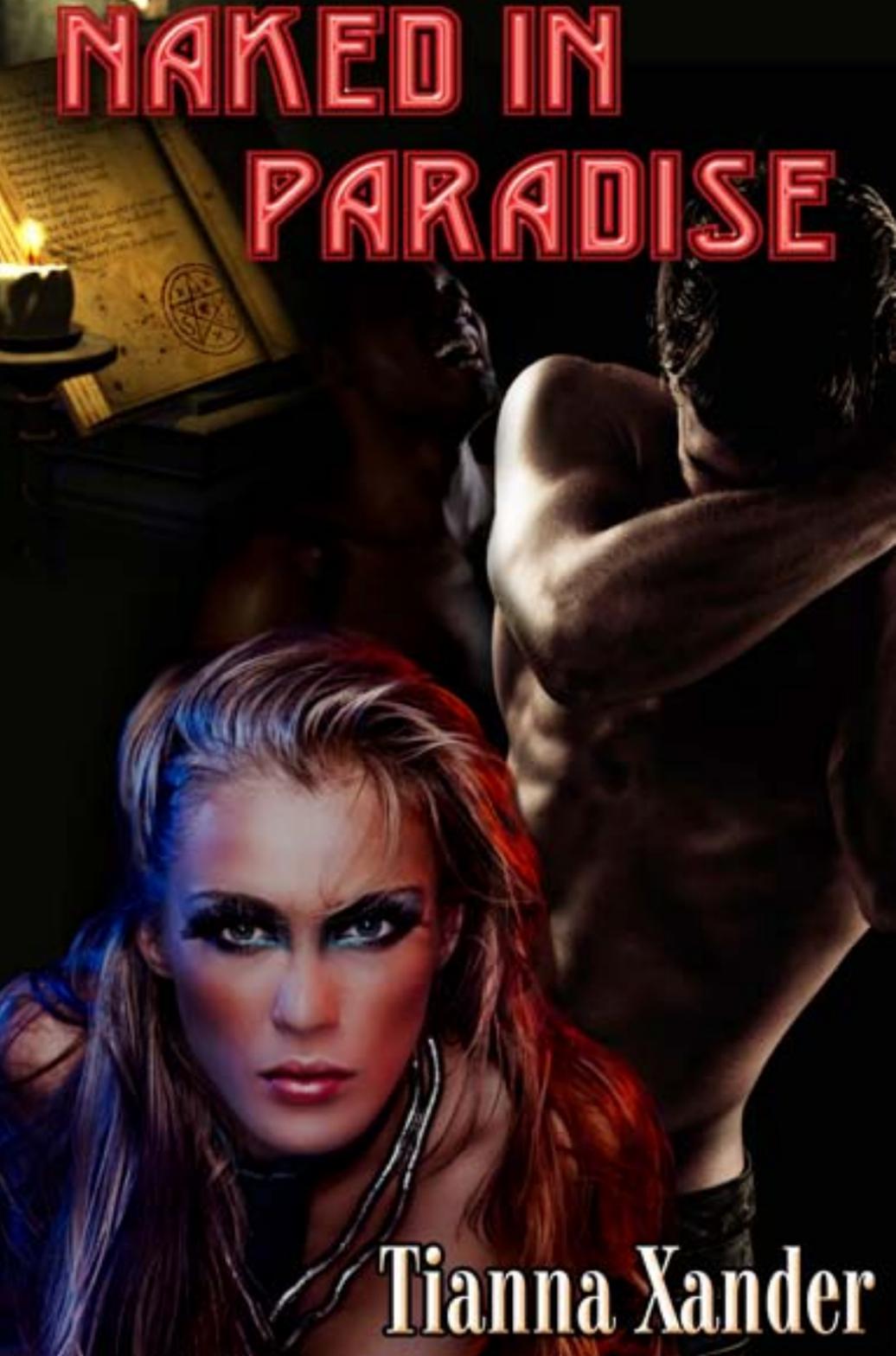


NAKED IN PARADISE



Tianna Xander

When Angel Reese decided to train for her next marathon in Texas, she never guessed she would find herself kidnapped and taken to the mountains of Wyoming. After her escape from her captors, Angel finds herself running naked through the forest surrounding paradise. Will she find the help she needs or find herself captured and readied for ritual sacrifice?

When Mace Goodman and Derek Hunter find a beautiful woman running blindly through the rain, their first thought is to warm her and care for her. They never expected her presence to warm them to a fevered pitch with the *el calor*, the mating heat.

After a clan enemy, previously believed dead, returns, will they finally defeat the sabbat slayer or will their enemies prevail?

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NAKED IN PARADISE

BY

TIANNA SANDER

DEDICATION

To everyone in my yahoo group. Thank you for inspiring me and telling me to keep the stories coming. You Rock!

To Kevin: Thanks for buying those cases of MREs from surplus. They really are nasty, but I'm glad for the opportunity to share the experience with you. I'm only sorry you got so many.

CHAPTER ONE

Lightning flashed, its jagged bolts illuminating the dark sky overhead. Thunder crashed in the distance, its low rumble growing closer with each passing moment. Reeds and weeds bent nearly double in the increasing wind and branches from close trees and bushes grabbed greedily at delicate skin.

Angel Reese ran as fast as she could, heedless of the pain. Her long legs ate up the distance between her and her captors as her heart sounded out a frantic rhythm to match her pounding feet. She couldn't stop to rest even though her lungs ached. They felt as though they would burst at any moment as she ran frantically through the thick undergrowth, darting haphazardly here and there, trying desperately to leave a twisted path that would prove hard to follow.

She shivered in the growing darkness, fear and lack of oxygen clogging her throat. A chill settled in the air and she knew she must keep moving because if she stopped, they would find her or she

would certainly die of exposure in the cold October night.

A thin coat of perspiration coated her body, only serving to chill her as the slight breeze kicked up to a heavy, blowing wind. Frigid raindrops spattered her head and face, covering her skin with gooseflesh and still she ran. Angel didn't think she'd ever been so desperate in her life.

Frowning, she thought back over the last few days. The marathon she trained for, the run through the back trails to familiarize herself with the terrain. Nothing seemed out of place. Yet, here she was, God only knew where, running for her life like some frightened child having a nightmare. It was a nightmare all right, but still, all too real.

How in the heck did she keep getting into these sticky situations? She'd bet cash money that she was the only marathon runner in the world to ever get kidnapped on a training run and stripped naked for some kind of weird ritual sacrifice. She'd call it pagan, but she knew a few pagans herself and she also knew they never, ever sacrificed living beings...not the sane ones anyway.

Angel stubbed her toe on an exposed tree root, barely righting herself before she fell flat on her face.

Ignore the pain. Ignore the pain. It wasn't the first time she'd ever chanted the phrase to herself.

She'd said much the same thing many times since she broke free and started running naked through the woods. Her bare feet ached. They were probably bleeding, but she didn't dare stop to look. God only knew how many of those lunatics were still on her trail.

Lightning struck a tree nearby, the moment her foot hit nothingness. It lit up the area barely enough to see that she had run headlong over the side of a steep drop and Angel plummeted down an embankment into a swollen and angry river.

Frigid water closed over her head and she fought the need to gulp in air from the shock of it while she was underwater. Clawing her way to the surface, Angel struggled to the opposite bank and dragged herself to shore where she coughed and retched up what felt like gallons of the foul water from her lungs.

Sharp stones dug into her tender flesh as she lay prone on the bank for a moment, allowing the cold water to soothe and clean her raw, battered and filthy feet. Finally, Angel gathered enough strength and pushed herself upright, choking back a sob of agony, pushing the sensation of pain into a small compartment in her mind where, hopefully she could ignore it.

"You can do this." She spoke aloud more so she could hear her own voice for comfort, than any other reason. "This is nothing compared to that

thirty-five mile run last year." Her feet had ached for almost a week after that one. "Suck it up, Reese. Your life depends on it." And if what she'd heard from her assailants was true, she'd just cheated death. Barely.

Rain poured down on her, chilling her to the bone. Heck, maybe she would die today anyway. She sighed. At least hypothermia was supposedly painless. She'd heard it made its victim tired and you merely fell asleep. Sleep was preferable to having some lunatic stab her in the heart any minute, in her opinion.

"Only *you* could get into a situation like this." She continued on at a more sedate pace, knowing what would keep her from her captor's clutches would be her ability to outrun them in a foot race. It didn't matter that she'd knocked the one out. Someone would discover him lying unconscious in the tent sooner or later and she had to put as much distance between them as possible.

Once, she thought she'd heard the sound of some large cat trailing her, the incredibly terrifying sound of a feral growl growing closer until she had put on that last burst of speed and sent herself flying over that drop-off and careening into the frigid waters of an unknown river.

Slowing to a walk, she crossed her arms over her breasts. God, she felt so exposed out here.

Angel half-smiled and shook her head at her actions. Here she was, in the middle of nowhere, as naked as she was the day she was born and the first thing she did was cover her breasts. What about the rest of her? The small patch of blonde hair left behind by her cosmetologist wasn't going to cover much downstairs and it certainly wouldn't do much to warm her.

Shaking her head, she continued on, away from the river and away from those who wished her dead. Who else managed to get themselves kidnapped just days before Halloween while training for the last marathon of the season? If she hadn't decided that her health and her training was more important than her relationship, maybe, just maybe, she'd be with Jacob, having dinner instead of running who knew where in the middle of some nameless forest, fighting for her very life.

Heck, she wasn't even sure what day it was anymore, for goodness sake. If she were to believe her captors, it was still five days before Halloween, or All Hallows' Eve as they put it. Why would they lie? What did they have to gain from it? They said something about sacrificing her to bring forth some kind of evil spirit or god. They were all obviously insane. The only hope she had was staying alive until next week. Then, in their eyes, it would be too late to sacrifice her. She hated herself for thinking it, but better they

sacrifice one of their own in a pinch than kill her. She had too much to live for...well, she hoped she did anyway.

Angel, shivering so badly she could barely move, forced one foot in front of the other until she worked herself back into a slow trot. At least she was moving again. With a little luck, the run may warm her up – if only a little.

You can do it. She repeated the litany in her mind, trying to convince herself she could carry on—that she could escape the monsters chasing her and that she had a chance to survive out here naked in the cold. If only she could find a house, even an old hunting cabin where she could warm up or swipe a blanket or two.

Lightning flashed again and she screamed as she ran into a tall, dark mountain of human flesh. The only thing visible in the short burst of light was a very large man standing with his arms crossed, his dark skin hiding all but the most stubborn of his attributes, his glowing white teeth bared in a grin and the reflection of the flare of lightning on his wet, mahogany skin.

Large hands grabbed her shoulders in a firm grip as she slammed into the man's hard frame. She let out another bloodcurdling scream. After all that running, she still managed to get herself recaptured.

Ghastly visions swamped her as the memory of what her captors said awaited her, flashed through her mind. She could practically see the large knife plunging toward her chest to pierce her heart.

“Please, God, help me,” she managed to beg before she knew no more.

* * * *

Mace Goodman stared down at the unconscious woman and automatically reached out to his best friend. *You're not going to believe this.* He paused, knowing full well, he spoke the truth. Derek would expect a prank. It was a game they played with each other often.

It was a ritual for them if they were on Gate duty. The duty usually lasted seven days. The pranks and practical jokes helped pass the time and kept them on their toes, ready for anything.

I'm sure I won't, but you are welcome to try me, came the other man's sardonic reply.

Believe it or not, D, a naked woman just ran into me, and by the looks of it, she's not one of us. We have our first gatecrasher.

Right, Derek drew out the word, emphasizing his disbelief. And if I believe that, I'll just bet you have some prime farmland in South-central Florida you want to sell me.

Mace frowned as he lifted the woman in his arms, holding her close to his chest. Her pale skin was almost as cold as ice and a faint blue sheen ringed her lips. *You'll see when I bring her to the cabin.* He only wished they weren't over a mile away from the warmth and comfort it offered.

He'd just begun to shore up the defenses of the gate they'd agreed to protect this year when the woman came from nowhere and freight-trained him, nearly knocking him from his feet.

Sighing, he wished he'd gotten out sooner. If he had, he may have strengthened the spells hiding the gate in time to avoid this small disaster. Having a human slip through the gates was bad enough, but a naked human with raw and bleeding feet was a problem he was certain they could do without. He fit her closer to his chest and ran as fast as he could back to the protection of the log cabin where he knew Derek had a fire going. He never did understand the other man's affection for roasted marshmallows. They were nasty, messy little things that consistently burned to oblivion when held over a fire.

After an interminable amount of time, he finally saw the light from the cabin shining through the darkness. As a shifter, he didn't need the light to guide his way, he could see very well in the dark. He merely looked for it to gauge the distance.

It wasn't far now, just a few hundred feet. Then he'd rub Derek's nose in it when he carried the unconscious—and naked—woman through the door and ceremoniously dropped her on the other man's bunk. He glanced down at her pale face and sighed. Okay, so he wouldn't drop her. He would lay her carefully on Derek's bunk...still wet. The thought made him grin. *I'm about fifty feet away, you stubborn ass. Open the door now and see for yourself that I'm not pulling your already overlong legs.* Mace felt more than heard Derek's sigh.

If I must. You shall play this joke to the last, eh? You know what will happen if you are yanking my chain.

He had a particularly nasty memory of the last time he'd jerked Derek's chain. Derek, being a bit older, was also more powerful. Power came with longevity. The older one was, the more powerful they were, unless you were talking alphas. Alphas were as strong as their followers. When the people they ruled faithfully followed their leader, the alpha could never lose a fair fight. *You must. Now open the damned door before this poor woman dies of exposure because of your lackadaisical ways. She's turning blue around the edges.*

Derek opened the door, his bored expression falling away and turning to one of disbelief. "Shit, Mace. You *did* find a naked woman," he said, moving away from the door so Mace could carry

her into the warm interior. "What the hell do you suppose she's doing running around naked inside the perimeters of Paradise?"

"Hell if I know." Shrugging, Mace glanced down at her pale face. "All I know is she ran hell bent for peanuts out of the woods, took one look at me, let out a bellow loud enough to wake the dead, then promptly fainted."

"I told you that you were one ugly bastard." Derek laughed. "This just proves it."

"Fuck off and die." Mace fought the urge to laugh as he pushed past his oldest and best friend in the world. "You're lucky I've known you forever, jerk-off, otherwise, I may think you're serious." Striding across the room, he laid the woman on the closest cot, noting with satisfaction that it just happened to be Derek's bed. Stepping back, he started to strip out of his own soaked clothing.

"She's freezing and we need to warm her." He knew just the way to do it, too, though it may scandalize her beyond bearing when she woke. It didn't matter what she felt. Sharing body heat was the one thing he knew would help her before she succumbed to hypothermia. After stripping down, he grabbed the extra blankets, handed them to Derek and crawled onto the bed with her.

"Cover us up, you unbelievable ass, then go out to the South ridge and finish respelling the entire

area. I have no idea where she came from or which section of our gate she entered through for that matter." Mace rolled onto his side and pulled the girl tight against him. He wasn't sure what it was, but something within him demanded he save the woman no matter the cost. "I'll do my best to warm her up while you're gone."

"Yeah, I'll just bet you will." Derek gave him a knowing smirk that said he'd be more comfortable lying next to a naked and beautiful woman, too.

She *was* a beauty. At least that much was certain. Mace couldn't help the thought as he gazed down at her. Long hair hung almost to her waist. It looked somewhat blonde, though the strands were wet. Just looking at her made his gut clench and he wanted nothing more than to lie here, breathe her in and become one with nature with her, instead of waiting patiently for her body to warm, to heal. He continued to stare at her hair. It was difficult to determine the exact color while wet, but if he had to make a guess, he'd say it was dark blonde. Her eyes appeared blue in the bright flash of lightning as she first stared up at him with undisguised horror.

Who had she thought he was and why in the Goddess' name, was she running around these woods as naked as the day she'd forced her way from her mother's womb?

She stirred and the blankets moved off her a bit. Reaching out, he flipped the blanket back over her, but not before he glimpsed a bare hip and thigh. At the reminder of the woman's lush curves and bare skin beneath the covers, his body stirred to life.

The attraction clearly could have come at a better time. Steering his thoughts away from her lush nakedness was a prudent thing, to be sure. It wouldn't do to have her wake up in a stranger's arms when said stranger had a raging hard-on. Closing his eyes, he willed his body back under his control.

Having her wake to find him lusting after her would *not* be his first choice. Still, it took longer than he expected to get his raging libido in hand. In fact, he was beginning to think the damned hard-on was there to stay until the woman began to shiver in his arms.

There was nothing like a freezing cold and shivering woman to bring things back into their proper perspective, especially when said woman jams her freezing cold fist into your tender and quite exposed nads.

Mace barely stopped himself from howling with agony as her hand crashed down and crushed his prized possessions for a second time before he could get his hands over them. *Holy shit that hurts!*

Hands cupping his exposed sac, Mace sucked air in through clenched teeth as he fought back the nausea that gripped his stomach in a vise. Squeezing his eyes shut, he concentrated on breathing, trying to get oxygen into his system and wait out the pain. He was still wheezing when he heard the unmistakable sound of a feminine gasp.

The woman, finally awake, stiffened beside him and tried to roll away. Instead of going far, she found herself trapped between him and the outer wall. Finally giving up her attempt at escape, she rolled over to face him, staring up at him through huge, frightened eyes.

“Where the heck am I and who the heck are you?”

CHAPTER TWO

Derek Hunter strode through the woods, looking for some sign of where their *visitor* came from. The rain assured there was no trail or scent to follow, so if the worse happened and other humans came searching for her with dogs, the trail would be cold. Still, they needed to know who she was and where she belonged so they could take her back to her people.

The lack of trail was certainly good for the woman if someone was chasing her for some reason. If it was as he suspected and she *had* been running from Camulus's men, she at least had the driving rain on her side.

There was more than one mystery surrounding the woman. If he knew where she managed to break through the gate, he could at least strengthen the spells and try to make sure no one else could sneak through. He hated that a human managed to make it through on their watch. At least it wasn't the first time something like this

happened. Last year, two other males found their *truebond* mate in much the same manner.

Sometimes he detested these times of year. The sabbats rendered the gates' protection almost useless. They constantly needed someone redoing the spells to make sure no humans could find their way to Paradise unescorted. The protective spells that made humans sick with fear were always weak around the sabbats.

The Alpha planned to reopen the gates soon, but even then, they couldn't allow most humans to enter Paradise during the sabbats and the times of power when they could witness the magick of such times.

Still, he liked camping out in the cabins, who wouldn't? He loved the prestige being a gate keeper offered to the single men of Paradise, but even that status meant nothing if one didn't have that special someone to share their life with. He had hoped to find his mate before now, before he reached his one-hundredth year. His birthday was last week and, with the exception of Mace, he was as yet unattached.

The only thing Derek didn't like about doing this job was finding the strays. He'd only found one other. It had been a man. Lost, hungry and alone, he stumbled into Paradise looking for something to eat and a way home. They'd given it

to him and in exchange, they'd taken his memories. It was a small price to pay for one's life.

Derek ran his hand through his damp hair. The rain stopped pouring down a while ago, but it still misted and drops fell from the canopy above. He thought about their time here. They'd have to hold the woman here for another three days or at least until someone could come and fetch her.

Frowning, he wondered at the feral growl that threatened to escape him at the thought. Why should he care if someone removed her from their presence and wiped her memory of anyone and anything she may have seen here?

Shaking his head, he shoved his fingers through his hair once again. Fucking with people's memories was abhorrent. Maybe that was what his problem was. Deep down he knew there was too much room for error when altering a human's mind. Hell, he'd rather eat a housecat than have that responsibility. He shuddered at the thought. "Tastes like chicken, my ass." He didn't know one way or another and he didn't plan to find out.

Making his way to the river, he looked across the swollen expanse. Deep water boiled angrily over the now invisible boulders. The area in the middle that was usually rapids, was now so deep, it hid the large rocks, making fording the river even more dangerous. His entire body shook at the thought of the woman somehow crossing the

raging rapids. If she had, she was far luckier than anyone else he knew.

Closing his mind to all distractions, Derek focused on his beast. His cat snarled with satisfaction when it realized he was about to set it free to roam the area. Wary of the water, the leopard wouldn't stray too close to the stream left to its own devices but it would attempt to find the woman's scent, to determine where she came from and whether danger followed her like a spurned lover.

Taking a deep breath, Derek concentrated on the change. He reached for the magick and his clothing disappeared. Soon, his body began to shift, to contort as he hunched over, his bones snapping and popping as they became smaller, more compact. Muscles shifted, became denser, surging with the power of the great jungle cat as the beast took over and he became one with his leopard, his other half.

His jaws widened, elongated into a muzzle, becoming larger to accommodate bigger, sharper teeth. Finally, spotted fur sprouted along his skin, making him itch for a split second as it covered his body in a smooth, silky coat.

Lifting his nose to the air, he searched for a scent—any scent—any information on the wind that indicated where the woman found her way through the gate. Following his nose to the North,

he got a whiff of something familiar, an odor he thought he would never smell again. Derek shook his head, certain he was imagining things. It was impossible. The man he scented was long gone from this Earth, killed in the battle to wrest Paradise from its dictatorial leadership. Part of him wanted to see his brother again, but he knew if he did, he would have to kill him.

Derek took another deep breath and almost sighed with relief at the absence of any odor. His brother, rest his damned soul, was dead and gone, his body burned with countless others to preserve their way of life. The putrid stink, as he hoped, was apparently nothing more than his overactive imagination.

* * * *

Angel stared up into the dark face of her captor – or was he her savior? Only time would tell. The man didn't say anything. He just lay there, staring at her with those fathomless eyes and grimaced, his teeth white in contrast to his dark skin. It appeared as though he was in pain, though why was a complete mystery to her.

She remembered how his strong hands gripped her shoulders just before she lost consciousness and she scooted away from his warmth, her still shivering body protesting the loss of heat.

After giving her a brief glance, the man groaned, squeezed his dark chocolate eyes shut and panted through his pain—if that was even what it was. Angel realized he could be having some kind of fit. How was she to know? He wasn't talking and the few inarticulate grunts he managed didn't tell her a thing.

Shifting to make herself more comfortable, she brushed up against his naked body and frowned. Her heart slammed erratically in her chest as she stared at him, her tongue thick, her mouth dry. What in the world was she doing in bed with a man she didn't know and why were they both naked?

It was a measure of her upset that she didn't realize she'd spoken aloud until he answered, "Because you were suffering from hypothermia." He squeezed the words out, his breath seeming to come a bit easier. "Sharing body heat is more efficient with our clothing off."

"Excuse me for sounding ungrateful, sir, but I'm sure you could have left your underwear on." She bit her lip. "Couldn't you?" She gave him a frosty glare. Leave it to a man to take advantage. She didn't know one that could be a gentleman if his life depended on it.

The man merely looked at her for a moment, his dark eyes unreadable as his grimace slowly

changed to a pained grin. "Believe me, ma'am, I would have if I had a pair."

"Really!" She shifted farther away from him, pressing her back against the rough-hewn logs behind her. "I don't believe you don't own a pair of underwear."

"I never said I didn't own a pair." His grin got wider, drawing her attention to his perfect smile and even more perfect teeth.

The better to eat you with, Angel.

"I definitely own some, ma'am." The grin turned to a chuckle before he added, "I just meant that I didn't have any here."

Holy Hannah! What kind of person even admitted to not wearing underwear to a complete stranger? Was he a deviant like those maniacs who planned to kill her? She moved as far away as she could, plastering herself even tighter against the outer wall.

"If you don't mind my asking," he said as he rolled over and got out of the bed. "What in the world were *you* doing running through the woods stark naked?"

Angel felt her eyes widen and her cheeks burn as he turned toward her. Goodness! The man was perfectly proportioned—well, with the exception of that rather large bit of flesh dangling between his legs. He coughed and she flicked her gaze up at his face. The jerk had the audacity to wink and

grin as he grabbed a pair of jeans from a nearby chest of drawers and slid them on over his long, lean legs. She couldn't help but stare as he pulled a t-shirt out and tossed it toward her.

"Go ahead and put that on. It'll be too big, but at least you won't be naked any longer." He raised a brow, letting her know he still waited for her answer.

Angel grabbed the shirt and yanked it over her head. She didn't intend to tell him anything until he fed her. The others said she couldn't eat before the ritual for some reason. It had something to do with some form of cleansing. If this man fed her, she hoped it was safe to assume that he wasn't one of those lunatics that planned to sacrifice her to some obscure god...or was it a demon? She gave a mental shrug. They were both the same thing in her opinion. "I'll make a deal with you," she said as she made sure the shirt covered her most private areas, then flipped the blankets back. "I'll tell you why I was naked if you'll feed me first. I haven't eaten in at least a day."

Both of the man's brows climbed toward his hairline. "At least a day? You don't remember the last time you ate?" Turning, he headed for the kitchen area of the one room cabin, pulled a brown package from a box marked MRE and ripped it open. Then he glanced down and grinned. "Oh, you're lucky. The lasagna is good."

He made a face. "Never eat the hot dogs, they're nasty. I'm not even sure those are really food."

As she watched, he poured some water in one side of the packet and swished it around for a few seconds before sitting the entire thing down on the table in front of a chair.

"It'll be ready in a couple of minutes." He pulled out a chair. "By the time you get your gorgeous behind over here and settled, would be my guess." He patted the seat, pulled some strange-looking plastic-ware from the original package and set it on the table before he strode around to the other side to take a seat. He waved to the chair directly in front of him. "It's okay. I don't bite. I promise."

There was that smile again, urging her to trust him. He seemed sincere. He didn't act like an axe murderer. Not that she would know how one acted. It wasn't as though she'd ever met one before. At least she didn't think she had... Who knew now with all of the strange stuff that she had been through over the last few days?

Lowering her feet to the freezing floor, Angel curled her toes against the cold and pain, almost giving in to the urge to ask him to bring the food to her instead. She may have done just that if being in a bed half-naked didn't make her feel at even more of a disadvantage than sitting half-naked at a table would.

Biting her lip against the pain, she stood and limped over to the table. Her feet burned as though she'd just walked over hot coals, but she'd never admit to any discomfort. She wasn't sure she could afford to. Not now. Not until she determined she could trust the man who sat on the other side of the table. As it was, she was at a distinct disadvantage. After all, what could be worse than being in the middle of nowhere, trapped in a cabin with a man you don't know?

The door opened and she immediately got the answer to her question, and that was, being in the middle of nowhere, trapped in a cabin with *two* men you don't know. Closing her eyes, she sighed. How in the heck did she keep getting herself into these messes?

* * * *

Mace sat on the other side of the table and watched while myriad emotions flitted across the strange woman's face as Derek walked in. She looked as though she wanted to pass out again, then appeared confounded when she didn't. In fact, she would probably welcome another good faint. Whatever caused her to run naked through the woods and smack dab through one of the gates of Paradise, scared her spitless, if he wasn't mistaken.

He felt like laughing and comforting her all at the same time. "Sit down before you fall down," he urged her, keeping his voice as low and gentle as he could manage. He gestured to Derek. "This is Derek Hunter. He and his brothers own the mill in Paradise." Resting his hand on his chest, he continued, "And I'm Mace Goodman." He made a face. "I'm not so good a catch as Derek. I own the Beat the Clock Diner. I just bought it from Sarah Browning about three months ago. She still manages it for me though. It'll give her a chance to take some time off and go somewhere when she wants to in her old age."

"The restaurant in question is also known as the *Beat the Cock Diner* to the Gibson boys." Derek chuckled and gave Mace a knowing look. "And if Sarah Browning catches you calling her old, she's liable to make you eat one of Mrs. Connor's chainsaw sculptures."

Mace shot him a scowl. "One of these days I'm going to catch those boys messing with my sign and when I do, I'm going to turn them over to Myrtle Connor."

"You're just jealous because you never thought of it when you were younger."

Just because Derek was right, it didn't mean he had to like it. Mace crossed his arms and glowered at the other man. "Just you watch it. You get most of your meals there." He narrowed his eyes and

smiled. "Free, too, I might add. So just keep your damned comments to yourself if you want to continue eating on a regular basis, dickhead."

Derek merely grinned at him, then turned back to the woman. "Now that we've introduced ourselves, perhaps you would like to do the same?"

He phrased it as a question. Mace wasn't sure he would have been so diplomatic, but he supposed diplomacy was only one of the things one gained when a person aged to over one-hundred years old.

The woman watched both of them, twisting her hands as she sat in her seat. "I told you." Her eyes narrowed to little slits. "I'll tell you about it after I eat." She paused, obviously wanting them to know that the thought of food wasn't what prompted her to act the way she was. "They told me I had to be fasting for their—" She cut herself off before she said more and bit her lip. Sighing, she picked up the food packet, dumped it on the paper plate Mace provided, then took a bite. She made a face as she chewed and swallowed. "I thought you said this was good."

"It *is* good, compared to the others. I guess what I should have said was it isn't *bad*." Mace chuckled. "I can't say as much about the hot dogs I warned you about." He grinned. "An MRE is rarely good." He waited for her to take a few more

bites. “We have to call you something, Miss...” He deliberately left it hanging so she would get the hint. He knew she had no reason to trust them. No reason other than they’d just given her a roof over her head, clothing and something to eat.

Mace thought about that, then sighed. It was beneath him to think that way. She was obviously running from someone. Add to it the fact that whoever it was she’d escaped from had stripped her bare and starved her, it wasn’t any wonder she didn’t trust easily. Who could blame her?

CHAPTER THREE

Angel stared at the two men for a minute. She rubbed her belly, the burning, gnawing feeling that kept her company over the last day or so was finally gone. At least they'd fed her, even if the horrible tasting food would probably give her indigestion later. At least she wasn't faint from hunger anymore.

"I'm Angel. Angel Reese." She shook her head and took a sip of the water Mace sat in front of her. "I don't know what those men wanted. All I know is that they kidnapped me while I was training for a marathon."

"You run marathons?" Derek looked her up and down while she squirmed a bit. "The last I knew that wasn't a crime. Why do you suppose they kidnapped you?"

She watched, a bit curious, as he lifted a large pan of hot water from the stove and dumped it into a pan then added something from several bags to it. "They took me and told me that they

planned to perform a ritual on Halloween. That would be in about five more days, wouldn't it?" Though she was relatively sure she hadn't lost more than one whole day, it would be nice to know if she was out of danger—at least for the immediate future.

"Yes. It's still several days before Halloween," Mace informed her as he sat back down. He held out his hand. "It's nice to meet you, Angel." His grin went from friendly to downright sexy in no time flat. "I know you've been told Angel is a beautiful name."

He gave Derek a glance that practically screamed, *shower her with compliments*, while the other man continued to work on his concoction. Was he making soup?

It would have been comical if the whole situation wasn't so bizarre and terrifying. How did she know these two wouldn't kill her or rape her? She glanced around the cabin, hoping to see a phone—even a cell phone—but she could see nothing that linked them with the outside world.

I hope you didn't jump from the frying pan into the fire, Reese. She couldn't help it. She had the bad habit of talking to herself when she was nervous or frightened, which on a normal day, wasn't usually a problem. "Where am I?"

"You're in Paradise," Mace said as he moved to take her dirty, makeshift dishes. "You came up

from the riverbank, rising through the mist and rain like some sort of goddess and ran smack dab into me." He chuckled. "Then promptly fainted right after you let out a bellow loud enough to wake the dead."

"I-I thought you were one of the men who wanted to kill me." Angel knew she'd screamed like a banshee. She was just glad that these men didn't want to sacrifice her. At least not today.

She covered her mouth as she yawned. "I'm sorry. I'm just so tired." She glanced toward the beds wistfully. She fully expected to sleep on the floor. After all, she was the odd person out, as it were. She was the unexpected guest. If you could call her that.

Angel studied the rug in front of the fire with a critical eye. It looked comfortable enough. Certainly more comfortable than that strange altar the others planned to strap her to just before they murdered her. "If you don't mind, I think I'd like to go to sleep. All that running today has exhausted me." She glanced at them both. "It *was* today, wasn't it?"

"Yes it was today," Mace said as the two men moved toward the beds.

"Take mine," they said at once.

Derek glanced at his bed and made a face. "Better yet, take Mace's bed since mine is still wet. We'll take the floor."

"Well..." She glanced at the twin bed with longing. "If you're sure."

"We're sure," Mace answered as he moved to his bed and pulled the covers back. "I'd change the sheets for you, but they're the only ones we have."

Smiling softly, Angel shook her head. "It's not necessary. It's perfectly fine the way it is." It was strange that she felt that way. It usually creeped her out even to think of sleeping on a bed someone else had slept in without clean linens. Yet here she was, ready to crawl into a stranger's bed, barely giving it a second thought. Fatigue will do that to a person apparently. Angel covered another yawn with the back of her hand. "I'm sorry. I'm just so tired, I can't seem to think."

"It's okay. We understand." Mace waited for her to get into the bed, then pulled the covers over her. "You've had a rough couple of days."

"Tell me about it." She felt somewhat surly and that really was unfair to the two nice men who took her in, fed her and gave up their beds. "I'm...I'm sorry. I don't mean to sound ungrateful."

"We know," Derek said with a simple shrug of his shoulders. "You've been under a lot of stress. Plus you've run quite a ways, I'm sure." He smiled down at her. "Though I hate to be the bearer of bad news."

She frowned. "Bad news?"

"You can't go to sleep yet." He gave a meaningful glance to his buddy and an unspoken communication passed between them.

Immediately wary, Angel pulled the blankets up to her chin and stared at them through wide eyes. "Why not?"

"Your feet."

"My feet?" Angel began to wonder what her feet had to do with anything until she remembered the condition they were in. She was so used to bloodying her feet while running, the pain barely fazed her. Still, she knew she had to clean the cuts on the soles of her feet. She didn't need an infection on top of everything else.

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Mace watched as Derek carried her to the basin of warm water he prepared for her while they talked. They promised not to let her fall asleep in the chair, knowing full well, that once she slipped her feet into the warm water, rest would be the last thing on her mind. Derek had poured some of the most powerful antiseptics in the cabin into that water. It was going to sting like a bitch.

When Derek lowered her gently to the chair, Angel moved her feet to hover over the basin of steaming water. "It's not too hot?" she asked,

biting her lip in the manner of a person who knew pain would follow their next action.

"I've made it just a bit warmer than my skin. The heat of the water will not burn you."

"But the germ killing agents you added to it will, won't they?" she asked with a crooked grin.

Derek smiled at her. "Why do you ask questions you already know the answers to?"

"I'm buying time."

"You're procrastinating." Mace gave her a stern look. "The sooner the better. You should soak your feet for at least thirty minutes."

"Thirty minutes?" Her eyes grew round. "I don't know if I can stay awake for that long."

"You'll stay awake, love. Believe me." Mace almost warned her that putting her raw feet into the innocuous looking basin of water would feel like walking barefoot into the depths of hell, but refrained. Instead, he stood with a blank expression on his face and waited for her to lower her feet into the medicated mixture.

Mace fisted his hands, wishing he could take the pain away from her when she drew in a sharp breath as her feet made contact. He didn't know what it was about the woman that made him feel so connected to her, making him want to protect her from everything that could hurt her.

Still, there it was, that inexplicable need to enter her mind and take as much pain from her as he

could. He glanced at Derek who also stood with his hands fisted at his sides.

I feel it, too, Mace. I feel strange. My body burns. I feel like I'm about to spontaneously combust.

His gaze darted up to meet that of his best friend's. Mace saw what he expected. Derek's strange, amber eyes lit up with red from within. Sweat coated Derek's brow and he began to shake.

She is my mate. Derek pressed his lips together. If there is truly a god, she will be your mate as well. I'm not sure I could share her with another.

How will I know? He glanced at Angel, her drying blonde hair covered her face as she looked down at her feet. "You must keep them in the water so the medication can soak into your cuts and begin to heal you." Reaching down, Mace pushed on her knees, holding her feet below the surface.

"It hurts!"

The sound of her voice, so filled with pain, was almost his undoing. He was torn between making her do what he knew was best for her and allowing her to pull her feet from the burning mixture. Instinct kept his hands on her knees, even as she fought to pull free. "I know it hurts. How much do you think it will hurt tomorrow when infection sets in because you will not allow the antiseptic to soak in tonight?"

Sighing, the fight went out of her. "You're right. I know you're right, but it just hurts so much, it's hard to keep my feet in here."

"What if I told you we could help you with your pain?" Mace wasn't sure how true it was, but he'd heard that if a male could form a mental bond with a female without a blood exchange, that the female was his mate.

Brilliant! You're brilliant, Mace. If you can enter her thoughts, she is your mate as well. The tales are true.

Mace was relieved. The last thing he wanted was to get his hopes up, then have them dashed. *Then shall I try? If I can't help her though, you must. I can't bear to see her in so much pain.* Just that statement should have told him he was her mate. Still, he wanted to be sure. "I can try to help remove your pain, but I must have your consent first."

Angel met his gaze, obviously confused. "Other than a shot of a great painkiller or really old scotch, I have no idea how you could help me, Mace."

Kneeling down, he took her hands in his and met her gaze. "This is going to sound totally crazy. I know it is, but you must listen and you must keep your feet in the water."

"Okaaay," she said, drawing out the word. "This is kind of creepy, but I'll try not to run out of

here screaming like my hair is on fire as long as you don't tell me you plan to hurt me in some way."

"Neither of us will hurt you in any way, Angel. I swear." Taking a deep breath, he sighed, knowing she was going to think them both crazy if he couldn't enter her mind. "I plan to link my mind to yours and take your pain as my own. It will keep you from feeling it." He paused. "At least it should keep you from feeling most of it."

"Uh, yeah, right." She looked nervous now and attempted to pull her hands from his. "That's insane." Her gaze darted around the room as she obviously searched for a way to escape.

He wasn't even sure if she realized she continued to attempt to remove her feet from the basin from time to time. "It's not insane and I'll prove it. And," he added, glancing at Derek, "If I can't for some reason, Derek will. Will you consent?"

"I would if it was possible, but it isn't."

That was consent enough for him. She said if it was possible. It was possible if he was her mate and if he was not her mate, it wouldn't matter anyway because he wouldn't be able to enter her mind. Either way, he had his chance. This would prove one way or another if she belonged to him as well as Derek.

With all the blood they had exchanged healing each other throughout the years, they should have a strong enough bond for triad mates, but who knew how those things worked?

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Angel stared at Mace. *It figures. Why are all the good looking ones, creeps or crazies?* Never in her life had any of the good looking guys been just normal Joes. Taking a deep breath, she nodded. "Okay. Do whatever it is you think you can do, but I reserve the right to call you a nut job and run from you both, screaming bloody murder if you're feeding me a line of crap."

Two things could come of this. They could be beautiful but crazy men or they could be Wiccans. She rather hoped they were Wiccan even if they couldn't take her pain away. A Wiccan would never harm her. She knew that at least.

"Try to relax. It will make it easier for me."

Relax? Ha! Like that's even possible now. Mace still knelt before her, his expression vacant. She began to wonder if she should worry. Then her pain began to fade.

She would have thought he'd done it if it weren't for the fact that she'd had her feet in the burning mixture for a good five minutes. Her feet were probably just getting used to it.

There is no need to worry, my Angel. Derek and I both have entered your mind and have successfully blocked your pain. He paused. *At least I'm sure we've blocked most of it.*

Angel stared at Mace for a moment before she shot a nervous glance at Derek. "What..." She cleared her throat, feeling her face turning red. "What all can you see in there?" Good grief! Had she really thought they could do it, she never would have given her consent. *Crap and criminy!* How did she keep getting herself into these things?

"Your pain is gone?" Derek asked, an expression of concentration on his face.

Nodding, her gaze darted between them. "Yes. Thank you. I don't know how much more of that I could stand."

But what of them? Were they now feeling the pain she felt? If so, was it really fair to make them suffer her pain when it was her injuries making her ache to begin with?

"What you felt was no mere ache. Tomorrow, we shall treat your hands. But," Mace grinned at her grimace, "it won't hurt nearly as bad as your feet. We needed a strong antiseptic for those cuts. The dirt was ground deep into the lacerations. We had no choice but to use the strongest of our tisanes for that."

They never named what they used, always calling it a mixture, antiseptic and now he used the word tisane. They must be Wiccan or part of some naturalist commune or something. However, that didn't explain how they managed to get inside her head. "How did you..." She waved her hand around her head. "You know."

"We are different. Everyone in Paradise is different. I'm sure you've heard about the weird folks who live here."

She shook her head. "I have no idea what you're even talking about. I never heard of Paradise before those lunatics kidnapped me." Sighing, she added dryly, "And if *they* were from Paradise, I can see how the rumors started."

Angel plucked at the hem of the t-shirt she wore, glad that instead of the sensation of stepping on hot coals, her feet merely felt warm and tingly. Kind of like her tummy when these two hotties got close to her.

They both grinned and she closed her eyes, mortified. How could she have forgotten they were in her mind, her thoughts, privy to every private thing going on in her head? *Stupid, stupid, stupid, Reese.*

"Do you always talk to yourself like that?" Derek said with a chuckle.

Goodness, that was embarrassing. That's what she got for lusting after two guys she barely knew.

“Um... I need you two out of my head before I die of mortification.”

“Too late, honey. We’ve already heard all the damning evidence of your desire.” Derek knelt in front of her, took her chin in his hand and gently forced her to meet his gaze. “I’ll tell you a secret.” He smiled. “We want you, too.”

Think about it, Angel. Two men to love you. Two men to worship your body. Two men to see to your every need.

Mace wasn’t playing fair. He projected his fantasies into her mind, making her want them both more than was decent. Trembling hands covered her burning cheeks. Her breath came in shallow gasps as vivid pictures of what they both wanted to do filled her mind. She should feel fear, outrage even at their ideas. She didn’t want this, couldn’t want it. Heck, she barely knew them. Closing her eyes, she took a deep breath. Apparently, she barely knew herself because, God help her, she was actually considering it.

Derek reached up and brushed a stray lock of hair behind her ear. “Don’t worry, love. We won’t rush you. Your feet need to heal and that will take at least a few days, even with us helping.” He stood and looked down at her before continuing. “Plus, there are a few things you need to know about us first. Just know this...” He paused to glance at Mace before returning his gaze to her.

“We will not force you to do anything that makes you uncomfortable.” Smiling, he handed her a towel. “Now let’s take a look at those feet, shall we?”

CHAPTER FOUR

Angel cracked her eyes open slowly the next morning. Light streamed in through the open window and she glanced around, half-expecting to see both of the men there staring at her, or worse, grinning at her as they thought of all the things they wanted to do with her. Her face heated at the memory of their quite indecent proposal of the night before. What else could she have done but act as though she was considering it?

Sighing, she flipped the covers back and sat up, elbows on her knees and her head in her hands. Whom was she trying to fool? She'd wanted them. Last night, no matter how wrong she thought it, she'd wanted them both in that insane and intriguing way they had each suggested would be nice. Nice wasn't even the word they used. That was her word. The two men who took it upon themselves to keep her here and protect her from

those who wished to do her harm, plainly stated that they would rock her world.

Standing, she ignored the throbbing pain in her feet, made her way to the window and looked out. The day was like any other fall day in the mountains. The color of the trees gave a spectacular showing. The yellow, orange and red, colors reserved for fall were brilliant in the bright sunshine. Funny that she hadn't noticed the colors when she ran yesterday. Granted, it had been near dusk when she first escaped and she was running for her life, but still, she couldn't imagine not noticing them today.

She sighed and ran her fingers through her tangled hair. At least today, she was safe. What of tomorrow or the next day? She had to get out of here. She couldn't stay here and endanger the two men who took her in. She also couldn't take the chance that they would give her up if faced with the mad men. What if they decided handing her over was better than defending their own lives?

Resting her head against the cold glass, she bit her lip and sighed. She couldn't trust them to keep her safe. She had to find her way to a town. As long as she kept running south through the woods, she would head away from those who wished her harm. If she could find her way back to the river, she could follow it downstream.

Sooner or later, she had to come upon some form of civilization. Didn't she?

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Mace groaned. "She's up and about and thinking of running. We have to get back to the cabin before she leaves." She had no way of knowing they found evidence of her captors searching for her. They were thorough, if not very bright. Thanks to the rain last night, they didn't follow her scent to the cabin, but if she set foot outside, they would soon be able to track her and it wouldn't take long for her to fall back into their clutches.

He wouldn't wish that on any human. He definitely didn't want to even think of his mate coming into contact with those men again. He clenched his fists and smiled darkly. Let them try for her now. They would find not one, but two very pissed leopards waiting in the shadows to rip their throats out. Mace didn't mind the idea of sharing her with Derek. In fact, the thought turned him on. However, he drew the line at ritual sacrifice for any living thing.

Putting on a burst of speed, he used his preternatural powers to take over and rush back to the cabin. He'd just stepped onto the porch when she opened the door, dressed in his shirt, a

pair of Derek's pants tied at the waist with the legs rolled up and carrying the fireplace poker. "Where do you think you're going?" He stood before her, his arms crossed over his chest as he crossed his legs and leaned against the porch support.

"I-I..."

Her words trailed off as he stared her down. Then, obviously gathering her courage, she tugged the too large shirt down just far enough to give him a glimpse of one rosy nipple through a small hole near the pocket and raised her chin. "Whoever is after me will find me sooner or later. I would rather not put you or your friend in danger."

"Besides, how can you know that we won't decide to give you up instead of fight for you?" He scowled down at her for her uncharitable thoughts. "I can read your thoughts easily now that we've connected the first time. That is why I insisted on your consent."

"You didn't tell me that you'd be a permanent resident in my thoughts at the time," she said with a frown. "Not to mention the fact that you had to know I thought you were both a few sandwiches short of a picnic."

"That doesn't matter now." He straightened and stepped forward, crowding her back into the cabin. "All that matters now is that you stay inside and let your feet heal." He looked down, glad to

see that she at least had the presence of mind to don a pair of socks, then wrap a few towels around them before she decided to venture out. Though it still didn't soothe his stung pride that she thought they would trade her for their own safety.

He sighed, hoping she would soon come to trust both him and Derek, soon. They couldn't afford her distrust. She could run at any time and then Camulus's men would capture her.

Derek and he discussed what it was the men could want with her or any of the women they had sacrificed over the last several months and neither of them could think of a thing. Camulus was dead. His movement was also dead. What advantage was there to the slaughter of innocents?

"Trust us, Angel. We will do everything in our power to protect you, and here in Paradise, that is not an empty promise." The men in Paradise were most likely the last of a dying breed. Literally. Not only were they shape shifters, but they also prided themselves on the fact that they still had their honor they did *not* mistreat women or children. The men of Paradise, under Adam Greer's leadership, prided themselves on their return to gallantry and Mace and Derek liked it that way.

* * * *

Angel watched Mace as he entered the cabin, closed the only door and leaned against it. He had no intention of letting her go. Was she just as much a prisoner here as she'd been in that tent she escaped? Her heart raced, slamming in her chest as fear clogged her throat. They may not want to kill her, at least not right away, but there were worse things than death. Rape and sexual slavery being right at the top of a relatively short list.

She stuck her thumb in her mouth and bit down hard to keep herself from saying something she knew she shouldn't. She'd already as much as insulted them when she had her distrustful thoughts.

"Do you think your new thoughts are any nicer?" Mace asked, the corner of his mouth lifting in a cheerless grin. Moving to the counter next to the door, he leaned his hip against it and stared at her for a moment. "I know you've had a hard couple of days, but not every man is like those who took you. Derek and I have no intention of harming you. In fact, we both would protect you with our lives, whether you want to believe that or not."

"I want to," she said after she pulled the tip of her thumb from her mouth. God knew she wanted to believe in them, to trust them, but how could she? How could she stay here knowing that any minute, either of them could return with the

kidnappers in tow ready to give her up in exchange for their own lives?

Mace merely shook his head.

He'd obviously read her thoughts again. And what the heck was up with that? How could these two know what she thought? Last night she'd attributed it to being tired. When she woke this morning, she'd decided it was a dream. Now what was her explanation? People just didn't read other people's minds. They just don't do it.

"It's done with my people." Mace pushed away from the counter and stepped closer. "Sit down before you fall down. I could tell by the expression on your face that your feet are killing you even if I couldn't read it in your mind and feel it for myself."

There it was again. That reference to mind reading, mind sharing or whatever it was they chose to call it. It just wasn't normal.

"It's normal for my people. Our people are as old as time. Our race dates back to prehistory. We can see things, do things that others would deem impossible. In fact, the things we *can* do are impossible for some people, such as you. At least it is impossible for you now."

Angel had no intention of touching *that* comment. She wanted to though. She wanted to ask what he meant by saying it was impossible now. Now that she was under their control? A

shiver of fear shimmied down her spine as she thought about all the things that could happen out here in the middle of nowhere with two men in a cabin in deserted woods. She'd never wanted to run as fast nor as far in her life and for her, that was saying something.

"You're only frightening her more," Derek said as he stuck his head in the door. "I need your help over on the north ridge. The..." He glanced at Angel, then back at Mace. "The air is a bit thin up there."

"We can't leave her here alone, D. She plans to run at the first opportunity."

"How would we be any better than those she ran from yesterday if we hold her here against her will? She has to see that we will not hold her here, that she can come and go as she pleases." He turned his gaze to her. "Just so you know, the men you eluded last night have been all over the woods today. They still search for you. You may leave if that is your wish, but know that if you do, you will most certainly fall back into their hands."

Angel nodded, wondering how much of that was truth and how much was plain bull chips. After all, they could be telling her that just so she would choose to stay, so later, she couldn't accuse them of holding her here against her will.

Still, she wasn't stupid. She would stay put for today. Another day or two would only make the

men who kidnapped her desperate to find someone else. She was sure if she held out one more day, she could leave this cabin and its strange inhabitants and make her way to the nearest town.

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“She doesn’t trust us. The only way to earn her trust is to let her leave if that is her wish. The only thing we can do is do our best to protect her when and if she does. How else can she learn that we mean her no harm?” Derek said as they walked through the woods toward the north ridge.

He figured Mace wouldn’t agree with him. The young were usually a bit hotheaded. Though to Mace’s credit, he had never been one to jump to conclusions and, if he were truthful, Mace wasn’t as young as he treated him half the time. The man was forty-eight last year, still, he was over fifty years his junior and that was a lot of maturing, especially for their kind.

“We can keep our thoughts connected to hers. If she does something foolish, or if those who mean her harm find her at the cabin, we will know quickly enough to save her before she is injured. After all, she herself said they wished to sacrifice her on the sabbat. One would think she would be relatively safe until then.”

Though Derek didn't like the thought of the men getting their hands on his mate, there was really nothing he could do save keeping her locked in the cabin, which was the one thing they could not do. Angel would never learn to trust them if they kept her confined. She would no doubt look at the cabin as a prison and to them as her jailers.

"So we just wait for her to put herself in harm's way? You know she will. She is a strong willed, strong-minded female. We both have been victim to many types of ridiculous things that go on in the minds of young women." Mace paced away from him, his hands in his hip pockets as he glanced over the edge of the cliff.

"Do you really think there is a risk of someone making their way through the veil here?"

Derek met his skeptical gaze and shrugged. "Not really, but you never know. There could be some gung-ho rock climber out here tomorrow who gets lucky enough to make his way through."

"Whatever," Mace said with a sigh. "How long before she trusts us? Any ideas?"

"Not really." Derek shrugged. "I mean she will either learn to trust us or she will not. Personally, I hope she does. I can't imagine waiting another hundred years or more to meet another woman capable of being our mate."

"I can't imagine waiting that long." Mace reached out and gave Derek's back a pat. "She'll come around. She has to."

Derek continued to stare out over the mist-coated valley below them. "I certainly hope so." If she didn't, they would have to let her go. His most fervent wish was that she would soon decide she wanted them both, needed them both at least half as much as they both needed her.

Reaching down, he readjusted himself as his jeans grew tighter just thinking of her, of the way her blonde hair tumbled around her shoulders untamed by a brush. He smiled, knowing she probably would have died of embarrassment to know her hair needed a good brushing. Still, her hair mussed from sleep, only made her look sexier, wanton, as though she'd just left her lover's bed. His bed.

Turning to face the sheer rock to his left, Derek pressed the heel of his hand against his unruly erection. Gods...if the woman could leave him this needy from merely thinking of her, how would he ever withstand an all out seduction?

Derek almost chuckled to himself. He didn't know how he would survive, but he would love the opportunity to find out.

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Angel stared through the fog outside the window and wondered why leaving seemed so hard to do. She'd planned this. Heck, she'd even planned to leave yesterday, but for some inexplicable reason, she couldn't bring herself to walk through the door when the men left.

They left her to herself for at least two hours during the daylight hours. Two hours was a long time to sit and contemplate an escape. But an escape from what—to what? That was the question.

Neither of them made a move to harm her. Heck, neither of them even made a pass at her. Maybe that was the problem. Her inner hussy kept trying to get them to notice her, to make a pass at her. To touch her in some sexual way, but they didn't. She sighed. Knowing her luck, the first men she was attracted to since Jacob left her six months ago were here in this cabin alone because they were gay. She shook her head. No, that wasn't right. Not if those visions they put into her head were any indication. Unless that strange scene was all a weird dream.

Just a week ago, she was certain that six months without Jacob was an eternity. Now, after meeting the two men she shared this cabin with, six months didn't seem so long. It was funny how perspectives changed with time.

Sunlight shone through the morning fog, the growing heat slowly burning it away. The leaves on the trees sparkled as though dipped in diamonds as the fog and dew left droplets of water behind, coating the trees, brush and grass.

It was amazing how many animals lived around this cabin. The rabbits, squirrels and chipmunks scurried here and there, gathering what little food there was, to store for the winter.

Sighing, she opened the door. She had to leave. She had to find this Paradise they spoke so highly of. If she made her way to town, perhaps she could find a place to stay or talk to someone who knew Derek and Mace. Perhaps they could set her mind at ease.

Taking a deep breath, she inhaled the cool mountain air, loving the scent of pine and cedar that permeated everything around the cabin. She moved toward the outhouse. The last thing she needed was to have to go on the trail on the outskirts of town. If she could believe the two men who helped her, and she did, Paradise was only about five miles down the mountainside, secured in a secluded valley.

One last look. Angel turned to glance back at the cabin. It was a haven of sorts. It kept her safe and warm over the last two days and three nights. However, she knew she couldn't stay. Her

presence only brought danger to the two men who had been so kind to her.

Besides, even without the danger, she knew she couldn't stay. Every day she was around them, she wanted them more. The need she felt frightened her. It was a slow, burning ache deep inside that she couldn't assuage.

Her only option was to leave and hope distance from them would take the edge off her growing desire. So far, nothing here lessened the feelings. She had even gone so far as to take a cold shower in the cabin's tiny bathroom, with the hope that the unfamiliar craving she felt for both of the men would ease. It did not. If anything, it only made it worse.

The shower pelted her warm skin, causing her nipples to pebble, it rushed down her body in a cold cascade, touching her intimately in areas reserved for a lover.

Angel couldn't help herself. She reached down, slid her fingers between her legs and brought herself over the edge, climaxing beneath the cold spray. No, the shower didn't work. If anything, it only served to make things worse.

Giving one last look toward the rather large log cabin, Angel whispered her goodbyes and her regrets to Derek and Mace. She didn't really want to go, but she knew she couldn't stay. Still torn, she moved to the outskirts of the clearing, trying

to remember which way to go, where the two men told her they would find Paradise.

The air was still thick with moisture beneath the canopy of trees. Warmth from the sun burned the fog away, leaving droplets of water on the leaves and grass. Angel drew in a deep breath, loving the scent of the damp earth and loam, the ancient composted leaves.

Turning to look back at the cabin, she was shocked to see that she almost couldn't find it. If she hadn't known it was there, she doubted she would have seen it. The architecture was perfect. The style and landscaping so precise, the small abode fit beautifully on the edge of the small clearing. Vines covered the outer walls and strategically placed hedges and shrubs hid it from view.

Whoever designed the cabin did so with the love of nature in mind. The architect obviously wanted as little human impact on the small grove as possible and she could only admire the unknown artist for that.

Sighing, Angel finally managed to put one foot in front of the other and made her way deeper into the woods, heading south down the nearest trail. She hoped it didn't take long to get to town. Walking alone gave her the creeps and running for any length of time was out of the question with rags tied around her still healing feet.

After about an hour, Angel realized she wasn't alone. She also realized whoever it was that followed her, was not one of her two gentle men. Her stalker reeked of body odor and the scent she'd come to associate with death when the others held her captive.

Taking a deep breath, she bravely pushed on, hoping to stumble upon the small town before the person trailing her decided to make his move. She could only hope to elude him long enough for that.

CHAPTER FIVE

“She’s running,” Mace said turning to Derek. He always deferred to the older man. Well...almost always. Derek had lived a little over a century and he’d seen so much in his lifetime, gained experience in things Mace could only dream of. Still, there were times when action was needed, not the stagnating feel of patience.

Mace wanted to go after her. Chase her down, drag her back to the cabin and show her she belonged with them, to them. But Derek didn’t think it wise. In truth, Mace knew it probably wasn’t either. After all, how would they be better than those who held her captive if they resorted to such tactics. Still, the urge was there, like it or not.

He jammed his hands in his pockets and paced while waiting for the other man to finish his spell. The veil was especially thin here today. It was almost as though someone hit it with a barrage of negativity just to keep them busy. Pausing, he

searched the surrounding forest with narrowed eyes. *Do you get the feeling we're being watched, D?*

Derek stopped chanting for a second, then resumed quickly. Most wouldn't have noticed that small pause, but Mace knew how his friend worked and the cadence of his voice never wavered while spelling. He supposed that ability was another thing that came with experience.

Now that you mention it. Derek moved to better see the forest behind him while Mace watched the forest directly behind his partner. *It does seem as though someone wants to keep us busy.*

Frowning, Derek added the last sentence of his spell, closed the circle and began the short trek back toward the cabin.

"At least she's running toward town." Mace matched Derek's pace. *Can you reach someone in town and ask them to start heading up? If they're watching, it won't take them long to recapture her.*

I already have. The sheriff and his mates are coming along with Fish Troutman and his mates. We could use an all-shifter's help.

The sound of a high-pitched screeching in the distance brought them up short. *How much do you want to bet that that is no hunting raptor. I'd bet my life it's Fish searching with the incredible eyesight of the hawk.* Mace may not be as old as Derek was, but he still had his uses. Something about that scream told him it was Fish.

Derek kept moving when they reached the cabin. Their Angel was gone. There was no use wasting time looking for her there.

The sound of flapping wings had them looking up as a hawk landed on a branch to their right. The rather large bird of prey leapt from the branch and changed to Fish Troutman who landed on his feet directly in front of them.

"She's a bit southwest of here and moving slowly." He cocked his head to the right, resembling the bird of prey he'd been when he arrived. "She appears injured. She's limping." He frowned at them both. "Why didn't you keep her under guard and keep her safe with you?"

Derek sighed, shook his head and rubbed the back of his neck as he gazed toward the ground. "Someone," he said, flicking his gaze to Mace, "abducted her a few days ago. She escaped and literally ran into Mace the other night. She didn't trust us and we wanted her to learn to believe we meant her no harm."

Mace stepped forward, his hands fisted at his sides. He wanted nothing better than to take this smartass to task for his audacity. Who the hell did he think he was? Just because he'd lived thirty-five years or so and trained in Special Forces didn't give him the right to assume they were infants.

“So that’s how it is, huh? You wouldn’t give a rat’s ass about trust if she didn’t mean something to you.” Fish grinned. “Another pair bites the dust, eh?” He slapped Derek on the back, then turned to Mace and held his hands out to his sides. “Believe me, you don’t want a piece of this. Others older and wiser than you have tried and lost. Besides, you’re going to need all of your energy for the taming of your woman.”

Backing down, Mace flexed his fingers. Hell, he supposed the other man didn’t mean anything by his comments. He’d been so on edge the last few days with Angel so close and the possibility of relief for his raging hormones still so far away, it was a wonder he wasn’t a raving lunatic already.

“I’ll go find her again and keep an eye on her until you reach her.” Fish gave them each a knowing look. “It’s difficult, especially if they don’t trust you or feel they’re freaks for wanting you both. Don’t let her give you excuses. From what I gathered from everyone who has found their mates lately, the best thing you can do is assault her senses. Keep her off balance and wanting you as much as you want her.”

Fish looked up at the sky, which was now a clear blue with the occasional cloud overhead. “It’s like a battle. Just keep ramming her defenses until her walls crumble and she surrenders. She will, given time.” Then he looked toward them

both and winked. "Being her heroes can't hurt either." That said, he jumped into the air, immediately changed into the hawk and headed back the way he came.

"That guy pisses me off sometimes." Mace shook his head. "He thinks he knows everything."

"He doesn't think he knows everything. If you would learn to see past your temper you would see a man who is very insecure sometimes." Derek shook his head. "You're at least fifteen years his senior. Don't go jumping to the same conclusions you think he has."

Hell, Mace supposed Derek was right, but it didn't make Fish's know-it-all attitude any easier to swallow.

"Perhaps not." Derek shrugged. "But it hardly matters now. Our mate is in danger."

And that was another reason Mace didn't like Fish. He made him forget his priorities. Usually, the only thing he could think of while in the other man's presence was how much he'd love to pound his ass into the ground.

"You're right. And when you're right, you're right." It was just nerve wracking that Derek was *always* right. "Let's get moving."

Mace looked on as Derek shifted into his other self, watching with appreciation as his body contorted and shifted shape into that of a leopard. He only wished he made it look so easy.

Stop feeling sorry for yourself. I told you, it comes with age.

Derek was right. It was time he stopped envying the other man's ability to shift his shape so seamlessly. He could probably get over it if that damned Troutman didn't make it look so easy, too.

He's an all-shifter. Everything comes easy to them. Deal with it.

Sighing, Mace closed his eyes and concentrated on making his clothing disappear while he shifted shape. Unlike Derek, who seamlessly shifted from one form to the other, Mace shifted slowly, his bones growing shorter as his muscles grew larger. The bones in his face shifted, widened as he grew a snout. His teeth ached as new, bigger teeth pushed through his gums into a mouth made larger to accommodate their size. Lastly, his skin itched as the short, satin soft coat covered his bare skin with dark spotted fur.

You should be proud. Not many of us turn into a black leopard. They're rare.

If Mace could have raised his brow, he would have. *Seriously, did you expect me to be any other color? Black is beautiful.*

Yeah, yeah... Let's get going. Our mate is in danger.

The reminder only served to make Mace feel guilty. Here he was worried over his ability to

shift and being jealous of his triad mate when their mate could be fighting for her life.

We would know, Derek said in way of comforting him as he headed off in the same direction Fish went. *Fish would have called us.*

Even though Derek was correct, it didn't make him feel any better. He was above the kind of feelings he kept having. What the hell was wrong with him?

You've met your mate. That's what is wrong with you. Nothing is the same. Nothing will ever be the same again. Your hormones are going crazy and your mind is in turmoil over wanting and needing her coupled with the fact that she is in danger. Derek looked at him and curled his lip. *Do you think I feel any differently?*

* * * *

Angel moved cautiously through the forest. Moving off the well-travelled trail, she kept to the thick brush, trying to stay out of sight. Someone or something followed her. Whatever it was, gave her the creeps. Whether it was man or animal, it meant to do her harm. She could feel it. Angel hated that she knew things sometimes. Like now.

She would give every cent in her bank account to be able to walk through these woods oblivious to the danger stalking her. Instead, she felt it, right

down to her bones. Each step she took was an effort. Should she go right, left or straight? Maybe she should run screaming back to the cabin. She knew the danger was out there waiting, she just didn't know in which direction it lingered.

One thing was for sure. Who or whatever it was had patience. It stayed out of her sight quietly passing the time as she sat huddled in the brush, trying to decide what to do.

The screech of a hawk startled her and she jumped when a squirrel dove for cover, nearly running over her foot in its rush to reach safety. Angel stayed still, her hand clamped over her mouth. She didn't blame the poor little thing. She knew just how he felt. Hunted.

She should have stayed in the cabin. Angel knew that now. Still, she didn't think it was an option. Even knowing in her heart that she could trust the two men wasn't enough. Her life depended on getting to an area with people. Lots of people. Instead of finding that, she was more alone than ever and, again, running for her life. Only this time she couldn't run. The rags on her feet prevented it and she hesitated to expose the cuts crisscrossing the soles to the dirt on the forest floor again. Goodness! She'd never been so indecisive, so afraid to make a decision in her life. What the heck was wrong with her?

You are frightened. It is interfering with your ability to make informed choices. The logical part of your brain realizes this. It is nothing to be ashamed of.

That was Derek's voice in her head. It soothed her. Helped her. It didn't matter that hearing him meant she'd finally gone off the deep end. Either she heard him because her mind was attempting to cope. Or she heard him because he really could enter her thoughts the way they said. Either way, she was nuts.

Angel's vision grew blurry as tears filled her eyes. Death or an asylum. What a choice. She should have listened to Jacob. He told her that she would run herself to death. He'd love to know that her love of marathons really had been the death of her. That he would never know was one comfort at least.

The jerk was too full of himself already. He would love to know someone kidnapped her on a training run and she died cowering in the bushes while trying to escape. At least she'd learned about that horrible part of his nature before she married him. He probably would have been a wife beater, too.

Shaking her head to get herself back on track, Angel concentrated on what she needed to do next. She couldn't stay here in the brush, cowering like a mouse. A mouse she may be, but she

refused to go out without a fight. Even mice bit the cats that tormented them.

She looked around her, trying to see if there was something, anything she could use to harass those who insisted on recapturing her. She smiled darkly as she thought of a way to give them a hard time and escape back to the cabin at the same time. There was nothing but a few rocks. She frowned. Perhaps she could use those...

* * * *

Mace heard Fish laugh through the common telepathic link they all shared while in their animal form.

If I didn't already have a mate, I would fall in love with yours.

Snarling his displeasure at that comment, Mace's beast picked up the pace behind Derek as they made their way down the mountain toward Paradise.

Stay away from my mate, dammit, Derek said. His cat wasn't pleased either if the fact that he broke out into a full run as they followed Angel's scent was any indication.

Lighten up, you two. I already have a mate if you haven't forgotten. She's all I could ever want. Beautiful, sexy, sassy... He laughed again. *Quite a bit like your mate.*

Why do you say that? The last thing Mace wanted was for another male to try to claim his mate. Sharing her with Derek was one thing. They were triad mates and friends. Anyone else was a dead man as far as he was concerned.

I feel the same way, old friend, Derek said through their link. *She is ours. No one else's.*

Why do you have such an affinity for our mate? Mace couldn't keep himself from showing his displeasure in his speech.

She's brilliant. She's picking up rocks, rubbing them on her body, I assume to carry her scent, then throwing them in every direction while she makes her way back toward you. It looks like she's decided to go back to your cabin. There may be a few seeds of trust taking root.

If only he were right. Gaining her trust would go a long way toward furthering a relationship with her. It was bad enough that they would have to convince her to go against society's conventions and mate with them both. Having the trust issue taken care of would make the other things that much easier.

The sound of Angel's terrified scream drove them both to action. She was close. Only about twenty feet away. They both leapt into a clearing just as she ran from the underbrush, looking behind her.

A man burst from the bushes, his face contorted with rage. He was so intent on chasing Angel, he

didn't even notice the two large cats staring at him as though he was a side of beef. As soon as he noticed, he immediately shifted shape into that of a large boar.

Ha! Fish said from his perch in the trees above them. I bet his friends always wondered why this jerk was always such a bore at parties.

Mace rolled his eyes, then looked to Angel. She stood still, her mouth hanging open as though she wanted to scream, but nothing would come out. Standing with her body stiff, her hands fisted at her sides, she looked ready to topple over at any second.

She saw him shift, Troutman stated the obvious.

What the hell were they going to do now? She was bound to think she was crazy and they had to let her know *they* were the ones rescuing her. It would build trust between them. But what good was trust if she couldn't stand the thought of them being, at least, part animal?

You take care of our friend, D, and I'll see to our mate. I'm going to shift in front of her so she will know it is we who have aided her.

Derek snarled and dove toward the man who terrorized their mate.

Mace took that as an answer and headed toward Angel, moving slowly so as not to frighten her more.

CHAPTER SIX

Angel stood in the clearing, blinking her eyes. *I know I didn't just see that man turn into a pig. I know I told Jacob that all men are pigs, but this is ridiculous.* The last thought ended with a hysterical giggle.

When two leopards made their way into her field of vision, Angel was sure she'd lost it. Then when one attacked the boar, leaving the other slowly approaching her, she closed her eyes and prayed that it would kill her quickly. If she had to die, being a wild thing's dinner was better than needlessly dying at another's hand. Not much better, but better all the same.

You are not going to die.

Her eyes popped open and her gaze darted around the clearing. That was Mace's voice and if he knew she wasn't going to die, then he must be here. If not, he was at least close. *You have to help me. I've either gone insane or there is some sort of*

crazy..." She let her words trail off, unsure how to describe what she'd seen.

Shape shifter trying to harm you?

Forgetting about the large black cat staring at her with those unblinking eyes, for just a moment, Angel spun around, certain Mace was here with her...somewhere. "Mace! Where are you? I know you're here. You have to help me."

Stop panicking, Angel. Turn to your right toward the leopard and look down at him.

"How do you know it's a *him*?" She couldn't help a last glance around. He was here somewhere if he could see her. When she couldn't see him, she did as told and looked down at the large leopard that sat before her.

Because I am that cat, Angel.

When the cat began to shift shape into that of the man she'd become so attracted to over the last few days, Angel felt her mind go fuzzy as a dark haze ringed the outer edges of her vision.

Don't you faint on me, Mace barked the command. "I won't have you insisting this was all just a dream when you wake up." He grabbed her by the shoulders and shook lightly. "Do you hear me? Don't you dare close those beautiful eyes. Deep breaths. Take deep breaths." He inhaled slowly. "In for three. Out for three." Mace stood, his hands on her shoulders, talking her through her need to faint.

At least she didn't pass out like the wuss she so obviously was. Here she'd thought she was tough. Angel shook her head. She wasn't tough. At least not as tough as she'd hoped.

She shook her head again, thinking of her pagan friends and how she owed them all an apology. Man, that was going to be a tough biscuit to swallow. All this time they'd told her there was more here on this Earth than she knew, that there were some things that just defied explanation.

Looking at a fully dressed Mace not two minutes after he'd shifted forms from a leopard to man, she wondered exactly how many of those things were true and how many were the fantasies she'd originally thought?

"Magick is real. The pagans or Wiccans will tell you that easily enough." Mace drew her under his shoulder and led her to the outer edges of the clearing, out of the way of the two circling beasts.

"Why don't they just attack each other and get it over with?" Angel didn't want to think about the impossibility of the things she'd seen today. Instead, she'd rather think about Derek and his ability to take down that boar without getting hurt, because there was no doubt in her mind that the other leopard was Derek.

"Because," Mace answered as he nodded toward the boar, "our smelly little friend there doesn't want to attack because he knows the

leopard can take him and Derek won't attack first because he doesn't want you thinking he likes conflict."

"Then take me out of here so they can do whatever it is they're going to do. If they're just going to back off each other, tell them to do it. If not, tell Derek he soon won't have an audience." She paused, her hand on Mace's arm. "To tell you the truth. I think he probably deserves exactly what he was going to give me, but then, I guess I'm biased."

Turning her back on the two, she leaned heavily against Mace, unsure how much longer she would be able to remain standing after everything that happened today. "Just take me back to the cabin, will you?" She gave him a smile that she knew must look as tired as she felt. "I just want to go to bed."

* * * *

Derek was never so glad to see her leave. In fact, he usually felt bereft after she left. The absence of her presence seemed to hurt him somehow. Not this time though. This time he was glad she'd gone from his sight. Taking one last deep breath, he inhaled her scent into his lungs. Mate. The word was a miracle to him. He'd never dreamed

he would find her, never dreamed he would be so lucky.

The sound of small feet tramping through the brush brought him back to his purpose. His need to bring her assailant to justice was uppermost in his mind. Snarling, he leapt to follow the odiferous boar through the woods. Keeping to his trail wasn't a problem. The man-beast needed to bathe. The odor attacked his olfactory glands with a vengeance. If the asshole could fight as strongly as he smelled, Derek was certain the boar would kill him. Lucky for him, stinking like a ton of rotten meat didn't do much for you in battle.

He'd just caught up to the malodorous pig and leapt onto his back, claws extended, fully ready and able to use his unique type of four-wheel drive on the boar's underbelly when he heard the unmistakable sound of someone clearing their throat.

"I know you want blood, Derek, but we have to take him back for questioning and an interrogation goes much better for us when the person in question is still alive."

Derek held the boar in place until Merrick Hunter, Sheriff of Paradise, wrapped a collar around the boar's neck.

"Man or animal?" The sheriff waited for an answer, a brow raised in question. "It's your choice. Once I put the cuffs on you, if you shift to a

man, it will likely cut your hand off, or will at least make you think it did.”

“My goodness,” one of the newcomers, Merrick and Matt’s mate, Gemma, said as she stepped into view. “He stinks!” She glared at him. “Haven’t you heard of bathing? Maybe if you guys washed more often, you wouldn’t have such a hard time finding dates *and* you wouldn’t have to force women to do what you want.”

The woman standing next to her agreed. She could only be Fish’s new mate, Samantha. She had a tissue in her hand and held it over her nose and mouth. “Good God, he smells.” She looked at Fish. “Do you mind taking me home, Aiden?” she asked, looking a little pale.

The color drained from her caramel complexion and Mace was sure she was about to vomit.

She rested her hand over her slightly rounded belly. “I think I might be sick.”

Troutman tucked her under his shoulder and stepped away from them all. “How do you want to travel, love?” He smiled as though he already knew her answer.

“The Pegasus if you don’t mind. You know how I love that.”

Derek grinned, the action no doubt looking like a snarl on the cat’s face. Shifting back to his fully clothed human form, he turned to Merrick Hunter and his triad mate, Mattius Stewart. “I am in your

debt." He glanced toward the man who apparently decided that being a man was preferable to a pig and added, "Though I wished to kill him, I had no desire to return to my mate with his blood on my hands. Now I can truthfully tell her he cannot return, but also that I did not kill him." He gave them a slight bow. "Now if you will excuse me, I must attend to my mate."

"Go with our blessing and good luck," Matt said before he turned his attention back to their intruder.

"If she needs to talk, you can bring her to me," Gemma offered, her smile genuine. "I'm sure Samantha would say the same if Aiden hadn't taken her out of here so quickly."

"I'm sure she would have." Derek smiled and glanced at Samantha's other mate, Quinn Sadler. "With luck we won't have to bother you." He looked back over his shoulder, wanting to go, yet knowing he *was* in their debt.

"Go. Be with your mate. I can smell the *el calor* riding you. If you ignore the mating heat too long, you could harm your mate. Go to her and tell her what you are and what you need. If she is your mate, she is strong enough to handle what you have to say. I believe Mother Nature assures that those destined to be our mates, are mentally able to cope with it."

"I hope you're right." Derek knew he only had one or two more days before the heat held him in its thrall, then...there would be hell to pay.

* * * *

Angel waited until they reached the cabin before she started to ask questions. And she had a lot of them. "What—" She stopped to clear her throat. "What...was that man?"

"Don't you mean to ask, what we all are?" Mace asked her with a crooked grin.

She wanted to know. She really did. But she wasn't sure she would like the answer or how she would handle it, for that matter and wanted to work her way to it slowly. Nodding, she said, "In for a penny, in for a pound, I suppose." Then she sighed. "Okay... What are you?"

"We are shape shifters. Our people have been around since the beginning of time. We're not sure if we evolved to this from the human gene pool or if humans evolved from us." He shrugged. "We are related in some ways. Close enough that we can breed with humans. We can even turn a human into one of us."

Thinking of the putrid smelling pig, Angel shuddered. If she'd turn into something like that, she was sure turning her would be no favor. What

woman would want to become a shape shifting pig?

Still, she took a deep breath in an attempt to dispel the heat growing in her belly and deep in her womb. If she felt the same way toward stinky that she felt toward Derek and Mace, being the mate to a pig might not be all bad. Then she shook her head. From where she was standing, pigs just weren't sexy.

Mace pulled three packets out of the MRE box and started their version of dinner.

Angel just shook her head. If that was their idea of food, they really needed a woman to cook for them. That stuff was good in a pinch. It was probably delicious when there was nothing else to eat like while stranded on a desert island, but it just plain sucked here.

"That's all you two have to eat?" Angel made a face. She was hungry, but she wasn't sure if she could stand the idea of eating another one of those nasty things.

"Yep." Mace didn't stop what he was doing.

Angel could tell he expected her to just suck it up and eat the darned thing. It wouldn't be so bad, but she'd eaten food on the trail that tasted better than that crap. "Do you think it would be safe for me to walk down to the river for a swim?"

He paused in the act of opening a package. "You'll be fine as long as you don't go more than one-hundred feet in either direction."

Not sure she wanted to know how he knew that, Angel just nodded, then turned, grabbed a towel and left the cabin. She half-expected him to follow her, but she didn't hear the door open or close behind her.

Hurrying to the river, she looked for cattails. She knew they were edible and she could make a flat bread out of the boiled and mashed roots as long as she had a pan to boil them. They also had a similar consistency to overcooked potatoes. Heck, she'd eat that before an MRE any day.

Keeping an eye out for snakes, she approached the cattails near the northernmost limit of her protection and dug down beneath the sand at the base of the plants. If it was earlier in the year, they could even eat the tender new shoots. They had a similar taste to cucumbers, but she had spotted other plants she knew proved useful for making salads.

After gathering a good amount of the rope-like roots, she rinsed them in the river water and laid them on the towel she brought with her. On the way back to the cabin, she gathered plantain and dandelion leaves. Both were better in the spring, but they weren't bad when cooked later in the year. Coupled with the hot sauce she discovered

was in every MRE, she was certain she could make an appetizing dish. At least it would be better than the boxed stuff the guys kept trying to cram down her throat. She'd take a few minutes to tickle some trout if she didn't think they'd come looking for her and laugh her out of the water.

Jacob may have been a jerk, but he was a survivalist jerk and he'd taught her quite a bit about living off the trail. Maybe one day she would thank him for that...maybe.

The towel was full of edible plants by the time she made it back to the cabin. She'd even lucked out and found some mushrooms that she knew were edible and not the kind that would make them ill.

Carrying her booty like it was priceless gems, she strode into the cabin, laid the towel on the counter and turned to find both Mace and Derek watching her. She tried to ignore them, to not think about what they were, what they could do, but she wasn't sure she would succeed. She wanted them with an urgency she didn't think she could deny, but wasn't sure she could love someone who was half beast.

The thought brought her to Jacob and she grimaced. Was he any better? Was a full human man any less of an animal? At least animals only killed for food. Men killed for sport.

It was time she really thought about the things they could do, but Angel knew she wouldn't. She would put her head in the sand like some ostrich and not think about it until something forced her to.

Putting the thoughts to the back of her mind where she could try to get used to them, Angel turned to the men, unable to keep herself from looking at them. Goodness, they were hot. It was all she could do to keep her hands to herself, even knowing what they were.

Turning her attention back to the greens she carried in, Angel was determined to ignore both her feelings of fear and her attraction. At least for a little while.

* * * *

Mace watched her set the towel filled with weeds on the counter. "What in God's name is that?" He wasn't sure, but he was damned afraid she meant for them to eat that shit. He'd had enough of eating tree bark and toadstools during survival training while they were still *Tudra*.

Angel's eyes narrowed and looked ready to spit fire. Thinning her lips, she put her hands on her hips and answered, "Dinner. At least for me it is." She waved her hand toward the stack of boxes in the corner that their Special Forces friends

managed to stock in every cabin along the outer fringes of town. "I feel the same way about eating that crap as you obviously do to eating this." Turning, she knelt down to look in a lower cabinet and stood with a few pans in her hands. "Why don't we agree to disagree and leave it? You eat that crap and I'll eat the fresh vegetables I gathered. Okay?"

What could either of them say to that? They didn't like eating what they did either, but neither of them wanted to forage for food and they hadn't had the time to buy provisions. They weren't supposed to be here. The other pair couldn't make it after one of them fell off his roof and broke his leg in three places along with cracking a few ribs. He would heal quickly, but old Doc Parker refused to hear of him traipsing up and down the mountainside.

Hell, Mace, I'd eat worms dipped in dirt and fried in garlic if she cooked it. Are you crazy? Derek's caustic comments interrupted his thoughts.

Well, Hell. Angel stared at him, blue fire spitting from her narrowed gaze. It was obvious that she felt insulted. It was never his intention to make her feel anything but appreciated. *It just goes to show that no man should go so long without the company of a woman,* he said to Derek. *Apparently, I don't know how to act.*

Derek chuckled. "If looks could kill, you'd be a walking corpse, old friend." He shook his head. "That's what you get for subjecting me to all of those stupid zombie movies you love so much."

"Oh, shut up." He glared at Derek, silently daring him to mouth off again. Hell, he liked good food as well as the next guy. He just wasn't sure he wanted to eat weeds. Pointing to the white, rope-like knot of roots piled on the towel next to the sink he asked, "What's that?" He mentally cringed at the thought of choking the shit down, but choke it down he would, even if it tasted like ass. Angel's face lit up with a bright smile at his feigned interest and he felt several kinds of a bastard.

"It's cattail roots."

Ugh. Shit. I remember those. Your brother used to love trying to shove those damned things down my throat on training runs.

Yeah, but Darrin didn't know how to cook. Derek flicked a glance toward Angel, then shrugged. I'm thinking she does.

Hell, I hope so. He fought the urge to gag at the memory of Darrin's culinary experiments.

Mace watched a frown flicker over her face, the frown marring the beautifully smooth line of her forehead. Gods, she was beautiful. Even with little pieces of dirt and leaves sticking out from her hair

and a smudge of dirt on her face. If anything, the smudge made her look adorable.

“You don’t like cattail roots.”

“To tell you the truth...no.” He shrugged and waved in Derek’s direction. “His brother used to try to cram them down my throat on a regular basis because he knew I didn’t like them.”

“How did he cook them?” She turned and began to wash the roots, scrubbing them vigorously before cutting them and tossing them into a pan of water.

“He fried or roasted them. Fried was okay, but...” He made a face. “I didn’t much care for eating them almost every day.” If they’d really been starving, perhaps he wouldn’t have felt that way, but they hadn’t been hurting for food. Darrin was just an asshole. No wonder, the dick sided with Camulus’s council. It was a shame he was dead. Mace would like a reason to kill him again.

Angel wrinkled her nose. “I’ve had them like that and you’re right, they’re okay, but not great. She set the pan on the stove, picked up a strike-anywhere from the box on the counter next to the stove and struck it against the rough wood wall to light the stove. “You can also boil and mash them with butter. The consistency isn’t the same, but they have a similar flavor to mashed potatoes. At least they do the way I make them.” She glanced

around the cabin and frowned. "Please don't tell me you don't have butter."

Derek grinned and moved forward. "That's about all we have. The bread and few cans of stew we had in our backpacks were gone the first day." He moved over to the small refrigerator and pulled two pounds of butter from the cool confines.

Angel shook her head. "You guys amaze me. You're here, living off nasty military rations." She glanced at the nearest box. "Expired military rations at that, and you have two pounds of butter in the refrigerator?"

"We don't know why it was here. The guys we replaced brought it here with them sometime last week. We have no idea why they needed so much butter. Whatever the reason, it's here and we can use it." Mace didn't really care one way or the other. The last thing on his mind was filling his stomach. He would rather think about other things, like sinking his cock into the moist flesh between their mate's legs.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Angel met Mace's dark, feral gaze with no little amount of trepidation. The look he gave her was unsettling, but it wasn't nearly as disquieting as Derek's penetrating amber gaze. The look he gave her reminded her of the predator he was in his other form. It was almost as though he had her in his sights and didn't plan to let her get away. The feeling was both frightening and exciting. Exhilarating may be a better word.

Her heart began to pound so hard she feared it would leave her chest. She was sure they could hear it. It was so loud. Ignoring what that look did to her wasn't just difficult, it was nigh impossible. She wanted nothing more than to act as though nothing was wrong. That not one thing between them was different. But she was forever changed.

How could she pretend she didn't want them? To pretend as though her body was *not* betraying her arousal as liquid heat slid silkily from her core to soak her panties, making her slick with need. If

they bothered to lean close, they would smell it. She could smell it. Or maybe it was her imagination.

What could she do? She had to do something before she fell apart in some weird hysterical mess. Instead of doing nothing, standing there, in front of the stove, twisting her hands together and lusting after these two men, she decided to do something. Anything was better than giving herself away. How would she ever live with herself if she made her arousal known and they rejected her? What if they thought the same thing Jacob thought? That she wasn't even adequate in bed. Could she live with another rejection like that?

Angel wasn't sure she was strong enough to handle their dismissal, no matter how gently they did it. Not knowing one way or the other was better than a rejection any day. Besides, how would she ever choose between them? They were both hot, with a capital H.

Finally picking a course of action, she decided that searching the cabinets was a good idea. She hoped to find some vinegar that she could turn into a dressing of sorts. She'd never made any with butter before, but butter and vinegar dressing over her dandelion greens and plantain would be better than nothing.

Glancing back at her pile of greens, she decided to steam them instead. Steamed greens would taste much better with butter instead of some strange vinegar mixture she tried to use as a salad dressing. Then there was all those mini-bottles of hot sauce that came in every MRE package. They could make use of that as well.

She'd just finished washing the greens and set them on a burner when Derek reached around her waist and turned the burner off.

His breath brushed her neck as he leaned closer and inhaled. "You always smell so good. Even using our soap and our deodorant, you always seem to smell sweet." He lightly brushed her shoulder with his lips.

Angel's knees almost buckled at the contact. She grabbed the counter for support before she melted into a puddle on the floor where she stood. What in the heck was happening to her and why did she seem so powerless to stop it?

Mace moved closer and pressed his lips to her other shoulder, nibbling lightly. "Did you know that we can smell your arousal? The sweet cream that slides from your slick channel smells as sweet as you do and intoxicates us. You cannot hide it."

Derek growled against her neck and she shivered at the sensation of his warm breath brushing the sensitive skin there. It sounded so strange, so primal she could almost believe they

were something...more than they seemed. She shook her head to clear it. They were so close. Too close. Their proximity made it hard to think, to breathe. Even the air seemed thick. Too thick to draw into her lungs as she attempted to gather her failing wits.

“You cannot deny wanting us. It is there in the way you move, the way your heart pounds when we draw near. It is in your very breath.”

Goodness, Derek could talk. If she wasn't careful, he would talk her straight into one of those beds. Suddenly, a vision of the two twin beds pushed together into a king-sized bed, filled her mind and she almost groaned. She couldn't do this. She couldn't be with two men at the same time. She was too staid, too boring. Even Jacob had known that.

What had he called her? Vanilla. That was it. He'd said she would always be vanilla and why should he settle for someone so plain, so boring as she, especially when she wouldn't put him above all else? If he thought saying that would make her change her mind, he'd been mistaken. His cruel words merely fueled her desire to train for the marathon. To prove that she wasn't just vanilla. A marathon winner couldn't possibly be something so plain. Could she?

Now she knew what he meant. She finally figured it out. She wasn't exciting enough in bed

for him. He'd callously taken her virginity, not bothering to see to her needs, then called her a prude. Angel didn't like to think of herself as a prude. Maybe she was just inexperienced. The thought gave her pause. What if she *did* sleep with these two men? She could hardly get farther from vanilla than that. Having a ménage a trois was definitely not vanilla. It was at least strawberry, wasn't it?

When they each cupped one of her breasts and feathered their thumbs over her erect nipples, she was lost. Nothing could convince her she was something plain ever again. It took courage to do what she'd done over the last few days. She'd had the courage to fight her way free of her captors and she had the courage to stay here with these men for the last few days. Now, she would have the courage to grab onto this opportunity and hold on tight.

Didn't every one of her friends at work fantasize over this very thing? What would it be like to have two men dedicated to seeing to her pleasure? Perhaps now she would find out.

The two hands at her breasts and the two mouths nibbling at her neck were enough to make her moan. The sound came from somewhere deep within her. Being so daring felt strange, yet wonderful. Never in her life had she had the courage to step forward and take what she wanted

like this. This time, however, she intended to do just that.

* * * *

Derek wrapped his arms tighter around his mate. He wasn't sure which of their holds was more unyielding, his or Mace's. It seemed neither of them wanted her to get away from them. Hell, he'd done naught else but think of the way her silken sheathe would caress his cock since he'd first laid eyes on her. How could he do anything other than hold her as though she were the most precious thing on this Earth? To them, she was.

She was a miracle, plain and simple. Not once in his long, lonely years had he ever expected to find her. He'd given up hope to find a mate. In fact, he'd just spoken to the clan leader about handing off his property when he committed the *transia*.

After years of celibacy, years of searching for a mate, the ritual was the last vestige of hope for a warrior's soul. He would commit suicide with witnesses and, if he could not complete the task, a group of chosen men, friends usually, would do so for him before he brought disgrace to his name, his memory.

Before, he'd wanted to do it alone, he knew he didn't lack the courage to do so. Then the war

came and the clan needed him. After that, the Sabbat Slayer marked women for death and he could do nothing but protect all he could.

It was too late before he discovered he may no longer have the will to carry out his own demise. He no longer trusted himself to go through with it. Mace and a handful of others were scheduled to help him on his way the second week of November. To say that finding his mate now was fortuitous, was an understatement.

That was why he cherished the woman in his arms. That was why he could scarcely believe she was his mate. To go so long with no woman to love, with no one to cherish as he already did this woman, was enough to drive a man insane. Thirty years he'd been celibate. Thirty long, lonely years he'd waited since the *el calor* demanded he mate only with his destined female.

It was a long time to do without sex. He wondered if all of his male parts would work the way they should or if he would disgrace himself and his name before he brought his woman to her deserved climax.

Still, whatever happened didn't matter. This was his chance. He glanced over at Mace who was preoccupied with loving on their mate. This was their chance, their woman and he'd be damned if he would let her go. Mind fuck be damned. No one was touching his mate. He would die before

he let anyone take her memories of him whether she chose to stay or not.

Heat burned deep in his belly. It was the *el calor* reminding him she was his mate and he need take her before the fire drove him to madness. Her fresh scent, the silky feel of her skin beneath his fingertips helped to assuage the madness. Yet he could still feel it churning within him and he would until they mated.

It was time to make her his. He felt her head fall back on her shoulders as he leaned down, pushed her partially unbuttoned shirt aside and covered the tip of her breast with his lips, flicking the hardened nub with his tongue as he gently squeezed it between his teeth.

Gods how he wanted this woman. How he wanted to push the pair of his boxer shorts to her ankles and delve his fingers into her moist flesh. Again, he wondered, how long would he last? What part of their love play would finally drive him over the edge to release? Please, Gods, let him at least bring her joy before he spent himself.

"Please," she whimpered, then swallowed convulsively. "I-I don't think I can take much more."

Her face reddened, making Derek think she wanted to say something else, but didn't think she dared voice it.

“What is it, dear heart?” He pressed tiny kisses along the line of exposed flesh at her neck and collarbone. Again suckling her breast, but only for a moment.

“I don’t believe I’m about to say this. Do this!” She sucked in a lungful of air. Lifting her head off Mace’s shoulder, she bit her lip, then stared down at the floor as though ashamed. “I want you.”

Derek’s stomach clenched. She wanted him or she wanted Mace? Could she not see it within her to accept them both? Was her heart not big enough to give love to two men? She cleared her throat before he could voice his concerns.

“God help me. I want you both.”

He released a breath he didn’t realize he’d held as Mace did the same, expelling the air on a rush, then gulping air as though they’d just run one of her marathons.

Praise the Gods! She wanted them both. There was but a small step between wanting and caring, between lust and love. Soon, she would be theirs in every sense of the word. Soon, Angel Reese would call their names with ecstasy, with love and they would answer her. Every day of their unusually long lives. It was only a matter of time before she would come to accept them as they were. Only a matter of time before she would accept them as her *truebond* mates.

He gazed back down at her pert, pebbled nipple and decided they needed a bed. A big one. "Come, Mace," he said, ushering Angel to a seat at the table. "Let us push the beds together. Neither of us wants to fall on our asses tonight."

A few minutes later, they turned their attention back to Angel. She sat, her face still flushed, though her eyes not glazed over with need any longer. No matter. It took only a moment to bring her to that place before. It would be the same now.

She stared up at them, obviously nervous, her gaze darting between the two of them. Taking a deep breath, she slapped her knees, then stood to walk around the table away from them.

Did she think to put them off? The table was no hindrance. Was she now frightened because they'd given her the opportunity to think about her actions and she'd changed her mind? If so, he could afford to wait for her to come to the conclusion that they belonged together. At least for a little while...

* * * *

Angel couldn't think. She could barely breathe. What in the heck had come over her? Why had she said such a ludicrous thing? She didn't want both of these men, especially at the same time...did she?

She bit her lip, trying to ignore the fire that action brought to their eyes. What could she do? Closing her eyes, she took a deep breath and let it out slowly as she counted to ten. They wouldn't force her to do something she didn't want to do. If she'd learned one thing about them, it was that they respected women. It was an antiquated sentiment these days in this world of deadbeat dads, but that was one of the things she liked about them. It didn't help that there was that little part of her, deep inside that whispered about their abilities. What were they, who were they and why could they do the things they could do?

More importantly, Reese, is the question of whether they intend to eat you or love you? Could they change her into what they were? If so, how was it done? Was it through a bite, a way of getting their saliva into her system? She covered her lips with trembling fingers. She'd already kissed them. Heck, she'd had her tongue in their mouths playing tonsil hockey not too long ago. Did that mean she would be like them?

Thinking of the man who accosted her and how easy it would be to defend herself against a friggin' stinky pig if she could shift shape into a jungle cat and smiled. It might not be half-bad...

Still, she kept the chair and table between them for a minute while she made up her mind. After about sixty seconds, during which, she watched

them both begin to undress, she decided the pros extremely outweighed the cons and moved away from the table. Gathering her courage, she unbuttoned the few remaining buttons on the shirt she wore and let it slide to the floor into a puddle of dark blue at her feet.

Sauntering over to stand before them, wearing nothing but a pair of Derek's undershorts, she gave them the sexiest smile she could muster. "Okay, boys, what do we do now?"

Bending down, Derek lifted her in his arms, carried her to the bed and dropped her down on the already mussed blankets. "We do what we were meant to do, woman." The words came out almost a growl. "We love each other until we cannot move."

Angel wanted to giggle at that. At least part of her did, but she couldn't. There was just too much testosterone floating about the room for her to do anything other than lay on the bed looking up at them and wondering which one would take her first.

After a moment, she found it didn't matter. Each of them was important to her in a different way. She paused at the thought, wondering that they could feel important to her after such a short time, but they did. Again, she bit her lip, sucking it between her teeth.

Both Derek and Mace dove on her with a groan. It was only a matter of seconds, two, maybe three, and they had her divested of the rest of her clothing. It wasn't much, so their expedience really didn't surprise her.

They took turns kissing her before they moved to her breasts. Each of their mouths drew on an already hard nipple as tendrils of desire shot through her system and straight to her groin.

Heat pooled low in her belly and her womb contracted. She actually felt it. Her clit throbbed with anticipation as the two men continued their sensual assault and she was sure she would expire on the spot if the pleasure got more intense.

Derek was the one who slid down her body to rest his head between her thighs. He kissed the tender spots behind her knees before moving upward and nibbling along the length of her thighs until he reached the core of her desire, of her very being.

The first long, slow swipe of his tongue sent her hips flying from the bed. It was as though the lower region of her body had a mind of its own. Her hands, almost of their own accord, found their way to his head, her fingers thrusting into his hair and fisting to hold on tight.

Mace stayed with her through the sensual assault. His mouth never leaving her body for long, alternating between giving her long,

drugging kisses to suckling her neck and breasts. It wasn't long before the heat in her middle spread out, fanning flames in her that she wasn't sure would ever diminish.

It wasn't long before she felt the warmth in her belly spreading outward, throughout her body, when her climax finally overtook her and she screamed out her release.

* * * *

Derek wasn't satisfied with her climax. He wanted not one from her, but two before he filled her with his cock, with his seed. She had another climax within her. He knew it. He kept his attention focused on their mate. There was no doubt in his mind that Mace would do his part to help him bring their Angel to another screaming climax.

They needed to cement their bond with her. She needed to know that her needs would always come first with them, that they would forever put her pleasure, her wants and her needs above their own when at all possible.

Raising his head for a moment, he turned his full attention back to their mate. He let his gaze travel slowly up the long line of her perfect body before he returned his concentration back to the pink flesh between her spread thighs and lowered his head once again.

At the first swipe of his tongue over her flesh, Derek felt Angel's desperate need to come again. Her heart raced, her breath hitched. He felt the craving in her as her entire body quivered with pent up desire. Again, he suckled her clit into his mouth, drawing on the small bud until her head writhed on the pillow. She fisted her hands in his hair once again and her hips jerked involuntarily.

Cupping her ass in his hands, he lifted her up, giving himself better access to feast on her flesh. Angel let out what sounded like a low keening wail as she came again, her voice growing hoarse as she screamed her pleasure.

Drawing back, he moved lower and kissed her long legs as he dreamed of her wrapping them around him as he fucked her hard and deep. It was all he could do to take his time to cover her, line up his cock with her weeping channel and slide his shaft slowly inside her waiting sheathe.

Sweat covered his body in a fine sheen as he slid in and out of her slowly. Gods, she felt so good. The heat, the *el calor* was upon him, driving him hard to ram his cock into her as hard and as fast as he could, then deliver his seed deep inside her waiting womb.

The heat was their guarantee of continued existence. It was the survival mechanism for their species. If they didn't mate with their *truebond* mate, they would go mad. Not him. Not now. He

gazed down at Angel as Mace continued to worship her breasts. This woman had saved him from that unspeakable fate.

When Derek felt the hot cream slide from her channel and coat his cock, he lost all semblance of control and drove himself as deep inside her as he could go on a single thrust.

* * * *

Angel could barely think, let alone be thankful for this experience. Still, she managed to acknowledge, at least to herself, that this was the best decision she'd ever made. Not only did she have one, but two gorgeous men to pleasure her and to bring pleasure to. She had no doubt that they could all make each other happy. At least for a time.

Not once before she'd met these two men had she ever considered doing something like this. She had never been curious what it would be like, feel like. Now she wondered why she never thought about it. Right now, it seemed the most natural thing in the world.

"Wrap your legs around my waist," Derek groaned as he lifted her, cupping her buttocks, as he continued to drive himself deeper and deeper inside her.

Mace continued to suckle at her breast while he pulled and twisted the other nipple, alternating his attentions between the two.

Angel had never felt like this before. She never dared dream that something like this would ever happen to her. Yet here she was, two men loving on her, making love to her and she loved it.

It wasn't hard to forget that the following day was Halloween. It wasn't difficult to forget about the men who wanted her dead. Right now, the only thing worth remembering was the two men pleasuring her did so over and over again.

She needed to come again, needed another orgasm more than she ever thought possible. After what seemed like an eternity, Angel finally screamed out another climax. She felt her muscles clamp down over Derek's thrusting cock. He drove his tempo faster until, with a deep, guttural groan, he jerked inside her, spilling jets of his seed deep within her womb. Angel could do nothing but wrap her legs tighter around him. Something deep, something primal within her didn't want a drop of his seed to escape.

Mace moved away when Derek leaned down to press his lips against hers. She could hear him moving around the bed, but didn't quite have the strength to open her eyes just yet.

She wanted him, too. Angel knew that before this fling was over, she wanted to have them

both...at the same time. The thought made her cheeks burn and her clit to throb. What had come over her? She could count, on one hand, the number of times she had *any* sexual fantasy. But this...this was one she would see come to fruition before she left this place.

Right now though, she knew she'd be happy if Mace would only come to her and let her suck his huge cock, or maybe, just maybe, she would ask him to take her up the rear. *That* was something Jacob never would have done...at least not with her. He always treated her like some china doll that would break and then put her down for being too plain in bed.

Angel was done with plain. She wanted it all. If giving her love away got her insults, perhaps she would keep it to herself. She wanted excitement. Angel licked her lips. She wanted these two men inside her at the same time.

* * * *

Mace could barely contain his excitement. *Do you hear her thoughts?* He knew better than to speak aloud. It would only remind her that they could read her mind at will and it would stop her delicious ideas.

Of course I hear them. My cock is getting hard just thinking about giving her what she wants. We should

do it – mate her before she gets away. Derek rolled off her, gave her one last kiss and then rose from the bed. *I'm going to take a shower. Perhaps you would care to get to know our mate a little better.*

Nodding, Mace watched as Derek entered the small bathroom and closed the door behind him.

"I don't know how he can stand to be in there with that door closed. It's absolutely claustrophobic in there." Angel frowned after Derek.

No wonder he'd only seen her use the facilities once. She must wait until they were away from the cabin to use the toilet because she didn't want to close the door.

"He likes his privacy when he showers." It was a damn good thing Derek turned the water on just then or he would have reminded her of their telepathic abilities.

"Oh." She stretched sinuously and gave him a sexy smile. "I know you didn't get a chance to, uh..." Her voice trailed off and her cheeks grew rosy with obvious embarrassment.

"That I didn't get to come?"

She nodded, her face turning a deeper shade of red. "Don't you want to?"

She looked away, unable or unwilling to meet his gaze. Her entire body trembled. Did she quake with fear that he wanted her, or fear that he didn't? He hoped it was the latter.

The tip of her tongue darted out to wet her upper lip. Mace wasn't sure if it was a nervous action or she devised it to make his cock jump to attention. Whichever it was, he was hard as a rock just thinking about those full, pink lips circling his cock as he fucked it down her throat. Reaching down, he grabbed his shaft and began to stroke it, wondering if she liked sucking cock.

Sitting up, Angel slid from the bed and fell to her knees in front of him. He couldn't believe his eyes. Angel knelt before him, looking up, her hands reaching for his cock and her tongue snaking out to slide along the sensitive slit.

"Ah...Gods, Angel." The words came through clenched teeth. His hips jerked involuntarily and he fought the urge to ram his shaft down her throat. The feel of her lips and tongue moving slowly over the head of his cock was more than he could bear without doing something.

Reaching down, he thrust his fingers through her hair. It was so soft. Like silk threading through his fingers. There was little else he could do but hold her as she continued to swirl her tongue over the head of his cock, occasionally brushing the sensitive underside and making his heart slam erratically in his chest.

Looking down, Mace met her upturned gaze and she smiled just before she wrapped her lips around his thick shaft. It was all he could do to

keep his feet beneath him as she took him deep in her throat.

Tightening his grip on her hair, Mace thrust his hips, pushing his cock deeper and deeper into the tight confines of her throat. It was difficult to retain control, to keep his thrusts slow, measured, as to not harm her or make her choke. It was the most difficult thing he'd ever done when all he wanted to do was ram himself into her mouth with a burning need he'd never felt before in his life.

Warmth radiated through his body. Heat engulfed him, burning him from the inside out as he continued to thrust faster, harder. The feel of her tight lips pulling at his cock and her fingers gently cupping and squeezing his balls, drove him toward release.

Mace felt his balls draw tighter against him. The familiar tingling heat crawled through his blood, moving straight to his groin. His stomach muscles tightened, his thighs quivered as they strained to hold him upright when he finally gave himself up to his release with a low growl.

Thick jets of semen shot from his cock, filling her mouth as she attempted to gulp it down. A small amount escaped her lips, trickling down her chin as she pulled away and looked up with a sexy smile.

"Feel better?"

Mace wanted to grin. The minx was proud of herself for sucking him off like that. She had to know almost every man loves a good blowjob. If not, she would soon learn. He would see to it.

Derek chose that moment to leave the bathroom his, hair still wet from his shower, a towel wrapped around his waist.

Glancing toward the window for the first time in hours, Mace noticed darkness had long ago settled over the mountains. Tomorrow was All Hallows' Eve and if their enemies planned to take their woman, the attack would come tonight.

"We need reinforcements up here. We have no idea what those assholes are up to, and I have no desire to face them alone if they decide to attack in force," Derek said, heading for their radio. Each of them hated using the damned thing. Using it was tantamount to saying, *help, we can't do our job*, but there was no room for pride here. Pride could get their mate killed and Mace had the fondest dream of turning their mate and making her much harder to kill.

* * * *

"What do you think they plan to do?" Adam Greer sat in the chair across the table and watched Angel with an unreadable look. It was unnerving the way the man kept staring at their mate. Derek

may have challenged him if he hadn't known the other man already had a *truebond* of his own. Still, it was disconcerting to watch him stare at her with such interest.

"We have no idea," Mace answered. His stance indicated he'd noticed the alpha's attention himself. "All we know is they planned to sacrifice her tonight after five days of ritual fasting."

"Five days?" Alarm filled the other man's dark gaze. He reached down, grabbed his cell phone from his pocket and punched a few buttons. "Get Nina up to the cabin on the Northwest ridge. Bring everyone you can and I mean everyone. This is going to get bad and we need every man, woman and child above the age of fifteen that we can spare. Leave the younger kids, not that there are many of them, with a few of the fourteen year olds and get up here as soon as possible."

"What's the matter? What does all this mean?" Angel had her fingers curled around a cup of coffee as though it was a lifeline.

The Alpha brought supplies with him when he and the three men with him came at their request. The first and only thing Angel concerned herself with was the coffee and brewer they brought. It seemed their mate was addicted to caffeine. She was more relaxed and amenable now than he'd ever seen her.

It wasn't as if she wasn't cooperative, of course she was. It was just that she didn't seem quite so on edge now that she'd had a healthy dose of caffeine and a few doughnuts. She had to have one hell of a sugar rush right about now.

Adam turned to her and pinned her with that dark gaze. "It means that whoever our friends are, are going to take a stab at summoning a demon lord." He raised a brow. "Literally."

"Oh, my God...they're insane." Angel clapped a hand to her mouth in horror.

"Yes they are. But besides all that, they need to be stopped before they succeed."

"Su...succeed?" Angel's voice grew thin as she realized the Alpha actually thought it was possible.

"It's a dangerous undertaking, and if they are successful, they will have a difficult time controlling him. Demon lords do not a good pet make."

Derek had had enough of the other man scaring the shit out of his mate, but what could he do. The man was the alpha after all. It wasn't as though he could demand him to stop saying things that affected their mate's peace of mind.

"Holy Hannah." Angel's head hit the table with a loud thump. "Their all nut-jobs and here I am, smack in the middle of nut-job central." Lifting her head, she glanced around. "Where are all the

squirrels? You'd think the place would be overrun with the pests with all you nuts running around."

* * * *

Apparently, none of the men deemed her comment worth acknowledging. Angel sighed. At least she'd been living with two relatively safe nut-jobs. Geeze! How did she keep getting in to these things?

Reverently, she lifted her cup of coffee to her lips. Nut-jobs or not, this new guy sure knew how to make a killer cup of Joe. She hadn't realized how much she'd missed it until he'd walked through that door carrying a pound of freshly ground beans. The smell was almost enough to make her orgasm on the spot. Almost.

"Okay... Let's just say I believe the crap you're spouting. What demon lord are they trying to bring forth and why?" She set her chin in her hand and watched them smugly. If they were making this crap up, they wouldn't be able to come up with any semblance of an answer in a short time. Even an elaborate hoax would never have gotten this far without some sort of mistake, but so far, there were none. That fact was beginning to worry her.

Mace and Derek just stared at her for a minute after she addressed the newcomer. If she wasn't

mistaken, the look they both gave her was one of shock. It was as though no one spoke to this Greer person the way she did. Well, too bad. He'd get over it and if the world were lucky, he'd get over himself as well. By the looks of it, he already had because he didn't even bat an eye at her disrespectful tone. It was almost disappointing.

"We have no idea who he plans to summon. One thing is sure though. Whoever it is that he brings forth will not go quietly back where he or she belongs." Adam tipped his cup back and drained the contents. "That is why we must have everyone from Paradise here as soon as possible. We have much preparing to do before sunset and, traditionally, sunset is when the spell will be wrought. The veil grows thinner as we speak." He slammed his cup down onto the table. "We have little time to prepare for something we have no idea how to defend against. We need all of the elders here." Snorting, he half-laughed. "Not that there are many of them left."

He picked up his cell phone and punched a few numbers again. "Nick? Make sure you bring the elders. All of them. We need them all up here." Pausing to listen to the other man, his expression grew hard. "As I said, we need them all. Bring even the women. Anyone who could have knowledge of the old ways. And bring the grimoire we found in the secret room. Yes, the

book with the pentacle. I think we're going to need it." Closing his phone, he set it on the table and leveled his gaze on Angel. "Is there anything you're forgetting to tell us?"

Angel felt all eyes on her along with the ridiculous urge to ask him how she would know if she'd forgotten, but shook her head instead. "I don't think so. I think I've told you everything. They planned to starve me for almost a week before their ritual." Pausing, she thought for a minute. "I do remember they kept talking about making some sort of payment. I distinctly remember something about paying a man."

One of the other men stepped forward.

Angel thought he'd been introduced as Damon Stewart, but wasn't sure. There were so many new faces here.

"Could they have said Paymon?"

Not liking the look he had one bit, Angel thought about it for a moment, then nodded warily. "Used in the context I heard. It was most likely what they meant. Why?" Who or what was Paymon?

Damon sighed, then turned to address their leader. "Paymon is a demon lord sometimes called Hell's master of ceremonies. Some consider him a king of Hell and others say he leads two-hundred legions." He ran his hand through his hair. "If they manage to bring him forth from the

underworld, it will be nigh impossible to send him back. He will attempt to kill the man or men who summon him and when he does, he will be free to wreak havoc on the world. We cannot allow this.”

Angel stood so fast her chair tipped over and fell to the floor with a loud clatter. “You all are crazy! You’re all mad as hatters and I don’t want anything to do with any of you. How could someone summon a demon lord?” She laughed hysterically. “They don’t exist. Not like that anyway.” Turning, she ran and locked herself in the bathroom. Claustrophobic or not, the bathroom was the only place where she felt even remotely safe right now.

Placing her back against the wall, Angel slowly slid to the floor, brought her knees to her chest and cried. How could she have fallen in love with two men crazy enough to believe that crap? Furthermore, how could she even believe herself in love with the two of them—especially after only a week? *Geeze.*

After a while, Angel sat with her head on her knees and forced herself to face the fact that they could be telling the truth. After all, she never would have believed in shape shifters before either. Yet, apparently, they exist. She’d seen it with her own eyes.

Sighing, she looked up and noticed where she was. Her heart gave a little leap, but she was okay.

She'd been in here quite a while with the door closed and she could still breathe. It was uncomfortable. She didn't think she would ever be comfortable in small spaces, but she could deal with it now.

* * * *

Derek watched their mate run from them and lock herself away. Sighing, he turned to the others. "I hope she can overcome this. I do not want to have her memories erased."

"She is your mate then?" The alpha turned to glance at the bathroom door, a thoughtful expression on his face.

Nodding, Derek waved to Mace. "She is our *truebond* mate, though we haven't claimed her as yet."

"Hmm..." Adam nodded. "That would explain her actions then."

"Why?" Both he and Mace asked the question at the same time.

"She doesn't believe in magick, yet she has accepted you for what you are. Either that or she's put it from her mind and is not acknowledging it. Whichever it is, she must accept you or her memories are lost. You know we cannot allow an outsider to leave here with knowledge of our existence. You know we can't."

Derek sighed. He did know it, though he didn't have to like the policy. What would happen if she thought about the situation after she left and changed her mind or if she decided she couldn't live without them after all? That could never happen if they took her memories and replaced them with something as innocuous as an injury on the trail.

It didn't matter though. What the Alpha said was law. *If they must wipe her memories, taking her experience with them away, she could never change her mind and return...and Gods help him, he didn't want to lose her. He would never survive it.*

I don't want them to harm her. Taking her memories is something akin to rape and I don't want any of them touching her. I will die trying to protect her, but it will still come. I know why we cannot allow outsiders to leave with our secret, yet I know I will not be able to stop myself from attempting to protect her. Derek knew the madness would take him at the thought of his mate in danger and the mind fuck they planned to use on Angel could and most likely would harm her.

I feel the same way. Besides, I don't know about you, but I don't want to live without her. It's been such a short time, but she's already become my life. I'm sure you feel the same.

“Stop planning to kill us all. No one will touch your mate until after the entity is sent back to where it belongs.” Adam gave them a crooked grin. “Who knows? By that time, she may believe in demons coming to Earth. Nothing will stop her from seeing or hearing what is going on. We only hope she has enough sense to stay the hell out of the way so she doesn’t get herself killed.”

Derek knew that he and Mace would see to that. They would protect her with their lives.

* * * *

Dusk grew nearer and Angel knew whatever was about to happen would within the next few minutes. She didn’t know how she knew it. She just did. One minute, all of the shifters were standing in a circle in the quiet forest as the sun dropped below the horizon. The next instance, a loud roar echoed over the mountain and a strange deep voice bellowed words in a language she didn’t understand.

A large figure loomed above them, looked down and around the forest before turning its attention somewhere to the southeast of them. “Why did you summon me, puny one?” The voice finally changed to English.

Mace leaned back from his position in the circle and caught her attention. *He must follow the dictates*

of the person who summoned him. Whomever it was that brought him forth must have demanded he speak our language.

I wondered. She smiled back at him. She still wasn't sure she could stay here with them and accept what they were, but she was willing to give it a few more days. She wasn't stupid enough to throw away the love of a lifetime because of cultural and racial differences and while she thought nothing of Mace's being African American, there *was* that bit about him shape shifting. *That* was the part she was having a hard time coming to terms with.

"I will kill your enemies for a price. Are you willing to pay?"

Suddenly they could hear the reply of the other as he and his followers burst through the woods. The people in the circle gave a collective gasp as the man strode from the cover of the forest, his face twisted with hatred and rage.

"Anything! Anything at all. Take whatever it is that you want. I just want them all dead."

Deep booming laughter spilled forth from the entity's lips, then he scowled down at the man. "Your name, human. I wish to know your name...among other things."

The man stopped and preened up at the demon lord.

Angel couldn't believe the man was dumb enough not to be frightened of this...thing he had wrought.

"Camulus, my name is Camulus. Don't kill the women." He gave Angel a look that made her feel dirty to the core. "Only kill the men and leave the women to me."

The entity laughed again. "I shall just as soon as I receive payment. I think I want..." The deep resonant voice paused as he looked thoughtful for a moment. "You."

Leaning down, he picked Camulus up in a tight fist and hurled the screaming man at the ground near him. "I can use a follower such as you. You will serve me." He glared out over the collection of shifters ready to stop him. They began to chant as Paymon gathered his power and sent hot wind to buffet the circle that protected them all.

Angel closed her eyes. She knew not to move. She'd learned enough from her Wiccan friends to know she couldn't step out and break the protective circle that surrounded them all. As frightened as she was, she stood her ground as the demon buffeted the forest around them with wind and fire. Still nothing touched them inside the circle. She began to chant with the others as she learned the repeated words. Her voice rose with theirs as the cone of power lifted and grew larger.

Paymon screamed his rage at not getting what he wanted. He must kill them so he could be free. Damon told them that only doing what his summoner desired gave him the power to take Camulus as his supplicant for payment, freeing him from the summoner's control.

The circle held strong as every adult shifter in paradise held hands and chanted their spell. The golden cone of power grew larger, brighter, engulfing the forest around them in its protection. The scorched trees and shrubs grew back at an alarming rate and still they chanted.

The demon lord bellowed for his legions to come, to be a scourge on the world. It was, no doubt, an attempt to distract the shifters from their purpose.

The cone grew larger, reaching for the sky as they continued to chant, then began to sway, still holding each other's hands. Mace released Derek for a moment and they each reached back to grab one of her hands and pull her fully into the protective circle now that she chanted the incantation as loudly and surely as the rest of them. After a large clap of thunder and a flash of lightning, Angel heard another bellow, louder and lower pitched than that of Paymon's temper tantrums.

"You dare to attempt to harm my people?"

A man suddenly appeared in the center of the circle. The golden power swirled around him. He carried a large club in one hand that he twirled like a baton as he glared at the demon, Paymon.

A crow suddenly appeared next to him on the ground.

As Angel watched, the crow changed to a woman so beautiful it almost hurt to look at her.

“You summoned me?” she asked the man next to her.

The man with the club looked down at her for a moment, love shining in his eyes. “Yes, my love.” He turned his attention back to Paymon whose fiery tantrum still buffeted the outer edges of the circle. “This, *demon* intends to harm our children.”

A few of the younger shifters gasped at his statement.

The woman turned to Paymon and glared. Sparks flew from her eyes as she spoke in a voice both loud and deadly to all she deemed unworthy to live. “Paymon, lord of the underworld, leader of two-hundred fifty-three legions of the damned. I sentence you to death in this realm. Never shall you draw another breath from this summoning and never shall you take a life of those I protect.”

Spreading her arms and legs wide, the woman Angel could only guess was a goddess, reached over her head and clapped her hands. A loud clap

of thunder echoed through the woods as the god grew larger, swung his mighty club at the demon at the same time and the stench of sulfur dissipated as something sucked the demon back into the ground from which he sprung.

The god looked down at the goddess and smiled. "Until the new year, my love."

She nodded and blew him a kiss as he disappeared. "Until the new year." Turning, she looked down at her feet where a body lay in the throes of some sort of seizure. "For your crimes to my people, Camulus, I sentence you to death." Reaching down, she touched him on the shoulder and the body ceased to move. Turning to Adam, she smiled. "You are a good leader for your people. Your children shall be strong and plentiful. You are our people. Do not hesitate to call on Dagda or me again." After she touched him on the shoulder, giving the alpha some sort of blessing, she turned her attention to Angel. "Choose."

"Wha...what?"

"Choose. Either you choose the men for which you were born, or you choose to live the rest of your life alone. You will retain your memories, but you will never be able to communicate this happenstance to another living soul." She turned to Mace and Derek. "There is another for you if you can wait. I will not tell you when or where,

but there is another." She flicked her gaze back to Angel, her eyes filled with disdain. "Choose, full human, or I shall choose for you."

Angel bit her lip, glanced toward her men and knew what she had to do. Just the idea that there was another woman out there to claim them, one who could take them away from her if she didn't act fast helped her. She didn't know why it took her so long to decide whether she wanted to live with them or without them when the answer was in how she looked at them. She saw them as *her* men. That would make her their woman. "I choose them, Lady."

"Then it is decreed. From the mouth of the Morrigan, these three are mated. And," she turned another glare at Angel and raised her brow. "Do not change your mind after I leave. I shall be watching."

EPILOGUE

“The Morrigan may have declared us mates, but we still have to complete the ritual. It will bind you to us, heart and soul. Should one of us die, you shall remain here with the other. Without the bond, if one of us dies, you die with him.” Mace stared down into his mate’s eyes, wishing he knew what she thought, but was unwilling to invade her privacy again.

“What happens if you both die? Not that I want it to happen any time soon. I just want to know what to expect.”

“If we both die, you die with us unless you are pregnant. If you are carrying our child, you will live until you die of old age or consciously choose to join us.” He gave her a nervous smile at Derek’s nod of encouragement. “You would also have our longevity.”

“What do you mean, *I’ll have your longevity?*” she asked with a frown.

Derek stepped forward, obviously nervous. *Of course I'm nervous. What if she decides we are too old for her? She could still leave us. The goddess did not say she couldn't change her mind. She merely said she would be watching.*

"How old do you think I am?"

Angel cocked her head and took turns glancing between them. "I would guess you're both around thirty or thirty-five. Why?"

"I am fifty-two years Mace's senior. I am close to eighty years older than you are. I was one-hundred two weeks ago."

Her mouth dropped open as her gaze shifted from one to the other, alternately staring at them in turn. "You're a hundred years old?" She turned to Mace. "And you're forty-eight?" At their nods, she reached behind her for her chair and sat down heavily on its seat. "Wow. I don't know what to say."

Mace stepped forward. "Say it doesn't matter, that you'll mate with us anyway." Mace felt his stomach clench when she looked up at them with tears in her eyes. *She's going to leave us.*

They both fell to their knees in front of her. "Please stay. Say you'll be ours." The words came from both of them at the same time and she gave them a wobbly smile.

"Of course I'm going to stay. Just try to get rid of me."

* * * *

Derek couldn't believe his ears, though they'd never been faulty before. It was a dream come true to hear her say those words. Still, she still didn't know everything. They needed to tell her more facts before they bonded, but he had no idea how to break the news to her.

"What's wrong?" She reached out with both hands to caress their cheeks. Are you scared to tell me the rest?"

"What do you know of the rest?" Who could have told her?

"The Morrigan told me everything in that few seconds she looked at me. She told me what you had to do and why. Why I feel this way toward you two and that we would make beautiful babies together." She blushed and looked down, dropping her hands to her lap. "She just didn't bother to tell me of our age differences."

"Age probably means nothing to a being as old as time itself."

"You're probably right."

"And the rest?"

"I know you have to do something that makes me like you." Angel bit her lip, then smiled. "I want to be like you. I want to know that we'll have years and years together. Most of all, I want to

spend the rest of my life with you two, no matter how long that life turns out to be.”

Derek was never so glad to be alone with her as they were now. He moved closer, cupped her chin in his hand and pressed a kiss to her lips. He could smell her arousal, feel the way her breath hitched as he kissed her and hear the pounding of her heart.

“You’ve decided to stay with us, to love us. To become our *truebond* mate?” He hardly dared to ask the question. She must be sure before they took her together.

“Yes.” She straightened, held her chin up and met each of their eyes in turn. “Yes. I want to do this. Now.”

Standing, she turned and led the way into the small area of the cabin that served as the sleeping area. The two twin beds were still together and that was a blessing. He didn’t want anything to distract her from her purpose.

She stripped off the thin robe Nina Greer brought her to wear and draped it over a stool next to the bed before she sat down on the edge, her hands held primly in her lap.

The blonde down of her sex peeked out from behind her hands and Derek licked his lips, dying to taste her again, needing to feel his cock slide in and out of her tight channel until she milked the seed from his balls.

Neither of them waited for an invitation. They both wished their clothes away and leaped for the bed before she changed her mind.

Reaching out, he cupped her plump, perfect breast, his stomach clenching at the contact. It wasn't unusual. His body always reacted the same way whenever he was near Angel. Their personal angel brought to them to ease their suffering, to make their lonely lives worth living again.

After years of searching the world, visiting other clans looking for a mate, she'd found him quite by accident. What were the odds that so many things would go wrong and bring them together? He and Mace weren't even supposed to be here. Angel planned to run a marathon somewhere in the Deep South. None of them should have been where they were and last of all, Angel should never have made her way through the veil after escaping her captors. Everything put together brought them their mate. Life and circumstances were strange, but Derek had no reason to complain.

Still cupping her breast, he brushed his thumb over the tight nipple. He didn't think it was possible, but he watched it grow tighter as her breast swelled to fill his hand.

Angel moaned as Mace leaned down, took her other nipple into his mouth and suckled. Derek followed suit until her head thrashed on the

pillow and her hips undulated on the bed in a blatant invitation for one of them to crawl between her legs.

Reaching up, Angel's fingers grasped their heads, her fingers tightening in their hair. It was almost as though she couldn't get enough. Perhaps she couldn't. He knew he could never get enough of her, of her scent, of the feel of her body clasped around his cock. It was amazing how much he'd come to want and love this woman in so short a time.

Her back arched as they continued to suckle her nipples, each of them cupping the underside of a plump breast before letting their hands trail down her flat stomach to the strip of downy soft hair at the juncture of her thighs.

Derek's heart nearly leapt from his chest when she licked her lips. Wet and full, they practically begged for his kiss, but his lips were still busy at her breast. Torn between laving her breast and taking her mouth with his, he raised his head to meet Mace's gaze.

"I believe it's your turn to taste the honey of our mate's flesh while I worship her breasts and mouth."

Mace nodded and moved down her body with a smile.

Nothing could have prepared Derek for the shock of her kiss when he finally pressed his lips

against hers. Tasting her was nearly his undoing. The feel of her hot mouth pressed against his was almost more than he could bear. The need to slide his cock into her while Mace fucked her was overwhelming and he wondered how long he could hold onto his control. He hoped he'd keep his control at least long enough to bring their mate to orgasm at least once. It must be good for her. Nothing else mattered to him but her pleasure.

* * * *

Angel was lost in a sea of sensation. Nothing could have prepared her for what it would feel like to have two men love her or for them both to want to pleasure her at the same time.

She nearly flew off the bed when Mace settled between her legs, threw her legs over his shoulders and sucked her clit into his mouth. Derek leaned down and kissed her like there was no tomorrow. He thrust his tongue into her mouth until she parried back, then suckling her tongue with almost the same rhythm that Mace sucked her clit was amazing. More than amazing. It was downright orgasmic.

Her first orgasm of the night tore through her with the force of a hurricane and her hips came up off the bed with a scream. Reaching down, she thrust her fingers through his hair, clamped her

thighs around Mace's head and held him in place. She knew it was her first because neither of them seemed ready to stop what they were doing and she could already feel another climax building up, warming her from the inside out. The familiar tingling warmth warned her that she would come again soon.

Mace pulled free of her thighs, pushed them gently back to the bed and kissed his way back up her body until he lay next to her on the bed. Rolling over, he took her with him until she lay draped over him.

"Straddle me, love, and put my cock into you." His voice was deep, the way he talked almost primal. The low growling sound brushed tendrils of heated desire over her body and she could barely contain her excitement. The time had come for them to bond.

Rising up, she positioned herself over him until the head of his cock met with the opening of her channel. She knew she could do this. It wasn't as if she'd never had sex before. It just wasn't quite like this. She felt her eyes go round as she lowered herself onto his large shaft. He was always big, but he felt huge like this.

"God, it feels so good." Hands on her hips, he held her in place while he thrust his hips up a few times before he stopped. Putting his hands on the cheeks of her ass, he pulled them apart and

glanced back at Derek. "Get the lube and start moving. I don't know how long I can hold out," he said between clenched teeth.

Derek paused and looked at her. "Are you sure?"

She could see the fear in his eyes. Fear that she would change her mind. She smiled and nodded. "I'm sure, Derek." Her voice grew breathless as Mace leaned up and suckled her breasts. "I'm also sure we're both going to come without you if you don't hurry."

Derek leaned down, grabbed the small tube of oil from the small table next to the bed, dumped a generous portion on his cock and rubbed it in. After he finished with that, he poured some down the crack of her ass then inserted one thick finger into her tight hole. After she was sure he would drive her insane, he inserted a second, then a third, stretching her back hole and preparing it for his cock.

When he stopped, she could almost feel the heat of his gaze on her back. Leaning down, he kissed the small of her back, then each buttock before straightening and pressing the head of his cock against her virgin back hole.

Nothing could have prepared her for the heat or the pressure when he began to ease his way into her body.

“Don’t fight it love, don’t clench your muscles. Just try to relax your muscles as I press against you.” Derek groaned when the head of his dick finally made it past the outer ring of her anus. “Gods you’re so tight.”

Angel breathed through the pain. She knew it wouldn’t last long and she knew she could never tell him it hurt or he would stop. This had to be done. It was something she’d come to want more than anything else in the world. She wanted them and she wanted them together, just like this.

Mace’s cock jerked inside her as her channel grew tighter with the invasion of Derek’s cock into her ass. What did it feel like for them, she wondered. It was hard to imagine how it felt from their point of view.

“Hot,” Derek breathed behind her.

“Tight,” Mace added between clenched teeth.

Smiling, Angel decided to add her own word to their disjointed conversation. “Full,” she said, then sighed when she felt the sensation of Derek’s stomach finally come to rest against the cheeks of her rear.

Angel felt the muscles of her ass clench tight on Derek and her channel spasm around Mace’s cock. The two of them worked a rhythm together as they rammed themselves into her body.

She didn’t know how much more of it she could take. Orgasm after orgasm ripped through

her. She screamed over and over as they continued their alternating thrusts. Nothing could have prepared her for the sensations she felt. The pleasure they brought her as they continued to love her.

Mace reached up, took her nipples between his fingers and pulled the twin peaks until she groaned.

“Come for us one more time, Angel,” Derek said from behind her.

More cream seeped from her body at his words, coating Mace’s shaft and she screamed out another release. How much more could she take? How much pleasure could she stand before she broke apart into a million pieces? It was hard to believe that this could feel so good...so right. Yet there it was. Nothing had ever felt so right in her life.

The thought of having two men to love, two men buried to the hilt inside her was such a turn on she marveled that she’d never tried it before today. In the past, nothing could have convinced her this was right. Now she wondered that she ever thought it was wrong.

Groaning, she bent down, lowering her mouth to Mace’s nipple, her tongue laving the dark flesh. He groaned beneath her, his hips thrusting up to ram his huge shaft home against her womb. God she loved the way they made her feel. Nothing in

her life could ever compare to this. "Do it," she said, finally raising her head from the luscious expanse of Mace's chest. "Do it now. I want us connected in every way possible."

"You're sure?"

Looking into Mace's perfect, chocolate eyes, she nodded. "I've never been so sure of anything before in my life."

The two men continued to ram themselves inside her. The force of each powerful thrust bounced her, moved her into the other, forcing her down onto each hard cock tighter as the other withdrew. Perspiration coated them all in a thin sheen. Their bodies grew slick as they continued to thrust inside her.

"Now, dammit!" She wanted them to mate her, she wanted them all to come together and she could feel her climax growing closer and closer with each powerful thrust.

Leaning up, Mace suckled the curve of her breast as Derek leaned down to press his lips against the backside of her shoulder. The pleasure pain was the most erotic thing she'd ever felt in her life. She came again when they each bit gently into her, sharing what they were as they climaxed inside her, pouring their warm seed inside her body.

Afterward, Angel could do nothing but fall limply onto Maces chest and sigh. To think after

all the times she'd heard women talk about it and all the times she'd said it wasn't for her. Two men to love were just what she needed. One day she would have to ask them how to thank the gods for her gift, but right now, all she wanted to do was sleep.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tianna Xander is an eclectic author of numerous paranormal, sci-fi, time travel, romance erotica books. Gaining inspiration for her characters and dialogue through her family and her addiction to the internet, she never fails to amaze readers with each new book she creates. As a reading junkie herself, Tianna has no problem reading whatever is available at the moment from romance novels, murder mysteries and encyclopedias to books on solar energy.

Tianna's life wouldn't be complete without a "happily ever after" of her very own. She resides in Michigan with her husband, two children, three cats, two dogs and an intimidating bunny. Never one to fail to give credit where it's due, she commends her family for their constant support. After writing many books and receiving rave reviews, her family is just as proud of her. Always full of ideas, Tianna rarely puts the pen down, so readers can look forward to many more exciting stories in the future.

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