd rather mate a woman and that was just... ewww.

Sterling backed up when Vladimir started stalking him around the room. "You were to be mine, and now you've soiled yourself!"

Sterling blinked. The shock of Vladimir's words was enough to make him pause. "I did what?"

“You let him touch you!” Vladimir shouted, coming closer. “Do you think I can’t smell his stench on your skin? In your blood? You’re unclean!”

“He’s my mate.”

Sterling was too stunned to get out of the way fast enough to avoid the hand that smacked him across the face. He grabbed his cheek and turned back to stare at Vladimir in shock. The man was nuts.

“I’m your mate!” Vladimir shouted as he raised his hand into the air again. “You belong to me. Elder Lewis gave you to me. You were mine, and now you’re nothing but a dirty little whore.”

Sterling flew backward when Vladimir delivered another stinging slap to his face. He stumbled and tripped. His head cracked on a table as he fell to the floor. The throbbing pain that flared in his head told him he had cracked his head open.

It didn’t help when Vladimir’s nostrils suddenly flared. Sterling’s stomach fell the second he realized Vladimir could smell the blood trickling down the back of his head. A mad vampire smelling blood? Yep, Sterling knew he was screwed.

Sterling tried to dodge the hands that reached for him, but his head ached and his vision was a little blurry. He couldn’t keep himself from being yanked to his feet and slammed into another wall. Sterling groaned when his head cracked against the drywall again. He was going to have a killer headache when this was over, assuming he was still alive.

“You want to act like a whore?” Vladimir’s words were snapped out so hard spittle splattered on Sterling’s face, making him gag. “I’ll treat you like a whore.”

Sterling didn’t start struggling until he felt Vladimir’s hands at the buttons of his slacks. He didn’t care if the man was a coven leader or not. There was no way in hell he was going to allow Vladimir to touch him.

“Get the hell away from me!” Sterling shouted as he punched Vladimir in the face.

The man reared back, surprise written all over his face. Sterling could tell Vladimir hadn’t expected him to fight back. But Sterling wasn’t done yet. No one forced him to have sex, no one. He raised his fist and punched Vladimir in the face again.

Vladimir stumbled back, giving Sterling the chance to move away from the wall where he was pinned. Sterling swung out with his foot, catching Vladimir’s legs. The man went down with a loud thud.

Unfortunately, he was back up just as fast. Vladimir wiped the blood off his face and grinned at Sterling, sending a cold chill down his spine.

“So, my little slut wants to play, huh?” There was a thread of hysteria in his laughter. “I like playing, Sterling. Just ask my toys.”

Sterling glanced over at the shivering man under the table. He realized his mistake in looking away from Vladimir when the man slammed into him, sending him crashing to the floor. Sterling cried out as his injured head smacked the hardwood floor.

His eyesight dimmed as the world spun around him. Vladimir swung a leg over him and pinned his arms over his head before he could stop it. He felt the strength seep from his body as he was held down. He knew it had to be from being so tired and the blood loss from his head wound.

Sterling cried out when he was flipped over onto his stomach. His arms were yanked behind his back, something wrapping around them a moment later.

“No,” he whimpered when his pants were pulled down.

“Such a sexy little whore,” Vladimir said as he squeezed Sterling’s naked ass cheek. “I’m going to fuck you until you forget all about your mate. And trust me, you’ll like every second of it. All my little bitches do.”

Sterling seriously doubted that when he heard a small whimper from several feet away. He suddenly remembered the little twink

under the table and knew he had to save himself and the man that Vladimir obviously had been abusing.

Sterling closed his eyes and mentally shut out the unwanted touches being forced on his body. He concentrated on his breathing and regaining his strength. He would need both if he hoped to escape.

He was just getting ready to kick out at Vladimir when he heard a crash and Vladimir suddenly slumped over the top of him. Sterling held his breath as a set of bare feet came into his view.

“Are you okay?” a small voice whispered.

“Can you get him off me?”

The man knelt down and started pushing on Vladimir. They both jumped when the door crashed open and several armed men came rushing in. Sterling tensed until he saw his Uncle Lewis walk in a moment later. He blew out a deep breath and rested his head on the cold wooden floor.

“It’s about time,” he whispered. “I never thought you were going to get here.”

“Yes, it does look like I’m a little late for the party,” Elder Lewis replied.

“Do me a favor.” Sterling’s voice started to rise until he was shouting. “Get this fucking asshole off of me!”

Sterling felt someone roll Vladimir off of him, and then his hands were untied. His face flushed fiercely when he realized he was lying there with his naked ass hanging out. The instant his hands were free Sterling reached down and yanked his pants up.

Something was pressed against the gash in the back of his head. Sterling angrily pushed away and scooted over to lean back against the wall. He frowned when his head started to throb again and held out his hand.

A stack of gauze was placed in his hand. Sterling winced when he held it against his head. This sucked on so many levels. He still wanted to be left alone, and now he had a roomful of people to deal with.

Sterling heard a whimper. He raised his head and glanced over to see the little twink standing there, naked as a jay bird, shivering. His eyes darted left and right as he watched everyone with apprehension.

“Come here.”

Sterling held out his hand. The little man raced across the room and grabbed it, falling to his knees to cuddle under Sterling’s arm. A moment later, someone draped a blanket over the man’s shoulders. Sterling carefully tucked it around the man then turned to seek out his uncle.

“Uncle Lewis, this little guy needs a safe place, somewhere that Vladimir can’t get to him. I also suspect that the other guys that Vladimir gathered around him might be in the same situation.”

“And that situation is?” Elder Lewis asked.

“Vladimir is a sick son of a bitch.”

“Sterling!”

Sterling cocked an eyebrow. “Seriously? You cannot be chastising me for bad-mouthing a coven leader after finding him trying to assault me.”

Elder Lewis huffed up. “What I saw when I came in was an unconscious man lying over the top of you. What happened before that, I do not know.”

Sterling just stared, shocked more than he could ever remember being. He knew he wasn’t exactly his uncle’s favorite, but he always assumed the man had at least some intelligence. He was an elder after all. Maybe he was wrong.

“Fine.” Sterling pushed himself to his feet, careful to pull the smaller man up with him. “I’m tired, I’m injured, and I’m hungry. I’d like you all to leave, and you can take Vladimir with you. I am no longer in his service.”

“You are resigning as his personal bodyguard?”

“Oh hell, yeah.”

“Disrespectful speech is not needed, Sterling.”

Sterling blinked. He was so not in the mood to hear about his disrespectful speech right now. Not when he had almost been assaulted and had his head beaten in. “Elder Lewis, I appreciate your coming, but I ask that you and your men leave. I need to see to my injuries and get some rest.”

“Sterling, we still have the little matter of your mate to deal with,” Elder Lewis said as he folded his hands together. “You are, after all, the one that called me.”

“Please forgive me for bothering you with something so trivial.” Sterling plastered a fake smile on his face, the same one he used to give Vladimir. “I’m sure the situation will rectify itself in due time.”

Right about the time he went feral and had to be put down for everyone’s safety.

“Sterling, you called me here. This will be dealt with right now.”

Sterling’s heart sank when Elder Lewis glanced at the front door. He knew what he would see before he even turned to look. Still, his heart beat a little faster when he saw Beau standing in the doorway.

“Beau,” he whispered.

Beau arched an eyebrow at Sterling and crossed his thick muscular arms over his chest. “You seemed to have left something behind in Wyoming.”

“What?”

“Me!”

Chapter 4

Beau was livid. He hadn't been able to even speak the first hour after Sterling left him stranded on the tarmac. It had taken him another hour to get a hold of someone and discover where Sterling even lived.

He was still livid. He had never been this angry before and was almost a little afraid of what he might do if he got his hands on Sterling. If this was an indication of how their mating was going to be, he'd end up strangling the guy inside of a week.

"I really don't have time for this right now, Beau," Sterling said.

Beau growled and grit his teeth. "Make the time."

"Beau, plea—"

Sterling's eyes suddenly rolled back in his head. Beau leapt across the distance between them and caught the man before he hit the floor. It was only as Sterling's head flopped against his chest that Beau realized the man was injured.

Beau's roar of outrage shook the windows. He saw several of the elder's armed guards step back and bring their weapons up. The elder himself looked a bit shaken. Beau swung Sterling's smaller body up into his arms and glared.

"What in the hell is wrong with my mate?"

"I believe he has an injury on the back of his head, alpha."

"I can see that," Beau snapped. "I want to know how he got it."

"I'm afraid I can't answer that. It happened before my arrival."

Beau growled. He was *not* getting the answers he wanted. "Just why are you here anyway?"

“Sterling called me from his plane and asked me to come. He wants to negate your mating.” Elder Lewis gestured to another man standing across the room. “I’ve brought the shaman so we can see what needs to be done before either of you go feral.”

Beau growled again. This time it was low and threatening. No one was going to take his mate away from him, not even his mate. “If he steps a foot near Sterling, you’re going to see feral.”

“Beau, surely you can see that—”

“The only thing I see is someone trying to come between me and my mate, which, Elder Lewis, I believe is against UPAC rules.”

“Beau, if the mating is not working out—”

“It’s working out just fine!”

Elder Lewis arched his eyebrow. “If it’s working out so fine, then why did Sterling call me?”

Beau narrowed his eyes. He wasn’t going to let anyone come between him and his mate. He wasn’t. He might not have been prepared for Sterling, and he’d be the first to admit their problems weren’t over. But since the moment Sterling left him in Wyoming, the only thing Beau could think of was getting back to his mate.

He’d actually had a lot of time to think about Sterling and what had happened between them. He couldn’t say he didn’t enjoy himself because he did. Sterling had opened his eyes to a whole new level of pleasure he hadn’t even knew existed. He was still reeling from that.

Beau decided that the best thing he could do was get Sterling out of there before someone did something that couldn’t be undone. The safest place for his mate was back home where he could be protected by the entire pack.

He started backing toward the door. “Sterling belongs to me. Our mating has been recorded. Interfering in a mating is against UPAC rules. If anyone attempts to come between us, I will file a grievance with the elders.”

“I am an elder.”

“I don’t care,” Beau snapped.

He started carrying Sterling toward the front door again when he noticed a little man following them, wrapped in a blanket. Saying he was little was an understatement. He was even smaller than Sterling.

“Who are you?”

The man blanched. “Mi–Micah.”

“Can I help you with something, Micah?”

Micah’s forehead wrinkled and he started chewing on his thumb as he glanced between Beau and Sterling. He looked terrified, but he also looked desperate, like he needed to say something but was afraid to.

“Micah?” Beau made sure his voice was softer this time. He didn’t want to frighten the man any more than he already was.

“He... he...” Micah gestured toward Sterling. “Can I go with him?”

“You want to go with Sterling?” That surprised Beau.

“Please?” Micah whispered.

Micah looked like he was about ready to fall apart. Beau found he couldn’t say no. He nodded and started for the door again. “Come on.”

Beau carried Sterling to the elevator. He was surprised when Micah rushed ahead of him and pushed the down button. “Thank you, Micah.”

Micah’s face flushed, and he quickly looked down at the floor.

The elevator dinged, and the doors opened. Beau wasted no time. He carried Sterling onto the elevator. Micah once again hit the button, this time for the bottom floor. Once they reached the lobby, Beau hurried out to the car he had rented at the airport.

He carefully laid Sterling in the backseat then helped Micah into the front seat. Traffic was pretty light, but it was also after two o’clock in the morning. People with brain cells were sleeping in their beds.

Still, it took Beau nearly forty-five minutes to reach the airport. Luckily, the plane he had chartered was still there. Beau made

arrangements for them to fly home then loaded Sterling and Micah on the plane.

He was so upset still that the takeoff didn't even bother him. They had a seven-hour flight before they reached home, and Beau needed to make sure Sterling wasn't truly hurt. He wished he'd had time to do it before, but getting Sterling to safety had taken over every thought in his head.

"Do you need anything, Micah?" he asked as he unbuckled his seatbelt then stood up.

Micah shook his head.

"Okay, I'm going to take Sterling into the back and check out his head, make sure he's okay. I'll be right back."

"Can I help?" Micah whispered.

Beau blinked. "Ah, yeah, sure. I could probably use the help."

Beau picked Sterling up in his arms and carried him to the small bed in the back. That was one thing he liked about chartered airplanes, he could rent one with a hundred seats or a smaller one with a bed in the back. If he had to fly, he preferred the ones with the beds in the back.

Beau gently set Sterling down on the bed. He was a little more than concerned that Sterling hadn't woken up yet and wondered if he had been too hasty in taking the man out of his apartment instead of having him checked over.

"Micah, would you search the bathroom for a first aid kit or some wet towels? I want to clean this up a little."

Beau carefully rolled Sterling onto his stomach and started checking over his head. The bleeding had stopped, but Sterling had a large bump on his head with a small gash in the middle. It didn't look deep enough for stitches, but what did Beau know? He wasn't a doctor.

He also wasn't a vampire and didn't know what Sterling might need. He felt Micah climb up onto the bed and turned to him for answers. "Micah, you're a vampire, right?"

Micah froze. “Y–yes.”

“Shh, there’s no reason to be afraid. I’m not going to hurt you. I just need to know if there is anything special I should do for Sterling. I don’t know that much about vampires and don’t want to do something that might hurt him.”

Micah swallowed. “He... he’s going to need blood when he wakes up,” Micah whispered. “He’ll be really hungry. We always are after we get hurt.”

Beau cocked his head to one side as he considered Micah’s words. The man sounded like he had a lot of knowledge about what a vampire might need if hurt. It made Beau wonder what Micah’s story was.

“Okay, so he’ll need blood. I suppose I can give him some of mine until we can get more.”

“Just don’t let him take too much,” Micah said. “With you being his mate and all, and as hungry as he’s going to be, Sterling will be especially addicted to your blood. He could take too much if you’re not careful.”

Beau smiled. “Noted.”

He took the cloth Micah held out and gently cleaned up the wound on Sterling’s head. There really wasn’t any way to put a bandage on it without shaving a spot, so he just left it uncovered.

“He was very brave,” Micah murmured.

Beau glanced up at Micah to find the man watching Sterling with an almost reverent look. “Oh?” he asked carefully. “What did he do?”

“Vladimir was really angry. He kept slamming Sterling into the wall, screaming at Sterling, but Sterling still put himself between me and Vladimir. When Vladimir attacked him, Sterling fought him off, even when his head was bleeding.”

Beau stiffened. “Who’s Vladimir?”

“Our coven leader.” Micah started twisting his fingers together, but he never lifted his eyes off of Sterling. “Sterling was Vladimir’s bodyguard, but he told Elder Lewis that he quit.”

“Was he the unconscious guy at Sterling’s apartment?”

Micah nodded. “I hit him over the head with a lamp when he started raping Sterling. I know Sterling doesn’t like me much ’cause of what Vladimir does, but he’s never been mean to me. I had to do something. I couldn’t let Vladimir make Sterling dirty like me.”

Beau sucked in a deep breath and fought his wolf for control. Now was not the time to shift, no matter how angry he was, or how much agony Micah’s words brought him. He needed to know exactly what happened to Sterling.

“Micah, whatever Vladimir did to you wasn’t your fault. I’m sure that Sterling likes you just fine. If he didn’t like you, he never would have tried to keep Vladimir away from you.”

Micah shook his head rapidly. “He always calls us twinkies or toys.”

Beau frowned. “Does he know your name?”

Micah finally looked away from Sterling to look at Beau. His eyes were rounded as if he had never thought Sterling might not know his name. “I don’t know. Vladimir called us his toys, so Sterling did, too. I thought it was because he didn’t like us.”

“I’ll bet he called you that because he didn’t know your real name.” Beau cautiously reached over and patted Micah’s leg through the blanket wrapped around him. “And if Vladimir is such a bad man, I’ll bet Sterling never wanted to single anyone out by calling them by their name. It could have started trouble with Vladimir.”

Micah inhaled sharply then went back to staring at Sterling. “Do you think?”

“I do, Micah. Sterling is a good man. He would never do anything that would cause others harm.”

Beau didn’t know if he was trying to convince Micah or himself. He knew nothing about Sterling beyond the fact that the man had dumped him in Wyoming. For all he knew, Sterling could be as much of a rat bastard as Vladimir. He just didn’t think so. Something told him that Sterling held his honor close to his chest.

“Micah.” Beau swallowed hard as he braced himself for whatever Micah might say to his question. “Did Vladimir rape Sterling?”

“H—he tried.” Micah went back to twisting his fingers together. “He had Sterling’s pants down and he was... he was... but I hit him over the head with the lamp before he could finish. Sterling was one of the few that didn’t treat us bad. I didn’t want Vladimir—”

“It’s okay, Micah, I get the picture.” And he couldn’t stand to hear anymore. “Why don’t you go back into the main cabin and get some rest. I’m just going to stay in here with Sterling for awhile and keep an eye on him.”

“Okay.”

Micah started to climb off the bed but got caught up in the blanket. As the side slipped down, Beau realized Micah was naked under the blanket. He growled. He really wanted to get his hands on whoever was allowing this sweet little man to be abused.

Beau sat up and pulled his shirt over his head then handed it to Micah. “Here, let’s get you covered up a bit. This will do until we can get you some clothes.”

Micah stared down at the shirt like it was a snake about to bite him. “I’m not allowed to wear clothes.”

“What?”

“Vladimir doesn’t like us to wear clothes.”

Beau gritted his teeth and took a deep breath. “Well, Vladimir isn’t here, is he?”

Micah’s eyebrows shot up. He seemed shocked as if he never considered the possibility that he could go against Vladimir’s orders. Beau chuckled when a slow smile crossed Micah’s lips, and he grabbed the shirt, pulling it over his head.

Beau patted Micah’s leg against then nodded toward the door. “Go on, now. We have a few hours yet before we land. We all need to get some rest.”

Micah fairly bounced as he jumped off the bed and went to the door, his blanket trailing behind him. He paused at the door and glanced over his shoulder.

“Thank you.”

Beau smiled back at the man. “You’re more than welcome, Micah.”

Micah walked out and closed the door behind him. Beau turned back to Sterling. The man was still out cold, but at least the color was coming back into his face. Beau scooted to the head of the bed then pulled Sterling up into his arms. He grabbed one of the blankets on the bed and pulled it over the both of them.

Beau didn’t realize until he had Sterling settled against his side how totally exhausted he really was. The last several hours had been life-altering, and that was a huge understatement. No matter what happened, Beau didn’t think his life would ever be the same again.

And, strangely enough, he didn’t want it to be. Despite the questions he still needed answered, because he was as confused as hell, the thought of giving Sterling up made Beau’s stomach clench.

Knowing that he had been unable to protect Sterling made him growl. It was Beau’s job, his duty, to protect those under his care. That duty was even more important when it came to his mate. And he had failed Sterling miserably.

Granted, Sterling hadn’t exactly made it easy for Beau by dropping him off at a Wyoming airport, but Beau should have made sure that Sterling hadn’t felt the need to do that. He knew what happened to Sterling rested firmly on his shoulders.

He just needed a way to convince Sterling they belonged together because he wasn’t giving the man up. Not even if it meant he had to hog-tie him and keep him locked in a room. And he was seriously considering it.

Beau breathed in deeply. The anger and tension in his body started to ease when Sterling’s heavenly scent filled his nostrils. He started to breathe a little easier knowing that his mate was safe and in his arms.

As long as he continued to keep Sterling wrapped in his arms, Beau knew they could figure everything else out, whether Sterling liked it or not.

They still had a lot of problems, the least of which was telling his former fiancée that she was *former*. Marilyn was going to be pissed. She might be a very attractive woman, long blond hair, pert little breasts, and legs that went on forever, but when she was in a snit, she was so not attractive.

It wasn't going to be pretty, but Beau couldn't very well marry Marilyn when he had Sterling as a mate. He didn't think Sterling would stand for that. Beau frowned the more he thought about the differences between Marilyn and Sterling, and there were many.

Besides the fact that they were different sexes, there was something about Sterling that called to Beau, and he didn't think it was the mating heat. From what he could see, besides being a sarcastic son of a bitch, Sterling held the same ideals that Beau did. If they could get past sniping at each other, they just might have a chance.

Beau grimaced. That was assuming Sterling forgave him for allowing him to be hurt. There was a very real possibility that he wouldn't. Sterling certainly had reason not to. Beau had royally fucked up.

If Beau ever got his hands on Vladimir, he knew only one of them would walk away alive. He'd kill the man if he got close to him, and not only because of what Vladimir had done to Sterling. There was still what the man did to Micah, and who knew how many others.

Beau clenched his hands and tried to avoid Sterling's skin as he did so. He was angry, yes, but he would never do anything to mar the man's perfect alabaster skin. Licking all of the skin from the top of Sterling's head to his toes was an altogether different story.

Beau was still little unsure of the feelings Sterling provoked in him. He'd never felt this way about a man or a woman. He felt fiercely possessive. The mere thought of anyone even touching

Sterling made him want to howl. He wanted to bundle Sterling up where no one could touch him. He was just afraid Sterling would slug him if he tried.

Beau chuckled as he remembered Sterling slamming him into the wall when they met. He knew Sterling would slug him. The man might be a whole lot smaller than Beau, but he had a temper that rivaled his. Beau liked that. He didn't want a mate he could walk all over.

Of course, it remained to be seen how his pack took Sterling. It wouldn't do for Sterling to show him disrespect. It could undermine Beau's standing with his pack, and that would never do. He worked too hard to get where he was just to toss it away.

Beau wondered, after experiencing all that Sterling was, if he would actually choose his pack if it came right down to it. He hoped he never had to choose because he wasn't sure what his choice would be.

Beau hugged Sterling closer to his body as a shiver raced through him. "I hope you're worth this, Sterling, 'cause it's going to be a wild ride."

Chapter 5

Sterling hissed as he came back to life. His fangs dropped down the instant he smelled someone else in the room. His cock hardened when a sweet, manly scent started weaving in and around him.

He growled low in his throat when he felt arms tighten around him. He pushed free and flipped over, straddling the man next to him. Sterling's eyes drank everything in with a deep hunger—the chiseled jaw, the golden eyes, the dark brown hair framing the man's face.

He licked his lips, hunger riding him hard. Sterling leaned in and shoved his face into the curve of the man's neck, inhaling deeply. He shuddered at the deep rich scent filled him. He nuzzled his face against the man's skin, rubbing Beau's scent all over his face. He would bathe in the scent if he could.

“Mine!”

“Yours, Sterling.”

Sterling moaned and arched into the air when he felt Beau's hands stroke down his back. It felt so good to be touched, caressed. He wanted to touch as well. Beau's naked chest lay below him. All that smooth skin combined with a smattering of dark hair across the top of his chest—it was incredibly yummy.

Sterling leaned down and followed the small trail of dark brown hair from the edge of Beau's bellybutton and up his chest to one dark-hued nipple hidden in even more curly hair. He heard Beau cry out below him when he gently bit down on that nipple. Large hands curled into his hair, holding him there.

Sterling took it as an invitation for more and gently bit down. One of Beau's hands stayed in his hair. The other moved down Sterling's

back to grab his ass. Sterling moaned as heat filled him. The need to feel more snapped any control he might have had.

The need to taste Beau's blood was even worse. Sterling was so thirsty he felt like he hadn't had any blood in weeks. It was much like he had felt the night of the Great Gathering. He was in mating heat. He just didn't care. He needed.

"Need!" Sterling growled as he started clawing at Beau's pants. He wanted the man naked, and he wanted him naked now. He growled when his hands were pushed out of the way until he realized that Beau was undoing his pants and pushing them down his legs.

As soon as the pants were gone, Sterling scooted down Beau's body and buried his face in the man's groin. The strong fragrance of man was overwhelming. Sterling inhaled again and again, rubbing his face back and forth over Beau.

"Fuck, baby," Beau groaned, "what are you doing?"

Sterling growled over being called baby but decided to argue about it later when Beau's erect cock smacked him in the face. Damn, it was such a perfect cock, too—all nice and thick and long with hot silky skin.

Sterling wanted. He wanted to feel that silky hard cock in his mouth, and surprising to him, he wanted to feel it in his ass as well. He never desired being on the receiving end before, but now his aching hole nearly quivered at the idea.

Sterling wrapped his hand around Beau's wide girth and licked the tip, pressing his tongue into the small slit on the top before swirling it around the mushroomed head. Beau shouted out his name and bucked beneath him. Hot spunk filled his mouth. Sterling swallowed it down and kept licking and sucking until Beau was hard again.

He wasn't done with that beautiful cock yet.

Sterling yelped when he was suddenly grabbed and rolled beneath Beau. The man was all over him, as wild as Sterling felt. Their mouths came together suddenly. Sterling realized it was the first time

they had really kissed. He just couldn't figure out why they hadn't done it before. Beau was a master kisser. Sterling could come just from being kissed.

He felt Beau's hands move to his pants. Sterling kept his lips pressed against Beau's as he lifted his ass and tried to help Beau drag his pants down his legs. He kicked them off then wrapped his legs around Beau's waist.

Sterling stiffened when their cocks rubbed together. His hands clenched against Beau's shoulders. He ached. He throbbed. He felt like his head was going to blow off, both of them. He inhaled sharply when Beau grabbed his shirt and ripped it apart. Smooth naked skin met hairy muscular skin. Sterling groaned as a shiver of pure ecstasy rippled through his body.

"Need," he pleaded.

"I've got you, baby," Beau whispered back.

Sterling stiffened for a moment when he felt Beau's fingers trail between his ass cheeks. He tried to remember that this was Beau and this was something he wanted. This wasn't Vladimir. But the more pressure he felt, the less aroused he became.

When one of Beau's fingers started to push into him, Sterling panicked. He started struggling, pushing back against Beau's shoulders as he cried out in denial. Before he could voice his fear, he was suddenly swung around until he straddled Beau once again.

Beau's eyes were intent, and somewhat sad, as he looked up at Sterling. He grabbed Sterling's hand and pulled him down until they were chest to chest then curved his hand around the side of Sterling's face.

"It's okay, baby, we won't do anything you don't want to do."

"I just... I just..." Sterling pressed his lips together and laid his head down on Beau, nuzzling under his chin. "I want to," he whispered, "but I'm scared."

Sterling was surprised at his willingness to share with a man that was a virtual stranger. He just felt safe with Beau, especially wrapped

up in his arms the way he was. It helped that he wasn't pinned under Beau's much larger body. He didn't feel trapped.

"Would you feel better fucking me?"

Sterling gaped. He raised his head to look into Beau's eyes. "I thought you didn't do that."

One corner of Beau's mouth curved up. "That was before I found out that my mate was a man and he introduced me to the pleasure of being with him. If it makes you feel better being on top, then that's what we'll do."

"You'd do that?"

This time, Beau's entire mouth lifted up in a smile. He reached down and grabbed Sterling's flagging cock, which hardened right up the moment Beau touched him. "I happen to know from experience that being fucked by this beautiful cock is pretty damn hot."

Sterling groaned and buried his face in Beau's neck again. "I want..."

"What do you want, sweetheart?" Beau whispered in his ear.

"I want..." Sterling swallowed hard and drew up his courage. He lifted his head and asked for what he really wanted. "I want you to fuck me, but I don't think I can be on the bottom."

Beau cocked his head to one side, a curious expression on his face. "Do you have to be on the bottom? Can we do this with you on top?"

Sterling blinked. He hadn't really expected that response. "Uh, yeah, I suppose."

"You suppose?" Beau chuckled. "I hope you can more than suppose, Sterling. You're the one with all the experience in this stuff. You tell me."

Sterling swallowed again and nodded. "Yeah, we can do this with me on top."

"Show me."

Sterling closed his eyes for a moment. The hunger in Beau's face was going to make him cream right there and then. "I ha-have to get ready first," he whispered as he opened his eyes again.

"The finger thing?"

Sterling groaned and dropped his head onto Beau's chest as he envisioned the man's fingers in his ass. "Yes, the finger thing."

"And lots of lube, right?"

"Yesss," Sterling hissed as he felt Beau's hands stroked over his ass cheeks, "lots and lots of lube."

"I have a better idea."

Sterling yelped as Beau grabbed him by his arms and pulled him up his chest until he was straddling Beau's face. Hot breath blew across his balls followed quickly by something wet and cold and cloth like. Then Sterling felt Beau's long tongue stroke over him. He shuddered.

"Fuck, Beau, that's... that's..."

Beau lifted him up by his thighs. Sterling fell forward, catching himself by his arms. They started shaking when Beau's tongue scrapped across his hungry hole. He could feel Beau's fingers digging into his ass cheeks. The man's thumbs were just a hair's breadth away from his opening, almost within stroking distance. The tease was almost Sterling's undoing.

Being mated to a wolf shifter definitely had its advantages as Sterling soon found out. Beau apparently had the ability to shift just parts of his body, like his tongue, making it longer and thicker. Sterling couldn't help but wonder what other body parts Beau could shift.

All coherent thoughts were pushed from his mind when Beau's tongue began pushing into him. Sterling inhaled deeply and clenched the tight little ring of muscles. Beau just pushed right on through them and started fucking Sterling with his tongue.

Before long, Sterling started bouncing, impaling himself on the thick organ. His arms shook even as his ass quivered. There was no

word in the dictionary Sterling could think of to describe the ecstasy flowing through his body. He felt like he was on fire. Every stroke of Beau's tongue lit another fire.

He could feel his body opening up, begging for more. He didn't know how much more he could take without exploding into a million pieces. Sterling ached so bad that his entire body shuddered.

"Beau, please," Sterling begged.

Sterling could only shiver in anticipation as Beau pulled him down until he was once again straddling him.

"You have to take it from here, Sterling."

It took Sterling a moment to understand what Beau meant. When he did, he grinned and lifted his ass into the air. He grabbed Beau's cock and placed the head against the entrance to his body.

Sterling held his breath as he slowly lowered himself down on Beau's thick cock. He winced a little at how much he was being stretched. Beau's cock hadn't looked *that* big. Apparently, he was wrong. For a moment, Sterling wondered if Beau would fit, and then he slid the last few inches down.

"Damn, you're so tight, Sterling."

Sterling grinned down at Beau as the man's hands gripped his hips. Beau's lips were pulled back tight against his teeth. Sterling could see the man's canines threatening to descend. If Sterling didn't know better, he would have thought Beau was in pain.

"Sterling, please, I need to move."

Sterling smirked. "So move."

Beau's reaction to his words took Sterling by surprise. Exquisite pleasure shot through Sterling as Beau suddenly started to move, pulling his hips down as he thrust up. The sensations were at first a little abrupt, but they quickly turned into something that kept building and building until Sterling couldn't catch his breath.

"Beau," he groaned. Sterling didn't even have time to panic when Beau suddenly sat up, but he did notice that it brought their faces with in a breath of each other. "Beau."

“You need to feed, love.” Beau’s hand curved around the nape of his neck. He tilted his head to the side, baring his neck, and pushed Sterling’s face closer.

Sterling groaned and struck, sinking his fangs into Beau’s neck. Sweet, hot, blood blasted across his tongue, filling his mouth. He distantly heard Beau cry out, and then the man was frantically pounding into him.

Beau stiffened, and something burning hot suddenly filled Sterling’s tight channel. Sterling tore his fangs away from Beau’s throat and shouted out as the hot seed filling him dragged him into his own orgasm. His body felt like it was seizing, shaking from head to toe.

Sterling slumped against Beau when his body finally stopped throbbing. He panted heavily. He could hear the heavy thud of Beau’s heart beneath his ear. Every few seconds, the cock in his ass would spasm, sending little shockwaves through Sterling.

“Next time...” Beau panted, “next time you do me.”

Sterling chuckled and leaned up to lick away the small trail of blood trickling down Beau’s chest. He did the same to the bite mark on the man’s throat then tucked his head under Beau’s chin.

“Deal.”

“Did you get enough to eat?”

Sterling smiled. “I could use a little more, but I’m fine for now.”

Beau’s hand stroked down the back of Sterling’s head. “Take what you need, baby.”

“Beau—”

Beau pulled back to look at Sterling. His eyebrows were drawn together in a deep frown. “Please?” he asked softly. “I need to do this, Sterling. I need to be able to provide this for you.”

Sterling stared at Beau for a moment, wondering if the man really meant it. The longer he looked, the more sincerity he could see in Beau’s deep golden eyes. The need in them warmed Sterling more than anything could, even sex.

“Okay, Beau.”

“Thank you,” Beau said then tilted his head to one side.

Sterling moved carefully, licking the small patch of skin until he felt Beau shudder, and then he sank his teeth in and took what he needed. Beau groaned and pulled him closer, his arms locking around Sterling.

When he had taken enough, Sterling extracted his teeth and licked the bite closed again. He drew in a deep cleansing breath and licked his teeth, catching the last bit of the sweet taste of Beau.

When Beau’s arms loosened, he leaned back and looked up at the man. He needed to make sure he hadn’t taken too much blood. With a shifter, the amount he could take was different than with a human.

“Did I take too much?”

“No, I’m good.” Beau smiled. “Promise.”

Sterling nodded then grimaced when he felt something trickling down his butt cheek. “Can we clean up? I think I’m a little gooeey.”

Beau chuckled and lifted Sterling up off his flagging cock then set him down on the bed. He pointed to a skinny door near the entrance to the room. “There’s a bathroom right through there.”

Sterling grabbed his pants and shot off the bed. He streaked across the small room and into the bathroom. He closed the door behind him and just leaned back against it, taking in several deep breaths.

He’d just had sex with Beau, again. And he still was no closer to being in a mated relationship than he was when he dropped Beau off in Wyoming. Beau was still engaged, and Sterling was still bonded to a straight man.

Sterling sighed and pushed himself away from the door and stepped over to the sink. He quickly cleaned up then got dressed. His shirt was pretty much toast. Beau had ripped the buttons off when he tore it. Sterling tied the ends together over his stomach.

He looked at himself in the mirror and grimaced. He looked like crap. Perfect. He tried smoothing his short hair down, but it just stuck right back up. God, he hated bad hair days. He so needed to see his

stylist. Sterling glanced down at his nails and wrinkled his nose. He also needed a good manicure.

“Sterling?” Beau suddenly called through the door, knocking and making Sterling jump. “Are you okay in there?”

“Yes, I’m fine.”

Sterling patted at his hair one last time then plastered a smile on his face and opened the door. Beau was dressed in his pants again and looking devastatingly handsome. Sterling doubted the man ever had a hair out of place.

“Where is your shirt?” Sterling asked when he realized he was having a hard time concentrating when the man’s naked chest was right in front of him.

“I loaned it to Micah. He didn’t have anything but that ratty old blanket to cover him.”

“Micah?” He gripped the doorframe. Was this someone he needed to be worried about?

Beau chuckled. “He said you didn’t know his name.”

Sterling frowned. “Who?”

“The little guy that hit Vladimir over the head and saved your ass.”

“The little platinum blond?”

“That would be him.”

“He’s here?”

Beau nodded toward the other door. “He’s in the main cabin getting some rest. And if I can give you a bit of advice, don’t call him toy or twink or any other stupid name like that. He already thinks he’s been ruined by what Vladimir did to him. He doesn’t need help believing it.”

“What did Vladimir do to him?”

Beau’s eyebrows shot up. “You don’t know?”

“No.” Sterling shook his head. “Vladimir didn’t let his boy to—he didn’t bring them around me very often. When I did see them, they

were all so quiet. They never said a word, and I never noticed anything out of place.”

Beau cocked an eyebrow. “Maybe you weren’t looking.”

“What would you know about it?” Sterling growled and pushed past Beau. He stalked across the room then threw one hand up in the air as he turned to glare at Beau. “Have you ever had to protect someone while trying not to look like you were protecting them?”

“Uh...”

“The only reason I was chosen for this damn job was because I look like one of Vladimir’s little toys. I blend in. That also means every loser on the planet felt me up, pinched my ass, and assumed I was theirs for the taking.”

“Sterling—”

“It was demeaning and humiliating, but I did my job, and now you want to tell me that what happened to all those pretty boys was my fault because I didn’t look deeper?”

“Sterling—”

“What?” Sterling snapped, slamming his hands down on his hips.

“Do you feel better?”

Sterling blinked.

“I never once said that what happened to Micah and whoever else Vladimir had, or has, is your fault. I just asked that you don’t call him degrading names. He’s in a situation not of his making. He needs our protection, not our censure.”

“Okay.”

Beau smiled and walked across the room to stand in front of Sterling. He rubbed his hands up and down Sterling’s arms. “Now, that wasn’t so bad, was it?”

“Who are you?”

“Beau Garret, your mate.”

Sterling started shaking his head as he pushed away from Beau. “No, no, you’re engaged, remember? I contacted my uncle. He’s

going to figure out a way to break this mating thing, and you can just go on home and marry whoever.”

Sterling’s eyes rounded when Beau let out a loud growl and slammed him into the wall. His eyes had darkened, showing his anger. Sterling inhaled sharply when Beau pressed up against him and got right in his face.

“I’ve already informed your illustrious uncle that we have no reason to break our mating. I also told him that if he tried anything to break our mating I would file a grievance with the elders since interfering in a mating is against UPAC rules.”

“Why would you do that?” Sterling whispered.

“Because you are my mate and I won’t give you up.”

Sterling couldn’t have stopped the tears from welling up in his eyes if his next breath depended on it. Beau was shoving a knife into his heart with every word he spoke. “You have to let me go.”

“Not going to happen,” Beau growled.

“I won’t be your thing in the background, Beau, I won’t.”

“I’m not asking you to.”

Sterling’s eyes widened. He had to make Beau see reason. “I won’t share.”

“I won’t either.”

“But... you’re engaged.”

“I *was* engaged, Sterling, and now I’m mated. That changes everything.” Beau’s hands cupped each side of Sterling’s face. “I’m going to tell her the second we get home. I would have just called her, but I feel I owe it to her to tell her that I’m calling it off in person.”

Sterling’s heart started beating faster as hope began to blossom in his chest. “You’re really going to call it off?”

“There is only room for one person in my bed, Sterling, and that person is you.”

A small breath of air escaped Sterling’s mouth as he stared into Beau’s eyes. “You mean that.”

“I do, although, there is one thing you’re going to have to deal with.”

Sterling knew it. He just knew it. Nothing could be that good.

“What?” he asked, bracing himself.

“I refuse to call you baby just when we’re alone.”

Chapter 6

Beau watched Sterling grow tenser and tenser the closer to home they got. He knew his decision for them to stay the night in a hotel near the airport had been a good one, and not just because of the great sex they had enjoyed.

Sterling needed a night to decompress. He also needed to realize that Beau meant every word he said. Unfortunately, Beau knew that would take time. Sterling was still jumpy and uncertain. Beau knew he would just need to continue to reassure the man that he was the only one he wanted in his bed.

"I think you'll like the house, Sterling," Beau said to break the silence. "It might not be your fancy New York penthouse style, but it is rather comfortable. And once we get your stuff packed up and moved here, we can add your stuff to the décor."

"Geez, my stuff." Sterling wiped his hand down his face. "I need to have my entire apartment packed, and then there is the loft on Forty-seventh Avenue and the office on Fifth. And Tony and Andre, we'll have to see if they would be willing to transfer out here."

"Andre and Tony?"

"Oh." Sterling sent Beau a quick smile. "Tony is my pilot. Andre is my driver, butler, and basically my brain on most days. I'd be lost without the man."

"Right." Beau gripped the steering wheel as he seethed. Sterling shouldn't need anyone but him. "Tony and Andre."

"Oh, you'll love Andre. He's a whiz with computers." Sterling frowned. "You do have Internet, don't you?"

Beau rolled his eyes. "Yes, we have Internet."

"If I'm going to be in the backwoods, I have to have Internet, at least some way to contact my people." Sterling wrung his hands together. "Things would just fall apart otherwise."

"We do have phones, Sterling," Beau said. "You can contact anyone you want."

"Contact anyone I want?" Sterling chuckled and patted Beau's leg. "Aren't you cute?"

"Sterling—"

"Honey, do you have any idea what I do?"

"Do?" Beau glanced over at Sterling in confusion then quickly back to the road. He had no idea what Sterling was talking about.

"I'm not just a pretty face, darling."

Beau snorted. "No, you're a damn sexy face."

"Oohhh." Sterling leaned over and licked a line up the curve of Beau's ear. "That statement will win you a blow job."

Beau inhaled sharply as his cock took an instant interest in Sterling's statement. He almost drove off the road when his zipper bit into his hardening cock. "Careful, love, I'm driving."

Sterling chuckled. "What, you've never had road head before?"

Beau glanced into the rearview mirror when he heard a soft giggle from the backseat. Micah sat in the backseat, his eyes twinkling with amusement. He had his mouth covered with his hand as he laughed.

Beau had yet to figure Micah out. He knew Micah had been abused in some way, but the man refused to discuss it. He practically became hysterical when Beau tried. But, just left alone Micah was as happy as he could be.

Beau still had to fight the man to get him in clothes. Micah seemed to believe he was supposed to walk around naked. It had taken nearly three hours to convince Micah he could get into serious trouble streaking through the neighborhood. And then Beau had only gotten him into a pair of loose-fitting cotton pants and a shirt. Micah drew the line at shoes or underwear.

Beau had a lot of questions, both about Micah and what had happened to him. He just didn't think Micah was in a place in his head where he could answer them. He needed to just feel safe for awhile, and not be made to obey someone's every word.

Beau hoped to be able to provide that with his pack. He even had just the man picked out to keep an eye on Micah. James Walker was one of Beau's pack enforcers. He was actually in charge of training other enforcers and keeping track of which pack had which enforcer.

He was strong, protective of the pack members, and could be a mean son of a bitch when pissed off. Walker would fight Beau's orders to take Micah under his wing, but he would be perfect at keeping Micah safe.

"Sterling, I'm afraid to admit that I do not know that much about vampire covens," Beau admitted. "Is there any sort of hierarchy to them?"

"Of course, there has to be, or else chaos would reign."

"Like?"

"Well, obviously, Elder Lewis is at the top of the heap. From there, we have regional leaders that govern several covens in an area, like the New York one covers all of the state of New York, not just New York City. Each coven is governed by a coven leader that reports to the regional leader. Each coven leader has an inner circle that usually entails personal bodyguards and enforcers."

"So, pretty much the same as a wolf pack then."

Sterling smiled. "Almost exactly like a wolf pack."

"What is Vladimir?"

"He's the coven leader for New York City."

"Not the entire state?"

Sterling shuddered. "Oh god, can you imagine how horrible it would be if he had that much power?"

"If this guy is so horrible, how did he ever get to be a coven leader?"

“Challenge, how else?” Sterling stared out the window for several moments. He looked stiff and upset. “Vladimir was the nephew of our former coven leader, Donnelly. No one is actually sure what happened, but there was some sort of fight. Vladimir was the only one to walk away. As such, he was declared the new coven leader.”

“Was it a fair fight?”

Sterling chuckled, but it sounded cold. “No one is really sure of that either. The only witnesses to the fight are either dead or working for Vladimir. Being the coven leader of New York City comes with a lot of power, and no one is stupid enough to question Vladimir’s claim that he won the fight fair and square.”

“Didn’t Elder Lewis do anything?”

“Yes.” Sterling grimaced. “He assigned me to be Vladimir’s personal bodyguard.”

“Why would he do that?”

Sterling shrugged. “I have no idea. Maybe my uncle has a sadistic streak just like Vladimir. Who knows?”

Beau’s hands tightened on the steering wheel again. At this rate, he was going to need a new one by the time they reached home. “Micah said you resigned.”

“I did.” Sterling laughed again. “You have to have what they consider a legitimate reason for switching covens. Not liking the job assigned to you doesn’t cut it. But the rules are different when you’re mated. You go where your mate goes, one of the reasons that most vampires mate within their own coven.”

“Is it going to bother you being part of a wolf pack instead of a coven?”

“No, not at all.”

Beau breathed a sigh of relief and flexed his fingers. “Well, to be honest, it’s a little more than that. As regional alpha, I govern several wolf packs, not just one.”

“Oh.” Sterling batted his eyelashes. “A man of power. That is so incredibly sexy.”

Beau blinked. He wasn't sure if Sterling was joking or not. "Uh..."

"Relax, big guy, I'm joking." Sterling paused then waved his hand in the air. "Well, not about the sexy part. You'd be sexy even if you shoveled shit for a living. I just couldn't care less if you're in power or not. That's never been my thing."

"Thanks." Beau frowned. "I think."

"What will be expected of me as your mate?"

"I imagine whatever is expected of other mates."

"That's not very helpful, Beau."

Beau grinned sheepishly. "I've never had a mate before, so I guess I'm not really sure. I guess I can always send you to the sitting room with the other wives."

Sterling's grin was mischievous. "You could, but be forewarned, girls talk."

Beau shuddered. He could just imagine what Sterling would say to a bunch of alpha wives. He'd never hear the end of it. Beau started shaking his head. "I think, under the circumstances, you should stay with me."

Sterling smirked. "Yes, I thought you'd say that."

Sterling was going to be so much trouble. Beau was just having a hard time being upset about that. Sterling intrigued him—the way the man looked, the way he thought. Hell, the way he smelled. It was all intriguing.

It was hot.

Beau slowed the car and turned into his driveway. He stopped at the gate house and waved to the guard. Once the large, iron gate opened, he drove through and headed up the driveway.

"We have a few thousand acres here, most of it forest land. The main house acts as both my home and the regional alpha headquarters. We have pack gatherings, host visiting dignitaries, and generally run the Pacific Northwest Region from here."

Beau was lucky enough that his house, and all the surrounding land, belonged to him and not the Pacific Northwest Regional Alpha position. Even if he wasn't alpha of the tri-state area, he would still own it all, and had for the last two hundred years.

"How big is the house?" Sterling asked.

"Why don't you guess?" Beau slowed the car as the forest broke to reveal a wide open space where the main house sat. He heard Sterling inhale and knew the sight was impressive, even for a man that had lived in a penthouse in New York City.

His house was a sprawling three-story mansion built almost entirely of wood. Beau particularly enjoyed the two-story floor-to-ceiling windows that ran all along one wall on the side of the large building. The only thing that blocked the beautiful view of the surrounding meadows and forest was the stone fireplace in the middle of the windows.

There were several stone fireplaces in the mansion—in the large living room, Beau's office and bedroom, the den, and several bedroom suites. The winters could get very cold, and the extra fireplaces helped keep the place warm.

The mansion also had an industrial-sized kitchen, small informal breakfast area, formal dining room, two smaller offices, a library, indoor swimming pool and sauna, cellar, and thirteen bedroom suites. The outside had three different decks and a second floor balcony.

It had started out small two hundred years ago, just a one room cabin. Little by little over the years, it had been added to and redesigned until it was the place it was today. Beau was very proud of his home.

He really hoped Sterling liked it. He cast a small glance at Sterling out of the corner of his eye. Being a wolf, he needed lots of room to run. He could never imagine living in the city like Sterling did but...

"I have a condo I use when I have to be in the city on business. If you don't want to live here, we can move there. I know this is a long ways from what you're used to."

Sterling's eyes narrowed as he turned to look at Beau. "You consider moving us away from this gorgeous house and I'll cut off your balls and feed them to you."

Beau's eyebrows shot up then a slow grin crossed his lips. "Duly noted."

"Hurry up and park this beast." Sterling waved his hand forward then smacked the dashboard. "I want to see the inside."

"Right away, sir." Beau smirked and stepped on the gas. He heard a small yelp from the backseat as the car shot forward. "Anything you say, sir."

"And don't you forget it."

Beau thought Sterling was serious until he looked over and saw the grin on his face. He chuckled and shook his head. "Oh, I can see life is never going to be boring with you around."

"Hell, no." Sterling chuckled and patted Beau's thigh. "What would be the fun in that?"

Beau saw a distinctive shadow cross in front of the front windows as he parked the car, and swallowed hard. He knew this wasn't going to be easy. He turned off the car and turned to Sterling, grabbing the man's hand and holding tightly in his.

"Things might get a little tense when we go inside, but I want you to know that you are here to stay. I will tell Marilyn the engagement is off the moment I can."

One of Sterling's eyebrows arched. "The moment you can? What exactly does that mean?"

"It means that we are going to go inside the house where I will take Marilyn aside and tell her in private that it is over. I'm not going to embarrass her and call it off in front of a bunch of people. I owe her more respect than that." Beau squeezed Sterling's hand. "I'm asking that you understand that and give me the time to do what I need to do."

Sterling pulled his hand away and crossed his arms over his chest. "You have ten minutes."

“Sterling—”

“Ten minutes, Beau, or I do it.”

Beau dropped his head against the steering wheel. “There’s just no reasoning with you, is there?”

“Sure there is,” Sterling replied. “I’m giving you ten minutes, aren’t I? If I had my way, I’d just toss her out on her ass.”

“Sterling!”

“I’m sorry, Beau. I guess I am not as unaffected by this as I would like to think I am.” Sterling blew out a deep breath and laid his head back against the seat. “Maybe I should just stay out here.”

“I know I am asking a lot of you, Sterling.”

“No, you’re not. I just don’t like the idea of someone trying to lay claim to what belongs to me. I understand what you feel you need to do. I just can’t help feeling that she’s going to cause problems. I would if someone was forcing me to give you up.”

Beau wasn’t in love with Marilyn. He never had been. But pressure from UPAC council to find a mate, as well as his own pack members, had made him choose someone to be by his side despite the fact Marilyn was not his mate.

Beau smiled. He couldn’t help it. While he didn’t think that Marilyn would be happy when he broke the engagement, he didn’t think she would really stay around and fight for him. Sterling would. That thought warmed Beau deep down inside.

“If you would feel more comfortable staying outside while I handle this, Sterling, I understand. And I wouldn’t blame you in the least.” Beau pointed out the front window of the car to the side of the mansion. “There’s a small lake with a dock around the side of the house. You and Micah could go wait for me there.”

Before Sterling could answer him, the backdoor opened then slammed shut. Beau swung around just in time to see Micah running toward the side of the house. He groaned as items of clothing went flying into the air.

“Shit, he’s streaking.”

Beau jumped out of the car and went chasing after Micah. He could hear Sterling laughing hysterically as the man ran behind him. The situation was amusing, but it was also a pain in the ass.

It didn't get any better when Micah ran off the end of the small wooden dock and jumped into the water with a loud whoop of glee. By the time Beau got to the end of the dock, Micah was swimming around in circles, naked as the day he was born.

Beau stopped at the end of the dock and leaned against the wooden railing. He crossed his arms over his chest and just watched. Micah was truly enjoying himself. It was probably the first time he had seen so much joy in Micah since he met the man. Beau couldn't bring himself to deny the man his happiness.

"He looks like he's having fun."

Beau looked down at Sterling as the man walked up beside him. "He does. I have to wonder if he's ever even seen a lake before because he's going to be freezing when he gets out. Summer won't be here for a few more months. That water has to be ice cold."

Sterling grinned. "I don't think he cares."

Beau laughed and wrapped an arm around Sterling. He pulled Sterling in front of him then wrapped both arms around Sterling's body, resting his chin on top of the man's head. He couldn't remember the last time he felt so carefree, especially considering the tense situation waiting for him in the house.

"Thank you, Sterling," he said softly.

"For what?" Sterling asked, tilting his head back.

Beau smiled and gestured toward the water where Micah was swimming. "For this. For letting me see a world I never knew existed. For wanting to fight for me." Beau trailed his thumb gently down the side of Sterling's face. "For agreeing to be mine."

"That's a two-way street, you know. You could have just as easily not come after me when I left you in Wyoming. You could have just gone on home and married that woman."

Beau thought about Sterling's words for a moment then shook his head. "No, I think no matter what I would have come after you. You're too special to give up just because I was a little confused about the equipment."

"Was?" Sterling's eyebrow went up.

Beau chuckled and swung Sterling around in his arms. "I think I'm getting the hang of things."

To prove his point, Beau leaned down and pressed his lips against Sterling's. The man moaned and leaned into him. Beau could feel Sterling's tongue brush against his, inviting him in. Beau felt an easy hunger flare through his body as he accepted Sterling's invitation, pushing his tongue inside the man's mouth to taste and explore.

Kissing Sterling was like lighting a match then throwing gasoline on it. One touch of Sterling's tongue, and Beau went up in flames. He could think of a hundred places he could take Sterling within a mile of the house so he could ravish him before going inside to face the firing squad. He seriously considered it.

"Damn, I could get so used to this," Beau said softly once he lifted his head.

"Yeah?" Sterling panted heavily, which was a great look on the man.

"Yeah." Beau grinned. "It's definitely on the top of my list of things to—"

"Beau Garret, what is the meaning of this?"

"Shit!"

Chapter 7

Sterling peered around Beau to see a busty, blonde-haired woman standing behind them, and she did not look happy. Her face was pinched in anger, her arms crossed over her chest. She was glaring daggers at both Beau and Sterling.

Sterling could instantly tell from the burning anger in the woman's eyes that this was Marilyn. He also knew that Beau wasn't going to be able to take her off somewhere private and break the news to her. A small crowd was gathering behind her. This was going to be very public.

The one thing Sterling didn't understand was why there was no pain or sadness in Marilyn's eyes. She was angry, but just angry. There wasn't a single glimmer in Marilyn that said she was emotionally devastated by catching her fiancé kissing someone else.

"Marilyn," Beau said as he turned around, "we need to talk."

Sterling grabbed Beau's arm when he started to walk away. He could tell by the look Beau gave him that the man expected him to protest or something. Sterling rolled his eyes and yanked on Beau's shirt.

"I need something to cover Micah up with."

Realization came suddenly to Beau's eyes. He looked past Sterling and smiled then turned and sought someone out in the crowd. "Memphis, would you get a blanket from the house? Our little friend here is going to need something to cover up with when we fish him out of the lake."

Memphis chuckled and took off for the house. Sterling gave Beau's arm a reassuring squeeze and sent the man a little smile. "I'll wait here with Micah. Go do what you need to do."

Beau smiled back. "Thanks, babe."

Sterling stared out at the naked man swimming in the lake as long as he could. When he couldn't stand it any longer, which truthfully was about ten seconds, he turned to watch Beau leading Marilyn off down the edge of the lake.

He could feel the curious eyes of those gathered watching him. He just didn't care. He couldn't stop watching Beau and Marilyn. Besides, it really wasn't his place to inform everyone exactly who he was. That was Beau's job.

Sterling tensed and growled low in his throat when Marilyn grabbed on to Beau's shirt and started crying. Sterling was an expert at crocodile tears. He knew them when he saw them, and he was seeing them in spades. Marilyn was putting on an act.

Unfortunately, Beau seemed to be eating it up. The idiot. He was patting Marilyn's shoulder and talking softly to her. Sterling knew he was going to have to school Beau in the art of putting on an emotional show. He might start by throwing the world's biggest temper tantrum if Marilyn didn't step away from Beau soon.

"Is he planning on staying in the water all day?"

Sterling turned to see a rather large man standing beside him, holding a blanket in his hands. It was the same man Beau had spoken to minutes earlier. He was massive, almost as much so as Beau, almost. Sterling wasn't sure anyone was as big as Beau.

"He'll probably come out when his parts start to freeze off," Sterling replied. "I don't think he's seen a real lake before."

Memphis shivered a bit. "And the cold doesn't bother him?"

Sterling shrugged. "You'd have to ask Micah that."

"Micah?"

"Yeah, you know..." Sterling waved his hand toward Micah, "the naked man in the water?"

Duh! Was there something in the water around here that made big sexy men as dumb as the day was long? Maybe it was just the tall ones? A brain needed oxygen to live. As tall as they were, maybe they weren't getting enough. How did they ever get anything done?

A sudden cold chill blew over Sterling, making him forget all about Micah. His breath caught in his throat as he slowly turned to see where Beau and Marilyn had gone. They were several yards away, standing on the edge of the lake.

Beau stood facing Marilyn as he talked, one hand waving about in the air. Marilyn had tears streaming down her face as she looked up at him. The scene looked innocent enough, but something about it just wasn't right to Sterling, and he couldn't figure out what it was.

He took a step closer, watching carefully. Beau gestured to Marilyn and started walking again. Marilyn walked next to him. They were both heading away, further down the edge of the lake.

Sterling saw something metallic flash in the sunlight, and took off running. He jumped over the railing of the dock and landed in the ankle deep part of the water. The freezing cold water splashed around him as he ran toward the shore.

Something was definitely wrong. The chill running down Sterling's back was bitter and menacing. The closer he got to the pair, the more sure Sterling became that something was seriously wrong.

He just couldn't figure out what it was until he saw Beau's arm wrap around Marilyn's shoulders and Marilyn's arm wrap around Beau's waist. The glint of silver was suddenly identified as a small dagger.

Sterling growled and put on a burst of speed. He could hear people behind him yelling. He just didn't care. He had to get to Beau. At the last second, Beau turned to look back at him. He must have heard the shouting.

Sterling narrowed his aim for the buxom blonde and took her down to the ground with one leap. He felt something cold and painful

enter his arm as he crashed down on top of Marilyn. He barred his fangs and growled as he pinned her to the ground.

“Mine!”

Marilyn’s frightened eyes stared up at him. She knew she was caught. Sterling saw it in her eyes. He also saw the sly look she sent in Beau’s direction, and knew when she cried out in fear that she was going to put on another show for the man.

“Beau!” she screamed, big fat tears rolling down her face. “He’s crazy. Save me!”

“Sterling, what are you doing?” Beau shouted.

“Saving your damn fool life,” Sterling snapped. Damned if he would be the bad guy here. He leaned closer to Marilyn, letting his fangs just a bit more. “Come near him again and not even your elders can save you. Beau is mine!”

Sterling gave Marilyn one huge shove then stood up. He wanted to howl, to growl. He wanted a doctor. His arm hurt like hell. The blood loss so soon after losing blood the night before couldn’t be good for him. He could already feel his head starting to spin.

“Sterling, have you lost your mind?”

Sterling snarled and turned to glare at Beau. He heard the man’s swift inhale the moment he spotted the blood saturating his shirt. The dagger sticking out of his arm was also a big clue. Sterling yanked it out and held it out to Beau.

“Here, I believe this was meant for you.”

Beau stared at the silver blade as if it might suddenly jump up and bite him. His eyes slowly moved to Marilyn, who was slowly climbing to her feet and wiping the dirt off her clothes off. “You tried to kill me? You tried to kill my mate?”

“No, no,” Marilyn whined. “It was his blade. He tried to kill you. I love you, Beau. I would never hurt you.”

Sterling lost it. He snarled and spun around, his claws lengthening as he dove toward the woman. He was ready to rip her head off.

Powerful arms wrapped around Sterling, one on his waist to hold him back and one putting pressure on the wound in his arm.

Sterling growled and turned. He was ready to bite into whoever held him back from attacking the threat before him until he realized it was Beau.

“No, baby, you can’t attack her.”

“Why not?” Sterling snapped. “She was going to kill you.”

“I know, and she will be dealt with,” Beau replied. “But you’re just going to make the situation worse if you attack her, no matter how much she might deserve it.”

“Beau, surely you don’t believe him over me. We’re engaged to be married. I’m going to be your wife, rule by your side.” Marilyn started twisting her hands together, more tears falling down her cheeks as she gave Beau a hurt look. “He’s a stranger, a vampire. He can’t be trusted. You know that.”

Sterling growled and lunged for a second time. Once again, he was stopped by Beau. His hatred for the woman was growing beyond the fact that she was engaged to Beau. She had now threatened his mate’s life. That made her dangerous in Sterling’s book.

“He’s my mate, Marilyn.”

Sterling’s eyebrows shot up at the venom he could hear dripping in Beau’s voice. He had never heard the man so angry before, not even at him. He glanced back over his shoulder at Beau, feeling a bit stunned.

“I don’t care if he’s a vampire, a wolf, or a wood rat. He’s mine, and that means I trust him more than I trust anyone on earth. Whatever we had between us was over the minute Sterling and I mated.”

“I’m supposed to be your wife,” Marilyn ranted. “How can you treat me like this?”

“I tried to break it to you gently, Marilyn, in private. You’re the one that pulled the knife.”

Marilyn stomped her foot. “It wasn’t my knife. It was his.”

“You’re lying, Marilyn, and you want to know how I know?” Beau shot Sterling a lust-filled look that took his breath away. “I’ve spent the better part of the last twenty-four hours with Sterling naked in my arms. I happen to know exactly what he has on him, or doesn’t have. I even picked out his clothes and helped him get dressed this morning. A knife was not part of his outfit. It wouldn’t match his tie.”

Marilyn screeched. Sterling’s eyes widened when he looked at her and saw her canines drop down. When her claws came out and she lunged, Sterling acted on instinct to protect his mate. He pushed Beau out of the way and caught Marilyn in his arms.

As quickly as he could, Sterling swept out with one foot, tripping the woman, then took her back to the ground. This time, he flipped her onto her stomach, pinned her arms behind her back, and placed his knee in her back.

He glanced up at Beau’s stunned face. “I don’t think she wants to break off the engagement, Beau.”

“Fuck, you move fast.” Beau rubbed his hand down over his mouth.

Sterling shrugged. “I just did what I had to do to protect my mate.” He glanced down at the struggling woman beneath him. “Now, what do you want me to do with her? Ripping out her throat and watching her slowly bleed to death is at the top of my list.”

“No, she will be placed on house arrest until we can convene a jury and try her for attempted murder.” Beau grimaced as he looked at the blade in his hand. “We can add in a charge of bringing a silver weapon into the headquarters of the regional alpha.”

Sterling’s eyebrows shot up. “That’s against the rules?”

“Very. Silver kills wolves.”

Sterling turned to stare down at the woman on the ground. He felt his anger growing again. His fangs ached to sink into her jugular and rip it out. He growled.

“Sterling, don’t do it.”

“She tried to kill you.”

“And she will pay for that, but not by your hand.”

Sterling felt a hand land on his shoulder.

“Please, baby?”

Sterling growled again then pushed away from the woman. If he touched her a moment longer, he wasn't going to be able to control himself. She had knowingly brought something into Beau's house that had the potential to kill him. And Sterling had no doubt that she knew exactly what she was doing.

The moment Sterling was out of the way, another man was in his place, slapping silver cuffs around Marilyn's wrists. Sterling tensed and stepped over to place himself between Beau and the woman as she was hauled to her feet.

He could see the venom in the woman's eyes, the pure hatred. If Marilyn had been free at that very moment, she would have gone for Sterling's throat. He didn't have a single doubt about it.

“You will pay for this,” Marilyn snarled.

“Oh please.” Sterling rolled his eyes. “You have nothing more original to say than that?”

“Sterling, don't antagonize the situation.”

Sterling's eyebrows shot up as he turned to look up at Beau. “Seriously? You really think the situation could get any more antagonized than it already is? The woman tried to kill you, Beau.”

Beau sighed, and Sterling could see a lecture coming on.

“Fine, what do you want me to do?”

Beau's lips twitched with amusement. “Kiss me?”

Sterling's mouth dropped open in shock. He heard Marilyn screeched behind him, and knew she had heard Beau's words. He vaguely acknowledged the woman being led off somewhere, but he only had eyes for Beau.

“Okay, I can do that.”

Sterling melted into Beau's arms. He winced a little when he tried to wrap his injured arm around Beau's neck then decided to go with

the waist instead. Beau's lips were warm against Sterling's, drawing a deep moan from him.

Beau really did have this kissing thing down to an art form. Sterling could sit and kiss the man for hours, which is why he groaned in protest when Beau pulled away.

"Wha—"

"I love kissing, baby, but we really need to get your arm looked at. We can kiss for hours later, once we are sure that it's not a bad wound, okay?"

"It's not," Sterling insisted.

Just then, a wave of nausea made Sterling's stomach clench. His knees started to buckle. Beau quickly caught him and swung him up into his arms. Sterling rolled his eyes when Beau started carrying toward the house.

"You carry me over the threshold like some blushing bride and I'll castrate you in your sleep."

"No, you won't." Beau chuckled. "You like my dick too much."

Sterling laughed. He couldn't fault Beau's logic. He did like the man's cock, preferably hard and in his ass. Just thinking about it made Sterling's hole quiver. He groaned and buried his face in Beau's neck.

"That kissing thing better happen fast."

"It will, love," Beau replied. "Just as soon as we get you checked over and settled."

It couldn't happen soon enough for Sterling. He needed to reaffirm his claim on the bigger man. "I need to claim you again, Beau."

"I know, love."

Stefan sighed deeply. There was something to be said about being mated to an alpha. Beau understood the need to assert his claim, to let everyone know they belonged to each other. Hell, Sterling was pretty sure Beau needed to do the exact same thing.

"Do we need to get you more blood to replace the stuff you lost?"

Sterling shrugged. "It probably wouldn't hurt. I drained you pretty good last night, and you haven't built up enough protein in your system yet to be much use to me right now."

Beau stopped to grimace down at Sterling. "Gee, thanks."

Sterling laughed. "You know what I mean."

"Luckily for you, I do," Beau said as he started for the house again.

Beau's statement made Sterling feel bratty. He leaned up and scraped his fangs over the corded muscles of Beau's neck. Beau shuddered. His steps faltered, and he stumbled.

"Fuck, Sterling," Beau panted after righting them, "you can't do that."

"Why not?"

"Because I'm liable to fuck you up against the side of the house, and I don't care who sees us."

Sterling swallowed hard as his entire body started to burn. "Okay."

Beau burst out laughing. "Okay, you won't do that, or okay, I can fuck you against the side of the house with an audience watching us?"

"Either." Sterling licked the side of Beau's neck again. "But I know which one I'm voting for."

Beau just growled.

Sterling lifted his head and glanced around when they entered the house. It was about as far from his New York penthouse as one could get. Instead of white walls and black leather, the mansion boasted of wood and earth tones. There wasn't a hint of marble anywhere, just wood and stone.

It was quite homey, which was strange for Sterling. He had never been into the homey thing before. But the more he thought about it, the more Sterling realized how cold and sterile his penthouse actually was compared to Beau's home.

"Not quite your New York style, hmm?" Beau asked.

“No, but it’s not cold either. The penthouse does what it needs to do, but a family doesn’t live there.” Sterling blinked, surprised by what he had said. He hadn’t known he was going to say those words until they came out of his mouth. “I guess my style just changed.”

“You’re welcome to change anything you want.”

“As long as you have an espresso machine, I’m good.”

“If we don’t, I’ll buy you one.”

Sterling laughed as Beau carried him up the stairs. If he thought the downstairs was nice, Beau’s bedroom bordered on fantastic. The huge king-sized bed in the middle of the room was the main focal point for Sterling. The river rock fireplace and wall of built-in bookshelves was just an added bonus.

Beau paused, giving Sterling a moment to take it all in. Sterling looked up and grinned. “What’s your bathroom look like?”

Beau smiled. “It has a tub and a separate shower big enough to hold us both.”

“Then I approve.” Sterling chuckled. “Well, at least I will as soon as I get to try that tub out.”

“I’ll see what I can arrange.”

“Where’s Micah?” Sterling asked as he was laid down on the bed. “Did someone fish him out of the lake?”

“I think Memphis got him out.”

“Memphis?”

“Memphis is my second in command, my beta.” Beau suddenly chuckled. “I think you would call him my Andre.”

“Oh, Andre.” Sterling started to sit up until Beau reached over and pushed him back down. “I need a phone. I need to call Andre and Tony. Andre must be going out of his mind right now.”

Beau sat down on the side of the bed and lessened the pressure on Sterling’s shoulder. “I’ll tell you what, you let the doctor take a look at you, and I’ll make sure you get a cell phone.”

“It’s really just a scratch, Beau. I’m not trying to be a pain.”

"I know, love, but I would feel a lot better if the doctor took a look at it."

"Fine," Sterling sighed and settled back on the bed. He figured he was going to be there for awhile. He might as well get comfortable. And the bed was incredibly comfortable, more so than even Sterling's own bed back in New York. He especially liked the soft tan comforter on the bed.

"Beau."

Sterling looked past Beau's shoulder when he heard someone call out his mate's name. It was the large man from before. He didn't look very happy. Sterling was beginning to wonder if he ever looked happy.

"We need to speak, Beau."

Sterling frowned. That didn't sound good.

"Go ahead, Memphis, I won't hide anything from Sterling."

Memphis's face seemed to darken even more than it was before, making Sterling wonder if the man had an issue with him. He just didn't know if it was the fact that he was a man or the fact that he was a vampire.

"The little guy won't get out of the water."

Sterling rolled with laughter until his stomach hurt. Trust Micah to give the big bad beta a headache. He had given Sterling more than one in the past. "Offer him some chocolate. I can guarantee it will get him out of the water."

"Chocolate?"

Sterling nodded. "Dark chocolate is best."

"Dark chocolate, huh?"

"Micah is crazy about dark chocolate, works every time."

Memphis shrugged and started out of the room.

"Memphis, wait up," Beau said, stopping the man. Memphis turned around. "I need you to contact the pack doctor to come look at Sterling. We'll also need some blood to replace the blood Sterling lost when Marilyn stabbed him."

“I’ll see to it, Beau.”

Sterling waited until Memphis left the room before turning to look at Beau. “Is he always like that?”

“Who? Memphis?”

“Yes. He’s very uptight.”

“I suppose.” Beau shrugged. “I’ve never really thought about it much.”

“I think he likes to glower.”

Beau chuckled. “Maybe, but being my beta is no easy job.”

“Oh, I’m sure that being your mate is going to be a cake walk.” Sterling laughed when Beau stuck out his tongue. “Not to worry, sweetheart, I’ll keep you in line.”

Chapter 8

Sterling was a trip. Beau had to give the man that. He was totally unexpected. He had absolutely no doubt that Sterling would do exactly what he said and keep him in line. The man was just tenacious enough to do exactly that.

Beau would be happy to let him do exactly that, if he could keep Sterling in bed long enough to be looked at by the doctor. The damn man kept getting up, and Beau was just about to pull his hair out.

“Sterling, please, just stay in bed. The doctor will be here soon.”

If he wasn’t, Beau was going to have words with the man. They had been waiting nearly an hour already. He should have come immediately when Beau asked for him. What in the hell did he pay the man for?

“Fine,” Sterling said, “you want me to stay in this bed, get me a phone. I’m going to start going through withdrawals pretty soon. I need a phone.”

Beau walked over to the door and swung it open. The sentry that was standing there turned. “Get me a cell phone, something with unlimited minutes, and find out why that damn doctor isn’t here yet.”

“Yes, sir.”

Beau was in a growly mood and he knew it. He should have been showing his mate around his new home. Instead, his mate was injured. He slammed the door and stalked back across the room.

“Beau, come sit down next to me, sweetheart. You’re going to walk a hole in the carpet.”

Beau grumbled a little to himself but walked over and sat down on the bed next to Sterling. “Let me see your arm.”

Sterling rolled his eyes and held out his arm. "I'm telling you, it's just a nick. I've had worse shaving."

Beau pointed his finger at Sterling. "I get to be upset when someone stabs you, so stop giving me a hard time and shut up."

Beau could not understand why Sterling was taking his injury so lightly. The man had been stabbed. Anyone else would have been screaming to the high heavens. Sterling was just sitting there like nothing had happened at all.

"Why are you being so calm about this?"

"Because I really have had worse, Beau. I was a personal bodyguard, remember? This is what I'm trained to do."

"Getting stabbed?"

Sterling snickered. "No, but dealing with situations like this is something I *am* trained for. It's what I'm used to. There's no sense in getting upset over it."

Beau felt like pouting. Sterling must have seen it in his face because the man suddenly laughed and reached out for him. Beau allowed himself to be pulled forward and stretched out along side of Sterling. He propped his head up on his hand and looked down at Sterling.

"Just what are you trained to do?"

"Oh, honey, I'm a lethal weapon."

Beau started to laugh until he realized Sterling was serious. "Uh..."

"I know, I don't look it, do I?"

"Not really."

"And wouldn't that be the point if you wanted to hide your personal bodyguard? You see Memphis and you know the guy is powerful. You'd never try and attack someone with him around. Now me, no one expects me to be able to fight my way out of a paper bag. I'm just too cute."

Beau chuckled. "I can see that."

“Anyone that is going to attack you won’t do it when Memphis is around. They will wait until your guard is down or you’re alone or...” Sterling smirked.

“Or when you’re around,” Beau finished for him. “Don’t take this the wrong way, but can you really defend yourself?”

Sterling grinned. “I beat your ass, didn’t I?”

Beau felt his face flush. “And we will never discuss that again.”

Sterling suddenly frowned and tilted his head to one side. “Just why did you go after Vladimir anyway?”

“I didn’t.”

“But you did. You attacked Vladimir, and that’s when I tossed you into the wall.”

“I wasn’t trying to attack him. I was trying to get out the emergency door. He was just in the way.”

“So, this whole mating thing is your fault?”

Beau could see that Sterling was trying hard not to laugh. He felt his own lips begin to twitch with the need to laugh.

“Well, I was just trying to get out of the ballroom. You attacked me. Maybe it’s your fault.”

“I say we blame Vladimir.”

“We could send him a thank-you gift.” Beau started to grin. “Kind of our way of thanking him for being such a complete ass.”

“Just what did you have in mind?”

“Memphis.”

Sterling’s mouth dropped open. “Oh, that’s cruel, even for Vladimir.”

“I disagree.” Beau started tugging on Sterling’s buttons, popping them free one at a time. “I think it’s exactly what he deserves. Not only did he abuse you, but he abused Micah, and we both know Micah can’t defend himself.”

“You know, Micah wasn’t the only boy toy that Vladimir had. If he abused Micah, he might be abusing the others.”

“Maybe we should call your uncle and have him look into it.”

Sterling frowned and looked down at his hands. "I'm not sure my uncle would do anything about it. He seems pretty oblivious where Vladimir is concerned. He's the one that sent me to guard Vladimir in the first place."

"Elder Lewis did?"

Sterling nodded. "Yeah. I thought at the time it was just another gig, you know? But now I'm not so sure. Vladimir seems to think I belong to him, and you have to admit, I don't look that much different than the rest of his boys. I'm starting to wonder if it was a setup from the very beginning."

"Your uncle wouldn't really do that, would he?"

"He's an elder," Sterling replied. "What do you think?"

"You have to be wrong, Sterling. I don't know that much about your uncle personally, but elders are held to a higher standard than we are. If they were caught doing something wrong like that, then suspicion would fall on the entire council."

"It's a power position, pure and simple."

"You could say the same thing about me."

Sterling grinned. "Naw, 'cause if you become an egotistical power-monger, I'll have to smother you in your sleep."

They both turned when they heard a knock at the door. "Come in," Beau said.

The door opened and Memphis walked in followed quickly by the doctor. Beau growled and jumped off the bed. "What took you so fucking long? I called for you over an hour ago."

"Uh..."

"We've had a development, Beau," Memphis said. "It delayed the doctor."

"What sort of development?"

"Marilyn escaped before we could get her under house arrest. She killed one of the guards and knocked the other one out."

"Marilyn?" Shock rolled through Beau. He never saw an aggressive bone in Marilyn's body the entire time they had been

engaged. She always seemed so soft, so gentle. She would have been the last person he saw hurting someone else.

“Told you she wouldn’t like you calling off the engagement,” Sterling said from the bed. “I can’t say I wouldn’t have done the same thing if I was in the same position though.”

Beau pushed his hand through his hair, frustrated. “It would seem I never really knew Marilyn. I wonder when she planned on showing her true colors.”

“When she didn’t get her own way,” Sterling snorted.

“Sterling.”

“Oh please, you escaped a fate worse than death, admit it.” Sterling’s eyes were twinkling. “You could have been stuck with that bitch for life.”

Beau frowned and crossed his arms over his chest. “No, instead I’m stuck with a smart-mouth for life.”

Sterling’s eyebrows wiggled, and Beau knew he was in trouble. “I didn’t hear you complain about my mouth earlier.”

Beau groaned. He could hear the doctor and Memphis chuckling behind him. Sterling was not going to easily slide into the role of alpha’s mate. He was going to slam into it headfirst. Beau was doomed.

He turned to the doctor and waved his hand toward Sterling. “Isn’t there something you can give him to knock his ass out?”

The doctor laughed and headed for the bed. “Why don’t I take a look at his arm first, see if he needs to be knocked out?”

“Oh, he does, believe me.”

Sterling howled with laughter as Beau headed for the door. Memphis was holding his laughter in so hard he looked ready to bust. Beau just rolled his eyes then held out his hand.

“Do you have that cell phone I asked for?”

“Oh, yeah.”

Memphis dug into his pocket and pulled out a silver-colored cell phone and handed it over. Beau carried it over to Sterling and gave it to him.

"It has unlimited calling, baby, so make your calls and get your stuff packed." Beau leaned down and kissed the top of Sterling's head. "Be nice to the doctor. He's the only one we got. I'll be back soon."

"Wait, where are you going?"

"I have to go check on this situation, Sterling. And then there are families that need to be informed."

"Can I go with you?"

"Let the doctor fix you up first and we'll see." Beau grabbed the phone and put his number on speed dial then handed it back to Sterling. "Call me when you're done, love, and I'll come get you."

"Fine." Sterling's lower lip slid out.

Beau chuckled and shook his head. He was beginning to see that *fine* was Sterling's answer to things he didn't like. Beau needed to remember that. He leaned down and grabbed one more quick kiss then headed for the door.

"Be good, Sterling," Beau called out as he left the room and headed down the stairs.

"Is he really a danger?" Memphis asked.

"Sterling?" Beau glanced over at his friend and right-hand man. "He's dangerous but not to us."

"But he's so... small."

Beau chuckled. "Yep."

"And he really is your mate?"

"Yep."

"How in the hell did that happen? I thought you were going to marry Marilyn."

Beau frowned when he heard the disgust in Memphis's voice. "Do you not like the idea of me being mated to Sterling or me marrying Marilyn?"

“Marilyn is a bitch,” Memphis said. “I haven’t decided about Sterling.”

Beau paused at the bottom of the steps to stare at Memphis. “If you never liked Marilyn, why didn’t you say anything?”

Memphis shrugged. “I figured you had a right to be happy just as much as the rest of us, maybe even more so. You do a lot for our clans. You deserved someone just meant for you. If marrying Marilyn made you happy, well...”

“I was getting pressure from the packs and the elder’s council to marry Marilyn. After so many years of being alone, I just gave in.”

“And Sterling?”

Beau grinned. “Being with Sterling makes me happy.”

Beau continued on down the stairs and headed for the front door. He hated the fact that he had to inform someone that their family member died. It was never a good thing. But at least they had only lost one pack member. Still, one was one too many as far as he was concerned.

“So, tell me what happened.”

“As far as I can tell, the two sentries were taking Marilyn to the car when she broke free and escaped. She killed Thomas during the escape and knocked Brian out cold. He has a pretty good egg on his head, but he’ll live.”

“How in the hell did she overpower two sentries?”

“I’ve been asking myself that very question since I discovered she was gone. Marilyn is strong, I’ll give you that, but she’s not that strong.”

Beau could see the dead body of his sentry on the ground beside Marilyn’s car the moment he stepped out onto the porch. He grimaced and headed for the small crowd that had gathered.

Beau squatted down next to the sentry and brushed his hand through the man’s hair. The alpha in him wanted to howl in anger. Every member of the pack, no matter how close they were, felt the loss of a pack member. They were family.

Beau had no doubt that, even now, the family knew of Thomas's loss. The human in him wanted to mourn right along with the family and the entire pack. But, he had a killer to catch first.

"Beau," Sterling said from behind him, "can I speak with you for a moment?"

Beau growled low in his throat. Sterling was supposed to be upstairs with the doctor, not out here running around. "Can it wait, Sterling?"

"No."

Beau sighed and stood, turning to his mate. He could feel the resentment of those standing around because he was being called away from their dead pack member by a stranger. Unfortunately, there was nothing he could do about that now.

Beau walked over, grabbed Sterling's arm, then propelled him several feet away from everyone else. "What's so important that it can't wait, Sterling?"

Sterling bit his lip for a moment then glanced at the dead body on the ground. "Does that man mean a lot to you?"

"He did," Beau replied.

"He's not dead yet, Beau."

"What?" Beau snapped and swung around. "Of course he is."

"No, he's not. His heart has stopped beating, but he's not dead yet." Sterling grabbed his arm and pulled him back around. "I can save him, but he won't be the same as he was before. He'll be part you and part me."

"What are you talking about, Sterling?"

"I can give him some of my blood. It will save him, but it will also make him part vampire. As his sire, I will always have a connection to him just as he will to me."

Beau growled deep in his throat as something dangerously possessive reared its head inside of him. "And that means what?"

"It's not a mating, Beau, but more like I would be his blood brother. He would become part of my coven."

Beau growled again, his hands clenching. “You left your coven.”

“I did, but when we mated, you became my coven. That’s how it works for vampires. Our mates become our covens because without them, we go rogue. If I save your friend, he, too, then joins my coven, our coven.”

“But you won’t be mating with him?”

“No.” Sterling chuckled. “He’d just be another coven member.”

“Is it dangerous?” Beau couldn’t allow anything to happen to his mate, not even to save another. He’d lose his mind if he lost Sterling.

“It can be. I don’t know how he will react when he wakes up. With the combination of wolf and vampire blood, I can’t follow the normal rules. This isn’t a normal thing. It may not even work. But he is already a shifter, so there might be a chance. But be warned before we do this, if he wakes up, he’s either going to follow me around like a lost puppy or try to kill me.”

Beau frowned. “Isn’t there a third choice?”

“Yeah, the council could get to me first.”

Beau narrowed his eyes. “Why don’t I like the way you said that?”

Sterling’s lips twisted for a moment. His eyes darted off to look anywhere but at Beau. “We’re not exactly supposed to do this. Hell, we’re not even supposed to know about it. The only reason I do is because I was with Uncle Lewis once when he did it. If the council finds out what I did, they might sanction me.”

“That doesn’t sound so bad.” Beau had thoughts of Sterling being under house arrest or something. He was even in favor of Sterling being under house arrest. It would keep the guy out of trouble—maybe.

“They will take my fangs, Beau.”

“No!” Beau snapped. “You’d die.”

“No, they would grow back, but it would take awhile.” Sterling grimaced. “And it hurts like a son of a bitch.”

“You sound like you’ve experienced this before.”

“I might have been sanctioned once”—Sterling’s lips twisted again—“or twice.”

Beau rubbed his hand over his face then shook his head. “I don’t want to know. Maybe you can tell me later, like when we’ve been mated for thirty or forty years and my heart can handle it.”

He looked back over to the body on the ground. Thomas wasn’t mated, but he did have a father and mother, plus three siblings, that loved him. He was also a damn good sentry, very loyal. Beau hated to lose the man.

“Are you sure this won’t hurt you, Sterling? You just lost a bunch of blood from being stabbed. Can you spare any more?”

“I just have to give your friend some of my blood. I’ll need a couple of bags to replace what I lost, but I should be fine. I’ll be tired for a little while, but that’s all. You just have to watch when he wakes up. Like I said, he will either love me or hate me.”

“How do we do this?”

“Well, I’d prefer to do this without a lot of eyes watching. I don’t want everyone knowing this can be done. I’d never hear the end of it. Other than that, I just need a flat surface and a place to rest afterward.”

Beau nodded and turned toward the small crowd again. “Memphis, carry Thomas into the dining room. Put him on the table and then I want the room cleared out except for you and the doctor. I also need someone to go get Thomas’s parents and bring them to the house.”

Memphis nodded and turned to another man, who ran off after Memphis spoke to him. Beau grabbed Sterling’s arm and escorted him toward the house. He could hear Memphis coming up behind him and knew the man held Thomas in his arms. He quickly climbed the steps and held the door open for Memphis.

Beau’s heart beat a little faster as he followed Memphis and Sterling into the dining room. He would be the first admit he had no

idea what Sterling was doing, and he was very worried that something would go wrong.

If he lost Sterling, Beau wasn't sure how he would handle it, or even if he could. The man had become the center of his universe in a matter of days. Life without Sterling just didn't appeal to him anymore.

"Memphis, would you go get the doctor and ask him to join us?" Beau asked. He waited until Memphis left the room then turned to Sterling, drawing the man into his arms. He heaved a sigh and stroked his hand down the side of Sterling's face.

"Beau?" Sterling frowned.

"Three days, Sterling," Beau started. "It's been three days, and I can't imagine my life without you in it. I don't even want to try. If anything were to happen to you..." Beau felt like his throat was trying to close up.

Sterling stretched up and gently kissed him on the lips. He was blinking rapidly when he settled back on his feet as if he had something in his eyes. "I love you, too, Beau."

Yeah, that was what he wanted to say. He'd just never said it to another living person before. The wealth of meaning behind those words scared the crap out of him. He didn't like the idea that his entire existence depended on someone else.

"You can't let anything happen to you, Sterling," Beau whispered. "I wouldn't survive it."

"I'm tougher than I look, Beau."

"Just..." Beau patted Sterling's arm, "just don't, okay?"

"I'm not going to do anything that will take this away from me, Beau." Sterling waved his hand between them. "For the first time in my life someone wants just me, not wants something *from* me. That's too precious to fuck up."

"Beautifully put, love." Beau chuckled as he hugged Sterling to him. Trust his mate to make his chaotic feelings seem perfectly normal. "Just be careful, sweetheart, and I'll be a very happy alpha."

“Promise.”

Beau hugged Sterling for a few more minutes until he heard the door open. He looked up to see Memphis and the doctor walking in. “Close the door behind you, Memphis, and keep everyone else out. No one is to come into the room until I say so.”

Memphis seemed a little confused but the man had never refused an order from Beau before. He didn’t this time either, shutting the door and standing in front of it. The man was an unmovable mountain. Nothing would get through.

“Okay, Sterling, do whatever it is you need to do.” Beau waved his hand to the other man in the room. “Doc, stand by in case you’re needed.”

“What’s going on, Beau?” the doctor asked.

Sterling walked to the table. He frowned as he looked down at the man. “Thomas isn’t dead yet.”

“The hell he’s not!” the doctor shouted. “He has no pulse.”

“And?”

“And that means he’s dead.”

“His soul has not left his body yet,” Sterling snapped. “That means he’s still alive.”

“He has no pulse!”

Beau was in no way surprised when Sterling growled and turned on the doctor. His baby had a temper a mile wide. Beau just crossed his arms over his chest and stood back to watch the fireworks.

“Why do you want him dead so much?” Sterling shouted. “Do you hate Thomas or something?”

“He’s dead!” The doctor waved his arms in the air as if trying to get his point across.

“No... he... is... not!”

Beau chuckled when Sterling spoke slowly. He’d been on the receiving end of Sterling’s temper and didn’t envy the doctor. “Just stand by, doc, and let Sterling do what he needs to do. There might be a chance we can save Thomas.”

“But—”

Sterling reached over and grabbed the doctor by his collar, lifting him several inches off the floor. “You may be a shifter, but you do not know everything there is to know, doctor. Watch and learn.”

Sterling pushed the doctor away and went back to leaning over Thomas’s body. He unbuttoned his shirt and pulled the torn edges apart. Beau tensed when Sterling inhaled sharply. He quickly stepped closer.

“What is it?”

Was Thomas too far gone to be saved?

“These wounds,” Sterling said, “they were made by a vampire, Beau.”

“What?”

“Vampire claws are very identifiable. They’re different than the claws on any other shifter in the paranormal world. I’d know them anywhere.” His face was pale when he glanced up. “Thomas was attacked by a vampire.”

Beau turned to Memphis. “I want extra sentries at the gate and patrolling the grounds. I also want the house on lockdown. Except for Thomas’s parents, I don’t want anyone in or anyone out without my permission.”

“I’ll see to it immediately,” Memphis replied and headed out of the room, shutting the door behind him.

Beau turned back to Sterling. “Can you tell who did it?”

“No, while vampire claws are distinctive, they are not that distinctive.”

“Will this change your ability to save him?”

“No, but it worries me. Why would a vampire be attacking anyone here?”

“I don’t know at the moment, but I will be finding out why, and whoever did this, vampire or not, they will be dealt with.”

Sterling nodded as if that was a given. He held out his hand. “I need a sharp blade, preferably something not made of silver.”

Beau was a little surprised when the doctor reached into his bag and pulled out a scalpel. The doctor seemed to be resistant to Sterling's belief that Thomas was still alive. The last thing Beau expected was for the doctor to help.

When Sterling started to cut across his wrist, Beau jumped forward and grabbed his hand. "What in the hell are you doing?"

"How else am I supposed to get my blood into Thomas's system? It's not like he can bite me."

"But cutting yourself?"

"I'll heal, Beau."

Beau reluctantly let go of Sterling's arm and watched him continue to cut across his wrist. Blood immediately started to well up and drip from the cut. Sterling quickly held it out over the wounds on Thomas's chest and let the blood drip in.

Sterling did it over and over again. Beau winced every time Sterling cut his wrist. He hated every damn one of them. He was exceedingly grateful when Sterling finally laid the scalpel down on the table.

"Are you done?"

"Yes," Sterling said. "I've given him all that I can. If he's going to pull out of this, the rest of the work is up to him."

Sterling pushed away from the table and started to sway. Beau quickly reached over and grabbed him. "I have you, baby."

"Okay," Sterling said right before his eyes rolled back into his head, and he slumped in Beau's arms.

Beau stared down at him for a moment then chuckled. "I guess he's done."

Chapter 9

Sterling woke up ravenous. His fangs had already dropped down as if anticipating sinking into someone's flesh. His nostrils flared as the sweetest scent in the world wrapped around him. Sterling growled and flipped over onto his hands and knees.

He needed.

And what he needed was laid out in the bed next to him. Beau lay on his back, propped up against some pillows. His tanned skin glowed in the morning light shining in through the windows.

He was watching Sterling, a small smile on his lips.

He was naked.

He was hard.

He was perfect.

Sterling growled again and crawled closer. Beau didn't say a thing. He just spread his legs. Sterling moved further up his body, stopping at the juncture of Beau's thighs to sniff the hard flesh there. Sterling shuddered as the thick masculine fragrance of man filled his senses.

When Sterling moved further down to sniff at the man's balls and found a thick red butt plug, he had to close his eyes to keep from coming. The sight was just too beautiful. When he opened his eyes, he saw something even more arousing nestled just above Beau's groin.

Sterling shuddered. A wave of possessiveness swept through him at the sight of the mating mark. He wanted everyone to see the mating seal, to know that Beau belonged to him. He just didn't want anyone to see his mate naked. The mere thought made Sterling growl.

He was hungry for Beau. Where Beau was concerned, Sterling's hunger for blood seemed to be tied into his hunger for the man himself. Knowing that Beau was giving him permission to have both was enough to make Sterling ravenous.

"Take what you need, love."

Long, strong fingers sank into Sterling's hair, urging him closer. Sterling wasn't sure it was a demand or a request. He didn't care. It meant he could have what he wanted, and he wanted Beau and blood.

Sterling grabbed the butt plug and started moving it around inside of Beau. At the same time, he licked the man's hard cock from root to tip. The long cry that fell from Beau's lips was music to Sterling's ear, fueling his hunger.

He sucked Beau's cock deep into his mouth. The man's unique flavor blasted across his tongue. Everyone had a taste that was unique to them. Beau's was heady, a mix of man and earthy musk. As far as Sterling was concerned, it was the most arousing scent in the world. Add in the thick drops of pre-cum and Sterling was in heaven.

Sterling started bobbing up and down on Beau's dick. He licked his way down then sucked his cheeks in when he moved back up the long length. Beau's legs started tensing every time Sterling moved. Sterling's cock grew harder with each moan that he heard.

"Ster-Sterling, bite... fucking bite me!"

Sterling groaned at the forcefully shouted demand. He wanted to bite, but he made himself wait until he felt the head of Beau's cock start to swell in his mouth. The moment Beau stiffened and hot spunk shot into his mouth, Sterling struck, sinking his fangs into the man's cock.

The combined taste of his mate's cum and blood roared through Sterling like a tidal wave. Sterling drank until his hunger lessened, then extracted his teeth. He quickly pulled the butt plug out of Beau's ass and tossed it on the bed.

Sterling scooted up between Beau's legs then hooked them over his arms. One powerful thrust of his hips had him balls-deep inside

Beau's tight, hot channel. Sterling was so hard, so on edge, he knew it wouldn't take more than a few thrusts before he blew.

He leaned down over Beau's body and started moving. Each thrust took him higher. The smoky desire burning in Beau's dark golden eyes made Sterling start to tremble. No one had ever looked at him the way Beau was looking at him.

This wasn't just sex and getting off. It was more, so much more. Sterling could see Beau's love shining brightly in the man's eyes. The warmth, the want, it meant more to Sterling than anything, even the need to feed. Beau gave to him because he wanted to, not due to some mating forced upon them by the elders. Beau really loved him.

The longer Sterling gazed into Beau's eyes, the harder he got until he felt like his cock was made of steel. Beau seemed to be enjoying it as well. His eyes had fallen partway closed. His breath came out in little pants. With his skin flushed and the tense clench of his jaw, Beau looked sexy as hell.

Sterling felt something press against his abdomen. He glanced down then grinned when he looked back up at Beau. The man was hard again, or maybe he had never gotten soft. Sterling didn't care. He just knew Beau was headed for another orgasm.

"Jerk yourself off, Beau," Sterling ordered. "I want to feel you come on my cock."

Beau's eyes fluttered for a moment, and the man groaned as he reached for his cock. Sterling knew the moment Beau teetered on the edge. He could feel Beau's tight muscles quiver around his cock as they tightened and loosened then tightened again.

When Beau's canines dropped down, Sterling knew what he wanted. He leaned closer and angled his head to one side, baring his throat to Beau. He knew Beau didn't need his blood to survive like he did, but it would build a closer bond with the man.

"Take from me, Beau. Let me give to you"

Sterling was stunned by the swiftness in which Beau struck. He barely got the words out of his mouth before Beau growled and sank

his canines into Sterling's throat. His hands tangled in Sterling's hair. Sterling cried out and began rapidly thrusting into Beau's tight ass.

Beau suddenly pulled his teeth free and slammed their mouths together. The coppery taste of his own blood on Beau's tongue sent Sterling over the edge. He cried out into Beau's mouth and drove his cock as deep into the man as he could go as his orgasm rushed over him.

Beau moaned a moment later and then the tangy scent of the man's cum floated up to Sterling, adding to the sensations flooding his body. Sterling felt overwhelmed. He collapsed down on top of Beau and buried his face in the man's neck.

Sterling moaned and arched when he felt Beau's hands stroke down his back. He loved being touched by Beau, even a simple touch like that. Beau just seemed to know where to touch him and when to bring him the most pleasure.

"I never get tired of that," Beau panted softly.

"Tired of what?" Sterling mumbled.

"The way you move into my hands when I touch you. You're like a cat. I keep waiting for you to purr."

The sound that came out of Sterling's mouth was part groan, part chuckle.

"And there it is."

"That wasn't a purr, Beau."

"The hell it wasn't." Beau chuckled.

Sterling blew a raspberry of protest against the side of Beau's neck. It just seemed to bring more laughter from the man. Sterling smiled and leaned back, propping himself up on Beau's slick chest.

"So, what's with the butt plug?" Sterling's eyebrows shot up at the soft flush that filled Beau's face. "Beau?"

"I knew you'd be hungry when you woke up. I wanted to make sure I was ready. I remember what happened the last time you needed blood."

Sterling grinned and traced his finger across Beau's lips. "Are you sure there wasn't more to it than just feeding me?"

Beau's face turned even redder than before. "Maybe."

Sterling chuckled. He leaned forward and licked the bottom of Beau's chin. "I get to wear the plug next time."

Beau groaned and shuddered. "Fuck, the thought of you walking around with a plug in your ass... Sterling, that's just... just... grrr," Beau growled.

"I think my big bad alpha likes the idea of a butt plug in my ass." Sterling laughed as Beau rolled him over onto his back then blanketed him with his body. His eyes widened when he felt Beau's fingers move down between his butt cheeks to stroke his tight entrance. "Oh yeah, you like it."

"I do," Beau admitted. "I like knowing I can fuck you whenever I want to."

Sterling swallowed hard at the visual that made for him. "Maybe we should get a matching set?"

Beau grinned. "Already taken care of, love."

Sterling pushed at Beau's shoulders. "Then get your hairy ass off of me so we can go shower. I'll let you put the plug in after I'm all spick-and-span."

Sterling laughed at how quickly Beau rolled off the bed and scooted to the edge of the bed. He reached back and grabbed the discarded plug and jumped to his feet. There was amusement and a hint of arousal in Beau's eyes as he glanced back over his shoulder.

"First one in the shower gets to top first."

"Hey," Sterling shouted as Beau took off for the bathroom. "That's cheating."

By the time Sterling climbed off the bed and ran into the bathroom, Beau was already in the shower. Sterling chuckled at the huge grin on Beau's face as he climbed into the shower beside the man.

"You don't feel guilty for cheating at all, do you?"

“Nope.”

Sterling rolled his eyes and held out his hand. “Hand me the soap, cheater.”

Beau laughed and handed over the soap. Their shower probably would have been shorter if they had taken separate ones or if they could have kept their hands off each other. As it was, by the time they climbed out, the water was cold but they were both very happy men.

“Okay, babe, bend over and spread ’em.”

Sterling rolled his eyes and bent over the bathroom sink. “It should probably just slide in. You’re not exactly a small man.”

“Why thank you.” Beau chuckled as he pushed the lubed plug into Sterling’s ass. “So glad you noticed.”

“Ki-ki—” Sterling cleared his throat. “Kind of hard not to.”

Sterling groaned when Beau wiggled the seated plug. He just knew Beau was going to be doing that all day long just to drive him crazy. Sterling grinned. Two could play at that game. He pushed up from the counter and held out his hand. Beau swallowed and handed the other plug over.

Sterling twirled his finger in the air. Beau swallowed again and turned around to bend over the counter. Sterling made sure the cleaned plug was nice and lubed then pushed it gently against Beau’s hole.

A streak of possessiveness suddenly flew through Sterling with such force that he shuddered. Before the plug could sink in all the way, he pulled it out again. Beau tensed and glanced over his shoulder.

“What—”

Sterling lined his cock up with Beau’s ass and pushed all the way in to the root before the man could finish his statement. Beau’s ass clenched, the tight circle of muscles stretching to accommodate Sterling’s cock.

“I thought we already did this?” Beau panted.

“We’re doing it again,” Sterling growled sharply.

He had no idea what was going on, but he suddenly felt desperate and needy, hungrier than he had been when he woke up earlier. He needed to dominate Beau, to leave his scent all over the man. It mattered more than his next breath.

Sterling began pounding into Beau. Each thrust moved the plug in his ass, driving him to distraction. Beau braced himself by placing his hands against the mirror and pushed his ass out. He spread his legs. Sterling gripped Beau's hip with one hand. The other one still held the butt plug.

"Fucking love this ass," Sterling groaned.

"It—it's yours."

"Yes!" Sterling shouted. His head fell back on his shoulders and his eyes slide closed as euphoria enveloped his entire body. No one was ever as tight as Beau, as sweet. No one accepted him so much.

"Mine!" Sterling screamed as ecstasy filled him. His body throbbed, pulsed. It burned just for the man below him. When every last ounce of seed had left Sterling's body, he quickly pulled out and shoved the plug in.

He grabbed Beau's hips and swung the man around and dropped to his knees, swallowing his cock before Beau could even find his balance. He pushed at the butt plug with his hand as he deep-throated Beau's long length. Beau cried out and shot into his mouth.

Sterling continued to suck and swallow until Beau was all cleaned up. His legs were a bit shaky as he stood to his feet then leaned in to kiss Beau. "And that is how you put in a butt plug," Sterling said as he leaned back.

"Works for me."

Sterling chuckled as he walked out of the bathroom. He picked up his dirty clothes and wrinkled his nose. There was nothing he hated more than to put on dirty clothes, especially if he had just gotten clean. Unfortunately, it would be a few more days before his stuff arrived.

"Sterling, there's a set of new clothes hanging in the closet."

“Oh, thank god.” Sterling tossed the offending ones down to the floor and headed for the new clothes. He was surprised when he found a nice pressed black suit and pristine white dress shirt. There was a small bag with a belt, socks, and cufflinks.

Sterling’s hand almost shook as he pulled the clothes off the hanger and got dressed. They fit perfectly, almost as if they had been tailor-made for him. Sterling crossed to the mirror and checked himself out. He looked good.

“How did you get this suit, Beau?” Sterling asked. “It fits perfectly.”

Beau chuckled from where he sat on the side of the bed, pulling his boots on. “I’m the alpha of the Pacific Northwest Region, remember?”

“Beau.”

“I used that cell phone I gave you and called your little Andre dude, got your sizes, and ordered them from a shop in town.”

“There’s a shop in town that sells these suits?” Sterling asked as he ran his fingers down the soft material. He didn’t know who the designer was, but the fabric was of the best quality. He expected to find something like this in only the best men’s boutiques in New York City, not some hole-in-the-wall backwoods town.

Beau stood up and walked over to stand behind Sterling, grabbing his shoulders as he met Sterling’s eyes in the mirror. “Only the best for my baby.”

Sterling beamed. He was getting more and more used to Beau calling him baby. It no longer sounded so bad. Still, he preferred the endearment Beau used next more.

“I only ask one thing, love.”

Sterling cocked an eyebrow. “Anything.”

“Don’t wear a tie unless it’s a formal function. Suits look fantastic on you, but you’re going to look a little out of place here if you get all fancied up. We’re more the jeans and T-shirt type around these parts.”

“You’re wearing a dress shirt,” Sterling insisted as he gestured to the white shirt Beau wore.

“But no tie.”

Sterling rolled his eyes. “Fine, I’ll lose the tie.”

Beau reached over Sterling’s shoulder and unbuttoned the top few buttons of his shirt. Sterling blinked a little when Beau spread the collar open. He looked damn good even without the tie.

“See, still all dressed up, but approachable.”

“Is that important, me being approachable?”

“It is,” Beau said as he moved away. “You’re my mate. The packs are going to want to get to know you. That means they need to feel comfortable approaching you.”

Sterling frowned and turned to look at Beau. “Just what are my duties now that I’m your mate? I do have duties, don’t I?”

“Well, you’ll be expected to stand by my side at social functions, host visiting dignitaries and such, and be my advisor and confidant.”

Sterling’s jaw dropped in shock. “I’m expected to be your advisor and confidant?”

“Well, yeah.” Beau frowned. “Don’t you want to be?”

“I just didn’t think anyone would accept that with me being a vampire and all.”

Beau chuckled a little. “Being my mate trumps everything else.”

“Oh.”

“Yeah, oh.” Beau smirked and started for the door. “Come on, let’s go check on Thomas.”

“Oh damn, I forgot all about Thomas.” Sterling hurried after Beau and followed him into the hallway. “Did he make it?”

“Well, the doc says he’s alive, but beyond that, I don’t know. I’ve been more worried about you.”

“Why? I was fine. I just needed a bit of rest and some blood.”

“Because you’re my mate and you come before anyone else.”

Sterling grinned at Beau's declaration. He grabbed Beau's arm and pulled him to a stop. Beau looked confused until Sterling leaned up and kissed him. "I love you, too."

Beau's face flushed. "You know I'm not very good at this type of stuff, Sterling, but—"

Sterling pressed his finger over Beau's lips. He knew Beau had a hard time saying the words, and he never wanted to force them from the man, but he still felt the depths of the man's feelings deep in his soul.

"I think you're very good at it," Sterling whispered. "You may not verbalize how you feel, but you show it in everything you do. That's good enough for me, Beau. I know you love me."

"I do, Sterling." Beau looked so serious. "More than you could ever know."

"Oh, I think I have a pretty good idea." Sterling smiled and pressed himself against Beau's muscular body. He trailed his finger over Beau's lips. "You just might love me as much as I love you."

Chapter 10

Beau kept Sterling close to his side as he walked into the bedroom where Thomas was recovering. Sterling said that Thomas would either love him or hate him. Beau wasn't taking any chances, on either score.

"How is he, doc?" he asked as he looked at Thomas. The man's color was better. He actually looked as if he was just sleeping instead of a corpse.

"He's doing surprising well for a man that I pronounced dead." The doctor chuckled from his chair by the window. "He woke up a little while ago, and I gave him some of that blood you had flown in. It seemed to do the trick."

"You had blood flown in?" Sterling asked.

"Of course I did. I want to make sure there's always some on hand in case my protein levels get too low. I've made arrangements to have fresh blood flown in once a week, enough for both you and Thomas."

"Oh."

"Sterling, if I may," the doctor began, "I need to apologize to you for my conduct. I was positive that Thomas was dead and thought you had fallen off your rocker when you said he wasn't. My behavior was inexcusable."

"Don't worry about it, doc," Sterling replied. "What I did is not widely known. In fact, we need to keep it between us. If UPAC found out, I could get into some major trouble. I just couldn't let Thomas die if he wasn't really dead."

"Thomas's parents were in here a little while ago, and I can tell you that they will be forever grateful. Thomas is their youngest son,

and I think they would have been devastated if anything happened to him.”

“Well, we’re not out of the woods yet,” Sterling said as he peered across the room at the sleeping man on the bed. “We still need to see how Thomas reacts to me.”

“Should we wake him up?” Beau asked.

Sterling shrugged. “It couldn’t hurt. The faster we know how Thomas will react to me, the faster we can make whatever plans need to be made.”

“What are our options?” the doctor asked as he stood up and walked toward Thomas.

“Thomas will either love me or hate me, depending on his previous personality and how he feels about being part vampire now. If he loves me, then he should settle in fairly well. There will be a little hero worship going on until he learns to control his impulses, but he should be fine.”

“And if he hates you?”

“He’ll make it his mission in life to kill me.”

Beau growled and stepped closer to Sterling. “Maybe we shouldn’t wake him up.”

“We have to find out sooner or later,” Sterling said. “And frankly, I’d rather find out when we can prevent my death versus having it come out of the blue.”

“Let me call Memphis then.”

Beau dug his cell phone out of his pocket and dialed his second in command. He wanted just a bit more muscle in the room to keep Sterling safe in case Thomas tried to go after his mate.

“Memphis, could you and Walker join me in Thomas’s room?”

“We’ll be right there,” Memphis replied before hanging up.

Beau wasn’t surprised that Memphis and Walker walked in moments after he snapped his phone closed and stuck it back in his pocket. They were always quick to follow his directions, and Beau

knew they wouldn't have left the house without informing him first. They were close at hand in case he needed them.

"We're going to be waking Thomas up," Beau explained to the two men. "He's either going to love Sterling for what he did or try and kill him. I want you to run interference. Sterling must be kept safe at all costs."

Memphis and Walker nodded. Beau turned toward the doctor. "Okay, doc, go ahead and wake Thomas up."

He kept Sterling close to his side as the doctor did as he ordered. He expected Thomas to wake as if he had just been sleeping. That's what the man looked like. He didn't expect Thomas to suddenly inhale sharply and sit right up.

Even Sterling jumped.

"Hello, Thomas," the doctor said. "How are you feeling?"

"Hungry!"

Beau stiffened when Sterling started to pull away from him. Sterling quickly shook his head and continued over to the side of the bed. Beau swallowed, fear riding him hard when Sterling sat on the side of the bed and held out his wrist.

So much damage could be done before he reached Sterling. He was wolf and vampire both. There was no telling what new abilities he might develop. Thomas could rip out Sterling's throat in the blink of an eye or slash him with his sharp claws.

He held his breath, waiting.

Thomas's eyes snapped to Sterling. A thick, intense air filled the room, almost as if every person there were holding their breath waiting to see how Thomas would react to Sterling.

"Go ahead," Sterling said softly as he held his wrist closer to Thomas. "I know you're hungry."

Thomas kept his eyes glued to Sterling like no one else in the room existed. He grabbed Sterling's wrist with both hands and slowly brought it to his mouth. A low moan filled the air as Thomas sank his

fangs into Sterling's wrist. His eyes fell closed as if he were drinking the ambrosia of the gods themselves.

Beau growled as something dark and possessive flashed through him at the low sound Thomas made. He was having a hard enough time letting someone else drink Sterling's blood. The sound of that someone finding pleasure in the deed was almost more than he could take.

When Sterling held out a hand to him, Beau quickly stepped forward and took it. It felt like a lifeline, and lessened Beau's need to attack Thomas. He bent down when Sterling pulled him closer.

"As soon as I pull my wrist away, you need to assert your claim on me. If he doesn't try to kill me, Thomas will try to protect me from everyone. You need to show your dominance so he doesn't try and challenge you for me."

"He wants to mate you?" Beau snapped.

"No, no, he will want to protect me." Sterling flushed then shrugged. "Well, assuming he doesn't try and kill me."

Beau started breathing a little easier until Sterling tried pulling his arm away from Thomas. The man growled and tightened his grip on Sterling's arm. Beau reacted without thinking. He just knew his mate was in trouble.

He leaned over and growled at Thomas. Thomas growled back. Beau roared and grabbed Thomas by the neck, slowly squeezing until Thomas's face started to turn different colors. He squeezed tighter on Thomas's neck until the man's fangs came out of Sterling's arm.

The moment Sterling was free Beau pushed Thomas back on the bed. He grabbed Sterling and swung the man away from the bed. "Mine!" he snapped.

Thomas growled and lunged across the bed. Beau caught him with one hand around the throat and lifted him into the air until they were nose to nose. Thomas was a sentry. He was a big man. Beau was bigger.

"Sterling is mine!"

The soft purr like noise that came out of Sterling's mouth shocked Beau so much he almost dropped Thomas. His eyes widened when Sterling's body curved around his and the man started moving between him and Thomas.

"Bite me," Sterling mouthed before tilting his head to one side.

With his eyes locked on Thomas, Beau leaned forward and sank his canines into Sterling's throat. Thomas frowned and started to struggle. Beau tightened his grip on the man's throat until Thomas finally stopped struggling and lowered his eyes.

Beau loosened his hand and let Thomas move back. He kept his eyes on Thomas as he retracted his canines and licked the bite on Sterling's throat closed. He gently set Sterling on his feet but kept an arm wrapped around his waist.

Thomas didn't look like he wanted to attack Sterling. He actually looked sad, which surprised Beau. He expected anything but that. Thomas's eyes were dropped. The corners of his lips curved down.

"Thomas."

Thomas drew in a deep breath and looked up.

"Do you understand where you are?"

Thomas nodded.

"Do you understand who I am?"

Thomas frowned for a moment then nodded. "Alpha."

"Yes," Beau said. "And Sterling belongs to me."

Thomas frowned again. This time his hands clenched as if he wanted to argue. "But..."

Beau almost wiggled when Sterling started that weird purring noise again. He had to admit, it was effective. Thomas quieted right down and just stared at Sterling. Beau, on the other hand, could feel his cock hardening up with the way Sterling was plastered to him.

When Sterling reached back with his hand, Thomas leaned right into it. It was odd.

"Geez, that's some freaky shit," Walker murmured. "Is he always going to be like that?"

“No, Thomas in the beginning stages right now, and the only thing he can feel is his hunger for blood and his need to bond with me.”

“Does that mean he’s not going to kill you?” the doctor asked.

“No.” Sterling laughed. “I think we can safely say Thomas is not going to hurt me.”

“Wait.” Beau frowned. “You said the beginning stages. The beginning stages of what?”

“His change,” Sterling said. “Remember I told you, if he survived, Thomas would no longer be strictly wolf. He’d be part vampire, too. His body is getting used to the changes. It may take a few days, but he survived the worst of it. Right now, he’s in the lost puppy stage.”

“Puppy stage?” Walker asked.

Beau chuckled at the stunned look on Walker’s face. “Sterling is Thomas’s sire since he donated the blood that saved him. Sterling said that Thomas would either come out of it and follow him around like a lost puppy or try and kill him. Personally, I prefer this option.”

Sterling snorted. “You say that now, but wait until he tries to sleep at the foot of the bed.”

“Yeah.” Beau grimaced as he looked down and watched Thomas rubbing his head against Sterling’s hand. “That is so not happening.”

* * * *

“Beau.”

Beau glanced up from the security maps he was looking over to see Memphis standing in his office doorway. He was trying to figure out how Marilyn escaped and if she had an accomplice. He was thinking that she had. There was no way that Marilyn could have overpowered two sentries.

“What’s up, Memphis?”

“We have guests at the front gate.”

“Okay.” The deep frown on Memphis’s face sent a cold chill down Beau’s spine. “Who is it?”

“Elder Lewis and a coven leader named Vladimir Vlad.”

The pencil in Beau’s hand snapped. “Did you say Vladimir Vlad?”

“Yes.”

“I want a man on Sterling at all times. He is not to be left alone.” Beau clenched his hands and he came out from behind his desk and headed for the door. “I also want someone watching Thomas and Micah.”

“I’ll see to it right away.” Memphis followed Beau out into the hallway. “What would you like me to do about Elder Lewis and the vamp?”

“Let me speak to Sterling for a moment, and then we’ll go down and meet them at the front gate. I do not want them on the property for any reason. If Elder Lewis wishes to have a meeting, he can do it outside the gates or take it up with UPAC.”

“I’ll get Walker and meet you at the front door.”

Beau nodded then bounded up the stairs. Sterling was supposed to be resting in bed after donating blood to Thomas. The extra blood still had not arrived, and Thomas was a growing boy, as Sterling put it. Beau tried to remind himself to make another call about the blood. He didn’t like Sterling getting so drained.

“Sterling, love,” Beau called out as he walked into the bedroom. He felt like pulling his hair out when he found Sterling on a cell phone, pacing back and forth across the room. “Sterling, get back in bed.”

Sterling waved his hand dismissively and continued pacing. Beau growled and stalked across the room to rip the phone out of Sterling’s hand.

“Hey, I was using that,” Sterling snapped as he grabbed at the phone.

“And you can use it from bed.”

Beau swept Sterling up in his arms and carried him over to the bed. He gently laid him down then held the phone in front of him, just out of Sterling's reach. "Promise me that you will stay in bed."

"But—"

Beau held the cell phone higher up into the air. "Promise me, Sterling."

"Fine," Sterling huffed. "Just give me the phone back. I'm in the middle of negotiating Andre's transfer here."

"Offer him whatever he wants to get his ass out here as fast as possible." Beau handed the phone back to Sterling.

"Anything?"

Beau so did not like the little glint that came into Sterling's eyes. "Anything within reason."

Sterling frowned. "Spoilsport."

"What were you going to offer him?"

Sterling grinned mischievously. "Memphis."

Beau chuckled and started back for the door. "I'll consider it."

"Oh hey, what did you come up here for other than to harass me?"

Beau paused at the doorway and turned back to Sterling. "Elder Lewis and Vladimir are at the gate. I want you to stay here where you're safe while I go down and see what they want. I'm not allowing them on the property."

Sterling's eyes widened. "You could get into a lot of trouble for not allowing an elder entrance, Beau."

"This isn't pack property, Sterling. It's mine. I don't have to allow him on my personal property if I don't want to."

Sterling frowned as he seemed to consider Beau's words. "Just be careful, please. I don't trust either of them."

"Which is exactly why I plan on meeting them down by the gate."

Beau blew Sterling a kiss then headed out. The faster he discovered why his unwanted guests were there, the faster he could send them in their way. He met Memphis and Walker at the bottom of

the steps then the three men walked outside and headed for the front gate.

“Did you put everyone on alert?” Beau asked.

“Yes,” Memphis replied, “and I doubled the sentries.”

“Good,” Beau said. “I don’t know why Elder Lewis is here, but Vladimir was Sterling’s coven leader. He was also the man that abused Micah and attacked Sterling back in New York. I don’t trust either of them as far as I can throw them.”

“Understood,” both men replied at the same time.

Beau nodded without comment. None was needed. He had worked side by side with both Memphis and Walker for more years than he really cared to remember. He trusted both men explicitly.

Beau paused several feet from the closed gate right in the middle of the driveway. He could see his sentries pacing back and forth on both sides of the large gate. A black limo sat just beyond them, its headlights pointing toward Beau.

He crossed his arms over his chest and braced his legs apart. Memphis and Walker took up a similar stance on each side of him. Once they were in place, Beau nodded toward the sentry at the gate. The double gate opened slowly.

With the moonlight shining down on them, Beau knew that they made an imposing picture. They were all very large men. And they weren’t moving.

A car door opened and Elder Lewis emerged. He walked to the front of the car and stopped. “What is the meaning of this, Beau?” he asked as he gestured to the sentries with his hands.

“Is there something I can do for you, Elder Lewis?”

“You can offer me some common courtesy and allow me to come inside.”

“Nope.”

“Are you saying you refuse entrance to a UPAC elder?”

“No, I’m refusing you and Vladimir entrance.”

“Then it shouldn’t be a problem.” The elder smiled. “Vladimir has gone for a walk. We can discuss our business and I can pick him up on my way out.”

Beau’s blood froze in his veins. “Vladimir went for a walk?”

“Yes.” Elder Lewis nodded. “He said he needed to stretch his legs.”

Panic seized Beau. “Sterling!”

Chapter 11

“You’ll like it here, Andre, I promise.”

“It’s the boonies, Sterling. You can’t be serious. Do they even have running water?”

Sterling chuckled. “Better than that, they have a whole houseful of hot men.”

“Really?”

Sterling laughed. He could hear the sudden interest in Andre’s voice. Andre was more than Sterling’s personal assistant and driver. He was a friend. As much as he moved around for work, Sterling didn’t have time to make a lot of friends.

“Just pack up my stuff and get it shipped out here. If you don’t like it here, I won’t make you stay.”

“I’ll think about it.”

“You won’t regret it, I can promise you.” Sterling chuckled. “There’s this one guy out here named Memphis. I think you’d like him a lot. He’s really hot.”

“Now wait a minute,” Andre snapped. “I thought you were mated.”

“I am, but I’m not dead. Just because I’m on a diet doesn’t mean I can’t look at the menu, and believe me, this is a USDA prime meat menu.”

Andre roared with laughter. “Does your mate know you talk like this?”

“Yeah, he—” Sterling paused and sat up when he heard something outside the bedroom door. “Hold on, Andre.”

He rolled to the side of the bed and walked over to the door, pressing his ear against it. Silence filled his ears, almost too much silence. When Sterling didn't hear anything else, he shrugged and headed back to the bed. He still wasn't used to the lack of noise in the country.

"Sterling?"

"Yeah, I thought I heard something but... it's just so damn quiet up here, Andre. I'm just not used to it yet."

"How quiet?"

"Well, the place could really do with some loosening up. You can hear the damn crickets at night."

Sterling froze as he realized he *could* hear the crickets. He didn't remember opening any windows. He turned toward the windows and almost dropped the phone as fear filled every corner of his body.

"Vlad—" Sterling choked on his word when the man held his finger to his mouth. Vladimir gestured for Sterling to keep quiet then directed him to hang up the phone. "Hey, look, Andre, I need to go. I'll tell Memphis you said hello."

"What?" Andre screamed into his ear.

"I'll talk to you later, Andre." Sterling slid his fingers along the edge of the cell phone and hit the speaker button. He closed the phone and set it down on the nearest flat surface then slowly raised his hand into the air. "What do you want, Vladimir?"

"You've been a very bad boy, Sterling."

"I have?"

"You know you have," Vladimir whined as he stepped toward Sterling. He looked demented. His eyes were glassy, wide, and red. His fangs had dropped down. Sterling couldn't help but wonder if the man had gone feral. "You left me in New York and came out here and whored yourself with that mongrel."

"You mean Beau?" Sterling asked.

He backed away and started making a slow circle around the room. He needed to keep space between him and Vladimir while he

tried to figure out how to get out of this mess with his life, and preferably no concussion either.

Vladimir's face darkened. "You know who I'm talking about."

Sterling shook his head. "I told you back in New York that I'm mated to Beau as requested by UPAC. There's nothing I can do about it."

"You belong to me!"

Sterling so seriously wanted to roll his eyes. He just didn't think Vladimir would appreciate his gesture. "I was your bodyguard, Vladimir. I didn't belong to you."

"You were mine!" Vladimir shouted. "You were given to me."

"No, I wasn't." Sterling was getting damn tired of Vladimir saying that. "I was hired to do a job, that's it."

"No, you are mine, Sterling," Vladimir growled as he slowly started toward Sterling. "Never doubt that. You were given to me when I became coven leader of New York City, a gift from the UPAC council."

"I was your bodyguard," Sterling snapped, "not your play toy."

"You will be whatever I tell you to be," Vladimir shouted just before he lunged across the room at Sterling.

Sterling wasn't stupid. The moment Vladimir's body tensed, he took off running for the door. He had survived Vladimir once before. He wasn't sure he'd survive a second time. He wasn't sticking around to find out.

He grabbed the door handle just as Vladimir slammed into him from behind. Sterling drove his elbow back into Vladimir's stomach. Vladimir grunted and loosened his hold just enough so Sterling could yank the door open. The gun pointed at him was not what he expected when he opened the door.

Sterling froze.

"Marilyn."

"I was just going to kill you," Marilyn said. "But Vladimir convinced me to let you live. He said he would make sure that you never escaped again."

Sterling swallowed hard. He couldn't stop looking at the gun in Marilyn's hand. It looked as big as a cannon. He knew he was a little stronger than the average human, but he could still die.

Marilyn waved the gun. "Back up."

Sterling stepped back and right into Vladimir. He cringed when Vladimir's arms wrapped around him, holding him prisoner. "You really don't want to do this."

"Yes, I do," Marilyn replied. "With you out of the way, Beau will come back to me."

"You're off your fucking rocker, lady. Beau will never take you back."

Sterling fought the arms wrapped around him when he saw Marilyn start to swing the gun toward him, but he couldn't avoid the sharp hit to the side of his head. He grunted as the butt of the gun made impact. His vision blurred as a blast of pain exploded in his head.

"Beau is mine. He has always been mine," Marilyn snapped. "And I won't let some little bloodsucking whore come in and take him away from me."

"Beau isn't yours," Sterling shouted right back. "He's mine, my mate."

"No!" Marilyn shrieked.

Sterling instantly realized he should have kept his mouth shut when Marilyn's eyes took on a fanatical glint, but that had never been a strong point for him. *Oh well, in for a penny, in for a pound,* Sterling thought as he head-butted Marilyn.

"He's mine, and you can't have him," Sterling shouted.

He started pulling on his arms and wiggling back and forth to get away from Vladimir. When that didn't work, Sterling went limp. He

regretted that decision a moment later when Vladimir unexpectedly dropped him to the floor with a thud.

Sterling didn't even think. He let his instincts guide him, and they were screaming for him to run. The moment he hit the floor, Sterling swung out with his leg in one wide arc. Vladimir stumbled back. Marilyn went down like a ton of bricks.

The gun in her hand crashed to the floor and a loud bang filled the room. Sterling jumped to his feet and bounded over Marilyn. He ran for the door as fast his legs would carry him. He could hear Marilyn screaming in the background as he hit the door and kept on going.

As soon as he rounded the corner, Sterling ran smack-dab into a wall of muscle. He yelped and started to jump back until he realized Beau was holding him, and then he threw himself into the man's arms.

"In the bedroom," Sterling panted and pointed behind him. He was never so happy to see anyone as he was to see Beau. "Marilyn has a gun."

"Marilyn?"

Sterling nodded. "She's working with Vladimir."

"Vladimir?"

Sterling rolled his eyes. "Would you stop repeating everything I say?"

Beau blinked. "What would you like me to do, Sterling?"

Sterling opened his mouth to give Beau some snappy reply when he heard a noise from inside the bedroom. He tried to push Beau toward the stairs. "Run!"

"Alphas do not run, Sterling," Beau said, digging in his heels. He seemed unfazed by the fact that Vladimir and Marilyn were in the very next room.

Sterling, on the other hand, was frantic.

"She has a fucking gun," Sterling shouted. He felt like shaking Beau. Didn't he understand the danger they were in? Frustration made

Sterling's fingers curl into fists. "Even you can die from a bullet wound, you stubborn son of a bitch!"

"Just stay here, love," Beau said as he pushed Sterling behind him into Memphis's waiting arms. "I'll go take care of this."

"No!" Sterling yelled as Beau walked away. His heart sank as Beau disappeared into the bedroom. This couldn't be happening.

"Have some faith in your mate, Sterling," Memphis said.

"Faith?" Sterling shrieked. "I have to protect Beau, even if it's from himself."

Sterling tried to pull away from Memphis only to wince when the man's hands tightened on him. He was probably going to have bruises in the morning in the shape of big, beefy hands. Sterling growled and punched Memphis right in the face.

The man looked shocked for a split second before blood began gushing from his nose. He stepped back and grabbed his face. The moment Memphis's hands dropped from his arms, Sterling spun and went tearing into the bedroom.

He skidded to a stop just inside the door. Vladimir was still on the floor. He wasn't moving. Marilyn, however, stood by the windows. The gun in her hand was pointed directly at Beau, who stood several feet away.

Sterling held his breath and didn't move. He didn't want to set Marilyn off. He watched her carefully, though, watching every single move she made. If she started to pull the trigger, she was a dead woman.

"You betrayed me!" Marilyn snapped.

"No, I didn't," Beau replied. "I followed the dictates of UPAC."

"No! I was to be your wife, to rule by your side." Marilyn waved her empty hand wildly in the air. "Not that... that thing. How could you bring that bloodsucker into our house?"

"Our house?" Beau crossed his arms over his chest like he wasn't staring down the barrel of a gun. "I don't remember seeing your name on the deed to this house, Marilyn."

Sterling grit his teeth but didn't move from where he was. Beau was just making Marilyn angrier. Couldn't he see that? He was just antagonizing her.

"It would have been my house if you hadn't brought in that little whore of yours."

"I was never going to put your name on the deed, Marilyn. This house has been mine for nearly two hundred years. Why would I just hand it over to someone else?"

"I was going to be your wife!" Marilyn shouted.

"But you weren't my mate, and that makes all the difference in the world."

Sterling saw everything as if time was moving in slow motion. Marilyn's face turned red with anger as she screamed. Her finger started squeezing the trigger. Sterling jumped across the room, pushing Beau out of the way with all of his strength as he ran past the man.

He heard Beau crash to the floor behind him. He widened his arms and dove for Marilyn, putting himself between Beau and the gun. Marilyn cried out. The gun went off. Sterling felt a sudden deep cold in his chest when he heard Beau grunt. He just knew Beau had been hit and a small part of him curled up and cried. He had failed his mate.

The force in which Sterling hit Marilyn propelled them backward. Before he could stop it, they crashed through the window. Sterling had one thought as he plummeted toward the ground two stories down.

Beau!

* * * *

Beau crashed to the floor. He looked up just in time to see Sterling and Marilyn smash through the window. He watched in dawning horror as they disappeared over the edge of the windowsill. Marilyn's

screaming stopped abruptly, and then there was nothing but deadly silence.

“Sterling?” he whispered as he scrambled over to the window. His heart thundered in his chest as he drew in a deep breath then looked over the edge. Sterling lay on the ground on his back. His eyes were open, but he wasn’t moving. He wasn’t even blinking.

“Sterling!” he shouted. “I’ll be right down, love. Don’t move.”

Beau jumped to his feet and ran out the bedroom door. He ignored Memphis and Walker and even Elder Lewis as he raced down the stairs and out the front door. He needed to get to Sterling as fast as he could.

And if Sterling was alive, Beau was going to paddle the man’s ass for taking a hundred years off his life. And then he was going to tie Sterling up... in bed... to the bed... he could get up to pee, but that was it. Beau would feed him. Sterling was never leaving the room again.

Never!

Sterling was still lying on the ground in the same place when Beau ran around the corner. Beau dropped to his knees the moment he reached his mate. He couldn’t see any immediate wounds, but he was afraid to touch Sterling. He didn’t want to injure him further.

“Sterling, baby?” Beau whispered softly as he gently trailed his finger down the man’s cheek. His heart started beating faster when Sterling’s light gray eyes moved to his face. Sterling’s lips moved but no sound came out. “Shh, it’s going to be okay, baby. Just lay still, don’t move. I need to make sure you’re not hurt.”

Sterling was alive. That was all that mattered to Beau at the moment. Anything else could be dealt with. Beau started moving his hands over Sterling’s body, looking for injuries. He kept glancing back up to Sterling’s face to see if the man was in pain.

“What hurts, Sterling?” Beau asked because he knew something had to hurt.

Sterling’s lips moved. Beau leaned closer.

“Yo—you?”

“No, I’m fine, baby, not a scratch on me.” Beau cupped the side of Sterling’s face with his hand. “You’re the one that fell out of a two story window, Sterling.”

“O-okaaaay,” Sterling whispered. “N-not hurt, o-o-only wi-wi-winded.”

Beau glanced up when Memphis knelt down on the ground across from him. “He’s okay, just winded.”

“He’s a strong little fucker.” Memphis chuckled.

“Marilyn?”

Memphis shook his head. “She broke her neck on impact.”

“V-Vladimir?” Sterling asked.

Beau glanced down. “He was shot, love.”

Sterling’s eyebrows drew together as he frowned. “Shot?”

“Marilyn shot him, I think.”

“But... they were working together,” Sterling said. “I think Vladimir is the one that helped Marilyn escape.”

“That would make sense, Beau,” Memphis said. “Marilyn wasn’t strong enough to get away on her own. Someone had to help her.”

“Maybe.” Beau shrugged. “But whatever happened, it’s over now.”

Sterling shook his head. “My uncle is still here.”

Beau frowned. Sterling was right. He didn’t know how Elder Lewis played a part in all of this, but he was bound and determined to find out. Beau carefully lifted Sterling into his arms then stood to his feet.

“Memphis, please take care of Marilyn’s body and have someone remove Vladimir’s, too. I want my bedroom put back into place as if nothing had ever happened before Sterling steps foot in the room again.”

“I’ll see to it personally, Beau,” Memphis replied.

“Thank you.”

Memphis nodded. Beau turned and started carrying Sterling toward the house. Sterling clung to him, nuzzling his face into Beau's neck. Beau tilted his head and rested it against the top of Sterling's head. He couldn't believe he held Sterling in his arms again, and that the man was alive.

"You know I love you."

"I know," Sterling murmured.

"You also know that I'm going to paddle your ass the moment this is all over, right?"

"That could be fun." Sterling laughed softly.

Beau snorted. Trust Sterling to turn a punishment into something else. Beau didn't know if he would ever understand his mate. Sterling was much smaller than him, but somehow had decided that he was meant to protect Beau.

And Beau just didn't understand that. Sterling was smaller, the weaker of the two of them. Beau should have been protecting Sterling, not the other way around. He was the fucking alpha here.

"Sterling, baby, you have got to stop putting yourself in danger," Beau said sternly. "My heart won't take it."

"Beau, this is what I do."

"Fall out of second story windows?" Beau snapped. "Get stabbed? Shot?"

"Yes!"

Beau was going to strangle Sterling.

"No!"

Beau stopped walking when Sterling grabbed his face and forced him to look down. He didn't like the determined glint in Sterling's eyes because he knew he'd give in, and he hated that. He wanted Sterling happy, but he also wanted him safe.

"Beau, this is what I do."

"Can't you just—"

“Just what, Beau? Sit at home and file my nails? I’ve trained my entire life to be a bodyguard, and I’m damned good at it. I don’t know how to do anything else.”

“Sterling.”

“But I am willing to compromise.”

Beau arched his eyebrow. “Compromise?”

“I refuse to stand by and watch you be hurt.” Sterling tapped his finger into Beau’s chest as he talked. “You agree to let me do what I need to do to protect you, and I won’t take anymore outside jobs.”

“No more outside jobs?”

“I’ll be your personal bodyguard and only yours for the rest of my life.”

“There has to be a catch here that I’m not seeing.”

Beau wasn’t dumb.

“There is.” Sterling drew in a deep breath and let it out slowly. “You have got to trust that I know what I’m doing and let me do it. Keeping you alive is more important to me than anything. I won’t fuck it up.”

“What about keeping you alive?” Beau asked. “Do you think I’d survive without you?”

Sterling suddenly smiled and Beau knew he was doomed. “Now see, that’s the great thing about this compromise. We’re mated, Beau. If I want to keep you alive, I have to stay alive to protect you.”

Beau still felt like there was a hitch somewhere, but if Sterling was willing to give up outside work, he’d find a way to deal with it. Besides, while Sterling was protecting him, he could assign someone to protect Sterling.

“Fine, but I reserve the right to keep you safe when I need to.”

Sterling sighed deeply and laid his head back on Beau’s chest. “We’ll discuss it.”

Beau chuckled as he carried Sterling into the house. He paused in the entryway when he saw Elder Lewis standing at the bottom of the

staircase. He'd almost forgotten about the man while talking to Sterling.

"Elder Lewis."

"Is Sterling okay?"

"Define okay." Sterling chuckled.

"Well, you're alive anyway."

Beau growled at the dismissive way the elder spoke about Sterling. "I think maybe it is time for you to leave, Elder Lewis."

"Excuse me?" The elder's eyebrow arched.

"I'm damn tired of the way you've treated Sterling, and it will no longer be allowed now that he is my mate. If you wish to speak to him in the future, you can go through my elder. Otherwise, I wish you to leave and not come back. You are no longer welcome in my home."

Sterling chuckled quietly.

The elder, on the other hand, started shouting. "I'm no longer welcome in your home? You haven't welcomed me yet. You've done nothing but treat me with disrespect since I arrived."

"Anyone who sells out their family doesn't deserve my respect."

The elder's eyes widened. "What in the hell are you talking about?"

"You gave Sterling to Vladimir."

"I most certainly did not."

Sterling growled. His body tensed. Beau tightened his arms around his mate, afraid that he might attack the elder. Ordering and elder from his home was one thing. Attacking one could get them into serious trouble.

"Vladimir said that you gave Sterling to him, that he was a gift when Vladimir became coven leader of New York City."

"Vladimir is an idiot," Elder Lewis snapped. "Why do you think I assigned Sterling to him?"

"Why don't you tell me?"

"Because I needed someone I could trust to keep an eye on Vladimir. There were concerns about how he became coven leader

and rumors about some of the things he did once he was in power. I needed someone on the inside.”

Beau blinked. That wasn’t the impression he had gotten from either Vladimir or Sterling. “Are you telling me you planted Sterling in Vladimir’s organization on purpose?”

“Yes.”

“Then why didn’t Sterling know about it?”

Beau was shocked when the elder’s face paled, and he suddenly sat down on the bottom step. The man looked astonished.

“How could you not know?” he asked quietly. “I asked you to keep an eye on Vladimir that day in my office when I assigned you to him.”

When Sterling wiggled in his arms, Beau reluctantly set him on his feet. He watched Sterling walk stiffly across the room. Sterling groaned when he lowered himself down to the step the elder sat on. Beau growled low in his throat. He knew Sterling wasn’t as unhurt as he wanted to think he was.

“Uncle,” Sterling began as he clasped his hands together and let them dangle between his bent knees, “you always tell me to keep an eye on whoever you assign me to. How was I supposed to know Vladimir was any different?”

“But surely—” Elder Lewis frowned. “You really didn’t know?”

“No, I didn’t know.”

“The man is a complete jackass. How could you not know?”

Sterling snickered. “I agree with you there, but that still doesn’t explain why Vladimir thought I belonged to him.”

“Because he’s a sick freak?” Beau tossed in.

Sterling frowned up at him for a moment then turned back to his uncle. Clearly, he wasn’t done interrogating the elder.

“If you knew what a dirt bag Vladimir was, then why didn’t you believe me when I told you he attacked me back at my penthouse? You practically told me I was lying to you.”

“You’re right, and I apologize for that. My main concern at the time was keeping you and Beau mated, not Vladimir. I did bring someone with me to break your mating bond, but I also knew Beau was on his way to you. I was simply trying to keep you from remembering that you asked me to break the mating.”

Beau tilted his head to one side as he regarded the elder with confusion. “Why?”

“Because I knew you and Sterling were perfect for each other.” The elder chuckled as he waved his hand toward Beau. “Beau needs a keeper, and you need someone to keep. I couldn’t have picked a better mating if I tried.”

Of all the things the elder could have said, Beau least expected that. He thought the elder didn’t like him or Sterling. Now, he was learning things were a bit different than he thought. He wondered what else might have been different.

“If you knew Vladimir was such a bastard and you wanted me and Sterling to stay together, then why did you bring Vladimir here?”

“Believe me, I didn’t want to, but without Sterling’s testimony, I had no way of keeping Vladimir locked up. None of the men he kept are willing to talk. I was hoping that if I brought him here, Sterling would agree to testify before the council to what Vladimir tried to do to him. I suspect that Vladimir went feral, but I couldn’t prove it. He was too good at hiding things.”

“And Marilyn?” Beau asked. “How did she fit into all of this?”

The elder frowned. “Who?”

“The woman that just tried to kill me?” Sterling added.

“What woman?”

“You didn’t hear the fight?” Beau asked.

“I heard a bunch of yelling and stuff, but I didn’t know what it was. I tried to get upstairs, but your sentries wouldn’t let me.” Elder Lewis frowned again as he looked at Beau. “What woman?”

Chapter 12

Beau slowly sipped his coffee as he watched Sterling moving about in the yard. He wasn't sure if Sterling was dancing, or stretching, or what. He just knew it was hot as hell. It didn't hurt that Sterling only wore a pair of black pants. His rippled bare chest glistened in the morning sunshine as he moved.

"What's he doing?" Memphis asked as he joined Beau on the porch.

"I have no fucking idea." Beau chuckled.

He didn't, but he sure liked watching. Sterling moved with such grace that it was almost an art form. He'd raise his arms into the air then stretch them out. Then his leg would move around in an arc before he stretched it up in the air as well. All of this was done very slowly, very meticulously.

"It's hot."

"Yep."

Beau took another sip of his coffee. He refused to take his eyes off of Sterling. He didn't care if an airplane landed in his front yard.

"Is he dancing?"

"I don't know, and I don't care. I'm just enjoying the show."

"Well, I hate to rain on your parade, but the alphas are here."

Beau growled. He did not want his morning entertainment interrupted. Sterling started coming out to the front yard to "dance" a couple of months ago, right after the mess with Vladimir had been cleaned up.

At first, Beau thought it was Sterling's way of dealing with things, and he had given the man his space. He'd spent the first couple of

weeks watching Sterling from their bedroom window. Then he watched from his office on the first floor. Last week, he had braved the front porch, and he hadn't missed a morning since.

Sterling knew he was there. Beau knew that. But the man never acknowledged him when he was in the yard. As soon as he was done, however, Sterling would race Beau upstairs for a little morning interlude.

Beau was just waiting. And apparently so were the alphas.

"Fuck."

"You want me to tell them to come back?" Memphis chuckled.

"No, I ordered them here. The least I can do is meet with them."

"I'll just stay out here and keep an eye on Sterling."

Beau punched Memphis playfully in the arm. "Get in the house."

"Hey, someone needs to keep an eye on him."

"Sterling can take care of himself."

Beau knew he spoke the truth. He'd spent a lot of time training with the man over the last month. At first, he wanted to make sure that Sterling could handle himself in case of danger. He quickly realized that not only could Sterling protect himself but the man knew more about hand-to-hand combat than he did.

Beau started training with Sterling, wanting to learn everything he could that would help him protect his mate. He'd even had Sterling work out a training regiment for his sentries. They had laughed until Sterling put every damn one of them on their collective butts. Beau had laughed his ass off, kissed Sterling, then sat back and watched his mate teach his sentries that dynamite came in small packages.

The sentries still weren't speaking to him.

"Micah called."

"Oh?"

"He said he'd be back next week. He's given his testimony to the council as Elder Lewis requested. His testimony along with that of the other men Vladimir held will be recorded in the council records.

Vladimir's personal assets are being liquidated and divided between all of the men that were abused. "

"Good."

"Micah was given a choice to stay in the New York City coven or move to another coven with the council's blessing. He chose to come back here, said he was part of Sterling's coven."

Beau grinned and started for the house, reluctantly leaving Sterling in the yard. "He misses you."

"I might have missed him, too." Memphis held his hand up, his thumb and finger just an inch apart. "But just a little."

Beau chuckled. He had thought that Micah and Walker would have been a good pairing, but Memphis seemed to have taken more of an interest in the little man than Walker. It didn't hurt that Micah seemed to hang on Memphis's every word.

Beau stopped suddenly as he realized something profound. "Damn, do you realize this means Sterling has his own coven now?"

"Yep." Memphis chuckled. "Micah mentioned that, too. He said that Sterling's coven, consisting of you, Sterling, Micah, and Thomas, has been officially granted a charter by UPAC. We are now the Pacific Northwest Regional Coven and Wolf Pack."

"Stop laughing," Beau said. "You do realize the minute Sterling learns of this he's going to be hell to live with."

Memphis's face paled. "Shit, I didn't think of that."

Beau smirked. Nothing scared his big bad beta more than Sterling. He just didn't know how to deal with the man. Memphis was used to protecting those smaller than him. He wasn't used to someone that could protect themselves, or didn't listen, or argued right back when Memphis shouted, or fussed over wrinkled silk shirts.

"Let's not tell him."

"He's bound to find out, Beau."

"Find out what?"

Beau plastered a smile on his face and swung around to face his mate. "Hey, babe, how was your workout?"

“Very relaxing, thank you.” Sterling used the towel around his neck to wipe down his face and neck. “So, find out what?”

Beau grinned when Memphis started backing away.

“I’m just going to go check on the alphas.” Memphis practically ran from the room.

“What was that all about?” Sterling asked, staring after Memphis.

“UPAC granted you a charter, baby. You’re now officially a coven leader.”

“A coven leader?” Sterling’s eyes widened as he looked back at Beau. “What coven?”

“Pacific Northwest Regional Coven.”

“I don’t remember that coven.”

“It’s a new coven, Sterling, just you and me, Thomas and Micah.”

“Oh.” Sterling looked perplexed for a moment then shook his head. “I guess it’s a good thing I turned my uncle down when he asked me to take over the Atlanta coven then. I can’t be in two places at once.”

Beau’s amusement at the situation fled in an instant. “He asked you to take over the Atlanta Coven?”

“Yes, it seems the coven leader there, Cortez, pissed off the wrong person, namely Shea Mayer. Uncle Lewis is still cleaning up the mess. He called and asked me if I was interested in taking over the coven, even if it was just until he could find someone else for the job. I told him I had my hands full here with you.”

“Good choice.”

“I thought so.” Sterling’s laughter filled the room. He leaned up and planted a small kiss on Beau’s lips. “I’m going to run upstairs and jump in the shower. I’ll be quick.”

Beau stood there and watched Sterling run up the stairs. It wasn’t until Sterling had almost reached the top step that Beau realized what had seemed so out of place. The sexy little fucker had a butt plug in his ass.

Beau growled as heat infused every cell in his body. He bounded up the steps after his mate. He was met by Sterling's laughter as he ran into the bedroom after the man. He peeled his clothes from his body as he headed for the bathroom and the heavenly body that waited for him there.

Sterling stood under the shower spray. He crooked his finger and motioned for Beau to join him. Beau wasted no time in dropping the rest of his clothes on the bathroom floor then climbing into the shower with his mate.

"Hi," Sterling said.

"Hi," Beau replied.

"Come here often?"

"I'm hoping to come in the next few minutes."

Sterling chuckled. "Bad, Beau, very bad."

Beau grinned. "You love it, and you know it."

"Maybe."

"I can prove it."

"So prove it."

Sterling yelped as Beau suddenly picked him up and pinned him against the wall. Beau reached down and grabbed Sterling's ass, making sure his fingers pressed against the plug spearing his mate's ass.

Sterling groaned. His eyes took on a heated, glossy look. "Are you going to fuck me in the shower, Beau?"

"You know I am." Beau chuckled. "It's my turn to top."

"Keeping score, Beau?"

"Nope." Beau pulled the plug free and replaced it with his cock, easily sliding all of the way in. His eyes almost crossed at the pleasure that racked his body at being inside such silky tight heat. "I was too busy watching someone dance in the front yard. I forgot to put mine in. That means I get to top."

"Works for me," Sterling groaned as he started riding Beau's cock hard and fast.

Beau gripped Sterling's ass tightly in his hands and pounded into the man. Sterling's head fell back against the shower wall and loud groans filled the enclosed space. Beau felt Sterling's legs wrap around his waist.

It changed the angle of his thrusts, hitting Sterling's sweet spot. Beau knew this because Sterling went crazy, crying out and coming all over the front of him. Tight, silky muscles clamped down on Beau's cock.

Beau groaned as his orgasm was dragged from him before he was ready for it. He shoved his cock deep into Sterling's ass and stiffened as spurt after spurt of cum shot from his cock. His knees shook as waves of pleasure rippled through him.

Beau was enchanted by the pure bliss on Sterling's face. He couldn't look away. He doubted there was another soul on the earth that was as sexy as his Sterling when the man was aroused.

"So sexy," Beau whispered.

"Yours," Sterling murmured, "just yours."

"Mine."

Beau leaned in and claimed Sterling's lips. He was hungry for every taste of the man he could get, every feel. No matter how long they had been together, or how many times they had sex, Beau could never get enough of Sterling.

The man was perfect for him. He was strong and fierce, but gentle and loving. He was spunky, sarcastic, and a royal pain in the ass, and yet he could speak words of love that made Beau's heart melt.

And Beau loved Sterling with every fiber of his being. He was just glad he had the rest of his life to show Sterling how much he was loved. He had been truly blessed the night he had been forced to take a vampire as his mate.

THE END

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Stormy believes the only thing sexier than a man in cowboy boots is two or three men in cowboy boots. She also believes in love at first sight, soul Mates, true love, and happy endings.

Stormy lives in the great Northwest region of the USA, with her gorgeous husband and soul Mate, six very active teenagers, two boxer/collie puppies, one old biddy cat, and one fish.

You can usually find her cuddled in bed with a book in her hand and a puppy in her lap, or on her laptop, creating the next sexy man for one of her stories. Stormy welcomes comments from readers. You can find her website at www.stormyglenn.com

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